Form

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FORM

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Thesis Proposal

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The purpose of this Thesis is to do an exploration of different forms, both functional and nonfunctional in nature. Concern will be given to form as it relates to depressed and swelling volumes, convex and concave forms, as well as positive and negative spatial relationships that may result between various objects.

Thesis Statement

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The body of work in this thesis embodies an exploration on form. My interpretation has primarily dealt with form as it relates to hollowware, both functional and non-functional in nature. The hollowware pieces maintain relatively simple shapes with smooth contours, linear dimensions and movement. The linear elements have opened different interpretations so that the work may extend and expand the forms beyond the geometric shapes to allow new contours and directions. Various transitory lines, subtle curves and gradual taperings all work to enhance gentle flow, movement and elegance within each piece.
This Thesis Document delves into an investigation on form. Considerations for departure are many, including establishing a communication and understanding of the term, defining and explaining its usage, exploring the historical and aesthetic aspects of form, and presenting personal perspectives developed during the thesis study.

Webster's Dictionary defines Form as, "the shape or structure of anything." 1 A more expanded definition refers to form as the shapes of material objects and the arrangement in space of their elements or parts. Form, from an aesthetic viewpoint, may be defined as a particular organization of shapes that are capable of arousing the emotional and intellectual participation of an individual. It may also be thought of as an organizing principle which brings elements into significant relationships with each other. Component elements of larger wholes are interwoven to give the object its identity, as they create the "form" of the object. "Form is not a department of effect exclusive of material and expression, it is not exclusively form of form, as are the tangible shapes built up of lines and surfaces already formal in themselves. It may exist in the relation between indeterminate sensuous elements." 2 The viewer is carried beyond the material into the object's relationships or forms.

Judgments and interpretations of form are influenced by various factors: structure, organization, shape, and pattern. Form may also be thought of as coming from, or being influenced by, physical, biological, aesthetic, historical and or psychological viewpoint. Each provides a different interpretation, which
complicates a clear understanding of the term. Following is a brief overview of these aspects.

In geometry, the essence of form is in its relationship between dimensions and space. A biological reference deals with the study of form in organisms. This aspect was established in 1827 and is called Morphology. From a more aesthetic perspective, the significance of a particular form depends not on its actual shape and structure, but on the formative processes of perception, the personal needs, tensions, social and historical reference of the perceiver.

Art forms reflect the world from which they originate, capturing a time or period in history through the interpretation of artists, providing a tangible link to past histories and cultures. Because of this, I feel it is important to note some of the parallels between the history of the world and that of form. Forms changed over the years as they adapted to the needs of the period. Different natural and cultural environments directly affected this growth and development. There have been periods when similar forms were developed, variations occurred and then the original form reappeared, while some forms remained through many time periods. They may have been easily adapted by people from different environments, cultures or societies. Various forms were also adapted by national or cultural groups, which had a tendency to maintain similarities from generation to generation. It seems that the functionality of the form was the single most important factor for the continuity of any specific form. The ease of use, storage, availability of materials and knowledge to produce it, were also important factors in a form's genealogy.
From the art historian's view, the beginnings of form started with primitive man. He derived his forms from nature—the environment which totally surrounded him. As time went on, this sharp sensitivity was lessened as man grew farther apart from nature. Egyptian art developed a totally unique and unduplicated interpretation for form, using form patterns. Form, in the interpretation of the Greeks, belonged to the essence of being or "sein". This "sein" meant, that which achieves a limit for itself. Once reaching this limit, it comes to have form or "morphê", with a personal and specific value. The Greeks, working toward this harmony with nature, were able to maintain continuity between the forms of nature and man. The Greeks, having no word for "art" used "techne", the equivalent of our word "skill". The word "art" is derived from the Latin "ars" which also implies skill. The Romans were responsible for the distinction that gradually developed between arts and crafts, as they personified the arts and began to think of them as activities. During the Middle Ages, the meaning of art was skill, a way of doing, and science, logic and geometry, as a way of knowing. The Middle Ages, Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance brought about a conscious stage toward the development of form. Art became a manifestation of human society rather than nature's society and began to serve its own sake as a "Fine Art". The object itself had importance, being viewed for its own intrinsic qualities. Its merit came from viewing the form's composition, with individual aspects and component parts, then achieving a feeling of wholeness for the viewer. The importance of the form as an art piece continued to grow from that time on.
The history of form may also be examined from a philosophical perspective, which has also undergone various changes. The Greek contribution was the most substantial in defining the philosophical basics of form. Around 550 B.C. the School of Pythagoras concluded that numbers are the essence of things and form was considered the characteristic principle of things. Democritus in 415 B.C. relates form to the different arrangements of atoms, while Plato's theories regarded ideas as pure form. In 335 B.C. Aristotle distinguished form from matter. There were others who supplemented these thoughts on form with many involving a mathematical perspective.

