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Preternatural Fauna

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Introduction

Imagination is more important than knowledge. (1)

Albert Einstein

I agree with Einstein’s statement, but one who has a powerful imagination must also have the knowledge of tools, applications, and processes to engage and bring to reality their visions, whether it is tools of a mathematician or those of a sculptor. As a sculptor, my primary tool is my imagination, fueled predominantly by my experiences with nature both as a youth and as an adult. My secondary tool is the academic and educational training I have received, which has developed my current knowledge of metalsmithing. With these tools, I strive to reinterpret my revelations of the natural environment.

I propose to demonstrate my understanding of sculptural forms by utilizing recognizable elements found in nature, which includes a prolific palette of patterns, colors, shapes, and textures. The sculptures will predominantly draw their inspirations from my personal experiences with the natural world, including my exploration of one specific encounter, a collective memory of nature, and my fascination with a creature. With these ideas serving as fuel for my imagination, I realize visions of sculptural forms and then draw out their reality, with a hope to reveal elements of life and to incur a sense of wonder and curiosity.

Imagination is not only a trait with which one is born, but it is also cultivated by the environments, personal surroundings, and situations experienced by each individual. Our interpersonal and expansive
interactions contribute to our beliefs, which in turn shape and develop our personalities and our self-awareness in relation to the cultural and natural world.

My human experience and the shaping of my identity are pivotal to the development of my imagination. Like each skill or tool, the creative mind is a process that needs to be practiced in order to develop. My imagination is a continuous result of my training, my formal education, and my exploration of the world’s boundaries. From an early age, I developed a strong affection for nature and anything nonhuman that helped fuel my creativity. I grew up in the developing region of the Front Range in Colorado, with our home situated between a large lake in the front of the house and a smaller lake at the back. Home was surrounded by vast fields and prairies on the east, in contrast with the snow packed Rocky Mountains abruptly shooting from the grasslands to the west. As an active child growing up in Colorado, I was constantly on the go, hiking and exploring the natural world, from fossil hunting on the prairie at the Pawnee Buttes to skiing some of the most striking slopes in the Rockies. I was subject to adventure and fortunate to have a family that loved to travel and explore new continents, cultures, and oceans.

Furthermore, as a young adult, my most influential and educational experiences came in the form of nature and art, specifically personal experiences with nature and my constant interest in studying land and sea life. Scuba diving, with constant exposure to fresh diving experiences and aquatic information, fueled my intrigue with oceans, and sea life. Art, on the other hand, was introduced to me through travel in many diverse cultures, such as Java, Bali, Jordan, Israel, France, Mexico, and Prague, all of which enhanced my understanding of the cultural phenomenon of
human creativity and expression. I was also greatly influenced by my own family’s pursuit in creating, including my mother’s activities with ceramics and my uncle’s own artistic abilities as an architect and draftsman. I am a product of my environment. I choose to explore, express, and reveal my experiences by sharing stories, retelling them with drawings, painting, photographs, and sculptures.
Influences and Inspiration

Current artistic inspirations and influences came to me early in life, but only now have these influences begun to emerge artistically through my sculpture. As previously addressed, nature has played a key role in my understanding and appreciation of art. An additional influence upon my artistry is the visual experience of film.

As a young adult, I was drawn into the cinematic experience to learn about and experience the world beyond. Science fiction films and productions of similar genres have had the strongest cinematic impact on my current artwork, with such films as Star Wars, Aliens, and Blade Runner compelling several of my sculptures. Primarily, the set designs of each of the aforementioned films have captivated me and motivated my work.

The set designs and environments created for the Star Wars sextet (fig 1) are some of the most amazing works generated by the creative minds employed by George Lucas and Company. These films instilled within me the idea of employing recognizable elements from this world and combining them to create the revealing works of my imagination. Specifically, this mindset was applied to the piece I titled Arbor Evolution (completed 2005).

Other films, such as the Alien trilogy, exposed to me a more horrific beauty of the cosmic realm and suggested a tangled relationship between the creature and its environment. Ultimately, the Alien trilogy films ignited my interest in contemporary graphic artist, sculptor, and surrealist H.R Giger. Giger was the “creator of the terrifying life forms and their otherworldly environment in the film classic ALIEN, for which he
received the Oscar in 1980. Painter, sculptor, designer, interior architect, Giger extends his artistic vision into all domains. Fundamental to the nature of his work is his Biomechanical aesthetic, dialectic between man and machine, representing a universe at once disturbing and sublime." ¹ Geiger’s contribution to the organic set design in the second film Aliens served as my inspiration to create hammer-formed steel within my sculptures.

The ribbed surface of the hallways (fig 2) and organic quality of Giger’s style in Aliens has stimulated my artwork; his dark, yet sensitive artistic style of organic shapes and forms compels me. During my undergraduate training, I learned the technique of hammer forming half round craters in steel by using a ball-peen, as seen in my first demonstration of hammer forming (fig 3); this hammer forming technique was adapted from Giger’s aesthetic. I also created an additional piece (fig 4) & (fig 5) with the use of my newly acquired technique, which allowed me to stimulate the metal and create the suggestion of ribbed qualities successfully. Today, I predominantly utilize hammer-formed steel in my work.

