

Forms of Meditation and Discovery

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by

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Abstract

As a woodworker, appreciate opportunities to celebrate, in my own quiet way, the honest efforts we make to build and connect with those around us. I am an object-maker, an object-fixer, and object-refiner. I excavate hidden beauty and find potential in the material I'm most drawn. My practice is one of creation as well as healing using a medium that shares our fragilities and strengths.

By responding to woods' qualities of growth, adaption, and decay, as I carve away layers, I am often humbled by its infinite aesthetic offerings. Working with it settles inner curiosities and gives my thoughts physical bearing. In this way I can confront and better understand the lived experiences that inspire me in my own quiet and well-crafted way.

Acknowledgement

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis work to my wonderful wife and children. Lana, thank you for putting up with me these past 3 years and thank you for all your help and support. I couldn't have done it without you. To my children, Sevn, Arthello, and Suni thank you for always being my little cheerleaders.

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CHAPTER 1: Discoveries

When I find broken things, I appreciate the opportunity to mend them. When I come across a tool that has been left behind, I like giving it a new use. As husband, father, and brother, I celebrate in my own quiet way the honest efforts we make to build and connect with those around us. As a woodworker, I am an object-maker, an object-fixer, and object refiner; perhaps even a hoarder, if you ask my wife. But through all my gathering and renovations, my dedicated craft gives support back to people. As an artist, I wish to share with others the beauty I see in objects and tools and the possibilities I see within them. This document provides evidence of this practice.

I began woodworking from a mix of necessity and welcomed invention. When faced with a broken table leg, I saw no reason why an entirely new table was needed to replace it. I was young and industrious, so why not just fix the table's failed appendage myself? After all, eighty percent of the old table was in perfectly acceptable condition. I could not only save money, but perhaps restore the table to better than new condition at the same time. Repairing the table helped to put food on the table, as I was a young father with mouths to feed. My instinct to salvage has remained beneficial since.

I have an ever-growing and insatiable hunger for all things wood or woodworking related. Once I succeeded in repairing my table to one hundred percent, I became addicted to the constant possibility of new woodworking challenges. I started searching the phonebook for every local cabinet shop and paid each one a visit. I introduced myself and enquired about their scraps and offcuts. A few shop owners were more than happy to let me search through their scraps for anything I might find useful. It's amazing how much perfectly good, all be it smaller, wood gets thrown out by some of these businesses. With a steady stream of good hardwood lumber coming in, I focused more of my energy on how to utilize it. At least what energy I had left after working a fulltime job as a cook and kitchen manager.

My hunt continued for tools and the knowledge of how to use them. I began skimming the classified ads in the local newspaper every Sunday, as well as keeping my eyes peeled for any yard sale signs. My arsenal of tools began to grow larger and larger, and thanks to an



Image 1.1 Bookshelf

older gentleman who decided it was time to retire, I got a great deal on an assortment of older machines. These included a lathe, table saw, and compound miter saw. Amongst this new wealth of possibility, I now had to contend with the legacy of his long and hard career. Most tools were in disrepair and sported quite a good deal of rust, but the possibilities they offered for future use has been well worth it. It's hard to beat an old tool because they just don't make them like they used to and with some extra care and attention, they have continued to serve me well.

Now that I had the wood and the tools, my focus shifted once again towards gaining more knowledge of traditional skills and the books that would provide it. I visited all my local bookstores and used bookstores nearly every weekend spending any extra cash I had on books with bespoke designs, woodturning, and craftsmanship tips. To this day I'm still looking out for new books to add to my collection of nearly 300 others, a section of which is pictured above (Image 1.1).

Looking back and calculating the money I've saved on furniture and the occasional handcrafted holiday gift verses the money I've invested in tools and materials; I suspect I've broken even financially, but I'm confident on my gain for the future. What I can make and the tools that make them possible can last for generations, this is at least what I keep telling myself...and my wife. This lifelong obsession has taken seed and I'm determined to keep



Image 2.1 Using the lathe

watering it with knowledge and practice. With any luck I can help to keep these traditions alive and pass them down to my children and anyone else who wishes to learn.

CHAPTER 2: Turning

Much of my work is created with the use of my trusty Nova wood lathe (*Image 2.1*). Over the course of hundreds of hours standing in front of this seemingly simple tool, I have developed a great love of the transformative power it affords me over rapidly spinning blocks of wood; my learned reverence



Image 2.2 Turning Detail

accumulated with every wispy shaving I remove. Discovering the hidden character of each wood piece has a way of humbling a person. With any wrong move, I could be

seriously injured or even killed. However, with every right move, I can create a shape or profile that is near mathematical perfection, rivaling those of ancient potters. This dance with danger and design is one that I find endlessly seductive.

