ON BECOMING AN ARTIST

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Fine Art Degree in the
Department of Art of The Ohio State University

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ABSTRACT


-Andre Breton

When I was an adolescent, I realized what would occupy my time for the rest of my life: art. For the last fifteen years I have dedicated myself solely to that pursuit, immersing myself completely into every aspect of that world. Throughout that time, I have put myself through the rigors and hurdles of art education both at the undergraduate and now the graduate level; fulfilling a goal I set for myself when I was sixteen years old. In that time I have also experienced the in and outs of the professional art world, working both individually and collaboratively to create artwork ranging in media from painting to PHSColography and showing in venues all over the country. As I approach the end of my formal education as an artist, I have the chance to reflect on the years I have spent working and studying in this discipline.
Since the task of creating a thesis paper for the Master of Fine Art student seems to be an assignment in writing a detailed artist statement, and from experience I realize that artist statements change almost weekly, I thought it important to speak about what these years in art education have meant for me. Not as a way to fulfill the task of generating this prose for my audience or committee, but as a means for me to document my current train of thought. A snapshot of Fernando Orellana in the year two thousand and four. What type of person has the exercise of “learning to be an artist” created? How has it affected what my current work is about? What does art mean for me now? What has it done to my perception of what art is? And finally: How will it affect what I will communicate in the future? After careful consideration of this task, the questions above seem to be the most appropriate and useful for me to think about and discuss.
Dedicated to my Mother and Father

and

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VITA

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FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field Art
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CHAPTER 1

EARLY EDUCATION

It seems that I was born into creative thinking. One of the first things I remember is my father teaching me how to play chess. I remember how he cleared the board and showed me how each piece moved. The pawns moving one square at a time, the knights moving in a nautilus fashion and the bishops moving diagonally. At the time, I of course had no idea how complex and challenging the game was. This is because chess is a game that is analogous to life, presenting the players with three-dimensional problems, challenging them with increasingly complexities, and demands that they evaluate each decision carefully in an attempt to control the outcome. Since most of the discipline of sculpture requires that the artist see things from many angles in order to arrive at an adequate solution, the three dimensional nature of the game would later become invaluable to me. In addition the game configures itself into endless permutation and complexities, which is where I first started thinking abstractly, thereby fueling my imagination.

My environment also played a big part in creative thinking, filled with original artwork that my father and mother collected in El Salvador, my native country.
Though some of these paintings have been sold over the years, I remember them clearly because I would sit around staring at them. Not in the deliberate way of “I will look at this art on the wall because it is art” but in the more innocent way in which a child looks at the shape of a flock of birds or a caterpillar cocooning on a concrete wall. They were the backdrops of my early years; the place where my imagination grew.

At home, I spent most of my time drawing from my imagination, creating disturbing images that did not sit well with my mother. One day when I was approaching my teenage years, she threw most of those early drawings away. I remember clearly finding them in the garbage while I was skateboarding outside of my house. When I asked her why she had thrown them away, she said she thought that they were just garbage. In hindsight, I can understand why she threw them away the drawings were bizarre. Most of the themes involved mutilated arms and legs complete with impaled knives, bullet holes oozing with blood, and dismembered toes or fingers. In addition there were also war drawings depicting people in bomb shelters as nuclear holocaust took place (no doubt inspired by social fear of nuclear war prevalent during the cold war) or strange monsters populating a school classroom; it made for a very concerned mother. I guess she wanted me to draw pretty things. In fact I remember her asking me why I always drew monsters and ugly things.
I also remember spending a lot of time watching my father and brother working on their electronics projects, be it a rolling LED dice kit or a homemade television set. This is where my interest in mechanical and electrical engineering started: it would become crucial to my current artwork. As I entered Middle school I became turned off to art classes, because I did not like someone telling me what to draw or how to draw it. To me art was fun and it did not belong in the realm of rules and regulations. It was because of this that I did not pick up formal art education again until my final year in high school.

When I entered High School, two important things happen to me that pushed me back into formal art education: a close friend of mine died in a terrible car accident and shortly after I started experimenting with different drug altered states of consciousness. The first introduced me to death and my own mortality, a concept that was foreign to me. It spelled out clearly that our time on this planet is limited and we must make the best of it while we can. The latter introduced me to the worlds that exist beyond this one: the worlds of subjectivity, imagination, metaphor and the unconscious. These two events are what changed my life and made me understand that making art was what I was supposed to do.

From then on I exclusively pursued the avenue of becoming an artist. Everything else became secondary to that one thing. Surprisingly to me, my parents were not as supportive as I thought they should have been about my future career as an artist. After all, my father had dabbled in the fine arts as a young man and my mother studied architecture before her children came along. In retrospect I completely understand their uncertainty about the matter, the life of an artist is, after all, very unpredictable. Inside my parents' large library of books (imported over to the United States from El Salvador) were two books on surrealism and dada. Since the books were in Spanish and at the time I did not read Spanish very well, I was
only able to look at the pictures in the pages. However, this was enough to introduce me to a new world of possibilities in image making and reinforced a philosophy of art that I had been unknowingly following since I was a kid: using the imagination or the world of the subconscious as the starting point for art.

As a young boy I would make drawings that had no intention, from an initial squiggle or blob of ink. I would close my eyes, draw for a while chaotically on the paper and then with my eyes open bring forth the image that I saw within the scribble. I am not sure if someone taught me how to do this or if I found this method on my own, but when I started researching surrealism back in high school I learned that the process was called automatic writing or in my case automatic drawing. The surrealists used it as way to enter into their subconscious minds, a way of tapping into what they thought was “the real process of thought.” As Andre Breton writes in his first surrealist manifesto:

Preoccupied as I still was at that time with Freud, and familiar with his methods of investigation, which I had practiced occasionally upon the sick during the War, I resolved to obtain from myself what one seeks to obtain from patients, namely a monologue poured out as rapidly as possible, over which the subject's critical faculty has no control—the subject himself throwing reticence to the winds—and which as much as possible represents spoken thought. It seemed and still seems to me that the speed of thought is no greater than that of words, and hence does not exceed the flow of either tongue or pen.

Without hesitation I can say that automatic thinking has had the most influence on me artistically. It is from the initial freeing of the mind that all my work
branches. Arrived at the free association of not words, but visual form: not sentences but visual metaphors, not paragraphs but visual narrative, not books but visual content.

In particular the works of Juan Miro, Jean Arp and Yves Tangueley, three artists that seem to tap into their inner child so eloquently, fascinated me. In Miro’s work, specifically the more simple paintings from late in his career, I appreciated his ability to create work that seemed spontaneous and child like. Also, I learned a great deal about how to compose an image on a two dimensional surface. With a few simple shapes, lines and colors, Miro could guide the eye in any direction he pleased, leading us across a narrative that was unique to each viewer. In Jean Arp’s work I found similar things as in Miro’s, only reflected in three-dimensional space. His ability to break down form into basic shapes, reducing a bird into a line or a rabbit into an oval is something that to this day I appreciate for the directness and minimal quality. The imagery that Yves Tangueley generated in his short life made the most direct impact on the type of form that I rendered. One can still see his influence on my work if you look at “patty” the rapid prototyped sculpture I showed in the fall quarter 2003 art and technology show, or in some of the interactive sculpture I was working on a few
months ago. I imitated his bulbous-sexually driven forms in my late teen years and still think about them now. I remember staring at the works of all three of these artists again and again as an undergraduate in the Art Institute of Chicago's modern collections. All three shared the ability to look inward for their inspiration, for their dialogue.

