“Containing The Facade”

Tatara Anne Siegel

May 25th, 2014
Abstract

What do we choose to see? Do we see what others tell us to see? If I were to tell you that something is what it isn’t, would you believe me? Would your level of belief be based on our level of acquaintance? It appears that we, human beings, have developed a highly acute set of skills, which enable us to believe what we choose, whether based on fact or fiction. Our perception is dictated by what we learn and what we experience. When what we learn is controlled or influenced by others around us, and we lose sight of our truth and adopt a general truth. Once we establish a comfort level of general truth, we then develop facades. We present these facades to rationalize the artificial and protect the actual. We present these facades in our everyday interactions and functions. Facades or the art of deception is something that has intrigued me for a long time.

2Facade is a way of behaving or appearing that gives other people a false idea of your true feelings or situation. Why do we create facades? We create facades to ignore questions or to alleviate future questions. We accept general truth as reality and don’t question. We create to

2 Facade as defined in Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia Britannica
protect and regain control of our Ego. Does this explanation prove that façade’s can be tools for self-preservation? I believe that we, the human species, are stuck, stagnate, in a transition between, what we know as truth and what others dictate as truth. We find ourselves not asking, not striving, but always wanting more. We find ourselves scared, alone, and wandering with false direction but expecting arrival. This work will address whether the façade, what we show, is a tool used to protect our inner selves, what we really are; or actually a tool that will untimely destroy or hinder our prolonged perception and growth.

The objects presented are used to illustrate this introspective examination. They will be facsimiles of everyday iconic functioning tools. These objects will hint towards metaphorical undertones through the use of labels and text, which relate to specific psychological defense mechanisms. These defense mechanisms include, denial, repression, regression, displacement, rationalization, and projection. Defense Mechanisms are innate coping tools that our psyche develops in order to preserve and rationalize our ego. Theses defenses are said to be a necessity to our survival. As cognitive emotional being we are given a very unique ability and opportunity to feel and mentally process that feeling. However, as fallible entities, we find comfort and stability in our attempts to not recognize. Are defense mechanisms a method of protection for survival or sustainability?

This exhibition will recreate a some-what comical environment of self-reflection and self-preservation. The objects presented will be facsimiles of everyday iconic functioning tools. Some of theses objects will include, brooms, cardboard boxes and a dumpster. The presentation of these specific objects will be oriented similar to how they would be placed in their natural functioning setting. These objects will hint towards metaphorical undertones, which relate to sociological and psychological processes of our cognitive development through means of labels and text. The recreation of these non-functional objects will metaphorically express citchy, cliché sayings that best represent the psychological defense mechanism. This body of work will explore visual, metaphorical references alluring towards introspection and dialog between what we perceive, and what we know to be truth.

Where We Find It

Is what you see what you get? In nature what we see, is usually what it is. A tree, mountain range, a body of water, non-domesticated species, etc. A complete ecosystem thus thriving off of, Charles Darwin’s. ³“Survival of the Fittest”, wherein the animals work with, against, and for one another in unaware harmonious symbiotic relationships. This is a very complex

system that is simplified through its appearance. The predator eats the prey; the tree gets sunlight and grows. What separates us from this primitive system is our ability to cognitively process our emotions and actions. When threatened, an animal will defend itself. An animal will retreat and hide if presented with danger. Are we really so different? Are our methods of protection less primitive because they are cognitively emotional?

American psychologist, Abraham Maslow created a basic structure to describe humans behavioral motivation, thus coined, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. It states that specific needs must be met for basic level of survival. These include what we know as basic physiological necessities; food, water, shelter, etc. however, as you venture toward the top of the hierarchy, things like emotional needs outweigh physiological needs. He states that even though our biological needs are met for basic survival, emotional and psychological needs are what become most important to optimal survival. He states, Self Actualization, which is located at the top of the Hierarchical pyramid, as being a need that the majority of our species will never fulfill in one lifetime. Self-Actualization is described as the ability to find self-fulfillment and the ability to realize ones potential. His theory states that we are capable, but unable; to reach a higher plane of emotional recognition that separates us from the primitive animals.

