

The common experience
by Ian Kuakini Patten

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

Master of Fine Art

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

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1993

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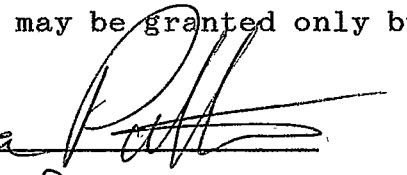
Signature 

Date 4-19-93

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

My work originates from youthful experiences focusing on how they have formed and shaped me and the way I view the world around me. The sculptures evolved out of a period of self examination and a realization that these experiences are not unique to myself only, but are shared by a great number of people. When these experiences are multiplied by the number of people who have felt them, they affect the world as a whole as we pass them along generation to generation. My personal role as an artist is to use the three dimensional presence of sculpture to communicate these experiences to the viewer.

Use of the figure is important to me because it provides the viewer with access to the work and changes the question from "What is it?" to "What is this about?". The figure draws the viewer in, and with the addition of other visual clues, such as broken glass or cast objects, forms the composite story. The viewers are then able to form associations with the work through references to their own experience.

I have an interest in other sculptors who use the autobiographical situation as a source for their work. H.C. Westerman's sculptures are inspirational because the work evolves from his personal philosophy and life experiences rather than formal or theoretical ideology. Magdalena Abakonowicz's torso pieces are examples of how to use the

character of the materials to define the meaning of the work. The result is work that is simple in its presentation, and yet, eloquent beyond words.

My sculpture has evolved from my childhood as a basement tinkerer and mad scientist. I would build objects from the stockpiles of war surplus material that my Grandfather had stored in the basement to escape from the turmoil of the adult world. It was also in the basement that I started my early experiments with electricity that eventually led to my work with Neon.

The pieces start out as rough sketches originating from the memory of a particular childhood incident. After the sketch I start to visualize the piece in different materials. The large sculptures are primarily constructed of metal, though I choose materials that best express the idea. "ROOTED CONVICTIONS" is about inflexibility and immobility during a long family conflict over the house I grew up in. Therefore, I felt it appropriate to construct it from the bark of the large, looming Eucalyptus trees which surrounded the house. In contrast, "UNTITLED II", evolved out of a moment of self discovery and is built of neon and steel rod in order to create an open, positive and expansive feeling. The small "TORSO SERIES" are self portraits in cast resin. The use of resin enables me to cast symbolic objects into the form of the figure and to use light to define its presence. Burlap and nails were always around the house when I was growing up and

the photographic transparencies recall my day as an undergraduate in Photography. The figure is based on a torso of Hermes at the DeYoung Museum in San Francisco. It represents youthful ideals about what I was, what I viewed myself as, and what I hoped to be. Some of the large sculptures are assemblies of smaller pieces. I use these in reference to the composite of a person with each piece representing experiences and knowledge. The assembly represents the way we spend our lives making the pieces fit and trying to hold them together. Based on my own experiences, the pieces are intentionally rough, battered and ill fitting. I use cutting wheels, torches, grinders and welders to achieve this look. Auto body metal provides a vast assortment of colors and shapes and is relatively easy to fabricate. I find some human forms already in the scrap metal and then hammer, cut and grind out the rest.

I fabricate the neon tubing in my portable shop. The glass is purchased in straight, four foot lengths. I heat the tubing over a gas and air flame to soften it. It is then bent over a pattern or by freehand. Electrodes are welded on and the tube is hooked up to a vacuum manifold. The tube is then superheated or "bombarded" as the term is known, allowed to cool and then filled with Neon or Argon gas. Color is determined by the type of gas and the type of phosphor coating on the inside of the tube. Neon gas in a clear tube is a bright red, while Argon is a pale violet. Mercury is usually

added to Argon gas to produce a bright blue color in a clear glass tube. Phosphor coated tubes have different chemical compounds in the coatings on the tube wall and when filled with Mercury-Argon gas produce a wide array of colors.

I use Neon primarily because of its low operating temperature, color range and plasticity. The use of light has been a continuing interest, because for me it represents energy, life and emotion. Light is an added dimension to the sculptures. As it emits through the open spaces of the work, it defines an internal presence. Essentially, the viewer is able to see both the interior and exterior of the work at the same time. I choose color according to the mood that I want to express. Cool colors (such as blue) represent solitude or isolation, while red indicates intensity or anger. In the large figure, "UNTITLED II", red and blue are combined to create a sense of vitality in contrast to the blue lonely feeling of "UNTITLED III" or the angry red intensity of "ROOTED CONVICTIONS".