After High School I spent two or three years at the Broward Community College in Davie, Florida, the town where I grew up. Fortunately, the art program was very progressive. Though the junior college did not have the immense budget of bigger institutions, one of the professors, Steve Elliot, managed to put together an electronic art program. With a few meager bits of hardware, Professor Elliot was able to introduce me to what would become the digital art revolution that we are in now. I had dabbled in computer graphics all my life, creating 8 bit animations using a primitive DOS based slide show, but it was not till I took Professor Elliot's course that I realized the computer could be used as an art tool.

Simultaneously as I was learning how to make art digitally, I was also learning how to use traditional media, like printmaking, photography, drawing, and painting. In painting I found the medium that would hold my interest as much as the computer. In painting there was and still is no limit for me. One does not have to rely on anything outside of buying pigment and something to apply it to. Within painting I could also continue to explore the irrational side of reality. At first the imagery I painted was based on a desire to mimic the work of the surrealists. This early work was terrible. It reeked of an amateur artist working in a subject and technique that he was foreign to.

Luckily, there was also another professor at the college, Greg Eltringham that was able to tell me that I was making crappy paintings. Though it might not have been initially constructive, Professor Eltringham unknowingly influenced me to start
over in my approach. To re-evaluate what I thought at the time was great. It was not till later on in my training that I would find out what painting really was and what it meant to me.

After two and a half years at this college and some invaluable coaching and mentoring from Professor Eltringham, I was accepted into The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. In the winter of 1994, against my recently separated parents wishes, I moved to Chicago, Illinois with the only ticket I could afford to buy, an Amtrak Train ticket. The decision to leave home and attend The School was by far the best decision of my life. It is in the unending and anonymous labyrinth of the streets of Chicago where I came of age.
CHAPTER 2

THE SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

The first thing that I did when I arrived at The School in Chicago was to sit in my dorm room and look at the wall. It had taken so much effort for me to get to this school that I was not sure what I was supposed to do next. In retrospect, it is exactly where I am now, the moment where one realizes the goal and plans out the next. I did what came naturally to me: I started painting. Painting to me is sort of a bouncing board, providing a moment to reflect and then start over. That is exactly what is happening now. I have finished up my thesis show and have gone back to the drawing board. In my case, that drawing board is paint on canvas.

Back then, in 1995, my next step was to achieve my BFA degree. For the next three years, I was enrolled at The School, attending classes during the week and working as a waiter/bartender on weekends. I focused mostly on art and technology, though I did take an occasional painting course to keep me stable. The art and tech program at The School is much like the one here The Ohio State University, split between 3D graphics which involves mostly working inside the virtual world of the
computer and physical computing that allow for events in real space to take place. I spent a lot of time in the 3D graphics area, which at the time was still in its infancy. I actually did not have much interest in 3D graphics. I always tell my students that I did not find 3D graphics it found me. It found me before I started pursuing the medium, I was taking a UNIX course in experimental computer programming taught by Jason Salavon. I had taken another programming course with him during my first summer and to my surprise programming came very naturally to me. This was strange because my entire scholastic career has been marred with extremely poor marks in mathematics. Part of Salavon’s course was to program in OpenGL, a programming language that is the basic building blocks of all 3D graphic programs today. Like a heroine addict, once I started fooling around in the 3D world, I was hooked. Before I knew it, I was making storyboards and developing witty 3D characters.

I spent two years working almost exclusively in the nether world of a Silicone Graphics UNIX environment, immersed in a 3D application called Softimage. Though I did learn a great deal and am extremely happy that I learned the skill, I am very grateful that the art department also had physical computing. After two years of working in 3D I realized that I was not a filmmaker, which is what 3D animation is all about: making film, not making fine art. Luckily, when I jumped from the ship from 3D graphics, I was enrolled in a micro controller course with Ken
Rinaldo, at the time a visiting artist at SAIC. In his course I was able to direct all my attention to completing a drawing machine I had designed in a previous course. That crude, barely functioning machine was my doorway back into the fine art world. For my remaining time at The School, I focused on learning as much as I could about kinetics, mechanics and electronics. Thankfully, there was a great group of graduate students there that all worked in a similar pursuit, one of which is Amy Youngs, and were willing to show me a few tricks around a computer, basic electronics and machine shops.

In addition to The School, the museum at the Art Institute of Chicago was extremely important to my undergraduate education. Access to one of the most well respected art collections in the world was fantastic. It is within the hallowed halls of the institute where I first learned about Ann Hamilton, Tadao Ando and Gary Justice. Up until then I had not really understood conceptual art. I had read and learned about it in art history courses, but it was not till I saw Hamilton's site-specific installation at the Institute that the light bulb went off. Her use of new media as a means to communicate larger ideas, her ability to make use of space and time so eloquently, and her attention to details is something that I am still trying to emulate in my work. In the work of architects Tadao Ando I found another side to art that I have yet to tackle on my own work. He has created what
can be described as a sanctuary in one of the galleries of the Art Institute. I spent many hours in this room, removed from the whirling speed of the city outside, quietly meditating on nothing at all. The columns in that piece are where the forms for “Unending Closure” came from, a sculpture that I made one year ago and will talk about later in this paper.

In sharp contrast to Ando’s minimal form and tranquility is another influence for me: the local Chicago artist Gary Justice. In Justice’s works I became lost in his attention to detail, his workmanship with metal and his genius at constructing mechanically wondrous machines. It is almost impossible to find flaws anywhere in his machines. He buffs every corner and polishes every surface. One machine that I remember vividly involved an elaborate mechanism that resembled some sort of aluminum insect that was geared to hit a tiny steel hammer on a suspended aluminum cylinder. The result was a very pleasing “ding” sound that traveled through all the galleries of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. From Justice I extracted my mania for trying to make things perfect and my interest in machines that are designed for purposelessness.

I graduated from The School with the next version of my drawing machine finished and a very well rounded education in art and technology. The experience of attending this institution was one of the best in my life. Having daily access to a world-class art collection like the one
found in the halls of the Art Institute was an invaluable asset to help me have a better grasp of art history and contemporary art issues. The School has also opened up the door for countless opportunities and long-lasting friendships. One of the most determining of these opportunities was working at the inconceivably bizarre art studio of (art)^n laboratory.
CHAPTER 3

OUTSIDE THE EDUCATIONAL BUBBLE

The economics of life came whirling into my reality the last few months I was at The School. I had little idea of what I was going to do and I had recently quit my job in order to focus my last semester on making art for the BFA thesis exhibition. With my last $1.50 in my pocket, I was not sure where I was going to find money to take the train home that evening. Thankfully before that day was over, I would be employed at (art)$\text{\textsuperscript{n}}$ laboratory, making PHSC\textsuperscript{olograms}, a medium I knew nothing about. Founded in the early 1980's and based in Chicago, (art)$\text{\textsuperscript{n}}$ laboratory is an art studio that holds the patent for the production of PHSC\textsuperscript{olograms}, a process that is similar to holography. For over 30 years, (art)$\text{\textsuperscript{n}}$ laboratory has collaborated with emerging and established artists to create PHSC\textsuperscript{olograms} for a variety of clients including NASA, Nintendo and JPL. By the end of that semester, with out knowing it, I was in charge of the lab because the lead guy was leaving for bigger and better things. (art)$\text{\textsuperscript{n}}$ laboratory can only be defined as the doorway into "wacky-land." Due to the eccentric personality of the woman that owned and directed the lab, Ellen
Sandor, this was by far my strangest and most challenging job. Within that eccentricity and dare I say lunacy, I learned a great deal about how the professional art world operates, due to Mrs. Sandor's long history in the Chicago art scene. In all her bizarre requests and insane lifestyle choices, Mrs. Sandor had a great deal of wisdom to provide, especially on matters involving art and education. She also helped me understand how to manage large-scale projects involving huge budgets like "The Battle of Midway Monument" for Midway airport in Chicago and to deal with super-ego artists like the Chicago imagists Ed Pashke.

