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Sustenance

Brenton Pafford

Clemson University, bpaffor@g.clemson.edu

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SUSTENANCE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Art
Ceramics

by
Brenton Russell Pafford
December 2014

Accepted by:
Valerie Zimany, Committee Chair
Andrea Feeser
Syd Cross

ABSTRACT

Utilizing the ceramic process I create objects that facilitate experiences in the domestic space. Developing sculptural elements that evoke memory traces, and in heightening the everyday to an aesthetic, I place value on the overlooked, under-thought items that sustain existence.

“It is the realm of these submerged memory-traces that creative art moves, bringing them into the orbit of everyday life and making them available to the experience of others by formalizing and projecting them onto elements of the familiar world which can receive and transmit them.” - Rawson

The objects I created for this exhibition are rooted in memory traces, reminiscent of heirlooms that have been passed down to me, that I cherish and value. The work in *Sustenance* presents contemporary heirlooms.

At the intersection between generations things are lost. Domestic items lose their potency in daily life, and rarely are objects created, manufactured, or bought with intentions to spend a quality amount of time with them, care for them, and pass them along to younger generations. The work I create is a reaction to this reality. Contemporary society is consumed with disposability, and people are no longer connected to the objects that aid in their sustenance. Making objects that are formed with touch, labor, and time counterpoints this disposability: the objects I create patiently wait to be discovered and enjoyed, retained and later passed on to others.

DEDICATION

Sizzle Simmer Sear
Enamoring Smells Throughout
Morning Has Come - Bacon

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend a thank you to my peers, mentors, and advisors for the continual support, inspiration, and fresh air. A very special thank you to my committee members - Valerie Zimany, Andrea Feeser, and Syd Cross - for being exceptional individuals that will continue to be a part of my creative practice through your wisdom, guidance, and personal drive to continually develop.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Nostalgia, historical patinas, and emotional connections create memory traces, strengthening bonds with objects. Surrounding myself with physical and visual remnants that preserve experiences of time and place and collecting symbolic objects to memorialize these events creates a comfortable, lived-in atmosphere. I have been researching relationships with these objects – in particular those associated with food and sustenance – investigating the function of utilitarian and sculptural objects, and analyzing memory traces imbued into particular objects.

I create utilitarian ceramics that facilitate experiences in the domestic space while also developing sculptural elements or stand-ins that evoke memory traces, heightening the everyday to an aesthetic value. Interacting with the work, the user or viewer is asked to decelerate, and take time to think about the objects and contemplating their actual function, in turn affecting the experience of use with them in his or her own domestic environment. Movements such as the Slow Food movement have similar frameworks. Folco Portinari, a founding member, wrote in the *Slow Food Manifesto* in 1989:

Born and nurtured under the sign of Industrialization, this century first invented the machine and then modeled its lifestyle after it. Speed became our shackles.

We fell prey to the same virus: 'the fast life' that fractures our customs and assails us even in our own homes, forcing us to ingest "fast- food. Appropriately, we will start in the kitchen, with Slow Food. To escape the tediousness of "fast-food", let us rediscover the rich varieties and aromas of local cuisines.

In the name of productivity, the 'fast life' has changed our lifestyle and now threatens our environment and our land (and city) scapes. Slow Food is the alternative, the avant-garde's riposte.

Objects and implements used in the creation of food should also be slow, yielding material pleasure, sensual pleasure, and a rediscovery of the importance of everyday objects to allow us to preserve long lasting enjoyment in the acts of sustaining ourselves. Working in the grocery industry for a number of years before coming to graduate school allowed me to interact with people as they became acquainted with the *Slow Food* and similar movements. In turn I reconsidered what I valued in the purchasing, preparation, and serving of sustenance.

My interest in family structures and gatherings stems from growing up in an environment in which Sunday dinner was a place to catch up, plan, and enjoy one another's company. As I move into a different stage of life away from my relatives, I have been redefining what I consider family: family is a community of individuals where everyone relies on one another, founded upon trust, support, constructive challenges, and most of all mutual respect. As our lives continue to grow and change I no longer have the ability to attend Sunday dinner, but the value and meaning of these events and times together remains. Considering this time and place has allowed me to explore other events and objects involved in the creation of these experiences, intended to promote similar notions of like gatherings.