The messages I send with this work are not the sole purpose of their creation. There is a cathartic experience in confronting painful issues and being able to release them, and there is also, in these works, the joy of creation. It is my hope that at the very least, these sculptures present themselves as visually interesting objects. Ideally, they should touch the viewer at the deepest levels. What the viewer comes away with is dependent on that person's background,

whether they are victim, perpetrator or bystander.

LIST OF TITLES

1. TORSO SERIES V

   18 x 9 x 6 inches

   Cast Resin, Vinyl Tubing, Neon

2. TORSO SERIES IX

   18 x 9 x 6 inches

   Cast Resin, Photo Tranparencies, Neon

3. TORSO SERIES VII

   18 x 9 x 6 inches

   Cast Resin, Nails, Neon

4. TORSO SERIES VI

   18 x 9 x 6 inches

   Cast Resin, Machine Nuts and Bolts, Neon

5. TORSO SERIES III

   18 x 9 x 6 inches

   Cast Resin, Burlap, Neon

6. TORSO SERIES VIII

   18 x 9 x 6 inches

   Cast Resin, Photo Transparencies, Neon

7. TORSO SERIES X

   18 x 9 x 6 inches

   Cast Resin, Electric Wire, Switches, Neon

8. UNTITLED II

   96 x 24 x 36 inches

   Steel, Neon

9. UNTITLED VI

   Front View

   77 x 77 x 34 inches

   Enameled Steel, Neon, Glass

10. UNTITLED VI

    Side View

    77 x 77 x 34 inches

    Enameled Steel, Neon, Glass

11. NIGHT VISITOR

    Front View

    108 x 84 x 22 inches

    Enameled Steel, Neon, Plaster, Sand

12. NIGHT VISITOR

    Rear View

    108 x 84 x 22 inches

    Enameled Steel, Neon, Plaster, Sand

13. UNTITLED VII

    120 x 74 x 24 inches

    Steel, Enameled Steel, Neon

14. UNTITLED VII

    Female Figure

    68 x 24 x 21 inches

    Steel, Enameled Steel, Neon

15. UNTITLED VII

Male Figure

74 x 24 x 28 inches

Steel, Enameled Steel, Neon

16. UNTITLED VII

Child Figure

48 x 13 x 7 inches

Steel, Neon

17. UNTITLED VII

Child Figure (detail view)

48 x 13 x 7 inches

Steel, Neon

18. ROOTED CONVICTIONS

144 x 64 x 67 inches

Steel, Eucalyptus Bark, Balsa Wood, Neon

19. ROOTED CONVICTIONS

Front Figure Detail

67 x 22 x 16 inches

Steel, Eucalyptus Bark, Neon

20. ROOTED CONVICTIONS

Rear Figure Detail

67 x 22 x 16 inches

Steel, Eucalyptus Bark, Neon

21. Gallery Installation

Detail View

22. Gallery Installation
    Detail View
23. Gallery Installation
    Detail View
24. Gallery Installation
    Detail View
25. Gallery Installation
    Detail View

3. TORSO SERIES VII
18x9x6 inches
Cast Resin, Nails, Neon
Ian K. Patten 1993



6. TORSO SERIESVIII
18x9x6 inches Cast Resin
Photo Transparencies, Neon
Ian K. Patten 1993



9. UNTITLED VI
77x77x34 inches Front View
Enameled Steel, Neon 1993
Ian K. Patten



12. NIGHT VISITOR
108x84x22 inches Rear View
Enameled Steel, Neon, Plaster 1993
Ian K. Patten



15. UNTITLED VII
74x24x28 inches Male Figure
Steel, Enameled Steel, Neon 1993
Ian K. Patten



2. TORSO SERIES IX
18x9x6 inches Cast Resin,
Photo Transparencies, Neon
Ian K. Patten 1993



5. TORSO SERIES III
18x9x6 inches Cast Resin
Burlap, Neon
Ian K. Patten 1993



8. UNTITLED II
96x24x36 inches
Steel, Neon
Ian K. Patten 1993



11. NIGHT VISITOR
108x84x22 inches Front View
Enameled Steel, Neon, Plaster 1993
Ian K. Patten



14. UNTITLED VII
68x24x21 inches Female Figure
Steel, Enameled Steel, Neon 1993
Ian K. Patten



1. TORSO SERIES V
18x9x6 inches
Cast Resin, Vinyl Tubing, Neon
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4. TORSO SERIES VI
18x9x6 inches Cast Resin
Machine Nuts and Bolts, Neon
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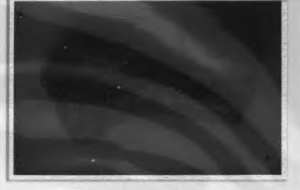