Within the huge spectrum of woodworking activities and skills to learn, turning is one of the easiest to access and yet hardest to master. It takes time and patience (*Image 2.2*) to understand how

to correctly present the cutting tool to vastly different wood species spinning at hundreds to thousands of rotations per minute. I say this because I believe the danger involved in turning has something to do



Image 2.3 Collaboration



Image 2.4 Keepsake #1

with my love and fascination with it. I feel an excitement when balancing on the edge of creativity and danger.

Another huge attraction to woodturning is its similarity to treasure hunting. In fact, I often see them as one in the same. The treasure is in the wood, and I only need to dig it up by carving it out. When peeling back the years of piece, I'm excited about what each removed layer reveals to me. Through experience, I've learned to "read" what characteristics may be hidden under the surface of a given piece of wood bark. Many of these hidden characteristics are rarer than others, such as spalting, burls, or

curly grain patterns. The level of moisture in a log or piece of wood plays a huge role in the resulting object formed from it. If a piece has been cut recently it will still contain the water that once gave it life. My piece *Collaboration* (Image 2.3) is a wonderful example of how I can use fresh and wet wood to allow the turned forms to warp as they dry. By doing this I can relinquish some control of the resulting finished shape. In this way of working, the wood itself becomes a collaborator and we both play a large part in how the final form materializes.

I believe it is an artist's responsibility to preserve the methods and skills they use in



Image 2.5 Keepsake #2

their practice so that they may be passed down through the years. We as human beings have always used the lessons and knowledge of those that came before us to build upon and steadily move forward. I think that craft and craftsmanship is increasingly being lost and forgotten in our steady march into the computer age and mass production. Through my art practice and teaching, my hope is to convey and share the importance of creating art objects that carry with them a quality of care and reverence for the time and knowledge accumulated and passed down over hundreds of years. *Keepsake #1 (Image 2.4)* and *Keepsake #2 (Image 2.5)* are representative of the care and time I put forth in all my work to continue growing as an artist and craftsman. These keepsake boxes are physical manifestations of the skills and knowledge I wish to celebrate and pass down to the next generation.

CHAPTER 3: I love Tools



Image 3.1 Hammer Collection

I love tools (*Image 3.1*), so much so that the line between a tool and art is blurred in my practice. In *Form Over Function (image 3.2)*, I carve the handle of a hammer into an artwork shifting its use and provoking the viewer to consider their pull towards aesthetic experience in a tongue and cheek way. By taking a perfectly useable hammer and turning the handle on my lathe, I simultaneously made it more attractive and less useful, dangling this artistic choice out to towards the viewer and away from the hammer's perceived job at hand, pulling out a cartoonishly bent nail. I pushed the hammer's form past what it's function could

“handle”. When I posted this piece online it garnered a fair amount of praise, but the most common response was, “why?”. I loved this reaction from the viewers, because I believe that it shows that they were struck by the dissonance I was trying to evoke. In the end, the most important part wasn’t why I did it, but how it changed the relationship we have with the object. With parts both estranged and connected, all parts exist in a grey area where the value of form and function are confused; this tension offers up some humor and levity for the viewer.

Form Over Function successfully confused people through its playful persona and as a humorous form, generated the cognitive dissonance that I was hoping for. Viewers see a hammer and it conjures up their past experiences and notions of what a hammer is and does. Then their mind begins to try and reconcile how this version of a hammer relates and differs



Image 3.2 *Form Over Function*



Image 3.3 Handmade Awl #1

from what they know of a hammer. Does this new version of the hammer even function anymore? Wouldn't improving its beauty and ornamentation make it a better hammer? In this case the answer is no. The function was sacrificed in the name of form.

I find myself creating or restoring tools nearly as often as I create artworks. To me a well-crafted and reliable tool is a work of art that is at home alongside a fine carving or painting. Tools imply use, and use, as a systematic understanding, is sophistication. In some cases, I

believe a fine tool is more an artwork for its ability to not only be beautiful, but also be functional at the same time. My vessels, for example, are tools that are nearly all equipped with the ability to hold other objects. These objects can be as everyday as a pencil or pair of keys or as precious as a loved ones remains. The possible forms that these vessels take can be as varied as the contents which they hold. The convergence of form and function surfaces as a concept often in my arts practice. When I make a tool, I not only see it as an object, but also containing the potential for all the possible outcomes of its use. In creating tools like this, I have a closer relationship



Image 3.4 Handmade Awl #2



Image 3.5 Playtime

artistic vision.

Artists today, I included, are spoiled by our easily obtained mass-produced tools. These tools tend to be cheap to replace and at the lower end of the quality spectrum. Historically, caring for your tools, your ability to fix your tools and the application of your tools was a part of your apprenticeship and training. This deeper understanding and reliance on your instruments helped to foster a stronger bond and appreciation. One's tools had a direct and significant effect on not only the quality of their work, but also the quality of one's resulting livelihood.

