



2006

Forging Space

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Forging Space

Documentation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Interdisciplinary Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University

By

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August, 2006

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Artist Statement

I naturally like sculpture. My artistic medium of choice is sculpture because it occupies physical space commands attention and thought. The expressive qualities found in steel are numerous as they are in manipulation of found materials. Both materials involve a process of discovery on an evolving road towards any sculpture's ultimate conclusion. My primary goal is that my sculpture should be personal and capture the viewer's eye, stir his or her subconscious, and serve as a form of communication.

Forging Space

In the Beginning

As a Peace Corps volunteer in Mali, West Africa, I learned many valuable lessons. The best of these was to be resourceful. In daily life and work I also grew to understand the value of reusing materials and recycling in creating art. The Malians used animal hides, gourds, old tires, aluminum cans, and earth baked mud to create original and amazing art work. Returning to the United States, I earned a Master's Degree in Education from George Mason University. When I went abroad, again I acquired a K-12 art position in the Canary Islands. During that time I fell in love with sculpture and painting. Just as the proud people, vast desert, and traditional artwork of the Malians had inspired me, so did the beautiful, warm island of the Canaries. I visited many museums and was impressed with what I saw. I began taking notes and making sketches. I walked the beach to find natural and manmade items that had drifted ashore. These items became the materials I used to create sculptures with my students. Eventually, I discovered a local junk yard and bought a load of scrap materials and my first welder. I began to assemble small constructions as direct, spontaneous impressions of animals and human forms. My work earned the praise of others, faculty as well as parents. This encouraged me to continue experimenting with unusual and diverse materials. During my five years in Mali and the Canary Islands, I lacked the necessary equipment to cut and bend metal. I relied on pure assemblage to produce art. In spite of these limitations my creativity flourished.

Returning to America, I became a vocational arts teacher. This seemed a natural fit because of my past experience in the field of construction. I found, however, that I used much of my free time to concentrate on making art. Equipped now with the necessary tools, I moved beyond the

construction focus of my class toward making forming artistic creations. As my students became excited with this new dimension of instruction, I discovered that I wanted to become a high school art teacher.

I enrolled in the VCU/MIS Program in order to get the art certification required by the state of Virginia. This was a good professional as well as personal decision. It not only put me on my chosen career path, it also allowed me to narrow the scope of my artistic aims and bring focus to my creativity.

Ultimately, I found my talent best suited to the mediums of steel and wood. Courses in other mediums, however, taught me a lot about materials, techniques, and personal expression.

Creating on Canvas

My first VCU painting class was quite daunting. Having no formal training, I approached painting landscapes with little skill but armed with an open attitude and experimental spirit. Since I was unfamiliar with oils and acrylics I tried both and learned their respective qualities. One of my first paintings was a tree *On the Potomac River* (Appendix, 1). Creating a strong contrast of the subject in full sunlight was difficult at first, necessitating improvised shadows to produce light and dark areas. Over time, I learned how to build up translucent layers of paint in order to create illuminating effects. As sculpture is my first love and the area in which I had the most practice and success, I found myself wanting to give my paintings physicality. I discovered that I was most comfortable with a pallet knife and began exercising before each painting. This seemed to help me loosen up and feel confident applying the paint. It also helped me give my work interesting surface qualities.

Furrowed Fields (Appendix, 2), resulted from an assignment to paint a landscape without using green. Another student in my class noticed that my work was heavily textured in the style of Aselum Kiefer. I was not familiar with Kiefer's work, but the next day the student brought me a book about him. I was intrigued with Kiefer's experiments with dramatic depth of field. Unfortunately the personal appeal of deep perspective caused disinterest with the foregrounds to the degree I had difficulty finishing my paintings. At the time, I did not know how to solve this problem. Along with discovering my unique point of view with painting problem, I needed a motivation combined with inspiration to make my work more meaningful. Although I experimented with many styles of painting, the impressionistic styles of Claude Monet and Vincent Van Gogh held the deepest attraction. My attempts to find my own voice with this medium became apparent when I began exhibiting my landscape paintings in art shows along with my sculpture. The paintings seemed out of place. The pastel colors and subjects of my paintings, clashed too much with my wood and metal sculptures. This discovery uncovered a reason I was having difficulty with my impressionistic style landscapes: although I enjoy impressionism in its own right, it's not a good match for my own artistic style.