By 1214 A.D. the Greek philosopher's ideas had been studied and challenged by logicians, and the Oxford School defined form as "that by which a thing is what it is". About the same time, Thomas Aquinas developed the scholastic doctrine of form as the "essential creative quality of a thing". He thought form was either inmaterial and held within the mind, or it was matter. By the end of the century, form had a comprehensive meaning. Form was the character, nature, or structure of a thing, the visible aspect or shape. It was the image, representation or likeness, the manner or procedure of doing anything. Soon form was used to describe model, type, pattern, beauty, or homeliness. In general, the appearance of a living thing or person was associated with form.

This synthesis periodically became broken down. Leonardo da Vinci, for example, studied natural form and separated his observations into scientific, aesthetic and practical activities involving form. In 1593, Francis Bacon stated "the form of a thing
is its very essence." This same thought continued into the seventeenth century, when Milton stated, "the form by which a thing is what is." The introduction of the term "formal" also took place at this time, altering the concept from Aristotle's basis of form as a primary active principle, to one that concerned the configuration and came to mean "compatible arrangement of parts". Around 1764, the philosopher Kant viewed form as "the principle which holds together the several elements of a thing". These three concepts have remained and are the primary basis for the interpretations of form that exists today.

This thesis study developed from my interest in metalworking. My desire was to expand my knowledge of hollowware processes and techniques through the execution of pieces which would then serve as a visual record of development. Questions arose as to how the pieces might evolve. Would there be a theme? What size, shape and materials would be used to achieve a desirable appearance? It occurred to me that these questions all dealt with a basic concern for the form of the object. I decided to pursue exploration on form and correlate it into the thesis. From here the thesis proposal and consequent study on form began. Another goal of this thesis project was to better understand the creative process in general and to investigate my own tendency to continually sketch and create the same type of forms. These were questions I had often thought about, but never pursued and the thesis format would also allow me this opportunity.

The forms in the thesis pieces embody qualities found within various aspects of nature. For myself, the many phenomena that
exist in the natural environment seem to hold unlimited inspiration for design. Organic forms, the result of the interaction of many different forces, abound in every crevice and open plain in so much abundance and variety, that even in selected areas they become overwhelming. Trying to isolate the specific things which intrigued me, I viewed natural images which then became the foundation for my designs. I then tried to transform them into usable aspects which would create order, unity and interest within my forms.

As the thesis study progressed, I observed nature more closely, with specific aspects such as sand dunes and desert landscapes becoming particularly strong inspiration. There is a unique quality about them in the ability to visually combine soft and hard edges. The mounds of sand seem to be of one soft body which undulate gracefully with the wind, creating wave patterns which accent the surface. Yet these smooth forms, when silhouetted against the sky, reveal sharp, crisp lines and a very hard edge. They summarize what I envisioned for my pieces—an integration of convex and concave sections with the incorporation of linear accents.

Inspired by these relationships, I looked for other examples. Plant vegetation exhibited similar characteristics, with graceful undulating areas, primarily smooth surfaces and sharp, crisp edges. The integration between the stems, petals and leaves seem to accentuate a fluidity and gesture. Another area of inspiration was stone formations where boulders and rock faces were smoothed by centuries of water erosion. Mountain streams and riverbeds exhibited the most fascinating mix of natural concave and convex
areas. The rock surface flows from swelling to depressed area with smooth rolling curves.