A good example of a quality self-made tool is called a scratch awl (*image 3.3 & 3.4*) and is used in my work for layout and piercing holes in leather or wood. I made it from hardened steel, brass, and African blackwood. This tool is not only lovely to use but also beautiful to

with the work I produce and esteem for the mechanics of the art process and not just the finished product. There is a certain amount of greed, hoarding and addiction that is fed with my hedonistic tool making. If you understand the means of production, no one can take away your ability to produce. As a creator, I think it can be helpful to create the tools needed to exercise our talent and

hold and look at. If it is used with care and respected, it will last far beyond my lifetime looking and working as well as the day I made it.

In a more conceptually driven work *Playtime* (image 3.5), I utilize working tools to comment



Image 3.6 Playtime Detail

on our creative drive as well. Here I question a youthful instinct to create through oversized wooden replicas of tools. In *Playtime* a “too-big” hammer (*Image 3.6*) and flathead screwdriver are finely crafted from black walnut, sycamore, and orange-osage wood. I made them to resemble children’s plastic blow molded toys so viewers could feel transported back

to a time when playing was more of a fulltime job. Because we can't shrink ourselves back to our youth, enhancing the scale of the object offers a shift to an imagined environment.

At first, this scale could be off-putting to some since the expected use of tools are warped; it can be confusing to understand purpose when well know objects are utilized for aesthetic purposes. I know I personally feel cognitive dissonance when viewing artworks that I struggle to separate from my preconceive notions and labels. When works that communicate meanings are at odds with what I expect or think I know, I am put off in ways I don't want my viewers to be also.



Image 3.7 – *Spoonbridge and Cherry*, (2014), Paulson

In creating *Playtime*, I challenged myself to overcome this interference or confusion. I knew I risked eliciting this dissonance due to my desire to make a well-known object oversized, but this scale was important to my concept of seeing an object from a childlike perspective. If grasped physically, it would be awkward and unwieldy, but if well-made and polished, the forms could at least be visually grasped as something to behold.

This play on scale is reminiscent of the Pop Art sculptural work of Claes Oldenburg. His large-scale sculptures of everyday objects were able to reverse the relationship between humans and the object. For example, his piece *Spoonbridge and Cherry* (Image 3.7), served to make the viewer the size of an average spoon and cherry by comparison. I too enjoy distorting the relationship we can have with everyday well know objects. In doing this I hope we can better appreciate the less glamorized moments of our lives.

CHAPTER 4: A Message to the Shareholders



Image 3.1 Stool Sample

I am no stranger to dad jokes and puns as my kids can attest to. Here I show my version of a stool sample (Image 4.1) and the lengths I will happily go to for a good laugh. I am a firm believer in the power of humor and laughter as not only medicine, but also to understand and interpret the world around us. My humor leans toward the irreverent or dark side because I believe it is the dark parts of our lives

that need humor the most. If I play with expectation in form, display, or surface treatment, I

can trigger a sense that something isn't right and hold a viewer's focus further on this idea. My works contain contradictions and absurdities and perhaps may be read at first as one-liners or plays on words. I welcome these quick reactions, but my hope is that my craftsmanship in turn can permit a viewer to question their quick assumptions. If I have taken

the care and time to make this thing and present it in this way, maybe my intention to frustrate can be experienced as a good thing, an offering of sorts for a changed

perspective. I want to subvert expectations in big and small ways. I want viewers to question why they hold on to their expectations when they confront new experiences. This

instinct is learned and can be beneficial, but

also it can be a crutch which limits our understanding of experiences. At times my making is my own act of letting go, and welcoming odd, strange or unusual ideas into my mind. I hope others will join me when viewing my work. My piece titled *A Message to the Shareholders* (Image 4.2), is a direct result of this idea of letting go and embracing the absurd. Sitting atop an all-white pedestal and safely enclosed within a clear glass bell jar is a plaster cast of my right hand. This white plaster version of my hand is forever locked in a gesture of my middle



Image 4.2 *A Message to the Shareholders*

finger raised upwards. This hand rotates constantly at slow steady pace and is an almost passive aggressive assertion about my 2020 experience. Indeed a 2020 that many of us wish we could forget.

Considering *A Message to Shareholders*, now in 2022, I reflect on how relevant this work is on my feelings about then but also how it still speaks in a timeless way to the hardships that life brings to our past, present, and future. The glass has become a time capsule but is also relatable to many. It may not be a universal hand, but due to the display's lack of emblem, it becomes a humble offering reminding us of all about what we have stake in.

Through use of a hidden electric motor, the doppelganger of my dominant hand, slowly and silently rotates round and round under its glass dome. Spinning endlessly the gesturing hand spares no one from its direct glance.