In my third painting class, I approached the instructor about different styles of painting. He suggested I try to paint in the same manner that I constructed steel. This was a turning point in my painting. The instructor encouraged me to choose subjects that are more geometric in nature. This idea inspired me to try new subject matter. My first painting, *Under Construction* (Appendix 3) was a scene composed a triptych including river barges, a crane, and the Wilson Memorial Bridge. My second painting *To Hatteras* (Appendix, 4) was another bridge based on a photograph.

I also became fascinated with telephone poles and painted a series of transformers and poles in

Prussian blue. Monochromatic colors were used as to convey structural forms. *Interrupted Skies* (Appendix, 5) is a series of paintings whose mood is cold and lonely, similar to the emotions conveyed in Picasso's Blue Period. Moving beyond conventional subjects open up many new possibilities. This new avenue of expression was a better fit for me because of my background in construction and steel. More importantly, this new content I explored seems complementary to my sculpture work. I was becoming a more unified artist.

Process in Steel

Many of my classes were done through independent studies since I live a great distance from where most of the program's classes are held. Because of this I took one class through James Madison University. It was motivating and inspiring to work alongside other artists. Although family and career demands necessitated independent studies, I clearly gained much from being able to bounce ideas off my peers.

I created the *Eye of the Beholder* (Appendix, 6) at JMU during the summer 2004. I began with a scrap of metal shaped in a "U", perfectly suited for base. I then chose an arrangement of pieces of steel of the same thickness and began experimenting with composition. I soon found two pieces nearly the same height and welded them to the base. The shapes interacted well and created harmonious voids of negative space. To counteract lack of clear central focal point, I welded a hoop perpendicular to the floor on top of a vertical piece and intersected the circle with a solid ball from the top of the other vertical shape. I began pondering how the other vertical form would interact with the circle. The finish was flat black and lacking something so I polished some of it and exposed the under painting. I then gilded the ball in gold to create a strong focal point for the

viewer. This created a sense of interaction between the two vertical pieces with opposing ball and circle. I worked hard to create a title that would direct the viewer's thoughts. Finally, I settled on *Eye of the Beholder*. It is a common expression often associated with the field of art. In this case, the expression works on two levels: as an abstract form and/ or an eye ball. Ironically the sculpture "sees" the viewer as the viewer looks at the sculpture.

Process in Wood

In one of my courses I was challenged to do works that provoked a sense of volume. This was challenging as I am more familiar working with linear forms. I decided to try my hand at carving. *To Timbuktu* (Appendix, 8) was carved after I acquired a walnut timber and began my adventure in space. The more I chipped away at the green wood the more connected I felt with the form. While working with my hand adze, I realized that sticking with hand tools would be appropriate to this piece. Recalling the local artisans laboring in the hot sun of Mali, I was inspired to make this piece the result of tools, involving skillful carving and ancient traditions.

During my second independent sculpture class I was encouraged by the instructor to continue with abstract forms. Nevertheless my wood sculpture *The Ballerina*, (Appendix, 7) came to life by accident when I was casually sketching on a napkin. I made three simplified shapes of dancers, transferred them to timbers and cut them out. At first my piece reminded me of "The Three Graces" by Sandro Botticelli. I sensed the forms resembled ballet dancer, but they needed tutus. I fashioned a cardboard disk template from a pizza box. This tilted angle of the resulting "tutus" certainly enlivened the piece. I remade the tutu shapes in hammered copper. This gave the piece dimension, contrast, and visual humor. It was exciting to feel a specific direction at the beginning

of the process and to watch as the forms evolved and emerged.

