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tableau vivant.
[living picture]

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Art

by

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Edinboro University of Pennsylvania
Bachelor of Fine Arts in Ceramics and Printmaking, 2008

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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Abstract

With an overwhelming concern for functionality, the design world and industrial production have moved far beyond the pure necessity of the handmade object. With the paper coffee cup, disposable utility is the primary goal; afterwards the service is performed and the thing is discarded. On the other hand, the clay object can be used and reused allowing a personal relationship to form between the user and the object, the maker and the user. My work is meant to reconnect us with the haptic; the tacit knowledge of the physical. I want the user to think of a place beyond the gallery; I want my sculpture to bring greater awareness to the constructed world around us. I am focused on discussing the functional aspects of mundane or ordinary things and investigating the importance of objects, as they exist within popular culture and the domestic sphere, by constructing tableaus from *component-based* objects fabricated from ceramic.

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Dedication

This edition of *tableau vivant*. [*living picture*] is dedicated to Tim Latourette.

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I. Introduction

Haptic interaction is what happens as we consciously or unconsciously pass our fingertips across the surface of a wall, table, or the cup from which we drink; it is all about how our bodies interface with the space and things around us. Physical proximity to an object creates a visceral connection to the concept of that object that cannot be achieved by viewing a two dimensional painting, drawing, or photograph.

A person's preconceived understanding of object use could be described as the enculturation of an object's true function, or their culture's taught reaction to an object's utility. It is understood that a pair of sunglasses are used to shield our eyes from the sun's rays with no verbal explanation as to how we should use them. This object association, the understanding of object based on experience with it, creates a personal narrative within the viewer's own conceptual awareness of the objects that they come into contact with daily. These mundane, daily, interactions with similarly ordinary objects are highlighted in the arrangements that I have presented in my thesis exhibition.

The word *thing*, as I am using it throughout this document, should be viewed as the combination of symbol and object that has the potential to exist in almost any shape or form. The general nature of the word *thing* loses its generality when the theories I use throughout this document are applied to the fabrication of furniture and plant objects that could still be described as *things*. Therefore, a *thing* is an object operating as a symbol, which illustrates a visual language that cannot be articulated verbally. This language uses knowledge of the physicality of the *thing*, which then translates into the viewer's tacit realm of comprehension.

The re-fabrication of objects by hand that are stereotypically reproduced in the multiple accentuates the individual nature of the object separating the hand made from that which is mass

produced; objects ordinarily formed from plastic are viewed as easily discarded where more value is placed on the one-off thing. Little correlation is brought to the importance of a disposable object after the action of use has occurred. My aim is to refocus an audience into thinking in greater depth about the manufactured artifact against that which is made by the individual artisan. The value of specific objects based on the maker, ownership or history of object over time, the metaphorical facsimile is a set of English or Chinese fine porcelain dinner service that may have been passed down through family members gaining emotive value as it passed through hands, familial meals, and over the years.

The replicated and collected arrangements that exist in-the-home setting can be looked at as still life (representation of the arrangement of mundane objects typically rendered in two dimensions). As I define it, still life, refers to the fabrication of the commonplace object in 3 dimensions as sculptures made with primarily ceramic components. The thesis title, *tableau vivant*, comes from the French, which translates into *living picture*. The ceramic sculptures made in the exhibition accompanying this text are just that, a living picture. Using ceramic material and mixed media I have, in essence, drawn three dimensional *tableaus* that exist in space along with us that we may experience them physically, as well as visually. The *tableau*, in this case references the end of a stage scene in which the cast freezes in place, for a moment, before the lights go down and the curtain is drawn. The work should appear as a moment, frozen in time, which can be reflected upon.¹

Joanna Powell and Anders Ruhwald are two artists whose practice of physical object placement in space relate directly to my own resolution of object arrangement. Powell uses the handcrafted object combined with those that are found, like furniture, to create ambiguous yet personal

¹ (University of Chicago, 2016)

narrative and physical space within the piece, all-the-while referencing the two dimensional still-life arrangements of Henri Matisse. Much of her work deals with specific people from her family. In some cases she recreates scenes or objects connected to individual people. While I am not interested in creating specific narrative, her approach to making clay objects and her connection with painting as reference material makes her significant for my practice. Additionally, her installations have a staged, prop or set-like quality that I reference in the placement of my own work in a gallery space.² Ruhwald's work in terms of object and his installation and arrangement of objects in space, drawing three-dimensional images in space, has helped to inform my practice as well. As I see it, he makes both ambiguous sculpture referencing interior design elements such as furniture and displays them in a department store-meets-Shaker wood worker style. His installations are meant to be immersive, and through investigation of spatial relation to object the viewer can have a physical-relationship experience that I seek to elicit with my own installation.

