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A Synthesis of Structures

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A SYNTHESIS OF STRUCTURES

By

Patrick Kingshill

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Art

Under the Supervision of Professor Peter Pinnell

Lincoln, Nebraska

April, 2018

A SYNTHESIS OF STRUCTURES

Patrick Kingshill, M.F.A.

University of Nebraska, 2018

Advisor: Peter Pinnell

I create compositional structures based on a curated catalog of physical and visual relationships that I have cultivated from my daily life. These compositions are intuitive expressions related to my fascination with the many facets of the built and designed world. My arrangements are curious and intriguing and they unify the expansive diversity of my formal inquiries into a cohesive visual and contemplative experience.

Ceramic and wood are my primary mediums. My interest in woodworking is both aesthetically motivated and nostalgic. I was born in a region of northern California that is historically known for its native giant sequoia and redwood trees. The lumber industry thrived during the turn of the 20th century and redwood continues to dominate the architectural vernacular. My appreciation for the material is embedded in my consciousness from my upbringing, and the tradition of woodworking has been passed down for generations in my family. I am aesthetically captivated by the intrinsic color of wood, the unpredictable and gestural pattern of the grain, and how working with it, especially the smell of it, can conjure memories of my childhood. In this exhibition I mostly use white oak that is locally sourced here in Nebraska. It represents the place that I now call home, and is the ideal visual complement to my ceramics. Clay is a material that I have a visceral reaction to both in the process of working with it, and in its aesthetic

qualities as fired ceramic. The plasticity of clay and the ways in which it responds to my hand and my tools leave a desirable record of the process of making. Its transition into ceramic through the firing process creates a depth of color and texture that has a captivating intrinsic quality that I decidedly embrace. The pairing of wood and clay is fitting because of my personal connection to the materials and also because of the association these materials have with craft traditions. While my practice is enriched by the world of vessel and furniture making, I purposefully shift the context of the objects I make from that of utility to a more metaphorical and imaginative space.

For years, I have nurtured my fascination of the built environment as an observant wanderer. Recurring themes in architecture, furniture, vessels and vehicles resonate in my memory and compel me to interrogate them further. The sources that spark my curiosity are vast and varied. I make an effort to harness that sense of diversity when creating my work, but also seek an elusive sense of clarity and cohesion from the amalgamation of my influences. The *built environment* is a term that describes all things designed and built to facilitate human habitation and daily life. I am interested in how the many facets of design are dictated by the natural world, yet are also disruptive to it. For example, the foundation of any building is to some degree dictated by the landscape it rests on, while simultaneously disrupting that landscape by implanting into it. I find this relationship to be comparable to the way a vessel rests on an article of furniture, or the way that piece of furniture rests on a floor. In each relationship the objects are reacting to one another in a way that is dependent on its counterpart. Even in two things as different as a teacup and a bell tower, there is a distinct attention to how such objects interact with

their surroundings. The sensibility of those interactions is designed by their makers, and as a maker myself I endeavor to find links between vastly different disciplines by drawing formal inspiration from them. The similarities between the formal tropes utilized in craft, design and architecture speak to our broader understanding of what we build, how we construct the things we use, and what we recognize as functional, habitable, and aesthetically pleasing. *A Synthesis of Structures* is a collection of objects that embody formal aspects of the built world. It's a collection of ideas amassed into one visual experience that prompts the viewer to consider the human connection we have to the objects that surround us, and how they help to define us. Whether it is the house we live in, a heritage dining table or a precious keepsake box, we have the capacity to be emotionally bonded to the things that we live among. My work probes that emotional capacity both in our conscious and subconscious connection to our surroundings.

