



FOREVER•FACTORY

Samuel Turner

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Problem Statement

Forever Factory tells the story of a post-apocalyptic landscape covered in mountains of refuse. Throughout the landscape, surviving humans scour radioactive remnants of past civilizations with plastic belongings suffocating their bodies. Whatever the humans find of value is gifted to the *God of Eternal Industry*, a stump-legged maggot-dragon sitting upon a pile of gold amongst its spawn.

This piece processes an insecure future as a professional artist. It seems there is no avenue to success save for selling one's intellectual property to corporations so large, old, and wealthy that their influence will continue unregulated even after a worldwide nuclear holocaust. Though I have faith that humans survive regardless of modern strife, I fear the continued, unchecked control of companies regressing into feudalistic control over people and what they are capable of producing.

Additionally, I've found that my "recycled material murals" are all infused with a sense of shame. I'm ashamed that I benefit from such material excess while others live in abject poverty. My job with paintings like these is to, at the very least, try to apply some sort of value to materials that are disregarded and thrown away.



Gallery View

When creating this space, I wanted my audience to feel claustrophobic. Murals tend to be spread over a large viewing space, yet our individual cells give an interesting opportunity to bombard the viewer with art from every angle.

The Ever-Factory worked especially well because it spanned over multiple walls and appeared as if it's bending around the viewer as they walked into the space. I'm very glad that I opted against a third character and made a dichotomy between dragon and human, as it allowed for the best usage of scale.

This connects them with the life-sized hermit, as they're similarly trapped in this cycle of refuse at the whims of *The Ever-Factory*.

However, in retrospect, I think a full-coverage of cardboard would've made for a more cohesive studio. At the very least, the gold pile would've worked beautifully if I incorporated a 3D pile of paper mache or other gold-colored refuse.



I decided against hung incandescent lights because they would interfere with other exhibitions near me and would alter the colors of this piece.

A full character on the ground proved to be too inconvenient, so it was cut and replaced with the small suggestion of a tail.

The Ever Factory, Dragon, and Mother



The Ever-Factory is a personification of industry. Its fiery, toothy maw consumes the livelihood and labor of individuals to hoard its own vast fortune. With countless eyes and impish spawn, the dragon lords over its domain. Its wings, though formidable, would struggle to lift its own weight after years of consumption. It is uncompromising, unrelenting, and unreformable. It exists to destroy the land and the people who call it home.



This character was supposed to my exhibition's main focus, yet it got lost amongst the characters on the other walls. I made the executive decision to replace *The Fauna* with *The Dragon's* rear-end, as the landscape already showcased the destruction of nature. At this scale, the monster could be truly intimidating to my viewers and draw more observers into the space.

The Hermit



The Hermit, emaciated, struggles under the weight of that which they cannot own. Humans must work all day, sifting through the irradiated garbage mountains in hopes of finding objects to satiate their Lord's inner incinerator. Day and night, they carry it all on their back through this wretched valley. Unfortunately, if one fails to find something to her liking, they are eaten as tribute to their overlord.



The Hermit was my largest uncertainty, as it constituted the most significant sculptural element to the piece. My initial idea was to paint the bags, but thought that incorporating these bulging forms would help distinguish them from the rest of the painting. By committing to this material exploration, I was motivated to add elements of sculpture everywhere in the piece.

Dragonkin



The Dragonkin, vile creatures birthed after the Earth's nuclear destruction, cling to their mother and leech off the land. They are groomed to consume, to destroy, and to lord over humanity like their mother. I included the dragonkin as a means to understand industry as an ever-growing, expanding cancer which divides itself into companies upon trusts upon sub organizations. '



The wealth accumulated by their mother is only in service of producing more offshoots and nothing else. It is growth for the purpose of growth, of an abstract sense of prosperity, not for the good of human experience. After removing the allegory of *The Fauna*, I was left with a compositionally dull backside of *The Ever-Factory*. *The Dragonkin* were a solution which accentuated the scale of their mother, and corrected the shape of her head in the case of the central wall.