II. Living with Things

I grew up surrounded by things. I can remember navigating spaces that could only be entered by gingerly following a winding path through rooms overwhelmed with the stuff of living: cans of nails, furniture piled with books, receipts for gas bills, plastic decorations, and taxidermy animals.

My paternal grandparents had survived the Great Depression and I can only assume that after having lived with almost nothing, the alternative seemed much more appealing. From photographs, their homes were once organized and furnished in a manner that one would expect

² (Powell 2015)

to find in any ordinary living space. By the time I came into the picture the state of organization had shifted. What might have once been separate collections had drifted and homogenized into grand amalgamations of objects. These sets of things that had been meticulously developed over the years could only be categorized in terms of their owner's place of living. These places were given names and in some cases personified further by ensuring that the collection was maintained and kept together. Many of the things were detritus from the everyday, some more specific to the occupational tasks or hobbies of my relatives. I was always being reminded of the significance of the collections and the emotional and actual value placed on the vast assortment of objects. Before I began going to friends' houses in elementary school I had developed the understanding that the sea of objects that I explored and played around was the way all people my age lived. From the beginning I became connected to the object.

I seek to create a novel experience by fabricating objects that exist in everyday life. I am very interested in what makes mundane objects special to us, sacred in a way. By choosing to live with or use specific objects we imbue them with a certain power.

I grew up around an amalgamation of every type of thing; from commonplace, modern or contemporary objects, to the rare and the antique. I believe that my work has become a distillation of the experiences surrounding my family's connectedness to history, tradition, and the collecting and prescribing of meaning to all objects. From the well-preserved automobile to the rusted hulk with trees growing through the sunroof, there is an importance of keeping vigil over these things while refreshing the connection to what makes them worthwhile and sacred.

III. Reconciling Myself with the Object as an Adult.

Since I came from a background of object obsession, while in graduate school the idea of being a person who produces objects began to concern me. Having been inundated with things, making objects out of clay, a material that is both delicate and heavy, and producing “mere stuff” (objects that have little value in today’s society of consumer-based systems) seemed counterproductive. How was I helping to solve the problem of collection and consumption? It became apparent that in making objects that are meant to be re-used, they transcend their disposable nature as over time their value appreciates through the development of relationships and use. As I began battling with the idea of being a producer of objects, I came to the realization that I was making things related to and intertwined with the aspect of utility, or the idea that some function was present in the nature of the object. Through research into object awareness and ideas about space, my understanding of making objects, and the value of those objects, became clearer. I am therefore focused on the functional aspects of mundane or ordinary things, and investigating their importance, as they exist within popular culture and the domestic sphere, by constructing tableaus from component-based things fabricated from ceramic.

IV. Physical Space, The Body, and Valuation of Objects

At the beginning of my graduate school career, I looked at the construction of the canvas and how paint reacted to gravity creating the preparatory model for surface decoration on that which would eventually become ceramic-based furniture. I recognized that there has always been a direct connection between the objects I fabricate, their physical environment or the space they occupy, and the human body. With this understanding I then began approaching the idea of making an Art that operated as a wall-bound figural abstraction. I realized that in making *things*

that people interact with in space, or touch, I must consider the body in my representation of objects, as well as the scale in which I was working. Because of the body, the size of the object related directly to how the viewer identified to the work physically, by making things that are held or are typically used to sit on or place things on. My curiosity with object interaction via touch, and the idea of the intimacy of this human-object interaction, deepened my exploration to include found object furniture. Using the combined elements of a small-scale installation of furniture, painting as direct and indirect symbol, and both clay vessel and abstract sculptural elements, I tried to deal with the formal aspects of construction and surface treatment. This experiment with the idea of collection, of fabricated object and found object arrangement, led to ideas about how the viewer can make value judgments. These judgments concerning place, ownership, object use, and the importance/valorization of the object to/by the viewer (or perceived owner?), are then based on the information included in the sculptural installation, i.e. the collection. Value, as I am defining it, does not directly correlate to a capitalist mindset or monetary value. I use it to differentiate between that which is culturally stimulating and that which is status quo or banal, as well as that which is or becomes sacred, and that which is profane/mundane.

