Human sensibility - Alienation

Hyuejin You

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the MFA thesis is to involve creating the ‘Human sensibility-Alienation’ as the sculptural pieces. I choose the human sensibility as the vehicle of my work because I believe it is where basic determination about motives, values and responsibility are formed.

The body of work explored in this thesis is about physical, emotional and psychological issues in the context of the human characters and my viewpoint of art. It reflect on aspects of myself such as the struggle between independence and connection, love of nature and alienation from our environment, social constraint and personal growth.

In this thesis, my aim is to illustrate images and ideas which resonate in the imagination, and examine time for introspection. I hope to show that in order to achieves self-worth and inner strength, man must appreciate and accept all condition of being.
ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

This research is about the personal understanding of art and human sensibility. The art works are based on my beliefs about aesthetics and philosophical opinion.

There have been many things that have acted as forms of inspiration for me, ranging from painters, sculptors, literature and philosophies to nature and life experience.

For me, it is the feeling and content of an image and an idea that carries over into my art. My work is based on a marriage of concept and once an idea is constructed in my head, it is merely an action that releases it. Human sensibility—Alienation is the most approachable element in my work.

To gain greater understanding of my art and the symbolism in it, I looked at how I comprehend art to explain my philosophy. My philosophical background has been influenced by existential philosophy. It will reflect in my view that I am concerned about man’s isolation and alienation. In describing man as a stranger in the world, existential philosophy has formulated one of the central experiences of our age. Heidegger once wrote: “Homelessness is becoming a world fate.”¹ As well as the same metaphor is used to symbolize man’s deepest fear by the poets and novelists who have best understood the inquietude of our time.

“Who has no home now will not build one any more.
Who is alone now will remain alone”² writes Rilke. In one of his later poems he compares man to a stranger who from his window looks out into the dark, abandoned street of an unfamiliar and inhospitable town:
“The new city was still to me as though denied and the unresponsive landscape spread its darkness as though I were not there. The nearest things did not bother to reveal themselves to me. The alley climbed to the street light. I saw how alien it was. Across the way a room was warmly lighted by a lamp. It made me feel included. They sensed this and drew the shutters.” 3

American novelist, Arthur Miller, also have described man’s fate of alienation and homelessness. When I was a junior undergraduate study, I experimented with his play which is Death of a Salesman. At that time, I was spiritually inspired by the man’s fate.

Moreover, I have found man’s own lives portrayed in Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman. It shows Willy Loman - the “other-directed man” personified - striving all his life to be popular and “liked” but remaining absolutely lonesome and irrelevant, forever dreaming that “personality always wins the day” but in reality destined, as his wife fears, “to fall into his grave like an old dog.” His motto is: Start big and you will end big. He advises his son: “Get right down the field under the ball, and when you hit, hit low and hit hard.” He does not realize that he himself is kicked around and that his whole existence is summed up in the world with which one of the women in the play describes her life: “a football.” 4

What my work is trying to accomplish with harmony is an understanding of the human sensibility and body of work. These two main part of harmony involves diverse artists and my understanding of art. I want my work to allow the viewers the
opportunity to see something new every time they look at the piece.

Each time surprising themselves with a new sense of the complete emotion finding beauty in the work.

Therefore, I have researched diverse artists who investigated human sensibility; however, my main interests are with Australian artist Ken Unsworth and Alberto Giacometti.

Ken Unsworth works ooze out his unique imaginative mind that interested me. "The roots of his drawings and in his performance pieces, which began with The Body as Object : Five Secular Settings for Sculpture as Ritual (Figure 1-5) in 1975 - 77. The first part of that work consisted of five static tableaux, each using his body as the focal element. In one he was draped over a pole in such a way as to make it appear that the pole went thought him; in another his head seemed to be squeezed between the ends of two large beams leaning into one another while the weight of his body appeared to be borne by his neck. He called these "secular" to make clear that they had nothing to do with religious ritual but the static intensity of the pieces did evoke the feeling of ritual enactment. The work was a powerful sculptural narrative of the journey of life: birth, suffering, alienation, death and resurrection." 5

Out of my own fascination to his work, I became aware of the fact that his high degree of risk and physical pain were clearly involved from his life experience. I found that his installations are invariably very private because Unsworth’s works explore the metaphorical implications of personal mythology. In addition, his works so obviously transmitted segments of a private experience and communicate from a responsive viewer.