Maslow works hand in hand with Freudian theory to understand why we are ‘incapable’ of ever fulfilling the emotional and self-actualization need. The inner self is composed of a series of tools developed by psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, and his daughter Anna Freud, known as Psychological Defense Mechanisms. The Defense Mechanisms, some of which are repression, realization, denial, displacement, and projection, are psychological coping mechanisms that we use to rationalize traumatic or emotionally difficult events in our lives. These defense mechanisms allow us to self-protect and continue daily operation and function, which ultimately exacerbates our rationalization of our Ego. Put simply, when things get tough, we can convince ourselves otherwise. We can do such a convincing job of believing what is not true, that we can train our mind and body to function as if the event never occurred or existed. It is in this ability where facades are invented and where my interest is peaked. The defense mechanism is the tool used to create, and the façade serves as the product.

By enabling Freudian defense mechanisms we push Maslow’s hierarchy to the bare necessities, food and shelter. This is my argument and disagreement. Is this a good/healthy method of flourishing, or is it a very successful method for sustainability? If Maslow states that we will never reach Self-Actualization, and Freud states that defense mechanisms are a vital aspect of the self, then what? "Ignorance is bliss”? When you are presented with something you dislike or disagree with, what do you do? You accept it, argue it, or dismiss it entirely. Why is this the case? Should observation and deep consideration be a predominant thought in knowing?

---

4 Freudian theory on psychological defense mechanism is also subject to transitional thoughts and theories through the incorporation of his daughter, Anna Freud and her research from a collaborative written text, Correspondence.
The Understanding

My day-to-day interaction or function consists of observations. I observe, interact and process everything surrounding me, indoors, outdoors, alone in nature, or surrounded by the masses. The basic idea of my artistic practice is observer and inquirer. I find it extremely informative and interesting to question anything and everything. Everyday I am surrounded by people, places and things that all have a life, a story, and a history. Each interaction presents an opportunity to learn more about someone or something else and for me to grow individually, as a whole. The amount of information that is available to fulfill one's curiosity is limitless and undiscovered for more than ten life times. This ideation pushes my motivation to create. It draws from every fiber, every capillary of the self and filters from the imaginary and makes it tangible. The content changes as rapidly as what you see changes. Nothing stays the same for too long, it is in a constant state of flux and fluidity. This is very similar to my creative process. It is also fluid. To take an experience that has greatly altered, or questioned my being and make them something visual for us to acknowledge or to ponder.

For me the act of making is a direct and simple process that relates to the current environment I find myself in. Like my skin, my emotion and cognitive state are both very permeable. People, objects, interaction are all able to permeate my senses and instill thought or emotion. This drives my creativity and starts the dialog. The physical objects that are made serve only as insight to the conversation I am already having. This specific body of work created a very interesting discussion between others and myself.

When I approached making this body of work I asked myself a few simple questions. The first was, ‘what is art’, and ‘what makes it unique?’ What is this work conceptually? I thought about all the art I have been exposed to in my youth and in young adulthood. What is art, everything is art. Whenever my eyes are open, I am seeing potential influences in my ability to visually converse. This can be a raw object found in nature, interactions between individuals, a distinguishable smell or sound. The most important influential part of my process and practice is utilizing my five senses to the best of their ability and pushing their potential. What makes this body of work unique is my ability to acknowledge something that might not seem precious and start a dialogue with it. I ask it all the questions based on its current appearance, for example, a dilapidated box on the side of the road. The majority of my creative flow is not what I choose, but what chooses me.

