I Wanna Rock!

Amanda Briede

Virginia Commonwealth University

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I Wanna Rock!

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art at Virginia Commonwealth University.

By

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BFA University of Louisville 2009
MFA Virginia Commonwealth University 2011

Director: Jack Wax, Professor in Craft/Material Studies Department

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
May 2011
Acknowledgement

- To Mom and Dad, for their constant love, support and guidance, and willingness to listen to endless rants on the telephone.
- To Kyle, for keeping me sane and putting up with me when he couldn’t and for providing a necessary perspective from outside the walls of the art world.
- To Ché, for giving me a well-rounded art education, for always believing in me, and for never telling me there was something I couldn’t do.
- To Rorschach, for being a perfect companion and making graduate school that much easier.
- To Eric, for teaching me the life-changing skills of 3D modeling and printing, and for being an important source for me outside of the Craft Department.
- To Matt, for being the best blow partner I could have asked for and for always listening to my complaints and complaining along with me.
- To Laina, for being a great friend and constant companion on many strange quests.
- To Jack Wax, for providing guidance when it was necessary and room to explore when it wasn’t, and for an endless supply of puns.
- To my fellow graduate students and the faculty, for providing a challenging environment in which to create and show my work.
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Abstract

I WANNA ROCK!

By Amanda Briede

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2011

Major Director: Jack Wax, Professor in Craft/Material Studies

Do you know that feeling? That feeling when the music you are listening to a concert or a new record and it just seems right? When you think, that’s it! That’s what music should sound like! When the music seems to touch your soul or mirror it, or…. something. And when you feel that, nothing else seems to exist and you are purely experiencing the music. My thesis work explores the way in which we try to capture this ephemeral moment of pure experience in order to keep it with us to revisit at our leisure. This, however, is a futile endeavor. No matter how many photos you take, records you collect, or days of music on your iPod, that initial feeling, that visceral experience, cannot be replicated. In this work I use both materials that evoke this idea of the ephemeral (transparent plastic and glass) and materials are ephemeral themselves (water and wax) to convey the inability to capture music and the feelings it evokes in us. I have
also chosen to add elements to the space, such as a wooden floor, stage lights, and fabric panels, to suggest a performance stage or sound studio and to further this connection to the music which the work was inspired by.
I. The Long and Winding Road: Development of self, concept, and technique through graduate studies.

My time as a graduate student here at VCU has been marked by many changes in the concepts behind my work. These changes were not for lack of being able to focus on a singular subject matter for an extended period of time, but rather the inability to find a subject that suited both myself and my work. I decided that in graduate school I would attempt to deal with different subject matters than those I was previously working with. At the start of my graduate career I began to deal with a subject matter that was connected with the themes I was already working with, though also quite different. Over the course of my first year, I gradually came back to more similar themes. However, at the beginning of my second year I decided to totally switch gears again to something almost completely different. It is in this way, by not forcing myself to focus on a singular idea, that I was able to find a subject matter and a way of approaching it that was most appropriate for me.

I came to graduate school directly after receiving my BFA from the University of Louisville. While in undergraduate school I received a minor in Forensic Anthropology and took many classes in anthropology, archaeology and forensics. All of the work that I was making at this time was heavily influenced by these studies and dealt with the ways in which we learn about people from the things that they leave behind. An important aspect of this
work was that all of the pieces involved some level of audience participation. This participation ranged from asking my classmates be involved in the work, to the visitors of my BFA Show, and beyond. An important technique that I, with the help of my professor, Ché Rhodes, developed at this time was the use of simple wooden spin molds (Figure 1). These molds allowed me to make multiples of a form that were almost exactly the same. I thought of these molds as being similar to Andy Warhol’s silk screens. The same form was produced each time, but with minor discrepancies in every piece.

A. Southern Man: History and the South

When I found out that I was accepted into graduate school at VCU, I knew that I was going to have to make a radical change from the work I had been making for my BFA show, and because I view my work as being primarily conceptual, I knew that it was the conceptual basis for the work that needed to change. Also upon my acceptance into graduate school, I began researching the city of Richmond. I was struck by the importance of the city throughout the history of the country from the time settlers began coming to America. This deep history, as well as the idea of history in general, seemed like a perfect new concept for my work because, though it was related to the work I was doing before, it was also quite different and would allow me to explore and relate to my new surroundings in the city of Richmond. However, when I moved to Richmond, I became struck with how “Southern” the city was, even though it was on almost the exact same latitudinal line as Louisville. My first piece in graduate school was a cross that was over eight feet tall that was
supposed to be covered in kudzu (Figure 2). This piece was a spectacular disaster. Besides giving me perhaps my worst critique ever, it taught me many other things. The first lesson was that though kudzu grows wild all over the South, to the point of covering houses and cars, that does not necessarily mean it will grow in your studio when you actually want it to grow. Next it taught me to always keep in mind the size of doors and other practical considerations. You cannot build an eight foot tall, four foot wide cross with a dirt-filled base weighing over 200 pounds in a ten foot by ten foot studio and expect to get it out easily. Finally it taught me to be careful what you bring into your studio. Though I was unable to successfully grow kudzu in my small, windowless studio, I was, however, able to successfully breed millions of tiny winged insects whose eggs must have been attached to the kudzu or the dirt and hatched over Christmas break. I returned from break to find my studio literally covered in millions of tiny dead insects, with millions more still flying around. Despite beginning with such a spectacular disaster, I did not give up on the idea of “Southern-ness” right away and began one good piece based on this idea. The inspiration for this piece came when visiting the White House of the Confederacy here in Richmond. On the tour of the White House, our tour guide told us that during the summer, all of the furniture was covered in canvas because the ladies of the house would sweat through their many layers of clothing leave stains on the furniture. The tour guide said jokingly however, that here in the South “ladies don’t sweat, they glow.” As a female glass blower, I thought this idea was ridiculous. So I decided to make a piece where I embroidered “Ladies don’t sweat, they Glow” on handkerchiefs with the image of a hot gather of glass (Figure 3).
then gave these handkerchiefs to my closest female glassblower friends to use to wipe away their sweat while blowing glass. This piece was never finished because many of the participants never returned their sweat-covered handkerchiefs to me. However, I feel that this piece is successful overall because the concept deals with issues of evolving femininity and the perception of femininity within different time periods and occupations.

