THE MYTH OF THE NATURAL
A CREATIVE PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF FINE ARTS
BY
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Statement of the Problem

The research for this project revolves around the exploration into the myth of the natural. I am interested in the idea of the natural more than nature itself, where human manipulation of nature, and the untouched, virgin, natural environment coincides. My creative project focused on the re-creation of the natural. I am attracted to the artificial and manufactured natural environment. My exhibition goal was to create an installation to further remove the viewer from “The Natural”. I utilized the idea of the outdoorsman as a way to touch on these topics. The idea that man can do better than nature, and that man knows what is best for nature is the basis of my study; man’s manipulation of that which was once natural, to a now hybrid environment. The outdoorsman has a kinship with nature, feeling whole when placed back into nature. When you step into the outdoors, the man-made environment seems to disappear and you are allowed to once again interact at a raw level with the land. It is this idea, of getting back to nature, which I want to explore through human interaction with these environments.

My connection to nature stems from being an avid outdoorsmen. The idea of getting back to nature, becoming one with nature, is one that stabs at the core of the outdoorsmen. My research into the engineered and manufactured environments originated from fly-fishing for trout. I was fishing one day and had the best day I have ever had out on the river. Looking around the river, I couldn’t have envisioned a better day. There were deer sipping from the river. Turkeys on the banks, and there I was, catching fish. I caught 40-50 fish that day, all the same size and kind. It was then that I had the realization that these fish had been stocked that morning. These fish had been put there so that I could have this serene experience. The lake had been dammed for hydroelectricity, and the river was made from the tail-water coming from the lake. I
was a part of this system that had been fabricated entirely by man, so that humans can enjoy nature.

**Review of Influences/Literature**

Andrew Mowbray is an American sculptor whose works deal with the idea of “The Sportsman” as a metaphor for manliness, bravado and bachelorhood. A native of Massachusetts, he began fly-fishing and interacting with the outdoors at a young age. After completing his Masters degree in Sculpture at Cranbrook Academy of Art, Mowbray continued to exhibit and create his artwork in his own studio. During this time Mowbray took part in a group exhibition, *Back from Nature, The Sportsmen Redux*, at the Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art in Portland, Maine.

“Back From Nature explored art either dealing directly with the activities of hunting and fishing or with the aesthetics, cult status, history, and politics of the sportsman… The American sportsman is a cultural icon and enduring metaphor for manliness, bravado, and courage.” (Miller)

Mowbray’s addition to the show was a sculpture he calls *Palingenesis*, (1) which means rebirth, regeneration, and reincarnation. This artwork was inspired by Duchamp’s *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*. (2) This sculpture is broken up into two halves. In the top half the bride is depicted as geometric shapes interlocking to form a human figure. On the bottom of the pane of glass are nine forms representing nine bachelors. The bachelors are on an apparatus that is grinding chocolate, a reference to “grinding their own chocolate” or masturbating.
In Mowbray’s interpretation he has used the tools and aesthetics of fly-fishing to depict Duchamp’s artwork. Mowbray’s sculptural installation is a wall piece that is broken up into halves, like Duchamp’s, the top being the bride and the bottom being the bachelors. In this rendition, an over sized pink trout creel, a holding net for trout after being caught, stands in for the bride. Beside this creel was Mowbray’s interpretation of the Milky Way fabricated from synthetic fur. On the bottom half a white vinyl suit (3) with buttons made into little urinals, as Mowbray’s homage to Duchamp, stood in for the bachelors. Beside the suit is a fly-fishing rod, representing the chocolate grinder. Atop the fly rod there are placed seven trout nets, representing the seven sieves, which are a reference to the romantic languages. After the fly rod there is a shadow box with tied flies, in the box, tied with his own hair.

Before the opening to the exhibition Mowbray had a private performance, which only a select few collectors attended. (4) This performance included Mowbray going to the river with the trout creel in hand, dressed in the vinyl suit. Above his crotch was a girdle that held the fly rod. His action of turning the crank of the reel was Mowbray “grinding his own chocolate” (5). This performance was recorded, but the video was never meant to be seen by the viewer. Video stills of the performance accompanied the installation. Mowbray uses these pixelated photos to portray that this action was a performance and not real life.

