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Reflections on Sculpture

A Thesis Presented

by

Alton Ciro Frabetti

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Alton Ciro Frabetti

We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the
Master of Fine Arts degree, hereby recommend
acceptance of this thesis.

Nobuho Nagasawa, Thesis Advisor
Associate Professor, Department of Art

Hugh J. Silverman, First Reader
Professor, Department of Philosophy and Affiliate Faculty, Department of Art

William Oberst, Second Reader
Visiting Artist, Department of Art

This thesis is accepted by the Graduate School

Lawrence Martin
Dean of Graduate School

Abstract of the Thesis

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My current practice as a sculptor is the result of strong influences from my exposure to Renaissance and Greek sculpture during my ten-year sojourn in Italy. The principal influences from that period in my life, namely physicality, permanence, mathematical harmony and melancholy, I describe in full. I argue in this thesis that these influences are still present in my current work, such as the focus on materials, characterological projection, harmony and the conservation of the effects of time on found objects.

I also share with the reader some of my reflections about the problems of attribution and aesthetic judgment, and how I have struggled to resolve these issues in specific works.

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"It is a mistake for a sculptor or a painter to speak or write very often about his job. It releases tensions needed for his work. By trying to express his aims with rounded-off logical exactness, he can easily become a theorist whose actual work is only a caged-in exposition of conceptions evolved in terms of logic and words."¹

- Henry Moore, 1937

Introduction

Sometimes, when discussing my work with another artist, he or she asks me why I do not sketch my ideas more often as a prelude to my sculpture. My response is one from experience; I find that the sketch seems to rob me of the desire to create the sculpture. Whatever tensions and ideas I was feeling are now there in the sketch.

In this sense Henry Moore sees writing about art. However, he also sees it in another more subtle form. What we can call the Kantian dictum of art is not art since it follows rules instead of being an active expression from a free play of the imaginative faculty. The words and ideas for Moore are a 'cage;' the artwork is nothing more than an expression of that cage.

The approach of the writing of this paper is a kind of response to Moore. It is a reflection on what I have done repeatedly over a long period of time; by reflecting on such production, I have enough of a temporal distance upon it that no creative 'tensions' are at risk of being lost. I am an archeologist, gazing at the fossils of my own work. They are dead to me and hence I risk nothing creatively by contemplating them. On the contrary, I learn something about myself and use the information to consciously make better work.

I. Sculpture - Background Influences in Italy

My first introduction to sculpture occurred in Italy. I was moved by the beauty of the Renaissance forms. It is a very different thing to observe a slide of a sculpture by Michelangelo versus seeing the work in person. In a slide, I can step back and analyze its external features and place it critically within an art historical context. In person, that aforementioned activity is second to a first one, namely an overwhelming feeling of awe at the sense of magisterial force within his work.

Like Michelangelo and the other Renaissance artists, I became obsessed for a while with Greek Sculpture. I researched it diligently in books, and visited many museums to look at the work first-hand. Also, Roman sculpture followed the canons of the Greek works; these too I also studied. Living in Italy for ten years gave me the

¹ Henry Moore, "On Sculpture" in Theories of Modern Art. ed. by Herschel B. Chipp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 593

opportunity to experience first hand both the original works and the copies that were made afterwards. Finally, in my love of the Greeks via the Renaissance sculptors, one may argue that I confused the principles of the two; hence, when I discuss the Greek sculptures, I will make references to both works and qualities that are or in Renaissance sculpture.

I can identify four principle aspects of Greek sculpture that moved me. The first was the love of the human physique. The Greeks seemed to me to be in constant celebration as to the experience of this thing called the human body. There was a love for its musculature, its movements and its poise. The second was the sense of the sculptures embodying the deeper aspects of the human spirit. The Greek works were imperturbable, noble and graceful; they give one the sense of that which is constant beneath the everyday changes of existence. The third was the sense of mathematical harmony. Polykleitos wrote (and sculpted a work by the same name) his *Canon* with mathematical proportions, perhaps under influence of the Pythagorean school. As William Oberst, a painter and lecturer at Stony Brook University (and one of the readers of this thesis) noted to me, there was also the conscious use of the Golden Mean in architecture and even sculpture. Finally, I was struck by a pervasive sense of melancholy, both in the vision of the fragments of the work as well as the actual funerary works.

Of the first of the four, the love of the human physique, I was easily able to identify myself. I had studied martial arts for a decade before living abroad. In the movements and tensions I went through in the martial arts, I felt first hand what would be called later in Michelangelo's work *torsione*. I could also feel this in the work by Myron called the *Discus Thrower*. Since I was able to draw on personal experience, I was able to quickly give my early figurative work a sense of dynamism and struggle.

Secondly, one of the decisive moments for my entrance into sculpture was reading again the *Iliad*. As I read the *Iliad*, with its tendency to pit only two combatants as symbols of the force between two armies, I found myself in love with the idea of interpreting it into sculpture. I was easily able to imagine the figures in combat, since I had seen so many Greek and Renaissance forms also glorifying the hoplite warrior of antiquity. Consequently, my first few years of sculpture was entirely focused on interpreting into sculpture the Homeric epic. I picked key scenes in which the greatest significance was revealed. I also fell under the spell of the Christian French philosopher Simone Weil's writings on the *Iliad*, in which she wrote the following words:

The true hero, the true subject, the center of the *Iliad*, is force. Force as man's instrument, force as man's master, force before which human flesh shrinks back. The human soul, in this poem, is shown always in its relation to force: swept away, blinded by the force it thinks it can direct, bent under the pressure of the force to which it is subjected. Those who had dreamed that force, thanks to progress, now belonged to the past, have seen the poem as a historic document; those who can see that force, today as in the past, is at the center of all human history, find in the *Iliad* its most beautiful, its purest mirror.²

² Simone Weil, *L'Iliade ou le Poeme de la Force*, in Homer, *The Iliad*. Translated by Robert Fagles (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990), 29.

Though I had encountered her writings after I had already begun to sculpt the *Iliad*, they perfectly captured the sense I felt from the work. Also above she mentions how characters are 'bent under the pressure' of force; this sense I found in the experience of melancholy, which I will discuss shortly.

The second aspect mentioned above was the sense of character of the works. This, like the mathematical aspect which I will mention following this, gave the works their more profound spiritual component. What is unchanging and enduring in time seemed to be embodied in the sculpture. The strong, upright stance, carefully balanced between movement and stillness, the sense of their proportionate face and brow as a revelation of the dominance of principles and thought, the silent gaze and calm expression all seemed to contradict the love of the anatomy. Still today I feel under a spell when viewing classical Greek sculpture.

Later I would also be moved by Hellenistic work, which perhaps owed its drama to Greek theater. *The Laocoön Group*, *The Dying Gaul* and also later Renaissance works in emulation of them pushed my work to more dramatic levels. However, I was slowly influenced by Lessing's writings on *The New Laocoön*, in that such dramatic displays were more appropriate for other art forms. Sculpture seemed to be more appropriate when it gave the viewer the sense of solidity within time.

While I studied anatomy intensely (I had actually studied anatomy as an adolescent via George Bridgman's treatises on the human form), I was also under the influence of mathematical proportion, as mentioned above. This third aspect of Greek and Renaissance sculpture was a constant influence upon me. Not only was it apparent in the sculptures about me, but also in the architecture. Walking in Florence, for example, I was consciously and unconsciously under a constant influence of the beauty of Renaissance facades. Again, it is one thing to see such imagery in a slide; it is entirely different to feel oneself in a community that lives and breathes the influence of such proportion on the soul.

Also, I have always excelled at mathematics and geometry. In my youth I was one of the most capable in my school at geometry; in fact, when I set out for college, it was out of interest in computer science and mathematics, not philosophy and art. The eternal purity of mathematical forms with their nevertheless clear relationship with the outside world (a fact that would haunt metaphysicians for centuries in their efforts to account for geometry in their system building) was and still is a source of peace and joy.

I also became aware that too much mathematical harmony was bland and static. The sculptures of Canova, for example, struck me as being precisely that: bland and static. I was reminded of the Greek criticism of Polykleitos in his day at the works based upon his *Canon*: they were lacking in *pondus*, or a sense of weightiness that was far more present in the work of Myron, Phydias and Ageledas. Though beautiful, the work of Polykleitos seems to lack reality.