Conclusion

During my years in the VCU/MIS graduate program I have learned much about the process of art and myself as an artist. The suggestions and guidance of my instructors and the exchange of ideas and opinions with my classmates gave me the momentum and confidence to move forward as an artist. It also helped me focus and find my personal style. Ironically, my outcome mirrored my origin I returned to my background in construction and my appreciation for the Malian lifestyle to find inspiration and expression. Most importantly, my improved skills and enhanced knowledge helped me to become a better teacher. Not only did I learn new techniques and gain practice in new mediums, I also came to realize that beyond basic instruction is the power of guidance and suggestion. My instructors helped me to find myself in my art. To be a successful artist, this is a necessary but difficult step to become a successful artist. I hope to be able to offer the same inspiration for my students.

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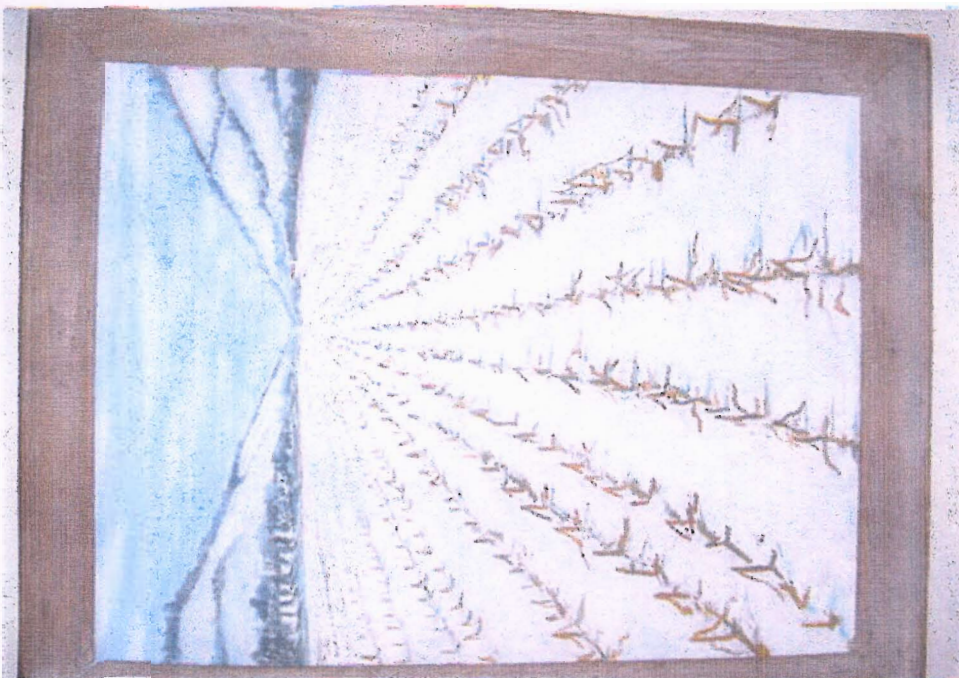
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Appendix

Slide List

1. *On The Potomac*, oil on canvas, 24" x 48", 2004
2. *Furrowed Fields*, oil on canvas, 16" x 24", 2004.
3. *Under Construction*, oil on canvas 24" x 36", 2005
4. *To Hatteras*, oil on board, 28" x 48", 2005.
5. *Interrupted Skies*, Oil on board 28" x 34", 2005
6. *Eye of the Beholder*, welded steel, 26" x 34", 2004
7. *To Timbuktu*, Carved wood and copper, 16" x 87", 2005
8. *The Ballerinas*, carved wood and copper, 26"x 74", 2005



