Old World . . New World

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Master of Fine Arts in the
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By

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* * * * *

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Abstract

The creation of a small fantasy world has been the greatest concentration of my recent investigations. This world is a way in which new meaning is given to the mundane and common. Through the intermingling of recognizable imagery with abstracted whimsical creations the work seeks to ask the onlooker to question their own personal surroundings.
Dedicated to Kristina
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. “New World”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Motives Realized</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. “Old World Departure”</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Scale and the Hand</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Line</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Influences</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Conclusion</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Still Life #3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Untitled Pink Hand</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Leg Pile</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Monster Self Portraits</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Robot</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Clay Tools</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Covered Jars</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>X Ray Specs</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Untitled Portrait</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Porcelain Figures</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Thesis Show</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

"New World"

I am seeking a 'New World', a different world. My work explores my fascination with the subconscious, which becomes a factory for the production of this world. Disinterested in imposing, on others, a definite system of existence, this is my proposal for a world with different parameters. A place that reflects, recombines, and refracts the world in which we all exist. In trying to separate myself from the religious "Old World" constraints, under which I was raised, I find that I'm interested in the notion that there may be a place where reality is different; more human and somewhat altered from the world, as I understand.

The scale and intent of my work is similar to that of a model train collector. In contrast to the train set, my 'set' contains hand carved porcelain objects; I am not imitating, but inventing. The concerns within my small world deal with creating a place that is not judgmental. A universe that transports the maker and viewer, and accepts thought of perverse humor and nonchristian ideas. The placement of each bush, tree, building, and train track are at the digression of the master conductor. The tiny ceramic forms function in a similar manner. Within a confined space I depict relationships between the elements. The ever-changing landscape of the train set is inevitable. As more additions are purchased the miniature scenery undergoes alterations. Perhaps a new water tower means the loss or movement of a shrub. Similarly, as I introduce new ceramic elements or parts into the whole changes are made.

Like the specificity in the order of the train city, my world has order as well. There are, undoubtedly, stricter rules for the train if there is to be a smooth flowing railway
system. One would never place a tree in the middle of the tracks. This testing of boundaries is where my interests lie. My "New World" aims at questioning the nature of things; the how and why the juxtaposition of forms create various meanings and associations. These ideas of experimentation and questioning are illustrated in the piece 'Still Life #3' (1.1). The intermingling of small porcelain plumbing, furniture, and conjured oddities are a safe yet inviting recommendation that we begin to ponder how we look at things. They include easily recognizable objects, but by use of strange arrangements and the combination with strange objects, this comfortable contemplation is contested and carries the meaning of the piece over into emotional and psychological areas of precarious human existence. Through the seduction of craft and form the pieces present an other worldliness, a "new" worldliness. Assemblages of weird machinery, uncertain utensils, and bizarre accoutrements volunteer a new reality. This new reality is not good or bad, but accepting of the person I am. The world I create is self-absorbed and the onlooker is granted small glimpses into this world through my work. I am not concerned with their comprehension of the whole, but am interested in their own conclusions of the work, which draws them in through the use of beauty and wit.

This crisscrossed world of mechanics and emotions is an abstract reality or, at the very least, presents a different view on what is generally accepted. A realm that intends to transform the use and meaning of conventional objects. By arranging these objects with one another, the intention is to cause the viewer to make strange affiliations with what they already conceive an object to represent. In saying 'strange affiliations' I am using objects to represent emotions and surroundings that attempt to capture complex relationships that exist between the individual and their reasonings of existence. It is a universe with a different perspective, a mad gala of word games, frenzied objects, delirious discourse, and
subversive structures. I am interested in all of these things, because they represent what I wanted, but was not supposed to think about or have.

The delicacy of porcelain mirrors the fragile relationship that teeters between what is real and what could be real. The questionable stability and precarious structural elements can be seen in untitled pink hand (1.2).

This piece I also found to be a Distinctive breakthrough in the Incorporation of found objects. On the top of a funnel like object there is a balloon with barely enough helium to keep it afloat. It hovers slightly above the armatures that protrude from the carved base. Typically the balloon is used for parties and celebrations, but in this piece it serves a different purpose. The balloon is deliberately pink and strangely fleshy. The sexual ambiguity of form becomes obvious. This became an interesting point of personal perception within my work. Rather than replicating in clay, objects with existing purposes, the objects can be misconstrued placing them into the "New World". By introducing found objects into my work references to the world and my views of it become more literal. Strange thoughts are emulated by specifically choosing odd objects from the world that are easily accessible yet uncommon. Like my work I am giving the viewer contradictions, objects that are familiar but unknown. These manufactured objects are a vehicle for pushing the ambiguity and strangeness they contain. The contradictions and questioning of this world found within these pieces possess a parallel to my own personal life.
1.1 Still Life #3

