ORBITAL ARMADA: AN INTERACTIVE STORY

A CREATIVE PROJECT (6 HRS.)

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE MASTER OF ARTS

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Statement of the Problem

In this project I am exploring how to create a world or story within a three-dimensional space. Unlike traditional story telling mediums such as animation film and comics, ceramic artworks have to tell a story without the element of time. My purpose is to take what would normally be shown through time, action, and dialogue in an animation film or a comic and show it through detail and interaction between ceramic artwork and the viewer. I hope my project brings the animation elements into the real world and creates an interactive experience for the viewer.

Each artwork adds an element to the story through detail, surface treatment, construction, and its place within the space. The artworks evoke their own tale as standalone objects; but in its entirety, the body of work will create an environment in which the full story is told. The viewer will be able to walk through the space and around the artworks as if they have stepped into the film.

The installation is intended to place the audience in an alternate world. The story is not explicit in its meaning, but is intended to be interpreted by the viewer when seen in its entirety. The artwork will be an attempt to create a short
story that varies through the eyes of each viewer as they interact with it.
Influences

The influences most significant to this creative project come from my interest in animation and other artwork that translates these ideas into three dimensional objects. The concepts and vision behind my project is primarily influenced by animation. Rendering my objects into three dimensions has been supported by examining the ceramic and sculptural artists that I appreciate. These influences have come from a wide variety of sources, from a special-effect make-up artist and animation artists to my interest in biology.

One of many of my influences has been special-effect makeup artists, more specifically those who are able to create a dark human persona. Ve Neill, who created makeup designs for Tim Burton’s Edward Scissorhands, Beetlejuice, Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street, Gore Verbinski’s Pirates of the Caribbean, Gary Ross’s Hunger Games (Fig. 1) has been a major influence. I have always found Neill’s way of highlighting features, color usage, and unique designs intriguing. Also, Michele
Burke created similarly dark styled works in Tarsem Singh’s *The Cell* and Neil Jordan’s *Interview with a Vampire: Vampire Chronicles*.

I have also been influenced by creature artists; such as, Rick Baker known for *Hellboy* and *Planet of the Apes*, Glenn Hetrick associated with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *The X Files*, and Greg Nicotero, the make-up artist on *The Walking Dead* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. These artists and films have a dark style that I appreciate.

In the animation world films that immerse the viewer in created worlds have the most impact on me. Hayao Miyazaki is well known for his extraordinarily elaborate background sets and attention to details that create fantastical worlds. His works such as *Howl’s Moving Castle* and *Spirited Away* exhibit this ornate attention to detail mixed with his unique European influence. Miyazaki creates characters and great stories that are supported immensely by the artwork. Tim Burton has also created many works in different mediums other than animation, in which he is widely known. Examples include; the movie *9*, stop
motion seen in *Corpse Bride*, live action films such as *Batman*, to combinations like *Beetlejuice*.

Tim Burton’s *Nightmare Before Christmas* (fig. 2) was my introduction to stop motion and became a significant influence on my choice of stop motion animation for undergraduate projects. This led to a preference for using my hands to make artwork rather than a mouse. As a result, I began to look at creature and figurative sculpture artists, such as Ellen Jewett (fig. 3) as a result.

Many films have influenced me stylistically. Chris Weitz’s *Golden Compass*, Don Bluth’s *Titan A.E.*, Ron Clements’ *Treasure Planet*, Stephen Norrington’s *League of Extraordinary Gentleman*, Guy Ritchie’s *Sherlock Holmes*, among others all exhibit elements of the steampunk genre. My animation and three-dimensional artwork have exhibited a darker element which has shifted more specifically toward the steampunk genre.

The Celestial Bodies have been influenced by my science interests as well. I have always had a fascination with science, more specifically, marine biology. I have collected an extensive visual library from a variety of sources, which I use to inspire my work. Books such as; Deborah Cramer’s *Smithsonian Ocean*, Jeffery L. Rotman’s *Underwater Eden: 365 days*, Laurent Ballesta and Pierre Descamp’s *Planet Ocean* are part of my collection. Brian Lavery’s *Smithsonian Ship: the
Epic Story of Maritime Adventure has been a direct resource from this collection.

My obsession with marine biology has also influenced me by looking to ceramic artists such as Carla Potter (fig.4). I am also interested in botany, more specifically, scanning electron microscope (SEM) images in botany. These SEM images along with references to coral and other marine forms have directly impacted the development of my Celestial Body series.