The objects I create are used in environments that promote, develop, and build new and lasting relationships between individuals. The vessels - meant to aid in

preparing, serving, and providing contemplation of our experiences of sustenance –
become physical manifestations for time and memories associated with them.

CHAPTER TWO

Heirlooms

Generosity has been a common thread through my work at Clemson, stemming from my interest in facilitating experiences for others, into how objects catalyze experiences, how they become memory traces and physical manifestations of time, effort, and value, and how this parallels building family. Through these explorations I concluded that integrity of object is important and that generosity may not be the correct descriptor of what I am trying to verbalize. I began considering the intent of the object created, the action it enabled, and the memory traces imbued upon it through use. Mass-produced objects, even if handmade, tend to lack the sentiment gained through experience, causing the user to be less attached, less aware, and less likely to be invested in the object. Ideas including *The Mug Exchange* and *The Potent Object Project* (Appendix C) pushed me to think about how I could make the forms more thoughtful and reciprocal rather than actively giving and receiving.

Some time ago I read a short story that prompted me to begin thinking of heirlooms that have been passed to me from members of my family. Specifically considering these items and the relationships that are inherent to the work I have created for “Sustenance”. *The Ungrateful Son* by The Brothers Grimm prompted considerations into the gift, gift economies, and passing objects to others. After ruminating over these ideas for some time began thinking about things passed to me, specifically by members of my family.

Objects passed to me have often been family heirlooms. Heirlooms contribute to

my perceptions, sentiments, and experiences. They hold memory traces while simultaneously being held as precious objects meant to be utilized for their prescribed function. They ask for introspection into the object and task at hand – considering those who have used the same object to complete similar tasks beforehand. These objects have been handed down, gifted to me with sentimental patinas – they ask me to further inspect, contemplate, and understand the object in my hand and the task it is completing. They have taught me to take care, to be careful, and respect the objects that aid in my own sustenance.

The work I make is approachable; removing the tension of separating the viewer from the work and the nurturing comfort that comes from approaching and interacting with an object that exudes warmth and invites touch and feeling. Approachability is shown through altering of wheel-thrown forms. Pinching allows the elasticity of the compressed wheel-thrown porcelain to activate and animate, adding playfulness to the forms allowing expression of casualness or nonchalance. The marks left on the forms render them soft, approachable, warm, inviting, comforting, and soothing. The indentions and marks left through the process give the work flesh-like qualities that ask to be touched, satisfying the needs of the user both functionally and sensually.

Touch

In Diane Ackerman's *A Natural History of The Senses*, she states, "Language is steeped in metaphors of touch (70)." Touch is the most sensual of the senses, skin is our outermost layer: it is through our skin that we make contact with and begin to understand the world around us. Skin confines and protects, it renews, and most of all "it harbors our

sense of touch (68).” The fingertips are one of the more sensitive parts of the skin and it is touch that informs us of consistencies and textures. Ackerman explains the “complex sensations that constitute touch (69)” stating that feeling takes place in the second layer of the skin. Touch drives us to explore things further; it encourages the use of the other senses to create experiences. Touch drives our need to please; the tactility of the forms through my touch makes them approachable, in turn making a pleasurable experience for the user.

Play is also encouraged in the domestic space. The kitchen in particular is a space for exploring new flavor combinations and entertaining new recipes while interacting with implements that provide you with this experience. If the objects associated with the domestic space are also playful the space becomes an animated environment encouraging exploration and allowing the space to be seen as fun, rather than burdensome as in today’s fast-paced culture. The forms seem to be animated, waiting to come to life through use. As objects are used, moved, and stacked in the whirlwind of a kitchen, compositions come together in fleeting moments. Color, composition, form, and texture working naturally together in the space create a playful environment. When at rest the objects are still, organized, and kept orderly, anticipating the occasion when they become lively through use.

Display

Explorations into installation and display have also been a part of my practice during graduate school. Display allows viewer or users to begin to create a dialogue with the work in their own space, evoking a sense of comfort. The addition of time interacting

with the objects will create sentiment that can be passed from one generation to another. Approaching display with a sense of casualness or nonchalance references the experience associated with brunch - gently flowing and developing, maintaining a sense of order that does not detract from the work.