The cultural significance in history of our earliest endeavors as people to create tools/functional objects and sacred or aesthetic objects, as well as how the current plastics industry and the red Solo cup are connected to this history, created a puzzle that needed to be solved. With the contemporary industry and design world pumping out millions upon millions of plastic objects that potentially operate as functional things, which people accept as normal yet impersonal, how do we view and value an object made by an individual that serves a potential purpose beyond visual interest? How important is knowledge regarding the identity of that individual? Does this

change the value of an object?

There is a connection between the maker and the object being made which filters through that object being used or viewed by an audience, allowing a nonverbal exchange to exist between the maker and audience. Interaction between maker and audience occurs through the progression of an object from its conception to its distribution. But objects also gain life through use that cannot be controlled by the maker or manufacturer, once that thing is sent out into the world what somebody does with it is dictated purely by their choice of how to utilize it. Makers convey meaning through the transfer of tacit knowledge about the object to the consumer/viewer/audience. I believe this transfer can occur with use through the conversation that is had between the Artist and the object, the object and the user, and the Artist and the User.

V. Clay Vessel

Handcrafted items are distinct in their ability to connect us to a mode of creating beyond reproduction. Each handmade artwork has an individual personality, warmth, which is unavailable in the mechanically reproduced.³ I believe that the handmade object helps to develop a heightened consciousness through touch and the intimate nature of that object made by hand, as well as the notion that the character of the hand made leads one to ideas surrounding beauty of the imperfect, or *wabi-sabi* (page 7 Leonard Koren *Wabi-sabi*).⁴

This imperfect nature brings that which has become invisible through *good design* back to the realm of visibility, to highlight how the audience applies object use, utility, and functionality of a *thing*. Objects that were originally derived from clay have mainly been translated into plastic, and while great care has gone into their design and manufacture, we have lost touch with the

³ (Benjamin 1968, 221)

⁴ (Koren 2008, 7)

things we touch. The enculturation of functional objects in Western culture has led us to a point in history where the vessel itself disappears, and it is assumed that what we are using operates under an understood utility. Functionality is so veiled in the history of the vessel that we don't really *see* what is right in front of us. British artist, Grayson Perry, works with many different media sets that have the ability to blend in to the background of an audience's perception, including architecture and textiles, though his main media of choice is the ceramic vessel. Perry utilizes the broad cross-cultural understanding of this specific *thing* by decorating the surface of the pot as a canvas. He does this in order to deepen the awareness of subculture and personal narrative, connecting the viewer to the human condition regarding ideas of functionality and about the history of our connection to objects. His choice to use the classical pot stems from the deep-rooted connection of the vessel to the viewer. Author Jacky Klein writes about his reasoning behind choosing the pottery vessel as a medium to connect to the viewer:

"Perry's pots always reference archetypal, historic forms, for the most part what he calls 'classical invisible' shapes of indeterminate oriental origins. The majority of his vases present international chinoiserie clichés, with their designs acting like frames to a painting, unnoticed surrounds that are subservient to the content and meaning they contain. This act of framing is an essential element of Perry's work and a core part of its effect on its viewers, for he actively exploits our familiarity with these generic forms and the built-in cultural preconceptions we invariably bring to such pottery. Whether we recall memories of decorative knick-knacks on a grandmother's mantelpiece, watch 'Antiques Roadshow', or admire elaborate ceramic splendours of country houses, we bring to the viewing of vases a complex bundle of associations, assumptions and expectations."⁵

My work translates these ideas by combining this type of understanding and in effect drawing in space, both by creating surfaces with line and paint brush but also translating thoughts of imagery into space, using my work as image to convey meaning. Therefore, I recognize the supreme value of the handmade cup. First, in the handmade there is warmth that is unavailable in

⁵ (Klein 2009, 39)

that which is mass-produced; i.e. the manufactured object. The clay material, in its wet state, records touch as it is handled. Second, the object fabricated by hand creates a different connection to the object's meaning by making the audience aware of the presence of a maker, and of the possibility of a conversation between maker and audience.

