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BENEDICT, DEXTER NOEL. Hammer Pieces. (1970) Directed by:  
Mr. Walter Barker pp. 3

This thesis is a contrast in volumes, line, and planar elements connected by various linkages, emphasizing the point of confrontation.

The body of the thesis consists of eight cast metal sculptures exhibited in the Weatherspoon Gallery at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro; May 3-10, 1970. 35 mm color slides, representing the exhibit, are on file at the University of North Carolina Library in Greensboro.

HAMMER PIECES

by

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A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro  
May, 1970

Approved by

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APPROVAL SHEET

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the following faculty members for their direct assistance in the preparation of this thesis:  
Mr. Walter Barker, Mr. Tal Streeter, and Mr. Paul Kubic.

The idea which has resulted in the "Hammer Pieces" is basically simple. It is the contrast in volumes, line, and planar elements connected by various linkages, emphasizing the point of confrontation. The most important aspect, in this regard, is the point of connection between the two parts, or as it has been termed, confrontation. The forms are all solid cast and stable, with no moving parts, although this possibility of movement is suggested. The patterns of the pieces are generally alike in that there is a tail section which is connected to a major mass. This form is then linked to a broad dominant plane, which is the other volume in the piece. The point of confrontation is developed as if it were a moveable joint in some pieces, and as a penetrating shaft in others. Thus, the pieces suggest both crude tools and developed mechanical forms.

The connection between the hammer and its action with the individual pieces is greatly abstracted. Each form suggests its own limited connection. In some the tail piece refers to the handle of some primitive tool, with the dominant plane being a head used as a hammering or cutting blade. In other forms the suggested moveable link reflects a simple machine action of a pounding hammer head or blade. The abstract idea of the hammer, the reference to crude forms, and the emphasis on the confrontation of the mass elements, all tend to develop a sense of connection between the pieces and primeval man. These sculptural forms suggest objects used by a primitive culture for survival or use in a pagan rite.



Certain aspects of the technical process through which the pieces were developed are of importance. The basic idea for a given form was conceived, but the development of the shape was open to the possibilities of surface dimension achieved in the cutting out process. An electrically heated nichrome wire stretched tightly between two poles was the instrument used in the cutting of the styrofoam forms. The method of twisting and turning the pieces as they pass over the wire yields the textured and undulating surface. The pieces can be added to, trimmed away, and eventually assembled to form the desired patterns. The pattern is then vented and rammed up in green sand. The molten metal is then introduced. The heat of the metal burns out the styrofoam and assumes the shape of the original pattern with exact surface detail. The sand is cleaned away and the surface is developed with the use of a grinder and sander. Some areas are highly polished to highlight and accent the surface texture.

The total statement consists of eight cast metal pieces of sculpture. Six pieces are cast aluminum and two pieces are cast yellow brass. The patterns for these forms were cut from blocks of styrofoam and fabricated together. The pieces were packed in green sand. The desired metal was then poured in. The surface was ground down and shaped further with the aid of power tools, finally being hand rubbed and polished. The six aluminum pieces have a natural finish, that is, the inherent color of the metal. The two yellow brass pieces have been patinaed. One piece is black and the other is a rich brown with some trace of the original yellow brass color reflecting through the surface.

In dealing with the yellow brass pieces, the chemical Ebanol was applied to the form to patina the surface. One piece was merely coated with the chemical, resulting in a rich brown color. The other piece was heated as the Ebanol was painted on, which resulted in the rapid development of a deep black surface. This surface was rubbed with fine watersand paper used to develop highlights and bring back some of the natural yellow brass color. A medium of beeswax and turpentine was then rubbed into the surface. A torch was introduced to burn away the turpentine and to melt the wax into the surface. The piece was then rubbed to give it its present surface luster.

In summary, the Hammer Pieces have their own unique character. The technical process and the motivating ideas from which the pieces were formed are presented as a basis for understanding the works. The abstract quality of each of these untitled forms lend them to a relatively open interpretation by the viewer.