Throughout explorations of material, context, and display the meat and potatoes of the work stemmed from the user or viewer experience, whether that be in the gallery or domestic space. I have explored how the implications of the work being presented effect the way it is viewed, considering how the viewed objects are catalysts for experience, lenses into how we value an action and the labor associated with the completion of a task, specifically in the domestic environment.

The gallery display of objects suggests domestic spaces with which the items are typically associated. I believe this allows functional work to be approached in a more tactile manner, promoting interaction and ultimate use, allowing the inherent qualities of utility to be accessed and understood. Artist and galleries have used this method of installation in the recent past. I am interested in The Clay Studio's exhibition *Pots at Rest*, in which they displayed utilitarian objects on pieces of furniture typically associated with a kitchen space. The work was curated by a group of artists and displayed in still life format, as they would be found in the home.

Explorations in display have led me to approach display in a way that references the environment that the objects are typically associated. Presentation is integral to how a viewer or user interprets the work in the gallery space, in turn affecting the way its end use. I intend to make the work more approachable, nodding towards the domestic space,

not directly representing it. Approachability allows the work to be read in conjunction with a sense of touch, creating a comfortable atmosphere that elevates the work without detracting from the overall visual environment. The simplistic nature of the display is meant to conjure thoughts of labor and workmanship. Simple designs – through size, scale, and placement – are rendered in bare wood and are reminiscent of domestic spaces. The installation borrows traits from vernacular spaces including kitchen, pantry, and dining as well as workshops, garages, and studios referencing an interior architecture within the gallery space.

CHAPTER THREE

Objects

Designing utilitarian objects that provide experiences for others whether I am present or not drives my desire to facilitate: to provide access to these experiences. The end user is, in turn, able to create their own, authentic experience dependent on personalized, individualized circumstances, tastes, and aesthetics. The work is merely a secondary role, a supporting element of the overall experience.

In *The System of Objects*, Baudrillard points to ideas and theories surrounding the differences in culture today versus historical ones. He writes about connectedness to possessions and points out the differences between older generations and current ones, making the argument that possessions are no longer about personal connections, but are now considered a disposable, physical desire for status.

Contrary to Baudrillard, I make the argument that the difference is no longer about a desire for status, but rather objects still are placeholders, reminders, and keepsakes that retain the memories of the times spend interacting with and around them. Paul Mathieu writes in his essay *Object Theory*:

If handmade objects have become largely useless in a practical sense, they nonetheless remain socially essential, as receptacle for the imagination and memory of human kind, memory and knowledge of experience (125).

At the intersection between generations things are lost, items lose their potency in daily life; rarely are objects created, manufactured, or bought with intentions to spend a

quality amount of time with them, care for them, and pass them along to younger generations.

In *Stuff*, David Miller makes an argument for what he describes as, “the humility of things (155).” Miller states, “The less aware of them, the more powerfully they can determine our expectations, by setting the scene and ensuring appropriate behavior, without being open to challenge (50).” His stance allows everyday objects, more often than not overlooked and forgotten to be analyzed under a new lens. Later in his exploration of stuff and the relationships surrounding it in today’s material culture he mentions individuals’ memorialization of the deceased through “idealized conceptualization (151)” and the same relationships and ideals can be applied to stuff or objects: when an object is deliberately and willfully passed from one individual to another the object retains the idealized concept of the relationship the object had with the original person. With passing and handing down of things they become heirlooms, cherished objects that are used and valued for their intrinsic worth.

Heirlooms that I have been gifted with hold the most value and worth. By heirloom, I mean objects, particular ways of doing things, traits, and rituals. These heirlooms contribute to my perceptions, sentiments, and experiences; I also project them back into the world sharing with others what I can.

Colanders

The colander is an implement used for cleansing, rinsing, draining, and straining. The process that I use to render the form makes the user aware of the action they are performing out while using the tool. These pieces in particular are designed in such a way that negates some of these specific uses of a traditional colander however they can still be used for certain applications. They are created in such a way that asks the operator to slow down, paying attention to the grip, the motion, and the handling of the object itself – causing the action to have more meaning and to affect the way a handler thinks about, pays attention to, and cares about the act. The pinch marks, handle placement, rim, and foot make the user aware of the piece in a purposeful manner forging a connection between the action, object, and user. The handler is challenged to engage with a fragile objects as opposed to one that can quickly be tossed in the sink, dropped, or used with a heavy hand like many of the similar mass produced products.