A similar criticism I felt towards Renaissance architecture in regards to medieval architecture. The Renaissance architects and artists saw the medieval structures as rough and lacking in harmony; many of their structures were just modifications of facades of the medieval buildings in order to make them more harmonious to the eye. I lived in a beautiful medieval city (San Gimignano) that was fairly intact. San Gimignano had been built around 1100-1200 AD and still had some of its old towers. The disharmony of the city's buildings - each was a different height, for example - gave it a beauty that the

Renaissance buildings of Florence did not have. Hence by living in San Gimignano, I appreciated the beauty of anti-harmony.

Finally, the fourth aspect of Greek work was the pervasive feeling of melancholy. In San Gimignano, I was surrounded by the ruins of this small city's once-glorious past. On a walk through its side roads I would pass old stone walls, their mish-mash stacking of various sizes somehow succeeding to form a flat, stable surface, always with cement eroding. Some parts of the city were gone, such as the walls built by the fountains. There, one passes the remnants of a once glorious set of battlements, now reduced to a slowly-rising wall that, in its lowest point, seems swallowed by the earth. The towers, too – the pride of the city, many standing strong with clean-cut travertine blocks, are themselves pock-marked and covered with weeds. Absent are the many wooden balconies that allowed the inhabitants – nobles and newly successful class of bourgeoisie – to look down upon what must have been filthy streets. Yet those streets were paved in stone and marble.

The sense I felt in the city was at first mixed. As an American, habituated to everything new and having only the word 'depressing' for melancholia, I wondered why the populace had not repaired and cleaned up their city. I was shocked by the state of 'disrepair' and abandon. Later I would learn in fact that the Italians constantly cleaned the organic growths from the structures, but nevertheless left them as history had made of them.

It was this sense of *visible history* which was, paradoxically, new for me. In the Medieval era the palaces and buildings were stuccoed and covered over with a smooth cement layer. Today, the stucco is absent to reveal how in time *here* was a window now bricked in, *there* was a much larger arched doorway, and so on. It was what Freud saw in Rome: the visible history of a people, a visible *id* with all its strata.

As I mentioned above, this visible decayed history gave me a sense of melancholy. The Italians once ruled 'the world' as Romans, now they are reduced to a chaotic political system for which most of them cannot even explain its technical workings. The Italians long for their past (something Mussolini exploited), or at least once did so; like an elderly person they are aware of a more vigorous childhood.

Likewise, the ruined sculptures of the Greeks give this feeling. The Greeks were the foundation of Western civilization and democracy; today they cannot claim such an influence. Hence in the image of the Greek sculpture, the Greek past is a nostalgic image. One gets the feeling of an ideal that has been smashed and tempered by time, yet is still clinging to some impalpable principle.

This melancholic temperament of ruins helps immensely those who by temperament are melancholic. I am melancholic and slowly found this aspect of my character profoundly vitalized. The broken sculptures, collapsing buildings and vanishing cities seemed to be the embodiment of melancholy. The Italians so appreciate this temperament that even new constructions often are modified to look weathered. Often steel is rusted and then covered with a maroon wax to preserve it.

The Greek and Renaissance artists worked with a similar feeling in their funerary monuments. I was more exposed to the Renaissance funerary works than the Greek; however, I always found a funerary work a perfect counterpart to a muscular, aggressive scene of battle (a la' Weil). Michelangelo's three moving *Pietás*, the *Achilles Holding the Body of Patroclus* under the Loggia dei Lanzeri of Florence and some of the works in the

St. Peter's Church all moved me profoundly. Whether it was a temperament or some deep unconscious sorrow on my part (separated as I was from family and country, with a string of failed relationships), I drank deeply of such forms and reproduced them in my own work.

Sculpture - In Spirit of The Greeks, My Current Work

The reader may be wondering why I have dedicated so much time in ruminating on past work. There are many aspects to my early sculptures and other influences that I underwent. I have focused on those above because they are directly relevant to what has become my style of sculpture, its language and its peculiar focus.

Each of the four aspects of Greek work above is present in my current work in abstraction. The term 'in abstraction' is key here. On first glance, there is nothing that a cylindrical, wooden sculpture seems to have with the Greek spirit. I will summarize now these abstract forms as inspirations of not so necessarily the Greek spirit, but my unique experience of it.

The first area, the love of the body, has become a love of *the actual qualities of my materials*. The second, the fascination with the inner unchanging self, has appeared in my contemplations of *characterological traits*³ and *my treatment of sculpture as a centripetal personification of selfhood*. Third, mathematics and the play of harmony and disharmony, has found its way in the constant appearance of *geometrical shapes, forms and straight lines*. Finally, the melancholic appears in my work in the form of its *degradation caused by the effects of time and damaging external elements*, or my preservation of materials that have the effects of such already on them.

Each of the above points will now have its own subsection below.

Body and Material

James Kelly writes in his book *The Sculptural Idea* the following observations about sculpture and the materials employed:

Sculpture is matter, matter is sculptural. One cannot exist without the other. All sculptural matter takes on physical characteristics...This brings us to the essence of matter: the intrinsic character of the material. Different materials possess properties that transmit two primary sensations to the viewer: physical and psychic. Physically, our senses react to the grain of wood, the texture of stone, or the ubiquitous roofing cement. Psychically, we feel the warmth of wood, the coldness of stone, and the clamminess of tar.⁴

³ I use the term 'characterological traits' and 'personality types' loosely throughout this thesis. I refer to the aspects of our personality and character that change little throughout our lives and that may be classified by tests such as Myers-Briggs and others.

⁴ James J Kelly, *The Sculptural Idea*, 4th ed. (Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 2004), 61-69.

Kelly taps into something very precise here that is often, though not always, a trait of sculptors. This is a sensitivity and even obsession with the material of the medium. A good sculptor will sense intuitively the relationship between the physical and psychic properties of a given material.

It may seem a stretch to create an analogy between the Greek love of the human body and the sensitivity to the qualities of materials. The relationship I had with figurative work during my *Iliad* phase of sculpture was with the inherent properties of the human body. The gestures, forms and relationships of the figures were inspired by the capacities of the body. The sculptures were not preconceived to embody a concept or idea. Instead the gestures that I chose arose from the body itself - from a desire to exalt musculature, torsion, and the forms the limbs made. In fig.1⁵, the composition of the sculpture arose from an exaggeration of the capacities of the human muscles and the stance that is possible in the situation as narrated by Homer. The principle of the composition is inherent in the body. Whether this was my own version of Greek figurative sculpture or a personal intuition is secondary to this thesis. The important point is that the origin of the composition came from what was before me (the human figure) and represented an exaltation of it. This same relationship I have today with materials.



fig. 1. Falcone, Alton. *The Wrath of Achilles*, 1997. Plaster cast.

A purely psychological point is that my initial attraction to sculpture was its sense of 'rootedness' in a sense perceptible world. I had been trained in philosophy and was practicing meditations. These practices and trainings worried me; out of humility, I did not wish to be too 'other worldly' and 'floating' (forgive me for the banal expressions in this paragraph). Sculpture became a means of 'keeping my feet on the ground.' The work with the human figure - the human body and its principles - meant that I had a metaphorical anchor. Hence in my current work, I still needed this psychological anchor for 'rootedness.'

In my current work, this bodily focus has been principally with recovered wood and oxidized steel. The impulse towards the human body and its relationship to the composition I then transferred to materials. Each of

these materials has inherent properties like the human body and these inherent properties are in my work.

⁵ 'Falcone' is the pseudonym I use to sign my sculptures

I turn here to these inherent properties. The first of these materials, wood, is mentioned by Kelly for its psychic warmth. However the wood I typically use is hardly 'warm.' On the contrary, the wood that I choose - recovered, worn-out wood often from abandoned shipping pallets - gives off the psychic sense of decay. When I discuss later in this thesis the temperament of melancholy, I will also argue that agedness of the material transmits the aforementioned psychic quality.

Recovered wood that is ruined has, as an advantage over new wood, what Kelly referred to as its physical properties. This is in fact its texture and its tones. The texture of recovered wood is far more interesting visually than a brand new, clean piece of wood. These textures result from a variety of influences. Some examples of these influences are artificial mistreatment, water and damage from other forms of precipitation, rot (from anything including worms and bacteria/insects), spray paint, natural breaks and more. Each of these property influences merits a discussion.