Alongside H.R. Giger, MC. Escher strongly influenced my artistic understanding. MC. Escher, a graphic designer whose popularity boomed in the early 1990s, served as the master of graphic illusions and systematic images, creating a new world for my imagination to discover. As a youth, I extensively studied Escher’s works, and I would find myself perplexed by the line structure of the imposable triangle (fig 6) and other images he developed, such as the 1943 image, Reptiles (fig 7). Of Escher’s body of work, one image captured my attention above all; the 1962 work titled

Waterfall (fig 8), which contains the now famous Penrose Triangle “tri-bar”, consisting of three bars joined at seemingly ninety-degree angles, it forms an impossible triangle. Interestingly, as I discovered when examining the particular image, the human eye is often distracted, which I find as being a unique artistic strategy. As critic E.B Versluis writes: “several other elements in the picture actually distract from a concentrated view of the structure ... The elaborate polyhedral atop the two towers enhance neither the impossible triangles not the Strange Loop (to use Douglas Hofstadter’s [9, pp.10-11] term) those triangles support, the polyhedron seems more related to the geometrized landscape, actually leading the eye to sweep across those severely ordered terraces”. With this “sweeping” view taking place, my attention is drawn to the lower left-hand corner of Escher’s piece. The viewer will notice a scene of surrealistic plant life (fig 9). While I feel the collected images should be considered as animal forms in accordance with their fauna characteristics. These exotic figures strongly resemble soft corals of the ocean (fig 10) – a theory that has led me to believe that Escher was similarly inspired by environmental seascapes or perhaps recent developments in underwater photography. The thought of bringing sea life to the earth’s surface as living organisms intrigued me; therefore, I too imagined and formulated a sculpture from my personal experiences with sea life, entitled Mountain Sponges (fig 11, fig 12). In this sculpture, I challenged the thought of combining ocean life forms with characteristics of Colorado. The piece, shaped from steel, possesses the formal appearance of the soft squishiness and physicality of five sea sponges, which are integrated with certain influences: snowcapped peaks of the Rocky Mountains and the vast blueness of the sky surrounding them. On this premise, I painted the steel sea sponges with a saturation of blues and

2 International Congress on M.C. Escher
whites; the forms themselves created a feeling of continuous movement. I attempted to express my sentiments for both sea life and mountain landscape, with an emphasis on discovering what might be the calm nature of the Mountain Sponge. With personal exploration in sculpting the hypothetically terrestrial environment for a traditional sea animal, I researched an artist whom also deeply explored nature and its innumerous inhabitants. In addition to Giger and Escher, I consider Franz Marc to be one of my essential artistic influences.

Franz Marc, a German expressionist who lived during the late 19th century and early 20th century, stimulated the creations of iconic movements such as the Bluë Rider movement alongside expressionist Kandinsky. Marc’s life was cut short as were many due to World War I, yet his contributions to the art world were significant. I find the connections in Marc’s writings, paintings, ideas, and interest in nature as well as my own work to be inspiring. Marc formulated a “subject matter with which he felt he could project his romantic, empathetic thinking...”3, such as ordinary horses expressed as is seen in Blue Horses (fig 13). Figures of cows, deer, and dogs also conveyed his symbolism for his use of color in his work. The piece that I appreciate the most is entitled Fate of the Animals (fig 14), painted in 1913, which was influenced by the effects of war on the animals, which most all creatures experienced such chaos indiscriminately destroying their environment. In Fate of the Animals, Marc addresses the sensitivity of the animals, by using a fury of lines that tear through the animals’ world. I recognize the pain in his work and feel emotionally connected to the animals and their confusion surrounding the vulnerability, and angst from the destruction caused by war. Though not readily apparent in my work, Marc’s divinity and spiritual attitude towards

3 Rosenthal, Mark page 13
the natural world is one that I too share, Marc writes: “people with their lack of piety, especially men, never touched my true feelings, but animals with their virginal sense of life awakened all that is good in me”

I too feel empathetic towards animals and their environment.

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The Inspiration and Processes of Preternatural Fauna

My exploration of the earth, nature, flora, and fauna are the most significant subjects in my current work. Having developed a spiritual union with the natural world and a connection with the cosmos has influenced my discovery of the relationship between animal life, plant life, and the environment. The experiences I have with nature and the constant fascination with studying the natural world, combined with my primary artistic abilities in metals and other natural materials have evolved into comprehensive exploration and development of sculptural forms.

Today, I am an avid “outdoors-man” and use nature as both an artistic inspiration as well as the material for my sculptural creations. I primarily utilize elements such as copper, steel, glass, and clay, as well as raw materials such as stones, shells, animal hair, and wood. Once combined, I find that these elements help create a history, a life force, and a dialogue with the viewer from within the sculptural forms.