Image 4.3 Dead Weight Wagon #1

I admire and utilize a good deal of sarcasm. As a result of this fact, it commonly finds its way into my artwork. The common outcome of this is to deliver a humorous, sharp, and witty message, but also be open to the possibility of pain. After all, if I've learned anything in all my years it is that both change and healing tend to be painful. The piece *Dead Weight Wagon* (*Image 4.3*) exhibits an ample helping of this brand of sarcasm.

Colors can be powerful. At first blush, a viewer could reactively conjure a sentimental story, wishing to savor it like remembered slice of apple pie. Within the next moment, however, the viewer has entered a realm of juxtaposition and cognitive dissonance. The bright candy red of the wagon is not a traditionally shaped rectangle, but a coffin sized for a small toddler. The striking red of this form is meant to call to mind a variety of comparisons and emotions. Different shades and tones of reds painted on different objects say different things. A flat octagon painted red means to stop, the bright red of an apple with a black background can say “original sin”, A red cone topped with a bush of white and bordered with white can say



Image 4.4 *Dead Weight Wagon #2*

“Christmas”.

Simplification or deconstruction of culturally agreed upon messaging is ripe opportunity for artists. I explored color’s symbolic influence with viewers in *Dead Weight Wagon* (Image 4.4) by painting a small casket-like form nostalgic *Radio Flyer* Wagon red. It’s familiar bold, red presence with attached black and white handle and wheels, triggers ideals of freedom, fun, and a wholesome American childhood. It produces possible memories of carefree outdoor adventures when the

curfew was the streetlights coming on. The combination of color and familiar utility conjures sentiment and story in flash, and the form replacing the open seat of the wagon sets

the stage for a sarcastic punchline. Perhaps there is a loss to yearn or mourn for here, but the kitsch and shine of the overall vehicle conflates any clear seriousness and asks the viewer to consider what of their past they wish to carry and how they wish to carry it.

The personal baggage brought to this piece is all-encompassing; and the handle sits waiting, offering the wagon to be pulled. The wagon's weight depends on the viewer, the weight that they bring can be a pound or the weight of world. The ever-present reality of the end that each person lives with and eventually each person dies with is always present, we all have a wagon. What we choose to load it down with is not always our choice but, whether to keep on pulling it is. I am still pulling mine although I find it harder and harder to peek back over my shoulder at what rides within.

CHAPTER 5: Personification

With much of my work I see my pieces as characters; on display, they act out their unique story. I believe by bestowing a persona on my works I contemplate the complexities of people and how we relate to each other. At various scales, my carved forms can carry an essence of a place, a sense of collective history, or the burdens of time by simply relating to the body and what we can hold. Through titling and form, I want them to speak metaphorically as stand-ins for what we go through and experience. I try to give life to my work believing I can better share my ideas, thoughts, and feelings with others through this method of creation.

In my work, I try to offer direct parallels between the uniqueness of wood and people. There are no two carvings that are the same and each one carries with it its own individual story and characteristics. This framework for my art making gives viewers an entry point into my work and a familiarity with the stories I try to tell.

My piece *Juniper family* (Image 5.1) was created out of a single log of juniper wood. These ten progressively smaller vessels are nearly all identical except for their size. As a metaphor for family these vessels literally come from the same tree. Like many families, the members all have some shared characteristics, but also contain differences that allow them to be appreciated for their own individuality. Presented all together in rows, their similarities as well as their differences are celebrated in the chorus line of their display



Image 5.1 Juniper Family

I am increasingly interested in the depth of narrative I can achieve through this abstract form and grouped display. How far along can I lead the viewer before they lose sight of what I'm trying to convey? How much are viewers willing to follow the breadcrumbs that I choose to drop along the narrative pathway? I don't like to proclaim outright what my pieces are about—I don't want an easy or gimmicky read, but I do wish to give a viewer something to visually savor as they try to navigate their own understanding or assumptions. Formal and conceptual clues vary in my practice and can include color texture, relationships of proximity, size, and silhouette. I offer the first breadcrumb of understanding with title I give my pieces; this is usually the starting point where viewers begin to interpret the abstract story I'm telling.

A good example of this style of storytelling is my piece *Reconnecting* (Image 5.2). Shou Sugi Ban is a Japanese method in which wood is persevered through burning and then oiling. Fire is the enemy of my material and exploring the possibilities of fire made me excitedly

anxious. Putting this piece into a hot burning fire (*Image 5.3*) pushed against all my natural instincts to preserve my creations, but in the pursuit of knowledge and at the risk of failure I threw it in the flames. The natural beauty of the wood that I usually allow to drive my work was blackened out, as if someone took a magic marker and scribbled all over it. Following the cues of the method, I added the finishing oil, and the piece took on a velvety finishing, still organic, but also a dark finality I have only reproduced with this method. A part of me mourned the distortion of the natural wood, but I respected the fire and its innate nature to hasten regrowth in the wake of its destruction.