Artificial mistreatment includes footprints, heavy weight crushed upon it, damage from being thrown about, poor nail assemblage and disrepair. The footprints give a sense of the disregard of the material, as if it is something 'lower' than the humans that utilized it. The heavy weight marks - signs of broken or bent planks from loads that were stored there - give the sense of burden and history. They also bring out the implicit strength and weakness of the wood, affecting psychically the viewer. Nails penetrating the wood haphazardly also create enigmatic textures and patterns as well as nice rust tones from water passing around the nails. Damage from being thrown about is like the aforementioned quality of being stepped upon; here, in addition, one gets the sense of damage that the wood has caused to itself from its own weight falling upon it. It is almost a form of self-destructiveness. Water damage, and other forms of precipitation, help oxidize the wood and give it a grey, unattractive colour. They age the wood. Water damage also helps cause rot; in the case of rot, new textures appear on an otherwise flat, uninteresting surface.

Spray paint is often found on recovered wood, especially in the case of shipping pallets. The advantage of such spray paint is that it is usually itself ruined by rot, water and oxidation. This gives it a range of tones that it does not have as fresh spray paint. Also, with enough damage from natural effects, the ugly artificial quality of spray paint is overcome and replaced by a more 'natural' effect. I have worked with many pieces of old wood and use very consciously the remnants of wood with paint tones still visible.

Also, I mentioned above natural effects. Sometimes a piece of recovered wood will naturally have a weak spot, such as a knot. If the wood is new, the knot remains fairly innocuous. In recovered wood, the knot often becomes a hole as the wood falls out. Also, as the wood changes tone from weathering, the knot areas are usually much darker. This creates further interest points for the viewer.

Finally, wood has other qualities that lend it more expressivity. It is always in everyone's unconscious that wood was once a tree. In today's era, given the rampant environmental destruction, use of wood now always has this as a subtext. It is unavoidable; hence also the use of recovered wood has as a subtext environmental respect.

Wood also absorbs water well, so that it is easy to splash tones or stains into it to gain soft changes in color. This has assisted me in its treatment, allowing me to work

with water-based pigments as stains. Stained in this way gives a greater tonal variation than with paint covering the surface.

Steel is very similar to wood in its revelation of its qualities and effects upon it. They include artificial mistreatment, damage from precipitation, and spray paint. The artificial mistreatment is especially visible with steel, given its varied uses; it is often cut poorly, or has holes for screws and more. Water damage, unlike with wood, gives to steel a different kind of beauty: the warm tones of rust. Here I have seen two kinds of water damage. The first is a light water damage in which the rust is barely on the surface; such rust does not mar the steel much and takes on a beautiful light hue. A long-term rust damage takes on a deep maroon and also mars the surface; salt water manages to create this effect in a very short amount of time.

Everything I mentioned about paint on wood may be applied to steel in a similarly symbolic fashion. For steel, like wood, may be used in its newness as a clean, flat surface with straight edges. Also, like wood, steel visibly exhibits the effects of mistreatment and environmental damage, such as in the case of rust (fig. 2). For example, paint on steel slowly corrodes away, and this in turn gives it a huge variety of tones and textures. One of my recent sculptures, the large shed-like cube in the show *Corrosion*, utilized a large piece of such painted, rusted steel and in fact I used it on my advertisement for the exhibition (fig. 3).



fig. 2&3. Left: Falcone, Alton. *Consonance* (detail), 2007. Rusted steel and wood. Right: Flyer for *Corrosion*, 2007

Steel also may have a history of improper welding; these welded areas point to other past uses and the absence of its welded counterpart. Welding is also of course a positive use of steel; however, if the steel is already rusted, welding can be difficult and the welds may be weak. A good case in point is the piece *Broken Obelisk*, in which these two qualities of steel are played out with each other: the welded strength and the weakened rust (fig 5 later in this paper).

My recent use of copper is not responsive to the material so much as with steel and wood, save in its ductility. Copper, by being malleable, enabled me to emboss unwound chicken wire into it. I also experimented with hammering it into a cartographic-style form. I enjoy the effect of oxidation on copper, for it gives it beautiful

cool turquoise tones that counter the warm tones of wood and rusted steel. Unfortunately, the difficulty of acquiring copper has prevented me from being able to explore its full range of possibilities.

Next, it is enjoyable to combine materials that are on the surface discordant. The challenge of bringing wood together with steel pointed quickly to a treatment of wood with reddish tones and oxidizing the steel. This resulted in several successful sculptures (in terms of this relationship) in which I used a diluted gold pigment for the reddish effect (fig. 2). I have preserved often the nails that I have pulled from shipping pallets, and used these as well. Nails are intrinsically bound up with wood, but are made of iron; this allows a bridge between the two materials, the one psychic while the other material. Works such as *Mantra*, 2006 (fig. 6) and *Consonance*, 2006 (fig. 2) typify this double use of the meanings of nails.

A nail, pounded into a piece of wood, is full of possible meanings. If it is only partially in the wood, as in the case of the above sculptures, it implies either a weakness of force to penetrate it into the wood or a resilience on the part of the wood to resist a force as strong as a hammer blow. A rusted nail psychically conjures up fear of tetanus and is hence dangerous. Rusted nails, then, may cause concern to the viewer. A viewer may see in the rusted nails something threatening to their own safety. However, the nails, since they are bent, seem like they have been beaten to the point of becoming so. This implies that the nails were not strong enough to withstand the blow of some no longer visible hammer; it implies that they have perhaps even been 'defeated' in some way. This sense may oppose that of the sense of danger just mentioned. Secondly, the red tones give them a visual warmth and further undermine the danger implied of rusted nails. In this way the nails become great contradictions with which to work. One may even see in them a veiled form of Christian symbolism, like stakes in a wooden Cross.

The Inner Self and Centripetal Sculpture

Here it would be useful to turn to Herbert Ferber's artist statement as to what he coins as *centripetal* and *centrifugal* sculpture. Centripetal sculpture is 'tied to its own center' and is also referred to as 'whole, solid...monolithic.' For Ferber, centripetal sculpture represents the work of antiquity (he notes how Michelangelo felt that a sculpture should be able to be rolled down a hill, the resulting damage such as arms and legs breaking off not being problematic to its success as a work of art) Consequently, the sculpture of today as been an 'art of extension' or, as he calls it, 'shuns the center.' Unlike the continuous surface of monolithic/centripetal sculpture, with its continuous surface, the centrifugal sculpture has 'airy, discontinuous forms.'⁶

Ferber created a metanarrative of art, arguing that a monolithic style of sculpture is outdated. Not surprisingly, his work was of the centrifugal kind.

I prefer to see in his observations something entirely different, at least as it pertains to my own work. Hence, even though I state this as a universal claim, I am using this as a form of self-analysis: A viewer of abstract centripetal sculpture will consciously or unconsciously relate to it as they would a person. There is a sense of inner/outer to

⁶ Herbert Ferber, "On Sculpture," in *Theories of Modern Art*, ed. by Herschel B. Chipp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 554-555.

centripetal work, and hence such a distinction is about relatedness to other people. Whether a work is a closed solid (fig. 5) or an open airy mass (fig. 4), this sense somehow remains.

It is key here to point out that almost all my works are centripetal. If my claim above holds valid, we can find further justification in the fact that human relatedness has been the constant focus of all my inquiries, either in art, philosophy or psychology. I have always been fascinated by psychological studies of human character and interaction, such as the previously mentioned works of Carl Jung and Myers-Briggs. As long as I can remember, I have been a “highly sensitive person,” bowled over by sensations and intuitions around people I encounter. My longing to both understand these feelings as

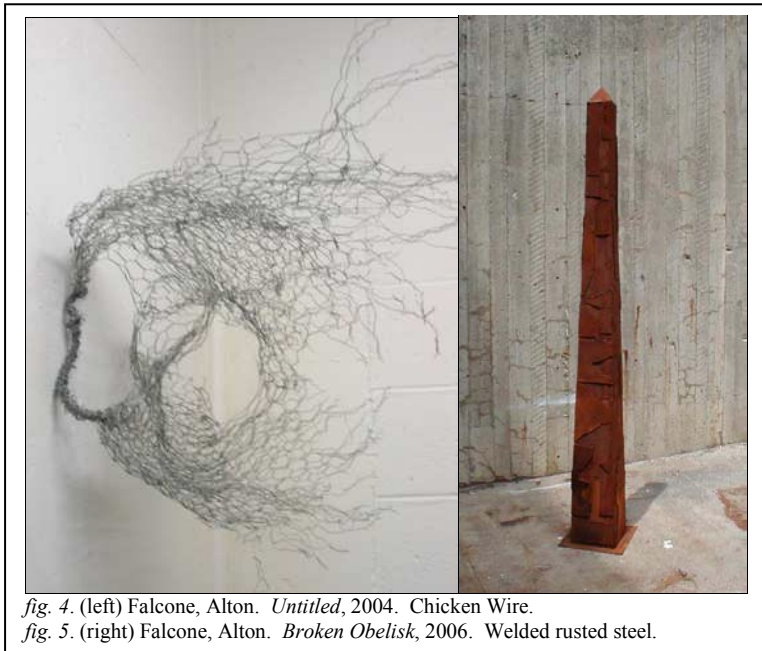


fig. 4. (left) Falcone, Alton. *Untitled*, 2004. Chicken Wire.

fig. 5. (right) Falcone, Alton. *Broken Obelisk*, 2006. Welded rusted steel.

well as to dominate them took me through studies from Jung (such as his work on *Psychological Types*) to the Myers-Briggs personality typing system. However, what differentiates my efforts in this area from psychologists is my formalist interest in what objective signs or symbols are embodiments in art (and elsewhere) of the attributes of personality types. For example, both Jung and Myers-Briggs describe what it means to be an introvert; however, neither describe how an

introversion appears in a work of art as an expressive symbol of such.

