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Density

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Density

by

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A THESIS

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For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

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This work is porcelain tableware and architectural ornament. I choose the context of function because the things we use contain purpose both actual and metaphorical. They are concrete, connected to our lives by necessity, regardless of meaning or aesthetics. Form and surface are more than the residue of concept, they must be specifically engineered for right application. This work, be it shelter, light, containment, etc. is the foundation for the intimacy we feel toward our belongings. That said, utility is only one facet of the objects I make. A Styrofoam cup works well enough, but its expressive potential is limited. The living environment is comprised of a million details taken for granted, and more often than not objects of use fall into this category. I made this work because I believe that the everyday does have the power to move us.

The starting point of my visual content is materiality. Clay is completely malleable; it records the most delicate touch with minute precision. This kind of sensitivity allows me to work physically, recording kinetic energy to be frozen in the firing. If my mark can properly express the vulnerability of wet clay that memory of softness will remain in the vitreous product. This transformation sets up a series of interesting dichotomies: Direct, aggressive touch thinly cast contrasts frailty with vigor. The finished piece is hard but there is evidence of softness, once in motion, now stillness. Another material attribute specific to porcelain is translucency; thin porcelain transmits light like alabaster. When turned off, the light fixtures appear to be heavy and massive.
They become weightless when lit. These contradictions make the work seem awkward, just enough to make the viewer curious.

I have always been drawn toward abstract pattern. To generate original sets I stripped away everything but process and materials and considered them conceptually. Fingerprints are the result of organic growth, a universal symbol of individuality; fingers also happen to be my tools. The shape and number of the chandelier scales is the result of a desire to achieve delicacy in a single mass. Casting is dependent on inversion and this gave me the opportunity to eliminate visual thickness thereby achieving the illusion of transparency in a solid field. I’ve tried to fashion my process around patterns of change in the natural world where form and surface are the consequence of process and purpose. By deconstructing nature’s algorithms of growth and decay I was able to access the key to repetition without sterility. Evolution is simply subtle variance in series. Order underlies all things, tension results in the breakdown; the anomaly is the heart of the pattern.

My work is based on facilitating the natural beauty of the materials and the expressive potential of my process within the context of function. I believe this strategy brings my work nearer to the moment when the machinations of my mind disappear and all that’s left is the thing itself; elegant, visceral, enough. Confronted with the futility of perfect understanding I focus on the details: a sensitive mark, a fortuitous drip, or simply a beautiful cup.
Jesse Ross

Image List

1–20 – Not Labeled