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Measured Chance

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MEASURED CHANCE

by

Brian Richard Kluge

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

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MEASURED CHANCE

Brian Richard Kluge, M.F.A.

University of Nebraska, 2011

Advisor: Peter Pinnell

In my practice I use clay to make enigmatic, non-representational sculptures that employ reductive geometry and archetypal forms. By pressing clay into a variety of molds, it is my intention to contrast a primal crudeness with a skilled precision in my handling of the material. I fabricate objects that range in scale from handheld to human-size. In this work, I combine references to the forms of manmade things with surfaces that allude to age and wear resulting from natural patinas that occur on stone, wood, or metal. This body of work shares qualities with the Minimalist and Earth Art works of the 1960s, but is also in such company as contemporary sculptors David Nash, Ursula von Rydingsvard, Richard Long, and Tim Rowan.

The enigmatic character of this work is similar to the character of an unknown archaeological artifact encountered in a museum. Both have qualities of objects that exist outside of their time and place. Inferences can be made from the familiar aspects of each object, but ultimately the narrative possibilities are left open-ended. Therefore, the experience of the object takes precedence over forming a narrative for the object. This is precisely where I want to lead the viewer.

Contrast defines this work: unknown/familiar, organic/geometric, old/new, rough/smooth, dark/bright, heavy/light, random/ordered, bold/timid. I am interested in exploring the dialogue between the extremes of these dualities. It is my intention that these contrasts have the effect of creating intellectual, emotional, and sensory dissonance in the viewer. This is another way that the sense of mystery in the work is

characterized. The co-existence of polarities results in tension, but the overall effect is resolution. This process imbues the work with an unusual sort of “beauty.”

The sense of beauty in my work deals with ideas of decline, imperfection, and irregularity. In 2002, I had the opportunity to travel in Western Europe when there were some major art restorations taking place. I was drawn to the alluring surfaces of many of the white marble statues whose surfaces had blackened since the industrial revolution. The combination of pollutants with water and wind over a period of time had emphasized the contours of the form and revealed previously unseen patterns. In addition, the weathered surfaces bore witness to the history of the work. The “restoration” of these works of art essentially attempted to erase the effects of time. I believe this demonstrates a social and intellectual repulsion with age and change. Within me, it set up a troubling dynamic of sensory appeal and mental repulsion. I had a visceral attraction to the surfaces of the sculptures, coupled with a disgust at the many years of pollution necessary to create them.

Life is rich with and enriched by such contradictions. They offer us opportunities to reconsider our predilection towards logical intellectualism. Logic has value, but an emotional component is often needed to resolve the co-existence of contrasting extremes. I expect this work to elicit both intellectual and emotional responses. I intend for the attributes in the work to mirror elements that I recognize within myself. By imbuing it with the qualities laid out in this abstract, the work is a metaphorical reflection of my understanding of life and the world.