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Feathers from a Post Extraction

September 27, 2012

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
In Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts

Feathers from a Post Extraction

By Bri Kinard

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To my mentors

Rick Hirsch

Elizabeth Kronfield

Jane Shellenbarger

Virginia Scotchie

Matt Wicker

Thank you for your support and encouragement

ABSTRACT

I proposed to create a cohesive body of sculptural work that would evolve through the act of making and the trials of experimentation. I invited every opportunity for my work to transform and take on a new direction. I had complete devotion to the work and material of clay. I considered my drive for discovery to be a purpose which spawned emotion giving me a reason to continue my pursuit of art. I approached the making of my work with a chronic compulsion for production. I make art because I have to. The choice to be an artist was never a conscious decision. The creation of this work was a subconscious process acted out by my fingertips. Thoughts manifested and exploded into the material and a refined physicality was triggered through my movements. I reacted to the results with extreme highs and lows willing the sculpture into life. This emotionally draining and labor- intensive process that I worked through left the work

and material raw and exposed. A hierarchy was devised and the outliers in the pack of multiples became fair game. I allowed myself to experiment without boundaries. Combating materials and interests played a strong role within this body of work. This allowed me insight into the cause and effect of the choices I was making. I denied any material the right to function as a historical marker. I deprived them of their nature and transformed their meaning. I maintained control over the chaos by organizing the fragile parts; making them a part of something much greater than the norm. I composed a frozen moment that was extracted from my mind and recreated it to exist in the real world.

DISCUSSION OF SOURCES AND RESEARCH

When researching other artists I am inspired by their words and not their work. I am not interested in how they make, only with how I make. The maker is the only one who gets to understand the fullest extent of their work. Finding my own strength inside of other people is a motivator for creation.

“I have wounded myself to prove that

I cannot yes you can

I cannot yes you can

I cannot yes you can

I cannot yes you can”

-Louise Bourgeois

Insomnia Drawings/December, 1994; back of page 3

When I discovered Louise Bourgeois' quote scribbled within her drawings I felt as if I were no longer alone. She helped me to reaffirm my existence as an artist; highlighting the pushes and the pulls one must undertake to create an autobiographical body of work. One that is personal and honest. Surviving myself is the true battle I must face and strive to overcome.

The catalyst behind the body of work produced for my thesis exhibition *POST EXTRACTION* was raw emotion, I became my own research. Throughout my life I have been afflicted with the burden of intense and overwhelming emotion. I am always aware of these feelings because society tells me that they are wrong and that I should hide them. The recourse of this causes a great confusion to rise to the surface. I tried to pull at these emotional ties in order to rid myself of them. In the moment of creation I was able to regard some of my greatest fears as allies. The work created for this particular exhibition was savage and visually disruptive. It was comprised of symbolism and filled with implications of fear and anxiety. I unleashed these situational exposures into the clay. In reaction to this I organized the pieces in order to regain control. This passion was the force that drove the work always screaming to be released. It fueled the graphic

nature and dark undertones that took possession over the concept. Most of the sources I pulled from were internal battles. The subject matter I worked with was personal yet indirectly related to a specific event.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Materials and Process

I explored many materials while creating this body of work. Some involved the process of ceramics while others did not. In no way do I feel that I have mastered the material of clay. However I do feel that I have a deep understanding and connection with the material. I enjoy advancing the acquired sensibilities one must have to work in clay. It fights back, has memory and can be made into anything taking on different roles. Composed of dissimilar elements it changes under fire and transcends itself.

I try to stand back and acknowledge that the material itself has a say in what is being created. Understanding the limits of clay and letting it follow its natural reactions, I gather information and respond accordingly. I work to gain experience outside of my concentrated medium in order to expand upon current ideas. Exploration is a necessary piece of my puzzle. When I seek out new ways of working my thoughts are jolted and limitless options are created. I was introduced to casting metal during the first year of my thesis research. I was exposed to bronze, aluminum and iron. I was immediately attracted to iron. It was beautiful, temperamental and hot with a personality that could literally kill. The dirty, time consuming and labor intensive efforts that are made throughout the creation of a casting enchanted me. The amount of physical work in the pursuit of art, set my guilt free. The care with which I handled my work did not change but the way I looked at it did. The translation of my work from clay to iron helped me see my work in a different situation. Without the answer to why something is the way it is my work refuses to progress. When learning the processes of casting metal the reasons for why I was doing something taught me more than just knowing what I was doing. I found myself content with this approach because there is a similar rhythm to the way I make with clay. Sometimes there is great potential for failure when working this way, but failures have taught me the most. Much like iron, clay is a strong yet fragile and layered substance that requires constant care. I work