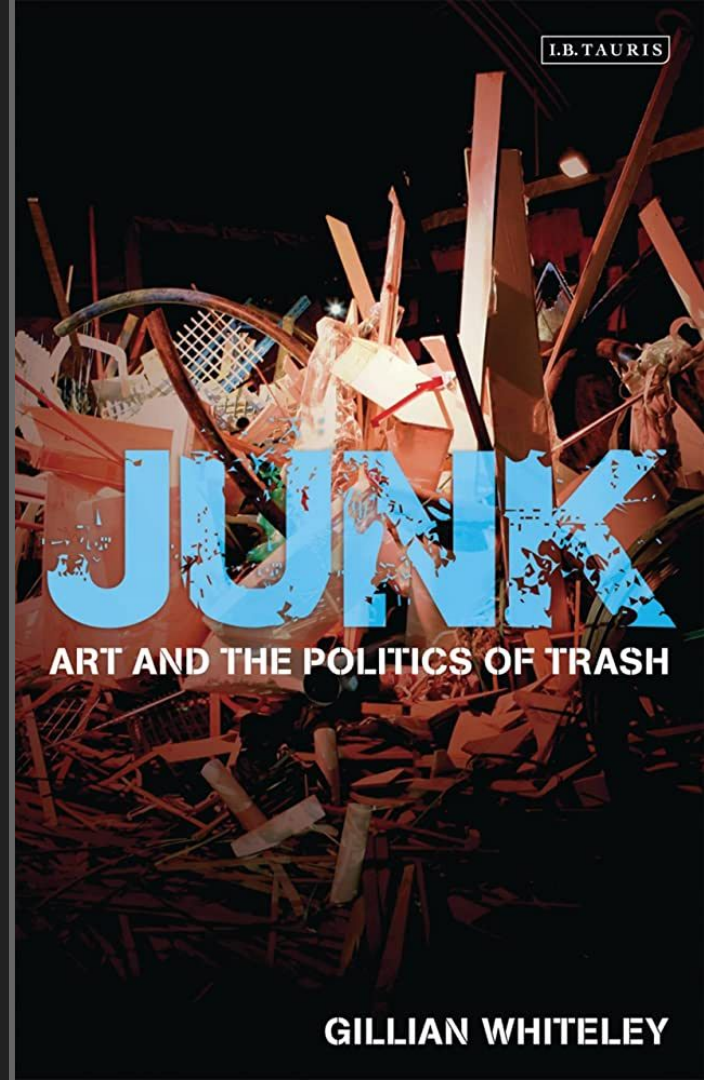
Junk Art and The Politics of Trash

This work taught me that trash does not require additional dressing to express political intention. Thus far I've covered up trash with paint, yet this book inspired me to leave material to shine on its own. However, after working with trash for so long, I'm still struggling to find the correct balance of subtlety and expression within the medium.

Tying together a piece with a singular broad statement is pretentious and a disservice to your audience. It removes one's agency to draw their own conclusions, and I really want someone to stay engrossed by the scale of my work. Talking directly removes that incentive to explore or revisit, as it had with various works introduced by the book.

The act of creating these pieces are, as stated before, a way of processing my shame from consumption. We all know that we toss items at an unsustainable rate, yet we ignore this fear at every opportunity. Using junk forces me to acknowledge the societal problems I willingly ignore. Because my process involves no planned purpose, what appears in the finished product are the anxieties I felt throughout its creation.

Even I can't forecast what the art means until months after completion. There are so many ideas present that I fail to find the most central issue amongst the noise. The power of trash is to remind and to reflect on the structures that cause such massive, unstoppable, unsustainable consumption.