In the beginning of graduate school, I struggled with taking a step back from creating functional geometric furniture that had dominated my body of undergraduate work. I found myself sketching on a daily basis, but I experienced no true spark of interest to create in the round through sculpture. So I found myself looking back and recalling that earlier, in high school and throughout my undergraduate work, I gradually developed a series of images which I coined “creative imagery”. As a graduate student, the first breakthrough I experienced in my work was when I revisited a style of drawing that required countless hours of labor and
intensive concentration. The premise of these drawings, which linked each image to the next and subsequently developed patterns of style and imagery in my work, focused primarily on relative subject matter and abstract forms. I systematically created images that where organically defined in shape, with equal spacing between each shape, which created a loose cellular structure. These structures ranged in size and shape; over all, the visual effect perceived by the eye created a subject matter with an overall strongly controlled form (fig 15). These drawings inspired the transition of my artwork from sketched images into three-dimensional sculptures. The first sculptural dynamic I developed was a cylindrical form, which I ultimately found to be too tight and controlled, while still maintaining physical similarities to a creature of the sea. My collection of sketches reminded me of the cellular structure of actual sea sponges (fig 16), which are also known in Latin as “Porifera”. In relation to the fundamental inspirations for my artistic views and work, the sea sponge falls under my personal fascination with an animal as a complete, living entity. My exploration of the sea sponge was an appropriate place to start my thesis experience as a graduate student, though only later in my research did I realize the importance of the relationship this animal had with the animal kingdom. With research into the sponge, I discovered the vitality of the sea sponge in nature, which possesses a lively tenacity that further inspired my work: “Recent studies using the tools of molecular genetics indicate that the animal kingdom evolved only once, and the Phylum Porifera is at the base of the animal tree of life. In this sense, sponges represent a key group for understanding relationships among all other animals”\(^5\).

Aside from the newly acquired scientific knowledge I learned through my research of the sea sponge, the original reason for my fascination with the sea sponge involved its form, color, colonization (fig 17), and the structure of the exoskeleton of this pivotal creature. I was especially interested in the calcified exoskeleton of the sponge, along with its resemblance to the “creative imagery”, or “piercing” aesthetic I employed in drawings and sculptural work with steel, copper, and silver. The process of creating the “piercing” aesthetic of my art was adopted into my vocabulary as a fundamental technique in future works. These piercings are created by the use of the plasma cutter, which emits a high pulse of electricity in combination with pressurized air. The air, in turn, blows through the metal and melts the material. Also, delicate applications for silver work, as seen in Sporing Porifera (fig 18); require the use of a small jeweler’s saw.

The process of creating these Porifera forms started with; the basic shape of the triangle, which helped create the sponge forms I used in several pieces from various mediums. After cutting out shapes from the copper and brass material, the process of texturing and webbing – which I derived from using planishing, raising, a texture hammer, or employing a large texture plate used in conjunction with the power hammer – expedited the development time of massive pieces of metal. After texturing the copper or brass, the metals are then annealed to form into the specula or cylindrical forms. Using the TIG (Tungsten Inert Gas) welder, I welded the webbing together in preplanned joints, which I then textured the welds to create a consistently textured, blending the surface. I shaped the spicule by utilizing a leather mallet and the use of stakes, stumps, and a crescent moon shaped wooden block. The final result reveals a slightly curved, undulated metal form as seen in Porifera (fig 19).
The sponge has transformed from an inspirational creature of my imagination and research into a tangible journey of sculptural form.

Numerous forms have been created employing this technique, though only the strongest examples of my exploration with pierced copper were utilized. The title of the sculpture series I created is Porifera Transition, named after my investigation of form, color, size, and arrangement of the sculptures in conjunction with the limitless possibilities of display and the physical transition between each piece.

Porifera Transition # 1(fig 20) is a stimulating form of color and movement. In this sculpture I employed the technique of welding fine silver to copper, which creates a series of vein like branches throughout the entire piece, establishing a powerful life force that circulates throughout the form. The form settles on a sculpted piece of Colorado alabaster, carved in a manner that initiates tension between the sculpture and the stone upon which the form rests. The alabaster piece maintains a carved and polished underside that creates the visual illusion of the Porifera figure sliding off or across the stone base. The choice to use the natural dish side of the stone as the resting point of the sculpture exhibits a sense of movement and puts forth a potential transition into another position. Ultimately, this piece represents one of my most successful and imaginative works in form, color, and presentation from within this series.

The next piece of the series, entitled sequentially Porifera Transition #2 (fig 21), sculpted from copper utilizing a patina of a rich saturation of liver of sulfur, which ultimately created a warm earthy, reddish-brown hue throughout the form. I displayed the piece in an upright position in conjunction with alabaster stone, which I chose for its complementary
compatibility to the vertical arrangement of the form. The form sits on the
top edge of the slanted gray stone, creating a sense of tension between
balance and motion. As with Porifera Transition #1, this piece represents a
highly defined execution of motion and transition.

The evolution of earlier drawings into the development of sculptural
techniques and revitalized forms exposes the value of revisiting original
ideas in order to transform and evolve them into their full potential. In
several pieces, I explored new inspirations found within the sea sponge,
which occurred solely due to earlier drawings and the investigation of
images that evolved into my three-dimensional technique. I further
refined my piercing technique in order to successfully exhibit personal
explorations of form, color, and movement through sculpture. Piercing
immediately opened a doorway though which I investigated sculpturally
a sea creature of significant impact upon my current body of work. With
the inspiration and fascination of the ocean and sea life in my mind, I
transitioned from an admiration for the sea sponge in to a series of pieces
to sculpting from the memory of a personal encounter that further
compelled my creations.

My inspiration for the next thesis piece that encompassed
exploration in metal technique and self-expression took place when I was
seventeen years old. I was on a boat with my parents, aunt, and uncle off
the island of Espiritu Santos, near La Paz in the Sea of Cortez located in
Baja, California. I left the boat to explore the coastline of Espiritu Santos. I
remember this day well: the intense heat hovering over the beach, which
was blanketed with finely crushed coral sand that gave way to the
unforgiving red sloped hills of this area. The land beyond the beach was
covered in cactus and other plants that thrived in this harsh environment.
After walking down the shoreline for a time, I noticed a large fleshy organic form that had washed up onto the shore about thirty feet in front of me. I rushed across the sand to discover a struggling three-foot Humboldt squid gasping, and bubbling in the surf. The animal was deep pink in coloration with thousands of brown freckles traversing the soft contours of its body. I felt the need to return the suffering creature to the ocean. I slid my arms under the massive, slippery body, while the squid’s tentacles moved and stuck all along my arms.