In his book on Japanese Aesthetics, *Wabi-Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets, & Philosophers*, Leonard Koren writes that Wabi-Sabi is the:

“Appreciation of the cosmic order. Wabi-sabi suggests the subtlest realms and all the mechanics and dynamics of existence, way beyond what our ordinary senses can perceive. These primordial forces are evoked in everything wabi-sabi in much the same way that Hindu mandalas or medieval European cathedrals were constructed to emotionally convey their retrospective cosmic schemes. The materials out of which things wabi-sabi are made elicit these transcendent feelings. The way rice paper transmits light in a diffuse glow. The manner in which clay cracks as it dries. The color and textural metamorphosis of metal when it tarnishes and rusts. All these represent the physical forces and deep structures that underlie our everyday world.”⁶

There is something intimate about the action of making something by hand. Clay as a medium reinforces and dramatizes this intimacy through the users' experience. The cup is cradled, held in close proximity to the body, and placed to the lips. As a material that is handled, it must be treated with care in order to preserve the fragile object and preserve it over time, despite its inherent ability to survive over hundreds of thousands of years in its fired state. If clay is cared for by its owner, its history can develop over time and expound in ways many other materials cannot. For example the ancient tea bowls of China, Japan, and Korea, which have been kept safe and revered over time to develop extremely complex histories and ownership. The owners, in some cases, have been recorded by name on paper and kept with the box that they are stored in for centuries

Moreover, in terms of actual practicality, and need for functionality, the design world and

⁶ (Koren 2008, 57)

industrial production have moved far beyond the handmade object as a necessary object. Because domestic objects that were once handmade have been translated into plastic, I have seen first-hand confusion about what one is to *do* with such a thing as a piece of studio ceramic dinner ware. I began considering what objects could be made from clay that performed specific and subliminal tasks in our day-to-day existence and experience, similar to the cup. The next direct parallel to the cup that I could devise was *the chair*. When we walk into a room and there is a chair or a table, we assume certain things about these objects through a tacit knowledge about what they operate as, or what users are predisposed to do with each. Therefore, I am making things (furniture becomes a surrogate for all objects) related to and intertwined with the invisible or subliminal aspect of utility or the idea that some function is inherently present in the nature of the object. I am focused on discussing the functional aspects of mundane or ordinary things and investigating the importance of objects, as they exist within popular culture and the domestic sphere, by constructing tableaux from *component-based* (see below) objects fabricated from ceramic.

My works reference these invisible objects in our lives, but are not the thing that we prescribe as ordinary and having inherent function; they are one-off sculptures of the cup and bowl, the table and chair themselves. As I noticed this difference in profile between the objects that I was referencing and what I was actually producing, I began to render sculptural elements that speak about their use/utility. By employing the practice of making sculptural objects referencing the functional cup, bowl, and teapot, using bold and colorful surface treatment, ceramist John Gill transcends some level of object making that crosses from drawing, to formal sculpture, to flower vase or drinking vessel simultaneously. His works seem to use functionality and the studio ceramic vessel as a conceptual element. Awkward and goofy in design his art objects require a

present mind to be able to use them, unlike the manufactured cups common today that slip into the background and disappear as they are being touched to our lips.

Mircea Eliade explains the importance of this interaction in his book, *The Sacred and The Profane*:

“ In each case we are confronted by the same mysterious act-the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part our natural “profane” world.” The act of drinking and the awareness of the action and interaction with the thing we are drinking from is more influential than the vast majority realize.”⁷

These operate as a vocabulary of non-verbal symbols that speak to the understanding of the manufactured artifact and our habitual collection of things. I continued deepening these subconscious understandings, the non-verbal symbols that I call “tacit knowledge” (tacit knowledge is information that cannot be explained through language) by, in effect, composing three-dimensional still life arrangements that the audience can experience physically. I want the viewer to be in the gallery space with my work and think of home, or their grandmother’s house, and conversely, when they are in these other places that the works in the gallery come to mind. This could be described as the phenomenon of our *Grandmother’s* china. Articles of daily life that have a connection to a person or *family* are carried through time and gain personification themselves. Time and use creates personality or we begin to relate to an object as we relate or care for a loved one. By making each of the objects by hand a singularity occurs. Furniture is more easily preserved and *passed down* from person to person. These mundane objects that connect to a person or personality are given power through ownership, which begets a more complex relationship to object function based on a connection to personal narrative. Object value or valorization of a commonplace thing by association to a person through ownership,

⁷ (Eliade 1961, 11)

interaction, or experience, tie the physical thing to a history of use, in theory, making used objects more valuable through association. I have been interested in how objects gain personality or can be personified over time and can operate in a surrogate position for human interaction. Through development as thinking visual creatures societies tend to collect information by building connections about our surroundings by looking at pieces or parts in order to make sense of the whole. This relationship to the parts applies ideas, things, and personal interaction somewhat interchangeably. By using objects that are either described as something or labeled as something, things that evoke certain ideas of object interaction, or the human element, (through experience, utility, touch, and scale), I want viewers to find themselves relating to my works in a déjà-vu, the sensation of having experienced an event or a moment before.