I.B. TAURIS

JUNK

ART AND THE POLITICS OF TRASH

GILLIAN WHITELEY

When Trash Becomes Art

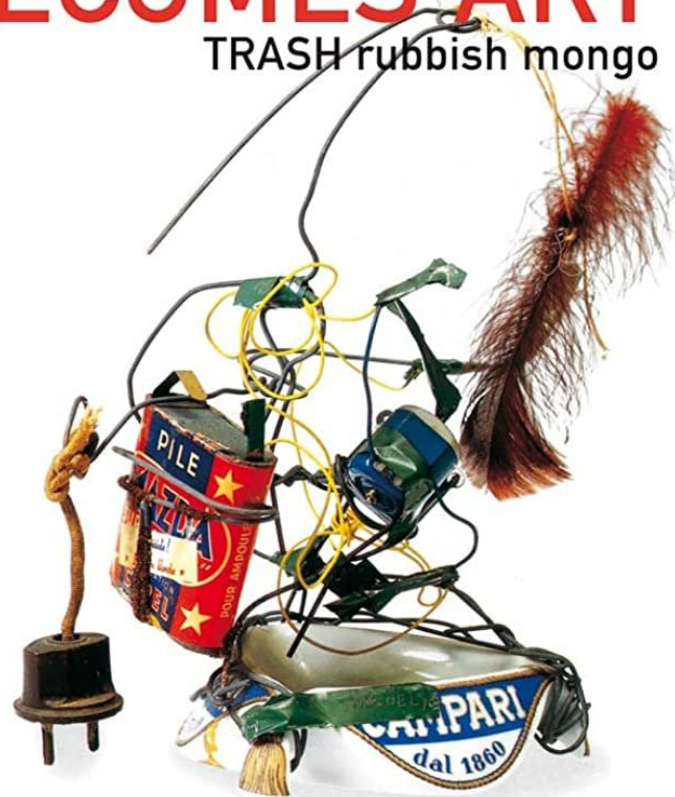
I suppose that before reading this text, I had the conception that trash art was a somewhat novel idea. Of course, that comes from my formal arts education where canvases were understood to be static things that you cannot manufacture yourself. The space for play and ingenuity was never in my purview until very recently, nor have I ever needed to use any other material besides store bought canvas out of necessity. The act of using non-traditional materials is a statement of rebellion against our relationship to items in this modern day.



After reading this text, I made it a point to leave exposed trash amongst the entirety of the painting.

LEA VERGINE WHEN TRASH BECOMES ART

TRASH rubbish mungo



Mary Mattingly

I find Mattingly's work so inspired. The relationship between her human figure and these geometric amalgams of trash speaks to the modern human's relationship to their waste. Though every tossed plastic seems insignificant, the lifetime of plastic waste accumulates into this solid mass of destruction upon this planet.

It is faceless, yet embodies the shame of individual contributions to our climate crisis. Mattingly highlights that we don't even understand where these objects come from because they are regarded as purposeless.

My work is not nearly as subtle, but I tried to imbue the same undercurrent of shame. The creature, itself a factory and an allegory for industry as a whole, is constituted of trash objects. It is a monster of our own creation, something which refuses to be ignored by the daily rituals of consumption and refuse. By creating a mural of trash I put the viewer in direct confrontation with our modern day boogeyman.



Pull, 2013



Life of Objects, 2013



Anslem Kiefer

This piece taught me the true power of material. As soon as you enter you are drenched in the stench of drying oil paint. Close up, brushes are coated in thick globs of beige pigment with occasional colorful speckles. As you walk away from the painting, it morphs into reedy stalks of grass and you realize that there is an entire ladder fused to the canvas.

I was in awe of the sheer scale of the work. It played with the limitations of the venue, and it transports a viewer into an entirely different world just from a static image. You could not escape the presence of the painting nor can you process it all at once; I like the discomfort that that brings me.

When creating *Forever Factory*, I aimed to trap my audience, confronting them from all angles. Entering my studio the goal is to become engrossed by the scale of the monster, and then delight at the close-up addition of small material explorations which fade at a distance.



***Questi Scritti, Quando Verrano Bruciati, Daranno Finalmente
Un Po' Di Luce, 2022***

Hieronymus Bosch

Bosch is known for his triptychs and their sheer breadth of detail. My initial plan was to harken to this allegorical, Christianized tradition by creating three neatly organized walls. However, the division of characters in this way did not fit what became a conversation between humans and the monster we have created.

Bosch juxtaposes the comparatively simple salvation scene with detailed earthly and hellish domains. At first glance, one delights at his silly anthropomorphization and joyous interactions. By indulging in the visual excess, his audience is reminded of their own temptation towards sin as opposed to worship. They are drawn to hell naturally because to be holy is to put effort into ignoring the pleasures of life.

My own work speaks to my own fascination with monstrosity. *Forever Factory* is silly and visually interesting in order to draw my audience in and remind them of that which they try and ignore.



