To Be Human

An Honors Thesis (ART 490)

by

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Thesis Advisor
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Signed

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Abstract

For my thesis I designed and constructed an art exhibition that incorporates many mediums with a focus on ceramic fine art. Conceptually, my thesis explores being human, our basic psychological needs, and our relationship to the natural world. The purpose of my project is to create a series of work that together form an immersive environment for the viewer that asks them to contemplate their role as a natural being within our world and to also consider the basics for human happiness. The final product of my thesis is an art exhibition in the atrium gallery.

*To Be Human* is a culmination of techniques, materials and many of the conceptual ideas my art has focused on over the years. This project fulfills my desire to create an entire space that forms an environment for the viewer to experience and interact with. By creating an entire space, my work has the possibility of a more encompassing effect on the viewer. This project has added to my knowledge in the use of various materials, such as ceramic, wood, steel, and glass, and the combination of those materials. While I have used all of these materials before, this project has demanded a lot of problem solving as I have figured out how to put everything together to bring my vision to reality.

My show in the simplest terms is about being human, so it will be intended for everyone. I hope viewers will take away from my show a desire to be more connected with our natural surroundings and the present moment. I also hope they leave with a deeper understanding of our basic needs in order to lead a more fruitful and happy life. There are many conceptual meanings that I intend my art to convey, but I also hope that viewers gain a greater appreciation for the materials and techniques I use and for art and beauty as a whole.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Ted Neal for advising me during this project. He has been extremely encouraging throughout the years and has always made great effort to expose his students to the ceramic world beyond Ball State. I would like to especially thank him for his support during my final thesis project.

I would like to thank my family, friends and professors who assisted me and encouraged me as I worked on my thesis show.
Author's Statement

-Significance/ Relevance

The world has been driven forward with the fast pace of technology, causing many great improvements in global health, communications, and several other aspects of life. While life for the general society has improved tremendously, have we lost a part of what it is to be human? A society that in the past spent their entire day toiling in the fields now spends their time glued to electronic devices. Daydreaming has become a thing of the past, with so many options to steal your attention away from your inner thoughts. We've become numb because our world constantly puts our senses into overload. Sitting idly and thinking is thought to be a waste of time when one could simply type a few words into Google and have thousands of answers or ideas in milliseconds. The boundaries of communication have exploded, allowing people around the world to have business and personal relations from miles away, moving conversation away from face to face interaction. My thesis show, To Be Human, combats these issues with society by providing environments that take the viewer away from the technology-obsessed world and allows them to return back to the basics of human nature.

The three areas of my thesis show create a relief from the speed of the world giving the viewer an environment to experience a break from the issues of society. Like other contemporary artists I am critiquing my biggest issues with the world, however, I am also trying to solve the problem through my work, rather than just making a statement about it, consequently pushing the impact of art within one's life.
-Influences

My art is an expression of how I see and react to the world, causing everything I come in contact with to influence my work in a minute to extreme manner. One of my biggest influences for my artwork that is an overarching theme within my work is the natural environment. More specifically, I am fascinated with seedpods or flower buds before they have opened, or as they are in the process of opening. I appreciate the seedpod in that it is producing seed or the next season, allowing for rejuvenation and a fresh start. The flower bud is also important to me because it is full of potential and is just about to come into the world in its perfect state. Natural fractals are also influential in my work. I find a beauty in organic perfection and organization of multiples that can be found when looking at natural matter on a microscopic scale.

Figure 1: Seedpod

Figure 2: Fractal: Romanesco Broccoli, tin.G

Figure 1 Fractal: Fern, Cobalt123
Seedpods and fractals influence both my sculptural and utilitarian work. While the natural world is most significant in my work, the work of several artists has directed my work as well. In my utilitarian ceramic work, the reference to nature by Bonnie Seeman and Martha Grover has helped me expand on my basic forms and focus on detailed work that brings my utilitarian work into the realm of sculpture.

I also feel heavily influenced by the forms I have seen from Tara Wilson. I enjoy the sleek curves in her work and the way she addresses the interaction with the surface the work sits on. I also have looked a lot at Deb Schwartzkopf's work. I feel most influenced by the way she puts sets of work together and many times contains them within a tray made specifically for that grouping.
My sculptural ceramic work is influenced by the work of Susan Beiner, Dale Chihuly, and Thomas Heatherwick's Seed Cathedral. The intense quantity of similar elements that create one large sculpture plays to my interest in fractals and also creates a lot of texture, almost like a landscape that the viewer can explore. I like the monochromatic color scheme of some of Chihuly's pieces and the Seed Cathedral, as well as Beiner's subtle palette.
A major goal in my work is to create an environment that encompasses the viewer with a feeling or mindset, which allows the viewer to have a deeper interaction with the work. Mark Rothko is my biggest influence in this regard. His paintings have an emotional presence in the gallery that the viewer can experience. Rothko even created a chapel that houses some of his paintings as a spiritual space to interact with his work. In a similar way, the Seed Cathedral also produces an encompassing space that sets a mood when one is present within the cathedral. Frank Lloyd Wright is another of my influences in the way he designed complete spaces. Everything from the building, carpet, window art glass, lights, furniture, and ceramics within one of his designs was created to work together to make a completely designed space for people to live or work within.
-Creative Process