Reflecting on these relationships, I composed sketches with the resulting designs integrating the soft and hard edge qualities of nature. Pursuing these relationships as the primary focus of my thesis work, I concentrated on their integration. Concave and convex relationships were explored in the first piece. I began by raising a simple bowl shape, a section was then dapped (a tapping with a hammer into the side), resulting in an indentation. There was definitely a concave area produced on the bowl, but instead of appearing intentional, it resembled a dent—a mistake. The concern that an alternative method was needed led me to an evaluation of earlier work I had created. Several of these pieces had linear dimensions. I had experimented with incorporating accent lines into hollowware pieces. These lines were stretched out from the main body so that they raised out approximately one quarter of an inch from the surface, while the section of the body adjacent to the raised line was slightly depressed. The visual effect was comparable to one running two fingers through sand, creating a ridge with a moat on each side. The direction of these lines was in horizontal bands, completely encircling the form. I was intrigued by their enhancing effect, particularly the extension and flow throughout the form. I thought a new approach might emphasize lines which were in a more vertical direction with possible tapering at one or both ends.

The linear technique was incorporated on the bowl form with the "dent". Using the line as an accent, along the top edge of the concave area, a clearly defined statement was created. It
provided continuity between the indentation, linear accent and the main body. The line was extended to a gradual taper, a trajectory line. Giving movement and unification, this transitory effect worked to soften the form.

It was interesting to see the basic shape develop, then alter with the incorporation of the linear element. As time progressed, it seemed necessary to incorporate these linear qualities into the primary focus of my designs. The strong suggestion toward movement and overall dramatic effect which they inspired, satisfied desires expressed in the thesis proposal.

I continued to explore the linear dimensions and their integration with organic forms. Pieces incorporated concave and convex areas, along with linear elements, into the "structural" form. There was a unique juxtaposition created between the relationships of the hard and soft edges, the transitional lines and sweeping curves, and the integration between the placement of these elements which balanced each other. Aspects which were working to achieve this equilibrium included harmony, symmetry or asymmetry and rhythm.

Harmony is achieved when there is agreement between the different aspects of a design. There is a unity or consistency among the parts so that the form appears to be an aesthetically pleasing whole. This harmony is easiest seen when an object is in balance, because uneasiness and tension are eliminated. When an object has balance, its elements have been properly proportioned and it has stability. This does not mean, however, that the form must have symmetry. Symmetry is when two sides of an object correspond to each other through shape, size, and common position of parts.
Some forms are able to achieve balance within the total composition of the form. They are not identical but utilize an asymmetrical format, as exemplified by the salt and pepper set. The pair is not identical, the overall shapes being slightly varied, as is the positioning of the linear accents. These also vary in length, width and depth, giving balance, not symmetry, and an overall union.

In nature, whenever there is symmetry there is a logical and functional reason for it. In many instances the symmetry is produced through repetition of elements where identical units of size are created which result in a rhythm. The rhythm is developed through the regular recurrence of elements, which help give emphasis, definition and movement to the total form.

There is a dynamic force which deals with the repetition of elements similar to that of rhythm. This type is that of pressure thrust which occurs when the force is distributed over a large surface area, similar to ground swelling or extreme air pressure. Involved are relationships of reciprocal patterns—elements working upon each other. There is the creation of ordered units, similar to waves. The hand mirror is a piece which shows a similarity to this type of pressure with the repetition of the linear accents on the swelled surface behind the glass.

Another dramatic force which can be related to my thesis pieces concerns a point of thrust moving in a straight line, paralleling organic growth patterns such as the upward stretching toward the sun and the downward pull of gravity. In the pieces produced in this thesis, the open forms reflect these qualities best. One has a straight line along a cone shaped form, the other
has two sweeping lines on alternate sides. In each the lines move in a vertical direction giving upward emphasis.

A third force is based on centripetal thrust, involving the uncoiling from a central core and resembling a spring. Natural or organic references are often seen in water with ripples, wave patterns and whirlpools. The bowl forms in the thesis seem to exemplify this type of dynamic force. The linear accents begin at the edge of a deep concave area then lead outward gradually.

