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As a sculptor, I am motivated by the opportunity to create new forms in the world. For me this is a way to portray how different our internal processes of experience can be and the pliable quality of our imagination. I don't work to express a particular idea or narrative, however. Rather I wish to create an experience that is decidedly separate from routine dailyness, especially the media overload that saturates much of our daily lives. To potentially focus on something new, rather than finding something immediately relatable in an artwork, may help us recognize, as much as we all have in common, that there is much that forms in the mind and imagination that makes us unique. I plan to give you an overview of how my concepts have evolved and helped me to develop a sculptural language. I begin with a look at my past experience with contemporary jewelry and the way that it has influenced my current work aesthetically and symbolically. Additionally, I will discuss the way my forms manifest through an intuitive process and my varied approaches for works completed during graduate school.

TO FABRICATE EXPERIENCE

by

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

To Joen

“Love what you do and do what you love. Don't listen to anyone else who tells you not to do it. You do what you want, what you love. Imagination should be the center of your life.”

— Ray Bradbury

Love mom.

APPROVAL PAGE

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## TO FABRICATE EXPERIENCE

As a sculptor, I am motivated by the opportunity to create new forms in the world. For me this is a way to portray how different our internal processes of experience can be and the pliable quality of our imagination. I don't work to express a particular idea or narrative, however. Rather I wish to create an experience that is decidedly separate from routine dailyness, especially the media overload that saturates much of our daily life. To potentially focus on something new, rather than finding something immediately relatable in an artwork, may help us recognize, as much as we all have in common, that there is much that forms in the mind and imagination that makes us unique. I plan to give you an overview of how my concepts have evolved and helped me to develop a sculptural language. I begin with a look at my past experience with contemporary jewelry and the way that it has influenced my current work aesthetically and symbolically. Additionally, I will discuss the way my forms manifest through an intuitive process and my varied approaches for works completed during graduate school.

My undergraduate experience was in metal design and jewelry. I always had a tendency to shift between functional, material and design-driven jewelry and more whimsically narrative forms. Aesthetically I was interested in pushing materials, colors and textures, against each other, emphasizing or creating an understanding of preciousness through these relationships. The work I made during that time included

large rings, with rather playful, open-ended ideas relating to impressions of places. I created carved and cast or sawn out landscapes and cityscapes with a dreamlike absurdity. In my more ornamental work, I would often combine bold enamel hues, unusual stones, and a combination of angular and curvilinear lines, a tendency which continues into my sculpture. The function of jewelry as a precious object to be worn on occasion, revered and passed down through hands, is in itself the element of meaning in the work, rather than imposing personal or hypothetical meaning through symbology or inscribing an explicit narrative. I have also experimented with literally writing and marking in the metal's surface in a way where the messages or implied messages become almost unrecognizable from a couple feet away, once you are out of the intimate personal space of a small object. The words, symbols and icons become an abstracted, all over surface texture in a way inspired by metalsmith Gary Noffke. In most of my jewelry work, rather than handing the viewer or owner a clearly suggested meaning, I prefer for the owner to find meaning through the way they interact with the jewelry object or who they may choose to give it to. In this way I believe the object itself can supply the desired sentiment solely through its distinct history.

Moving into sculpture, however, freed me from the limitations of an art form which is overdetermined in its sentimental meaning and its ties to the body. Nonetheless, my sculptural work is highly influenced by varying aspects of my experience with contemporary jewelry. Jewelry is used to mark an occasion, memorialize a person, place

or moment, show status, or individualize the wearer. These characteristics of the social and personal nature of jewelry are things I also consider when working sculpturally. As in *One Hundred Foot Necklace*, the large-scale site specific necklace I made in the fall of 2013, the site on which the sculpture is installed could function much the same as the wearer does for a piece of jewelry. The necklace installation was meant to pay tribute to places where I spent valuable time growing in an artistic capacity, such as the Leo Jenkins Art Building on the campus of East Carolina University. The series of sites that followed included my former public studio space and an arts non-profit in downtown Greensboro with which I was involved for several years and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I found that the site specific necklace began to merge the gap between the sentimentality of jewelry and the commemorative aspect of monumental sculpture. The object itself isn't telling the story of the place, but the idea of having a necklace, in a sense, worn by the specific site signals to the viewer a relationship between the form and the site.