Most of the established artists that we collaborated with at (art)^n laboratory were self-centered, which made working with them very difficult. They expected to be treated like superstars; including making sure that the chair was raised to a certain height when they arrived. However, there was one that was really a joy to work with and also made quite an influence on my painting style: Carl Wirsum. Of all the artists that we collaborated with, Wirsum was absolutely the most fun. Since he had no prior 3D experience, including almost zero in traditional sculpture, we had to work with him to realize his 2D drawings into a 3D world. From Wirsum I derived inspiration for my 2D work, especially in his attention to color and texture. Up until that point, I had been limiting my color palette to white and black with very subtle hints of pastel color. It was not until I worked with Wirsum that my palette shifted. This is apparent in a series of paintings that I made that combined colors I would have never put together and applying textures to some of the components of the images, something that I had never done in the past. Along with this, Wirsum really informed me about the Chicago imagists. The imagist where a group of Chicago based artist including Wirsum, Ed Pashke, Jim Nut, and Roger Brown that for the most part graduated from The School in the late 60s. They painted in what can be
described as a "cartoony" style. As the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago writes in their online "past exhibits" section:

At the end of the 1960s, a group of local artists became known as the imagists, so-called for their use of the human form, which they often rendered in a misshapen or humorous manner with aggressive colors and a nod to popular culture. The imagists were first shown in the now legendary, innovative exhibitions organized by Don Baum at the Hyde Park Art Center.

I had learned about the imagists as an undergraduate, but it was not till I was working with Wirsum that I started really looking at the work. Through most of my art education till this point, professors had frowned upon any painting that was stylistic or "cartoony", preferring that I focus on more academic subjects such as observation from life. I completely understand the value of their suggestions, since they were trying to teach me the traditional principles of paintings. However, since they shinned a negative light on the style, I always considered the type of paintings that I made some how less then the traditional styles. It was not until I researched the imagists that I found justification for the type of painting that I liked create, since their paintings can be found in museums next to the Rembrandts and Manets of the world.

During my time at the (art)^n laboratory we moved to a new location. As I was more or less in charge, I made sure that we included a fabrication shop in the new facilities. It was there where I continued developing the drawing machine that I worked on as an undergraduate. In that machine shop I generated "Drawing Machine 3.1415926 v.2" a refined and almost perfected version of the machine I exhibited for my BFA thesis. I also created "The Hive", which consisted of nine separate machines
in the first place; what was it about them that kept my interest so much. What I learned was that the machines were another exercise in the stream of consciousness method I had been using to draw since I was a kid. Furthermore, the many hours I spent watching the computer screen render my 3D worlds contributed to my fascination with watching a machine work for me. The drawing machines allowed me to separate myself from the equation, seeing my own artwork from the eyes of a third party. I was not the first artist to reach this line of thinking. The idea of a machine that draws goes back many centuries. In the Victorian age the inventors and clock
makers of that time created fascinating mechanical drawing machines for the
entertainment of all that could pay the entrance fee. Some of these machines like
"The Draftman" and "The Writer," created by the father-son team of Pierr Jacquet-
Droz and Henri-Louis Jacquet-Droz, were so skilled at drawing and writing that
people of the time thought the creators where devils. For their ingenuity, the two
ended up in heretical inquisition prison, because they were suspected of witchcraft.
Some contemporary authors argue that "The Draftman" was a forerunner to the
computer, mainly because the machine’s internal mechanism was composed of a
"memory" and a "program." The "program" was a wheel which made it possible to
choose the words the machine would write and the "memory" was made up by a set
of cams, making it possible for it to form letters. In the 20th century there are
examples of automata that create art, including Tinguely's manic machines and
Aaron the intelligent software, that Harold Cohen has been teaching to draw since
the mid 1960s. What I share in common with these artists is the idea of creating an
artificial agent that has the capacity to create art, an endeavor that is exclusively
human.

To continue this line of thinking into artificial life and generative art, I enrolled
into graduate studies at The Electronic Visualization Laboratory (EVL) at The
University of Illinois at Chicago. EVL is a lab that is dedicated to doing research in
Virtual Reality, data visualization and computer-network innovations. Two important
CGI founders, Dan Sandin and Tom Defanti, run operations. They are, for the most,
part the inventors of the CAVE, a multi-walled immersive virtual reality chamber. I
learned how to make my own immersive virtual worlds in the short time that I was
there, however I was dissatisfied with the product. Since I was interested in physical
computing and EVL was focused almost entirely on virtual reality, I was not happy with the program. It was interesting and challenging to learn the process, but it was not the type of art that I wanted to create. After the first semester, I applied to other graduate programs, one of which was at The Ohio State University.
Chapter 4

A TERMINAL DEGREE

Two years ago, when I entered The Ohio State University, I had specific topics I wanted to research and explore. I came to this school interested in pursuing generative art and artificial life. To a certain extent I did follow that train of thought, as evidenced by the pieces “Unending Closure” and “Matinal Noesis”. I have included the writing for both of these pieces below:

“Matinal Noesis”

Since 1997, the notion of creating systems that have the capabilities of demonstrating autonomous decision-making processes for the creation of art has consistently fascinated me. Through their unique drawing styles and idiosyncratic motion, the machines I have made take on personas of their own, exhibiting behaviors that transcend the boundaries of people's perception of what is alive and what is not. Moreover, by being able to hear via micro-phonic ears, the machines themselves have begun to take on rudimentary capabilities of perception, thereby giving them the ability to
generate art, which can be described as the machine's interpretation of its environment. Perhaps most fascinating of what has arisen from this pursuit is the relationship which has developed between the machines and myself over the years, being paternal, collaborative, and symbiotic in nature. This last point, of symbiosis, became most evident to me in the last year, where I at certain point came to depend on the income and artistic notoriety the machines generated from their drawings. Inversely, the machines depended on me for maintenance, upkeep and management. It is in the realization and acceptance of this symbiotic relationship that I have found the design and function of my next machine.