“Every man has his own particular ideas and fear; and he allows others to see as much of
them as is useful for him and as suits him." 

Also, I was influenced his minimalist sensibility with a predilection for the expressive and the dramatic. The minimalist sensibility is most obvious when he is working with objects of monumental proportions and characteristically pure simplicity. The sense of minimalist exerted a crucial effect upon my ideal of art.

Consequently, I realized that art is communicative. It is a dialogue in which two interlocutors - the artist and the viewer. Any successful act of communication will result in some restructuring of images with which we process our experience of the world. A work of art is incomplete without its audience, without its interlocutors.

Another artist I value is Alberto Giacometti. "Giacometti has the most distinct style. To have found new sculptural dimension as well as a variety of means to realize it is the basis of Giacometti's position in the history of sculpture." His sculptures symbolized and illuminated universal human states in conceptual formulations of high perfection. I think that he explored total visual circumstances such as materials, surface, scale, distances and proximity, space and light. That real visual contents are related to the viewer's vision and transformed from materials into a figure by the active participation of the viewer.

When I looked at City Square (Figure 6): four working men placed their path and the motionless women stands, I became a part of the composition of this work. I fully understand the attempt to make the figures of City Square became reality when living persons are confronted with them.

"In the street people astound and interest me more than any sculpture or painting. Every second the people stream together and go apart, then they approach each other to get closer to one another. They unceasingly form and re-form living
compositions in unbelievable complexity. The men walk past each other without looking. Or they stalk a women. A women is standing and four men direct their steps more or less toward the spot where the woman is standing. ... It's the ‘totality of this life’ that I want to reproduce in everything I do.”

In his thought, he approached the ‘totality of life’ is his compositional ideas. For this ideas, I felt that this ‘totality of life’ refers not only to a situation in the present, but also to a universal present.

Through all these influence, I recognized that the art work an expression of artist’s own condition, and the art work is communication between artist and the viewer. In my thesis body of work, I hoped to challenge for my audience to look, to think, to feel and to respond.
Figure 1. The Body as Object; Five Secular Settings for Sculpture as Ritual
Ken Unsworth, 1975
Figure 2. The Body as Object; Five Secular Settings for Sculpture as Ritual
Ken Unsworth, 1975
Figure 3. The Body as Object; Five Secular Settings for Sculpture as Ritual
Ken Unsworth, 1975
Figure 4. The Body as Object; Five Secular Settings for Sculpture as Ritual
Ken Unsworth, 1977
Figure 5. The Body as Object; Five Secular Settings for Sculpture as Ritual
Ken Unsworth, 1977
Figure 6. City Square II, Alberto Giacometti
Bronze, 1948
DESCRIPTION

The body of work in this thesis really came to me Fall quarter last year (1998), when I created what I consider to be the piece in the development of my aesthetic beliefs.

In the process of collecting ideas for this thesis, I have considered numerous questions. There are the outstanding questions that occur when I look at the human aspect of alienation or isolation. What is alienation as a human experience? Is the feeling for alienation something inherent in human nature? Is it an identical experience regardless of what kind of culture a person lives in, or is it something different according to the degree of individualism reached in a particular society? Is it the presence of something and if so, of what? I hope that my work tries to deal with these questions and religious big questions like, ‘Who are we?’, ‘Where are we going?’. The fact that I grew up within a Christian tradition, those things are part of not only my intellectual make-up but images of self that were given to me as a artist.