Skillets – Remember This as a Time of Day

A cast iron skillet is the most revered implement used in my kitchen. It serves multiple uses - it fries, it cooks down, it bakes, and it sears – it is the heart of the meal, making it the heart my kitchen practice. It is also the tool in the space that generates notions of reciprocity. As the skillet is used, cleaned, and seasoned over time it develops flavor that is specific to each individual skillet's use. Fat, onion, salt, olive oil, spices, vegetables, and herbs leave their essence, kept present by careful cleaning and re-seasoning. Cast iron skillets also add iron to the food cooked in them, giving back to the individual who takes care of the object. The skillets represent the notion of taking care

because they provide, develop, and change in flavor over time. Creating a representational stand-in for the cast iron skillet in porcelain captures these notions in an object that embodies these ideas but cannot provide them. Laboring to create a representation through porcelain renders the object useless in the context of a domestic space while capturing and engraving the skillet's purpose. The porcelain skillets become an object, a placeholder meant to represent development, change, and provision – to be presented as a relic, to pay homage to the functional skillet. The porcelain skillets become metaphorical; a memorialization intended to evoke memory.

Troughs

Troughs, old claw foot tubs, and large grain tubs were scattered throughout the land on which I was raised. Troughs and other implements used to feed the herd of cattle always intrigued me: the communal sense of the heard eating as one, the nutrients shared and rationed as the herd meanders through pastures, the ruminative chewing of cud. Readdressing this issue later in life and with some perspective, I believe that food – sustenance – is a human right – one of which we should be conscious and aware. The purpose of porcelain troughs is to serve a group of individuals, facilitate gathering and promote sharing – granting access. They grant equivalency, as serving or taking from one vessel eliminates boundaries.

The troughs tie my family structure, environment, and personal history from past to present. They lend sentiment to this past while capturing my present family; an ever-growing, ever changing group of individuals constantly in flux who always make time for and enjoy shared meal as equals. The troughs do not build anticipation for a meal to be

served; rather they rest in place giving their contents as needed. The pieces are important because they serve; they contain and culminate all the previous actions that create an experience. The forms are created by compositing multiple forms that have gentle, flowing curves. The forms are more often that not two convex lines merging to create a concave form, again referencing the body.

CHAPTER FOUR

Process

Ceramic

Creating objects by hand I interweave ideas of labor into the ruminative act of making and producing. In David Pye's book *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* he explores theoretical ideas behind what he describes as workmanship. He furthers his ideas describing "workmanship of risk and workmanship of certainty (20)," workmanship of risk being objects created in part by a trained human hand and workmanship of certainty being industrial fabrication methods. Pye explains that the two ideas must rely on one another, working together in both instances in order to gain a successful outcome in either case. As Pye investigates his ideas further the argument for workmanship comes to the foreground. He states that workmanship is based upon two criteria, "soundness and comeliness (30)." The two are described as follows, "Soundness implies the ability to transmit and resist forces as the designer intended; there must be no hidden flaws or weak places. Comeliness implies the ability to give that aesthetic expression which the designer intended, or to add to it (30)."

The objects I create have a sense of earnestness, straightforward honesty that promotes the user to consider not only the object while in use, but to reflect on the action the object makes possible. Philip Rawson states in the *Memory Traces and Meaning* Section of *Ceramics* "...we create a fund of memory-traces based on our sensory experiences. These remain in our minds charged, it seems, with vestiges of the emotions which accompanied the original experiences (16)."

He furthers his idea explaining that these experiences may never reach the formation of concept but argues that they "...provide the essential continuum from which evolves everyone's sense of the world and consistent reality, everyone's meaning of what it is to exist...It is the realm of these submerged memory-traces that creative art moves, bringing them into the orbit of everyday life and making them available to the experience of others by formalizing and projecting them on to elements of the familiar world which can receive and transmit them (16)." The objects I have created for this exhibition were selected because of the memory traces I associate with them.

