



Common Ground
by Harry Scoville Welch

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 recent work is a statement combining painting, sculpture, and architecture. The installation here in the Haynes Gallery consists of a painted network of panels and framework constructed out of materials collected from around the Bozeman area. The construction took place from September, 1990 to May, 1991 and was completed in my backyard studio in Bozeman. The structure was then dismantled piecemeal and moved to the Haynes Gallery where it was installed as my thesis exhibit.

The installation is a reflection of my fascination with time and its affect on all things. The different painted areas of the installation present a theme of varying abstract studies with color, line, curve, and shape. These studies are fused to create a uniform piece representing both the organic and synthetic qualities of life. The walls are designed in part to represent unconventional billboards, graffiti smattered walls, and a notebook for my day-to-day thoughts. The construction serves as an area for me to explore my interests with the time process by acting as a large tack board for paint and found materials. These different materials are what I use to represent different colors on a picture plane, and when combined they become a sculptural form of architecture. This structure stands as a new form created from time worn parts, ready to undergo a new transformation.

The main shape of this installation is designed to contrast with the permanent walls of the two gallery rooms by containing walls that run diagonal to them. My walls

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by

Harry Scoville Welch, Jr.

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

of

Master of Fine Arts

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

May 1991

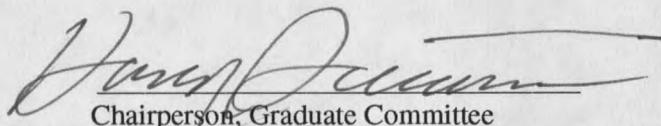
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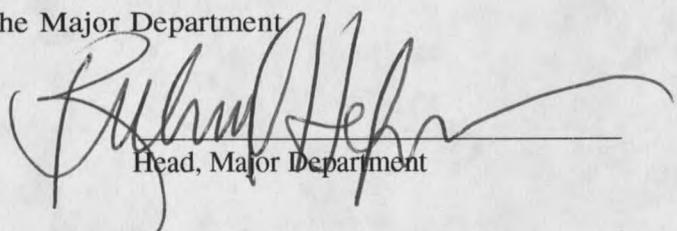
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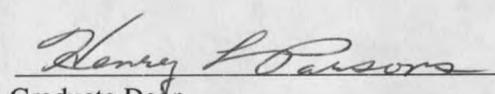
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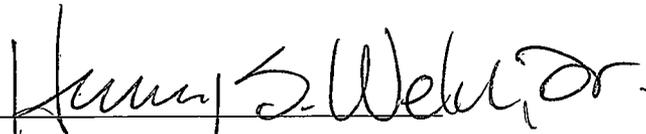

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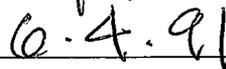
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ARTIST'S STATEMENT

My recent work is a statement combining painting, sculpture, and architecture. The installation here in the Haynes Gallery consists of a painted network of panels and framework constructed out of materials collected from around the Bozeman area. The construction took place from September, 1990 to May, 1991 and was completed in my backyard studio in Bozeman. The structure was then dismantled piecemeal and moved to the Haynes Gallery where it was installed as my thesis exhibit.

The installation is a reflection of my fascination with time and its affect on all things. The different painted areas of the installation present a theme of varying abstract studies with color, line, curve, and shape. These studies are fused to create a uniform piece representing both the organic and synthetic qualities of life. The walls are designed in part to represent unconventional billboards, graffiti smattered walls, and a notebook for my day-to-day thoughts. The construction serves as an area for me to explore my interests with the time process by acting as a large tack board for paint and found materials. These different materials are what I use to represent different colors on a picture plane, and when combined they become a sculptural form of architecture. This structure stands as a new form created from time worn parts, ready to undergo a new transformation.

The main shape of this installation is designed to contrast with the permanent walls of the two gallery rooms by containing walls that run diagonal to them. My walls

join together to become an oddly shaped room that is contained within the contours of the rectangular gallery rooms. The internal floor space re-specified by the location of my walls is enhanced by a minimal deck system built from pallets, sections of old floor, and other flat materials. The raised floor is another painted surface which connects the vertical wall paintings to the horizontal floor painting. The shape created after connecting the floor to the walls becomes an enclosure for the viewer, thereby acting as a container to his or her presence.