My artistic practice/process isn’t much different. I try to remain as observant and inquisitive as possible to help begin the idealization for any piece. Every place, person, object, has a story and a past life. Most of the research I have done is based on observations of my
current surroundings. For this body of work my surroundings are directly related to theses objects and the materiality they posses. I tend to be more focused on worn and used items that are typically object-based and were once functional but have become outdated, or outmoded.

**Materiality v.s. Functionality**

Does everything serve a purpose? When we think of objects we think of tools that perform a service. A broom serves as a device to clean. A cardboard box serves as a place to store and transport other objects. Are theses objects precious? Should they be treated with more respect because they are reliable objects that we potentially utilize and depend on?

From a preliminary encounter, I have presented what appears to be a series of functional objects contextualized in their natural surroundings. On the surface, everything appears to be, as it should, normal, for what you would expect to see in an abandoned industrial space. The cardboard boxes appear to have been used and weathered. They are pushed off to the corner, kicked on their side with packing material flung all over the floor. A broom propped up against a wall displaying all the signs of age and repetitive use, to where the bristles seem bent and short. An old rusty dumpster that is brought in to remove larger amounts of debris and rubbish, nothing out of the ordinary. The space is either in a transitional phase or has been left full of unwanted, discarded objects. What am I missing, or overlooking? Why is attention being brought here? Nothing seems unusual? What is so important in this space?

Upon further investigation, one realizes that what appears to be straw bristles or wet cardboard in a corner, are in fact not straw or cardboard, but something else. You approach an object that makes you feel comfortable, because on the surface, you recognize this object as familiar. Then you ask yourself a series of questions, why are those bristle’s shiny? Why is that cardboard cracking? Does cardboard crack? As you start to look around and notice that many things seem right, but not really. Holy Toledo… a gust of wind just came through the door and a hundred packing peanuts that are sprawled out all over the floor haven’t moved an inch. Everything I know about packing peanuts and wind has just been questioned and challenged. What am I looking at? Why do my eyes deceive me?
No, your eyes don’t deceive you. It is your head and your heart that are to blame. It is a preconceived notion from a prior experience that never instituted questioning. Is what you know to be true, truth? There are two components, your head and your heart, one rational and the other emotional, that are, either in constant battle or agreement with one another. This should never be the case. There should always be levels of gray between black and white.

When you feel something, a physical sensation is activated, an emotion. That information is then, sent for processing and an explanation is found. The processing is where the feeling could get displaced. When I was a kid, my parents would say, don’t touch the stove it is hot, it will burn you, you will feel pain. I have and probably will always be stubborn for this exact reason. I touched the stove multiple times. I could physically feel this so called pain, but it wasn’t enough. I finally started asking the right questions and then, I stopped touching the stove. This is an elementary experience, but extremely pertinent. We need to feel, process, and then question our rational thought derived from a feeling. How else are we going to know what is truth or understanding and what is just programmed response? What is feeling if you cant ask why you feel or respond the way you do. It becomes useless, similar to that of a glass broom or ceramic cardboard box. It is an object that appears useful, however remains useless. What is a useless object other than something we see and walk past?

Everyday we walk and look, but do we ever see. This body of work was created to address insight. What do we see? What do we understand? What is important? This argument is best understood by a quote from artists Claus Oldenburg.

5I am for an art that is political-erotic-mystical, that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum.
I am for an art that grows up not knowing it is art at all, an art given the chance of having a starting point of zero.
I am for an art that embroils itself with the everyday crap & still comes out on top.
I am for an art that imitates the human, that is comic, if necessary, or violent, or whatever is necessary.
I am for an art that takes its form from the lines of life itself, that twists and extends and accumulates and spits and drips,
and is heavy and coarse and blunt and sweet and stupid as life itself.
I am for an artist who vanishes, turning up in a white cap painting signs or hallways.

These series of objects represents just as he states, the minimal, the less desirable, the overlooked, the “ordinary”. It is not the big things that inform you or your life it is the small steeping stones that get you there, that make the difference. Life is a series of moments that are all dictated by the little choices we make throughout our life-span. Each choice provides enough information to determine which way to venture or continue. We just have to ask the right questions. So what are the ‘right’ questions?