VI. As Maker, and the Work Itself

In *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings* the philosopher writes, “The mind goes out through the eyes to wander among objects,” this quotation represents a clever and direct gesture that provides a wonderful metaphor to describe what is occurring with my works and the viewer.⁸ This wandering of the imagination beyond the physical presence of the viewer and the work in space is about how interaction could take place between the user and the sculpture. My work takes the viewer beyond the physical presence of the objects as symbols of real life and into their own imaginations, allowing an interpretation of how they might interact with actual objects from their own life.

The color choices and formal decisions in my sculptures are playful and methodical, used to mimic blurry vision in the periphery of our point-of-view; the thought that the everyday object

⁸ (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, 298)

might exist like a John Cage-style of silence (that space is not empty, what is viewed as ‘nothing’ truly is sacred). In his seminal work *4 minutes and 33 seconds* Cage instructs an orchestra to remain *tacit* (in notation for writing sheet music this means to be still or silent). When the performers do this the resulting auditory by-product is the shifting of the audience in their seats, a cough, and a baby’s cry, proving that silence is a figment of our imagination. I hypothesize a connection to this art by suggesting that the mundane objects of little concern to the people around them actually are more relevant than they are perceived. Construction of objects transitioned from the vessel to the chair in my practice because of this connection to a pre-conceived understanding of object use. While the handmade cup may not resemble a white Bull China coffee mug, thus causing confusion as to the meaning or function of that thing, the rendering of a clay object shaped like a chair immediately speaks to the viewer as to its intended purpose. (quote from *Objectified* relating to the chair)

“In "ye olden days" of what are called analog products, in other words they're not digital, they're not electronic, something like a chair or a spoon. "Form follows function" tended to work. So if say you imagine being a Martian and you just land on planet Earth, and you've never seen a spoon or a chair before. You can guess roughly what you're supposed to do with them... sit on them or feed yourself with them... by the shape of the object, by the way it looks.”⁹

My sculpture is meant to act as bits of a language, sentence fragments, to allow an understanding of meaning through the way the rendered object relates to the way we use it or interact with it in daily life. We are able to make value judgments of object use, importance/valorization, ownership, and place based on the information included in the arrangement. The reference to object and the self-reference to the things that we live with and come in contact with are the most important impressions for the audience to potentially perceive for me in this way of making. The connection of interacting with the thesis installation to the importance of the act of using the

⁹ (Hustwit 2009)

commonplace objects of the everyday is articulated through what Rob Barnard quotes Joseph Campbell as saying in his article *Beyond Entertaining* (from the magazine *Ceramics: Art and Perception*, No. 9, 1992):

“...in *The Power of Myth* [he] tells us: “If mystery is manifest through all things, the universe becomes as it were, a holy picture. You are always addressing the transcendent mystery through the conditions in the actual world.” This, it seems to me, is what all significant pottery throughout history has done, and what should be the goal of the modern potter. That is, to address the mystery of what it means to be human through use – ‘the actual world’. It is the effort to communicate this idea of mystery by a potter that can give a seemingly mundane object like a cup the sort of impact that leads the sensitive user to a previously inaccessible area of awareness.”¹⁰

Clay records touch and action. It has a unique character of using touch to manipulate the as a physical material in construction of three-dimensional form. I pinch the clay and intentionally leave the evidence of my own hands, in effect showing that the work is entirely made through touch. The fabrication of the pieces that come together post firing to become a whole sculpture is done by hand. The medium of Ceramics is rooted in the tradition of producing useful tools for daily life, so it makes sense to me that in translating mundane objects of utility into sculpture that it be the primary medium of choice. Tom Sachs is an important influence for me due to his particular touch, his approach to craft concepts, and his considerations of functionality. Some of his works operate more as informational devices, while others actually realize some physical utility. He makes his work under the framework of functionalism and much of his artworks perform a task, rather than existing solely as visual art. I share with Sachs a parallel interest in using art to bring awareness about the utilitarian to viewers. His crafting of sculptures using ad-hoc construction, and his choice to leave his materials and the construction methods unhidden, also seem to be similar to my modes of employing physical materiality.

I use two-part resin epoxy clay that connects the parts of the sculptures together and can be

¹⁰ (Barnard 1992, 1)

handled in the same manner as clay. This also serves as a reminder that the associations made by people who are not connected to the tradition. This making could be viewed as artificial, such as the artificial nature of plastic (acrylic media and polymer resin epoxy sculpt) operates as the artificial or man-made connections that exist around the real understanding of the machine made functional object. However, it is also heavily tied to the same pinching and coiling process as the ceramic elements that it brings together.

