

SOME STRINGS ATTACHED

by

Ernest Sumner Forward

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Master in Fine Arts

in

Art

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

April 2012

©COPYRIGHT

by

Ernest Sumner Forward

2012

All Rights Reserved

APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Ernest Sumner Forward

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

Josh DeWeese

Approved for the School of Art

Vaughan Judge

Approved for The Graduate School

Dr. Carl A. Fox

STATEMENT OF PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master's degree at Montana State University, I agree that the Library shall make it available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

If I have indicated my intention to copyright this thesis by including a copyright notice page, copying is allowable only for scholarly purposes, consistent with "fair use" as prescribed in the U.S. Copyright Law. Requests for permission for extended quotation from or reproduction of this thesis in whole or in parts may be granted only by the copyright holder.

Ernest Sumner Forward

April 2012

LIST OF IMAGES

Image	Page
1. Cooler Boat, 2012, Ceramic Mixed Media, 8'H x 5' W x 6' L.....	10
2. Cooler Boat, (Detail).....	11
3. Cooler Boat, (Detail).....	12
4. Cooler Boat, (Detail).....	13
5. Cooler Boat, (Detail).....	14
6. Cooler Boat, (Detail).....	15
7. 200 Ceramic Pins, 2012, Slip Cast Ceramic Pins, Wood, 13" H x 6'W x 14'L	16
8. 200 Ceramic Pins, (Detail).....	17
9. 20 Ceramic Bowling Balls.....	18
10. 20 Ceramic Bowling Balls, (Detail).....	18
11. Installation View.....	19
12. Colliding Ships, 2012, Ceramic, Mixed Media, 14' H x 20' W x 4'L	20
13. Colliding Ships (Detail).....	20
14. Colliding Ships (Detail).....	21
15. Installation View.....	21
16. Installation View.....	22
17. Installation View.....	23
18. Installation View.....	24
19. Installation View.....	25
20. Performance Installation View	26

LIST OF IMAGES – CONTINUED

Image	Page
21. Performance Installation View	26
22. Performance Installation View	27
23. Performance Installation View	28
24. Performance Installation View	29
25. Performance Installation View	30
26. Performance Installation View	31
27. Performance Installation View	32
28. Performance Installation View	33
29. Performance Installation View	34
30. Performance Installation View	35
31. Post Performance View.....	36
32. Post Performance View.....	37

ABSTRACT

I want everyone to see this work as I do, so I felt the need to create a new word that best describes my work. This new word is Haptiacle, which is formed by combining two words Haptic and Spectacle. Haptiacle: A hands on event or performance, designed for viewer transformation that is visually striking that can be experienced, especially something of a remarkable or impressive nature accessible to all.

This body of work is installed to create the environment as a Haptiacle. First, the work demonstrates the spectacle due to the unusual transformation of the sterile gallery, combined with the entertaining public display of the work. Secondly it is also a haptic because of the hands on connection with work; in this case the ceramic bowling balls.

This Haptiacle is the first of its kind, never performed before until now. This is the new Americana approach of ceramics, art, and the exhibition space. After the installation of this show I have relinquished the control to the viewers for a full Haptiacle experience with the complete elimination of the confinement of the gallery walls. This show exist everywhere that you have Internet and fully accessible to all around the world to provide an abundance of memories, and to provoke the imagination. Plus raise awareness of ritual involving the handling, breaking and performance aspect of ceramic objects.

Joseph Campbell said the role of the artist is to open a window in the wall of society and declare, “Look at what I see.” For me, I consider it more as: “Look how I see.” That is the role of the artist in society. I want everyone to see this work as I do, so I felt the need to create a new word that best describes my work. This new word is Haptiacle, which is formed by combining two words Haptic and Spectacle. “Haptics refers to the sense of touch (from Greek ἄπτω = ‘I fasten onto, I touch’). It is a form of nonverbal communication. (Wikipedia). Spectacle is defined as “something exhibited to view as unusual, notable, or entertaining; especially: an eye-catching or dramatic public display”. (Webster). My work is publicly exhibited both in the gallery and viva live on the Internet to view as both notable eye-catching and entertaining where the viewer physically touches and learns about the object by the sense of touch. People will discover with the sense of touch that the bowling balls are really ceramic and when held, and when bowled down the alley striking the pins that the pins are ceramic as well.

Haptiacle: A hands on event or performance, designed for viewer transformation that is visually striking that can be experienced, especially something of a remarkable or impressive nature accessible to all.

This body of work is installed to create the environment as a Haptiacle. First, the work demonstrates the spectacle due to the unusual transformation of the sterile gallery, combined with the entertaining public display of the work. Secondly it is also a haptic because of the hands on connection with work, in this case the ceramic bowling balls.

