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Combustion/Oxidation

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My senior thesis writing is intentionally fragmented
To parallel the broken bodies I have created.
I think in fragmented terms,
In short bursts,
With each surge of thought
Eventually intertwining and formalizing itself
In my sculpture practice.

Expiration Date

Every single human body on this earth arrives with an unknown expiration date.

Temporary Installation

We, as humans, are only tourists visiting Earth. My body's significance in space and its proximity to the end is a topic my mind unconsciously grapples with on a regular basis. Because “sculpture is unique among art forms in its ability to produce the illusion of human presence,” I convey these tense thoughts through sculpture and installation. “The power of the human personality frozen in stone has astonished, even disturbed people throughout the centuries.”¹



For my senior thesis, I combined two areas of interest, which overlap in their meaning and function. First, I hand built my body in numerous ceramic forms and then exposed them to a slow pit fire burn. The pit fire caused oxidation and other chemical changes to occur, damaging the body with cracks, surface burns and fractures. This damage highlights the body's inevitable erosion while the intact figure that was left conveys the human desire for permanence. Second, I

¹ Khan Academy. December 30, 2014. Accessed April 19, 2017. <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art->

created *Combustion*, a life-size neon body, which acts as an intense visual assault, enticing viewers to enter the installation. The neon radiates onto the ceramic bodies that are only visible to the viewer once entering the space.

Combustion with its exaggerated sense of excitement, functions as the initial visual ecstasy to the eyes: a combustion of sight, which serves as the entrance to the disjointed bodies. Initially, the neon represents a young flame, captivating and intact. Then the damaged/decayed bodies start to deteriorate. Now the heat and light of the fire has stressed and eroded the young bodies, revealing how time has eroded them. These splintered, ceramic bodies have experienced bruises and hardships over time, causing them to breakdown. This push/pull of life is how I have formalized my mind's yearning for youth, yet allowed me to acknowledge my body's unavoidable progression of aging.



The neon body and the sculpture bodies relate to each other in other ways concerning the progression of fire. Combustion is a chemical reaction that produces heat and light. The most common form of combustion is fire. Most forms of combustion happen when oxygen as a gas

joins with another substance like wood burning. Oxidation, another chemical reaction, is the chemical process or result the loss of electrons or an increase in oxidation state by a molecule, atom, or ion. This occurs in the pit fire.

Sculpture Timeline

Figure sculpture originated with the Greeks, who focused on naturalism and the mechanics of the body. During the Early Classical period, figure sculpture concentrated on carving figures into marble that were seen as moving through space, rather than merely standing. A body in motion can be seen in Myron's *Discobolus*. The sculpture *Discobolus* depicts a realistic nude of a young male discus thrower in mid action. The pose has an extreme amount of kinetic energy, which is tightly wound up just before he releases the cameo. Myron captures the moment when one movement is completed and the athlete pauses for the next. The discus thrower, who has just completed his backswing, is about to commence the forward swing with his outstretched arm. The work was widely admired for capturing the instability of an instant motion and combining it with a composition of balance and harmony.

During the High Renaissance era, Michelangelo and Donatello rekindled naturalism seen as an ideal human body form in figurative sculpture by adding the contrapposto stance. The contrapposto stance strayed away from the Greeks' 'mid-motion' stance. The figure stands with one leg holding its full weight and with the other leg relaxed. This classic pose causes the figure's hips and shoulders to rest at opposite angles, giving a slight s-curve to the entire torso. Michelangelo's *David* is an example of this.

"The statue's taut and swollen neck muscles and the arm straining forcefully towards the rear as if to check the forward movement on the figures bent legs are immediately evident in the statue and express the contrast between matter and idea, between finite and infinite in Michelangelo and the incarnation of interior torment that envelopes the human

soul.”² Michelangelo’s prisoners displayed in the Accademia Gallery located in Florence, Italy, serve as the entrance leading up to the *David*. These marble blocks still contain the chisel marks unlike the clean and polished strokes in the iconic *David*. In both the Early Classical Greek period and the High Renaissance sculptors subtracted by chiseling or carving the figures into marble stone, capturing the essence of an ideal nude human body.