I look at this work, at my experience in graduate school and I ask myself, ‘ why have I just spent two years, sixteen hours a day, seven days a week, killing my body and my social life to make objects appear real, when in fact they are not. Why am I honestly trying to comprise my

surroundings with dishonesty and kill myself in the process? Because, I believe. I believe that although there may be dishonesty in the world, we are all equipped to be honest with what we see, how we interact and who we are. We have a responsibility to be honest with ourselves. I believe that in order to understand dishonesty, perception, or façade, one must first be submerged in it. I can imagine upon reading this and interacting with the work that it would seem that my character would be that of a dishonest person. Quite the contrary, I don’t believe in dishonesty. It does neither me nor you, a service for me to be dishonest. Being dishonest or creating a façade only allows for doubt and unknowingness, which is derived from fear. Fear is something that I will not tolerate in my life. You spend the first part of your life learning, the next understanding, and the last part of you life reflecting. There is no time for fear or deception.

The Interaction, The Vulnerability

So the ultimate question, why am I trying to deceive you by making objects appear not as they are? It is because I am connected and invested in your reaction. I am very interested in the behaviors of all living organisms in nature. For arguments sake, let us refer to them and us, humans and everything else. All of these elements/objects are susceptible to change and interaction, and all posses an energy that is transferred or shared. It is an interconnectivity that all life shares. It is in this interaction and connection that perplexes and excites me. I choose to focus on us, human beings, as my topic of investigation, specifically our psychological and social processes. As cognitive emotional beings, we find ourselves “gifted” in ways that other organisms lack. We have the ability to feel something and then evaluate that feeling. We have the ability to question our actions and methods of living. Unlike many other species we don’t live to just survive, we attempt to thrive. But what is thriving?

What enables us to thrive is our determination and we are very compassionate and susceptible entities. This is both a gift and a curse. This instills mass amounts of power and potential to learn, grow and live but also instills potential for manipulation and or the adaptation of our defenses. It is when we loose sight of all that is around us and let our determination to gain be the driving force; we cease to question and feel. We project onto others, we repress emotionally difficult things, we deny truth and we become stagnant. We label each circumstance or situation with an object and they become potent triggers of reminiscent. They become the very things in the mirror we choose to not to see, but prey on us deep inside in our daily activities and interactions.
Many situational and circumstantial things can trigger one's ability to utilize their defenses. As the old cliché saying goes, ‘sweep it under the rug’, Repression as a psychological defense mechanism is one of the predominant psychological tools used for self-preservation. The glass brooms demonstrate this defense. Repression is a mental process by which distressing thoughts, memories, or impulses that may give rise to anxiety are excluded from consciousness and left to operate in the unconscious. The broom is a very predominant functional iconic object. Its main purpose is to remove unwanted entities, to preserve a clear clean area, free of debris. The title of this piece is, Reminder: The Rug Is Getting Full. Like many of the defense mechanisms when we ignore an issue or choose to not address a situation we create more mess than what was initially present. A broom entirely made of glass does not clean or control a mess. It creates one. Repression is used for temporary sustainability but builds into latter psychological chaos. Reminder: The Rug is Getting Full was created to address this defense mechanism. How much psychological debris will fit under the rug without anyone noticing?

Displacement is another common defense mechanism. It utilizes a "redirection of an emotion or impulse from its original object (as an idea or person) to another". I have conveyed this idea by recreating broken down ceramic cardboard boxes resting against the wall. This piece titled, Easy to Store, discusses redirecting efficiency of space and management. Is it a useful tool to store or temporarily redirect an impulse for a later time? When we redirect an impulse we choose to store it briefly, with the intentions of utilizing or addressing the situation in the near future. Whether on another person, situation, or place, the impulse remains present and stagnate and then becomes forgotten and lost. The impulse becomes easy to store but still remains present.