with clay because of the immediate responses and pressures that can be placed upon it and then quickly removed. When working with any material, I like breaking the rules and pushing the limits. I work from a state of agitation and often times this causes a reaction to become recorded into material. If I am satisfied with the result of the reaction I then marry it with more developed aspects of my work. Eventually the idea earns its own identity within the evolving structure. The current structure this tends to follow is one of intensity. I violently love, leave, break and hate my work. Within a few short moments I can fly through a range of highs and lows and a decision is made to keep or to destroy. I am not interested in how the work makes it through the violent process, only that it does. I am mostly concerned with the reasons for why it makes it through. I study the similarities and relationships of the survivors. I work in multiples and when doing so there are always a few that come out awkward. The rest of the work benefits from these outcasts giving them individuality and equal importance. These rejects are just as valuable as the work that is pleasing and non disruptive. I have spent a lot of time in life feeling like the outcast. These experiences make it hard for me to deny elements that are a bit distorted, but have survived. With so much disorder and a lack of consciousness in the making, I employ control over almost every other aspect of the process. I knew that keeping these ideas in mind when choosing an exhibition space would be important. I chose a large dark

space that allowed me the freedom to compose. It had to feel as though it were a canvas ready to receive the body of work that was being manifested.

The Work

The Coco and Vikky's were creatures built by hand with coils. Many were bisque fired and then cold finished others were glazed. I did a lot of cold finishing with different materials such as ; paint, glitter, bird feathers, both found and made objects. Many of the objects that the creatures were adorned and decorated with held great personal meaning for me. Some I pulled from my past and others were gifts from my studio mates. I may not always control the making but I do control the organization of the actions and outcomes. When beginning this large body of work I tried to keep the smaller pieces connected to the whole. This control was managed differently for each piece in the overall instillation. I broke the entire installation up into components and worked on them individually. Setting goals was an important factor behind why I was able to create such a large amount of work in such a short amount of time. The demons were made between January and March the extraction was created in March and April. I set a goal to complete sixty Coco and Vikky's, and when I was close to the end of their production I began making the torpedoes. When the torpedoes were nearly completed I began the wishbones, then the rings, and finally the black feathers. My vault of built up materials and knowledge was something I pulled from working in a production mindset; I grabbed from it

like a memory bank. When I sorted all of the material reactions and concepts I found that I gave myself more of a selection to work from. These elements progressed and changed in small amounts over varying periods of time. They relied on one another for their development. This helped to maintain an aesthetic consistency throughout the show.

The Rings were small and red; approximately 4" in width. They were made of a low temperature slip smeared onto a plaster slab. At the right consistency I scraped the slip in one fluid motion returning a long ribbon of texture. I was able to make two rings from each scraping of the slab. After I bent them into a circle, overlapping them at one point I compressed the circle together. I enjoyed the process of the rings the most, over all of the other elements. After they were made and given a few moments to dry I could stack the next round on top. They were easy to move and breaking along the edges during the stacking did not destroy their integrity. I liked this way of working and decided to continue this method throughout their process. In the kilns I stacked them in a similar fashion and they held their shape through the firing. When deciding how to finish the rings I tried to keep a few things in mind. The most important thing was for the rings to stand out based on the form they created. I tried to avoid anything shiny or distracting because of the preexisting texture. I chose to use a dark red slip, and I varied the hues of red by altering the amount of oxide used. I wanted them to range in color so that the viewer's

eye would wander through the interior of their form. They were suspended from lines of hemp, that I referred to as heart strings. I strung 3 to 6 rings on each line and tied them into a loop. The loops were hung from a tee made from plumbing fixtures. I used the same kind of fixtures for all of the pieces with heart strings. The piping helped the sculpture blend from the natural environment of the space. Each loop was cut to length allowing me to form a sculpture in the air that reminded me of a cloud. The tallest cloud was high enough to walk underneath. I wanted the viewer to have the opportunity of experiencing the extraction raining down from above.