As this project progressed, and I had established a steampunk style, I began gathering examples of artists’ work within the steampunk genre. Tom Banwell creates fantastical and unnerving masks. Greg Brotherton creates metal sculptures of little creatures. Many times these creatures are caught in inescapable scenarios (fig. 5). Chris Conte creates small mechanical insects out of sewing machine parts. Doktor A creates cartoon like creatures and objects from polymer clay. Eric Freitas creates elaborate clocks (fig. 6). These rusty spindly clocks are reminiscent of Tim Burton’s film and artwork style. The artists I have mentioned, as well as machinery and clockwork, provided references for design elements in...
this body of work.

The ceramic building process and kiln firing techniques come from a much closer influence. In the fall semester of 2011 senior undergraduate student Sharon Williams used slump molds to create her *Vessels with Voids* series and fired them in the soda kiln. My processes were also largely influenced by techniques demonstrated in class by both Ted Neal and Vance Bell.

This current body of work is an amalgamation of these many influences. It draws heavily from my background in animation as well as my academic background in biology. My recent studio exploration into ceramics has given me a new field of references. The specific style of this work integrates the steampunk genre with the procedural techniques that come from the individuals I have worked with in a variety of fields.
In creating the interactive story, I needed to create objects that were otherworldly yet still had a familiarity so that the viewer could find some connection to them. The Celestial Bodies are based on scanning electron microscope images of pollen. These shapes and patterns, which are normally not visible with the naked eye, are also reminiscent of larger parts of plants, fungi, coral, insects, and rocks. They are shapes and patterns that viewers will have some reference for so they are not entirely alien, but come from objects that are familiar and give a sense of wonderment. The dirigibles use the concept of a ship but take it out of its typical setting and put it into the air. The ships have mechanical attachments that would be seen on trains and rockets. They give the viewer an idea of an alternate universe where technology diverged from our reality to another. The objects give enough information so that the viewer has some basis on which to build a story, but it is varied enough to provide room for personal interpretation and alternate reality.
Creative Process

Each dirigible’s creative process started with a concept sketch drawn to full scale. Each ship was designed based on its perceived purpose in the alternate world. The concept sketches were rendered in full detail. After the concept sketch was completed slump molds were made of the basic ship shape from insulation foam. The insulation foam was cut in the profile of the ship, layered to reach desired thickness, and then carved into a smooth representation of the ship’s hull. The finished mold was separated into two halves and a thin slab of clay was laid over and fitted to the mold. This process allows the clay to retain the shape of the mold once it has set up and become less pliable. All of the dirigibles were made
with high fire stoneware clay. Once the two halves reached the desired level of moisture to hold their form, the foam slump molds were removed and the two clay halves were attached. After the body of the ship was formed they were smoothed and detailing of the ships features was started. All the ships have elements of carving and attachments, and some have slip application work. Details included: body surface design, gears, exhaust, propulsion engines, wings, windows, and other assorted mechanics. Once each ship body was fully constructed it was allowed to completely dry before being bisque fired. The bisque fired dirigibles were then glazed and fired in the soda kiln. In a soda kiln a mixture of soda ash and water is sprayed into the kiln near the end of the firing. This technique creates a glassy blushed surface. After the dirigibles were fired the surfaces were then worked again with model paints to give the mechanical parts a metallic quality. The wings and fins are made from a mixture of clay and cloth components. After all the ceramic components were attached, each dirigible had a scale hot air balloon created and connected with chain link. The balloons were created by the formation of a foam mold, balloon, or multiple balloons connected together with plastic wrap. The molds or balloons were then layered with muslin or canvas cloth that was soaked in a mixture of tacky glue, cornstarch, and water. After the glue mixture dried the molds were removed.
leaving a shaped cloth balloon. The balloons were then decorated with handmade custom netting created from crochet string stained with coffee and decorative chain. The finished piece is then displayed by being hung with high tensile strength line.
Specific Works

*Cargo Vessel- MK572*

Status: Operational

The *Cargo Vessel- MK572* is a sturdy workship intended for the transportation of large cargo and a small amount of passengers. A well-used dirigible, the surface exhibits some wear and rusting. It is an inexpensive ship constructed from scrap material informally fitted together with low budget copper mechanics, but is a durable workhorse that can get its cargo from one point to the other safely. The *Cargo Vessel* is not intended for fast transportation. The front features a large bay window for navigation; the back has decorative windows for captain's quarters and smaller closer windows for crew and passengers.
The Cargo Vessel was the first Dirigible made in the series. Its construction in the wet state took approximately three weeks. After it was bisque fired it was glazed with John’s Oil Spot, Pier Black, and bronze glazes and then soda fired. The wings are made of coffee stained muslin and its painting uses a combination of copper and rust paints. The hot air balloon is attached to the ship base by bronze link chain. The entire dirigible is 18 inches long, 21.5 inches high, and 13 inches wide.
Lotus Research Vessel