During this time period when I first arrived at graduate school, I did begin to experiment with processes of making that I had never used before. Many of these were traditional craft processes that I began to utilize because of the concepts I was dealing with as well as the environment in which I was working. As I mentioned, Richmond seems to be a very “Southern” city, an idea that I associate with deep roots in traditional craft techniques. I also found myself in a Craft department for the first time and was very much influenced by the different materials being used around me. It is these factors that lead to the use of such process as the embroidery mentioned above, as well as other techniques such as basket weaving, that I did with venetian blinds (Figure 4). In the glass shop, I continued to use the wooden spin molds that I developed in undergraduate studies. However, I began to make molds that were much more complex in order to properly recreate historical bottle shapes developed in Richmond.

B. Who Are You?: Identity

Following a rather brutal studio visit from glass artist Helen Lee, in which she asked me why I even wanted to come to graduate school in the first place, I had the first of many “what the heck am I doing” moments. For my BFA show, all the
work I did was very clean, very scientific, and almost sterile. This new interest in traditional craft and “Southern-ness” really had no connection to who I am or what I wanted my work to be and was therefore more a product of my surroundings and the sudden change in city and entrance into a craft department. It was at this point that I decided that maybe “Southern-ness” was just one aspect of something greater that I was interested in: identity. I thought that this made perfect sense since it tied in so well with the ideas I was both learning about and dealing with in art work as an undergraduate student. Issues of identity are central in forensic anthropology as you use bone markers to learn about the age, sex, race and even occupation of an individual. In working with the broad concept of identity, I focused on both literal and projected identity. For one piece dealing with my literal identity I extracted my DNA from cheek cells and preserved it in vials of alcohol (Figure 5). I then gave these vials of my preserved DNA to my classmates and asked them to do something with my DNA, write what they did on a card, and then return the card to me. This piece was successful overall because it forced my classmates to think about the weight of the responsibility of having someone’s genetic makeup and being able to do anything with it. It also forced me to trust my classmates enough to give them my DNA and allow them to do anything they want with it. This piece remains unfinished, however, because many of my classmates have not returned their cards to me. For a piece I did about
one’s projected identity I found all of the Amanda Briedes that were listed on Facebook. I then made small transparencies of the profile picture of each Amanda Briede and put them on glass slides that viewers could look at under a microscope (Figure 6). I made this piece to draw attention to similarities and differences between the side of our identity which is somewhat predetermined and can be put on a microscope slide to be viewed and the side of our identity that we choose to project to others through the way that we dress and act as well as the way that we portray ourselves on social networking sites.

The important thing about this work is that it marked the return of both the conceptual and visual influences of the processes and equipment of science. Such influences were very important in my undergraduate work and had disappeared in the work I was doing when I first arrived at graduate school. I was also able to incorporate techniques I used while working at the Louisville Science Center, such as the DNA extraction. At the Louisville Science Center, this DNA extraction technique was used as a hands-on activity that allowed visitors to extract and see their own DNA. From the first time I participated in this experiment, I thought that it had interesting implications as an art piece and was excited to be able to utilize this technique that I had learned. Another important aspect of the DNA extraction piece was that it was the first piece that I did at VCU that used the form of the event in the way that I used it in my undergraduate work. In my work at the University of Louisville, I often used my classmates as a focused group of participants in an event and then displayed the remnants of this event as the final piece. This is what I planned to do with the vials of DNA: give each person in my critique a vial of my DNA, and display the cards they returned to me as the final piece.

C. Observation
While small events such as these can be very interesting, I am always looking for ways to involve more people in my work. One way I would like to do this is to have work that visitors participate in while it is displayed in a gallery setting. Around the time I was making the “Identity” work, the new Dan Brown novel *The Lost Symbol*, was released. I love reading Dan Brown novels and was eagerly awaiting this new one so I began to research it online. I discovered an online quest in which you follow clues much like the characters in the books. This quest ultimately leads to the solving of a hidden puzzle on the book jacket, which leads to a phone number, which instructed you to send an e-mail. I thought that this was an incredibly engaging way of allowing the story to come alive and allowing readers to participate in it. So, I decided that creating some sort of puzzle or challenge in my work was a good way of getting people involved in it. At first, I tried to combine this idea of the puzzle with the concepts of identity that I was working with. The first piece that I made contained a clue which leads viewers to unlock a slide box containing microscope slide sized mirrors (Figure 7). Viewers were instructed to take a mirror and to write their name in the inventory for the slide they took. This piece also included a mirror ambigram (a word that reads the same both regularly and in a mirror) that I designed that was placed behind the viewer as they were looking at the box so that they could see it behind their reflection when they picked up a mirror (Figure 8). However, incorporating ideas of identity into a puzzle system became
quite complex, so I began to focus solely on the puzzles. I thought that the puzzles were more important to me than the complex issues involved in identity because the puzzle is perhaps got me interested in forensic science in the first place and because I felt that the use of puzzles would provide the best opportunity for interaction from viewers.

One important technique that I began using in this piece is the use of the CNC router. I began taking the CNC router course during my second semester and was beginning to explore its possibilities. I used the CNC router for many more complex pieces later in the semester for my Candidacy work, but the first thing I used the router for was to carve the ambigram I designed into a piece of MDF so that it could all be painted white and be a subtle addition to the piece.