I chose Andrew Mowbray to research because I like his approach to his work, his use of metaphors, as well as objects to create installations. His ideas, present in the “The Sportsman”, resonate in my own artwork. I feel a kinship with Mowbray. His sculptures and approach to subject matter motivates me in my work.
Being an avid outdoorsmen, my connection to nature comes from being a part of nature. Mowbrays installations touch on that aspect of my sculptures. Another portion of my research and interest lies in the re-creation of natural systems, that which are overlooked and taken advantage of in our everyday lives.

Among contemporary artists, Wim Delvoye has risen to the company of the best. His sculptures are controversial and thought provoking. In Delvoye’s series *The Cloaca Factory* (6), drawing inspiration from the artist Peiro Manzoni, Delvoye hopes to continue the conversation that Manzoni started in his artwork, *The Artist's Shit*, giving the gallery-going public that which is the total embodiment of the artist’s labor: his feces. In this Manzoni was packaging a natural object, in this case, his shit.

To fully interpret Delvoye’s sculpture, it is important to be informed of his artistic predecessors. Artist Piero Manzoni in May 1961 canned and numbered ninety samples of his own feces. This series was called *Artist’s Shit*, with the cans labeled, *Artist's Shit, contents 30gr net freshly preserved, produced and tinned* in May 1961, with Manzoni’s name repeating around each can (7). The cans were then weighed and sold at the market price of gold. Manzoni intended for the market value of each can to always reflect the current price of gold. The price of gold in 1961 was $35 per ounce; in 2012 the price per ounce was $1630. That means that in 1961 each can sold for $1050, compared to a modern day price of approximately $48,900. Manzoni said, “if collectors want something intimate, really personal to the artist, there's the artist's own shit, that is really his.” (Howarth)

There is some controversy regarding whether or not Manzoni actually placed and canned his own fecal matter. Agostino Bonalumi, an assistant to Manzoni, claims that some of the cans were filled with plaster and not excrement. Contrary to Bonalumi, at an exhibition in Denmark at
the Randers Museum of Art, one of the two cans on display started to leak, producing a foul odor, thus disproving her claim. (Marianne)

In the consumer-based, food obsessed world that we live in, Delvoye created an all-inclusive replication of the human digestive system. He has called this machine Cloaca Factory. The cloaca is a sphincter on certain animals, such as the chicken, in which both fecal and urinary matter is expelled. Delvoye’s machine is a living entity that requires food and fluids twice a day. On one end of the machine there is the feeding receptacle. Someone from the gallery has to put food into it at multiple intervals throughout the day. Delvoye gives specific instruction as to the quantity and substance of the food. In some installations that food might be your typical American diet of cheeseburgers and fries. In others this may be a high-end steak with caviar and wine. The machine tells you that it is hungry by a blue flashing light over it. From there the food gets ground up (chewed) by steel plates, and pumped into the first glass jar. Re-creating the mouths function. In this jar the solids and liquids are mixed with acids. Delvoye controls the acid level in this container via the Internet from his studio. This jar represents the stomach. This stomach has actual stomach acids, donated to Delvoye. This means that if the gallery does not feed the Cloaca Factory everyday, the living acids decompose and die, because they are living, breathing organisms. It then takes four days to build up enough acids to sustain the system. From there the mixture is pumped to the second jar. Pancreatic enzymes are used to start the breaking down of fats, starches, and proteins. The third jar is where bile gets introduced to the mix. From there, the 4th, 5th and 6th jars do the jobs of the small and large intestines. Just like in our bodies these jars neutralize the acids. In each jar the correct mixture of acids and oxygen are produced to ensure proper digestion. The final jar is where the liquids, urine, drain out and the solids are compressed. Then the solids get excreted through a tube and the final product is
literally, shit. The feces are to be flushed by the gallery down the toilet. Delvoye also will package and sell pieces made from the Cloaca Factory. (8) These pieces are the embodiment of the machine. Delvoye has created the machine to make his artwork for him. (Edwards)

Manzoni was attempting to give the viewer and the galleries the most personal part of him, that which is encompassing everything that he lives, breathes, drinks, and eats. This piece was about his labor over his art. What he consumed and digested was what he gave to the viewer. Delvoye took this to a whole new level. He not only packaged and sold feces, but he created the production of the feces. Delvoye's creation labored for him. It is a perfect re-creation of the body’s system. The irony of the piece is that it took many scientists and processes to do what the body naturally does everyday. Delvoye had his manufactured feces sent to a lab and compared to actual human feces. The lab attendants were shocked when the samples were no different from actual human feces.