I started a family young. My wife and I only one year out of high school having our first child, and then two more every two years. Each stage of marriage has been beautiful, even the times our relationship has broken down, or gone up in flames. Each time we have made

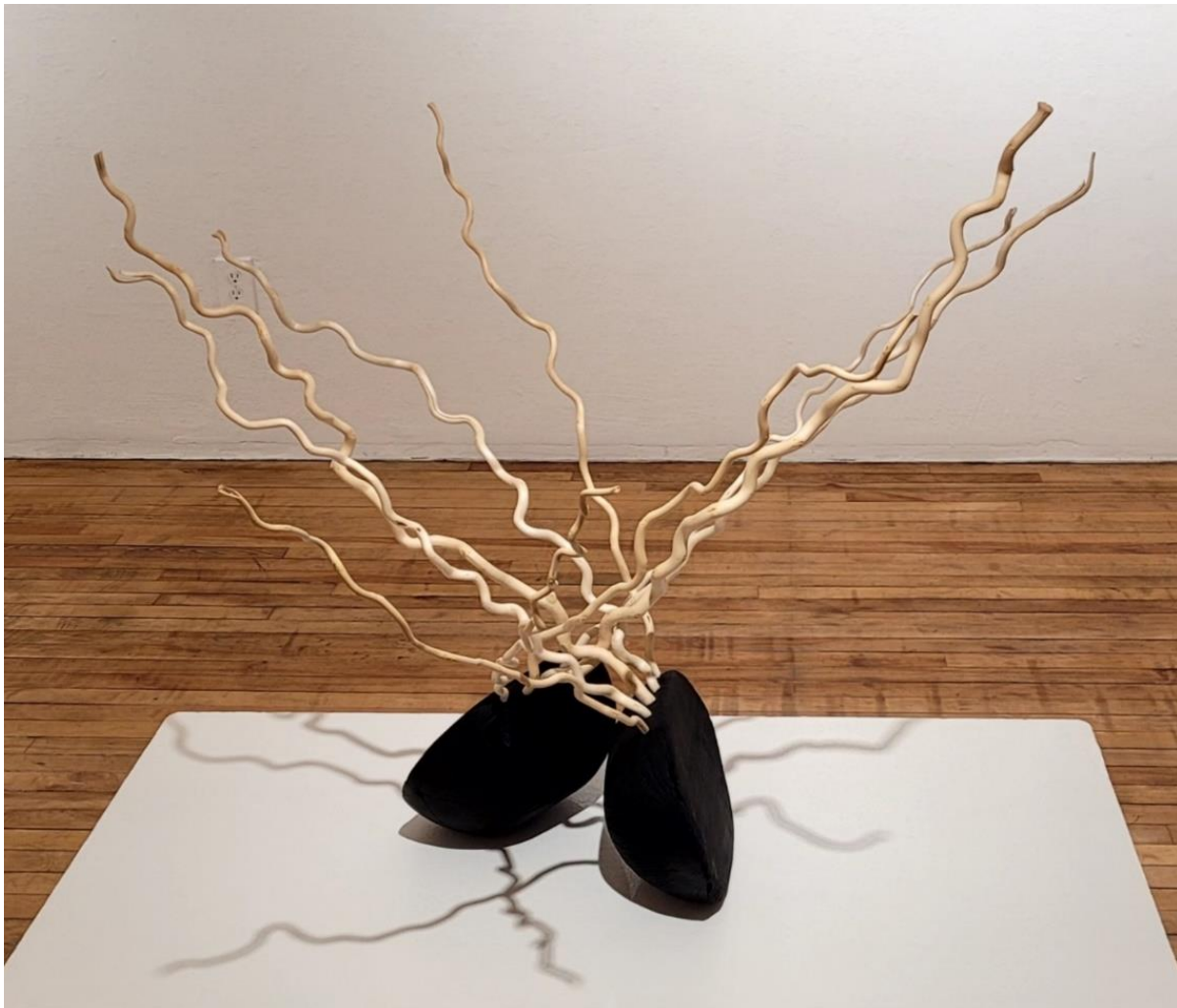


Image 4.2 Reconnecting

the decision to rebuild our lives in a way that brings more meaning, more love, more beauty, and allowing our previous way of life to burn to dust so we could rebuild.

The Shou Sugi Ban experience of this piece reminded me of the tarot card, The tower. The card depicting a horrific scene of a tower being struck by lightning and two people falling through the sky to the ground below. The reading of this card is specific to the crumbling of the environment of the person, but also the necessity of this event, required to build a new foundation of growth.