Garden of Earthly Delights, ~1510

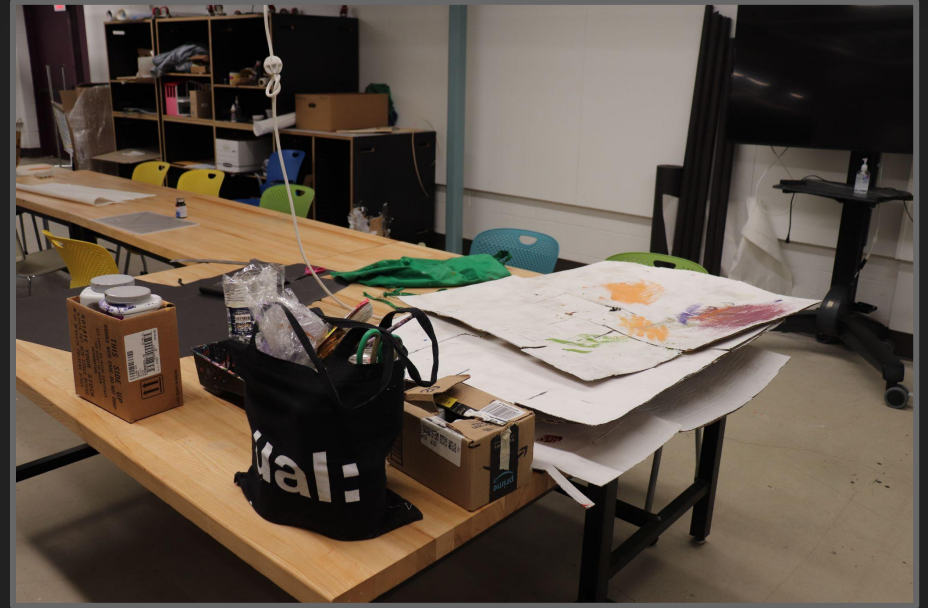


Trash Cutouts, Cardboard Bases

The base of each panel was created using cardboard or any other flat material I could find. In the spirit of letting little go to waste, I reused old adhesives and would water them down with cheap, expired paint borrowed from family members. It soon became apparent that in order to create something truly massive, I would need another studio to spread out and work on the floor.

The act of pasting cardboard together was exhausting. To achieve a desired depth of overlapping creases, the creation of a base became a multi-session process of crouching over the floor, pouring glue, and moving around weights to ensure there wasn't warping for hours. The synthetic adhesives I used were also bad for my health, causing headaches outside of class.

In retrospect a better material would've been wheat paste as it's inexpensive, less noxious, and more environmentally friendly than the modge podge I had put to use. I could've more easily incorporated paper scraps from other sections of the project and other class projects.



Work station for glueing cardboard together



Explorations and Precedent Work

This overarching, months-long process was an opportunity for me to properly establish a practice using cardboard as my medium. From previous projects, I understood that the most interesting parts of these murals were the interactions between smaller pieces of fabric and cardboard. However, it took time after relearning the medium to remember the shortcomings of what I had experienced before.

With *Colonial* and *Lamp*, I was exploring my relationship with infrastructure and the desire to represent objects as living, breathing things affecting our lives. This gave way to interesting character designs, but not into the compositional complexity I hoped to achieve with my mural. After shifting my focus to more apocalyptic subject matter, I created *Bigger Fish*. Here I finalized my visual style and finally realized that the value of cardboard was found in the interactions of pieces. In order to create an effective mural, I had to put more thought into the construction process.

Decay was especially relevant to this project, as it is what inspired the final design of *The Ever-Factory*. Each of these smaller explorations were eventually recycled into her wall panels.



1.



2.



3.



4.

1. *Colonial*, Acrylic on Cardboard,

12" x 18", 2022

2. *Lamp*, Acrylic on Cardboard,

28" x 10", 2022

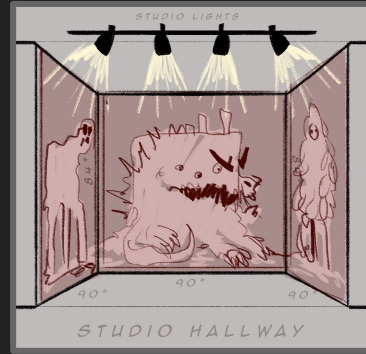
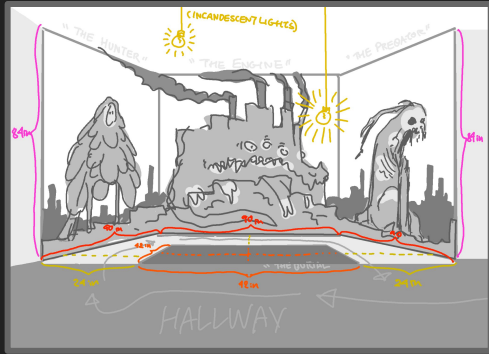
3. *Decay*, Acrylic on Cardboard,