1.2 Untitled Pink Hand
Chapter 2

Motives Realized

A realization occurred after the completion of two pieces that were made in my first year in graduate school. 'Leg Pile' (2.1) and 'Monster Self Portraits' (2.2) were a result from a desire to express frustration and the outcome of personal acts. I created the pieces to be easily read. The message of these pieces will be discussed later in this chapter. This directness was important because I wanted to pinpoint concerns within my work. Instead of concealing issues I revealed specific interests I had for the future of my work. It was a change for me, because until that time, I worked with multiple ideas, sporadically placed within a single piece. Not only was it a change in terms of limiting the concepts incorporated into one piece, but, the decision to use small scale and porcelain has greatly effected my work. The introduction of porcelain, its important inherent qualities will be discussed later.

'Leg Pile' (2.1) is a pile of differently shaped and sized, athletically fit female legs. The piece is about the temptations of the male being, not as a social commentary, but commenting on myself. The legs do not seem to have been forcibly removed, but, are representative of an aspect of personal sexual attraction and temptation. It is a monument to human enticement. It honors looking at and being sexually appreciative of the opposite sex. It is my human nature to have this sentiment and through this small sculpture I am revealing these feelings rather than suppressing what was once seen as forbidden or taboo. From the making of this piece, I became fascinated with the power contained within small scale and the beauty of porcelain. I decided not to continue with the literal readings within my work because it did not coincide with the issues contained within the 'New World'. I
realized that through refining the way I use multiple ideas within a piece, I could create more associations of form and meaning.

The creation of 'Monster Self Portrait' series (2.2) was essential as a commentary on myself as the creator of a 'New World'. The lingering value system, which I was brought up on, continually causes the questioning of my self. This becomes obvious, not in the monster heads themselves, but in the captions carved into their bases. Underneath the heads are inscribed the phrases..."Who made me this way?"..."Where did I come from?"..."I am a monster"... and "I cannot be stopped". These captions exemplify significant points of realization within my work: I am a creator of a new world; my world conflicts with the old world; my world celebrates imperfection and human impulses, while the 'Old World' strives to irradicate these human imperfections. The 'New World' allows me to be who I am without imposing pressures and guilt. After realizing this, previous works began to make more sense in the larger picture.

Earlier in the year, I became interested in robots, particularly the aspect of what they represented. I envied robots because their purpose was simple: they have no desire to question their actions. I wanted to be a robot. I made robots (2.3) that could serve different purposes. Some have attachments for sex, some were well armored, but all were made to represent a creation without a conscience. A robot is not faced with emotions and pain that humans encounter. A robot would not question the constitution of the 'Old World' but follow out its rules flawlessly. I could not exist in the 'Old World' because I have free will and seek to find a more appropriate place in which I can exist.
2.1 Leg Pile

2.2 Monster Self Portraits

2.3 Robot
Chapter 3

"Old World" Departure

In every religion I can think of, faith is a key element in the success of that religion. By reading parables and stories one begins to understand the function of "God" and his rules. Faith in church for me was like believing in ghosts; even Jesus was referred to as the "Holy Ghost". If religion is to work properly one has to accept with little question of logical explanation the vast array of variables that constitute the true path of enlightenment.

Unable to accept the whole, many occurrences began to sustain my growing idea that maybe this was not exactly the meaning of life. The following is a brief list of events that illustrates my developing suspicions: praying for the healing of a girl's mosquito bites.... I was eight at the time; the testimony of a young boy who had a nerve disorder that caused large bald spots...he said he could actually feel his hair growing back after being prayed for...it wasn't growing back; finding a bag of marijuana in the church parking lot...it had obviously fallen out of someone's purse or leather bible cover; "respected" people of the church sleeping around.people I viewed as good church people type. I could continue on about such trivial events that became devastating to my entire way of life. There were too many examples of how the system was flawed. Imperfections exist in the Old and New World, whereas the 'Old World' strives for the individual to be perfect the 'New World' accepts the flaws I have. The "Old World" is based on religion; this religion created personal guilt for thoughts and actions that I later decided were not imperfect, but human.
After the maturation of a dilemma that had been forming for some time, I desperately needed a system to live. What was once so easily categorized as good and evil was no longer black and white. I had a lot of gray area that needed defining so I could feel at ease. This dilemma left me with the continuing task of questioning boundaries and limits, which establish morals and ethics. This was the basis for the ongoing "New World" investigation.
Chapter 4

Scale and the Hand

The use of scale in my work, which is tiny, questions how we encounter and interpret objects. Everything that exists around us is based upon the contact, which we have with that object. The keys on which I am typing and everyone else's keyboard in this computer lab are the same. They are made for human hands. They were designed to accommodate and function for people. When the scale of objects, recognizable or not, are changed from typical experience our senses are challenged.