Later, during the 19th century, figurative sculpture shifted from naturalism/accuracy in stone to sculpting the nude figure to reveal the inner soul/ passion/intensity/desire/embodiment in an assortment of mediums including bronze, stone, plaster. Rodin, the key sculptor during this era, synthesized the figurative traditions from Myron, Polykleitos, Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini. His figures evoked the expressive potential of the human body and contain the inner soul of the alive human figure. “The human body is, above all, the mirror of the soul, and from the soul comes its greatest beauty.”³

After World War II, the intention of figurative sculpture deviated from sculptors conveying the body that contained lust, passion, and energy to Giacometti, who portrayed the human body in an abstract manner that depicted isolation and trauma of the aftermath of the war. Tall, thin figures visualized the fragility and the resilience of the human body as a result of the world wars and the Holocaust. The motif of the suffering human figure became a popular symbol of post-war trauma as seen in Giacometti’s work. “The head is what matters. The rest of the body plays the part of antennae making life possible for people and life itself is inside the skull.”⁴

² *Galleria dell'Accademia*. Michelangelo’s Prisoners, Italy, Florence.

³ Rodin, A., Gsell, P. (1957). *On art and artists*. New York: Philosophical Library.

⁴ Moorhouse, P., Giacometti, A. (2015). *Giacometti: pure presence*. London: National Portrait Gallery.

Contemporary artists continue to explore their wide range of possibilities through a variety of new techniques and materials. Importantly, there is no strict division between figurative and abstract sculpture. Many works deemed figurative—especially those made in the 20th century—have abstract elements, and vice versa.

Two artists that have visionary ideas are Michele Oka Doner and Aron Demetz. Two summers ago, I worked as an artist apprentice for an installation/bronze artist named Michele Oka Doner. Michele's work is fueled by a lifelong study and appreciation of the natural world. Michele's sculptures convey her interpretation and relationship with organic forms deriving from nature. Working as her apprentice this past summer influenced my own artwork in ways I did not expect. Prior to my artist apprenticeship with Michele, my work drew upon themes from nature. Following the apprenticeship, organic forms and nature amplified in my artistic practice and over spilled into my everyday life. The last day of the apprenticeship she told me that "I have created my own definition of a natural seduction."

Aron Demetz, a figurative woodcarver based in Selva Di Val Gardena, Italy, focuses on the vulnerability of the human body, as well as on our symbiotic relationship with nature, exploring the link between life and death, suffering and recovery. Using classical woodcarving techniques, Demetz creates life size figures which emphasize the relationship between man and his environment avoiding the traditional opposition among them, and allowing the two to become an inseparable whole. Amongst carving wood, the sculptor also explores many different ways of distressing the wood including fire, applying resin and shredding the surface of sculptures.

Visual Flame

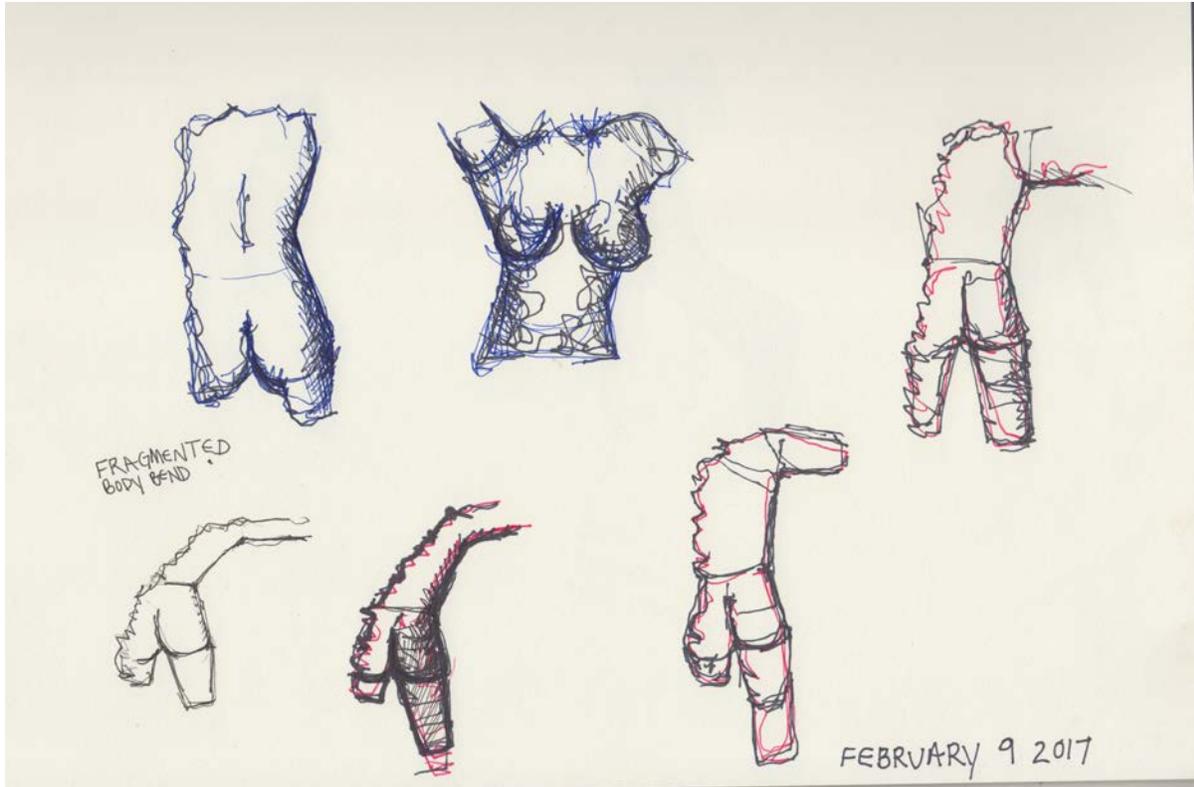
I believe a woman's body is the most desired *thing* on earth to a man. That being said, since the female is the owner of her body, she holds a remarkable amount of power in the