During the modeling process, it was certain that it would be possible to answer all my questions and to observe the models as feelings of acute men’s alienation and isolation ; moreover, it is this idea of a mediator between one level of being and another.

For my thesis, I created one installation piece, entitled “Entrance into the Internal World; Alienation”, measuring W144” x L144” x H84”. (Figure 7 ) The entire work is based upon metaphorical implications of a personal mythology and universal feelings experienced by all human beings. This installation incorporates two main elements; six human figures placed inside a red metal cage. These are immediately

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transcended into forms of symbolism, metaphor, and meaning.

The six different forms of figures are represent my intimate innerself portrait and views’ spiritual experience, such as alienation, isolation, and man alone with his fate. Each six figure has its own deeper meaning, however the body of work shares ideas throughout. These figures suffer from despair and isolation. They lack the ability to contain themselves as society would dictate. These are depictions of how the characteristics of despair and alienation show up in my mind. Each figure is only seeing himself. Their appearance is justified in the mind of anxiety. They suffer from despair. Each figure is distraught in its own way. The laying, standing, sitting and hanging figures show the strain that each is enduring. The characteristics in the pieces are being portrayed not only personal sentiments, but also they transfer into common, globally shared understanding. The red metal cage symbolizes the entrance between the outer world and internal world. The outer world depicts encircling environments which are overwhelming, at times, with feelings of numbing exhaustion, the taste of apparent fail, or the bitter experience of disenchantment about goals or purposes. The internal world illustrates where self-confidence is forged, where fundamental decisions about motives, values and responsibilities are formed. “Entrance into the Internal World; Alienation” is evidence of my personal experience of the reciprocal relationship between the outer and inner world.

One could say that all art is in some manner autobiographical, but the work of certain artists seems to deal more directly with personal experiences than that of others. I bemused by the magic of art that allows the artist to create an object or entity that speaks of my internal world, wonders if there is any other realm of human activity in which an individual can express such personal feelings.

My works are directly based on my life experiences. The interpretation of my
perspective in “Entrance into the Internal World; Alienation” is conceived in a much more self-conscious context that struggles with the “I” and desires a home from which to evolve, transcend. I am deeply interested in the world of the human psycho and finds clay and metal an excellent medium for exploring it. “Entrance into the Internal World; Alienation” explores the emotional texture of inner life especially during times of transition when one is searching for meaning, strength, and new ways of being.

During moments of introspection, I reflect on aspects of my life such as the struggle between independence and connection, love of nature and alienation from our environment, vulnerability and personal armor, social constraints and personal growth. The image that unfolded in this process became the start of a sculpture. When images leap ahead of the expected, the art work suggests a celebration of self-discovery.

My artistic intention is a conscious master of the medium and subject matter in which I work. Construction proceeded with technical skills and craftsmanship. A technique is critical to the success of work.

Color and surface are an important technical decision because this piece was to exist as both sculpture and visual mythology. For this thesis, I choose white color for five figures and one for blue color. White is the absence of color and the sum of all colors. It brings meaning both inherent and external to it; the notions of emptiness, simplicity, spirituality and lightness; moreover, blue color brings meaning of depress, pain and melancholy. I tested several kinds of white glazes and chose four differing ones for each figure, but they are variations of cold, warm, creamy and crackle whites. I manipulated the surface to give visual diversity, such as smooth, rough, satin and matte. In addition, one figure was made up of white paper. I intended the red metal cage to be more dominant and significant symbol than human figure because red cage
hold a sense of past, present, and future. Red color symbolizes the nature of a strong, yet I take meaning of brittle and flesh.

Displayed as they were in the gallery, I emphasized the space within the figure. The six figure created tension between the space and each figure. Each figure has a relation to the external space within which it exists as well as to the inner space it contains. And in an installation made as a dynamic between the figure as a thing and as a space which explore the relationship.

