



Parallel realities [slide]
by Armin Herbert Muhsam

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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PARALLEL REALITIES

by

Armin Herbert Mühsam

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

of

Master of Fine Arts

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

March 1997

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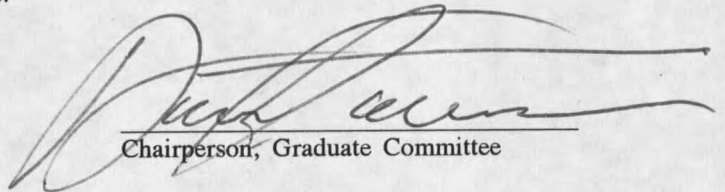
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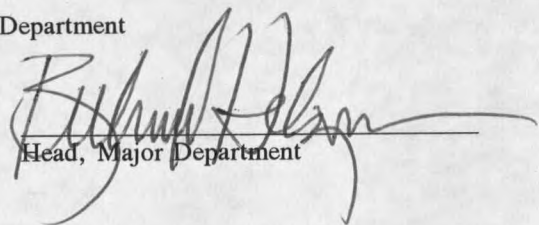
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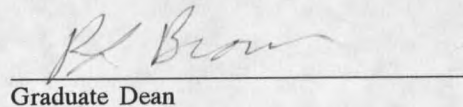
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ARTIST'S STATEMENT

My work revolves around the found object. More precisely, the machine parts found in junkyards. When I visit junkyards, I am in most cases completely unaware of the origin and function of the parts I observe. Instead, their shapes, textures and colors suggest to me qualities rather different from their original functions. In my work these relics of outdated technology are not only transformed into agents of aesthetic beauty but they also become charged with personal meaning.

I see junkyards as arsenals of abandoned objects which not so long ago were praised for their efficiency. They are the ruins of an ideology, symbols of the belief in progress through technology. I have always associated this peculiarly Western world-view with machines: For the sake of progress the latest technological development is accepted unquestioningly; if machines (or whole systems) do not "work" properly any longer, they are thrown into the junkyards. The machines that replaced them for even greater efficiency's sake will soon join them there. In the junkyard they all lie scattered across the landscape in a way that makes the very idea of progress of this kind seem absurd. Paradoxically, however, junkyards are places of inspiration for me: The debris of modern technology is the catalyst for my art.

I am interested in the after-life of machine parts, their existence after functionalism, their motionlessness, their being awkwardly out of place and, above all, the chaotic accumulation of fragments in the junkyard, which seems to mock the

hierarchical order within which they once functioned. What if these parts started moving again, not according to logical assembly plans but according to the random order they lie about in the junkyard? What would it be like if these fragments formed new machines, animated by internal forces or by residual energy from their previous use? They would be doing what I imagine being every technician's nightmare: The established order collapses and is replaced by unpredictable chaos. For me, this scenario is the stimulant for my art, the incentive to fix these situations into an image.

When I work with found junk parts, they serve as outside referents of which I make numerous studies. These drawings not only transform the object but also help generate fresh ideas and explore pictorial possibilities. I then transfer the drawings onto big canvases. Once enlarged, the forms develop a dynamic on their own and I often rely on this element of chance to produce unplanned changes in shapes and spatial relationships. When I finally paint these compositions I have arrived at a reality that runs somewhat parallel to the one I had started out from.

It is a world created out of the fragments of "objective" reality, self-contained and self-sufficient. The new machine parts resemble their ancestors in many ways. Much like before, they are part of a systematical order, they fit together, move, transfer force, balance or lift weight, in short, they "work." The constructions most often show the frozen moment in a situation that could lead to anything: implosion, explosion, collision, etc. But none of this actually happens and the machines remain in a state of precarious equilibrium. It is up to the person who looks at the paintings to complete the action.

Whatever course this action might take in the viewer's mind, what is presented in the paintings is a paradox. On a personal level they are reiterations of my visits to junkyards and mirror my own contradictory attitude toward machine parts. They attempt to illustrate what this feeling of paradox might look like and express, if anything, a refusal of ultimate analysis, of simple solutions. In this, they mock what I call "technological" reasoning in our society: A "uni-dimensional" interpretation of the world combined with a dogmatic arrogance that produces short-term successes yet ignores most of their consequences. The cost of this attitude is piled up in the junkyards, to remain there for thousands of years.

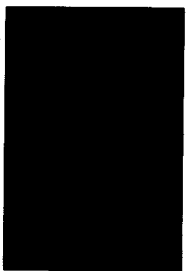
Despite all this, my work is not intended as dogmatic moral criticism (after all, my art benefits from what I would have to condemn). Rather, it makes ironical statements which attempt to undermine the dominance of technology and which, hopefully, reveal its limitations.

LIST OF SLIDES

1. "Correlative Tolerance," oil on canvas, 80 x 65", 1996
2. "Third Angle Projection," oil on canvas, 80 x 60", 1996
3. "Metric Twist," oil on canvas, 80 x 65", 1996
4. "Sleipnir," oil on canvas, 80 x 65", 1997
5. "RFS," oil on canvas, 80 x 65", 1997
6. "The Mechanical Advantages of...", oil on canvas, 60 x 80", 1997
7. "Axial Assembly," oil on canvas, 35 x 47", 1996
8. "Profile of a Surface," acrylic on board, 14 x 12", 1996
9. "Unit 38," acrylic on board, 16 x 12", 1996
10. "Variation on an Oil chute," acrylic on board, 12 x 11", 1996
11. "Spark Adjuster," acrylic on board, 12 x 11", 1996
12. "Sectional Elevation," acrylic on board, 14 x 12", 1996
13. "Primary Auxiliary View," acrylic and charcoal, 32 x 47", 1997
14. "Permitted Deviations," acrylic and charcoal, 22 x 29", 1997
15. Group of four untitled drawings, charcoal, 17 x 11" each, 1996-97
16. Group of four untitled drawings, charcoal, 17 x 11" each, 1996-97
17. Installation view
18. Installation view
19. Installation view
20. Installation view

A. Möhsam

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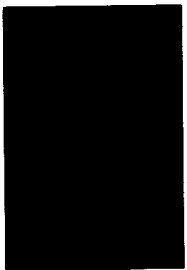


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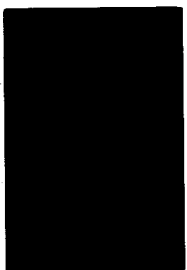


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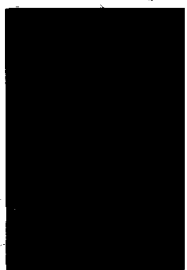
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