This, then, is my argument: *centripetal* sculpture is in itself a symbol for human relatedness and in fact we respond to centripetal sculpture as if we feel a sphere of human relatedness has been depicted. This is my only way of explaining why I am constantly attracted to centripetal work, and why my own work tends that way. If my day-to-day consciousness is immersed in the phenomenon of relatedness, then it will appear in my artwork.

As I noted earlier, the Greek sculptures had to do with the inner self, in their case as an imperturbable unchanging embodiment of the spirit. In my work this focus on the inner self continues, but with the modification in which I am interested in its relatedness with the outside world. A perfectly solid work like the *Broken Obelisk* has little to no relationship to the outside world, save in its varied and time-worn surface. If one were to view this piece as a portrait of personality (separating from it other significations), one could argue that this is a mistrusting, closed personality. On the other hand, some of my more recent works are very open and have been in fact consciously created as such. A good example of this is the *Variation* series of cylinders, of which I will analyze later in this thesis.

I will discuss other aspects of the self appearing in my sculpture under the theme of melancholy.

On a further note, in response to Ferber, how could we define centrifugal sculpture, that which he championed? Certainly some of my work for *Art Healing Space*, such as *The Lights* (fig. 12) and *Reinterpretations*, are centrifugal forms. I would argue that centrifugal sculpture tends towards architecture. Since it has no center, it automatically needs the framing created by structures around it. In this sense it becomes part of the architecture. The “center” of architecture is the external form of the human being passing within it, though there are always structural necessities and spatial limitations. The center of a work of centripetal sculpture is instead something internal to the work itself, giving it the sense of selfhood.

Harmony, Disharmony and Geometry

The Greeks worked mathematical harmony into their works, probably under the influence of the Pythagorean school. The Pythagoreans⁷ had argued that number was at the basis of all creation; hence if one created a work of art that was mathematical, it would draw from or be in image of this foundation of creation.

As I also mentioned, too much harmony makes a work uninteresting. In fact, the world of graphic art is based upon a harmonious arrangement of shapes and forms for advertisement. My eye is constantly confronted with harmonious images in the form of advertisements everywhere I travel - billboards, flyers etc. as well as web images. Since everything in that field is made with a machine, it is automatically aligned. Even this paper that I am typing has a perfectly harmonious layout in its own way - the sentences all have the exact same spacing, the margins are mathematically measured, etc. Even the text is all equal. Once writing did not have such an advantage, so perhaps the eye was not so easily bored by harmonious forms.

Whether the Pythagoreans were correct or not is irrelevant to me. However, what is true for me is a love for geometry and mathematics. I love harmonious forms but they require something more. Geometrical forms (in particular the square and rectangle, as well as straight, perpendicular or parallel lines) allow my mind to relax and be more receptive. Such forms though seem to belong to that sphere, and, since they are often placed down in an orderly fashion, they appear (or are) contrived. The feeling of contrivance for me is actually not relaxing; a contrived work feels like a mental labour.

This takes me to my experiences of Greek work that is a remnant of its old self. Imagine a Greek bust, broken and dirty. It has the mathematical purity in some way in the form of the part that is left. On the other side, it has the effects in time from natural processes. This creates disharmony. One side may have part of the shoulder, the other side may have nothing. Sometimes there is a bit of a leg, other times there is not. In this way the harmony has been broken (literally) and the piece becomes a little chaotic. Yet

⁷ No art comes about without proportion. All art therefore arises through number. So there is a certain proportion in sculpture and also in painting. Generally speaking, every art is a system of perceptions, and a system implies number; one can therefore justly say: things look beautiful by virtue of number” - Sextus Empiricus VII, 106 from the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, <http://etext.virginia.edu/cgilocal/DHI/dhi.cgi?id=dv2-26>.

there is still the underlying harmony of the original form that is often imagined by the beholder.

In such works I saw a play between the harmonious, artificial, contrived aspect and the raw, broken, natural and disharmonious aspect. This play gave me a sense of joy, and I decided to reflect it in my own work. In my early work, I naively imitated the Greek works by making a classical figure and breaking off the limbs. In my current work, the effect is in the abstract. The forms are almost always mathematical, such as a square, a cylinder or something similar. The parts are comprised of wood and metal that have suffered from time. They have a raw, natural feeling to them. In combining them together into a composition arises the challenge to keep not a balance between the harmonious and the disharmonious, but a dynamic play that somehow conserves both without any loss, i.e. some kind of play that brings out both of the qualities through their contradistinction.

Let us take, for example, my piece *Mantra*, 2006 (fig. 6) . The overall form of *Mantra* is a rectangle. This rectangle is further broken down into smaller rectangles, while the whole piece has other shapes that are formed by negative space. The metal has a clean, smooth and straight side to its edges. On the other hand, there is the texture of the metal; this is chaotic and rough, and has been punctuated (literally) with nails. The wood, too,

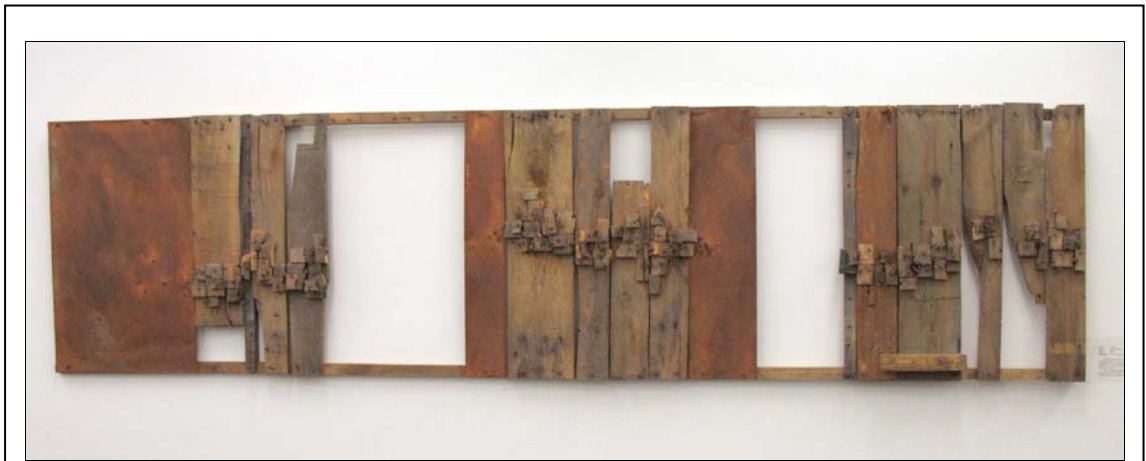


fig. 6. Falcone, Alton. *Mantra*, 2006. Wood, nails and rusted steel.



fig. 7. Falcone, Alton. *Mantra*, 2006. Pictured with lines delineating presence of the Golden Mean.

though in clean-cut forms, is rough and has had a rough history. There are furthermore the chaotic small wood pieces, flowing along the surface like a wave. The wave feels harmonious; the actual wood pieces are not so. The negative spaces are sometimes near-perfect geometrical shapes; other times, they are jagged or triangular cuts. There is also the large piece of wood in the lower right hand corner that is extending outward from the sculpture. This piece of wood is of the usual recovered quality. It is however placed perfectly parallel with the rest of the composition, and is hence able to sit where it is.

William Oberst has very insightfully brought to my attention the presence of the Golden Mean in my works. The Golden Mean was an ideal ratio used throughout antiquity (and even today) due to its natural harmony and its parallels with growth forms and physics (as we have learned scientifically in the last century). The Golden Mean is created by generating an arc from the mid point of a side of a square; the point of intersection with the extended base creates the y axis of a rectangle exhibiting the mean (approximately 1:1.618).