Image 5.3 Shou Sugi Ban

Reconnecting depicts the trial by fire that long lasting relationships go through. The dense smelting of impurities needed for the relationship to change old habits. What is left is the re-knitting? of the relationship, reconnecting after being burnt to coal, the next step of rebuilding into an even stronger and beautiful dance making the next phase powerfully secure; allowing the experience to mold the connection.



Image 5.4 Ghost of the Farm #1

The piece *Ghosts of the Farm* (Image 5.4 & 5.5) was inspired by my experience growing up on my family's farm. At the age of 8, my parents moved my four siblings and I from our home in Seattle to my father's childhood home in the hills of northern Idaho. As you can probably imagine, it was quite a change for us. For eight years I lived on that farm, and it was during that time that I learned about life and love and death. In making this piece and living with it near me I was able to reflect on that time and place in my life, a time and place that whether good or bad, has played a large role in who I am today. These forms are stand-ins for both the people and the place that I remember and can

never truly return to. They rise from the ground like apparitions of my past, standing tall the grass is like a memory that isn't quite strong or solid enough to completely grasp. As a young boy growing up in a farm environment I grew to hate and yet love the baling season. Every year as the land began to come back to life and spring's green would begin to blossom,

I would love the feel of new beginnings and dread the knowledge of the work to come. My



Image 5.5 Ghosts of the Farm #2

family owned about six hundred acres: half of a canyon and one third of a lake. About a quarter of the land was used for alfalfa and other straw-based plants. As they would begin to sprout the farm would begin to allow nature's beauty to paint our land through the season. When the time to harvest came, I knew my work was cut out for me. I would rise in the morning with the sun and set out with my older brother, male cousins, and my grandfather. We would all jump in the back of the truck with gallons of water, working gloves, jeans and a t-shirt and prayers that we would work hard and efficiently. Harvest would take about two weeks of sweating, itching, tiring work. We would break into teams,

outside of the truck you would line up the bales to be picked up, in the back of the truck you

would heft the bales and stack them as high as you could go. Next, you would ride with the bales back to the barn and pass the bails in a line into the highest part of the barn packing and stuffing it as full as you could into the dry heated area. And then you would do it again.

This piece also speaks of an ouroboros, the cycle of life, of sowing and reaping of harvest and the dead husk of the plant. It reminds me of the never-ending cycle of my family's farm, completing the tasks, over and over again, yet never really being done.

I continue to use personification of my wooden pieces in an attempt to understand them better and explain better their deeper meaning. *Self-Defense* (image 5.6) is an exploration of new materials as well as an embodiment of the defensive way we treat personal space since