For Candidacy, I focused on making all of my pieces fit together in a complex puzzle. I made seven different pieces, each of which had a word somewhat hidden for viewers to find. Also, one letter of each of these words spelled the word “observe”, which became an overall theme of these works (Figure 9). Many of these pieces required not only the mental participation of viewers to fit words and clues together, but also the active participation of viewers in the work. For example, one piece required viewers to look through a telescope to find the word, another asked viewers to record their name and the date on a roll of paper with pencils containing the word
Another important aspect of this work is that I made the words and even the pieces themselves purposefully hard to see. For example, I used monofilament to spell word on a wall similar to a technique used to determine the directionality of blood spatter and put glass letters into beakers full of glycerin, a liquid that has the same optic properties of glass, so the letters appear to disappear in the liquid (Figures 11 and 12). I made one word in a glass murini that was no more than a half inch long and hid another in a hole in the floor. I am very proud of the work I did for candidacy because I finally felt that I was back to making the work I was supposed to be making. It combined my interests in forensics and other sciences with my fascination with creating and solving puzzles. It was very visually simple but conceptually complex. It allowed the viewers to actively participate in my work rather than just look at it.

The work for my Candidacy show also allowed me to incorporate both techniques that I had used before and was comfortable with and new techniques that I was just beginning to learn. One technique that I was comfortable with was making murini that spelled a word (Figure 13). I had done this before when running to be the student representative for the Glass Art Society and created a murini that said “Vote Amanda”. One technique that I used that I was just learning was the use of the CNC router to create
letters to read through the telescope, as well as to outline the way the words fit together to form the overall structure of the works. I was able to combine techniques I had already used with those that I was just beginning to learn by making blow mold on the CNC router (Figure 14). Previously, I had to divide the mold into horizontal section and cut the shape out of each individual section by hand with a band saw. Because I had to do all of the shaping by hand, I was somewhat limited in the shapes that I was able to create a mold of. Now, being able to design the mold on a computer, I am able to do almost any shape I want. I still have to divide the mold into horizontal sections, but the CNC is able to cut much more complex shapes than I would be able to by hand. I ran into a few kinks with the process, such as the direction of the wood grain and the way the wood expands, however, I feel that using the CNC router is a very useful tool in making complex blow molds.

D. I Wanna Rock!

Even before the closing of my Candidacy exhibition I was trying to decide what to do next. Though my Candidacy exhibition featured work that encompassed many of my interests as well as the way I wanted to approach art making, it was not that personal to me. Because of this impersonal nature and the cleanliness of the scientific influence, this work came off as being sterile and cold. I decided that during the rest of my time at graduate school, I wanted to focus on work that was of a more personal nature. I also decided that I wanted to let myself loosen up a little bit: free myself of the somewhat rigid boundaries of science that I was adhering to and maybe even use a little color. Something that has been very important to me for a long time is
rock music. I had been toying with the idea of making this the subject of my art work for a long time, but for some reason I always thought that it was not a worthy theme for art. However, despite of this feeling I decided that dealing with rock music as a subject would give me everything I wanted. I could make work that was both deeply personal but nearly universally relatable. I could use as much color as I wanted in any way I wanted and would not be bound to a laboratory aesthetic. So this is what I have been working on in my second year of graduate school: investigating the ways in which we attempt to contain rock music through both digital and analog formats.

This year I have made many advances in my work not only conceptually, but technically as well. The first project that I began working on that dealt with the way that we contain rock music was a series of cast wax records (Figure 15). I was able to get these wax records to actually play the music from the record they were cast from. Though these records were playable, they degraded quicker than regular vinyl records. I was able to make a digital sound recording of these wax records playing and thus degrading, through a UBS turntable. Also significant this year, was the incorporation of more digital technologies in my work. Primarily, I have been using 3D printing to create small boxes to contain sound (Figure 16). These boxes have an interior spiral and resonate sound similar to the way sea shells do. I have been experimenting not only with the size and shape of these boxes, but also the material in which
they should be printed. I also experimented slightly with robotics, learning how to both wire and program a microprocessor. I then combined this robot with a 3D printed pick holder to make a machine that flicks guitar picks. This piece, however, was never fully realized as I became more interested in the sound holding boxes.

II. Influences

Though my studies in graduate school, I have been influenced by many diverse things: from traditional craft to contemporary 3D prints, from analog records to MP3s, from religion to science. The following are some of the influences that have proven to be the most significant in the completing of my thesis work.

A. Artists

First I would like to briefly mention Marcel Duchamp as one of my biggest influences. He is so important to me because none of the work that I make would be possible without his first use of the ready made. His “Fountain” paved the way for all of the conceptual artists that I admire so much (Figure 17). His ready made works demonstrated the integrity of everyday objects and their ability to articulate concept. These Ideas about ready made objects are very important for my work as I often incorporate simple everyday objects to help express my complex concepts in a way that is relatable and approachable. People have a relationship with these objects which makes them more likely to interact with them because they are less “art objects” and more everyday objects. In his opening essay for The Record catalog,
Trevor Schoonmaker discusses how this idea is used by the artists in the show. He says, “The Record: Contemporary Art and Vinyl imagines the record as a lens through which artists view the world, and demonstrates art’s singular ability to reveal the extraordinary, elemental power of everyday objects by transforming them into something new.” ¹ In “Deskilling, Reskilling and Artistic Labour”, a chapter from John Roberts’ The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and the Reskilling of Art After the Readymade, it points out that Duchamp was able transform the labor of the artist from a labor of the hand to a labor of the mind. The article states “Duchamp’s importance lies in his separation of artistic work from the conventional signs of artistic authorship.”² These “conventional signs of artistic authorship” include many aspects still involved in Contemporary Craft, such as the mark of the human hand. The art of Duchamp, however, means art without the hand of the artist. It also means “a split between conception and execution at the point of production”³ since the artist is not always the one that is creating the physical object. However, just because the artist is no longer making the physical objects does not mean that the art of the object is lessened. “Deskilling in art is not the same as deskilling in productive labour…Artistic labour does not suffer a diminishment of sensuousness and value. Rather, the sensuousness of artistic labour is transmuted and deflected into immaterial forms of labour.”⁴ These “immaterial forms of labour” are the labors of the mind that I previously mentioned. This makes other things such as installation, arrangement, and material choices more important than the physical making of the art object.