The symbiotic relationship discussed above reminded me of Horace E. Scudder's classic fable of "The Elves and the Shoemaker". As most of us know, this fable consists of a poor shoemaker that is secretly visited by two magical elves that make shoes for him while he sleeps. Economically benefiting from the elves product, their secret relationship continues every evening over an extended period of time. In response to this fable and to foster a willing and purposeful relationship between the machines and myself, I have designed Matinal Noesis, a telematic performance piece comprised of two mobile robots, which will only create artwork at times when they know

![Image 4.1 Matinal Noesis 3D visualization 2002](image-url)
asleep. They will do this by monitoring a direct real-time data feed of my brain activity. Using the brain patterns of my brain while sleeping, the machines will use a photographic method for generating full color drawings. Working in complete darkness, the robots will expose the photographic piece of paper over an extended period of time. Viewers will be able to see the robots working via an infrared camera installed in their nocturnal environment.

"Unending Closure"

Forty years ago, in the early days of the information age theorists, technologists, and futurists believed that by the 21st century the potential of the technology they were inventing would bring forth a new era, promising innumerous conveniences, adventures, and pleasantries. In a way, they were right, their innovations along with plenty of social and political change did bring a new era, though perhaps not as they expected. What their projections failed to account was the unaccountable; moments in history from which new social paradigms are created.

The first three years of the 21st century saw a dramatic shift in the overall psyche and demeanor of the global community. The events that have unfolded since the turn of the century, in addition to the unending
technological parade of innovation, and the bloating of Media influence over the world has yielded not a people that enjoy Sunday afternoon picnics on the moon, but a paranoid-delusional society, in constant fear of its own shadow. Using robotics as the primary medium, "Unending Closure" is a response to this accelerated social-trend. Being inherently driven by a sense of curiosity and exploration, the robots that exist in these two wooden columns live in a constant state of suspicion and fear, attempting to "see" what is outside, yet drawing back at the earliest guise of danger.

Each robot is equipped with an IR sensor, which it uses to "explore" its world from the small opening near the top of each column. The sensor is mounted on a mechanism that allows for the robot to search both vertical and horizontal space. While they do this, they each make unique searching sounds from a built-in sound generator and speaker. Once they find a viewer, they will focus on them, waiting to see what the viewer does. If the viewer gets too close they will try to get away by shaking around at varying levels of intensity and making distinct warning sounds. If the viewer stays within a certain distance, the robots will try to communicate with them, using sounds and shaking. If they do not find anyone for a long period

Image 4.3 Unending Closure (detail)
Kinetic Sculpture
Dimensions Variable
2003
of time, they will exhibit several types of behaviors, including communicating with each other via a stream of sounds.

The latter of these two, "Matinal Noesis", has yet to be finished, even though I received the Fergus Gilmore Materials Grant to create it. "Matinal Noesis" is another refinement of my obsession with drawing machines. When finished, it will likely be one of the best pieces I have made, though because it is an old idea with a new twist, I have sat on it for almost a year. It is the project that I will tackle next and I hope to have it working by the time the ARS Electronica 2005 submission is due.

In "Unending Closure" my pursuit of artificial life systems is most obvious. The robots that live in these wooden columns function like primitive life forms. They use their sensor system to inquire about their surroundings and react based on those observations. These sculptures are not in anyway "alive," however, the behavioral programming embedded in each and the quirky movements they demonstrate is just enough for people to anthropomorphize them. This is most apparent in the children that interacted with the piece. For them, the objects were alive, which was a big problem at COSI where I exhibited them during the summer of 2003, since the kids wanted to interact with them like puppies or kittens. Though I have become skilled at making my machines sturdy, I still have not made a machine that can withstand the destructive way a child interacts with an object.

Looking back, both "Unending Closure" and "Matinal Nosesis" seem far away for me now. They are the pieces that I thought of and made as soon as I arrived at OSU. They are projects that I needed to create in order to move on to the next phase. During the production of both of these pieces, what I did not anticipate happening was that I would come to question why I was using technology to communicate. Why was it important for me to use this highly technical medium to
communicate ideas that could also be communicated using other means? What I found after evaluating my previous work was that a lot of it depended heavily on technology and that it spoke mostly about technology itself. Technology that made art, technology that mimicked life, technology that was art. Since I could not answer why it was important to make technologically based art that was about technology, I spent a good portion of my first year painting. Painting has been a jumping board for me, a place to make sense of what is going on in my head. Luckily I found some other image-makers here in the printmaking department, which allowed me to continue to have an influential dialogue with non-art and technology students.

The comic book or sequential art was the most influence the printmakers had on me. For the most part, up until attending OSU, I had been creating narrative paintings that were singular in nature. Steve Seeley and Liam O’Brien, two graduate students in the printmaking department, where also working in narrative art, though they created series of prints or drawings that told stories. Without being totally aware of it, I responded to their approach at narrative imagery in my own process. Perhaps what appealed to me about the sequential narrative was that it was a way for me to include two elements that rarely surface in painting but are intrinsic in new media work: time and installation. Generating multiple paintings as frames of one
concept and installing them in different configurations can guide the viewer through a visual narrative that unfolds itself during the experience. In this way the paintings become like a kinetic sculpture or interactive work, where the viewer is expected to explore time and space to arrive at meaning. A variety of other possibilities can be explored when there are multiple paintings comprising a whole. Things like what direction the viewer reads the sequence, what meaning can be derived from the space between the sequence and the relative size each panel is from the other are all things that I am planning to investigate in future paintings.

Image 4.5 Talking to Myself
Acrylic paint on paper
Eight inches by five inches each panel
2003
Image 4.6 *All of me and the Bunny Makes Three*
Acrylic paint on paper
Eight inches by five inches each panel
2003

Image 4.7 *Automatic Membership*
Acrylic paint on paper
Eight inches by five inches each panel
2003
In addition to sequential image making, Seeley used appropriated imagery in his work. What became apparent to me after observing people interpret the appropriated images that Seeley used was that people add meaning to any set of symbols that are put together. Moreover, they seem to do this automatically. When the human mind is presented with something that seems illogical or nonsensical, our cognition automatically adds meaning in an attempt to deal with the problem. For the most part, our brains seem to dislike illogical structures; we just cannot cope with them. The meaning we arrive at for any set of images is heavily dependent on the pattern recognition built into all of us. From birth we add to our library of recognized patterns, appending new meaning that we find to patterns we already recognize. If we encounter a new pattern, we automatically attempt to find meaning in it. We do this by calling up patterns that are similar in shape or form. If we cannot come to terms with the new pattern, we create a way to understand the pattern by generating meaning for it. It is this thought process that I wanted to test with my first IQ question.

My series of IQ questions started with “Question 34” which was intended to be a social/visual experiment. It was meant to find out what the general consensus
would be on the answer of an illogical visual analogy. That’s why I created a website for it (www.question34.com) in attempt to attain as many anonymous responses as I could. To get the URL out to people, I created stickers, posters and put a slide of it in the slide show at the pre-show in The Grandview Drexel Theater in Columbus. The experiment for the most part was a success, though I do wish that I had been able to achieve more web traffic. I think the next time I do the experiment I will advertise a bit more, especially in newspapers and public transportation. As of June 1, 2004 here are the results of the experiment:

![Answer A: 35](image1.png) ![Answer B: 60](image2.png) ![Answer C: 39](image3.png) ![Answer D: 55](image4.png)

As with most of my work, I am not entirely sure what the results mean or what to do with this data, but I figured I should at least log them in this paper. I did learn a great deal from discussing Question 34 with people, in particular about the collective anxiety that is associated with these types of questions. I am sure that the anxiety has a lot to do with the fact that most people dread having to take these examinations.