Behind the rings were three bunches of tar dipped feathers. Black with tar and shiny with polyurethane, they hung down from a longer tee piping. I gathered organic materials from ponds around campus that fondly reminded me of feathers. They grew by the thousands and died off in the fall. Each feather was about one to two feet in length and light in weight. I dipped them in a tar like material used for sealing driveways. I felt that the black feathers were the most graphic element of the extraction because they were taken from nature. Transformed they looked tortured and sharp.

Wishbones cut the room into two parts. They were made from coils rolled and flattened on each end then pinched at their connection point. The bones measured from 8" to 2' in length, the average being 1'. I finished the surfaces with different slips and glazes. After the bones were fired I dipped them in a rubber that adhered onto the surface of the ceramic. During the

process I lost two out of three from start to finish. I began making these under the untested theory that they would be simple and painless. By the end of the process I was aware that the bones were the most fragile element of the show. Made for wishing the bones represented irony, an emotional tug of war that developed during their own progression.

The torpedoes were the main installation in the little room. They were thrown on the wheel; altered bottles with no bases. I then pinched their necks tight so that I would have a secure place to hang them from. After they set up and were close to leather hard I beat the open ends in a twisting pattern along the side of a table. I am very attached to this form and the history it carries. It has been a progression from my early work that spawned from my broken heart series. I thought it would be most appropriate in the small room bringing a sense of seriousness.

CONCEPTS AND THEMES

The Frozen Moment

There were many underlying themes and ideas that passed through this body of work. The most important of them followed a narrative with characters representing time, place and person. The time was abstract the place was my mind and the person was myself. This work was autobiographical and heavy in content. The idea that laid the tracks for this body was loss. The exhibition was presented as a moment captured within a stylized atmosphere. This environment was created in order to help the viewer relate to the dark origins the work was derived from. In order to avoid objectifying the work I chose to recreate a place of comfort and home taken from my mind. In this moment I was bearing witness to the post mortem of anxiety. The fear had been released and thus the product was revealed. The pain derived from the fear was destroyed through the act of making. In this still place the response of shock took control and transformed into a sharp trauma that quickly abandoned all logic. It was an inescapable emotion expelled for the world to feel. The process of release was a distraught energy that was unseen. The only evidence of its existence were the explosions that were captured in a fleeting condition. Internal and external scarring were all that remained, the pain of bearing this was much too great and had to be physically realized. It was so weighted that I had a difficult time comprehending it myself while involved as the maker. In order to view the work from a more objective standpoint I replaced myself with an army. An army lead by two demons CoCo and

Vikky. The two took shelter in a small room guarded by a demon adorned in decoration. The Scapegoat stood strong at the entrance bearing the weight of the world in her as she was comprised of numerous charms and weapons. In the center of the room there was a cast iron punching bag, it functioned as a power source for the demons representing control and strength. An arsenal of twisted torpedoes hung heavy behind the punching bag adding a sense of gravity to the room directing everything down. This room was the heartbeat to the moment caught in time. The large instillation was derived from this room. A depiction of a moment caught after the disturbance of personal loss. It is a sliding scale of shameful pain, the severity varies depending on the connection. With this body of work I wanted to explore not only the idea of loss, but its heart crushing repercussions. A loss not only of the physical but one that wreaks havoc on all aspects of humanity. I focused on the response to the action that causes me to become masochistic and out of control. This response stimulated the social reject inside of me. The collection of mythical figures displayed to the viewer on the left as they entered was comprised of 60, an army willed to life by Coco and Vikky. The two had similar personalities; one being cursed the other being charmed. Each persona was directly linked to a collection of different experiences and mental states. They united to create a mass that could not be denied. Many had been forsaken, most were destroyed or dismembered in some way. They contained weapons and charms that they

discovered through the extraction of their humanity. They spoke only with their wounds and were headless, because they were not to be trusted. They were highly or simply adorned with found objects, made objects and symbols; some had literal inscriptions scratched into their surfaces. These demons could not be pushed aside for any one's comfort. They witnessed and supported reactions to events that were not wanted. Having no control over their actions, I created them to rid them from my system and to expose them for what they were. When rendered in the world of life and not the land of fantasy they took up space and possessed energy forcing others to confront them.