Status: Operational

The Lotus Research Vessel exhibits a unique curved shape and circular air balloon. This was designed so the ship could pivot on its lowest point allowing researchers to get up close to their discoveries through the large front bay window. Platforms for work stations can be seen through the front windows. The Lotus has fully rotational wings to aid in what position the ship body is in and spot lights located near the front bay window to aid in lighting the terrain below. Located in the rear of the ship is an opened cargo door showing the exploration pod being released. The exploration pod has a design resembling a stingray with side wings and a propeller tail and is intended for short journeys.

The Lotus is a privately funded vessel. Unlike Cargo Vessel- MK572 its surface is created by hexagonally fitted panels and features gold and steel attributes. The front of the Lotus has a white flower emblem. The vessel is newer and has more decorative attributes but also shows its wear from its research missions with green growth on the bottom.
The *Lotus Research Vessel* was the second Dirigible created in the fleet. It took three weeks to complete in wet state. The *Lotus* was glazed with John’s Oil Spot, Pier Black, Bronze, and Sea Slug and soda fired. It was then painted with steel, gold, copper, bronze, metallic green, and gloss black. The wings were created from an olive green fabric stiffened with glue and cornstarch and the balloon is attached with a sterling silver chain. The *Lotus* is 19.5 inches long, 28 inches high and 11 inches wide.
Transporter K87H5

Status: Inoperable - Colonized

The Transporter K87H5 was once a large transporter ship, but has now become stationary and colonized. It was originally a low budget super ship created from scrap metal and cheap mechanics. Many of its mechanical parts are no longer operational and have been broken, covered, or removed for scrap. It no longer has its wings or rudder and, without reconstruction, will no longer be able to fly. The inhabitants of the Transporter K87H5 have converted the ship into a stationary floating city. Compartments have been created from scrap metal and attached to the ship’s base to create more living space for the colony.

The Transporter was the third Dirigible in the series and was created over a three month period. It was glazed with Pier Black and Bronze glazes. Like the Cargo Vessel the transporter was painted to look worn and used. It has elements painted with copper and rust. The Transporter has multiple air balloons to support its weight. It is the largest Dirigible at 40.5 inches long, 15 inches wide, and {insert} high.
*Mute Monster*

Status: Private Vessel- Weaponized

Threat Level: Mild

The *Mute Monster* is a privately owned and constructed dirigible. As a small privately funded vessel it has many different features from the previous Dirigibles. The body has a uniform paneled surface with a black finish. The ship's design is small and streamlined with its air balloon close to the ship's body for speed. The balloon is secured with multiple chains and custom netting to ensure its steadiness in quick flight. As a privately owned custom ship it has more expensive features than the other ships. The body of the ship has a bronze trim, a custom weapon on each flank, gold, copper, steel, and bronze mechanics, and the captain's octopus insignia on the front of the ship in gold. The *Mute Monster* is not considered a threat to the general population but has been known to have destructive conflict with the *Opal Raven.*
Construction of the *Mute Monster* in the wet state took five days. It was glazed with Pier Black and Bronze glazes. The fired ship was then painted with gold, bronze, copper, and steel enamel paints. Its air balloon is attached with bronze link chain. The *Mute Monster* measures 16 inches long, 14 inches high and 4 inches wide.
**Opal Raven**

Status: Private Vessel - Weaponry
Unknown

Threat Level: Low, pending

Also a private vessel, the *Opal Raven* is a smaller, higher budget dirigible designed for speed. The *Opal Raven* exhibits a diamond patterned surface with a white finish. The air balloon is chained closer to the body of the ship to aid with speed and movement. It also features multiple wings for expert maneuvering. The mechanics are more internalized than the other ships and it has fewer windows for protection against damage. The ship is decorated with a bird skull insignia on the front. While no external weapons are visible, the *Opal Raven* has been in conflicts with the *Mute Monster* known to cause damage to both dirigibles and surroundings and it is categorized with a cautionary low threat level.
Construction of the *Opal Raven*’s greenware form took four days. The *Opal Raven* was glazed with Sea Slug and Bronze glazes. The fired ship was painted with gold, steel, and bronze and its small air balloon was attached with silver chain. The *Opal Raven* has dimensions of 16 inches long, 14 inches high, and 4 inches wide.
Celestial Bodies