² John Roberts, “Deskilling, Reskilling and Artistic Labour” from The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and the Reskilling of Art After the Readymade (London ; New York : Verso, 2007) 81
³ John Roberts, “Deskilling, Reskilling and Artistic Labour” from The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and the Reskilling of Art After the Readymade (London ; New York : Verso, 2007) 83
⁴ John Roberts, “Deskilling, Reskilling and Artistic Labour” from The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and the Reskilling of Art After the Readymade (London ; New York : Verso, 2007) 87-89
I would also like to mention Pop Art as an influence that may be less obvious than some of the other artists I will be discussing. My mother was in art school during the late 1960’s and early 1970’s and as a result studied a lot about Pop Art and other contemporary art movements of the time. I think that her interest in and knowledge of Pop Art was something that was always present in my childhood and resulted in a deep love of artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Jim Dine, and most of all, Andy Warhol. This love of Pop Art that has been ingrained in me helps to account for my affinity towards blowing with spin molds, which, as I mentioned, I have always equated with Warhol’s silk screens. I think that Pop Art also explains my tendency to want multiples of everything. Just as Warhol made dozens of Campbell’s Soup Cans and Brillo Boxes, I always want to have a whole bunch of everything, whether or not it is necessary to convey the concept for the piece (Figure 18). Something that is beginning to become more evident to me in my investigations of rock music is the many connections between Pop Art and the popular music of the same time period. Many of these artists and musicians knew each other and were able to provide the soundtrack for the artwork and the visuals for the music. This is evident just in the many album covers created by Andy Warhol and many other Pop Artists.

Perhaps my biggest artistic influence is Yoko Ono. This is in no small part because of her connections and the projects that she did with John Lennon, a man I have admired since my early teens. However, there are
many things that I admire about her work and try to incorporate into mine. First is the Fluxus idea of condensation. The Fluxist artists, including Yoko Ono, believed in condensing a very large concept into as little visually as possible. The influence of this idea is why my work is often very simple and using very little color or decoration. I try to use in my work only that which is necessary to convey the idea. Another thing that I admire about Yoko Ono’s work is the hint of playfulness and irony. For example, at a show at the Museum of Modern Art over the summer, Ono had written very small statements directly on the wall in corners, between paintings, on the edges of walls, even on the floor (Figure 20). I found this somewhat game of hide and seek to be much more engaging that the many other giant paintings just hanging on the wall. I found myself only looking for the messages Yoko Ono had hid for me, and almost ignoring the other masterpieces around me. Also at the Museum of Modern Art at this time was a *Wish Tree* by Ono (Figure 19). This piece highlights another aspect of her work that I wish to incorporate into my work: interactivity. In *Wish Tree*, the instructions say:

Wish Tree for MOMA

Make a wish.
Write it down on a piece of paper.
Fold it and tie it around a branch of the wish tree.
Ask your friend to do the same.
Keep wishing.
Yoko Ono  
2010  

These Instructions not only ask viewers to participate while they are standing in front of the piece, but to keep participating for the rest of their lives as they “Keep wishing.” This level of active participation from viewers is something that I feel like I have not focused enough on in graduate school. Though many of the pieces I have highlighted in the first section involve participation, I feel that being part of a craft program has led me more towards object making and away from the more ephemeral, interactive work that I perhaps should have been focusing on. However, for my MFA show, I have been trying to get back to this idea of not only allowing visitors to view my work, but to also touch and interact with it.

One artist that I am greatly influenced by more scientifically and technically is Stephen Cartwright (Figure 21). I have loved his work since I was first introduced to it by his graduate school room mate: my undergraduate mentor, Ché Rhodes. I greatly admire his work because he is able to use scientifically collected data in a way that avoids becoming cold and impersonal. This is something that I have struggled with in my work: the ability to use science and data in a way that is both interesting and engaging, but also personal and relatable. I also greatly admire his use of 3D imaging programs, such as Rhino, the program I use to design my 3D prints. He uses these programs not to create weird, impossible to sculpt objects as many artists who use this
technology do. Instead, he uses this technology to create three dimensional representations of the data he has collected. I also appreciate his work because he is similarly interested in analog versus digital. He records all of his data in an analog format (paper and pencil) and then uses digital technologies to help create his work I was fortunate to have a studio visit with him in the first semester of my second year and thus far, it has been the highlight of my graduate experience. He liked my work and encouraged me to trust myself and not always listen to what those around me say. This is something that I really needed to hear at this point in graduate school, that I might actually know what I am doing sometimes. And to hear this from an artist I admire so much was just so encouraging.

As I mentioned, it was somewhat hard for me to think of rock music as a subject for fine art, even though it has played a fairly significant role in my life. So I was a little surprised to find out about an entire show entitled *The Record: Contemporary Art and Vinyl* at the Nasher Museum at Duke University that opened this past fall (Figure 22). I was not able to attend this exhibition, but I did purchase the catalog so I was able to see the artists and pieces in the show, as well as read numerous essays about the importance of vinyl records and its role in art over the years. This show is really important to me because it validated my work as a
legitimate and contemporary subject. Of all the artists featured in this show, the one I am most inspired by is Christian Marclay (Figures 23 and 24). I was able to see some of his pieces in person at The Whitney and The Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. I appreciate his work so much because, as with Fluxist work, it is often very simple and elegant, but represents a much more complex concept. For example, the piece of his that I saw in Chicago involved the floor of a room completely covered with vinyl records which visitors were allowed to walk on. Marclay then played and sold these records saying that everyone who walked on them contributed to the alteration of these records and that the records contained a “record” of everyone who walked on them. Another artist featured in this catalogue that I find very inspiring is Lyota Yagi (Figure 25). Her piece in the catalogue features an ice record of the sounds of the glaciers in the Antarctic. In this piece, the record melts as it is played. I am particularly drawn to this piece because I feel like it relates to my wax record piece where the records destroy themselves as they are played.