Although I have always been interested in dialogues of preciousness, playfulness and intrigue, I moved these concepts into new territory following the piece *One Hundred Foot Necklace*. I began by pairing materials that were very different from each other in form and feel. I used concrete and fur or concrete and feathers in these studies. Materials which are contrasting in nature are put together and then accented with gold leaf or paint. The concrete became a container of sorts, similar to a locket which functions to protect

the more fragile or more precious object inside. For one piece, *Dark Space*, I cast a solid concrete sphere and created a hole, the interior of which I painted black. Similar to Anish Kapoor's work in the sense that an illusion of exaggerated depth is created by the absence or specific use of light and color, the hole appeared much deeper than it was. Around the hole was a rim of gold leaf which contrasted both with the interior and the exterior and emphasized the darkness of the opening. Black feathers were deep inside the dark void, fluttering occasionally from a light draft which was intriguing as it created unease in the viewer, who was left to wonder what was going on inside the cavity. This is very much related to our perception of things we do not know or are not familiar with. I knew what was inside, but some viewers were almost compelled to reach in or get a closer look when the feathers moved. In an additional piece, *Dear Rabbit*, two concrete, partially spherical pieces were sunken into each other with an opening where rabbit fur was embedded. A red and gold painted rim perhaps hinted at the preciousness of the interior, the protected fragile and only partially revealed matter. In both cases the materials are juxtaposed to incite curiosity and imaginative interpretation.

For a while I departed from the influence that jewelry has as symbolic form or material study and decided to think about wearability. My attempt with this new wearable work was to express two distinctly contrasting emotions, one of bristling anger and the other as cheerful ebullience. The fact of making them emotional shells which could be removed and replaced, I found interesting. The piece, *Arghhh!*, expressing anger, is easily

understood as an armor of sorts. It has steel spiky crystalline linear forms that function as shoulder pads and an exploding arrangement of red wooden shards skewered to the chest plate. For the second piece, *Squee!*, the cheerful quality really relies on color and the fluidity of the lines to express the emotion. It is also made with a network of steel pencil rods, but steel itself is too heavy and stiff for this idea of lighthearted cheer. The visual buoyancy of the form combines with the bright sea foam green with which it was painted, giving an impression of lightness.

Upon completion of the wearable pieces, I wanted to expand on the participatory nature of wearable work. I am interested in creating a sense of function or activity without necessarily creating an interactive project, and am currently working on a new collection of coated foam and carved wood forms. The idea behind this approach is more related to the form an object takes when it is considered playful or toylike rather than the social aspect of having actual participants, though both interest me. Artists I am drawn to in this regard are Louise Paramor and Gary Webb. Through color and material arrangements, Gary Webb creates compositions that are idiosyncratic and playful. In an article written for Tate Modern's website to accompany a show there in 2002, Webb's work was described as mixing "abstraction with geometry and synthetic found objects with invented forms, he has created an unique hybrid language of his own. Much of Webb's work is an attempt to make tangible internalized emotions" (Manchester, n.p.). The idea of making tangible an internal experience is what I work to create in much of

my sculpture. The playful, colorful and material visual language is, for me, also similar to the way Louise Paramor uses a colorful collection of new and found forms and arranges them in a way that promotes the notion that they have been created through play. It seems as if the objects Paramor creates are temporarily constructed and could be moved around and rearranged. I choose to imply a potential for play, drawing a viewer's desire to touch or interact with the objects without satisfying the impulse, thus creating a stronger interest.

This idea of participation came to me as I played with my young son, Joen. We often play with wooden blocks and Legos, we collect stones outside as well as studying the old rock and crystal collection I had started as a kid. This led to me working with wood and creating gemlike blocks. The wooden forms are brightly stained with acrylic washes and to me begged to be handled, stacked up, turned over, arranged. Crystalline forms emerged but logically clash with the soft opaque materiality of the wood. These forms simultaneously recall wooden toy blocks, colorful gems and crystals. Seeing Joen want to touch and handle and move everything, especially palm sized objects, I wanted to recreate that urge to play, specifically his fascination with the details in the rocks that make him study them up close. The wooden forms I create are interspersed with surprising details such as touches of gold leaf or markings on the surface, with the goal of creating an effect similar to the close study of the rocks.

Over the summer of 2014, while cleaning up the backyard as I played outside with Joen, I decided to use the materials from my surroundings and thought of weaving with some of the overgrown English ivy. I thought of making forms, perhaps even small dwellings, but first I naturally thought of baskets. I made a small simple basket with the ivy. I considered the functional form and purpose of this type of vessel, to carry, transport and store. I knew nothing about basket weaving but that form interested me, visually and symbolically and I continued over the next week making more out of a variety of found materials from my home. The first basket I made actually resembled more of a bird's nest. This discovery led me to consign feelings of protection and motherhood to my basket making. The underlying idea with this series is that the baskets provide a metaphor for ourselves as vessels which contain experience.