I lifted the squid and moved towards the surf. Suddenly, the wet form convulsed as a dark green, bile oozed out of its beak. I stopped in the water motionless; the squid was dead. I placed the animal back into the ocean, cleansing it from its last moments and releasing this creature of the depths into the swell of the sea. The sun warmed my skin as the tide swirled tepid water around my waist. I realized that the squid had died not because the waves had stranded it upon the shore, but because its life had come full circle on that day, just as mine will some day, as does the earthly experience of every living being.

My experience in Cabo San Lucas with the squid that died in my arms established the fundamental reason behind my creation of the sculpture entitled Cabo Chipirón (fig 22), also known as “Caped Squid” in Spanish. From my memories of the Cabo San Lucas shoreline and the shell-filled beach, I formulated and envisioned the sculptural form for the piece. I created a series of drawings that worked through my original ideas of a visually stimulating shape that required both movement and a degree of accuracy that best represented the nature of my experience with the squid. With a final draft of the sculpture, I then realized how to construct a three-dimensional form in the shape of the squid, while I also
established the tools and materials necessary for the sculptural projection of a fleshy, breathing, if not a struggling animal.

While creating Cabo Chipirón, I utilized a technique that I call "lobing", which I named after the shape of the lobe form present in my sculptures. I employed lobing for the finalization of the sculptural form, where two identical halves of the sculpture ultimately depicted the same degree of texture and shape on both the front and back pieces. The lobing process starts with a pattern of the squid's body; I then used a leather mallet to form the main body of the squid around a beak horn stake. After initial forming the animal's body, I proceeded to texture the piece with the domed face of a planishing hammer. Over time, a texture of fish scales was drawn out of the metal, revealing the surface of the squid's body in the copper metal. I subsequently used a raising hammer to create a lined horizontal pattern over the fins of the squid to expose a flowing, marine-fin aesthetic.

After finishing the first lobe of Cabo Chipirón, I formed a second lobe that appeared identical to the first, with the exception of the additional undulating wings that created a sense of movement and life from within the sculpture. Once the edges of the copper were positioned, I welded the two halves together using the TIG welder; which in turn followed by cleaning the piece in a pickling solution. After pickling the form, the identical lobbing process for the body of the sculpture occurred as I formed the tail of the copper squid. After forming and welding the tail onto the body, I addressed the tentacles and arms of the squid. Initially, upon researching the squid, I learned that this particular sea creature has two arms and eight tentacles. The challenge was to create delicate, seemingly flexible appendages.
Deciding to use copper material for the arms was placed on the material’s continuity in relation to the body of the squid; copper added stability to the piece in addition to a malleable texture that ultimately established the realistic appearance of the squid’s suction cups. The use of glass also most accurately addressed the fluidity of the tentacles. With an earthy, red glass frit, I colored and then stretched the material, forming tentacles. By employing glass within the piece, I created a unique lighting that illuminated the reddish hue from within the form. The glass tentacles glowed warmly, creating a sense of life and fire from within the creature.

Once all the elements of the sculpture had been assembled, I focused on the skin of the squid, with the piece calling for realism and life-like textures. In addressing the skin’s color, I created an overall transparency to the piece, with the freckling of texture to establish additional color and depth. I applied a thin layer of acrylic paint medium to the form, which exuded a milky vanilla hue on the textured surface of the copper. After the acrylic dried, the next step required the use of fine one-hundred-grit sandpaper in order to remove excess paint on areas of strong texture throughout the piece. This process exposed clean copper and enabled the surface to cleanly reveal unique highlights of texture to which hot liver of sulfur was then applied. The hot liver of sulfur reacted to the exposure of copper and transformed the highlights into black and blue markings on the piece. The portions that I had painted with acrylic medium remained untouched in the sculpture’s original reddish hue. Throughout this process, I had created a brilliant leopard coloring which successfully completed the piece.
Once I had completed Cabo Chipirón, the final challenge entailed the display of the sculpture. I had originally envisioned that the piece would hang, suspended in a balance of weightlessness that alluded to both the sea and the atmosphere of air stationed above the earth (fig 23). After I finalized the piece, however, I understood further that the sculpture was merely a memorial to the squid of the Cabo San Lucas coastline, and that a stationary solution without suspension seemed more appropriate for the piece itself. I therefore created a bracket to mount the squid; the sculpture was then placed onto a greenish slate rock, which completed the work and immortalized my experience with the life and death of the caped squid (fig 22).

From my creation of Cabo Chipirón, I considered other past encounters I have experienced with creatures of nature. As I searched my memory, inspiration surfaced. The next sculpture I developed upon the completion of the caped squid was also based on an emotional experience, yet I incorporated a new, highly imaginative way of expressing my vision. I utilized my collective memories of nature and merged familiar materials into my work, as demonstrated in Arbor Evolution (fig 24).