VII. Still Life

The sculptural works operate as three-dimensional still lives. These arrangements have the ability to show a place in time, as well as communicate ideas about the personality of inanimate objects, and how these objects operate in a utilitarian capacity. The surface treatment pushes the work back and fourth between the *flat* and the formal. With the slip application and the choice to have multiple textures ranging from matte to glossy I want the surfaces to reference static, white noise, or *things* that are in the periphery of our vision and just out of focus. In true still life form the gesture and the composition are paramount as well as the choice of the elements included in the installation, a certain *point-of-view*. Hierarchy and the push and pull of the individual components bring the static objects to life in the mind of the viewer. The specificity of objects in their actual origin is less important than that which the groupings or sculptures represent to the individual viewer or participant. I am not looking to replicate things in the way that the *trompe-l'oeil* artist seeks to make the reproduction as real as the thing or things being represented. By including objects and groupings as symbols for how we use things, the everyday things, the profane things, the things perceived as mundane are given the opportunity to come out of the shadows.

Interpreting the still-life as a representation of an arrangement of collected items (found furniture, fruit, lamps and the like) usually recreated by means of a two-dimensional media (drawing, painting, photography), I take the same approach of developing a three-dimensional image that can be visually experienced in real-time. I am directly representing reality by rendering. The flat still life allows us to *imagine* the space presented while my works *are* the space presented. The group of installations present the tension between the imaginary interpretation of the viewer and the reality of their physical distance from the object. Our present physical self is drawn into a potential interaction that cannot be fully realized, as well as a nostalgic past created by our previous experiences with similar objects. The thesis sculptures are removed from the real and placed in a grey area accessible only in our minds, as we can only imagine interacting with the sculpture and with the objects that the sculpture reference. This self-referential back-and-forth continues after the art is no longer in the same place as the viewer. My works are largely component-based, meaning they are made in parts and constructed post firing. They also include separate objects which, when placed together constitute a *whole*, or a singular sculpture. The concept of the work, which is the refabricating of the mass produced object as a ceramic sculpture in order to remove it from its role as a mechanical reproduction to a singular object representing the thing as a symbol of itself, removes the viewer from their personal reality and repositions them in a parallel reality occupied by the object. I have been titling work in such a way as to allow language, the physical representation of form, and the viewer's own experiences to advance the audience into a mental place where my objects and their objects exist simultaneously, maybe as the same thing. This fluidity of concept keeps the static work in motion or at least allows it to act as a Venn diagram; the diagram's circles being the language defining what the viewers are looking at (title of artwork or labeling of object as a

specific thing i.e. “umbrella”), the physical rendering of the sculpture (if a chair or a table looks like a table, is it that thing?), and how the audience has come into contact with the things that are referenced. These three things overlapping in the diagram meet at a central point, which is the associative principle that occurs in the gallery around the sculpture, resulting in the experience or, in some cases, utility.

The non-traditional act of portraying the still life as a three-dimensional object instead of on a canvas or in a photograph gives the audience an immersion and physical relationship to the grouping or objects. Instead of viewing the work through the eye of a camera or a frame the viewer can be in the same physical space as the work, and can even feel the textures present, rather than be limited by what the eye can vicariously perceive. This interface allows for the development of a tacit knowledge, one that remains rather distant when conveyed by an image, but which develops to full fruition through direct interaction with objects.

The sculptures presented in the thesis exhibition function as parts or self-contained moments and can be seen as direct references from life. By placing these objects within a compositional arrangement they form single sculptural units and by combining these *things* as single plants or clothing items with other groupings, into small installations; I want to create connections between the individual parts and the group. Making the object was the original concern, as the body of work continues to develop I have come to understand that, depending upon which objects are placed within the arrangements or compositions, I can take the viewer to different places by isolating objects versus the placement of furniture and other things discovered in a living space that would create a residential environment.

VIII. Living Space

The elements of the installation in the University of Arkansas Fine Arts Gallery could be perceived as a collected set of domestic items that are laid out as if the viewer was entering a house-like space through the front door, first arriving in the foyer or mud room. The thesis exhibition used the lighting to allow areas of darkness between sculptural arrangements to act as the walls of a room that would be separating things allowing more intimate investigation. The individual tableaux, like a showcase of vignettes, placed in a room together; begin to relate to one another to create a larger picture while still retaining their individual content.