By micro-forming small porcelain objects the demand for attention is required. The viewer must actually place their eyes close to the piece to arrive at a point of visual comprehension. When this occurs the onlooker is transported, for however brief it may be, to another place. This evoking of the individual and the infinite, the universe and the self, and the question of presence verses surrounding coincides with my interests in the 'New World'.

This idea of challenging personal presence is made evident throughout my fantastical porcelain micro world. A piece that clearly portrays this is 'Clay Tools' (4.1). This piece replicates commonly used ceramic implements: a pen tool, a sponge, wooden ribs, a brush for slip all could comfortably be concealed inside my closed hand. Although porcelain is hard when fired, it retains a softness and warmth. The forms I use and intermingle in my work are smooth and engaging. Although the forms are not meant to be touched by the viewer the desire for tactile investigation is irresistible. The sculptures create the urge, not only to be touched but also held. The use of this scale, that is
associated with preciousness, empowers the components to transcend materiality. They become about the usage of hand by both the aspect of making them in the studio to being viewed by the onlooker. The hand is conjoined as both devices for creation as well as interpretation. Cradling the small objects within my palm, I carve and refine each porcelain component. This involvement of the hand in producing and reproducing objects allows for associations through emotional involvement that a 'readymade' often times can not sustain.

This hand involvement is manifested in my continual "product replacement series". In figure (4.2) there are two seemingly identical small covered jars. One jar was bought and exists among thousands of mass produced wares. I meticulously carved and detailed, under continual scrutiny, an imperfect replica of the mass-produced jar. On the box of the bought jar is the label,"hand painted". I found it to be humorous that the company was trying to deceive the buyer by claiming an element of authentic hand craftsmanship.

I in turn actually made the jar from beginning to finish and returned it in its original packaging. The unsuspecting buyer will treat the jar no differently than if they were buying one of the thousands of jars that look exactly like the one I produced. They are however acquiring a vessel that is handmade. Unaware of the time spent, the involvement of labor, and the technical knowledge required, they would take it home and let it to rest among their knick-knacks. We live in a world where handcrafts are no longer made by the hand but by machinery and technology. This object now exists simultaneously in two different worlds. The object exists in the art world as commentary on the mass produced. It also exists as a commonplace object whose owner could care less about the academic world of art. By returning the object to its natural habitat of the store shelf it verifies, on a personal level, that the object I made 'passed the test'.
I chose a ceramic object that’s crudely manufactured and of little value for specific reasons. The covered jar is reminiscent of my first contact with ceramic objects. Having grown up in the American middle class, our house was full of ceramic objects with little monetary value; as a child, this is what I understood "ceramics" as being. By remaking the low-grade ceramic pot, I am not only expressing my own interest in the value of handcraft, but in coveting a common household object.
4.1 Clay Tools

4.2 Covered Jars
Chapter 5

Line

In order to understand my use of line and the influences that shaped it I will have to probe, once again, into my past. As a kid, comics and cartoons were my escape. They were my first insights into the existence of a different world: a reality where Bugs Bunny could drill a new rabbit hole with the rapid spinning of his rabbit ears, where Spiderman could place a camera within his webbing in order to photograph himself against his foes and clear his name with J.J.Jameson, and, where Papa Smurf needed a petal from a flower that only bloomed one day of the year atop a blizzard covered mountain. I became obsessed with the idea that I could create my own comics and cartoons as a way of retreating from the demands and pressures of the community in which I was raised. These simple beginnings still inform my drawings. Through the mimicking of comics and cartoons I began to use similar qualities of line. Through 'academic training', a greater understanding of composition and spatial relationships began to enhance my drawings and sculptures but the love for my self-taught way of drawing remained. This comic book influenced style can be seen in the drawing 'X Ray Specs' (5.1).

As I began to examine the relationship that exists between my three dimensional, sculptural work and the two dimensional drawings that inform them, I discovered that I was interested in translating drawing into form. Although the two are commonly used techniques to describe form and space they each have advantages and disadvantages within my work. The use of line in my drawings is principally a description of form.
One of the utilizations of line, or drawing plane to be more specific, is the ability to defy laws of physics. Lines and forms within a two dimensional space can be transformed into an endless performance between ground and figure, space and non-space, gravity and weightlessness. Although it is impossible, my attempt to make no distinction between drawing and form remains. Drawing allows a quicker way to express and edit ideas that will, possibly, be realized into three-dimensions.
X-RAY ART SPECS UNVEIL THE TRUTH BEHIND ART

Notice horned rim "arty" frames

An enterprising degree filled with possibilities...