My creative process typically begins with writing a list of what I want my work to communicate to the viewer. Once I feel the concept is strong, the next step is to figure out how to visually reiterate those ideas. This aspect of my process can take a lot of time and usually is best worked through by spending time in contemplation. Often I will take a sort of meditative nap where I toss around ideas for artwork that will communicate my concepts, or as I am in a semi-conscious state of sleep I will work through many of my ideas as well. I also photo search inspirations or spend time looking at plants. After much thought I usually come to a visual that I feel accurately translates my concept, which at this point I start sketching my ideas and begin working through the technical processes.

-To Be Human- Artist Statement

The question “what does it mean to be human?” marks the human existence through the ability to perceive the self. My work explores this notion through environments designed to foster basic human psychological needs. Each environment focuses on reflective, internal, or external thought and communication and are meant to be interactive spaces for personal or interpersonal contemplation and investigation.

Natural forms are predominant throughout my work as a reminder of our origins as organic human beings of the Earth. I hope for my work to serve as a place where viewers can escape the speed of the synthetic world and take time to contemplate who they are and their place in the grand scheme of it all.
Reflection and Memory

This section of my show features three ceramic vases and two jars on a walnut and steel table with glass framed mirrors hung above the table. I see this area as an entryway into the rest of my work, with the set-up mimicking a typical hall table setting. The vases and jars represent memories and elements of the self and identity, while the mirrors ask the viewers to look at themselves related to their natural surroundings. I hope for the interaction with this piece to be personally reflective on past events and how they have shaped the viewer into who they are.
A triptych of large-scale sculptures made of hundreds of ceramic slip cast day lily seedpods and blooms, along with a steel seating area make up Self-Actualization. This environment asks viewers to take time to sit and contemplate their role in the world. This idea is articulated visually through large-scale wall sculptures of flower buds and seedpods growing out of the wall, symbolizing renewal and new beginnings of life. The buds are set up in a triptych form, a three part format that is common in religious art, in the
shape of a mandorla, the overlapping area of two circles, one representing earth and the other heaven or the spirit. These wall sculptures create a spiritual space for personal reflection. The natural design of the sculptures also asks viewers to think about their relationship to nature and the world and people around them. There is a bench designed for the space that I designed to allow for people to sit and contemplate while they view the sculpture. Viewers will be able to think, meditate, or embrace spirituality within the space, which will allow for a deeper understanding of the self and the ability to improve upon one’s self.
Engage

*Engage* is a full tea setting comprised of a ceramic teapot, sugar jar, creamer pitcher, and two cups on a glass tray. This tea setting sets atop a walnut and steel table with two benches and a slip cast ceramic light sculpture that hangs above the table. As the title suggests, this environment was created to facilitate the growth of relationships. Although in a typical gallery setting viewers will not be able to sit and share tea at the table, that is the true intent. This piece is meant to encourage face-to-face interaction and conversation while interacting with a work of art. In this space people could share a small meal and
build relationships, combating the societal shift towards indirect communication. Once again all the forms are taken from nature to bring back the idea of our place in the world and our connection to our natural surroundings.
- Work Dimensions

**Reflection and Memory**
- Middle Vase- 12"x6.5"x6.5"
- Exterior Vases- 11.125"x5.5"x5.5"
- Jars- 4"x5"x5"
- Hall Table- 31.75"x52.5"x20"
- Center Mirror- 16"x9"x2"
- Exterior Mirrors- 12.5"x7"x2"

**Self-Actualization**
- Corner Sculpture- 108"x38"x24"
- Branch Sculptures- 70"x11"x8"
- Bench- 17"x67"x13"

**Engage**
- Tea Table- 29"x74"x30"
- Benches- 17.7"x40"x15"
- Light- 12"x32"x12"
- Glass Tea Tray- 2.5"x22"x10.5"
- Teapot- 7.5"x7.5"x5"
- Creamer Pitcher- 3.75"x4"x2.5"
- Sugar Jar- 3.5"x3.5"x3.5"
- Cups- 2.5"x3.125"x3.125"
Works Cited


To Be Human
BFA Thesis Exhibition | Lauren Sherwood

December 8-18, 2015
Atrium Gallery
Ball State University

Tuesday - Friday, 10-4 p.m.
Saturday, 1-4 p.m.
Closed Sunday & Monday

Closing Reception
December 18, 2015
4-6 p.m.

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