As I thought about this contained experience and its relationship to personal history, which is often a notional facet of the work I create, I chose to revisit the form of a chain. While a resident artist at Salem Artworks in upstate New York, I worked on this new idea. This project considered untranslatable personal memory. I would carve several objects out of wood that would be linked together with a forged copper chain much like the objects collected and worn on a charm bracelet; my shapes would represent significant moments in time. I used laminated planks of wood to create large geometric chunks which I instinctively carved into, marking certain forms with grooves, while adding smaller gemlike blocks on some and using encoded colors to stand in for certain

events or periods of time. The encoding of particular cuts and colors into these blocks are generalized to where the distinct memory is not being revealed. As personal experience goes, no matter how specific the signals seem to be, only the one who holds the memory can have the experience of it. For one piece I used pastel orange and pink on a form recalling a particular sandcastle I built with my father. Further down the chain, I added three black wood gemstones to a longer form signifying three close friends I lost within a five year span. These signifiers only remind me of what the moment was and portray to the viewer a general marker of something they will never fully understand.

These wood pieces combined with the specific form of a linked chain together express more of the notion of a trajectory, or the shape a series of events takes in one's mind rather than narrating specific events. It represents the progression within my personal history. I was working from the premise that meaning is created in an object's use or from the context it exists in rather than in the object itself. This piece was first documented as a chain-like object I pulled in a photograph, then later in a video where the chain is hanging off of me throughout a typical day of domestic tasks including washing dishes, scrambling eggs, vacuuming, gardening and grocery shopping, complete with Joen and my two dogs. The chain represents the history leading up to the day in which I wear it. This collapses the highlights of a life with the in-between everyday moments that in fact connect and make up most of our time here, putting into perspective what our idea of our life is and what our actual life is. A viewer wouldn't recognize the

chain necessarily for what it is to me, but the absurdity of its presence as an appendage would open conversation and interpretation, filtering through their own experience to find their own meaning.

I decided to revisit the idea of basket-making, feeling as though I was not finished with the concepts generated during that time. This time I approached them differently. I wanted to use steel, a solid, structural material free from associations of basket making materials, but also more formally thinking of how the ribs of the basket, create the profile and how its position can emphasize the opening, presenting its cavity, the transition from interior to exterior. After the first structural form was made, I found I was more interested in the frame for the potential basket and decided not to weave any material through the spokes. I was excited by the simultaneous access to the inside and outside, along with the linear movement like drawing in space. When moving onto the second form, I worked responding to the first rather than the idea of a basket, then the third continued that activity by responding to the second. Through this process the forms grew increasingly abstract, further removing the form from the initial concept through each of these iterations.

I am continuing this work for my thesis exhibition through a series of large scale steel sculptures. Common to most of the forms is a rhythmic zigzagging or arched system of lines around the transitional rim that emphasizes the internal (the contained, protected,

carried, personal) and the external (the container, protector, carrier). The vessel I am reinterpreting acts as a repository for the desire to contain and protect the fragile and fleeting. The forms, generated from the idea of a container, consist of a structural framework, and are playful, ornamental, visually delicate, and rather bizarre, mere suggestions of a vessel. The decision to respond visually to the form rather than to the idea of a container suggests an object's limitation in embodying a given emotion. The playful and ornamental aspects to my work reflect the celebration and activity of the present, rather than the past. There is a series of work by Louise Paramor that includes oversized paper forms reminiscent of paper party decorations. The large ornamental installations evoke a sense that a party had occurred, or some celebratory event and the remnants are these oddly large decorations left behind. This work is exciting to me and I find some commonalities with the ornamental aspects of my large openly constructed steel forms. Ornament is typically understood as serving a purpose, whether as party decoration or architectural embellishment, or even as status signifier or fashion in the case of jewelry. When I use adornment within a sculpture, I intend for the surprise of the accessory to enhance the intrigue of the form.

I intuitively make most decisions during the fabrication of my sculpture. While I have a sense of a desired form, right from the beginning I create lines and planes on the spot, so that the body which results is very much a product of my particular mood. I react to the materials physical or visual characteristics. I choose materials for their physical

properties and what those properties allow me to manipulate successfully. I do not try to make a material do something it does not easily do. I often paint the steel I use, separating it from its industrial connotations, but the way I fabricate the steel is directly determined by its strength. I am able to create structurally open shapes using relatively thin steel rods, which allows my work to appear delicate and somewhat ephemeral like line drawings tracing the contours of an absent form. I typically use a combination of geometric and curvilinear lines and planes and I shift between symmetry and asymmetry which recalls a variety of things, including plants, insects, crystals, architecture and ornament. The change in length and the contrast between curves and angles also gives particular moments within the form a change in rhythm, moving the viewer's eyes around at alternating tempos.

