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Tangled Knot Tied

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TANGLED KNOT TIED

by

Shalya Marsh

A THESIS

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In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Art
Under the Supervision of Professor Peter J. Pinnell
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TANGLED KNOT TIED

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University of Nebraska, 2016

Advisor: Peter J. Pinnell

I make formal studies in layering that use abstraction and visual symbols as a metaphor for the complex relationship we as individuals have with language, interpretation, and human interaction. My current work explores ideas of connection through representations of knots and tangles. While knots can signify protection and strength, tangles allude to anxiety.

I rely heavily on format and structure as a means of conveying content. Repetition, contrast, and layering of elements suggest the complexity of relationships. The work is composed of a series of tied knots or tangles, single knot forms in multiple variations, or a combination of multiple elements in one piece. Shadows and voids have the ability to indicate the presence of a form or its absence, and represent distance and longing. I make multiples to satisfy a physical desire for the obsessive process of repetitive making but also address a psychological need to make again and again as a way to confront the anxiety and uncertainty that there is never one interpretation, one right answer, or one correct way.

Making objects over and over again provides distance from the original source. Forms become distorted and distilled through the process of abstraction just as interpretation of meaning occurs when artwork is viewed or words are read. I arrange and rearrange abstracted parts to create visual interest, leaving the viewer to decode the

works visual associations. This process allows the viewer to make their own interpretations, frequently leaving them with additional questions.

The formal devices that I use provide a means for exploration of relationships. The color and surface of the work serve to visually pull elements together or set them apart. Black has authority, but is also associated with loss and sadness. White can be neutral and signify simplicity, while also suggesting emptiness. Porcelain is a material traditionally associated with value, and strength. Fired porcelain is incredibly strong yet may be perceived as fragile. When stretched thin it takes on the shape of what is underneath and reveals forms, both present and absent. Clay is receptive to the touch of the hand, often recording the mark of the maker, but it can also be handled in a way that removes the human touch and negates its materiality. The pairing of vinyl with ceramic elements contrasts permanence and impermanence. These materials fix the forms at a specific moment where the knot or tangle can no longer be tightened or untied. When applied to the wall vinyl conforms to the surface – at times seeming to be part of it, yet incredibly short lived.

I work with vinyl and laser cutters to facilitate the making of multiples. The digital quality of these technologies speak to several things: the implied coldness of the machine made; the distance created in communicating when so many of our interactions occur through digital filters; and the inundation of information and knowledge overwhelming our society. The handmade and the digital collide, coalesce, and intertwine, creating a conversation between the hand or handmade and the digital tools and machine made. The materiality of clay gives way to the evidence of the digital process.

In my work I strive to elicit a visual exploration of form and structure. Initial inspections lead to discoveries as the layering creates the opportunity to reveal what is hidden or induces frustration at not being able to access every aspect of the work. Faint impressions created by the physical impact of one surface on another heighten feelings of distance and tension. Physical manifestations of cast shadows serve to give substance to both objects and their voids but also raise questions as to what is real and what is not. Multiples and abstraction aid in reflecting or obfuscating what is seen, creating interactions that mimic our own inner and interpersonal relationships, interactions that are filled with tension and complexity.