The construction of this work took place indoors and out, with the framework built outside and the panels painted mainly inside. The weather became a major factor in the fabrication and appearance of the walls as they arose. The combination of sun, rain, snow, freezing temperatures, wind, and spring thaw created cracked, blistered, and warped surfaces. The raw texture enhanced the look of the installation as well as giving it an aged quality. Placed outdoors, one could walk around the structure which one cannot do when it is located indoors. Placed indoors, one can view the work under consistent lighting in contrast to the constantly shifting outdoor light. This duality of viewing creates an added dimension to the work.

The structure itself represents a non-utilitarian sculpture crossing over to functional architecture through the use of recycled materials. When joined, the walls and floor of the installation are a colorful, multi-sided deck area. These materials are combined to form a new use of space in a more orderly manner. The paint gives life to the construction and the walls become the painting surface. The walls are a series of large paintings unified to create a larger, three-dimensional painting. The larger painting

enabled me to work on a scale where I could address my interests through various creative impulses. These impulses merged and became the overall structure. Time and change are a constant with everyone and some of the materials seen in this installation might remind you of a slice of your past. This sense of connection via recollection is common ground to everyone who has a memory. Common ground became the essence of this work because of the use of common materials in its construction and the use of everyday thoughts in its painted message.

During the process of building this installation, I realized a sense of flow to its construction. The noun form of the word 'flow' means the act or instance of flowing and the latter stages of building this structure represented that act. Different materials were connected with each other through similar junctures found in their shapes. The feeling of predestination ordered the different materials to their respective places throughout the piece, and directed my application of the paints according to their varied type and color. The relationship that I experienced with the installation after the hardships of building were completed was one of tranquility. I felt as if a great weight had been taken off of my shoulders, much like parents feel when their child has reached maturation. Building over three seasons dominated by wet and snowy weather on something I referred to as a 'monster' became a test in patience, humility, and perseverance. The weather was very humbling and the patience required to see beyond its constant precipitation had to be dug from the depth of my gut. I did envision an end to what I had created, and one day near the end of April the major construction of the installation was completed. The weather again became inclement for several days and I felt I was losing my grip on what was almost

finished. Then the weather cleared for a few days and I was able to refine and 'tighten' what I had spent so long on building. At that point, painting the piece and clarifying its form came naturally, and I truly felt that I was ready to unleash the beast to the public.

The experience of building 'Common Ground' was dramatic for me and it became a melting pot of symbolism. Everything that went into its development, including my blood, sweat, and tears, played a decisive role in its appearance. The cycle of life, death, and rebirth was represented by my act of recycling materials. The paint became my pencil, the walls became the sketch pad, and the colors and material shapes became the imagery. The path of building the installation was pockmarked with difficulty, but once I reached the door to its completion, the sensation of flow gushed forth. The creative act no longer represented to me the trudging of a Neanderthal. I felt like I had shed a skin and was reborn. Everything started to blend more clearly and I knew once again that I was experiencing the ecstasy of life.

Cycles are what keep life going and everyone is grounded by them. We all experience the common thread of being human: we are born, we live here on our home planet, and we perish to recycle life anew. The spiraling effect of cycles is a fluid transition of events, and the seam between differences becomes indistinguishable in this process of rolling over. Everything is a part of the universe, be it organic or synthetic, and being rational animals we need to acknowledge the logic of nature. If we don't assume the responsibilities of our relationship with our planet, we might not have one.

Through realizing the physical law of interconnections, one locates one's place in the natural order of cycles. The process of creating 'Common Ground' reacquainted me to

my position in the physical flow of nature. The act of creating in this manner felt honest to me and I hope to pursue this train of thought throughout my life. By sharing my work with others I am able to communicate my philosophical beliefs regarding our human relationship with the bigger picture of universal order.

Slide Documentation

Title: Common Ground

Size: Large Installation

Medium: Mixed (Wood, Paint, Cardboard, Etc.)

Indoor

1. Overview
2. South Wall
3. South Wall Continued
4. West Wall
5. Northwest Wall
6. Northeast Wall
7. Northeast Wall Detail
8. Overview With Floor
9. North Wall Total

Outdoor

10. Detail: Interior Space of Installation
11. Detail: Light Box
12. Detail: South Wall
13. Detail: West Wall
14. Detail: East Wall
15. Overview

INDOOR



OVERVIEW



SOUTH WALL



SOUTH WALL CONTINUED



WEST WALL



NORTHWEST WALL



NORTHEAST WALL



NORTHEAST WALL DETAIL



OVERVIEW WITH FLOOR



NORTH WALL TOTAL

OUTDOOR



DETAIL: INTERIOR SPACE



DETAIL: WALL BOOK



DETAIL: SOUTH WALL



DETAIL: WEST WALL



DETAIL: EAST WALL



OVERVIEW