Porcelain has been the material of choice for me during my time at Clemson. Porcelain is a challenging material to work with, it requires time, skill, patience, and understanding. Historically porcelain is held at the highest end of the spectrum in ceramics. It is a material that was sought after and imitated for its pureness and material qualities. Historically there has been mimicry between materials. Metal simulating clay, clay then imitating metal as technologies change and develop. In the colanders I have experimented with suggesting enamel, playing on materiality. In the skillets I have chosen to mimic cast iron through porcelain due to the preciousness of material as well as the physics behind the material.

Creating begins on the wheel. I start by centering the clay followed wedging on the wheel to ensure the porcelain is thoroughly compressed while retaining desired plasticity. I work to create simplistic forms that contain an ample volume. When pulling the walls to shape the form I economize my movements and actions to keep the form sturdy while working on the wheel. I focus attention on the fluidity of the curves, interior

curve versus the exterior, ensuring they are similar in order to achieve a soft, gentle form that is stable without seeming tense.

I work in sets when creating, typically sets of three or five. I do this for practice, it allows me to better each form as I work through it. This process encourages learning while new developing methods and techniques that will economize the way I create the next iteration. Practice also teaches and strengthens qualities, traits, and characteristics that subtly are introduced unknowingly into forms.

As the forms set to the proper stage – soft leather hard, I begin the pinching process. I begin with the rim of the form, applying pressure between the thumb and index finger. I work around the vessel on a banding wheel, ensuring that the incessant pinch leaves a mark on the entirety of the rim. Pinching hard enough to compress the clay, thin the walls, and expand the form while remaining delicate enough not to crack or distort the vessel.

After finishing the rim I move to the bottom of the vessel. I begin working from the interior, applying pressure to the bottom of the form with my right index, middle, and ring fingers. As I work up the sides of the vessel I move my right hand to the exterior and place my left hand on the interior of the form. Working at three o'clock on a banding wheel I methodically work around the form matching pressure between each finger, expanding the form – pushing in from the exterior while pushing out from the interior. As I work around the vessel the porcelain awakens, as it moves and shifts the forms begin to take anthropomorphic qualities. Pinching allows the elasticity of porcelain to become visible, paired with gravity the vessels begin to slump, relax, and recline at moments.

Pinching the wheel thrown forms is a cathartic, persistent exercise that compresses the clay body, adding strength and elements of touch.

This process allows the vessels to become animated and imbued with a nonchalant nature that mimics the softness and warmth of the domestic space that inspired their creation. The ruminative act of pinching requires persistence, strength, and patience. As the forms are pinched out I often have to set them aside during the pinching process for them to regain stability to resist cracking or collapse. Pinching wheel thrown forms allows the porcelain to capture, preserve, and document the process of making; strengthening the bond between the objects and the process. In order to achieve a desired foot I return to the wheel, place the vessel on a foam bat, so I do not damage the rim. With a variety of loop tools I then trim away excess clay, leaving the desired amount of clay. I pinch the foot out of the remaining clay incorporating it into the form.

Associations dependent on which part of the domestic space an object typically resides in have determined glaze and color. Objects in the pantry space are soft, light colors to reference the organizational aspects of how a pantry may be laid out. The colors are clean, pure, and simple much like the basic ingredients when preparing food.

Objects typically associated with the preparatory space are saturated and colored in a way that promotes a playful atmosphere. These choices are made in order to promote an environment that enhances the user experience. As the objects, ingredients, aromas, sounds, and movement come together the user is enamored of the harmonies that develop in the domestic environment. As bowls are stacked, unstacked, filled, and poured out the

whirlwind of a kitchen comes to life. The colors activate the space, animating the ephemeral moments that go into making a meal.

Items in the buffet space are glazed in mostly neutral tones highlighting the food placed in them. They become a pedestal, a blank canvas to be filled with content that has will aid in sustaining individuals who interact with them.

The ceramic process creates bonds and connections between material and concept. It requires, time, labor, effort, practice, and patience from the making of clay to the final product. The materials and methods used are delicate, requiring a specific sense of touch. There are two layers of skin, the second layer being the one that allows us the sensation of touch; the first layer is easily lost, scraped off, or shed. I implement in my own practice a process that has two layers, clay and glaze. The clay being the weight of the form, the skin like texture that references the figure – slightly protruding and receding, slumping, and dimpling. The glaze being the outermost layer that is not only protecting but functional. Glaze is easy to clean or sterilize, it is a smooth surface that seals.

