



Act of uncivil obedience : a master of Fine Arts thesis against mastery and fine arts - a holistic view
by Carl Thurston Stewart

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:

My artistic production in graduate school is primarily temporary public art with an increasing commitment to art that presents political and social issues. Most of my artwork takes the form of large banners with images and words. My year of thesis work included writing criticism and producing video works. The thesis exhibition is a culmination and logical extension of my thinking of art as a means of communicating about issues that have vital importance to the world, integrating living with art, and stretching the limits of art.

I am protesting "mastery" and "fine arts". "Mastery", furthers patriarchal values as a male term of dominance and control. It is an unsuitable term or value for these changing times. "Fine Arts", denoting a discipline separated from the other arts and disciplines, is also restrictive.

I am interested in art as a form of communication. The urgent world situation prompts me to direct my powers to political and social issues. We receive most of our information about political and social issues from the major electronic and print media which address a mass audience. They are bound to the prevailing culture, its traditions, and to the constraints of commercial success. I have chosen to communicate to a smaller audience in a poetic, non-traditional manner relatively free of constraints.

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ACT OF UNCIVIL OBEDIENCE: A MASTER OF FINE ARTS
THESIS AGAINST MASTERY AND FINE ARTS. —
A HOLISTIC VIEW.

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Carl Thurston Stewart

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.

June 8, 1988
Date

Jay Schultz
Chairperson, Graduate
Committee

Approved for the Major Department

JUNE 8, 1988
Date

William W. Myers 2
Head, Major Department

Approved for the College of Graduate Studies

June 10, 1988
Date

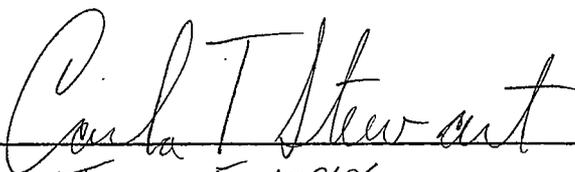
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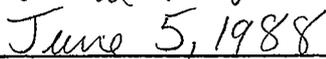
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VITA

Born August 28, 1955 of Lenore Thurston, and Omer Call Stewart, Carl Thurston Stewart, the youngest of four, was named by his brother for three Brooklyn Dodgers of that same winning year. His mother (MA in English with a thesis on Stephen Crane) was a librarian and his father an anthropologist (ethnohistorian), specializing in the Peyote religion of the American Indians. Brought up in beautiful Boulder, Colorado of the Sixties, he always wanted to be a baseball player. His plans were permanently interrupted when his parents took him to Bordeaux, France placing him in a French lycee for the seventh and eighth grades. Returning to Boulder High School, Carl became involved in theater, with leads in such plays as J.B., Beckett's Fin de Partie (Endgame produced in French), and Everyman. He was the Colorado State Champion in the Analysis and Interpretation of Oratory in 1973 when he graduated. Aimless, and scared of the sexual aura of the theater, Carl chose to perform more quietly. He took a job at the City of Boulder Ceramics Lab as janitor and aide for two years, doing his own pottery on the side. With the money he made, but feeling there were enough good potters in the world already, he returned to Europe, first Italy (Perugia) for nine months where he learned Italian quite well, then to Paris to study Art History (BA cum laude 1978, American College in Paris). After working in the ACP library for two years, he did a session at the Goethe Institute in Passau, West Germany passing their intermediate language exam. Without having found anything else that came quite so close to a passion, Carl returned to ceramics at the Kansas City Art Institute in 1980. There his ceramic work changed from almost purely utilitarian pots to pottery birds. Although pleased with the attention his birds attracted, he would return to more utilitarian forms of art in Graduate School. At Kansas City he was the Chairman of the Student Gallery Committee. After graduation (BFA, 1983) he worked at the Morgan Gallery, as Assistant to the Director where he oversaw all of the major and minor operations of the nationally recognized gallery. After two years there, he began graduate work at Montana State University January, 1985. He left ceramics after the first quarter, and spent a quarter in his second year in Guatemala studying Spanish, writing and doing watercolors. While at MSU he was a member of various committees and political organizations, wrote art related articles in the student newspaper, and was a radio news broadcaster.