Mowbrays sculptures deal with the Sportsman and his interaction with nature. Delvoye's installations deal with a natural system that he recreates in the exhibition space. While these two men are very different in practice, I see a kinship between their sculptures. With my installation I am interpreting their work through a postmodern perspective.

Description of the Artworks

With this creative project, I became the designer of nature. I was the set designer, my sculptural installation is the show, and the viewers are the audience. I created this synthetic and totally faux environment to further remove the viewer from the natural. In my scene there are no bugs to bite you, there is no water to dampen, there is no dirt to dirty your clothes. With this I
have created a sterile environment that the viewer can experience nature with out the worries of nature.

I like the products of the 1950s ideologies. The idea that to be modern, means to live in a completely controlled and suburban euphoric environment. That humankind knows what is best for the land and how to cultivate it to be more useful to humans. The perfectly manicured grass. Everything made out of plastic. A totally manipulated and controlled environment. To acknowledge that ideology, I created my scene in the same vein. My reconstruction of the natural is meant to be the ideal version of nature.

For my thesis exhibition, I recreated the “natural environment” as a scene. I did this in such a way as to further remove the viewer from the natural environment. I thought about this project as a stage, similar to a prop designer creating a stage for a play. The components of my exhibition were constructed on a super structure, almost like a pedestal. The super structure was never meant to be seen by the viewer. Only after they had seen the installation from the frontal vantage point could they see the superstructure. It was my intent here to make the viewer see a pristine view of my landscape. I intended to break this illusion by having the viewer walk around the exhibit and see how I built the scene. Seeing every nail, cord and prop I used to create my scene.

My installation is a study of the constructed natural environment. It is my intent for the viewer to walk into the space and see a complete and pristine environment. As the viewer experiences the sculptural installation from different angles, I want them to see that this environment was no more then a façade concealing the extensive amount of human engineering that is required to create the ‘ideal landscape.’
The actualization of my creative project materialized as an exhibition in the Atrium Gallery on Ball State University’s campus. My installation was titled *The Myth of the Natural.*

In the front room of the Atrium Gallery I created a river scene. This scene was comprised of all man made materials intended to represent aspects of the natural environments. This river scene was comprised of two main sections. The first was grass made of green and brown AstroTurf. In the grass were bundles of tall grass made out of fiber optic glass. The second was the river portion made of blue AstroTurf, mirrored tubes, and neon tubes. In the river there were river rocks made from mirrored blown glass.

For my installation I utilized neon to attract the viewer, the audience, to the scene. In my installation the neon represented moving water, flowing through the scene. Neon signs are used to attract attention. The neon is made using a torch to bend glass tubes. The glass tubes have a phosphor coating on the inside of them. This coating dictates the color of the final bent tube. The color can also be manipulated using gasses. If you put neon gas in the tube it becomes red. Argon with a little mercury placed in the tube makes the tube blue. It is a combination of phosphor and gas that creates the color. Once bent, on either end of the tube is placed an electrode. This electrode is attached to connect to a power source, giving the tube electricity. The tube is then connected to the gas manifold. The manifold does two things. One, it allows the tube to be connected to a vacuum, removing the air in the tube. Once vacuumed the tube can then be bombarded with a high voltage, low amperage electrical current. This current heats up the tube and burns all of the impurities inside. Two, the manifold allows the tube to be filled with either argon or neon gas. Once filled the tube is closed off so that the gas is trapped in the tube. The tube is now ready to be connected to a power supply and installed.
AstroTurf represents grass in *The Myth of the Natural*. AstroTurf is the first thing I consider as a faux natural environment. It is a synthetic product that is considered and used as real grass. AstroTurf is a polyurethane backed synthetic grass invented in 1965. Its main use was in place of grass in stadiums because it was cost efficient and low maintenance. It is the total embodiment of the engineered natural environment. I used the AstroTurf as the stand in for grass in my scene.

When building a form in a computer you start by using base geometry. Base geometry is the primal geometry necessary to make a shape. For example to create a human face, the base geometry of the face would be a square. The primary of all forms in a computer is comprised of polygons. Building upon these polygons gives you more advanced and intricate shapes. In my exhibition I used this idea to create the grass in my scene. I used polygon shapes butted up against one another to create a larger form. Using base geometry allowed me to create a larger installation using simple forms.