Installation Process

The kitchen is a domestic space designed for labor, preparedness, and conditional relationships between individuals revolving around a myriad of tools and ingredients. Utensils and tools are designed and crafted to serve a variety of specific purposes in this space. When used properly they work together culminating to a whole like members of a symphony. This melody of sound, smell, and movements has the potential to enamor, creating a sense of warmth, comfort and belonging. Furthermore this activity is often

done to comfort for oneself, provide enjoyment for others, and make family accessible. My work endeavors to facilitate access to these experiences and sensations.

The domestic spaces I portray through installation include the pantry, a preparation area, and a buffet space. The flows of these spaces reference the domestic space in which the objects I create exist outside of a gallery environment. I elevate the domestic experience and the objects utilized in it to be analyzed and raised to a position of inquiry and intrigue.

Pantry areas are typically windowless rooms utilized for storage of dry, non-perishable goods at the heart of the domestic space. They are the spaces no one mentions but that contain the beginnings of most meals. Not only is the pantry a storage area, it is an area for repurposing things. Often in my own pantry as well as my family's, items are kept in an assortment of reusable, repurposed bins that are labeled with masking tape and marker. The shelves are often cluttered with barely used, unopened, or forgotten items that are overlooked in daily routines. The objects I created for this space are open to user interpretation, allow for reuse, and are based on the idea of storing dry goods.

The preparation area is where things come together in a kitchen area. This space is where cleansing, mixing, spicing, cooking, and tasting ingredients happen. It is a place for trial and error, a place for exploration. The prep area is a structured environment that contains all the implements for creation – much like the studio. It is an explorative space with endless outcomes: exploration and play are encouraged in this space but it retains standards. Meals are reminiscent of times spent together, of recipes jotted down on scratch paper, stained with drips and spills of ingredients and memories. The space is

lived it while remaining organized and clean. Mixing/batter bowls, nesting bowls, spice bowls, cruets, etc. are displayed on these pieces of furniture.

The dining area consists of a buffet, creating a space that promotes sharing, serving, and family. The tables constructed for this space are higher than average dining tables to encourage interaction while serving. The forms displayed in this space are platters, troughs, and pitchers used to serve groups of people during an experience. The buffet creates a flow that speaks to notions of the contemporary family.

The colanders are displayed acknowledging the decorative function colanders often serve while not in use. Placed in proximity to the dining area the colanders become elevated to a position of intrigue, speculation, and consideration. The skillets are arranged on the wall above the buffet to signify their importance, referencing the traditional placement of revered objects on the walls of the dining space. They have been arranged in a composition that creates a visual rhythm. There are moments of balance, accent, and tension throughout the composition much like the harmonies, rhythms, and melodies that create the symphony in the kitchen.

CHAPTER FIVE

Historical and Contemporary Context

Artists working with social practice and relational aesthetics depict and share parts of their individualized human experience through a variety of mediums. Ben Davis stated “social practice”—both as a form of art-making and as a theory of art-making—grows out of a dispirited reaction to the commercial art industry’s complicity with capital, and a corresponding, and altogether wholesome, hunger for an art that actually makes a difference.” Social practice focuses on tangible issues that affect communities, in most cases seeking to provide a solution to a problem. Artists working within the ideological parameters of social practice are working towards creating systems that resolve a need, and ask: Why make art about something when you can tangentially change it, affecting individuals in need? Social practice is rooted in improving and furthering conversations, institutions, structures, and systems in a manner that is not specifically aesthetic. Theaster Gates describes this as “the thing that makes the things.”

Relational aesthetics are defined by Bourriard as "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space (113)." In the most basic of explanations the artist becomes the catalyst in the experiences of others negating a specific piece of work to focus their attention. Exploration into these ideas and forms of making and or living have prompted considerations into what to do with functional forms, in order to further provide experiences for the user. It has become apparent through my research that this particular aspect of my work is not for me to decide. Once

the work leaves the studio/gallery it begins its life, providing for its user, allowing for reinvestigation, resensitization, and rediscovery of material pleasure along with sensual and tactile pleasures inherent in everyday objects.