I have naturally intuited the presence of this ratio in many of my works; Oberst noted how many there are in *Mantra*. Here (fig. 7) it is reproduced a second time with some of the rectangles, some of which are even comprised of a union of negative and positive spaces. I have not written letters denoting the four points of each rectangle, so I ask the reader to look at where the lines fall to make the connections:

Another example of this play between mathematical qualities and roughness is my most recent work. Take, for example, one of my *Variations*, 2007 (fig. 8) from the twelve-sided cylinder series. The image below shows how there is a careful play between the geometrical qualities and the natural.

The geometrical qualities are fairly apparent. The overall form has carefully cut wood slats, each 2" width with a 13" height. The are cut at angles of 15 degrees so that they can fit cleanly together. The slats are all placed as precisely as possible to form a perfect cylinder. Small nails were used to nail down the metal cover on the top as consistently as possible.



fig. 8. Falcone, Alton. *Variation*, 2007. Wood and rusted steel.

The rough side is in the qualities of the wood. Since some of the wood was a little warped from bad weather conditions, they did not fit flush with the rest of the wood around it. From the photo above one can see how I retained the remnant of a knot in one piece of wood and a breakage in another. However,

these two aspects are harmoniously united - their two points connect at the proper height to give the illusion that they were the same piece of wood. A closer glance at the photo should reveal that this is not the case; they have completely different grains. Also, in the photo on the left, I have retained the damage to the central slat at the top. This cut turns out to be a nice geometrical square, something that allows imaginative significances.

The cylinders that I have recently been making are also fairly in accord with the Golden Mean. This happened by accident, but attests to my visual awareness to harmony.

For me, what gives "prettiness"⁸ to the works is their mathematical harmony; what makes them more shocking is the rough quality of the wood and the ensuing forms from the breakages. What transforms the annoying prettiness of the mathematical harmonious elements from pretty to beautiful, and what transforms the merely dirty, shocking old wood to sublime, is the play between the two qualities. In this way the aesthetic experience of the work is more elevated.

⁸ I use the term 'prettiness' as derogatory, in much the same way that Kant used the term 'charming' in *The Critique of Judgment*. An object that is merely charming for Kant lacks the sort of attributes to make it beautiful. I am arguing here that there is instead a 'scale' between charming and beautiful in which there is no hard, clear-cut transition between the two. They share in similar qualities; the beautiful contains the 'charming' but has something more. That something more, as argued elsewhere in this thesis, is seen within elements of sublimity and truth, i.e. power and depth.



fig. 9 .Falcone, Alton. *Variation*, 2007. Wood and rusted steel.

Each time I make a work with this play between the two qualities, I become more agile and aware of the play. For me as the artist, if I were to repeat the process, I would find it contrived and hence it would lose some of its magic. On the other hand, by repeating the same forms, I am challenged to find new ways to make this play happen. For example, in the case of the *Variation*, 2007 work above, I have made several identical cylinders in order to keep pushing my capacities to find more and more ways to create dynamism between the two qualities.

Here is another image in the *Variation* series (fig. 9). One can see the same focus upon the parallel slats of wood. This harmony has been retained. In addition, some of the slats of wood have been split into two; this is visible in both images. This splitting, though reunited in a harmonious fashion, adds a peculiar roughness to the composition. The pieces are sometimes of a completely different texture, and hence undermine the harmony.

Visible in both pictures are the add-ons. In the left one can see a piece of wood (the one also visible in the right picture) that is protruding below. Also in the left picture is a small piece of wood protruding above the mini-opening. These protrusions break from the flat harmony of the surface of the cylinder and are themselves made from rough, old dirty wood.

Also in the composition is a bolt of metal bent around three of the slats. This metal is rough and rusted, but it has harmonious edges. It also has three clean holes, barely visible in the left photo. These holes are then mimicked in the half-drilled holes above the metal holes (see left photo above). The holes in the metal are evenly spaced, and I attempted to do so with the wooden holes above it. However the wooden holes are not perfectly lined up. This small bit of disharmony actually bothers me; I had lined up the holes with a ruler, but the wood drill bit slid a little on one of them (third from the top).

One may also note that all the works thus far in this section are also excellent examples of centripetal works. *Mantra* could be argued as essentially a cylinder that has been unrolled. The cylinders in the *Variation* series give that sense of personality, with

an inside and an outside and the consequent interpretations that one may make about the work.

Melancholy and the Image of Agedness

Melancholy was understood in antiquity to be one of the four 'humors.' The four humors in antiquity - Phlegmatic, Choleric, Melancholic and Sanguine - were equated with health. Later, in human history, they were associated with typology and personality analysis. It is this latter aspect that interests me.

The easiest way to comprehend the Melancholic temperament is to contemplate its opposite, the Sanguine. A Sanguine personality is youthful, sprightly, always smiling and tending towards superficiality. They seem to be always happy. The reverse is the melancholic - brooding, somber, tending towards depths and introversion. Melancholia is not depression, although it is easy to confuse it with depression.

More importantly for me is the most personal experience of melancholy. It gives me the sense of the passage of time, of how human artifice ultimately fails. It is almost a nostalgia for the past without being nostalgia itself. Perhaps Duhrer's woodcut on melancholy is a fine example of this feeling that I am describing.

I mentioned earlier in this essay that agedness is the image or symbol of melancholy in the arts. Agedness gives to me the same feeling that I experience when I am feeling melancholic. An aged work has the sense of artifice that has experienced time; it is a visible tract of history. Wood is very expressive since it weathers and ages very quickly when not well-treated. The wood from shipping pallets is a prime source for my sculptures since such wood is completely mistreated and often exposed to the elements. Though its 'history' is often brief, the marks and effects are quickly apparent.

The same applies to the metals, in particular to steel. Steel rusts. Visually, rusted steel is a warmer, more comforting tone. Though in reality it represents a destruction to the actual object, the warm tones make us feel more comfortable with it in artworks. Italians even let the metal in their homes go rusty, and then cover it with a special wax containing maroon tints.

This is obviously not the case for rusted nails. As mentioned earlier, a sharp rusty point calls to mind tetanus infections. I have worked heavily with rusted nails in my compositions; however, the nails always point inwards to the work, leaving the rounded head to face the viewer. This takes the threat away from the nail and the rust, leaving the warming feeling intact.

Since I am a melancholic⁹, my works contain melancholic symbolic forms and materials. I am arguing that the image of melancholy is universal (the agedness) and that my use of it is expressive of my psyche. In this way the two aesthetic traditions of a focus on the nature of the symbol (formalism) and the transmission of personality (expressionism) find a union.

⁹ My claim to being melancholic is the result of much self-reflection and reading on the topic. There does not exist a formal test to determine one's temperaments, such as the Myers-Briggs personality type test. Unlike the Myers-Briggs categories, temperament is far easier to assess, especially in oneself. The Waldorf Schools, founded by Rudolf Steiner, use the classification of temperaments as a means to school children better - the needs of a melancholic child are different from that of a choleric.

A good example of this sense of melancholy is my work *Ruin*, 2006 (fig. 10). *Ruin* is composed of recovered wood and a piece of ceramic. The ceramic piece is actually recovered from other work that I had done, and is a fragment. *Ruin* was meant to evoke the sense of architectural remains, of the sort that I would often see in Italy. The wooden pieces should give the viewer the feeling of the last-standing sides of buildings. The ceramic piece should also give the viewer this effect.

Also, all the elements are thoroughly ruined and worn-out by the elements. The ceramic piece appears to have this effect, whereas in actuality it was fired with its natural color and without any oxidation or glazing.