48" x 48", 2022

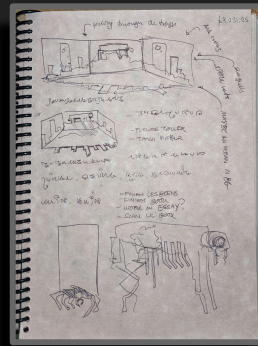
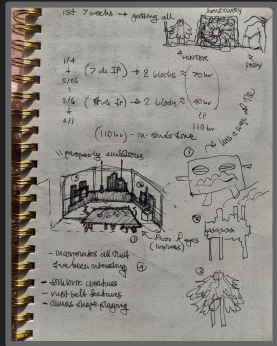
4. *Bigger Fish*, Tempera & Acrylic on Cardboard,

82.5" x 83.5", 2022

Stages of Ideation



Initial Exhibition Plans



Extent of sketching and character planning

For the previous semester's work, I allowed the shape of cardboard to inform my monsters. I find it a creative challenge to let the limitations of the material dictate character designs, and with small pieces it's a fun exercise. However, for something as large as a mural, I aimed to regulate my process far more than in previous iterations.

I went through a lot of despair when making *Bigger Fish* because I had approached the work with literally no plan. The painting erupted only after nonsense strokes suddenly became representational (following a week of trial and error). There is room for this type of creative practice, but it can only work if the painter is disciplined in rigorous iteration of ideas.

I am not yet that type of painter, so *Forever Factory* followed the same pattern of depressed and discovery. I work most efficiently when I feel the pressure of a deadline because at that point I don't have the luxury to procrastinate decision making.

Even if I wanted a more substantial plan, I feared that focussing too long on my design would hold me back from creating something spontaneous and layered like *Bigger Fish*— I knew plans would change after three months. To compromise, I only created quick, low detail sketches of each character so as not to feel restricted.

Early Process



After moving everything into my studio, I realized how agonizing it is to be working so large with such little room. There was no space to stretch my legs nor step back, and it became evident that I was procrastinating because I could not fully engage with my piece.

I had used this as temporary storage under the possibility of a project change that would never come. At some point, I understood these canvases were holding myself back from truly committing to something I couldn't achieve outside of art school. My priorities shifted in that moment to creating my own canvas after painting on industrially produced canvases, as the handmade quality better exemplifies the human value of artmaking.

After moving out as many objects as possible, cardboard finally began peppering the walls. With all previous iterations, I assembled my work with glue and duct tape on the wall because they were small enough to fasten with thumbtacks. After realizing the true scale of what I hoped to achieve, the only choice was to move to the floor to reach a new standard of sturdiness and complexity.



I reserved space in a different studio to assemble my work. At this point I also began moving studios because one of my walls was concrete which couldn't hold my work. . After all the glue had finished drying, I finally nailed my work to the wall. This time, I would actually add a layer of gesso to the cardboard which was something I had failed to do on *Bigger Fish* and suffered heavily for it.

Refining Process



At this point it felt so difficult to finish because I was too afraid to make decisions while constantly remaining in the studio. Even after my first shift and the cleaning out of so many materials, it was evident that too little progress was being made because I was cut off from the hallway of my section.

I found it so much easier to spread out and take an honest look at my project from afar, and it highlighted the importance of the freedom of movement whenever I'm trying to actually create art. I can't stay in one place, and I was ironically trapped in the same way I hoped to see my audience reacting to *The Ever-Factory*.

Full movement was only possible by removing my table and setting everything on the ground. The table had become another storage device, a place where I could place materials hoping I would use them someday. If those same things were on the floor, then I was directly incentivized to complete tasks in order to free up my space. I started progressing at a breakneck pace because I could more easily judge the effect of bold decision making.