The extraction

This side of the exhibition was what I considered to be my true body of work. It was a compilation of individual parts that were installed piece by piece. The pieces worked together to create an organized form. This form was realized on site and in the moment. The painting and assembling of the work was heavily influenced by the environment and mood I found myself in at the time. This half of the show represented the exit of overwhelming feelings that control my reactions to emotional pain. The extraction was suspended in space. The wall behind the suspension was painted with a background of streaming atmosphere. Horizontal streaks of cool colors highlighted the contrasting splashes of warm reds and yellows. Each side was counterbalanced with one side being higher and the other lower. The

two sides of the extraction were split by three rows of wishbones suspended on cables. The wishbones opened from the low side of the extraction and increased in height to the other side pulling the viewer across the instillation.

Wishing bones

The bones were my interpretation of the nature of hope. They were fragile and had an implied function. Something that has always puzzled me about hope is its great reputation. I believe hope to be the anxiety between the moments of not knowing and finding out. It is the mystery that keeps us moving in a forward direction. Based on this belief, the unfolding of their installation needed to appear as if they were barely balanced on the cords. In order to represent the shaky ground of not knowing and expecting the worst they needed to show weight through gravity. I did this by overloading the cords; the bones were back to back creating three spines. Everything could have fallen apart at any moment, but it did not. I have always viewed the word chance as the backwater word for hope. I think it is more honest and realistic to believe in chance, relying on hope is a sadistic action. It causes me to feel as if there is something I could do to resolve the situation. This need for control is a form of denial, it breeds guilt and disappointment when the outcome of the situation leaves much to be desired. It is a natural emotion that is guaranteed to create a valley of highs and lows. I receive a high from the disappointment and pain it causes, or a release from the gratification.

Red Rings

This is a piece for my grandfather the greatest loss I have ever suffered. He was the first person to encourage my artistic endeavors as a child. I think he saw a lot of himself in me because he understood how much I felt. During my summers off I would work with my Papa making things in his shop. We would sit on the floor and trace pictures of birds and eggs from old encyclopedias. He loved all living creatures but especially birds. I use to pretend that the bed of his big red pickup truck was a giant nest; so he started calling me his little redbird. I have worked with the texture scrapings that make the rings for a long time. I started calling them feathers in my undergraduate program and still do to this day. The texture has become apart of my work that I refuse to let go of. In my mind it represents a bandage or dressing for a wound. In this particular rendering the texture symbolizes blood soaked rags. I like to think of them as little red wings wrapped into little red rings. My papa died when I was fifteen. It was the first time that I was given the opportunity of meeting death in person. This is the experience that my work pulls from the most and these red rings are what I feel most connected to when I view my work. They are an old friend I will never lose.

Black Feathers

Tarring and feathering was a form of social punishment. It was meant to force the convicted into adhering to social norms nothing more

than a creative way of employing social control. The black feathers were a symbol of guilt and remind me of death. They appeared strong and dangerous, but would crumble if put under any real pressure. They were sensitive and enacted the reject having undergone the process of humiliation. I placed them in a row of three because I have always known death to come in threes. Death can never be alone, it craves attention.

CONCLUSION

This body of work helped me to expose my internal thoughts and fears. It showed me that anything is possible if it is only imagined first. I was able to reaffirm the reasons I make art. I feel that these reasons need to be realized and extracted from time to time. Thinking about making is the first step to the construction of a body of work but it is a place I only wish to visit. Without physically manifesting goals into reality nothing is achieved. I hope to expand on my current work in the future by broadening my bag of elements. I have always found progression in the small parts that come together to create a whole. Crafting new and different symbols keeps me interested in exploring deeper the reasons for why I make my work. I gain insight into my own work by creating it. It is a never ending process that continues to teach me. I will continue to explore ways of hanging and installing my work. I would like to see the work outside, in the elements, in order to give it a more efficient environment to be disguised in. I will

continue to explore new materials, becoming more comfortable to branch out.