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ABSTRACT

My artistic production in graduate school is primarily temporary public art with an increasing commitment to art that presents political and social issues. Most of my artwork takes the form of large banners with images and words. My year of thesis work included writing criticism and producing video works. The thesis exhibition is a culmination and logical extension of my thinking of art as a means of communicating about issues that have vital importance to the world, integrating living with art, and stretching the limits of art.

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My thesis Exhibition included an occupation of the art gallery, a 21 day liquid fast, and various changing installations. It was entitled, "An Act of Uncivil Obedience".

INTRODUCTION

My artistic production through three years of graduate school is primarily temporary public art with an increasing commitment to art that presents political and social issues. Most of my artwork takes the form of large banners with images and words hung outside from a tower next to the art building. During my year of thesis work I expanded my repertory to include writing criticism and producing video works.

My final work, the thesis exhibition, is a culmination and logical extension of my thinking of art as a means of communicating about issues that have vital importance to the world, and of integrating living with art.

I am an advocate of art which is as free an expression of the artist's will as possible. Although our society has established freedom in art, there are still many imposed limits. Some of the limits are imposed by institutions; others are imposed by the individual artist sometimes unconsciously. I am trying to stretch the institutional and personal limits to free my ability of expression as much as possible.

Personal limitations are formed by our experience. The broader our experiences the less they will be limiting.

My graduate studies and thesis have been a building up of these but, unlike many artists, I have not specialized in a particular medium, and the experiences that I have culled do not fit into traditional art skills.

Language can also be a limiting factor. The term "mastery", for instance, furthers patriarchal values as a male term of dominance and control. It is an unsuitable term or value for these changing times. "Fine Arts", a term denoting a discipline separated from the other arts and disciplines, is also restrictive. For these reasons I am against a Master of Fine Arts and my thesis is a protest.

I am interested in art as a form of communication. With that basic premise, the question is what to communicate and how. I am attracted to art that communicates the wonders of nature and that delves into the mysteries of the human condition. While these are part of most art, the urgent world situation prompts me to direct my powers to political and social issues.

We receive most of our information about political and social issues from the major electronic and print media which address a mass audience. They are bound to the prevailing culture, its traditions, and to the constraints of commercial success. I have chosen to communicate to a

smaller audience in a poetic, non-traditional manner relatively free of constraints.



Figure 1.

'Titled'1, Fall 1985. General view, First banner hung between Cheever and Haynes Hall, west side. Paper, paint and charcoal. 139"h x 285"w. All figures of banners are at the same location and are approximately the same size.

This means that, although there are specific meanings to my works, they are stated in an open manner, to be discovered after some consideration. I expect to get consideration by creating pieces that are intriguing through their oddity, curious juxtapositions and by their unexpected placement.

The following Artist's Statement describes the logic that I have pursued. I begin by illustrating holistic vision through a widely accepted concept of basic design. Then I show how I have worked toward this through my work. Finally, I describe the intention of my thesis exhibition.



Figure 2.
'Titled'. Close view.

A HOLISTIC VIEW OF ART

To define a thing summons everything else other than that thing, particularly its opposite. For example, to define snow it must be compared to other conditions of weather such as rain, sleet, fog and so on. The condition of no-snow is essential to describing snow. Together these conditions and their organic relationships describe weather as an organic whole. This "whole view", or holistic view, is what I am trying to achieve.

This principle of wholeness is illustrated by one of the basic principles of design: the concept of positive and negative space (see Figure 3). When one makes a shape on a surface, one not only makes that shape but the shape that surrounds it as well. Positive space is the shape itself while negative space surrounds the shape. One cannot exist without the other. They are organically dependent on each other. The important lesson in this is that one is not more important than the other and both contribute to make up the whole design.

This idea is often difficult for art students to understand. Teachers inevitably develop tricks which deceive students into learning this truth. For instance, they will have students draw all of the space around a