Living space, in my mind is the area we choose to inhabit or construct, either through buildings or areas, that can be occupied or in which we arrange collections of *things*. We move through or navigate the *room* between us and the objects that we surround ourselves with; the area above a table, place where our fingers intertwine with the handle of a cup, the room in which the cup and the table are situated; act as a stage, inviting interaction. This is negative space, which is neither body nor *thing*, and, by viewing this space the audience begins perceiving interaction, and touch, when viewing each object. The objects surrounding us are mirrored by our touch through the space around them.

Personal space could be thought about as the ownership of space or the proximity in which we as a physical thing can come in contact with any other physical thing. What is important about the things that people keep close to them? In some cases that isn't definable.

Georges Perec, lists some esoteric examples in page 18-19 in *Species of Space*:

“...everything I couldn’t do without was to be found assembled there, in the areas of both the necessary and the pointless: a bottle of mineral water, a glass, a pair of nail-scissors (chipped unfortunately), ...a packet of handkerchiefs, a hard brush that enabled me to give my (female as it happens) cat’s fur a sheen that was the admiration of all, a telephone, thanks to which I was able, not only to give my friends reports on my state of health, but to inform numerous callers that I was no the Michelin Company,... piles of newspapers, a complete smoker’s kit, various diaries, notebooks,... a pebble picked up on the beach at Dieppe, a few other small mementoes and a post office calendar.”¹¹

In the exhibition I did not use individual title cards, but left the thesis title to encompass the whole of the collected sculptures, though each piece has its own label. Here are some highlighted explanations of selected works as they appear in their physical sense.

The first work encountered upon entering the gallery space is titled *a cool dry place*. (Fig. 1)

This work is modeled after an imagined 1940’s umbrella stand and ashtray. Like all the pieces in the show it balances between rustic and elegant in its formal presentation. There is a single umbrella folded and placed in one of the four spaces underneath the empty cigarette receptacle. Its stature is stoic and the variations in thickness of the applied white slip give it the appearance of a distressed and worn patina.

The only table structure present in the space, *ave maria-blue table*, (Fig.2), held a front-and-offset center in the gallery. This work is one of only two primary colored pieces in the exhibition. The monochromatic table object’s surface is comprised of five different blue tones ranging from warm to cool in value. The vertical exteriors are covered with uniform, rising drips that push and pull creating depth of field within the singular chromatic surface. On the table top are placed a hand built clay plate with multiple white slips and an abstracted *sgraffito* line work drawing, an shiny white slip coated soup spoon, and a similarly white slip coated cup form that contains a rainbow of colored clay sticks that burst forth, rising actively from the interior of the

¹¹ (Perec 1999, 18-19)

small vessel.

Numen- a couple of plant stands. were constructed to act as physically present stand-ins for the body. The plants, whose fluid gesture rise and fall as if they had been caught in mid breeze, act as the head of the body. Moving down to the furniture elements comprised of two tripod stands (of orange terracotta, white latex house paint, clear gloss acrylic media, and flat white oil paint) whose undulating surfaces appear slightly *contra-posto* in poise. These stands could be thought of as the body or skeletal structures present in our own material selves. In between the triad of legs exists a shelf on which rests, respectively, a brightly colored pouring vessel and a naked brown clay basket containing pink and blue sticks arranged in a “v” formation.

Across from the couple are placed four diminutive Windsor-style flat-back chairs, titled *transition*. (Fig.3) The stance of the legs is splayed and jutting outward creating an animated gesture uncommon from static objects of similar design. The activity present in the colored seating area these four objects are colored in a flat charcoal grey, blue-grey, warm pink, and black and have a certain tension; as if to further enhance the curiosity of the audience, beckoning interaction of taking a seat. As stated above this sculpture, set up linearly in space, acts as a sentence fragment and having started the making of the elements in the body of work with chair forms; the black chair takes it's place as the 'period' in the show, as a sentence. Beyond the open and central part of the gallery which is flanked by the couple and the aligned chair objects sits a quiet yet distinct hamper, empty, with an element of crumpled clothing laying beside it, *of place and placement- interior and containment*. (Fig. 4) The hamper is modeled from the plastic perforated object of the same name. It is covered in a clear glaze and has a mottled white slip exterior and a warm pink slipped interior. The ability to clearly see the inside and outside at the same moment opens up the conversation of transparency and honest communication, while the

dry white surface of the clothing speaks to a sense of disheveled comfort; intimacy.

