



Hybrid symbolism [slide]
by Dewane Franklin Hughes

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
Montana State University
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Abstract:
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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of

Master of Fine Arts

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

February 1996

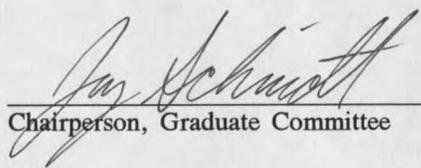
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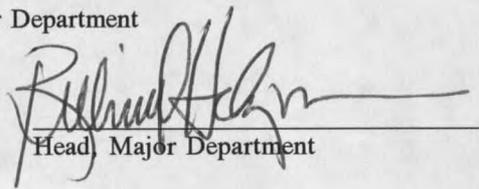
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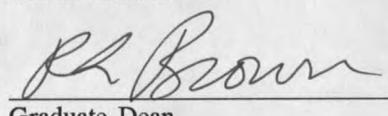
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Dewane Franklin Hughes

This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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Approved for the Major Department
Date 4/1/96 
Head, Major Department

Approved for the College of Graduate Studies
Date 4/21/96 
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ARTIST'S STATEMENT

In my most recent work I take objects that are significant to myself and transform them through a change in scale, materials, and context. By combining these objects I contrast the identity of each with the other. Through this process a deeper meaning and unusual narrative appears. Some sculptures, such as "Tunnel" deal more directly with specific concepts and read more literally. Others are more ambiguous and deal with provocative relationships that exist between different forms and objects. For instance, the idea of making a coffin in the shape of an old buck saw did not come from any specific philosophy or idea, but rather it was inspired by a curious combination of the two unrelated objects.

I use the images of tools because they are versatile and visually interesting. An object such as a hammer, saw, or wrench is interesting not only because of its own formal elements, but also because these familiar forms clearly allude to other things such as human figures, weapons, vehicles, or animals. For example, in my canoe sculpture, I construct an object that is identifiable as both a wrench and a snake. By combining formal elements in this way, I create a hybrid meaning that presents a new symbolism to the viewer.

My vocabulary consists of religious icons that I have retrieved from my past. Raised in a devoutly religious household, I have a firm knowledge of numerous biblical images and stories. These images have such historical significance and symbolism that when altered they do not lose their meaning, but rather create a hybrid meaning. For example, in "Tunnel," in order to emphasize the peculiar relationship between luck and religion, I juxtapose religious symbols with symbols of luck. I find luck to be an interesting concept especially in relation to religion. I created a new religious icon by combining the religious acronym "INRI," with

the image of the four leafed clover. The position of the symbols on top of a ladder is not only difficult or seemingly dangerous to reach, but also implies the involuntary use of a tool, in this case the shovel, if the ladder is used.

In my work, the object transformation is most successful when the actual original object does not appear in the sculpture. I chose to create my own canoe rather than use the genuine article. In its stylized form, the canoe is made plumper to fit better with the cartoon-like, or "Pop" aesthetic of the wrench. By recreating the object formally, I am not competing with any notion of pure function, and give the recreated object the power to transform its identity.

Influenced by Claes Oldenburg, I like the way he changes the meaning of an object, as well as his sense of humor. I am also intrigued by working on a large scale that both commands the gallery space and creates an environment that engages the viewer. The positioning of these large sculptures interacts with the gallery space in a way that encourages the viewer to walk around and under each of the individual pieces.

Likewise, I am interested in the work of Jim Dine because of his use of tools as subject matter. I relate closely to his extensive exposure to numerous kinds of tools when he worked in his father's hardware store, and his interest in tools as strictly visually interesting objects.

Another artist who has influenced my work is H.C. Westerman because I appreciate his ability to manipulate wood and transform it into having the characteristics of other materials. I like the fact that the viewer can see evidence of process and craftsmanship in the final product.

The most powerful influence, however, has been the culture in which I was raised. "Sesame Street" and cartoons such as "Hong Kong Phooey," combined with the car artists of

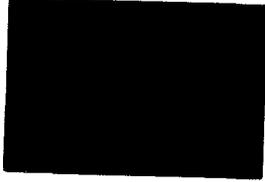
the 50's, 60's, and 70's comprised a majority of the visual information that made an impression on me and continues to do so today. Hot rod flames, neon, and bulky cartoon-like forms are all elements of popular culture that I use in my work today.

Odd relationships that existed between the popular culture around me and the Pentecostal religious traditions within my home have always intrigued me. The bible in my father's hand, and the tattoo on his arm, illustrate that same unique relationship that fuels the ideas behind my sculptures.

LIST OF SLIDES

1. Untitled, wood, variable dimensions, 1996
2. Untitled, wood, variable dimensions, 1996
3. Untitled, mixed media, 12' x 10' x 14', 1996
4. "Coffin," wood, 8.5' x 4' x 5.5', 1996
5. Untitled, mixed media, variable dimensions, 1996
6. "Tunnel" installation view, mixed media, 3' x 4.5' x 11.5', 1996
7. "Tunnel" studio view, mixed media, 3' x 4.5' x 11.5', 1996

Dewane Hughes
Untitled



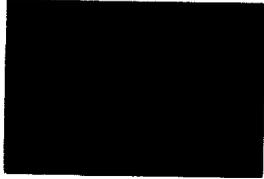
Wood
Variable Dimensions

Dewane Hughes
Untitled



Wood
Variable Dimensions

Dewane Hughes
Untitled



Mixed Media
12'x10'x14'

Dewane Hughes
Untitled "Coffin"



Wood
8.5'x4'x5.5'

Dewane Hughes
Untitled



Mixed Media
Variable Dimensions

Dewane Hughes
"Tunnel"



Mixed Media
3'x4.5'x11.5'

Dewane Hughes
"Tunnel" Studio view



Mixed Media
3'x4.5'x11.5'