The history of Arbor Evolution is rooted in my memory of childhood and the environment that I enjoyed. In my mother’s greenhouse as a child, I was surrounded by towering, florescent-green exotic plants of various shapes and sizes. This estuary of flora was the gateway to the outside world. It ultimately proved to be even more stimulating and impressive to the shaping of my childhood. Now, as an adult, I recall walking through the greenhouse as a complete adventure, during which I constantly brushed aside plants that clung to my skin and clothing. The
plant life left small scratches on my arms and legs and holes in the fabrics I wore, as if the leaves themselves were crying for attention and begging to be remembered. Upon escaping from the greenhouse, I entered a world of trees with seemingly mammoth proportions in my backyard. The limbs of the trees were elephant legs that stretched their branches beyond my reach in search of sunlight. In July, these massive trees gave birth to bushels of cotton seedlings that filled the hot air and released onto the world. In particular, cottonwood trees (fig 25) enveloped our house and grew voraciously between the two nearby lakes adjacent to my family’s property. Against the lakes, the trees drank freely and ensured the survival of their massive bodies within the drought environment of northern Colorado. The trees’ survival also served as a refuge to the animal world where the trees created high towers and perches amongst reaching leaves and branches - an ideal habitat for the nests of great blue herons and great horned owls. The lower limbs and vestiges of the trunks created nesting grounds to the ever-growing population of water fowl on my family’s property, including Canadian geese and mallard ducks. The molting of birds, trees and unusual plant matter was the foundation for my work on Arbor Evolution. The trees and plant life of my childhood impacted my life in such a stimulating way that when I remember my sunny summer days as a boy, strong feelings of curiosity, appreciation, and amazement for other life forms continue to happily envelop me.

After working through a series of ideas, of the tree, which serves as the fundamental piece of Arbor Evolution, I developed a sketch that captivated my attention and accurately represented the vitality of the trees and plants I admired as a child (fig 26). Today, Arbor Evolution remains the largest piece, by volume that I’ve created, and from the beginning, the form required a special consideration that involved the
construction and transportation of the piece upon completion. Initially, I understood that the tree form would have to be sculpted in sections – a realization that developed into my appreciation of the building process that started with a core shape, the trunk, and then required the attentive assembly of each appendage at later dates during the form’s completion.

The core of the tree was created out of steel due to the metal’s particular strength, color attributes, and its malleable qualities into which I hammered an organic texture; while building the core, I utilized techniques that I personally developed through this piece and through the completion of previous works (fig 27).

Beginning with four steel panels, I constructed the core trunk as a simple geometric shape, which allowed extensive texturing with the use of a hammer on the steel surface area that had not been tangibly weakened by welding. After I completed the core, the aesthetic of reaching, root-like appendages at the base, which tapered together at four points, consequently leading to the joints of the arms; this design was employed to both the top and bottom of the core trunk.

With the fabrication of the steel center piece completed, I established the design of hammer texturing and webbing patterns for the sculpture. I chose to wrap the webbing around the entire vertical form of the core in a way that visually stimulated the negative space of the hammer texture. After designating the areas that the webbing was to occupy, the processes of hammering and sculpting the tree from the trunk core began. Craters emerged on the textured surface of the core, sculpting the once-geometric surface.
Slowly, the organic appearance of the cottonwoods that lined my backyard during childhood began to appear. After two months to fabricating, hamming, and cutting out the webbing from the core. At this time, I created leaves – life-like figures that were inspired by the large leaves of elephant ear plants. I developed a texture plate to imitate the rifts and veins of the particular plant with the use of a power hammer.

Once I had finished the leaves for the tree form, the final step required the attachment of the limbs to the textured core trunk. The arm forms took a considerable amount of time to create, since each was uniquely formed and unlike the other limbs in shape and movement. I used copper due to the relative workability of the material into specula forms, but also for the colors that were pulled from copper itself in relation to the form and subject.

The construction of the spicules served as a challenge, with many of the pieces reaching lengths of six feet and widths of twenty inches that eventually tapered to a mere circumference of eight inches. The size of the metal proved to be cumbersome during the sculpture’s development, but as I used an appropriate plastic mallet and annealing of metal, I was able to successfully form the spicules.

The shaping process was similar to creating small jewelry spicules, with the incorporation of a technique that involved a half-moon-shaped piece of wood in conjunction with a steel plate of varying sizes containing half-moon shapes. Starting at the widest point, I hammered on the inside wall of the form slowly created curving walls. The attempt to control the direction in which the long spicules was a constant battle, I quickly
recognized that instead of controlling the form, I rather encouraged the movement brought on by the hammer blows, which resulted in spiraling forms, s-curves, and other undulating movements. By allowing the form to grow in unintended directions beyond my initial drawings and controlled perception, I adopted a new willingness and understanding of the work and the abilities of copper and steel. The final form of Arbor Evolution, however, remained relatively true to my original vision, drawings, and memories of the cottonwoods.

With the sculpted core and appendages complete, my attention remained on the task of gracefully combining the two parts and creating the final patina of the piece. This process required a refined patience and focus, because if I failed to assemble the pieces properly, the entire sculpture might have fallen to poor visual transitions and a noticeable lack of continuity throughout the form.

The need for simple assembly and disassembly of Arbor Evolution required a well-engineered joint that was both physically strong as well as portraying a natural transition within the piece. My original idea concerning the final construction of the tree was to bolt the reaching limbs of the tree to the top parts of the extending, yet tapering root structures. This option made the sculpture unstable, and I was left unsatisfied with the approach I had taken.