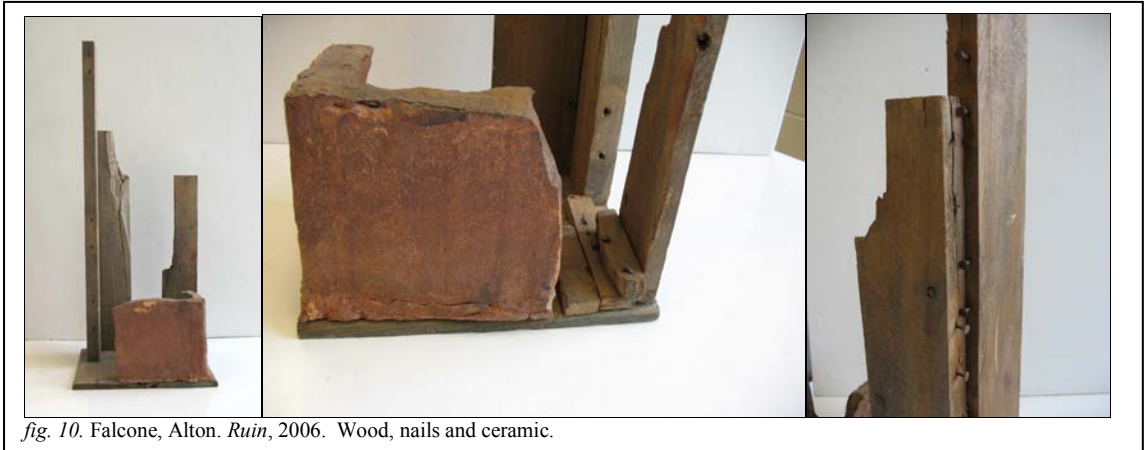


fig. 10. Falcone, Alton. *Ruin*, 2006. Wood, nails and ceramic.

The wood pieces also have nails lining their sides, and face towards one another with the nails. These nails do not seem to have any reason for being there, in the way in which they are bolted into the side of the piece. Hence they give the viewer the thought that there is absent some other element that was formerly held by those nails. This feeling of absence is palpable in this work - the whole work should recall to mind a tower-like structure of which we are seeing at best the frame and some of the foundational material. This sense of absence, destruction throughout time and weathered materials are key for the transmission to the viewer of melancholy.

In the United States it is rare to encounter architectural forms that give the feeling like that of the sculpture *Ruin*. The problem is that much of the constructions in the United States are fabricated with materials that do not age well. Reinforced concrete may be strong but in time it crumbles, revealing the metal poles inside. This is usually very unattractive. Plastic siding is particularly ugly when it begins to corrode. Even when metals are used, they are utilized in such a way that necessitates their newness, i.e. metal framework around glass.

The Medieval structures that I saw in Italy were made of stone and brick; both materials take on lovely tones and last for centuries. The stones rested naturally one on top of the other; the cement was an add-on whose departure did not bring the structure down. The arch, for example, holds due to the distribution of the weight of the various stones in the arch. It is not uncommon to see in Italy empty arches still standing long after the ceilings they held up have collapsed.

Hence the sense of melancholy cannot be derived from the decay of some of the modern structures; it is something unique to what I felt during my stay in Italy. I am deeply indebted to that experience and it shows in my work.

II. Relatedness and Its Importance for Art

By creating a work of art which touches us in that same sphere we use for relatedness and relationships, the artwork may also transform the viewer in a positive way. It is very difficult to transform one's characterological traits; this requires a slow, constant and repetitive influence. Art can achieve this, assuming that the person seeks to behold art that works on their character in the proper way.

Since my work, being centripetal, draws the viewer to relate to it like they would a person, it can act back upon them. This happens in a variety of ways, depending in part upon the viewer. If a viewer is a melancholic like myself, he or she will find a calming sense of identification with my works. It would perhaps ease psychological tensions that are created from being melancholic. Such tensions arise from the difficulty of melancholy, and our association of depression with it. Melancholics can sometimes be very violent people; the sculptures I create hopefully will express a side to melancholy that is more tender. This was my own experience in San Gimignano; in a certain sense I am duplicating that temperament in my work to transmit the experience to others.

Another way in which the melancholic aspect of the work may move the viewer is in the case of a viewer whose temperament is very much the opposite of melancholy. This type was known as the 'sanguine.' A sanguine person tends towards superficiality; perhaps by beholding my work they will be drawn to its sense of depth, history and the resoluteness in time. This would help such personalities appreciate wholly different stratas of life.

The mathematical, harmonious element contrasted with the disharmonious creates a sense of tension and resolution. This visible tension instructs the unconscious of the viewer to tolerate tensions, instead of suffering from repression. The psychologist Michael Balint¹⁰ argued that the tendency of modern art is in fact this visible embodiment of forces which were repressed in the past. By making them visible, the viewers learn to be more comfortable with the darker side of the unconscious. This then aids them in being more 'whole' as an individual. Such wholeness is especially transmitted in works such as my own that have the centripetal quality.

If we take, for example, my work *Mantra*, it is a piece with strong melancholic properties. It has rusted nails and ruined wood. However, it is beautiful. The

¹⁰ Michael Balint, "Notes on the Dissolution of Object-Representation in Modern Art." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 10, No. 4, Special Issue on Psychology and the Arts. (Jun., 1952), pp. 323-327.

harmonious elements that are mathematical aid the eye in feeling relaxed with the rougher, chaotic elements. Also, it has warm tones which soothe the eye. The viewer encounters the melancholic in a particular framework. In this way it teaches the viewer the beauty of melancholy, or at least its possible beauty.

In a culture in which we strive to hide aging, this may also be seen as something that could have a foundation in social criticism. I will not pretend that my work is created with this in mind. Rather, I would argue that the lack of visible history in our culture has resulted in the restless drive to mimic youth (from Botox to cosmetic surgery). By creating aged works, or rather, works that celebrate the mood and beauty of agedness as an embodiment of melancholy, the viewer unconsciously learns to appreciate their own agedness. Certainly in countries in which there are visible ruins there seems to be far less obsession in the elderly with how they look.

III. Accreditation and the Example of Music

My first installation for *Art Healing Space: The Lights* featured a ceremony involving a large amount of work done by students in my class. I was the designer of the event; however, the work itself - the construction of the 500 lotus flowers and the assemblage of the underwater lights - was the labor of my seventeen students. I asked myself many questions. Whose work was the completed form? How does one give credit to those involved? What is the appropriate form of that accreditation (in a catalogue, the advertisement for the event, and/or somewhere on the final work itself)? What or who is the 'artist' in this sense or should we re-define the artist as the being of the group itself?

I have seen many projects in the fine arts in which a visual artist gets complete credit for a piece that they designed, though others did the actual fabrication/construction. I am neither in agreement nor disagreement to this practice; however, I think that it should be discussed. Though numerous examples abound, a good one (due to its complications) is Anthony Gormley's *Field*, 1991. *Field* was an installation of 35,000 terra cotta figures. The Tate's website reports that "Participants were asked to follow only a few instructions: the pieces were to be hand-sized and easy to hold, eyes were to be deep and closed and the head was to be in proportion with the body."¹¹ Hence the design was loose and there was a freedom of interpretation and individuality available to each of the participants. One may argue that the individuality of the separate pieces did not matter, since it was the overall effect that he was aiming for. In response, we may equally note that the piece succeeds because we are awed by the level of uniqueness of the pieces on such a large scale. Had all the pieces been mechanically cast from the same mould, *Field* would not be effective artistically.

The question I pose here is in regards to the credit that should be given to the 35,000 participants in this project. It is easy to exclude their names under the title, since

¹¹ Tate Gallery, UK. <http://www.tate.org.uk/>

it is impossible to write out so many. Yet if there were only five people who had constructed all of them, and one of those five people were not Gormley, would it be so easy to exclude them from the credits? Gormley as the artist is not the fabricator of this installation; he conceived it. His role as the artist was to create a work and follow through with its production with the assistance of others.

A similar work was made by Peggy Diggs for MassMoCA in 2006. In *Recollection 2*, Diggs created a space at MassMoCA in which she hung photos of several places in North Adams. Visitors from the area were invited to write on luggage tags their specific memories and experiences in such places. These tags then filled the wire racks suspended in the space. In time, the collaborative effort of the community created a touching display of nostalgia and wistfulness.

For the sake of argument as above, we may say that such an installation is highly repeatable. In future repetitions, it would not be necessary for Diggs to be present; her concept could be happily reproduced in thousands of communities throughout the world as a way in which to create a sense of closeness and history with public spaces. Peggy Diggs is like a musical composer: she has composed the sheet music, and now its realization could really be made by others.