**B. Rock n’ Roll Music**

Rock music has continued to be extremely important throughout my life and saved me in many ways. In high school, when I had trouble fitting in, it was the guys that played in bands and listened to classic rock that accepted me (and my Beatles obsession). It was rock music that kept me company when I moved to a new city for college and didn’t know anyone. Rock music
helped me connect with my boyfriend that I have been dating for over four years now, and it gave us some of our favorite activities: going to concerts, playing Rock Band, and digging through the record stacks. And it is rock music that gave me the subject for my MFA show.

The musician that has had the single biggest influence on me is John Lennon and the Beatles (Figure 26). From the moment I first really listened to the Beatles at the age of 12 or 13, I was hooked. I never went back to listening to popular music and rarely listen to music made since my birth. John Lennon has been so influential to me because in all of his pursuits, music, art, writing, I could always tell that there was something more behind the surface. He was always witty and ironic and never afraid to challenge convention or the idea of what a song or art piece was. When I first heard “Revolution 9”, a conceptual music piece by Lennon, featured on the White Album, everything changed. I had a whole new definition of what music and art could be. I don’t know if I can adequately express exactly how much of an influence he has had on me, but I know that he has been the person that I most look up to for the ten years of my life when I truly became who I am. It is strange to think about now, but of course little 13 year old Amanda, clutching her first edition white vinyl pressing of The White Album, was destined to make this thesis work, with rock music as a subject and heavily influenced by Yoko Ono and Conceptualism, is exactly the work I should be making.
As far as contemporary music is concerned, I am most influenced by the Black Keys (Figure 27). The Black Keys are a two piece rock/blues band from Akron, Ohio that just won three Grammy’s for their most recent album, *Brothers*. To me, their music is what all music should sound like. Their music just seems like the music that is in my soul. I have been listening to almost nothing but this band since at least August so it is inevitable that their music has influenced my work. This band also plays a major role in the photo installation leading up to my thesis show since I have seen them in concert twice in the past year: once from the fifth row, and once from the first. It should also be noted that The Black Keys do a lot to support the place where art and music intersect. I love the cover of *Brothers* because it is like a piece of Fluxus art. It simply says “This is an album by the band The Black Keys. The name of this album is Brothers.” The band also releases a different limited-edition, hand screen printed poster at each of their extensive number of tour dates.

I am greatly inspired by going to any rock concert in general. Rock concerts inspire my work because they are the only opportunity for me to have a full visceral experience the music that I love so much and to see the musicians in person. As Bruce Baugh states in his essay “Prolegomena to Any Aesthetics of Rock Music”, that “rock is concerned with the matter of music…by “matter” I mean the way music feels to the listener, or the way that it affects the listener’s body.” ⁵ Baugh goes on to say in his essay that the only way to experience this “matter” is through live concerts, which is why it is crucial to attend them if you want to truly experience rock music. At a concert, you can hear the loudness and experience the “material or ‘visceral’ properties of rock (that) are registered in the body core, in the gut, and in the muscles

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and sinews of the arms and legs, rather than in any intellectual faculty of judgment.”

These concert experiences are also important because they create a community experience that is so different than the way many have become accustomed to listening to music, alone on their headphones. These communities exist not just between those that were at the same concert, but also those that have seen the same band at different venues. For example, one of my fellow graduate students, Jacob Sorenson, has seen The Black Keys in concert five times, and I have seen them twice. We have had a lot of fun sharing our different stories from the concerts. I also met a man at Deep Groove, a record store here in Richmond, who has also seen The Black Keys a few times. As we waited in line next to each other on Record Store Day, we found that we had an instant connection and talked about our experiences at length.

Because many of the musicians I listen to are deceased, I am not able to see them live in concert. This is one reason why I have so many vinyl records (Figure 28). I feel that these records give me the closest and most authentic connection with these older musicians because it is the original format that this music was recorded on. In his essay for The Record catalog, Mac McCaughan describes this idea as “a bridge, the physical incarnation of the connection between the artist and the fan.” However, I also have many records that have been pressed contemporarily. I think this is because of the richness and depth of sound that comes in an analog format. Another reason why records are so important to me is the relationships they help to foster. For example, my

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boyfriend and I’s favorite activity to do together is to go to record stores and look through the stacks. We do this no matter what city we are in, and if we are not in the same city, we call each other while we are looking through all of the records. My boyfriend’s parents have at least 1000 records. When the four of us are together, we take turns picking records to play, and sit around the turntable talking and listening to music. This is another example of the way that rock music is able to create and foster communities and a reason why myself and others feel so connected to rock music.