With the stability of Arbor Evolution a new priority to the piece, the idea of pressure-fitting occurred to me. I welded a small cup to the end of each appendage and then used a hammer to mold the cup and create a perfect fit around the appropriate tree roots. The appendages or limbs were then secured by drilling through both the attached cup and
the specific tree root. A bolt secured through each appendage at the site of the molded cup which concluded the process of attaching the limbs to the roots of the tree.

Clearly visible joints and connection points existed on each appendage upon assembly, however. The original drawing called for a soft substance at the joints, featuring little, and protective spikes protruding from the limbs in these specific areas. It seemed as if the tree I had imagined possessed a certain protection mechanism for these joints along its limbs. Ultimately, these red spikes were eliminated from the sculpture, because I realized that children and a less-accustomed audience might surround this piece; I wanted to particularly avoid a situation in my work where a viewer might be hurt. This left the implementation of the soft substance to surround the joints, thus creating the transition from each appendage to the tree.

Since the entire development of Arbor Evolution referred primarily to my memories of childhood, I decided upon a gentle material that, again, directly reflected my experiences as a boy. Alaskan Malamutes, which are large dogs whose breed originates in the north, were among the family pets that lived in my house as I grew up. I still remember the task of grooming each furry animal and the sense of security and protection I felt when playing and relaxing with the dogs nearby. As a result, the thick hair of Alaskan Malamutes served as my supply for the soft, white material with which I wanted to surround the appendage joints. By applying a section of Velcro to the metal sculpture at the joints, the woolly dog hair easily adhered to the targeted areas on the tree, while still possessing the ability to look tangibly lifelike. With the transition between the sculpted core and the limbs thoughtfully addressed, the final step towards finishing Arbor
Evolution involved the exploration of patina options and the concluding application of color.

In order for any patina to react to the metal sculpture’s appearance, the copper and steel must first be cleansed. Sandblasting helped create the ideal surface for applying the patina I ultimately chose; to use a copper coating over the form. I distributed the copper with the use of a tool that sprayed liquid copper particles on the sandblasted steel webbing and on leaves of the tree, leaving behind a sparkling copper coating that would then be patina.

After the sculpture had been sprayed in a copper coating, I experimented with variations of color for the piece. I prepared a sample to discover the effects of coloration on the webbing and the craters present in the form (fig 30). I used a store-bought chemical called “Antique Blue”, which I applied in a mist fashion solely to the areas of the sample that were coated in the copper spray. The use of Antique Blue created a light greenish-blue hue throughout the surface of the sample; the chemical then reacted with the steel and created rust that complemented the color palette of the tree. My satisfaction in the results of the sample allowed me to begin the process of misting the tree’s webbing and leaves. After a successful color change occurred throughout the sculpture, I used an oxy-acetylene torch to brush stripes onto the leaves, burning tiger-like markings into the patina. The effect created a wondrous, yet realistic aesthetic to the sculpture.

The last detail of Arbor Evolution surrounded the creation of the nest located on the interior limbs of the tree. The nest itself was inspired by those that existed throughout my family’s property during childhood. I
combined a number of raw materials, including straw, grass, feathers, dog hair, and goat hair to shape the nest that completed the memories of my past.

I appropriately titled the finished sculpture Arbor Evolution after the numerous flora and fauna that inspired this particular work. Once completed, the sculpture adopted a life of its own and left the memories it embodied to me. A thriving creature seemed to sway its coppery red and greenish-blue limbs in constant movement. With the use of my imagination and the collective memory of my experiences with nature, the sculpture created a sense of life that stood out in my body of work and filled me with satisfaction and wonder.

The next sculptural project that I created as a graduate student returned me to my fascination with a particular animal and its environment. As I gained both experience and practice as an artist of metals through the working of each piece I created, I also broadened my abilities to encompass more imaginative possibilities of sculpture. With the evolution of fresh techniques, such as hammer-form fabrication, piercing, stone carving, stone setting, and patinas, I developed a personal sense of craftsmanship that I was eager to apply to future sculptures.

The piece I developed after Arbor Evolution served as both an investigation of the qualities of sea life and as an imaginative exploration of physical environments. My primary goal for the piece was to emulate the stimulation I gained from the use of multiple, artistic techniques that I had personally developed. I remained cautious throughout the execution of the piece, however, to not intensify my use of various techniques too strongly, which I feared might distract from the focus and presence of the
completed sculpture. I sought an honest perspective towards nature in the sculpture I titled Black Gorgonian – in Latin, “gorgonian” refers to “sea fans”.

My fascination with sea fans (fig 29) derived from my interest in the direct and immediate relationship these creatures maintain with their surrounding environment. The sea fan is an animal that depends solely on the circulation of the ocean waters, because it is a stationary animal rooted to rock and coral. Unlike most creatures that possess the ability to move in search of nutrients, the sea fan depends on the oceans currents to deliver plankton and other microscopic life forms for nourishment.

Sea fans are strongly tied to coral, as sustainable coral provides a foundation for the life cycle of the sea fan. Coral is also mutually beneficial towards photosynthetic algae. But when sea surface temperatures at a given location rise above summer limits, the corals expel the single-celled bedfellows or photosynthetic algae. Algae provides coral with most of its energy and coloration – hence, the term “bleaching” is often used to define the dying of coral. Recently, marine biologists discovered a colony of eight-hundred-year-old star coral that reached more than thirteen feet high from the ocean floor. The star coral had just died in the waters off Puerto Rico when the scientists found the colony, and the predicted cause of death was the slight increase of ocean water temperatures by two or three degrees 6. I was fascinated by this situation and realized that the fragile environment of coral and sea fans would be immensely challenging to create artistically, yet convey accurately.