The Bauhaus also influenced investigations and ways to structure my practice. I am interested in the combination of art, craft, and design while examining the idea that art is an all-encompassing part of life. No one thing is placed at higher value than another; things are designed, crafted, and presented with a particular overarching aesthetic experience in mind. There are discrepancies in Bauhaus design and my own aesthetic. Bauhaus was not nonchalant or casual; there was an inflexibility to the Bauhaus that made it seem cold, sterile, and lacking an approachable personality. The Bauhaus was a movement reacting to the time and industrial developments from which it was born.

The work I create is also a reaction to the time in which it is being created, a reaction to my reality. Contemporary society is consumed with disposable objects; people are no longer connected to the objects that aid in their sustenance. Making utilitarian objects that are imbued with touch, labor, and time counterpoints disposability: they patiently wait to be discovered and enjoyed, retained and later passed to others.

I consider morals and aesthetics one and the same, for they cover only one impulse, one drive inherent in our consciousness - to bring our life and all our actions into a satisfactory relationship with the events of the world as our consciousness wants it to be, in harmony with our life and according to the laws of consciousness itself. - Naum Gabo

Contemporary Artists

Contemporary artist Matthias Merkel Hess has created a series of contemporary tombs. In this work he intends to comment on materialism and society's throwaway culture by glorifying mass-produced objects in slip-casted porcelain. Slip casting allows him to replicate multiple objects, pointing to contemporary societies obsession with material things. The objects he casts are particularly compelling themselves, ranging from coffee makers to industrial trashcans to gas cans. Merkel Hess approaches surface in multiple ways. Mainly he approaches surface as a way to enhance the otherwise boring, mundane object. Brightly colored glazes are reminiscent of advertisements, gloss that speaks to the shiny, newness of objects and layers that build additional visual depth. Occasionally he employs *trompe l'oeil* to the trashcan forms, commenting on materiality – light, durable plastic versus heavy, fragile porcelain. He then installs the objects in what he calls “contemporary tombs” referencing burial chambers of Egyptian culture expressing contemporary cultures obsession with materialism.

Merkel Hess also has a project entitled *The Merkel Mall*. This particular project becomes a comment on society while working within the Bauhaus notions of art as life. Merkel Hess becomes the designer, fabricator, and distributor of the objects. He introduces humor into the work as well, mocking *Sky Mall* and other similar catalogue distributors. Partitioning his practice Merkel Hess allows himself the freedom to explore multiple projects in different avenues encapsulating the Bauhaus' all-encompassing structure.

Kelly O'Briant's thesis exhibit is a sculptural exploration by a functional ceramicist concerning "exploration of humanistic ideas about existence, agency, relationship, memory, and mortality." She renders everyday objects in porcelain in order to elevate the objects to a "position of aesthetic and emotional value." O'Briant rendered everyday objects like cheese graters, swimming goggles, extension cords, and other things found in her personal domestic space through hand building techniques with porcelain to memorialize them: freezing them in time, negating use. Her process and installations allow the work to be viewed in an approachable manner that elevates them – they become metaphors for the actions, memories, and labor inherent in each object.

A portion of my work explored similar ideas and I ultimately concluded that both sculptural and utilitarian work harness these concepts. The skillets are presented as relics that hold memory, yet they exist in the same domestic environment as the utilitarian work. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines functionality as, "the purpose that something is designed or expected to fulfill (708)." This definition creates a conversation that can support both the sculptural aspects of the work as well as the utilitarian.

The time spent with the utilitarian vessels allow memory and time to become part of the object that is used to complete specific tasks. Memory and time become encapsulated in the object, elevating them to a place of importance in the lives of those who use them. The stand in elements of the installation are meant to reference and point specifically to the importance of the everyday object – its ability to take on and retain applied notions of nostalgia.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

In *Sustenance* I utilize the ceramic process to create utilitarian objects that facilitate experiences in the domestic space. I simultaneously develop and display sculptural elements or stand-ins that evoke memory traces while heightening the everyday to an aesthetic I place value on the overlooked, under-thought items that sustain existence. I create objects that are meant to make the user consider what is in their hand, its value and worth on an intellectual and aesthetic level. The objects ask to be discovered, used, and enjoyed: decelerating the user, allowing for introspection into object, action, and material and putting value back into shared experiences involving sustenance.