My work carries a number of ideas from the history of fine art. I relate my work in many ways to the traditions of still life painting, especially to the work of Giorgio Morandi. He paints delicately arranged vessels on a neutral field with an expressionist, whimsical sensibility. The placement of these vessels is unmistakably precise and intentional, and evokes a metaphorical conversation between them. The objects that I place in a composition rely on one another, and their proximity helps determine the visual density and coherence of the piece. Also in the tradition of still life painting, the frame of an image serves as the specific terminal edge of the curated field of vision. The surface of the main supporting structures in my compositions serves this function, and it is important to me that the work is absorbed in its entire visual profile in addition to the

finer details. I also draw from the idea of formal abstraction, especially from constructivist artists in Brazil. Sergio De Camargo was a sculptor that took simple cylindrical and rectilinear forms and altered and arranged them in ways that imbued them with a new and exciting vitality. This sensibility inspires my approach to design, and I find the simplicity of the initial forms to be elegant and poetic. In my studio practice I strive to distill my subject matter down to the precise formal aspect of it that I am interested in, intentionally leaving behind the finer details that would reveal the objects identity. This void of implied meaning creates a space for the viewer to create his or her own metaphor and narrative within the greater composition.

Though the initial conception of a piece comes from a very personal idea, my work seeks a relatable response from my viewers. In the piece *Towering*, the vessels are arranged in a tightly packed conglomeration, some even so close that they touch each other. I am fascinated by urban cityscapes, and wanted to make a piece that conveyed the feel of a tight bundle of skyscrapers. On a recent trip from my home in Nebraska to the east coast, I planned a route that took me to all the major cities along the way. It was a thrill to see from a distance the view of the entire cityscape, and how the tallest buildings were crammed toward the middle. The word ‘towering’ is an adjective, but I started thinking of it as a verb, personifying the buildings and thinking of them as competing against one another. The still life that I made is raised to a height that allows the viewer to investigate each individual vessel, and peer through the spaces between, as if you were walking the metaphorical sidewalks of this cityscape made of pots. In contrast, *Passing* is a piece that is reflective of the more rural landscape that I now call home. It is set on a

long, narrow surface, which implies travel. Placed along the 'path' are various objects inspired by my commute to and from my studio, and other structures and aspects of the landscape that I come across as I navigate from place to place. The tall, slender ceramic object is loosely inspired by rock cairns, which are stacks of rocks made to indicate a landmark along a trail. In this piece I also introduce gypsum cement as a material to act as an intermediary between the ceramic elements and the metaphorical landscapes. The whiteness of this material creates sharp highlights in the overall composition, and it adds a satisfying detail to the patterns created by the woodwork.

As a whole, this exhibition is an homage and a study of the many aspects of the built environment that have captivated me as a maker and as an appreciator of design and architecture. The things we make are driven by our deepest human needs and desires, and this body of work reflects on how we have embedded our own humanity into the objects we make.



Passing

White Oak, Ceramic, Glaze, Gypsum Cement, Guitar String

(Left) **Fur Me**

Elm, Ceramic

(Right) **Towards the Sun**

Elm, Ceramic





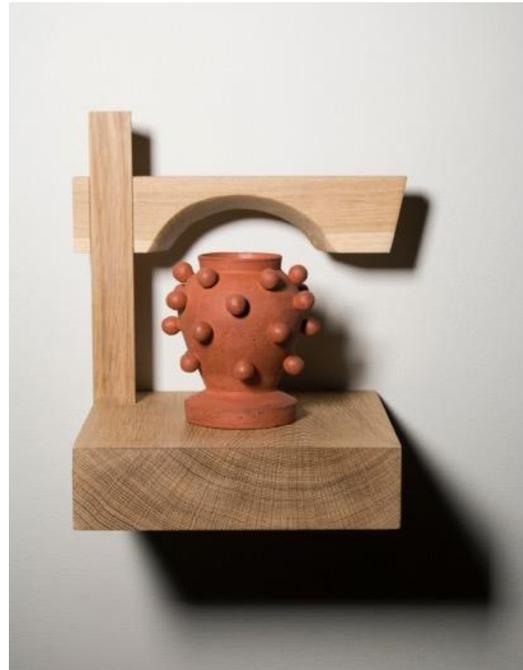
Peering Out
Elm, Ceramic

Rising
Elm, Ceramic



Give Me Shelter
Elm, Ceramic

Clockwise from top left: **Rerouting** White Oak, Ceramic. **When It Blows, It Blows** White Oak, Ceramic, **Due East** White Oak, Ceramic, **Decorative Deconstruction** White Oak, Ceramic





Towering
White Oak, Ceramic, Glaze





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