In many ways my work celebrates the uniqueness of our individual internal experiences of memory, self awareness, and perceptions of the world around us. By intuitively constructing idiosyncratic forms with moments of ornament and architecture, I intend for the viewer to question these decisions and consider the peculiarity of an unfamiliar mind, as a result recognizing the particularities of their own. Our experiences fill in the blanks, make cognitive connections unique to ourselves and supersede our interpretations of unfamiliar or new objects and situations. In this way art can speak to a common experience of creativity and self awareness in the abstract. Providing viewers a new visual and therefore cognitive activity can forge a community for learning new

things about ourselves by confronting the unknown. One method for maintaining the production of new forms is to not know exactly what it is I will end up creating; if it is new to me, I can almost guarantee it will be new to the next person.

Although my work does not narrate a story or present customary images to help provide the viewer a specific meaning, there are some forms I tend to use that resemble familiar objects. This dichotomy between familiar and unfamiliar reminds me of an article from *Sculpture* magazine in 1999, where interviewer Ian Tromp talks about sculptor Richard Deacon's work and its effect on the viewer:

Deacon's sculptures inhabit a space between meaninglessness and meaning. His forms seem to swim into significance and then dissolve again or recede. There is a play of advance and retreat in many of the works, as if their forms would become almost recognizable, knowable, but then pull back again, leaving the viewer once again in an unfamiliar space. (Tromp n.p.)

When Tromp ask about how he (Deacon) claims to not really know what it is he is making, or what resemblance his work holds to anything else, Deacon responds by saying "I think that when we look at art, one of the things we want to do is to attribute meanings...This is a mode of transaction which at its simplest is to do with a certain kind of recognition—we recognize that something resembles something else" (Deacon). He goes on to discuss how he responds to this desire for recognition and how an object can be recognized by being placed into a situation or assigned an idea. Deacon continues saying "Metaphor is an example of a way in which objects can be put in relationship

without them having any necessary resemblance; two things are put into conjunction and then you see the one in the other" (Deacon n.p.). Deacon's responses in this interview made me consider the current series of work that I am making. The resemblance of a vessel is no longer obvious in my current steel sculptures, as the basket was a starting point long left behind. The most recent work, *Steel Swing*, is more about gravity and connectedness with an open vessel at one end and a closed, hanging teardrop-shaped object at the other. The dark unpainted steel of this work also gives more visual and emotional weight to the feel of the precarious form, quite different from the bright colors and fluid lines of *Orange Contour* and *Blue Bell*. The relationship of these steel sculptures to each other more directly confronts the viewer with the sculpture's unique presence.

For me the reconstructions and abstractions of the initial basket idea, allude to our fabricated perception of reality. I tend to think that our common-sense notion that the learned meaning we assign to known objects through language is interpreted the same way by everyone, is fallible. To me, it derives from the fact that we agree on definitions and the words that make up those definitions. In addition to the unevenness of our shared perceptions, the things that seem to make up our day to day, the things we think we understand are only familiar because they are common to us. My drive to create new and unusual forms is rooted in this complicated idea of perception and imagination, where imagination is taken for granted in the everyday working of perception.

Rather than trying to create relatable, social or message-filled work, commonly found in the contemporary art-world, I am more compelled to create forms and artwork which separates itself from the frenetic spectacle of pop culture and contemporary society. Another sculptor with whom I relate in this way is Martin Puryear. He is the pinnacle of what I aspire to as an artist, creating compelling forms and showing a dedication to beautiful craftsmanship. He speaks so clearly about his work which conveys complete conviction in his practice, especially when he talks about how he is at odds with many contemporary artists when it comes to purpose and content. Since he was being trained in fine arts during a time when the artists around him were practicing minimalism, he claims to have tried it and disliked it. His understanding and acceptance that early on, and still, he is an original thinker and maker and doesn't fit easily into any genre gives me reassurance that it is not necessary to make sculpture that is relatable or easily read to make strong work. In an interview with PBS for his Art21 documentary, Puryear says "The work doesn't have to be a transparent vehicle for you to say things about life today...but my vehicle, typically, is to make work that is about the presentation of the work itself and what went into the making of the work as an object. And there's a story in the making of objects" (Puryear n.p.). This is very much in line with how I think about the objects I want to make. I would rather create objects that do not already exist, which a viewer can consider and contemplate, giving them access to a spatial and visual experience they would not otherwise have.

The sculptures I have created during my thesis work are like strange cages for things I desire to be protected, such as experience, time and precious, fleeting moments, but are all immaterial and therefore could never be contained in anywhere but our minds. The linear forms I am constructing are externalized, materialized objects that could only exist as they are from my mind and through my hands. Creating new forms for the world is just another way to record experience, which in effect captures the time in which it was created. This in itself creates a powerful metaphor for the absurdity of life...and its tremendous preciousness because of this.

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