I wrapped the AstroTurf around cut geometric shapes of wood, which I layered on top of each other to create a seamless landscape flowing down the super structure. Some of the forms are propped up at various angles to give the illusion of depth. The AstroTurf is different shades of green creating depth and variance. As the forms descend down the structure, there are earth tone panels that fade the grass to brown ending on the floor of the gallery, flowing into the viewers’ space.

In the water of the scene there are river rocks breaking up the blue AstroTurf. The river rocks in the scene are made of mirrored glass to reflect the environment around them. In this way the viewer was inserted into my work, becoming part of my work, as a reflection onto the environment. This allowed the viewer to be forced out of the passive and into the active. These
rocks are literally reflective, but the river is also a place where the outdoorsman can go and reflect on life.

To make the blown glass rocks, the hot glass is manipulated into a spherical shape. After the sphere is made it is shaped using a wet newspaper pad into a more geometric form. After blowing takes place the glass is cooled down in a kiln overnight. Once out of the kiln the bottom of the glass is cut and polished. Then a silver solution is used to mirror the glass. It is a process in which the glass is cleaned with distilled water to get any impurities off the surface of the glass. Once it is clean, the inside surface of the glass is coated with tin sensitizing solution to accept the silver solution. The silver solution is applied next. It is a 1/1/1 ratio solution of silver, activator, and reducer. When poured into the glass and swished around to evenly coat the inside surface of the glass, the tin solution accepts the silver and turns the glass to a mirror on the inside of the rock form.

To create vegetation in my scene I used bundled groups of fiber optics. Fiber optics has the amazing power to absorb the light around them. When a neon light is placed next to them the light travels up the glass and reflects off of the glass. This creates more light in the scene. This also allowed me to give the scene more dimension by having the bushes protrude into the space of the gallery.

To construct the fiber optics I pulled long, hair-thick strands of glass. Once pulled the strands were cut into two and three feet sections. Grouping together fist full bundles, they were placed into a small tube and fixed in place with an epoxy resin. These tubes were then placed into the scene using drilled holes in the structure.

**Conclusion and Exhibition Statement**
The Myth of the Natural is an exhibition stemming from my interests as an avid outdoorsmen. My connection with nature and the un-manipulated and pure environments drives my artistic practice. My exhibition goal was to create an installation to further remove the viewer from “The Natural”. While looking at contemporary artists that have approached this subject, I have found ways to attack these issues in my sculptural installations. Andrew Mowbray's methodologies towards his own art practice have been an inspiration to my works. My re-creation of the natural environment has been influenced by Delvoyes re-creation of natural systems.

It is human nature to look at an environment and make it adaptable to ones interest. It is easier to drive right up to a river, park my car and start fishing. This river is exponentially more accommodating to man than hiking to a stream that is in the middle of the woods. It is reason that we make the stream come to us, rather than us go to the stream. Man created the dam, created the river, and then stocked the fish so I can fish. This is what makes evolution great. Man can now re-connect with nature, which was constructed by man. By going through all this technology to create an environment, we have removed ourselves from the real environment. It is this idea that informs and drives my artistic practice. To further remove the viewer from the real and into a completely sterile setting consisting of nothing physical from the primary environment.

It is my intent to bring these ideas to the exhibition space. To show the viewer my installation from one perspective, giving one idea of what my scene is. Then when shown from a different angle, the inner workings of my constructed environment is revealed. To construct this scene in the gallery, I created the scene first in my studio. The super structure was fashioned in a way that I could put up and take down this exhibition easily and quickly. The preliminary
construction in my studio was important to me to be able to set the scene, being the prop designer. I wanted the structure to be in sections that could be manipulated once set into the gallery.

Through the research and conception of my creative project I have dug into the core of my interest into nature through fishing. I realized that the environment is what I like about the outdoors. Whether the river is generated by environmental conditions, or a construct of man. It makes no difference in the experience as long as the illusion is authentic.