Untitled (common house plant). (Fig.5) completes the explanation of selected works from the *tableau vivant*. exhibit and is placed in the only true corner of the physical architecture in the gallery. This three-part installation is comprised of a lidded storage vessel, its elongated knob waiting to be grasped to view it's interior. The middle object is a potted palm plant on a square stand. The palm fronds are brightly colored with green and yellow ceramic slips, stretching akimbo activating the space between the jar and the lamp object. The standing lamp is the only piece in the show that has any connection to the phenomenon of electricity and is placed next to an outlet of which its non-existent chord could be imagined allowing the also absent switch to be turned, lighting the clay bulb illuminating the yellow interior of its perforated shade. These three designed objects move our mind from ideas of actual function, decorative function, and the completely non-functional. This work operates as a blueprint and underscored sentence fragment bringing us back to the realization that the act of drinking from the cup; that which we so intimately interact connects us to the object we are physically in contact with as with another person's touch.

When viewing each other as people my work becomes close to the viewer and connects on a personal and emotional level. The conversation between the viewer and the work is silent but I want the introduction to be curiosity driven and the resulting time spent together and what is taken away to be long lasting.

The scale of the works is being pushed into the *real* scale of the objects represented and, as such, this *human scale* allows the work to relate to the viewer directly. Together the *things* create a tableau for the viewer to explore (quote from Susan Stewart's "Miniature", page 54 of *On Longing*).

“In describing the tableau, the writer must address a world of things defined in spatial relation to one another. But with the introduction of action, the task of writing changes toward the description of events within a sequence, and the description of the world of things becomes “mere” context... In this aspect of the tableau we see the essential *theatricality*... the object in its perfect stasis nevertheless suggests use...the [furniture installation] becomes a stage on which we project, by means of association or intertextuality, a deliberately framed series of actions.”¹²

It is difficult to create individual *things* and place them together in a space without a conversation starting between them. Proximity and scale play a part in this conversation, as well as color and *value* relation. The scene that is created then connects us to the ordinary through our imaginations.

The text attributed to Joseph Campbell earlier was placed on the back wall of the gallery in white vinyl text. The subtlety of the white text on a white wall was used to highlight that which tends to be over looked, while the quote itself describes the complex discovery of the mysterious by engaging with the mundane world lived within.

IX. Conclusion

I make furniture as a surrogate for all objects. Reproductions act as artifacts; still-lives heighten our awareness about the things might normally be taken for granted. The furniture is set up as it would be if it were found being used in a living environment, operating as a vocabulary of non-verbal symbols, which questions the audience’s understanding of the manufactured artifact and the loss of our senses in contemporary society. Industry and culture have led us to a point in history where the vessel itself disappears, and it is assumed that what we are using operates under an understood utility (that which seems to do what is culturally understood to do). It, the bowl that we eat from, is so veiled in the history of the vessel that we don’t really “see” what is

¹² (Stewart 1984, 54)

right in front of us. Many of the ideas presented exist within a simple definition of what happens with my work. This operates as an association or referential thought pattern, which occurs constantly, as we try to make sense of the world around us. We view everything in relation or comparison to something we have already seen or experienced. I seek to create a novel experience from the re-fabrication of objects that exist in everyday life. Though valorization of a commonplace thing, experience ties the physical thing to a history of use, making objects that are used more valuable through this association.

With an overwhelming concern for functionality, the design world and industrial production have moved far beyond the pure necessity of the handmade object. With the paper coffee cup, disposable utility is the primary goal; afterwards the service is performed and the thing is discarded. The clay object is used and reused allowing a personal relationship to form between the user and the object, the maker and the user. My work is meant to reconnect us with the haptic; the tacit knowledge of the physical. I want the user to be thinking of a place beyond the gallery; I want my sculpture to bring greater awareness to the constructed world around us.

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Figure 1. *a cool dry place*, 2015, earthenware, white slip, epoxy resin putty, threaded rod, 40"x16"x16". Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 2. *ave maria-blue table*, 2016, earthenware, terracotta, epoxy resin putty, acrylic, latex, threaded rod, 34"x32"x32". Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 3. *transition*, 2016, terracotta, epoxy resin putty, threaded rod, enamel, Installation length is 65". Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 4. *of place and placement- interior and containment*, 2016, earthenware, terracotta, colored slip, white slip, clear glaze, epoxy resin putty, Height of hamper is 25" . Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 5. *Untitled (common house plant)*, 2016, earthenware, terracotta, colored slip, clear glaze, epoxy resin putty, threaded rod, oil paint, acrylic media, enamel. Image courtesy of the artist.