When we are kids we are made to understand that standardized tests are how society learns out how smart or dumb we are. Standardized tests determined our overall intelligence, whether or not we continue to the next grade, what job we might have in the armed forces and if we can go to college. Because of this, these
tests typically become a stressful subject in our lives, generating a type of anxiety that we only experience when we face these examinations. For me, that anxiety can be most closely associated with the temporary loss of all intelligence or reason; that is, the moment during the test when the words in the questions become jumbled and twisted, removed from any practical context or logical structure. During the exams I would always find myself manically conscious of the time, frantically rereading if Joe was traveling faster than Jim as they simultaneously headed in separate trains to opposite sides of the country. It is from the observations I made in people reading my first IQ question and my own experiences taking these awful exams that I became interested in the how IQ questions are designed and evaluated.

I can honestly say that I have taken more IQ exams in the last year than most people will in a lifetime. There are many exams you can take online, ranging from exams that measure your intelligence, to surveys that somehow measure your personality. In almost all of the IQ exams I took online I would score rather consistently in the above average category. I did manage to score in the gifted section once, but I cannot really say that counts because I cheated. After taking the exams, I appropriated the question formats that were most commonly used in all the examinations. What I found was that by simply rearranging or remixing the words, I could add new meaning and new logic structures to the question, just like I did with images. I was also able to add content that would never be dealt with in the original examinations. Instead of the viewer figuring out how many gallons of milk Mary had, it was how many ounces of metamphetamines she had left. Instead of how many people could sit on the tree branch without breaking it, it was how many could sit on Pablo without breaking him. By using the question format that people already recognized, I created a captive audience where I could deliver any message I wanted. Without really knowing it, I had stumbled onto an interesting method of
communication, one in which I could explore a wide range of subjects, from current world events to comedic situations. My hope is to take the questions one step further into a weekly newspaper cartoon, a place where I think I'll be able to communicate to a more general audience.

04. Walter is taller than Scott, and Scott's little brother is taller than Roger. Since Walter is not the tallest one of the four, then Scott's little brother must be tallest.

a. Walter  b. Scott  c. Scott's little brother  d. Roger

Image 4.9 IQ Question 04
Digital Print
Thirty-eight inches by twenty-six inches each
2004
03. Which one of the four is least like the other three?

a.  
b.  
c.  
d.  

145. If we assume that Fribs are looking at Borbs, and that Luns are looking at Jirts, then Luns must also be looking at Fribs if Luns is not looking at Borbs. Which of these four are not looking at Jirts?

a.  
b.  
c.  
d.  

Image 4.10 IQ Question 03
Digital Print
Thirty-eight inches by twenty-six inches each
2004

Image 4.11 IQ Question 145
Digital Print
Thirty-eight inches by twenty-six inches each
2004
21. Pedro likes Sally but not Maria; he likes Debra but not Carmen; he likes Jill but not Claudia. Which does he like?

![](https://example.com/face_a.png)
![](https://example.com/face_b.png)
![](https://example.com/face_c.png)
![](https://example.com/face_d.png)

Image 4.12 IQ Question 21
Digital Print
Thirty-eight inches by twenty-six inches each
2004

30. 13-year-old May Wong was ordered to assemble 400 plush dolls in 8 hours. After 18 continuous hours, May was only able to make 223 plush dolls. For her infraction, May was not paid that month, which forced her to sell her body for food again. Luckily, her shortcoming meant 20 - 50% off the plush doll for some consumers. Which of these four got the best bargain for their plush doll at the local super-store?

![](https://example.com/face_a.png)
![](https://example.com/face_b.png)
![](https://example.com/face_c.png)
![](https://example.com/face_d.png)

Image 4.13 IQ Question 30
Digital Print
Thirty-eight inches by twenty-six inches each
2004
41. If a tree branch can hold three people and John weighs four times as much as Adam, and Rachel weighs half as much as Pablo, then Rachel, John and Adam can all sit together on Pablo safely. Which of these is Pablo?
42. Mary had a number of ounces of homemade methamphetamines. After mainlining one ounce, she gave half the remainder to her son. After snorting another ounce, she gave half of what was left to her daughter. Mary now had only five ounces of homemade methamphetamines. How many ounces did she start with?

Image 4.16 IQ Question 42
Digital Print
Thirty-eight inches by twenty-six inches each
2004

93. The FBI intercepted three messages in a strange language from a distant country. The investigators studied the messages and found that "Necor Buldon Stobor" means "Dangerous to Speak" and "Edwan Mynor Necor" means "Thinking Is Dangerous" and "Buldon Gimilzor Gondor" means "Corporations Own You". Which best defines the meaning of Stobor?

Image 4.17 IQ Question 93
Digital Print
Thirty-eight inches by twenty-six inches each
2004
20. Two cars, loaded with explosives, leave undisclosed cities at the same time. After 30 minutes and traveling at 55 mph, Car A makes a wrong turn and accidentally incinerates an occupied school. 45 minutes later, Car B, traveling at 90 mph, delivers a payload melting nearly everything around it, including 65 civilians and the various limbs of 15 soldiers. Of the five below, which benefited most from the result of this event?

Image 4.18 IQ Question 20
Digital Print
Thirty-eight inches by twenty-six inches each
2004

Along with serving as my best work here at OSU, the IQ question series was important work for me to create because it served as a departing point. They helped me see that using technology for the sake of talking about technology was not that interesting to me. They also helped me release even more control of the art process, by bringing the element of appropriation into the recipe. At this time, almost on queue, DJ Spooky came to town to give a fantastic lecture on his process. The lecture itself was not easy to follow, mainly because DJ Spooky is much like his music, a sampling of small bits and pieces of knowledge. Nonetheless, at that lecture he helped me make a connection about remixing (a hip way of saying appropriation) in relation to electronics; specifically electronic toys. The connection I made was this: What would happen if instead of remixing imagery or sound, I remixed electronic toys.
I do not even want to know how much money I have spent on toys in the last year. During December 2003, I was visiting toy stores every other day, in anticipation of the latest Tiger or Elmo dolly. Inside of each of these toys I would find an amazing mechanical machine, just bursting with art-making potential. These toys are the ready-mades of the 21st century new media artist. At first I was not sure what to do with them, I just knew that there was something there. Several pieces have come from this investigation of remixing electronics, the first of which is “8520 S.W. 27th Pl” that was accepted into the Biennale of Electronic Arts in Perth, Australia (BEAP 2004).

The piece started when I bought twelve of the Gemmy Corp. Dancing Hamster toys. After skinning them and turning them “on” all at once, I found it hysterical to watch all these ripped apart toy robots in action. My first idea was to simply let them do their thing in a chorus line, playing on the idea of repetition and mass production of products. The idea made me laugh, which is always a good sign. Fortunately after a few days of living with the piece it became terribly annoying which made it no longer funny. So I scrapped it. The notion of wasting money on twelve dancing hamsters didn’t sit well with me, so I kept playing with the toys for a few months. Luckily, one night by mistake, I glued one hamster to another and saw that what I had was a whole different creature. It was a hybrid toy with the new capability of lateral movement. From that discovery and an interest in communicating sociological issues through my art came the proposal for “8520 S.W. 27th Pl.” Below is the essay I wrote to the BEAP review committee about the piece for consideration:
“8520 S.W. 27th Pl.”