5.1 X Ray Specs
Chapter 6

Influences

Toys are currently one of the greatest influences in my work. Specific toys that I tend to reference in my work are figures, accessories, and toys with interchangeable and interlocking parts. Toys not generally naturalistic, but like comics and cartoons toys are easily accessible and accepted. Toy figures have a seductive power because they obtain a simplified reduction that caters to our subconscious sense of perfection. The reference of toys in my work creates a palatable means of expressing the desire to create a new reality. Whereas toys are essentially plastic and "disposable", the act of hand carving a porcelain toy-like figure gives rise to diverse meanings. By taking great care to individually carve toy like elements they transcend mass-produced toys due to their fragility and involvement of the hand. Although the figures I make borrow heavily from toys, it would never be rational to play with them. Whereas toys are for children, the pieces I make are designed for an adult audience. They require a tender and nimble care in both the making and handling of the pieces. The delicacy contained within the porcelain components reflects the precariousness of overt sensitivity. The fact that they are porcelain makes them precious objects while they still have the capability of appearing soft, humorous, and strange, emulating the qualities possessed by toys.
In 'Untitled Portrait' (6.1) a plastic Hugo head rests atop a whimsical body, where an actual toy part is incorporated in the piece. His facial expression is apathetic and his weird, bald head balances on the hand carved every day man porcelain figure. He is ready for the grind of life with his case in hand. He portrays an obsessive complex character that reflects the sadness of misunderstanding the world and his own goofy existence. In his composition I mean for him to reflect the paradox of being unique and manufactured simultaneously. While he is individually hand crafted, he contains elements of being massed produced (use of a plastic head that was a found object) in his scale and reference to toys.

In addition to mass produced toys, commercial ceramics have also been influential. The formal structure of 'traditionally' arranging figures and elements atop a base has become an essential component to my work. The base acts as a stage for the various pieces to perform and interact. A perfect example of how this has been used in ceramics can be seen in the figure (6.2). Historically these objects have contained subject matter that comments on social issues. These issues include courtship games, scenes of workers, as well as other common aspects of daily life. In a similar manner my work hinges on similar issues of design and content. The bases act as both decorative compositional elements as well as structural supports for my 'New World' elements. Although the elements are often more ambiguous in my work they are intended to create similar yet more twisted scenarios on human existence.
6.1 Untitled Portrait

6.2 Porcelain Figures
Chapter 7

Conclusion

This section will explain the decisions I made regarding the presentation of my thesis show, as well as discuss the important points I wanted to stress to the viewer. The show consisted of ten small sculptures on pedestals and a wall drawing. Dramatic lighting was used to enhance the meticulous marks made by the hand and the intricacies of the assembled forms (7.1). The monochrome porcelain sculptures relied on the modeling of lights and darks to display the detail inherent to the surface treatment.

The space itself was chosen for specific reasons. The space was intimate and the work relied on the proximity of the interior to enhance the miniature sculptures. The location of the space was in my favor as the large windows overlooked downtown; as if the work itself was commenting on what was happening in the surrounding world in which they exist. As well as the exterior view of the outside world, the interior of the space ironically spoke of the work as well. The intertwining exposed ductwork and the hanging light fixtures mirrored the tiny vignettes, which similarly possess piping and intertwining forms.

The size of the pedestal was designed to cater to each sculpture allowing for optimum viewing. They acted as a device to allow the pieces to be seen with ease, without becoming obtrusive and overpowering to the smallness of each fragile arrangement. The pedestals were used merely as a formal element, orchestrated to allow each piece to interact with one another while retaining their individuality.

Placing pen ink directly on the wall created the wall drawing. By putting drawings directly on the wall they become an inseparable aspect of the space. They were not applied
but existed as the space itself. The wall itself became a giant sketchbook page. Like my sketchbooks, the drawings on the wall were a record of the time period that it took to complete the drawing. They acted as a current flow of my psyche that were intentionally arranged to form a quilting of form, imagery, and text. This decision allowed for an immediacy and freshness that a previously completed drawings could not convey.

My objective for the show was to present the work in a manner that enriched the quality and nature of the work. I have acquired an intimate relationship with drawing and porcelain that was intended to be evident in my show. This relationship has bestowed a sensitivity and patience that is developing with the making of each new piece. The drawing acted as insight to the soup of muddled thoughts which I draw from to create my 'New World'.

The sculptures become three-dimensional manifestations of thoughts and drawings related to issues of the 'New World'. This cohesive body of work captures the most important 'New World' issues including craft, form, contradictions, imperfections, beauty, precariousness, humor, wit, and the desire to make sense of personal existence. These rich and complex issues continually feed my work, generating interests that will further my 'New World' explorations.
7.1 Thesis Show