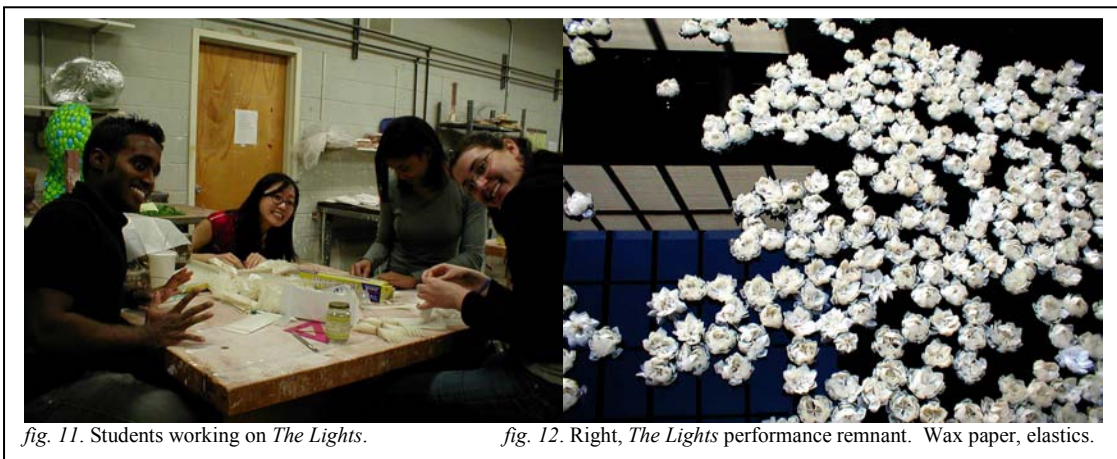


fig. 11. Students working on *The Lights*.

fig. 12. Right, *The Lights* performance remnant. Wax paper, elastics.

In the case of *The Lights* I was confronted with a similar situation as Gormley and Diggs. I opted to give credit to all the members of my class for the work they did. I have included above (fig. 11) photos of my students active while at work; how could one exclude the joy and energy that was a part of their process? I felt obliged to give them credit, especially since there were only seventeen of them.

However, I do not wish to focus only on giving credit. There is a second theme here and that is one of repeatability. In fact, Gormley's installation has been repeated since its first conception; in fact, the Tate hosted it as a second installation. Repeatability implies that there is a constant element (the conception) as well as a changing element (the physical performance and/or construction).

In music, there is the clear distinction between composer, musician and audience. The composer designs the musical piece; the musician gives it a temporal reality by playing it to some audience. The works of composers are repeated throughout time, often

without knowledge of the composer.¹² In fact, this idea of repetition is part of the conception of music. Since it is part of the conception, it is understood that their work can be played by someone else. The stipulation in music is that the composer receives credit for his or her production, *as does all others involved*, especially the musicians. When we attend a musical performance, this credit is carefully spelled out on the program; in fact, we usually learn in advance of experiencing the performance who is involved in its production and their exact roles. Note that the most important contributions are highlighted, such as the composer and the lead players.

In theater, it is similar. The drama is written by the author but then interpreted by others. The actors, stage manager, director, costume designer and others are all listed in the program to the audience. If one admires especially the work of the stage, he or she may then look at the program and note how capable the stage designer works. It is not all subsumed under the playwright.

Why is this not the tradition in the visual arts? There are certainly cases in which some repetition has occurred in the visual arts. Robert Smithson's *Floating Island* was only sketched out by the artist but then was realized in 2005 by others. I had the opportunity to watch it pass by Battery Park in New York City. I was filled with a sense, though, that this was meant to be done only this one time, but I may have been wrong.

There are many examples in which this kind of execution has been done, but key here is the idea of tradition. There is a long tradition in music and theater to repeat ideas by composers. It seems to me that the visual arts are now poised to take on this tradition as well.

There are many variables and possibilities that may be argued for and against the credit given to the composer artists of the visual arts. A good example is in the case of bronze casting. What of the artist who makes a quick sketch and has a massive work in bronze produced of their small effort? We marvel at the grandeur, not the composition, and hence at the work of the foundry. Parigoris notes, for example, how Barbara Hepworth had herself photographed in 1964 before a massive piece of hers in bronze (*Single Form*) to give the impression that she was the sole maker; the photo “belies the existence of a workshop needed to create this over-life-size bronze.”¹³ In fact, such a photo not only hides the truth but exploits another truth, that of the artist directly working into their material and the value of such.

What of posthumous bronze castings – what role does the artist have in such works in which intentionality is called into question as to its finishing? One may also question to what extent interpretation is involved on the production side as a standard for giving it some kind of credit, versus a purely mechanical process. On this thought one may also note that it is a very different result in which the artist is present and directs all stages of production versus one which is completely absent.

There are advantages to working in the mode that may be called ‘direct carving.’ This is that in which the artist is present at every stage of the work, and in which the work itself is representative of the process of production. This is what Harold Rosenberg

¹² Certainly music contains composer musicians, such as the case of improv, jazz, etc. Also, living composers gain royalties from the playing/recording of their works.

¹³ Alexandra Parigoris, “Truth to Material: Bronze, on the Reproducibility of Truth.” *Sculpture and Its Reproductions*, ed. by Anthony Hughes and Erich Ranfft (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 139.

called ‘action painting.’ In the case of sculpture perhaps we can call it ‘action sculpture.’ As per Rosenberg, the sculpture in such a case is not an imitation of some object outside itself but the ‘scene’ of an event – the event being the work of the artist in response to the changing form within the process of creation. Such a mode of creation allows more profound, unconscious workings of the artist to come forward; in this way a kind of psychological work of relatedness is constructed. The action is the conscious will of the artist to work with psychological tensions brought about by the forms before them. The artist relates to the work cathartically and is influenced in turn by his or her own productions, or, as Rosenberg states, “‘talked back’ to the artist not to quiet him with Sibylline murmurs nor to stun him with Dionysian outcries but to provoke him into a dramatic dialogue.”¹⁴ Given my reflections earlier on relatedness in art, one can appreciate why I would prefer this mode of creating.

I merely propose here that we first become transparent in our production. I invite an artist of a large-scale work to think about ways in which all the participants in the creation of the work may be credited for their role. The second proposal is more radical; it requires the visual arts industry to take on a new tradition of repeatability. In much the same way that a musician may shop for sheet music, perhaps some day communities will be able to research artist compositions of public work projects to then realize on their own. Everyone would benefit, for the artist would receive credit.

Gormley’s *Field* is a kind of installation that I especially admire. Individual expressivity appears in each of the works, creating a strong relationship between the individual makers and their production. Gormley also cited in his catalogue to *Fields* the presence of the many workers, including many photos of the whole process. In this way *Fields* represents a kind of installation that encompasses all the aspects I have struggled with in my own work, as well as a response to some of the questions I have just raised.

¹⁴ Harold Rosenberg, Tradition of the New (New York: Horizon Press, 1960), 33.

IV. Tensions and Aesthetic Judgment

I have frequently mentioned tensions and disharmony throughout this paper. I would like to turn my reflections now on what constitutes a tension in sculpture versus a harmony. Naum Gabo, in his series of lectures published under the title Of Divers Arts, discusses the concept of tension in sculpture as the intersection of the planes of two masses as they contradict each other's axis. This essentially amounts to a simple concept: If the works are not parallel, they will be in some kind of tension with each other.

This tension is simply a disharmony. It implies, however, that there is a harmonious background or presence of some kind that allows the disharmony to reveal itself. For example, two masses can only intersect each other if there is a sense of their mass as being formally and harmoniously constructed. A plank of wood, for example, may be perfectly smooth and rectangular; two such planks creating intersecting lines setup a tension. This tension and intersection may be direct or may be across negative space.

This, then, is the source of some tension in my sculpture: it is a tension of disharmonious, clashing forms with harmonious, aligned elements.

There are other forms of tension which Gabo did not explore, hence limiting the possibilities of his Constructionist philosophy. One of these tensions which I use is that of the trace of a force that is now invisible. This force is erosion, brought about by time and the wear of weathering conditions. A sculpture composed of smooth lines gains tensions if those smooth lines are of a ravaged wood. It is true that the erosion causes certain lines to bend and hence intersect with others (and hence create the kind of formal tension described by Gabo); however, there is a psychological tension in place before the tensions of erosion. The invisible presence of time becomes visible. This can in turn be used to create other tensions, i.e. with newer parts of a piece opposing itself to the 'older,' worn parts.

We may argue then that any element of the sculpture which communicates some kind of violence, either from an outside force or in relationship to the inner parts themselves, creates important tensions. These tensions must be made consciously in response to harmonies. The question is, what comprises a harmony?

I had defined earlier that harmonies arise from geometrical constructions. This has been a well-known rule in the arts throughout human history, from the Greeks to the Renaissance works to today. Even the most chaotic form may be exactly repeated and placed into a grid; suddenly tensions arise as the chaotic elements strive to exit a more contained framework.

I have yet to fully outline all the possible modes of creating tensions in sculpture for myself. However, what I have done is to work with a trust in aesthetic judgment; I strive to let the feeling of the form communicate to me the sense of force and violence necessary to bring strength and tensions into the piece. If a piece feels too 'heavy,' I will strive to bring in more harmonious elements; if it feels too stiff and 'pretty,' I will strive to violate its limitations with bold additions.