From the day we are born, free will demands that we make continuous decisions on which directions our lives should go. A newborn unconsciously does this while adapting to its body, making countless decisions on which direction its body should be moved in order for it to work correctly. As we age this decision process continues, becoming more and more conscious, complex and abstract. This process, being perhaps the most common attribute we share as a species, affects all of us. Moreover, we cling to this attribute dearly since we believe that it is what separates us from the rest of the animal kingdom, defining us as human. Throughout our lives, every decision pushes us further into the unknown future, culminating in a complex timeline that is unique to each individual. However, within this uniqueness there also exists a similarity, for existence does not discriminate between each timeline. At the micro or individual level, the decision for one person to wake up and go to work is crucial, since working is essential to that person’s existence. At the macro or the collective level, this decision has little significance, since it’s effect is not important to the over all existence of

Image 4.20 8520 S.W. 27th Pl. v.1
Kinetic Sculpture
Dimensions Variable
2004
the species. It is this that is at the heart of the human condition, the belief that our decisions or free will is imperative; when the reality is that its significance is lost when compared to the unperceivable totality of the universe. So each of us lives out our lives in this endless string of problems to solve, contemplating on what action to take on each, evaluating the consequences from the decision and moving on to the next. All the while realizing the irrelevance of the whole endeavor.

It is this pointlessness that 8520 S.W. 27th pl. speaks about. Within this installation there exists eight double-headed robotic rodents. They all live within their transparent houses which are exactly alike, differing only in the numerical address of each house. Each robotic rodent has the ability to walk left or right on its track. A micro controller, imbedded at each power station determines the direction it takes. The decision is random, but it serves as a metaphor for the overall insignificance of our decisions. The robots pause at each new assessment, pulsing a small light installed in each head, making them appear to be contemplating their future action. All the robotic rodents scurry about, seemingly with a purpose, only to bump their heads on the extremes of their houses.

Image 4.21 8520 S.W. 27th Pl. v.1 Kinetic Sculpture Dimensions Variable 2004
The piece that I proposed to BEAP was about free will or humanity’s never ending condition of making conscious decisions. Being able to complete one working prototype of the piece for my MFA show gave me the chance to reevaluate some of the conceptual and formal aspects of the piece. Conceptually I decided to hold back some of the information I presented to the viewer in the first version. From the observations I made of people viewing the first version, I decided that I was giving too much information away; there wasn’t enough mystery left for the viewer to chew on. I modified the second version by removing the LCD screen that was intended to inform the audience that a decision was being made. Instead I choose to create a program that would imply that the rodents were contemplating something and then taking action about it.

I did this by creating a program that abstractly simulates the process that we make decisions by. Each time we are presented with something new to decide upon, a variety of processes go into action. The first is our experience or our history. If you know where people come from or what their history is, individual human beings are easy to predict. A person that has had several bad experiences with eating hamburger meat in the past will probably choose to not eat hamburger meat if given the choice. There is, of course, that chance that they might, but probability dictates that the chances are slim. Life experience is nurture or as the American Heritage
dictionary states, Nurture: n The sum of environmental influences and conditions acting on an organism.

Environmental influences seem to be partially responsible for an individual's personality traits, defining who we are. In order to simulate this in software, I created a unique series of numbers for each robotic rodent. The series of numbers (jotted down randomly by me) represent the 24 personality traits that James B. Hittner lists in his essay "Fostering Critical Thinking in Personality Psychology: The Trait Paper Assignment." Below is his list:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passive</th>
<th>Outgoing</th>
<th>Unsociable</th>
<th>Active</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Careful</td>
<td>Talkative</td>
<td>Sober</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
<td>Responsive</td>
<td>Rigid</td>
<td>Impulsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peaceful</td>
<td>Easygoing</td>
<td>Moody</td>
<td>Changeable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled</td>
<td>Lively</td>
<td>Anxious</td>
<td>Excitable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>Carefree</td>
<td>Reserved</td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even-Tempered</td>
<td>Leaderly</td>
<td>Depressed</td>
<td>Restless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>Quiet</td>
<td>Lonely</td>
<td>Touchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociable</td>
<td>Pessimistic</td>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>Jealous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that this does not mean that there are only 24 human personality traits, far from that. These are just some that Hittner came up with for his essay. Or in his own words "The list is far from exhaustive and you should have no difficulty coming up with an additional list of traits (for help, see any unabridged dictionary)."

For each personality trait I chose a number between 0 - 255, (256 is the length of one computer byte). This series of numbers is written to the EPPROM so that when the rodent's power is switched off it still retains the numbers that defines
the "personality" or experience. Once they have been given an identity, the rodents are presented with their first decision to make. The decision is basically represented by a new list of 24 numbers. To ascertain the direction the rodent will take, the decision list is compared with the personality list. As the rodent crunches the numbers, the results cause the LEDs and motors on the rodents to turn on slightly, making them appear to hesitate or consider the decision being made. The resulting "behavior" that the rodents demonstrate is very fluid and even organic, a quality that I have been trying to emulate in software for some time now. I believe that the new software will allow viewers to make up their own decision about the "meaning" of the piece. Even better, I believe that there is enough ambiguity for viewers to arrive at their own meaning, which in the end is much more interesting to me.
Image 4.24 8520 S.W. 27th Pl. v.2
Kinetic Sculpture
Dimensions Variable
2004

Image 4.25 8520 S.W. 27th Pl. v.2
Kinetic Sculpture
Dimensions Variable
2004
Both version of “8520 S.W. 27th Pl.” have been a pleasure to create, perhaps because their creation involved my new process of appropriation and remixing electronics. The conversations that I had with audience members during the exhibition of both version of “8520 S.W. 27th. Pl.” helped me understand the piece even further. In particular, at the BEAP exhibition a few people remarked that since we peer down at the installation of transparent houses, we are viewing the piece from “God’s point of view.” I had not considered this before, but that was right. The piece made the viewers into “Gods,” observing how the inhabitants of the suburban dwelling behaved at every moment and simultaneously seeing the big picture of the situation; the houses where not only the rodents’ living spaces, but in the end also their death beds. It was interesting for me to realize this theological connection with “8520 S.W. 27th. Pl.”, as the idea of God also appears in “Looking for God,” another piece that was generated during my exploration of the electronic remix.
Late one night while I was working in my studio, I was listening to an old AM radio. The soundstage in Haskett Hall is an awful place for AM reception; consequently I was listening to a lot of interference. One second it would be playing NPR, the next second a religious speaker tuned in talking about his faith and the next the radio tuned out all together, going into the weird beeps and bops of static radio. After a few minutes of listening to this, I started playing around with the dial, looking for more interesting audio configurations. It was then that the little light bulb of imagination went off in my head. It made me think how interesting it would be to have a robot listen to the radio. If it could listen and understand the radio, what might it listen too? Since most of the broadcasts on late night AM radio are about religion, it occurred to me that the machine might search for the God-idea.