7. TORSO SERIES X
18x9x6 inches Cast Resin
Electrical Wire, Switches, Neon
Ian K. Patten 1993



10. UNTITLED VI
77x77x34 inches Side View
Enameled Steel, Neon 1993
Ian K. Patten



13. UNTITLED VII
170x74x24 inches
Steel, Enameled Steel, Neon 1993
Ian K. Patten



16. UNTITLED VII
48x13x7 inches Child Figure
Steel, Neon,
Ian K. Patten 1993



17. UNTITLED VII
48x13x7 inches Child Figure
Steel, Neon,
Ian K. Patten 1993



18. ROOTED CONVICT.
144x63x67 inches
Steel, Eucalyptus Bark, Neon,
Ian K. Patten 1993



19. ROOTED CONVICT.
67x22x16 inches Front Detail
Steel, Eucalyptus Bark, Neon,
Ian K. Patten 1993



20. ROOTED CONVICT.
67x22x16 inches Rear Detail
Steel, Eucalyptus Bark, Neon,
Ian K. Patten 1993



21.
Gallery Installation
Detail View
Ian K. Patten 1993



22.
Gallery Installation
Detail View
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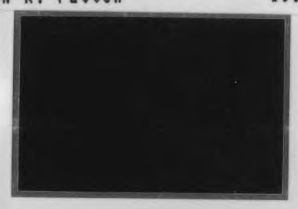
23.
Gallery Installation
Detail View
Ian K. Patten 1993



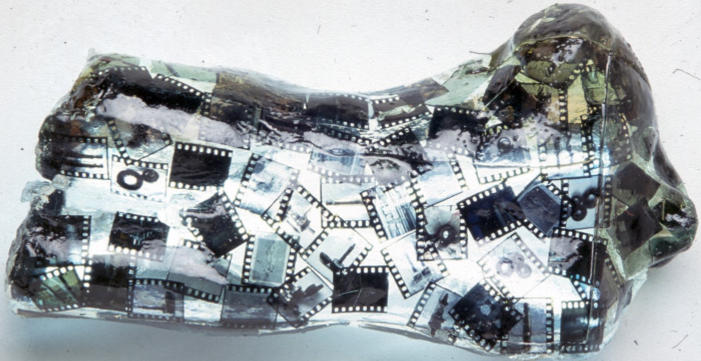
24.
Gallery Installation
Detail View
Ian K. Patten 1993