The fact that I was setting out to create a mural made my own physical involvement a vital component, and that wasn't apparent until the very end. It became evident that I was procrastinating by not engaging fully with my work, and I think the physicality added insight into my emotional state when rushing between walls and struggling to finish. In the future, I hope to own a work environment away from the location of the exhibition.

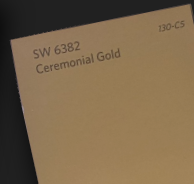
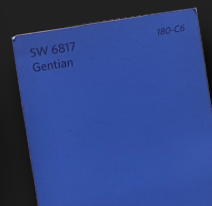
Materials, Tools, Waste



I think that I really valued my toolkit in a similar way to how I've worked with my trash. At some point, after shifting one's focus away from disregarding any material as worthless, everything becomes valuable. This can be a curse, as there were multiple points throughout the semester when I had more trash than what I knew to do with and my studio space would overflow.

I was always hesitant to throw something away, especially the tools which have stayed with me for years at this point. My hay-like brushes should've been tossed years ago, yet I continued to make do with the worn, bristly textures they created. The painting certainly ended with a smooth, vast landscape, yet the majority of my paint application was messy and spontaneous.

It equally reflects my shame of wasting something which can still extract value as well as my laziness when it comes to prioritizing the facility of my own experience. Even my paint was recycled from my family and their forgotten craft-projects. It was a rare treat when I decided to buy paint specifically for this painting, as my inclination is to stretch materials as long as possible or reuse hues between my work.



Filling The Plastic Bag



At some point, the process of bunching up these plastic bags into smaller forms became too slow and the progress too incremental. I realized that in order to achieve the proper amount of intrusion into the space of the viewer, I would need to fill the bags and create a gradual avalanche of trash.



I mostly used paper, plastic scraps, or sections of the piece which did not make it onto the wall. A favorite material to use was crushed up aluminum cans as it encapsulated the type of object I thought the mother-dragon to like to eat or add to her collection.

Adding to The Hermit

I initially conceived of this project leaving the exhibition space in one piece, so I tried my best to fuse the bags to the canvas with paint or adhesive. This would insure the bags stay affixed to the work after deinstall, but there came a point when waiting for glue to dry was far too slow. Instead, I opted for stapling bags through the cardboard and into the wall.

This move coincided with the removal of my table and other extraneous items. I find myself drawn to move quickly with my artwork in order to feel like I'm truly making progress. Simply stapling pieces to the wall allowed for a desired speed of assembly even with objects that were not plastic bags.



It was important for me to create a variance in bag size, and I allowed that to come through near the head where they were able to appear overtaking the face of the figure beneath.



Wrapping Up



I got the idea to paste plastic wrap against the wall to create the impression of scales because painting them individually would take too long. I thought back to previous pieces where I was commended for “painting with material”, so I thought that *The Dragon* could use more explicit references to her materiality.



I have difficulty allowing myself to leave the less important details untouched. However, these scales allowed for quick application of paint underneath which meshed with the variance in texture provided by the scales. It was nice to see the material bunch up as it gave the impression of an uneven hide.

Eyes, Looking Back



Her eyes were created using lids and whatever I could find. It wasn't until later in the project that I tried wrapping the sides with plastic to highlight these protrusions against her scales. I think this repeated element really challenged me because I had to think more practically about merging painting with sculptural elements.

I am very proud of the layers of material on this piece. I ended with something halfway between mural and practical construction, which has never been my forte. The eyes are a sort of confrontational element, yet they add a much needed bit of cuteness onto *The Dragon*.