The origin of the God-idea has always been a hot topic amongst those involved in seeking truth. Creationists will argue that the God-idea is built into us, believing that we were all made in the God’s image. Evolutionists will argue that the God-idea was learned, believing that it was the primitive human’s way of coping with a world that was hostile and mysterious. Still other religions and philosophies have their own views on the subject, believing faithfully that they are correct. The God-idea is passed on from generation to generation evolving into new permutations and combinations. An interesting consequence of the God-idea might be if and when humanity succeeds in creating artificial intelligence, will the machine inherit it? Will the offspring of the human race also look for the God? If so where might it look for It?

“Looking for God” is an installation that considers this notion. The basic setup consists of an old General Electric radio, a microphone, an electronic odometer, an electronic bell, a microprocessor and a mechanism that is able to tune the radio. The mechanism turns the dial of the radio slightly either to the left or right. The
microphone then captures a three-second sample of the audio signal coming out of the radio. This captured signal is then compared to a signal saved in the microprocessor’s memory of the word “god.” If the new signal captured by the microphone is not equal to the signal in memory, the mechanism turns the dial again and the process is repeated. If the signal captured is equal to the signal in memory, the piece deduces that it has found the word “god”. It then triggers the electronic bell and marks one unit on the electronic odometer. In this way, “Looking for God” tries to metaphorically replicate humanity’s own pursuit of understanding the world.

During the first exhibition of it at my thesis show, “Looking for God” generated lots of interest from viewers. In the conversations I had with people about the piece, two of the more interesting topics that came up were about faith and NASA’s SETI program (search for extra terrestrial intelligence). Concerning faith, many people were questioning if the machine would ever find the word “god” in the radio. Since I programmed the comparison between each new sampled sound and the one in memory to be a one-to-one ratio, the probabilities of “Looking for God”
actually finding the word "god" in the radio are astronomical. Because of this, there was no affirmation for viewers that the piece did what it claimed. Thus, much like people looking for the God, it takes a leap of faith for people to believe that the piece "Looking for God" will ever find what it is looking for.

It was not surprising that the other conversation I had with people about this piece was about SETI. Some people will tell you that our endless search for the God is analogues with modern society's search for extra terrestrials. However, the similarity that people saw between "Looking for God" and SETI was not about the God, it was about radio waves. Reasoning that any civilization that is as advanced as us would use radio waves as
a means of communications, for over 40 years the astronomers at SETI have been scanning the cosmos for any sign of an intelligent pattern in the electromagnetic spectrum. What I have always found interesting about SETI was the nature of that pattern. What exactly might a pattern or radio message from an alien civilization be? That in the end is the most challenging issue that scientists at SETI have to overcome: how to recognize an alien signal when they come across it, which is the same dilemma that people face in their search for the God.

Both of these pursuits, the search for the God and SETI also share another attribute that I find interesting in relation to my work. They are both seeking something from the realm of the invisible.

Coincidently this topic of visibility also appears in “Visible,” another sculpture included in my thesis show.

21st century reality is based on the interpretation and perception of visual information. With the
exception of the seeing-impaired, our civilization is filled with visual stimulus addicts. We cling to sight like a junkie does heroine, relying on it to make existence possible. As an artist I have meticulously trained my eyes to continuously give my brain the visual "fix" that it desires. Because of this visual dependence, people that were born blind, with no eyes at all, have always captivated me. I am fascinated at how they perceive their world. It's completely unimaginable and forever unattainable to me and other people that were born with sight. Their perception of the universe is a reminder to me that most of the universe is not visible. That, in fact, our visible
universe is only a small fraction of what the total is. The interactive sculpture “Visible” is an artwork that speaks about this invisible reality.

Using an infrared light, a custom “reading” device, an infrared sensitive camera and a small television monitor, “Visible” allows a person to see through acrylic paint in order to read the message hidden beneath. As the user pushes the “reading” device across a blue strip of paint, the monitor to the left of them displays letters traveling horizontally across the screen. Upon further inspection, the user might realize that the letters spell a sentence. The sentence reveals the following passage from the I-Ching and spoken by Dumant, a character in the 1981 Walt Disney Classic “Tron”: “All that is visible must grow beyond itself, extending into the realm of the invisible.” The quote insinuates that we must strive to deliver ourselves from the constraints of the visible universe. By doing this we can more closely understand the nature of existence.

In addition to these theological and metaphysical topics, remixing electronics gave way to “Telephoney” and “614-220-DUCK”, two projects that deal with telephonic communications.

The installation “Telephoney” consists of two clear acrylic cubes. Inside each clear cube is a little robot (formerly an electronic toy) that is tethered to a control unit mounted on the ceiling. Also connected to this control unit and hanging from the ceiling are microphones embedded into aluminum cans. The idea is that when a person speaks into one of the cans the robot inside the acrylic cube goes into action.
according to the sounds being made. The intent was for “Telephoney” to be a comment on communication or the lack thereof. Using all the sophisticated technology that humans have, we still have not found a way to communicate well enough to understand each other. If we had, we would not have some of the problems that we have in this world. The people that yelled and screamed into “Telephoney”, said all sorts of things, but in the end much like the trillions of telephone calls that are made every microsecond, they said nothing at all. As the American journalist Edward R. Murrow put it, “The newest computer can merely compound, at speed, the oldest problem in the relations between human beings, and in the end the communicator will be confronted with the old problem, of what to say and how to say it.”

“Telephoney” was the final piece I made for my thesis show. Including the piece in the show helped me work out problems with formal and conceptual qualities. In retrospect, I do wish that I had more time to think about where the piece was going. However, showing the piece in a gallery setting like the Mahan Gallery was very rewarding. It allowed me to have what people in product development call “focus group.” Seeing how people reacted and interacted with the piece showed me what worked and what didn’t. It also helped me generate a new set of ideas to explore in relation to telephonic communication. The next time I show “Telephoney” it will no longer be interactive, it will be mounted onto a wall and will be more self-contained. Activation of the robots will be driven by intercepted cell-phone conversations using a digital radio scanner. The robots will also face themselves and be inches away from each other.

It is the second time that I have visited the idea of a telephone or telephone calls in artwork. The first time was with the piece “614-220-DUCK”. Unfortunately “614-220-DUCK” was not included in my thesis show because it was at an exhibition
in Chicago. Another reason that I made “Telephony” was because I didn’t have “614-220-DUCK” to finish off the thesis show. “614-220-DUCK” started when I was working in the Art Department’s woodshop. Out of boredom, I decided to glue some wood together and cut out the shape of a wooden duck. When I was finished, the duck had this hilarious (at least to me) way to rock back and forth when I tapped it on the butt. At the time I was thinking that I wanted to make a new media sculpture that related to “humor.” After laughing at the duck rocking back and forth in front of me, I decided to make the duck rock with the assistance of a mechanical device. At first the piece was going to be activated by the gallery viewer stepping on a switch. After living with the idea for a few more months, it occurred to me that it would be a lot more interesting and funny to have the duck be triggered when someone made a phone call to it.