C. Mr. Roboto: Science and Technology

When I was in the first grade, I wanted to be a paleontologist, not an artist. Later, as the television show *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* became popular, I became really draw to forensic science. In fact, I think I have seen nearly every episode in the eleven years it has been on TV. I think that watching this show so much at a time when I was beginning to form my personality and my ideas about the world had an effect on me. As I mentioned, I even received a minor in Forensic Anthropology in undergraduate school. As part of my studies, I was taught many scientific techniques for observing and collecting data. Many of these techniques found their way into the wok for my BFA show and continue to influence my work. I often incorporate a clean, laboratory aesthetic, scientific instruments, and visual representations of data. Even as I have begun to deal with a less scientific subject matter, I am still treating it in a scientific way. I still keep my work very clean and white and am still using charts and graphs to display information about records. While in undergraduate school, I became friends with many engineering students. They stressed to me the importance of making something work in the
simplest way possible. This is something that I try to do with my work, to try to convey the concept in the simplest way possible and without a lot of excess visual information. Being so close to so many people outside of the art world and in fields that deal so much with data and innovation has really kept me grounded. It has kept me from getting overly involved in the visual aspects, and more concerned with simple ways of conveying an idea.

During my time at graduate school I have been taking classes in 3D printing, Rhino, and the CNC Router. Learning these new technological processes has had a huge impact on me and my work. I think I am so attracted to this technology because of how accurate it can be. It allows me to design something in the computer and then print or route the object absolutely perfectly as many times as I want. This is somewhat related to the wooden spin molds I was using before, however it reproduces things with a much greater degree of accuracy. One thing that I am particularly excited about is the newly developed ability to make 3D prints out of many different materials such as ceramics, metals, and most importantly, glass. Technically this is exciting because it gives the opportunity to create glass objects in one piece that is not possible through any other technique, such as complex interior spaces. Another thing that is exciting for me about 3D printing in glass is that it gives me the opportunity to use glass, a material that I love, without the historical and traditional associations that are connected with conventional glass making techniques. Glass 3D prints are glass without craft. For my thesis work, part of which deals the analog and digital formats, these new technologies promise a more unfamiliar way to represent digital forms of music. This gives me the ability to reference digital music formats without having to actually use MP3 players or play digital music files.

III. Thesis Work

A. You Won’t See Me: The futility of capturing the ephemeral
For as long as I can remember I have had a deep love of music: from Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* video that I watched repeatedly as a toddler, to attending local concerts in high school, and now as I have amassed a collection of over 300 records. However, I still do not understand it. I do not understand how to read music, how to compose a song, or even where music exists in the first place. It is this complex phenomenology of music that lends itself so well to conceptual work. This type of works allows for representing not only the physical manifestations that music can take such as written or printed lyrics and music, original pressings, records and CDs. However, conceptual work is also able to represent the more ephemeral aspects of music, such as the sound of the music, the performance, or even MP3 files, by itself being ephemeral and existing in large part in the viewer’s mind. It is the echo of this fleeting moment when we experience music that I am trying to capture in my work. This idea of trying to capture that moment when rock music feels so real and keep it with you in a tangible form is something that I have done in all the pieces in and leading up to my show. One important piece leading up to my thesis work is a photo installation of over 300 photos that I took at concerts in the past year (Figure 29). These photos are a good example of me trying to capture and contain the concert experience and keep it with me forever. Even while at the concert I would find myself taking photo after photo but not truly experiencing. These photos, while recording the event, do not capture the moment. The wax records and wine glasses work in a similar way. Both contain music, but as time passes the music disappears. The wax records are play-able and contain the music of the B side of *Abbey Road* by the Beatles. However, as the records are played and the music is heard, the records degrade and become more and more unplayable. In his essay,
“Beware of Gramomania: The Pleasures and Pathologies of Record Collecting” for *The Record* catalog, Mark Katz describes records as “impossible objects— they hold that which has disappeared.”8 The wax records “hold that which has disappeared” even more, as the music that is contained on them disappears at such a fast rate. The wine glasses are tuned to play “All You Need is Love,” but as the water in the glasses evaporates the notes change and the song can no longer be played. The 3D printed boxes were made for the specific purpose of containing this ephemeral moment of music that cannot otherwise be contained. These boxes have an interior spiral which allows them to trap sound waves the way that a seashell does. If you listen very carefully you can hear the faint echo of the song trapped inside.

All of these efforts that I have made to try to capture the rock music that I love so much are, however, futile endeavors. There is no way to accurately capture the moment when we truly experience music and feel it in your soul. I am not alone in this futile endeavor, however. People have been trying to record sound and music since the phonograph, developed in 1857 by Parisian inventor Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville and has continued through the present to the extreme of iPods that allow you to carry an entire library of music in your pocket. Though devises such as the iPod do allow you to constantly listen to music and even provide your own soundtrack to your world, I do not think that they always capture the music accurately and even these high quality sound files degrade as we rip them from CD’s and transfer them among computers and devices. This idea of futility and trying to capture the ephemeral relates more broadly to society’s obsession with recording our daily lives in an effort to be able to relive them.

On sites like Facebook and Twitter people compulsively post updates about their day or pictures

of themselves out having fun with friends. Nearly everyone now has a camera on their cell phone that allows them to record any moment they see fit. The pieces for my show, however, have a much more obvious and accelerated futility. My installation of concert photos is very obviously related to this idea of taking photos of a moment in order to keep it forever. However, a photo, no matter how good, is nothing like the experience of being at a concert. Both the wax records and the wine glasses are objects that can contain music. But through the passage of time and continued use the music dissipates. It evaporates away like the water in the wine glasses as even the memory of a musical experience does. The deterioration of the wax records is like an exaggerated version of the deterioration of vinyl records (Figure 30). Just as the ridges of the wax records get scratched off by the needle of a record player, so do the ridges of a vinyl record. Though the vinyl record may be one of the best ways to record sound, it is an impermanent one, as are digital files. This calls to mind the observer effect often discussed in many sciences and anthropology. The observer effect means that anything that is being observed is changed through the act of observation and therefore nothing can be observed in a truly natural state. Similarly, no recording can be heard without some change to the recording occurring. Trevor Schoonmaker discusses this idea in his opening essay for *The Record* catalog, “With each listening, with each scratch, we generate a new and very specific (and deeply nostalgic) *record* that contains within it time and memory, transforming the mass-produced object into something highly personalized that is at the same time a document of our larger social and cultural identity.”9 The sound boxes work differently,

however. These boxes are made specifically to hold this fleeting music. The boxes have an interior spiral so that they can contain the sound of a song in the way that sea shells contain the sound of the ocean. No 3D printed box can truly hold the sound of music the way that no sea shell can hold the sound of the ocean, however, the box resonates the sound from the surrounding environment the way a shell does to create the lost echo of the song one played into the box.