Gaping Maws, and Holes In The Execution

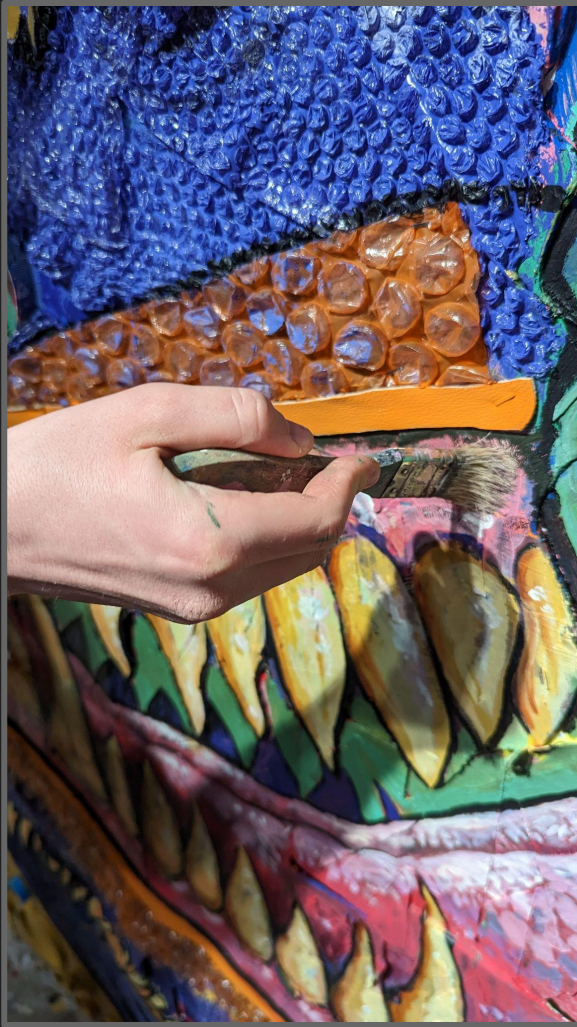


The teeth allowed me an opportunity to create a visceral and detailed anatomical view of *The Dragon*. I always see the act of bearing teeth as this animalistic expression of aggressions which is why I always love to include a well-rendered set in my monster designs. In this case, the mouth became a focal point also because of the layers I continued to add around it.



The fact that there was practical construction pasted on-top of the underpainting of the mouth was what interested me the most. Regrettably, this wasn't carried to all sections to the extent I could have done so. The Teeth exemplified my process, as I went back and repainted them a good five times before I came to my final color. You can see the layered shades leftover from previous drafts.





Conclusion

Creating *Forever-Factory* equipped me with an intimate understanding of my own creative tendencies and helped me understand my process works. I'm relatively happy with how I finished this piece, though I'm not sure if I would like to continue creating trash art. At the very least, my next project will not be for a long time nor will it be at this scale.

The root of my hesitation to start again is that I allowed myself to fall into an unhelpful, inefficient workflow. If I had followed the baseline design, then I would've struggled through the front-end cutting, shaping, and measuring. However, I was lazy and opted for a meandering and less straightforward journey. Even if I can celebrate my ability to be spontaneous, the associated depression I feel from no plan is an experience I never want to feel ever again.

Overall I have much to learn as an artist and have so much more room to mature as a professional. This project laid the groundwork for improvement and mastery of my workflow. Perhaps, with the wisdom wrought by failure, new trash art will be both sturdier and more professional.

I think that the practicalities of working as a professional artist will help me realize my coveted workflow. If I can more confidently and quickly make decisions on future projects, then I can address all the shortcomings of *Forever Factory*. In the future I hope to employ a more intense layering of cardboard, a greater emphasis on sculptural elements, and a smoother finish of paint.

From the very beginning, my desire for this project was to create a mural as a portfolio piece and in this respect I've gotten what I came for. If I were creating a mural for a client, I need a fully rendered mockup of the proposal before moving forward with the painting. The difficult work of conceiving a painting is front-ended, and the rest is simply the labor of paint application.

The fact that I've fixated on the trash and fetishized it imbues it with purpose. I've found it a lot easier to create under a continuum of anxieties over the course of a project and then decipher my intentions when I am finished.

Trash can make a statement on its own, it speaks with a booming voice because it represents so much fraught with our modern world. It touches on inequality, social mobility, poverty, and waste. That is what has motivated me the most, and going forward I hope to consider the material more than I have.

With previous projects starting at sophomore review, I conveniently opted out of interrogating why I work in this manner. With *Forever Factory*, I can say that my trajectory with trash art has only shot upwards in possibility as opposed to reaching its natural conclusion like I hope I would've. There are so many more opportunities to explore, and I think this project allowed me to open up a fruitful creative practice.

For that, I am eternally thankful.

Thank You