At the same time, my friend Sabrina Raaf was curating a show relating to humor at the Klein Works Gallery in Chicago. She invited me to submit something to the show. I submitted “614-220-DUCK”. Below is the abstract that accompanied the submission:
“614-220-DUCK”

In the 21st century, artists have access to tools that allow them to communicate better then at any time in history. This has generated new paradigms in art, including art that is controlled at the speed of light across the world, art that is created by genetically engineering costume organisms and art that cross breeds the human body with the machine. For the most part, the contemporary artist working in new media takes themselves very seriously, believing that the cutting edge technology being used somehow connects them more closely with our innate search for “true” meaning. The reality of it is that the new media artist is on the same boat as the painter or the photographer; they can all only create approximations of a reality that we are essentially not programmed to fully understand.

(614)-220-DUCK is a commentary on the realization that all the communication power that our silicone age has generated can in the end only communicate things that are trivial. The viewer makes a phone call with their high-tech personal cell phone. This connects them via a string of satellites and control towers to a computer in another part of the world. Prompting them with audio instructions, this computer then sends out another signal to even more satellites and control towers, eventually coming full circle a few inches away from the initial transmission and into the electronic pager unit mounted on the wall. At this point the signal is captured by the sculpture’s microprocessor, which has been monitoring the pager. When the processor’s algorithm detects the signal, it triggers a servomechanism, which taps the
wooden duck on the butt using a hand knitted swab. This causes the duck to tip slightly and then rock back and forth. A few moments later, when the call comes in again or a new call is made, the process is repeated.

The show "Tart" and the piece were a big success in Chicago, with one or two little blurbs about it appearing in local articles and an audio review of it on NPR in Chicago. I learned a great deal from the experience of making and dealing with it. One of the main things was never to buy an electronic pager from a flea market. The pager unit itself was fine, but the people that sold me the service were stupid. I had to tell them how their business worked, so that they would be able to make the pager unit function nationally instead of locally. I can only blame myself though. It's really my fault for being stupid enough to buy the pager unit at the flea market in first place. At the time, in my brain, the place where you buy pagers was the flea market.

"614-220-DUCK" left me with the desire to continue exploring the world of telephone communication. I already have two or three ideas for others, one of which will be able to make a phone call back to the person that interacted with it. A person visits the gallery, interacts with an art piece via their cell-phone and 40 minutes later, when the person is no longer at the gallery, they get a phone call from the art. I cannot wait to have time and money to make the piece.

By considering electronic media like a DJ considers music, there is a world of possibilities that opens up. I am not sure why I have not visited this idea in the past, after all, it is not a revolutionary idea in the arts. From the time of Picasso, people have been using collage in art. It was new for me was because up until the last two years, I exclusively made everything from scratch. I designed every aspect of the drawing machine series, sometimes including the hardware. In contrast to that, most
of the pieces in my thesis show involved some form of remixed or appropriated material. However, the arrival of meaning has for the most part remained the same since I was a kid fooling around with squiggles on a piece of paper. To this day I still rely on a great deal of automatic thinking in order to arrive at what it is I will make.
Chapter 5

SO YOU STUDIED ART FOR FIFTEEN YEARS, SO WHAT?

At the commencement of this paper I postulated several questions that I believed were important for me to attempt to answer. They are questions that are worth giving some time and will make the closing remarks for this paper.

What type of person has the exercise of “learning to be an artist” created?

Fifteen years ago when I first started the pursuit of becoming a professional artist, I had no idea what that meant. The one thing I understood was that art was the only topic in school that I put any effort into and that continuously held my interest. After going through the economic and social hurdles of private art school, a few years of exhibiting in the professional art world and two grueling years of graduate school, I can now say that the product of all that experience is a truly well-rounded, visually driven, insane person. The “real” world that I left behind years ago seems foreign and empty to me now. I am constantly looking at things with a critical eye, reading into them and thinking of how they can be used in the production of art. For instance, the first thing that I thought of when I saw the airplanes crash into the
twin towers during September 11th was, how beautiful. The second was, how can I
make art about this event? The third was the horror of the event. I have NO idea
what people that are not involved with art think about or do with their time. Nor do I
know what I would do with myself if I were not making some sort of art object. It
has become what defines me. It is the basis for my personality and is one of the few
reasons why I get out of bed. I would not trade it for anything else in the world.

How has it affected what my current work looks like and is about?

I have struggled with the implications of this question the last two years. One
of the things that I have learned over the years is that “good art” and “bad art” is
relative to the viewer. As the old proverb simply states, “Beauty is in the eye of the
beholder.” That said, the artist that goes through art education is taught that there is
a “correct way” to make art, much like there is a correct way to write an essay or
solve a mathematical problem. Because of this, a lot of what comes out of art school
looks very similar, using time tested techniques that demonstrate the “correct way”
to make “good art”. This notion of the “correct way” is easily argued when one looks
at the prevalence and success of “outsider art.” The paintings of the aboriginals of
Australia, the fetish objects of voodoo artists in the Caribbean or the fantastic
drawings of any child under the age of 5 demonstrates that people still make “good
art” even if they have not been “educated” in the “right way”. It is because of this
that I wonder what my art would look like now if art education would not have
intervened. Undoubtedly, the sophistication of my work, specifically the new media
work, might not be the same, however I will be forever curious as to what the work
would have looked like without 15 years of formal training.

What has it done to my perception of what art is?

This question would have been easier to answer as a 15-year-old. Back then I
remember thinking I knew what art was. Now I am not certain. Maybe it is partially
because I have looked at so much art that I have become jaded. Or maybe it is that my taste for what I like and what I do not like has become focused. Regardless, I find it hard to have a meaningful conversation about what art is after being involved with it for so long. I do know this; the art that touches me now cannot be completely described using words. It is an appreciation that exists mostly in the realm of sight, feeling and emotion. It is that moment when I forget that I am in a museum or gallery and I laugh out loud or jump up and down or get so inspired that I have to pee. That moment when for an instant I am a kid again looking at the tadpoles in the pond.

**How will it affect what I will communicate in the future?**

This question is a hard to answer since one never knows what the next experiment will unfold. Moreover, I believe the answer to this question is associated with the second question above. I will try to keep what I learned in my formal art education to a minimum in my work, relying on something that I learned as child more, automatic thought. However, since I did go through art education and there is not much I can do about it now, I will draw from the most valuable things that I learned in my time as an art student. Things like life-long learning, critical thinking, purposeful experimentation, and cultural awareness are all things that will hopefully make my work thought provoking and visually engaging in years to come.

**What is the next step?**

This is not entirely clear. I set myself the goal of attaining my Master of Fine Art degree years ago. I have arrived there now. It is not clear what the logical next step is. Perhaps it is to succeed to the best of my ability in the art sphere. Which raises the question, what does it mean to succeed in art? Is it money? Is it fame? Is it power? I am not sure. I do know this, at a certain point in my career, I would like to have the ability to wake up in the morning with one purpose: to make art and
nothing else. Basically, to roll out of bed, walk over to my studio and spend the whole day making stuff. I know it sounds idealistic or cliché, but honestly that is my goal. To have no other purpose other then doing what it is I love to do. I guess in a way it is the desire to remain a child, playing with my toys until the day I die.

*Note to reader: If you would like to see more of the work that I generated during my time at OSU or the new work that I have made since, please visit my website at:

http://www.fernandoorellana.com