B. Tomorrow Never Knows: Mystery and Discovery

Mystery is such an important part of Rock n’ Roll. It exists in that moment before the music. It is there at a concert when the lights go down and before the artist takes the stage. It is there when you walk into a record store and don’t know what you will find. It is there when you buy a new record and have not opened it yet. However, always following this moment of mystery is a moment of discovery. When the band starts performing, you uncover the perfect record, or find a poster in your new album. Trevor Schoonmaker mentions this “thrill of discovery”\(^\text{10}\) involved in searching though the stacks at a record store in his opening essay for *The Record: Contemporary Art and Vinyl* catalog. My work similarly uses these ideas by at first appearing mysterious but allowing for discovery after further investigation and thought. The wax records appear to be vinyl at first, but then once you notice the peeling and scratching on their surface it becomes apparent that they are wax. This deterioration then becomes much more important because the wax allows it to take place much more quickly than vinyl would. Similarly the wine glasses appear to be just wine glasses sitting on shelves until the concept begins to slowly reveal itself. The first level of discovery involved in this piece begins with the interaction

of the viewer with the glasses. Upon interacting with the glasses the viewer discovers that they make specific sounds and under the right circumstance with the right number of viewers playing at the right time, the specific song that the wine glasses are tuned to might even be discovered. The second level of discovery involves the discovery of the concepts behind the piece. As the viewer begins to think about the level of the water in relation to the black line on the glasses, they might realize that the water level dictates the note that the glasses make. Thus, over time as the water evaporates, the notes change and the music disappears. The 3D printed sound boxes work a little differently, however (Figure 31). They are mysterious because they are a strange object that has never been seen before. Because of their hand-held size and references to sea shells, images of the inner ear, and hollow bodied Les Paul guitars, the objects remain both familiar and unfamiliar. The discovery in this piece also comes when viewers interact with and listen to the prints. If you listen very carefully you can hear a sound similar to the sound you hear when listening to a sea shell. This sound is created by resonating the ambient noise of the room inside the box. However, I like to think that this sound is the faint echo of music once played into the box.

C. All Together Now: Community

As I mentioned, there are many ways in which a community is built around Rock n’ Roll. This includes communities built around bands, record stores, record players, and concerts. Because this idea is so important in Rock n’ Roll, I similarly made my work dependant on a community. For example, the wine glass piece is tuned to play the chorus of “All You Need is Love.” However, this line of music can only be played if there is one person playing each glass
in that way that a song can only be played when each member of a band plays their instrument (Figure 32). The 3D printed boxes are set up for one person to be listening to each box. This references the way in which a number of different people can be listening to different things in listening booths often located in record stores. However, because these pieces are located in such close proximity to each other in the same room, they are forced to work together and create a larger community. Because sound is created in the boxes by resonating noise in the surrounding area, the noise made by the wine glasses become a major contributor to the sound in the boxes, becoming a kind of “feedback”. Thus those interacting with the wine glasses assume the role of band or performer, and those interacting with the boxes assume the role of listener or fan, mimicking some of the communities formed around Rock n’ Roll and at the same time become part of a community centered around their participation with my work.

D. Crossroads: Analog vs. Digital

The dichotomy of analog and digital technologies is something that I encounter on an almost constant basis. I have a collection of over 300 vinyl records and 5 record players, but I also have 2 MP3 players and over 10 gigs of music on my laptop alone. I have a brand new desktop computer plugged into an analog receiver from the 1980’s that also has a record player plugged into it. For someone that has grown up primarily in the digital age, I still find myself connected to analog formats and am always choosing what way I want to experience music at different times. My thesis work touches on this conflict between analog and digital formats in both myself and the music community. Most obviously are the wax records. These records play in exactly the same way as vinyl records do and are truly analog. However, I have also made
digital recordings (that will not be used in my thesis show) of these records playing through a turntable that plugs into a computer and records MP3 files as it plays. I think of the wine glasses as also being analog because they physically store the information to create the song: the levels of water. When water is put in the glass to the line show and a finger is run along the top, music is produced in the same way music is produced when a needle is run over the grooves of a record. However, I see the sound boxes as being both analog and digital at the same time. They are analog because they are made with the conceptual function of physically holding sound waves. I like the think of them as “analog iPods” because they are meant to hold sound in a container small enough to carry in your pocket so you can listen to it later. The spiral shape is also meant to reference not only sea shells but also analog formats such as records and tape reels. Though these boxes have many references to analog, they are digitally produced. It is their obvious computer designed and 3D printed nature that allows them to reference digital music files and the changing shape of the way we now experience music.

E. More Than a Feeling: Subtlety, Coolness, and Creating an Environment

Though my thesis work is primarily conceptual, I have taken a number of aesthetic considerations into account. However, I keep these aesthetic decisions very subtle, so the focus is able to remain on the concepts behind the work and not what is physically seen. By keeping everything surrounding the work black and white, it minimizes their importance and directs attention to the parts of the work that are most central to conveying the concepts. These parts are also kept subtle, however, and are often made of transparent or impermanent materials. Because the concept deals with those moments that are fleeting and ephemeral, they cannot be represented through permanent, massive materials. These moments themselves are subtle, and must be treated with the same subtlety in work. The use of the record is important for this subtlety because, as a single object, it is imbued with so much meaning and personal relation. This physical object thus brings to mind many ephemeral experiences. Trevor Schoonmaker addresses this idea
of the intangible beyond the tangible in his opening essay in *The Record* catalogue: “Vinyl sales are slowly but steadily rising, and records have become increasingly popular as collectors and music lovers long to reconnect with that ineffable quality that extends beyond, but is intrinsic to, a record’s use-something more tangible, intimate, and expressive, an essential property linked to a search for identity and authenticity.”