---

6 Repression as defined by Merriam Webster Encyclopedia Britannica
7 Displacement as defined in Merriam Webster Encyclopedia Britannica
Although Freudian theory states that these defenses are psychological tools for survival, and Maslow states that we will never reach our fullest emotional potential, I disagree. I feel that everyone and everything possess the ability to go above and beyond what they think and feel. We just have to let go. We have to let go of fear and control. The only way to do so is by letting down your defenses and striving for your highest potential. There is no right and wrong. That is why I created this work and what I hope this body of work will speak to. What is art, who are you in relation to theses objects, what are theses objects.

**Where To Go From Here**

My expectation for this body of work is to make these objects accessible to the general public, so to speak. I feel that this work could be very influential in many ways. The basis of concepts is, notice what is around you and pay attention to details. They may not directly relate or influence you in that moment, but could be pertinent at some point in the future. The main idea is to place this work in a non-institutional setting. The interaction that this work generates with the audience is something special. The moment that a viewer’s perception is challenged and then questioned is an amazing experience for others and myself. The momentum generated by this work is limitless and contagious. Anything and everything can be “re-created”. I am recreation object that are already in existence. I am replacing the functionality of these objects with a functioning conceptual introspection. The possibilities of this style of work are limitless. The work is rapidly transitioning into interactive performance, where in the art becomes the prop for the start of a conversation. There is potential for recreating specific scenarios, for example, an old craftsman’s workbench, the corner of a busy intersection, or a trashcan in a cubicle of an office. I feel strongly that sooner rather than later, the actual pieces will become less relevant and the documentation of the interactive experience between the art and the viewer will be my voice. The objects will stay, as they are, the facades.

**Where We End Up**

Do we contain the façade, or present it out for the world to see? I believe in honesty, truth and understanding. Deception and perception are two are two terms that I do not believe in. Deception being an act or statement intended to make people believe something that is not true, and perception, the way you think about or understand someone or something. I feel that one’s perception should be based on their own experience without any preconceived notions or judgments. I believe that there is inherent understanding. With this acceptance of understanding,
there will be no fear and no doubt. What you see is not always what you get, but it is worth further investigation, which will then alleviate the fear and doubt. Defenses are set up to protect, to secure. Psychological defenses are set up to protect our emotions and Ego. What do we secure and fear and doubt for ourselves by not truly accepting and understanding.

What do we choose to see? Do we believe what others tell us is truth or reason? What is truth? In order to find out what is validity and truth we must first address what is deceit and façade. I whole-heartedly believe that the only thing we know as truth or an absolute certainty is, that we live and eventually we will die. The validity comes in the understanding that this absolute truth is uncontrollable. Fear lies within the uncontrollability of circumstance and happenstance. Where there is fear, there are facades. Facades are bound to be created and utilized as means of self-preservation. It will always be easier to self-preserve if we don’t address our fears and inabilities. What better way to stay hidden and stagnate, than to contain the façade.
Bibliography/ Works Cited


“Reminder: The Rug is Getting Full”
Glass and oil paint
Ceramic and borosilicate glass

(Detail)
“You Have Hit the Nail on the Head”
Sheet glass and borosilicate glass
"Easy to Discard"
Styrofoam, metal, and paint
Thesis Title: Containing The Façade
Student Name: Tatara Anne Siegel

Thesis Committee Final Approvals

Chief Advisor: Michael Rogers  ______________________________
Print name ___________________________ Signature

Date: __________________________

Associate Advisor: Robin Cass  ______________________________
Print name ___________________________ Signature

Date: __________________________

Associate Advisor: Carlos Caballero-Perez  ______________________________
Print name ___________________________ Signature

Date: __________________________

Chairperson: Carlos Caballero-Perez  ______________________________
Print name ___________________________ Signature

Date: __________________________