25.
Gallery Installation
Detail View
Ian K. Patten 1993





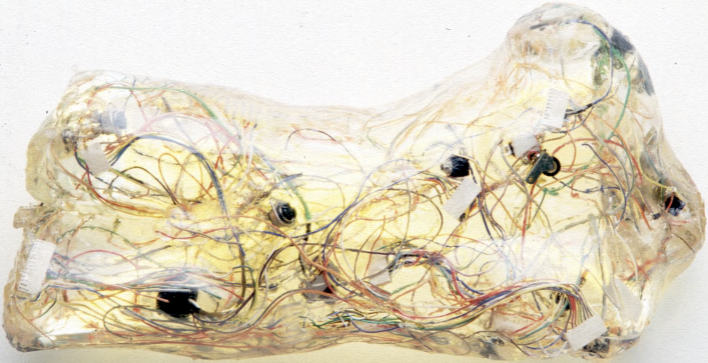












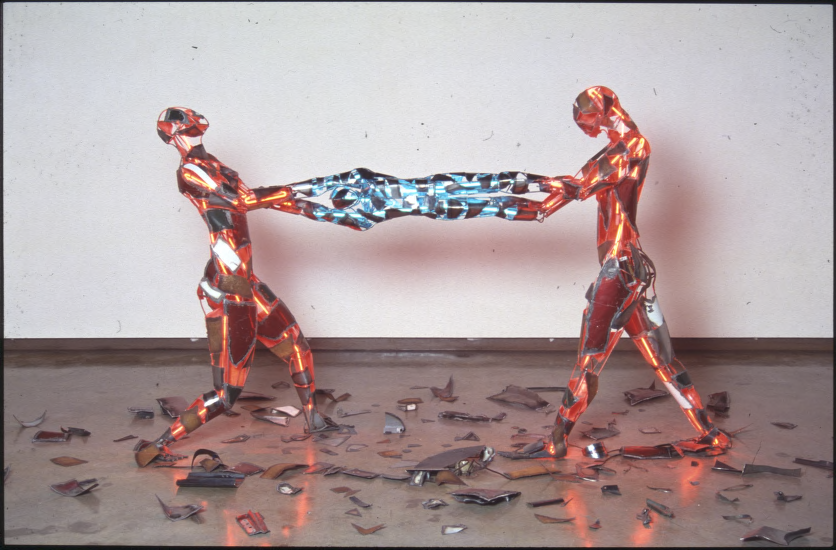




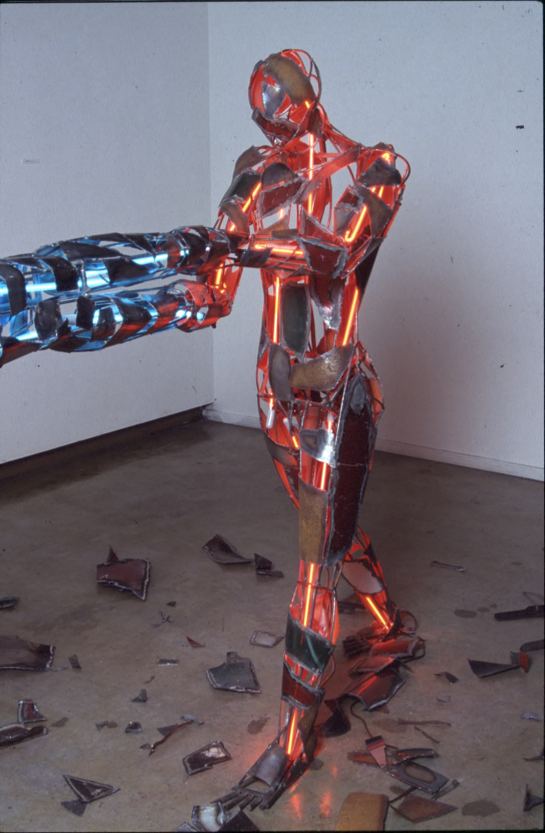