Though my work does not have the visual glitz and dirt of Rock n’ Roll, I believe that it has something else that Rock does: coolness. Many of the figures of the Rock world are so popular in part because they are just cool. These stars have the power to make the simplest items, such as jeans, white t-shirts, leather jackets, and sunglasses, look hip. My work is “dressed” similarly, all in simple black and white. My hope is that this similar feeling will allow viewers to experience the work in the way that they would experience music. That this “pursuit of one ideal in the language of another, offers a kind of synesthesia by which artists and viewers alike are able to rock, riff, groove, or get down to visual art with the same attendant urgency, fetishism, and visceral immediacy as any audiophile carried along by their favorite tune.”

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Because my thesis work offers little to look at, the environment in which the work exists becomes very important. Though this environment must remain subtle, as I mentioned, a small change to the gallery in which to work is displayed can greatly add to the overall feeling of the work. I decided to change and add elements of the gallery space to be reminiscent of a sound studio or performance stage. Upon researching famous studios such as Abbey Road and Muscle Sholes, I discovered that many of them had wooden floors, presumably to enhance the acoustics of the space. Because the Anderson gallery has marble-like floors, I decided to add a black vinyl laminate floor over top of the existing floor (Figure 34). I did this not only for the look of the black wood, but so that the floor felt like wood when you walked on it and to significantly distinguish my space from the rest of the gallery. It should be noted that the black vinyl of the floor also references black vinyl records (as the wax records appear to be). The second thing that I have done to alter the gallery space is to hang fabric panels on some of the walls (Figure 35). These panels are hung between the back false wall and the two side walls and on the two small walls next to the doorway when you enter the space. These fabric panels are plain white and meant to be an extremely subtle addition to the room, bringing just a little bit of texture and depth to some of the walls. I was inspired by acoustic material used in sound studios and stage curtains as another way of creating a space. Finally, I decided to add stage lights to light my work and the space (Figure 36). Less than a month before installing my thesis show I attended a Robert Plant and the Band of Joy concert. At this concert the performers were surrounded by stage lights served to create a concert/stage atmosphere. I thought that this would be a great but subtle way
to bring more of this feeling into my work, especially since lighting would need to be used for my work anyway. Combined, these small changes to the space create a space that distinguishes itself from the others.

F. A Few More Things to Mention

1. Humor and Irony

Though my thesis work can be very serious and thought provoking at times, I do not think that is without fun and humor. This relates to the somewhat quirky sense of humor found in many pieces of Fluxus artwork. For example, when you first look at the wine glasses, they just look like wine glasses on shelves serving as art. I think that it is funny and interesting that something can at first appear to be nothing and then turn into something. I think of this piece as being really similar to Yoko Ono’s piece where she put an apple on a pedestal. That was it, just an apple. And it was for sale. However, as time passes the apple begins to wither and rot, similarly to the way the water in the wine glasses begins to evaporate, and deeper meanings begin to become clear.

Another way that humor enters into my work is through word play. I refer to the written instruction portion of my pieces as “scores.” This allows them to be Fluxus scores for Conceptual Art and performance and a musical score at the same time. Additionally, in the scores for wine glass piece and the sound box piece it says “Play this piece” and “Listen to this piece” respectively. By using the word “piece” instead of something like “sculpture” it allows the work to be both music pieces and art pieces at the same time.

2. Record as Vessel

In his opening essay for The Record catalog, Trevor Schoonmaker says that for some, “vinyl records have a primarily symbolic function as vessels of culture and memory.”13 This idea of the record is

a vessel is something that really stuck in my mind as related to the wine glass piece. In this piece literal vessels are serving this same symbolic role as vessels that the records are. As these vessels hold the water that creates the notes of a song, they are indeed holding the same aspects of culture and memory as the record of the same song does. This is one reason why I did not want to reveal to viewers what song the glasses were tuned to. While I like the reference of the record as vessel as related to these literal vessels, I did not necessarily want all of these association of culture and memory to come into the mind of the viewer right away.

3. The Anti-Record

Also in his opening essay, Schoonmaker notes that “several artists in the exhibition render original records unplayable and offer new possibilities by creating anti-records out of alternative materials and methods.”14 I think that is important to note how well my wax records fit into this tradition. I used an alternative material, wax, to create a record that destroys itself as it plays, thus rendering itself unplayable. This relates closely with the work of Lyota Yagi that made ice records that melt and alter as they are played and to the work of Yukio Fujimoto who sanded to grooves off of existing records making them unplayable.

Bibliography


Vita

Amanda Briede was born on August 21, 1986 in Covington, Kentucky and is an American citizen. She graduated from Holy Cross High School in Covington, Kentucky in 2004. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in glass and sculpture and a minor in Forensic Anthropology and graduated Summa cum Laude from the University of Louisville in Louisville, Kentucky in 2009. Amanda received her Master of Fine Arts in Craft/Material Studies from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia in 2011. She worked as a student assistant at the Glass Department of the University of Louisville in the summer of 2008. Amanda received the Allen R. Hite Scholarship and the Winthrop Allen Memorial Award from the Allen R. Hite Institute at the University of Louisville in 2008 and 2009 and the Graduate Thesis School from the Graduate School at Virginia Commonwealth University in 2011. She has attended and participated in demonstrations and lectures in four Glass Art Society Conferences and has show work in galleries in Covington, Lexington, and Louisville, Kentucky and in Richmond, Virginia.