The Cooler Boat is the starting point; the beers in the cooler in the front compartment have ceramic buttons with Quick Reader (QR) codes on the bottoms of

them. To allow accessibility to all for those that do not drink there are waters in the back compartment of the cooler with the same features of QR codes. The viewer has to discover the ceramic buttons through the sense of touch and sight. After scanning the QR codes and with Smartphone participants discover if they are lucky, or whether they need to play again. I have taken into consideration that not all people will have a smart phone and I turn to the traditional Eastern influence of the tea ceremony as a place to come and meet with a select body of people to have an intimate and personal connection with others in the room. It is my intent to have the viewer's converse with each other and discuss the show as well as exchange of use of Smartphone's to work as a community to enable the performance. This approach with an Americana style is an attempt to rekindle ceramic use in ritual to western culture. This is the new wave of American Ceramics and participatory art.

The second phase of the show is the bowling alley. Bowlers are selected from the cooler boat leading them to the bowling alley. When rolled down the alley the pins break upon the impact of the ball striking them. If they miss the pins the pins will be swept regardless if they hit or not and will move on the next lucky bowler. The remains of the pins and balls will be stored in the hinged crate on the wall representing the mountains of shards I saw while I was studying ceramics in China. The last set of pins has a luster golden pin signifying the end of the bowling. The last pin is connected to a rope which leads to the trigger mechanism to dump the shards back onto the floor, activating a pressure switch, turning on the red light and soldering iron, causing the melting of the rope to release the pendulum boats, causing them to collide and break, revealing the

contents stored inside as the grand finale. One of my assistance will then remove the caution tape allowing the viewer to enter the previously restricted area of the boats, allowing them to visit the remains and discover artifacts similar to treasure hunts in the deep sea.

The interaction between the audience and the artwork encourages the viewers to be part of the show. A fine line separates the actors and performers. The actors in this case are the helpers that I have pre-selected to manage the movement, flow and carefully planned orchestration of the show. The performers are the viewers. Both the actors and performers are essentially performing together simultaneously with two different jobs, both being directed by the movement and activities of the show. Neither the performer nor the actor would have any part without the other. The actors and performers feed and react to one another dismissing the preexisting boundary established at the beginning of the Haptiacle. I find it fun for myself to step back as the creator of the work and performance to flip placement with the viewer, allowing them to become the creator of the Haptiacle, and for myself to become the viewer.

The performers/viewers are invited to break down the pre-established boundaries of the sterile white walled gallery and to physically interact with the sculptures and objects that are presented to the viewer. My Haptiacle shifts the viewer connection with the performance, similar to the change of acting on stage (the viewer was only able to watch from one side separating the viewer from the performance) to the Roman coliseums (where the viewer is now surrounded the performance, becoming part of the experience and to see and watch from all angles dissecting the boundaries between the

viewer and performance. In my show “Some Strings Attached” not only can the viewers surround the event and watch from all angles, but now the viewer can be a part of it with a Haptic experience. My Haptiacle is inspired from happenings and spectacles, specifically Survival Research Laboratories out of California. They have a top five list of things required to have a performance similar to theirs and the number one requirement is “Always respect the creative vision of the artist; above all this cannot be compromised”. Despite all of the obstacles I have experienced during the planning of this show I have read this quote and taken it to heart, that if all else fails, don’t compromise. I must figure out a way to do the performance with the support available to me and take full advantage of the opportunity. That is how I have developed this show. I have researched the way Survival Research Laboratories performs, plans, and organizes the details of the performance. One thing they don’t do is audience participation. The elimination of boundaries between the work and the viewers is similar in both of our performances but the Haptiacle is different because of the hands on approach to my work emphasizing the Haptic. I find that the physical touch and interaction with ceramic objects in the everyday life is disappearing and I want to encourage touching and holding handmade ceramic objects. By allowing people to break the precious hand made objects in the gallery, it is my hope to provide an opportunity for the viewer to overcome their fear of breaking something of value, and also to create a socially active performance. The social elements of the show are very important. People have to work together and time their actions around one another for the show to function. Ceramic artist have always been there for each other, through week-long firings, with a hot meal when needed, and have a really

close community. The ceramic community is the influence for creating this Haptiacle/ social gathering to be shared with all.

As a visual artist I am very concerned with how things look. Early Greek and Roman vessels inspired the images on the cooler boat. The early Greek and Roman pots were immaculately covered with decorations. Many images are narratives of war, victory, kingship, and myths that were culturally important to them. I focus my images in the same way in that I look at the things that make up the culture that I am surrounded by. In my case Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer, other wise known as PBR, is a beer that has a significant history in my life. I was inspired by PBR's commercial that I watched on the Internet. The video starts out with a blind-man sitting outside on his porch, describing the taste of PBR and what he thinks would be the image on the label of the PBR can based on the taste. The blind-man describes the taste as, "I think there is a naked woman riding a unicorn jumping over fire". I was inspired by this add and decided that the unicorn was the perfect fit. Unicorns have been known for their mystical presence in many myths and legends. In this way, the unicorn is the perfect connection for me to create a myth based on how PBR is made, connecting my fascination to early Greek and Roman vessels. PBR is also the only beer that has a website that supports and shows artwork so the choice of beer was a no brainer; I love art and so do they! PBR it is!