Overall, this installation translates my concept of the inner life into an art form. In other words, this sculpture communicates with the relationships of one human to another, of the individual with my internal world, and the shared human sensibility of isolation, alienation and men's fate.
Figure 7. Entrance into the Internal World: Alienation
W144” x L144” x H84”
Figure 7. Entrance into the Internal World; Alienation
W144” x L144” x H84”
Figure 7. Entrance into the Internal World; Alienation
W144” x L144” x H84”
Figure 7. Entrance into the Internal World; Alienation
W144" x L144" x H84"
Figure 7. Entrance into the Internal World; Alienation
W144″ x L144″ x H84″
Figure 7. Entrance into the Internal World; Alienation W144” x L144” x H84”
Figure 7. Entrance into the Internal World; Alienation
W144" x L144" x H84"
Figure 7. Entrance into the Internal World; Alienation
w144” x d144” x h84”
CONCLUSION

As I reflect on my thesis body of work, I realize that I have truly evolved conceptually, formally and technically since I have been at R.I.T.

During the development of process, I had a lot of thought, diverse materials, various processes and technique that I learned. For these reasons, I feel that my thesis work to be quite successful. I am proud of my work for what it accomplished for me emotionally and spiritually. It is a documentation of my emotions in their raw state, something for which I personally seek in my work, as well as in the work of other artists.

Finally, this was not a one year investigation, rather a trail that will be followed for many years to come. This work represents the first step of future sculptures which will further explore my ideals and beliefs.
TECHNICAL DATA

CLAY

The body of work forms are coil and out of solid works of clay built in a clay body. Each solid piece cut the piece into two equal haves. These halves were then hollowed until they were of uniform thickness. When they were leather hard, the halves were reattached.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White Sculpture Body (Cone 04)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hawthorne Fire Clay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Om#4 Ball Clay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tile#6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wollastonite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Grog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Grog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coarse Grog</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

GLAZES

I discovered many other variations and combinations of white glazes. These glazes offer desirable depths and textures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cloudy Imitation Stoneware Glaze (Cone 04)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lithium Carbonate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pemco Frit #626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Component</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zinc Oxide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaolin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bentonite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add: 1% Tin Oxide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4% Zircopax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White Satin Matt (Cone 04)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frit G-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frit G-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zircopax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add: 5% Mason Stain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% Flint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>V.C. Satin Stone Glaze (Cone 04)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frit 3124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerstley Borate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepheline Syenite</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talc</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whiting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flint</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPK</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>White Glaze (Cone 04)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frit 3124</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kona F-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiting</td>
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**PAPER**

I was made up of one paper piece of work. This piece was constructed chicken wire out of basic armature. After that I attached the white paper step by step on the chicken wire to make a form.

**METAL**

1” Conduit Tube

2” Square beam

5 1/16” x 2 1/2” Screws, Bolts & Washes

The steel cage, 12’ x 12’ x 7’, has designed with precise measurement. This cage requires the preparation of materials such as 2” square tubes, 1” outside diameter(O/D) conduit tube, and a 1” diameter drill bit. The significance of the cage is able to assemble and disassemble each components of the steel structure. In term of fabricating the steel cage, I had to drill 11 of 1” diameter hole on bottom square beam; however, 2 of top square beams have a holes on two sides. The conduit tube has incased round wood the each ends because the tube fits into a 1” hole on the square tube. The reason of incasing wood on conduit tube is to place and secure the tubes with screw from back of the square tube.

**PAINT**

I used cherry red car paint for cage and one figure painted by ultramarine oil paint.

Cherry Red Car Paint

Ultramarine Oil Paint

Primer Paint
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Foot Note

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2. Rainer Maria Rilke, Selected Works: Autumn Day, p.116
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4. Arthur Miller, Arthur Miller’s Collected Plays: Death of a Salesman, p.130 ~ 225
5. Daniel Thomas, An Australian Accent, p.28
8. David Sylvester, Looking at Giacometti, p.31