2. Furrowed Fields, OIL ON CANVAS, 16"x24", 2004



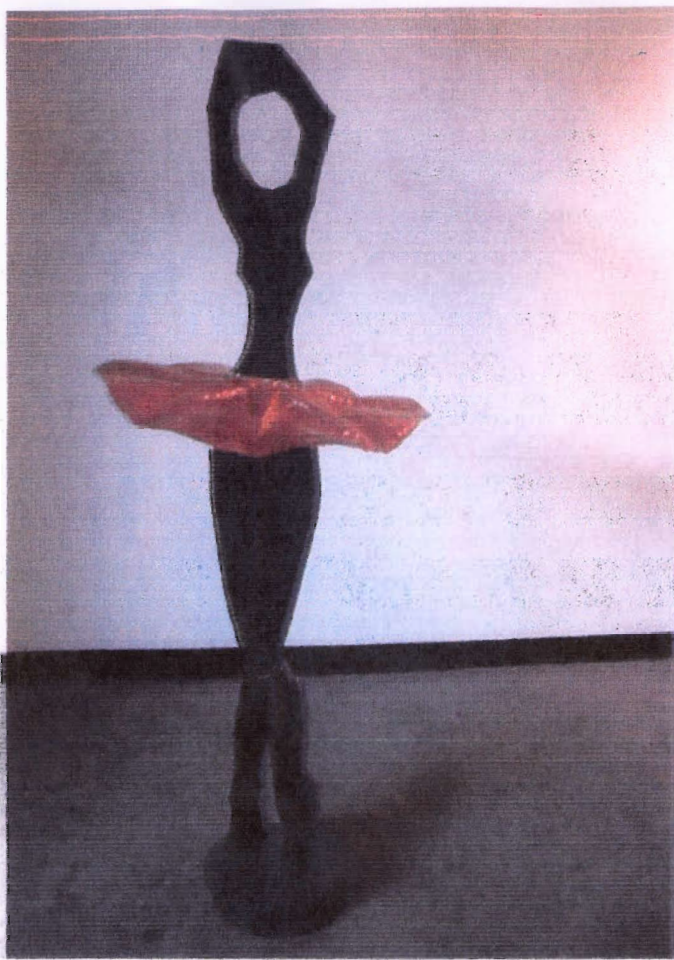
1. ON THE POTOMAC OIL ON CANVAS, 24"x48", 2004



4. TO HATTERAS, OIL ON BOARD 23"x48", 2005



5. INTERRUPTED SKIES, OIL ON BOARD 28"x34", 2005



8. CLOSER VIEW OF 1-3 BAKERINAS, 2005



7. TO TIMBUKTU, CARVED WOOD AND COPPER, 16" X 87", 2005



8. THE GALLEERINAS, CARVED WOOD AND COPPER, 26" X 74", 2005



6. EYE OF THE BEHOLDER, WELDED STEEL, 26" X 34", 2004



3. UNDER CONSTRUCTION, OIL ON CANVAS 24" X 36", 2005

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Education:

1995-2001	Masters of Education Curriculum and Instruction George Mason University Fairfax, Virginia
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1991-1993	Water Resource Manager United States Peace Corps Mali, West Africa

1996-1999 Art Teacher
American School of Las Palmas
Canary, Islands Spain

1999-2001 Technology Education Teacher
Page County High School
Shenandoah, Virginia

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Page County High School
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Exhibitions:

2005 *Reference to Reality*
Master Thesis Exhibition
Annandale, Virginia

2005 *Untitled*
The Warehouse Art Gallery
Luray, Virginia

2004 *Horsing Around*
The Warehouse Art Gallery
Luray, Virginia

2001 *Journeys*
Torpedo Factory Target Gallery
Alexandria, Virginia

- 1999** *Student / Faculty Art Show*
American School of Las Palmas
Grand Canary, Spain
- 1999** *Mother Son Exhibition*
Sycamore House Gallery
Harrisonburg, Virginia
- 1998** *Guest Exhibitor and Speaker*
Escuela Technico de Arrinaga
Grand Canary, Spain
- 1995** *American Indian Arts and Crafts*
Gulliver's Art Gallery
Luray, Virginia