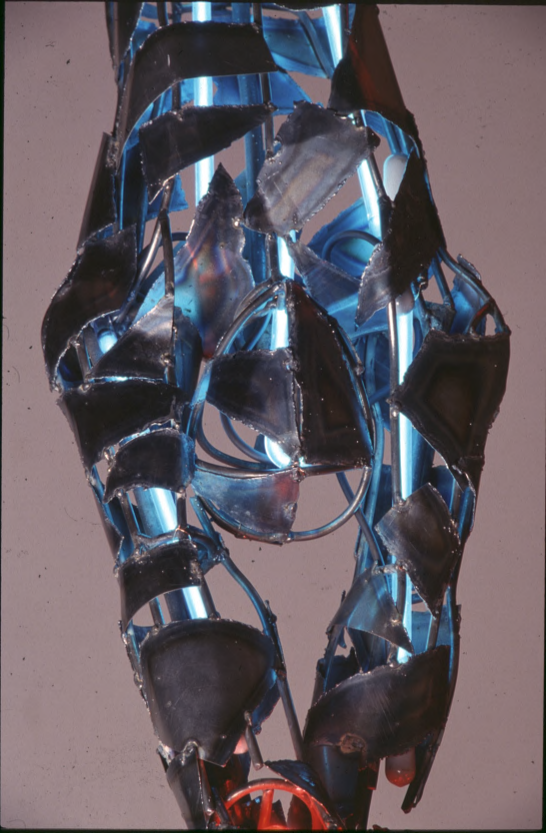










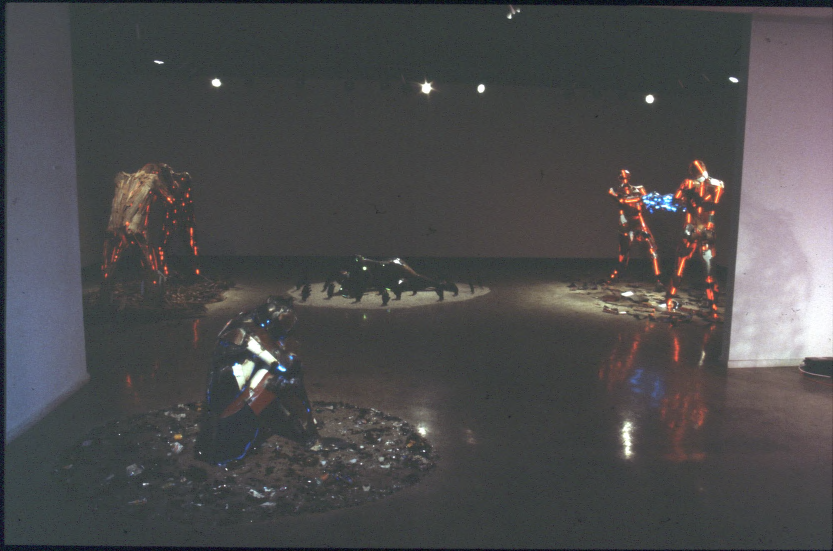


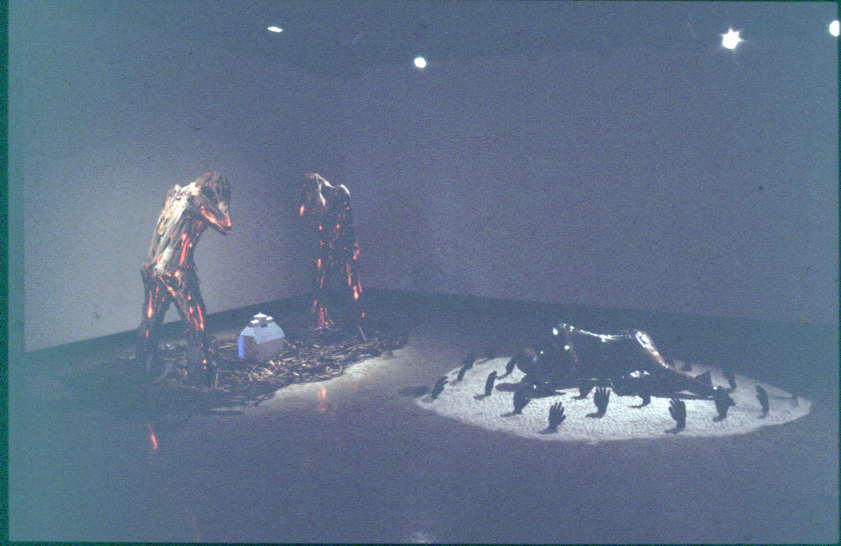


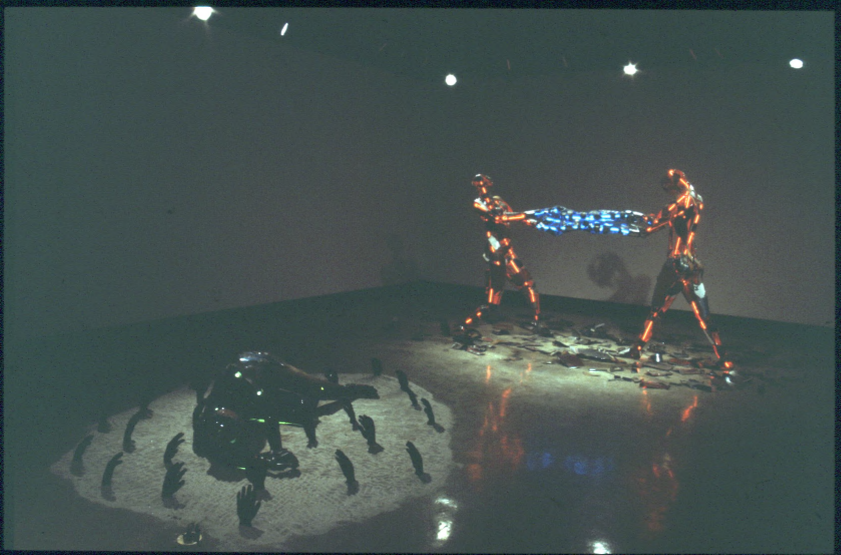
















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