Ships are a means of transportation as they create dreams, thoughts and ideas. Without the ship we would not think the same and our imagination would be limited. The ship can also be a metaphor, related to ceramic forms such as the gravy boat that sits on the dinner table.

...and if we think, after all that the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will understand why the boat has not only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development, but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take place of pirates.”
(Foucault)

The ship is a universal object that is open for interpretation with the ability for the individual to connect with their own visions and meanings while opening the doors for the viewers to use their own imaginations and dreams as Foucault mentioned.

For me, the noise emitted from a ceramic object are some of the most fascinating sounds whether it is the ping of pots cooling in a kiln, or the placement of a lid on a jar. My favorite is the sound of a ceramic object breaking, as well as the physical notion to do so. The Happening atmosphere that I have created with this installation integrates time, space, the actor, and a relationship between the actor and performer.

I choose bowling because it has a distinct sound – the rolling of the ball, the clashing of the pins, and the sound of the people at the lanes. It may be nostalgic for some – comforting – but it is also abrupt and arresting when taken out of context. Our activity takes on the qualities of a bull in a china shop. The noise of ceramics breaking is as arresting as bowling, if not more. It is the same idea, the balls rolling, the pins breaking, and the crowds’ noise. It is all part of the Haptiacle experience. Noise and sound create space, environment and are the result of a new wave of American ceramic ritual.

Haptic sensation is a normal part of traditional ceramics, i.e. pottery. The maker's hand speaks to the user's hand. However, my work is not about traditional or contemporary pottery. However, the work does involve touch. The lucky participants get to touch my work and socialize and if luck is on their side they will have a chance to roll a ball down the lane. They will place their fingers deep in the ceramic ball and use their bodies, muscles, and skeleton to roll a ball in an attempt to break some objects that I created.

Finally, while smell and taste are not directly related to the objects, they are an integral part of the art experience. With people eating and drinking at the Haptiacle their actions becomes an integral part of the social experience.

This installation is geared to be accessible to all. Not only can the viewers in the gallery space participate as well as online viewers with the addition of a live video feed connected to my web site (www.ernestforwardceramics.com). This accommodates those that are unable to attend and removes attendance boundaries altogether. With the live video feed viewers can watch the Haptiacle as it unfolds. However, viewing is not the only interaction they will have with the show. To aid in my obsession of fun and humor for all I have preselected faculty to be chosen by the Internet viewer to pick one member from the list by allowing the first text I receive to pick the lucky bowler. The online viewer, like the gallery viewer, must be prepared to interact with the Haptiacle, and cast their vote for someone from a list of names that I have selected via text to a cell phone in the gallery space creating a Haptiacle encounter for all. This Haptiacle is the first of its kind, never performed before until now. This is the new Americana approach of

ceramics, art, and the exhibition space. After the installation of this show I have relinquished the control to the viewers for a full Haptiacle experience with the complete elimination of the confinement of the gallery walls. This show exists everywhere that you have Internet and is fully accessible to all around the world to provide an abundance of memories, and to provoke the imagination, plus raises awareness of the ritual involving the handling, breaking and performance aspect of ceramic objects.

WORKS CITED

Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces" Trans. Jay Miskowiec. Diacritics, Spring, 1986: 27.

Pauline, Mark. Survival Research Laboratories. 2010. 2 March. 2012
<http://www.srl.org/>.

"Haptics" *Wikipedia*, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 17 March 2012. Web. 10 March 2012. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haptics>.

"Spectacle" *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, Incorporated.. 2012. Web. 10 March 2012. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/spectacle>.



Image 1 – Cooler Boat



Image 2 – Cooler Boat (Detail)



Image 3 – Cooler Boat (Detail)



Image 4 – Cooler Boat (Detail)



Image 5 – Cooler Boat (Detail)



Image 6 – Cooler Boat (Detail)



Image 7 – 200 Ceramic Pins



Image 8 –200 Ceramic Pins (Detail)



Image 9 – 20 Ceramic Bowling Balls



Image 10 – 20 Ceramic Bowling Balls (Detail)



Image 11 – Installation View



Image 12 –Colliding Ships



Image 13 – Colliding Ships (Detail)



Image 14 – Colliding Ships (Detail)



Image 15 – Installation View



Image 16 – Installation View



Image 17 – Installation View



Image 18 – Installation View



Image 19 – Installation View



Image 20 – Performance Installation View



Image 21 – Performance Installation View



Image 22 – Performance Installation View



Image 23 – Performance Installation View



Image 24 – Performance Installation View



Image 25 – Performance Installation View



Image 26 – Performance Installation View



Image 27 – Performance Installation View



Image 28 – Performance Installation View



Image 29 – Performance Installation View



Image 30 – Performance Installation View



Image 31 – Post Performance View



Image 32 – Post Performance View