I consider that all efforts to create harmonies in my work are ultimately strivings for beauty, and that all efforts to bring force and disharmony into the work are ultimately

strivings for the sublime¹⁵. As I mentioned above, harmony arises from disharmony in contrast to it, and vice versa. As a result, a work can never be beautiful unless some negative element, some destructive element, is brought into it. Likewise, a work will never be sublime unless it contains elements that are harmonious and beautiful. The beautiful, though almost the opposite of the sublime, composes it and vice versa. Without the sublime, without disharmony and destructiveness, a piece becomes merely charming or "pretty"; without beauty and harmony, a sublime piece becomes merely shocking.¹⁶

There is however one more important element in this play of forces. I believe that all significant tensions must arise from three forces. In physics, the results of an encounter of three equal objects cannot be predicted as in the case of two objects. Hence, if an artist is not balancing three aspects in his work then the work will become, in a certain sense, predictable and hence stolid and unsuccessful. The question arises as to what is the third force.

If we could symbolize the beautiful as soft fleshiness, the sublime as muscle and power, then the third is like the bone system, and is the work's *depth*.¹⁷ Hence the theme of a piece and how that theme orientates the sculpture in space becomes the third working. It becomes active in the play of tensions in as much as thematic considerations come head to head with beautiful and sublime considerations. This has been my guiding foundational principle for all my artistic productions.

If theme dominates to the point that a sculpture is nothing more than the formal articulation of the concept so that it is essentially an illustration, then the piece becomes arid. This is the risk of conceptual art when it abandons formal principles of harmony and chaos, and the theme alone is what addresses the viewer. Depth is easy to give to a work in text and discussion but the extent in which it is a real and active visual counter force to the disharmonious elements of the sublime and the harmonizing element of the beautiful is the extent to which it is a real and effective force in the work of art. It becomes the extent in which the work of art is effective at all.

¹⁵ I will use here the terms beautiful and sublime. These are terms loaded with significance; the reader will recall in particular Immanuel Kant's Critique of Judgment. I ask the reader to see in my wording here a new way of conceiving of these terms, in particular in their relationship with truth. The idea of a threefold play of dynamic relational attributes for such terms as aesthetic judgment or aesthetic experience is itself a worthy topic of a doctoral dissertation. I hence ask the reader to accept the unfortunate fact that this topic will only be glossed over; it is introduced within this paper merely to describe my processes as an artist.

¹⁶ Here is an example where I have redefined the sublime and the beautiful. I am arguing here how one may not divorce the sublime from the beautiful (and later I will hold this also true of truth as the third attribute). Kant gave fairly static notions as to what comprises a sublime or beautiful experience. If we may imagine the dynamism or force of the experience of something sublime or beautiful (within the Kantian notion) and abstract that force in our imagination to the extreme, we will find what I am arguing viz. that the actual experience of something beautiful or sublime involves both of those abstracted forces but in some relationship with each other. Namely, the sublime experience has some presence of beauty to it and vice-versa. This is an argument that demands of the reader a hopefully enjoyable leap with the imagination and a hermeneutic interpretation of aesthetic experience beyond how it immediately presents itself.

¹⁷ I gave a lecture on what I called 'conceptual anatomy' in the summer of 2000 at a festival in Norway in which I discussed more in depth the symbolic meanings of three aspects of anatomy as it appears in figurative art. This will be the focus of a future thesis or book.

If a work lacks depth, it can never be truly beautiful or sublime. Likewise, if a work lacks sublimity and beauty, it can never be truly profound. The three form the triumvirate of all works of art.

I have often argued that *Mantra*, 2006 (fig. 13) was the best work I created during my studies in the MFA program. *Mantra* represented the imaginative presence of all three forces at work. When I first thought of the layout, I pictured three masses, all somewhat disharmonious yet balancing each other. The disharmony would be met by the harmony of framing lines above and below, here seen in the wood that holds it parallel. The other harmonious elements were to be found in the parallel verticality of the wood and metal as the eye moves from left to right. While I was contemplating these aspects, the thematic element – a *mantra* – demanded negative spaces and some other sensation of consonants and vowels to symbolize sound. From this tension arose the smaller pieces with nails and their unusual sweeping movement. These though were met with the disharmony of their condition – a sublime element in the roughness and degradation of the wood pieces as well as the condition of the bent, rusty nails. Overall perhaps the piece would have risked becoming too chaotic, so the warm rusted tones of the metal, as well as some work with pigment, allowed me to soften the tones of the piece. Some of the wood was kept in its grey color to contrast starkly with the warmth of the metal. Also, the depth of the theme inspired negative spaces which let the eye rest from these two other tensions. To further give balance, one of the pieces of wood was coloured to look like iron (the plank that is fifth from the right is wood, not steel). This balanced the presence of the steel in the other two segments without sacrificing the force of the texture in the wood. In fact, the far right third of this piece benefits from the most wood and nail bits, contrasting with the negative space created by the angular negative space. The eye of the viewer may rest or plunge into tensions in this piece while always wrapped in the sense of the hum of a mantra.



fig. 13. Falcone, Alton. *Mantra*, 2006. Wood, nails and rusted steel.

In my most recent work I have continued to seek this kind of effect. The recent series called *Variation*, 2007 were all plays of formal harmonies, rough wood edges, and the overall theme of relatedness of inner and outer spaces. These culminated in some of my more successful pieces of the group, such as those pictured in this thesis (fig. 8 & 9).

V. Conclusion: Principles of Sculpture

(The following principles and declarations have been derived either directly from this thesis, during its writing or from sections that have since been deleted. They serve as a conclusion in the sense that they arise from topics either within this thesis or as a response to possible questions that may be raised.)

1. To give credit to all those responsible for the bringing forth of a visual art object/installation is honest. Anything else represents an appropriation of the beholder's associations with direct working in the material.

2. If *theme* dominates to the point that a sculpture is nothing more than the formal articulation of the concept so that it is essentially an illustration, then the piece becomes arid. This is the risk of conceptual art when it abandons *beauty* and *sublimity*, and the theme alone is what counts. Depth is easy to give to a work in text and discussion but the extent in which it is a real and active visual counter force to the disharmonious elements of the sublime and the harmonizing element of the beautiful is the extent to which it is a real and effective force in the work of art.

3. Our uniqueness arises in as much as we see it in others, especially where it is most challenging to find. An artist in love with the uniqueness of everything automatically creates original art. The role of the Classifiers is to create obstacles to this process.

4. If a work lacks depth, it can never be truly beautiful or sublime. Likewise, if a work lacks sublimity and beauty, it can never be truly profound. The three form the triumvirate of all works of art.

5. What is aesthetic experience beyond how it immediately presents itself?

6. A good sculptor will sense intuitively the relationship between the physical and psychic properties of a given material.

7. By creating a work of art which touches us in that same sphere we use for relatedness and relationships, the artwork may also transform the viewer in a positive way. It is very difficult to transform one's characterological traits; this requires a slow, constant and repetitive influence. Art can achieve this, assuming that the person seeks to behold art that works on their character in the so-prescribed way.

8. *Agedness* is the image or symbol in the arts of melancholy.

9. What transforms the annoying prettiness of the mathematical harmonious elements from pretty to beautiful, and what transforms the merely shocking to sublime is the play between the two qualities. In this way the aesthetic experience of the work is more elevated.

10. *Centrifugal* sculpture tends towards architecture. Since it has no center, it automatically needs the framing created by structures around it. In this sense it becomes part of the architecture. The “center” of architecture is the external form of the human being passing within it, though there are always structural necessities and spatial limitations. The center of a work of *centripetal* sculpture is instead something internal to the work itself, giving it the sense of selfhood.

11. A nail, pounded into a piece of wood, is full of possible meanings.

12. *Interest* is the engagement of the intellect. When we say something is *beautiful* or *sublime*, we have presumed interest on our part but gone far beyond it.

13. The appearance of the importance of the visible process of creation within the completed form arose at the same time as art’s consciousness as self-sustaining and self-referential - *art for art's sake*. Visible process in art is the love of history, for it is *visible history*.

14. The shadow of a sculpture is its documented image. The sculpture's death arises when the documented image is given any importance whatsoever.

15. Once a sculpture is completed, from the point of view of the Eternal it is in a state of imminent rebirth. It is the rare beholder that completes it. Upon completion, the physical form utilized for this communication ceases to have importance.

16. Expressionism coincides with Formalism in the universal signs or symbols of characterological traits.

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