6 Wadlow, Kevin
Black Gorgonian (figs 30, 31) was created in three steps: the sea fan, the coral midsection, and the geologically inspired environmental base. I shaped the sea fan form with the use of two techniques that were employed in the forming of the sea sponge in Porifera and the squid in Cabo Chipirón: piercing and hammer-forming of two lobes. In the current piece, addressing the inner form of the sea fan was a priority. I chose brass metal for the possible color applications that I sought for the figure of the sea fan. I wanted the natural golden coloration of brass to blend with dark reds, purples, and browns that I applied to the form with acrylic and oil paint. I also employed the familiar technique of sanding back raised areas on the painted surface in order to reveal the brass present beneath. At this stage, the brass figure resembled a dark golden kidney-shaped form that I then welded and visually merged with the copper sea fan.

I enhanced the copper sea fan by employing the technique of welding fine silver onto the webbing of the figure, which accurately imitated the healthy appearance of pulsing veins within a leaf-like structure. I polished the silver until it revealed a satin glow; I addressed the copper coloration by adding oil and acrylic-based paint in dark browns and red hues, as well as in rich blues, greens, and golden shades. I attempted to instill a sense of vitality that reverberated within the piece. After this form was created, the next step involved the sculpting of the midsection of the sculpture from which the sea fan would imaginatively thrive on.

The midsection of this sculpture was constructed in copper. My objective was to create a bulbous form that depicted a growth of coral across the surface of the form. The use of techniques, such as pattern
welding and hammer-forming, accomplished this desired visual effect. By using large copper circles that measured eighteen inches in diameter, I formed and then used planishing to sculpturally manipulate the copper into a vessel. In the process of creating this form, I encountered the expected, yet eventual undulation and rippling effect of the metal as I formed it into a dish. Usually, in metalsmithing, this process is worked through with planishing to create a smooth vessel, but as I developed the sculpture, I encouraged the rippling and directed the metal to create a ribbed form that appeared to be organic. In the process of planishing parts of the form, I required the use of a stretching or raising hammer.

Utilizing the cross peen of the raising hammer in a consistent way created hammer marks in circular patterns that formed a seemingly natural growth that rose out of the planished copper form. I repeated this process several times on other copper circles; gradually, I pieced together the circles with the use of TIG welding at the seams on the forms. I then used planishing in some areas, while in others the circular organic patterns were connected by similar hammer textures that alluded to a unified form. As the midsection came close to completion, my focus diverted to the lower geological base of Black Gorgonian.

My vision for the base of the piece was to emulate that of rocky matter upon which life would hypothetically be supported. I chose steel and grout to symbolize this mass. I created a pedestal form and proceeded to hammer-sculpt this structure, adopting the same techniques for this piece as the skills I used in Arbor Evolution. Ultimately, the techniques enabled me to create the impressions of stone in the base of the sculpture.
A new technique that I had recently learned required MIG welding at a rapid wire speed in combination with a low amperage that created a carpeted, hairy effect. I adapted this effect to develop a process for cementing the grout to the base. When applied to the ridges of the hammer-formed craters, this technique added a visually lively, mossy growth on the surface of the base that aided in the overall visual experience of the lower half of the sculpture.

I applied a wire frame that offered structure for the grout and steel base of the sculpture. With the wire in place, the grout was successfully sculpted. I combined a variety of pigments to the grout at the steel base, which developed into a stone-like formation. Gradually, the built-up grout adopted a stalactite form. While the grout was still wet after its application to the steel base, I crushed pastels to create powdery pigments of blue, red, green, and purple that I then sifted through a screen onto the grout’s textured surface. I was determined to create a colorful field of depth that would complement the natural, yet fantastical hues found in the sea fan.

The next step involved jointly assembling the copper midsection and the lower steel base. The texturing effect of the carpeting technique on the steel eased the transition of combining the separate pieces. Once assembled, the copper midsection created the visual illusion of the bulbous copper coral form growing out of the rocky, steel structure.

After completion and assembly of the base and midsection, I drew my attention to the orientation of the sea fan and how to address the physical transition from the midsection to the sea fan form itself. As I considered the level of relative ease that I desired in order to successfully
transport the finished piece, I sculpted a fourth, transitional section of Black Gorgonian that resembled half of an undulating, hour-glass figure that opened up into the sea fan. This fourth figure was merged with the sea fan through TIG welding and rested on top of the midsection, which created the visual illusion of continuous growth from the rocky base to the tip of the sea fan.

Final touches were focused on the copper midsection by washing the form with a liver of sulfur patina, which created a rich brown hue throughout the planished areas of the copper. A sea green patina was applied in layers in specific, crystallized growths. In addition, twenty gem stones set in the upper portion of the midsection; my goal was to metaphorically represent the microscopic forms of life that appear to sparkle in the ocean water of a diverse and fragile ecosystem.

The height of the completed Black Gorgonian sculpture is well over nine feet, and like the thirteen-foot coral growth off the island of Puerto Rico, the piece represents a lifelike environmental ecosystem of the sea fan. This sculpture not only reflects my fascination with coral and sea fans as creatures, but also served as an educational experience during which I combined contrasting elements, materials, textures, shapes, color, and ideas. I achieved my goal of creating a form that projects an environmental experience, yet I also created an experience that captivates the eye and imagination of the audience as well as the individual.