The Celestial Bodies are intended to look like a cluster of planets or asteroids. They form the ‘floor’ over which the Dirigibles hover. They were fired using multiple techniques. Each firing brought unique qualities of differing states of matter, life sustaining abilities, and the appearance of damage. Celestial Bodies that were fired in the wood kiln have dark colorations of reds, browns, yellows, and blacks. The harshness of the wood kiln atmosphere also warped the shape, left rough ash texture, and even broke some of the pieces. The affects give the objects surface qualities that make them seem weathered and dry or even war damaged. The objects which were soda fired were glazed with Moss Crystal glaze and have a glossy green surface. They seem lively, and the yellow and aqua tints also leave them with a resemblance to gaseous bodies. Lastly, some Celestial Bodies were fired to a middle temperature in an electric kiln to leave their surface porous. They were then painted with acrylic metallic reds, golds, and bronzes. The surface treatment gives them...
the resemblance of molten material or fresh red earth. The *Celestial Bodies* are either left bare or have plant life growing in or on them. Some of the forms have holes cut through their surface allowing plant life to be grown inside them. Others have a second layer in which the plant life can grow on the first layer and up through the holes cut in the top layer. The final type has recesses carved into the surface like craters where the plant life can grow. All of the different forms of *Celestial Bodies* have plant growth and bareness representing different states; beginnings, endings, life, death, and regrowth. The *Celestial Bodies* have three primary shapes; an elongated oval that measures 15 inches long and 7.5 inches wide, a sphere measuring 15 inches by 10 inches, and a triangular form measuring 15 inches by 7.5 inches.
Conclusion and Exhibition Statement

The origin of my creative project was a concept based on feelings and the work I attempted to make was much more abstract. I quickly decided that was not my style. After struggling with related concepts the interactive story concept formed. This project allowed me to use my animation background, giving me characters and a storyline I could build upon. The dirigibles genesis was through multiple projects involving lanterns, while my current influences from the steampunk genre helped to realize them more fully. The elaborate steampunk style also gave me a chance to fully explore my love for near excessive detail and intricate work. The Celestial Bodies started as process exploration that grew into something larger which played into the concept of my storyline. Much of my work has revolved around the concept of making unique vessels that conceptually hold life or energy. The Celestial Bodies concept also gave me the ability to explore plant life as a medium. The dirigibles and Celestial bodies elements combined continue the theme of storytelling that has been a constant my work.
The creation of this project has taught me many things about art, techniques, working, and myself. I have gained technical skills through learning processes for working the materials, creating new processes, organizing myself, working with other people, and learning technical skills with equipment. I have learned that when a project is truly intriguing it can become consuming. Many of the days in the last ten months I have worked fourteen to twenty hour days simply immersed in the project. Switching from animation to ceramics has given me a solid object to work with unlike the computer generated image. The experiential quality having a piece I can put my hands on has changed how I approach my artwork. I hope to continue this work in combination with animation work to create even more imaginative pieces.


Appendixes

Stoneware Clay body- parts by weight

1 EPK
1 Hawthorne Fireclay
1 Gold art
.5 OM4 Ball Clay
.5 Custer Feldspar
.5 Silica

Slips

Black slip
35 OM4
20 EPK
15 Nepheline Syenite
25 Silica
5 Whiting
10-15% Cobalt Free Black Stain

White Slip
35 OM4
20 EPK
15 Nepheline Syenite
25 Silica
5 Whiting

Glazes

Sea Slug
31.7 Custer Feldspar
18.8 Whiting
8.9 EPK
6.9 Talc
28.7 Flint
2 Bone Ash
3 Titanium

Moss Crystals

169 Kona Feldspar
127 Whiting
103 Gerstley Borate
119 Magnesium Carbonate
10 EPK
240 Flint
232 Spodumene
30 Copper Carbonate

John’s Oil Spot
54.62 NC4
29.41 Silica
4.2 Whiting
7.56 EPK
4.6 Dolomite
6.72 Red Iron Oxide
4.2 Cobalt Carbonate

Bronze Glaze

80.8 Custer Feldspar
3.5 Kona-F4
1.2 Whiting
7.0 Silica
5.7 OM4 Ball Clay
1.8 Dolomite
29.3 Manganese Oxide
0.8 Red Iron Oxide
4 Bentonite

Pier Black

42.6 Custer Feldspar
4.7 Whiting
23.6 Kaolin
23.6 Dolomite
5.4 Borax
6.6 Cobalt Carbonate

6.6 Iron Chromate

Paints

Testors Enamels

Metallic Gold, Gloss Black, Steal, Brass, Copper, Rust

Muslin cloth

Acrylic paints- Anita’s and Folk Art

Crochet thread

Aleene’s Tacky glue

Walmart Cornstarch

Epoxy