During the thesis study I created a wall form piece composed of several free form sections. Space became increasingly important with these free form shapes as each became a separate element within a unified piece. Each element is determined by the shape, structure and linear outline defining the space around it, as well as the internal forces working upon it. Mass becomes important to consider in these pieces because this is what displaces space. Here the organic free form shapes become separate elements within a unified piece. The individuality of each is maintained, while also maintaining an integration between them, a unique quality which occurs throughout nature.

The development of a thesis involves the growth and change of the artist's personality. The artist brings emotions, experiences and attitudes toward life into the working process. As time passed throughout the thesis, I found myself going through this process of change. Original thoughts and sketches became altered. There was a molding of many ideas in the development of my own distinctive style.

In order to better understand this thesis study, I feel it becomes essential to look beyond the influences, processes and
techniques, to the personal background of the artist. Throughout the thesis, I kept a log of my ideas, experiences and feelings, at times, only brief notes. Yet, these excerpts may best describe my relationship to the thesis as it actually progressed. These preliminary creative processes may show influences and variations from the initial ideas, sketches and rough drafts, revealing a broader perspective of the creative progression.

September
It is important to remember a schedule, a log, and solutions to problems as they occur throughout this endeavor. Forms should have strong areas with detail, dramatic sweeps, lines added, curved and swelling shapes, and curvilinear qualities.

October
Dapped in the bowl form and beginning of concave areas and the use of line to define the edge. Cone type shapes used to explore the linear of a vertical straight section. I am reminded that the forms must be appealing-pleasing. Maybe to start thinking of repetition using transition. The cylinder form with straight lines has drawn a good deal of attention. The top has nice line qualities which I may use for salt and pepper designs.

November
I feel it is imperative that I design without thinking about the metal. I must design with the form alone in mind. The eyes constant movement in and around an object, I think, is a necessity of a good form. I am looking at plant life and their forms in flowers, stems, trees and bark patterns. Also there is an interest in fabric folds.

December
Thoughts on my forms are that they are relatively simple but elegant. The linear quality accentuates the motion or fluidity of the piece. The basic organic shape reinforces a natural quality. The lines begin and end with subtle qualities. The slight bends exemplify the always changing, never ending lifestyle we lead. The organic shapes are due to strong natural tendencies. The linear feelings and composure I feel from the form is placid, yet interesting.

January

Recent designs look to flowers and foliage, particularly tulips. There are soft linear patterns, undulations and movements which I like.

February

There is a quality that can be carried into the hollowware, with the movement and transition in open or winged forms.

March

On form, I feel that natural things give me the greatest inspiration. I can see the work moving along towards the organic with references to flower and petal format and to landscapes with gently flowing hills and horizon lines.

April

I use lines to break up the smooth forms and to add depth, interest and a directional movement.

Art is a creative process built upon human effort and can be thought of as "...the production of freedom. It comes not through the ordinary course of natural events, but as the result of human effort, human skill and natural deliberation." 5
The artist goes from the intentions to fulfillment and realization through a series of reactions, efforts, pains, satisfactions, and decisions. The creative process involves a great deal of planning, discipline and hard work.

Creating art never becomes static because its activity is stimulating. As the artist, I become a part of the project created, an integral element that cannot be separated physically or mentally. Creating art is a physical activity involving the whole body, with mind and body working together with equal importance. There develops a similar integration between the body and the tools used by the artist. There is a strong, unique harmony which exists between the hand and the tools used in the craft. This is "composed of a subtle sort of give-and-take that cannot be defined by habit alone. This give-and-take allows us to understand that, once the hand conforms to the tool, once the hand has need of this self extension in matter, the tool itself becomes what the hand makes it. The tool is more than a machine. Even if its very form already postulates what its activity is to be, even if its form indicates a definite future, that future is still not absolutely predestined." 6

I believe metalworking, particularly hollowware, typifies the physical activity involved with creating art. The mental and emotional activity involved, although not as visibly seen, are equally as exhausting. These three aspects of creativity work harmoniously together. From one idea, thought processes take hold and respond to human hands, human emotions and expressions. Art is an experience. As stated by the philosopher Dewey, "Any activity that is simultaneously both means and consequence, process and
product rather than an alteration and displacement is Art. Emotion is an indication of immediate participation, an attitude or disposition which is a function of objective things” 7

The intensity of labor involved on a piece does not override the importance of the creative process. Without this inspiration, there would be no need for laboring at the craft.