The process of developing sculptures from my memory of detailed experiences with nature and various creatures has delivered my imaginative process into a new realm. My personal evolution in
understanding and applying concept and form gave birth to a series of sculptures that ultimately depict not only a fascination with a specific encounter, creature, or memory; but also evolved the development of sculptures, primarily from the depths of my imagination and exploration in form, color, and movement.

Articulated Migration serves as a collective, tangible metaphor of the incorporation of several varying sculptural techniques and skills in a number of unifying, yet transitional arrangements. The twelve pieces, which mirrored each other in shape and form, varied only in the stylistic ways in which they were artistically manipulated and changed due to color. This series differs dramatically from the initial series Porifera Transition. While the latter series was used to represent form, color, and movement, Articulated Migration (figs 32, 33) utilizes a multitude of the familiar specula forms to create a master form and movement.

New, natural forms where created as I explored the ideas behind the sculptural series through the working of six copper pieces and six brass spicule forms. Of the twelve forms total, each was distinguishable from the next by its particular coloration. Though they hold unique qualities from the varying techniques from which they were developed, the forms were still stripped of individualism and served as large, unified forms that informed connection and a continually merging visual assembly. A multitude of solutions arose from my consideration of the greater piece, which included the arrangement of forms hanging in space that alluded to Flurried Movement (fig 34). Other solutions played on the arrangements of forms that interacted in nature and utilized the pairings of three spicules to compose a stimulating visual experience of sculpture and shadow, entitled Nature (figs 35, 36). Other arrangements lent
themselves to creating structures such as the Arches (fig 37, 38) and a playful pinwheel affect titled Spiraling Porifera (fig 39). Despite the seemingly numerous solutions available to the larger, twelve-form sculpture, however, only one should could be shown. Ultimately, I chose Articulated Migration for exhibition and created a long, segmented, worm-like form that swam through space. The form imitated a recognizable, undulating movement of any number of living creatures that thrived beyond captivity and swam freely from my imagination into realization. This solution was the strongest arrangement that spawned visions of several sculptures forming one image; in my imagination, the sculptural forms would represent creatures swimming around each other in a large space, thus creating a ribbon like dance of color, form, and motion. The seemingly endless possibilities for the spicule form, as portrayed in Articulated Migration and other pieces, reveals several options that have served as a pivotal point in the resolution of my thesis work, but have also been the beginning of my future endeavors in sculptural.
Conclusion

Extrapolating my fascination and memory in order to create such works as the Porifera series, Cabo Chipirón, Arbor Evolution, Black Gorgonian, and Articulated Migration, showed that experiences that manifest within the imagination can result in a preternatural sculptural experience for both artist and viewer. Throughout my exploration into memory, imagination, and learning and refining techniques, one value remained constant in my mentality and body of work: my acceptance to embrace evolution, transition, movement, and change in my sculptural designs and technique nurtured a further accepting creed to utilizing the known alongside the unknown. By keeping true to my inspiration, and by realizing that continuous evolution in me and my artwork was not compromising my original design or intention, but rather creating the best opportunity for me to seize imaginative expressionism and growth as a sculptor.

The act of creating art is not subject to a right or wrong way of expressing thought through creativity, whether creationism be addressed through social issues that affect humanity as well as nature or instead provide conceptual reinterpretations of objects and alternative paths in the pursuit of truth. The creation of art is connected to the first entity of humanity’s early and present development, in that art is the idea of story telling; without regard to the actual profundity of the story itself, the story remains an art form. This thesis is the story of my artistic growth and depth of imaginative thinking; I envisioned sculptures as a result of personal experiences and interactions within the world; at times, I found sculptural material in one specific event, a culmination of elements, or a captivation with a subject. Through sculpture, my stories are retold to captivate and
spark the imagination of others as mine was originally spark, to arouse feelings of wonder and curiosity that is present within all humans.

In the modern world, the reality of humanity and the daunting emotional and physical tasks that lay ahead of us rarely ensure our discovery of success and self-worth in this world; we are distracted by material possessions and disregard the value of life. We, as people, seemingly possess an acute inability to be captivated and intrigued by the natural world. This is where the sculptures I have created realize their purpose in abolishing, even for a moment, the paralyzing thought of mundane, everyday tasks; additionally, my forms offer a glimpse into the memory of the inherent, occasionally lingering beauty that Earth offers.

As an artist, the choice to express and share my interpretations of natural world with others is sculpted and created in a diverse array of mediums and materials, demonstrating that there are few set rules that limit material usage or artistic creativity, but rather that only the limits of imagination.
Star Wars set design Degobah, 1983

H.R. Giger Aliens Set Design, 1985
Stephen Shachtman Lamp, 2001

Figure 3
Figure 11

Mountain Sponge front view, 2004

Figure 12

Mountain Sponge back view, 2004
Franz Marc, Blue Horses, 1912

Franz Marc, Fate of the Animals, 1912
Sea Sponges
Sporing Porifera, 2005

Porifera, 2004
Porifera Transition #2 2006

Figure 21
Arbor Evolution, 2005

Figure 24
Environment Pedestal, 2005
Patina sampler, 2005

Figure 28
Sea Fan

Figure 29
Black Gorgonia, 2006

Figure 30
Black Gorgonia, 2006

Figure 31
Articulated Migration, 2006

Figure 32
Articulated Migration, 2006

Figure 33
Figure 34

Flurried Movement, 2006

Figure 39
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