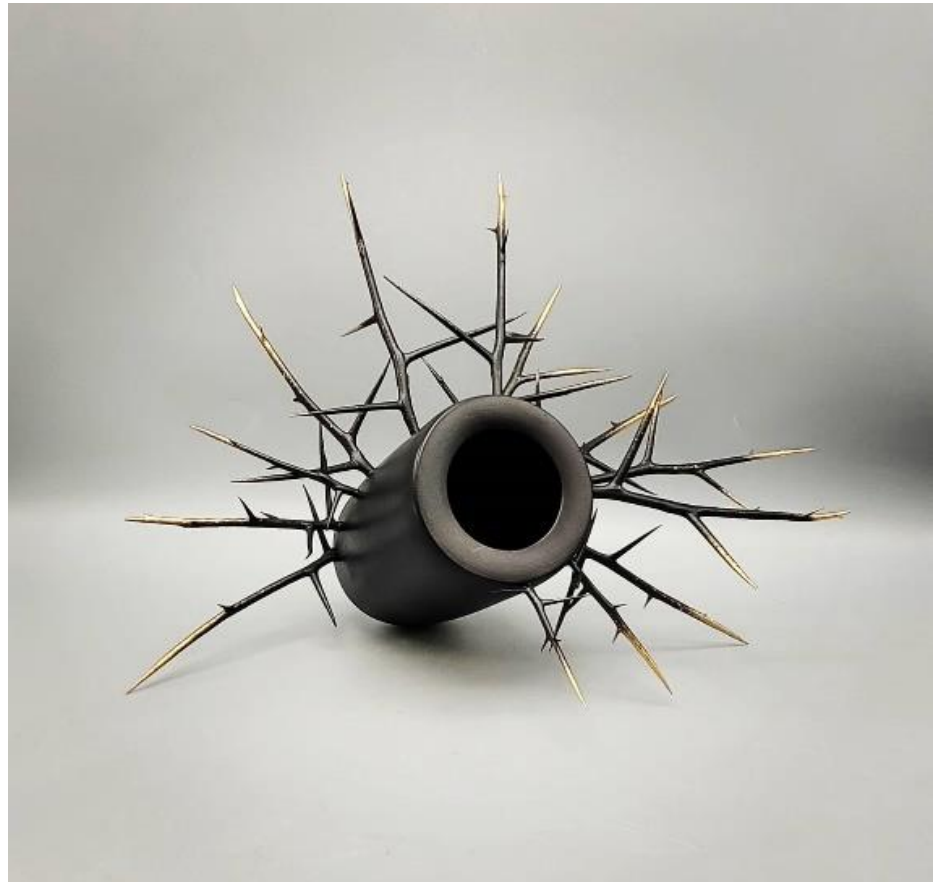


Image 5.6 *Self-Defense*

COVID. There is an interpersonal sacrifice that occurred throughout the experience of the global pandemic. Each human experience has suffered due to our need to treat persons as if they are the virus. Though we may never have meant to disassociate with the fundamentals of societal interactions, for the safety of our world, we disengaged. I believe that our ability to follow the rules and regulations as prescribed did lower the infection rate, it also isolated the human need to socialize. Whether it was meant to reorganize human interaction through new cultural norms or not; it did.

This piece, post-covid, would have represented a more introverted characteristic of human interaction. Though it still speaks to this; post-covid implies a more overarching experience, even to those who consider themselves more extroverted. Though I understand the reasoning and need for this form of self-defense, it does allow me to understand more of the “anti-maskers” point of view and what has been taken from society.

CHAPTER 6: Future Recordings

Between the ages of 8 and 16, I lived on a family farm near Harrison, Idaho. This farm rested on 100s of acres of land, made up primarily of hay fields and dense evergreen forests.



Most days, when not in school or the snow wasn't two to three feet deep, I explored the surrounding forests, ponds, and fields. Through my explorations and adventures, I developed a strong interest in natural history and the untamed wild parts of our world. My roots as a maker began here; to this day, I still seek my local landscape to support the materials I choose.

Image 5.1 30 Bones on Display

As kid in the wilderness, I took the opportunity to create “my own” spaces in the form of various tree houses and forts. Having my own space was not an option in my home. We were a big family in a small house living on the giving of other family members. I shared a room with my older brother, who didn’t seem to enjoy sharing with me. So creative forts were the place that I could be who I was, keep things that I wanted to, and feel free. My favorite fort took shape deep within an overgrown blackberry thicket near a shallow pond. It was perfect for all my safe, hidden and solitary needs. The only entrance into my little kingdom was by way of a years old game trail that required me to crawl on all fours for 20 or



Image 6.2 30 Bones #1

so feet. At the end of this little trek, the trail opened to a small clearing within the heart of the thorn bush. Long grasses were flattened, evidence of a well-used bed for any number of little creatures. Being hidden amongst this beauty of nature was soothing to me.

In amongst the floor of soft grass and walls of juicy blackberries, I found a scattering of dozens of bones. Most were the remains of deer and had visible gnaw marks left by some hungry predator. Others were bright white and stood out against the green grass background. It was then that I got the idea to hang these bones from the surrounding vines; a way to pay homage to life and death, to the reality that several small farm town people learn about and accept I returned the next day with a bundle of string and began decorating my hidden thorn fortress with the remains of animals that had gone before me. This secret area was now mine and stood as a sensory reminder of the inevitable end to one's life. This was my "bone fort", a place I still cherish and reference in the way I choose to approach my materials. This reverence can be especially found in my ongoing work *30 Bones (Image 6.1)*.

Looking back, I can also find myself using this fort as my hoarding location. There is a soothing part of me that needs to own and possess objects. This fort became the safe spot to store found paraphernalia: a stone found at Black Lake, a toy car that I was "too old for," a knife that I was "too young for." I have carried this coping skill into my present life; however, I did not realize this connection until I stumbled upon the creation of *30 Bones (Image 6.2)*.

Like all woodworkers, there is a stash of precious wood that could eventually become widow's wood. Widow's wood is the hoarded medium that has been saved for the right project, but the right project never came, or the creator died without giving the wood a platform to speak. I have bought widow's wood at run down estate sales and have felt a certain sorrow and joy at each hoarding purchase. I began to fear that I would die with nothing to show for it, but a box of dusty blocks waiting for their turn and hope to meet the next maker that would finally give them shape.

30 Bones was my hope to present and honor each piece of gluttonously acquired hardwood. There were several challenges; the small amount of medium of each costly piece of wood making the potential piece possibly disjointed, disproportionate and perhaps confusing. I needed the piece to agree as an ensemble while still honoring each type of wood for its qualities and showcasing the grain, chatoyance, figure, and color. The answer was my

childhood bone fort. The opportunity to revisit this memory and giving each wood a new organic form was an exciting and intrapersonal experience. In truth I never set out to create this work as a morbid method of measurement, however, it seems to have taken on this form. Each idolized ingot of tree seemed to give me a nod of approval wanting to represent the organic building block of a human form while allowing myself to re-enter the brier walled junk yard patch I once shared with wild animals, both living and dead.