Throughout the creating process, an intense personal and emotional involvement develops between the artist and his work. The artist cannot be totally separated from the work until there is a relinquishing of the ability to alter the piece. With thesis study, this takes place with the opening of the thesis show. No longer is the thesis a process of working and creating—the works are complete. There is a personal satisfaction and fulfillment brought forth from this accomplishment.

From the artist’s point of view, the process is often more clear than the final piece. Others will view it differently, considering the formal elements or principles of design within the piece itself. While an artist works toward a unity that grows from his perception and handling of materials, the viewer begins with this final product and afterwards becomes aware of the background needed to produce it.

This experience of achieving art can also be considered as the philosopher Eugene Veron did, "The artist...with his creative understanding, transforms his material into his own image; he personalizes it; and finally succeeds in leaving upon his finished work that indelible imprint of his individuality, his unique style." 8
The artist's style emerges from a continuous process of working, achieved through gradual growth and selection. At times, it develops spontaneously. It is this creative process within a craftsman which provides integral meaning toward the development of a style, a process and, ultimately, the work itself.

The aesthetic significance of the thesis pieces lies beyond the technical exploration of the artist. The viewer as the critic finds his or her own values, meanings and feelings. Yet, it is hoped that a consciousness will be reached...that the art work does have aesthetic qualities which unite it to or classify it as fine art.

For myself, I also wish to view the pieces as a critic, discovering new aspects each time. In viewing them through slides or on display at home or on exhibition, the pieces have the quality to inspire my mind once again. I am most excited when I begin to see new aspects of my own work. It is equally interesting to relate them to other visual experiences, correlate new thoughts and ideas, sparking the creative processes once again.

The thoughts, ideas and reactions encountered throughout this thesis investigation have been presented. These personal perspectives are necessary to note, for they clarify the position which I have established on form. They indicate what provided inspiration and describe how studies, designs and the final works were creatively molded together.

In this thesis on form, I addressed various aspects of the formal elements and principles of design. In designing the pieces I tried to integrate my earlier preferences for curvilinear forms, as I developed an appreciation for dynamic qualities. I tried to
integrate these two qualities while maintaining continuity throughout the form. Convex and concave surfaces were created from smooth geometrically shaped forms. Linear elements, consisting of sweeping curves and transitory lines, were then incorporated, working to enhance the space, directional movement and flow of the form. They gave vitality to the pieces while reinforcing an overall elegance.

In this thesis study, form has been identified as the individual aspects within the piece and also the total structure or character of the composition. I believe an accurate summation of form is: "The first form is pure essence of idea, only existing in the mind of the thinker. The second is the form of the idea given physical existence by tools and materials. The third is that form, that all things have, and that is peculiar to each object." 9

At the conclusion of this thesis study, my work reflects growth and development as a person, artist and craftsman. The exposure to technical skills and knowledge has been vast. I have been able to learn and apply fundamentals at every stage of this thesis development. Personal sensitivities have been sharpened and insights toward my own creative processes broadened. The investigation has allowed me to explore and analyze many aspects of form. The pieces are the visual result of physical, emotional and personal experiences and efforts—the symbols of the process which enabled their creation. The true significance which this thesis holds for me is within the total experience itself. Through application these experiences will be reinforced and their absorption, comprehension and application will be ongoing.
Footnotes

1 Webster, Webster's Seventh New College Dictionary.


3 Ibid., p. 230.

4 Ibid., p. 233.


7 Ibid., Dewey, p. 426.

8 Ibid., Veron, p. 219.

Bibliography


10. Webster's Seventh New College Dictionary.

Photographs

The following photographs are referred to in the thesis on the pages listed below.

Bowl Form with "dent" pg 8

Salt and Pepper Set pg 10

Hand Mirror pg 10

Cone Shape Form with straight line pg 10

Cone Shape Form with sweeping lines pg 10

Bowl Form pg 11

Wall Form pg 11

FORM

DONNA DETRAGLIA COLEBECK