Reference List and/or Bibliography


Appendixes

Product Companies

Neon

Peacock Laboratories, Inc.
54th & Paschal lave.
Philadelphia, PA 19143
(215) 729-4400

Mirroring Solutions

EGL Company Inc.
100 Industrial Rd.
Berkeley Heights, NJ 07922
1 908 508 1111
**Procedures**

**Step-by-Step Neon Bombarding Procedure.**

1) Connect bent tube to manifold, attach thermocouple to bent tube
2) With the main to the vacuum closed and the U gauge open, and close the mouth piece stopcock, turn on vacuum
3) Open main to the vacuum slowly
4) Check for leaks around each connection with the sparker
5) Unlock and turn on breaker
6) Lower chock almost all the way
7) Close vacuum
8) Close u gauge
9) Let in 2-3 mm of outside air from the mouth piece stopcock
10) Turn on safety to transformer
11) Pump tube to 100 degrees Celsius, do not let U gauge get above 4mm
12) Open Main stopcock for 30 seconds to a min, close stopcock
13) Raise choke 2-3 inch, approx. .25 amps on amp meter
14) Open u gauge, close u gauge
15) Let in 2-3 mm of outside air
16) Pump to 150 degrees Celsius, do not let u gauge get above 4 mm
17) Re-adjust U gauge to 2-3mm of air
18) Raise choke to 6 inches, approx. .45 amps on amp meter
19) Pump tube to 275 degrees Celsius, do not let glass get above 300 degrees Celsius
20) Open U gauge, close u gauge
21) Turn off safety, lower choke, turn off breaker
22) Let cool to 80 degrees Celsius
23) Let in neon/argon to appropriate tube size
24) Separate bent tube from manifold, open u gauge open air
25) Burn in tube
Step-by-Step Mirroring Glass

Before your begin make sure you have all of these materials

- HE-300 Concentrates.
  - Silver Solution.
  - Activator Solution.
  - Reducer Solution.
  - Sensitizing Solution
- Distilled water (about one gallon per four pieces)
- Funnel, Various sizes
- Measuring cups
  - 4 small
  - 1 large
  - 1 shot glass
Empty jug for waste liquids
Apron
Latex gloves
Respirator
Glasses

Diluting Silver, Activator, Reducer

These concentrated liquids can be mixed in any volume, as long as you stay true to the ratios. The diluted chemicals have a shelf life of over 30 days. Silvering can be done whenever you wish. You do not have to wait until there is a large quantity of mirrors to do before you can silver efficiently. KEEP STOPPERED AND REFRIGERATED.

1. Measure four fluid ounces of concentrated Silver Solution “A” into one gallon of distilled or deionized water and mix. (1 to 32)
2. Then add four fluid ounces of concentrated Activator Solution “B” into a separate container and dilute to one gallon with deionized water. (1 to 32)

   NOTE: CONCENTRATED “A” AND “B” SHOULD NEVER BE MIXED TOGETHER!

3. Measure four fluid ounces of concentrated Reducer Solution into a separate container and dilute with water to one gallon. (1 to 32)
4. Measure 4 fluid ounces of #93 Sensitizer into a container and dilute to one gallon. This solution must be prepared fresh daily. (1 to 32)

Step 1 – Cleaning the glass
Make sure your glass is clean. Rinse with tap water then carefully rinse with distilled or demineralized water.

Note: Beginning with the final rinse, the surface being treated must always be wet.

**Step 2 - Sensitizing (Tinning)**

1. Pour the diluted sensitizing solution in to your form. You only need a little. Cap the hole with a piece of glass or your hand. Shake the piece vigorously making sure to get every nook and cranny for 10-20 seconds. Pour any used liquid into a one-gallon jug to be discarded properly.
2. Rinse the object thoroughly with distilled water following the sensitizing step. Silvering the object should be initiated immediately following sensitizing. The surface must not be allowed to dry.

**Step 3 - Silvering**

Begin application of silvering solutions immediately following the final rinse under step #2.

**The Pouring Process:**

Mix equal amounts of Diluted Silver, Activator, and Reducer in a plastic or glass pouring cup (1 to 1 to 1). Use from 1 ounce of each dilute chemical per square foot of glass. Stir and pour onto the wet, sensitized glass. Pour into your form, like the sensitizer cover with sheet glass or your palm. Shake vigorously. You will see the glass darken, and then silver (No longer than 2-3 minutes). There is enough silver on the glass when a light is still visible through the silver film. Following the silver solution application, the film should be thoroughly rinsed with distilled water. The wastewater can be put into the discard jug. Dry your piece as fast as possible; use the air hose if necessary, then let dry upside down so water cannot collect in your form. After drying you can paint the back black to protect the mirror from scratching off.
Influences Images

2. Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1923


10. Andrew Najarian, *The Myth of the Natural*, (Back view) 2013