Image 6.3 30 Bones #2

Each potentially widowed

wood married the bone form: a vertebra, a metacarpal, a metatarsal, a patella. The easily recognizable skeletal segments that all humans recognize bring sorrow, longing, loss, relief and contemplation of time, beginnings and endings and existential inquiries.

30 Bones (Image 6.3) became a tribute of my youthful nook. Through my process of making *30 Bones*, I recreated the spirit of my blackberry bone fort that had such an impact on me as a child. Instead of the trampled grass, I gave this piece a square platform of red velvet, giving the viewer the feeling of elevation and precious reverence. The bright red also highlights the qualities of each piece of wood, allowing the warm tones to jump out in its presentation. Each bone is placed without restraint and with intent as would a museum curator. The creator in me still sees the timeline when I met each wedge of beautiful timber, a small inside memory each bone shares only with me. I've collected 30 rare pieces of wood that I have

packed and hauled through my life, holding them for the “perfect” piece. This work has given me solace from my worry and dread of the outcome of my death. I hope that my widowed wood will be inherited by a maker who finds a song for them to sing and that my dusty box is smaller, since they have joined the bones of my past and like my tools, I hope my wooden bones too are passed down, being enjoyed, and appreciated by many.

Through my program I began to make art forcefully, pushing my abilities as much as I could at every opportunity that I had. I used every emotion I could to wring out as much art as I could; anger, bitterness, frustration, sadness, humor, fearfulness, anything I could offer. This piece however brought me back to my roots. To a place of making where enjoyment and relaxation and fun were my main concerns.

Every day I tell my family “I’m going to go and check my deposits”. They have labeled this location on our shared digital family map



Image 6.4 Recordings – Hanging installation #1

as, “trash panda”, and my digital icon will be seen there at least once a day, if not twice a day. In reality, “trash panda” is the Moscow Recycling Center. My favorite days to attend are sunny Sunday’s, the day that the Moscow community usually takes the time to complete their yard work. Here is where I find my free treasures.



Image 6.5 Recordings – Hanging installation #2

Meditations and Recordings (Image 6.4 & 6.5) was built of the throw away limbs of the city of Moscow. You will often find me digging through the yard waste looking for potential timbers that may have spalting, burls, interesting growth marks, different textures and colors. Typically, woodworkers covet hardwoods that can be acquired in more elevated circumstances; these materials are known for having more special markings and demarcations to enhance, but I appreciate being able to salvage from my own community. I see being resourceful as a worthy cause.

Though the making of this piece I learn several valuable personal artistic lessons. The first is: just be. Pushing

myself through this master's program gave me the opportunity to overcome the comfortable niche of art I had previously created for myself. This piece also reminded me of my essence through the craft of wood turning. This experience, as termed in positive psychology is called "a flow state" or simply being in the zone. To encounter a flow state is to experience complete immersion into a beloved activity with extreme presence and relaxed delight. I had not realized until this piece, that I had prohibited myself from entering this meditative state. I had in some ways punished myself, disallowing the simple enjoyment of experiencing the creation of art. I allowed myself to re-experience what brought me to the master's program in the first place, the intuitive collaboration with wood. I allowed myself to feel the jarring pull of the wood as I center a piece, the creative problem solving of a limb not necessarily made to be turned, to see the ribbon of the thin



Image 6.6 Recordings – Hanging installation #3

shavings of the greenwood wobbling through the air and experiencing the tool shaping the piece in whatever way it deems fit. The mindful battle the always wages when working with dense material spinning at 433 rpms, while leaning my face close to razor sharp implements slicing slivers away with crafting skills.

Each limb is a lucid account of a moment of flow. The carved segments of each form act like a frozen thought. I use them like journal entries of my attempt to re-enter the organic pursuit of art. They are like statues depicting my experience, that I use to combat the anxiety and depression that have hovered over me in my life.

The installation of my *Meditations* and *Recordings* (Image 6.6) allows viewers to see what I see. Each discarded piece of yard waste was once in a forest of trees, once growing from deep roots. The hanging pieces allow the viewer to see “the forest”, the living growth and to experience the ghosts of the tree. The grounded pieces (image 6.7) are meant to be seen as more alive and growing into their potential, perhaps continuing to grow into their turned shapes even after the end of the piece.



Image 6.7 *Meditations* – Ground installation

Moving forward, I will continue creating and building my *Meditations* and *Recordings* work into a more immersive and substantial installation pieces. I hope it can become one that at some point

may approach the inspiration and awe that nature provides. I continue to imbue my work with personal and human characteristics to better tell stories. These characteristics I believe will become more representational and figurative as my skills and craft continues to evolve. My collection of skills, tools, and bones will continue to grow until the day I pass them on to the next steward of quality and craft.

References

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