At the intersection between generations things are lost. Items lose their potency in daily life, and rarely are objects created, manufactured, or bought with intentions to spend a quality amount of time with them, care for them, and pass them along to younger generations. The work I create is a reaction to this reality. Contemporary society is consumed with disposability, and people are no longer connected to the objects that aid in their sustenance. Making contemporary heirlooms that are formed with touch, labor, and time counterpoints this disposability: the objects I create patiently wait to be discovered and enjoyed, retained and later passed on to others.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Clay Recipe

Beaseckers Porcelain – Cone 10

Grolleg 50%

Custer Feldspar 27%

Silica 23%

100%

Add 1% bentonite (diluted in hot water - first)

Add 2 tablespoons Epsom salts (diluted in hot water)

Appendix B

Glaze Recipes

#150 Base

Nepheline Syenite	35%
Dolomite	20%
Whiting	5%
Grolleg	20%
Flint	<u>20%</u>
	100%

*Buttery satin matte in cone 9 - 10 gas

*Absorbs copper in reduction

*Clear and crazy in cone 9 - 10 electric

*Holds stain color from cone 6 - 10

Mason Stains Used –

Zirconium Yellow 1%

Pansy Purple 1% and 10%

Golden Ambrosia 3% and 10%

Nickel Silicate 7%

Robin's Egg Blue 3% and 7%

Mango (inclusion stain) 10%

Sunshine Yellow (inclusion stain) 5%

Dark Golden Brown 7%

Victoria Green 1% and 3%

Sam Chung Satin Matte (base)

F-4 Feldspar	35.7%
Neph Sy	21.4%
Whiting	14.3%
Kaolin	14.4%
Barium Carbonate	7.1%
Zinc Oxide	<u>7.1%</u>
	100

VC Black

G-200	20%
F-4 Feldspar	20%
Whiting	2%
Dolomite	15%
Flint	20%
Tennessee Ball	10%
Talc	<u>13%</u>
	100%

Oxides –

Cobalt Carbonate	3%
Chrome Oxide	1%
Manganese Dioxide	2%
Red Iron Oxide	3%

#361 Base

F-4	67%
Gerstley Borate	4%
Barium Carbonate	10%
Zinc	4%
Whiting	10%
Bentonite	<u>5%</u>
	100%

Appendix C

Links

The Mug Exchange – <http://www.themugexchange.tumblr.com>

The intention of this project is to exchange or barter items/experiences that hold value relative to one hour of time. I began exchanging mugs that I have handcrafted for the project in hopes that there is continual expansion and distribution of the objects. 1 hour is an approximation of the time that it takes for me to complete each cup. I ask that the people involved in the exchange consider time as a unit of measure to mediate worth of the cup

The Potent Object Project – <http://www.potentobjectproject.wordpress.com>

We are exchanged 500 handmade ceramic mugs for 500 unique stories. All participants will begin with a shared experience with our ceramic mugs, but they all bring to that common experience their different histories, values, personalities, and concerns. The mugs will be designed to function as a creative outlet with compositional lines that promote the user write on them. From this initial point of contact, the mugs and participants will scatter into their different lives. Each participant will give us a story about his or her own life and a photo of their written on mugs in their ‘natural environment.’ After two weeks of use, we asked all of the participants to give their mugs to someone else. This could be anyone. The mugs will continue to travel into more homes, more hands, and more lives.

Appendix D

Liminal / Sustenance Installation Photos



Figure 1.1: Installation View - Pantry



Figure 2.1: Installation View - Preparation Area



Figure 3.1: Installation View - Dining Area



Figure 4.1: Installation View – Detail, *Tri-Trough*



Figure 5.1: Installation View - Preparation Area, Detail, *Small Nesting Bowls*



Figure 6.1: Installation View - Preparation Area, Detail, *Large Nesting Bowls*



Figure 7.1: Installation View - *Colanders*



Figure 8.1: Installation View – Detail, Hanging *Colanders*



Figure 9.1: Installation View, *Remember This as a Time of Day*

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