universe. For my senior thesis, my body functions as both the ‘muse and the maker/model modeler.’ The duality of this relationship grants me the power to decide how much liberation of the body is presented in the fragmented forms.



Formalizing Body Position

I began by positioning my body into various poses right before I go to bed. Then I take these in flux poses and formalize them into quick gestural sketches in my sketchbook. Each burst of gesture drawings are loose, active, and fragmented. Gestures contain the life and soul of the object/body. When I gesture/draw, I synthesize the movement, gravity, and depth of the body, developing a vision for how I anticipate the final ceramic body to appear. I anticipate yet subconsciously know that flux will occur during the multiple stages allowing the ceramic body to evolve.



Body Casting

This next step is complicated as well as strenuous. Background: I observed body casting basics from my sculpture professor John Taylor when I studied abroad in Florence, Italy, during my junior year. He briefly mentioned how he cast a body, explaining, “I lube the body up with Vaseline. Then apply plaster bandages and plaster. Don’t forget to make a shim wall for the front/back mold.”

I took this vague set of instructions and began to develop new methods, also utilizing new and some of the same tools when body casting at University of Michigan. I mainly worked with my peer, fellow sculptor Lorenzo Lorenzetti. We worked as a team to body cast each other. When he made a cast of my body, I would keep the plaster negative; then, he modeled as I casted his body and he would keep his negative. Each person kept his or her own plaster negative body. I also tried casting my body by myself but found this to be extremely strenuous and impractical.

I re-used the plaster cast I made at Michigan over and over again. When a new pose sparked my interest, I cast that pose and added it to my “morgue” collection. I never will throw out a plaster cast. Instead, I patch it if it is damaged and then continue to use it or retire the plaster cast, leaving the empty mold in the studio. The thought of tossing one of the plaster casts of my body makes me cringe. I wouldn’t dare abandon my creations.



Ceramic/Clay Inlay

I then took the plaster negative/shell of my body and inlays thick terracotta/stoneware clay slabs into the plaster cast. This was when flux and fragmentation arose. It is hard to explain why because there is no rhyme or reason, but this is when I made the decisions about how I would intentionally fragment my body in clay. Each fragmented body I produced influenced the decisions for the next clay body I created.

Once I am finished inlaying the clay slabs into the plaster shell, I waited until the clay was the right consistency and ~~carefully~~, more like half hazardly, flipped the clay filled plaster shell over. I use the analogy of flipping a bundt cake. I flipped the plaster shell onto a wood

plank just like flipping a cake onto a plate! The clay released out of the plaster shell onto the wood board. I then patched the surface of the ceramic body and added definition and texture to the clay. I did not edit the clay to make my body look thinner. Instead, I fixed the obvious flaws from the imperfections from the plaster.

Clay Firing

The ceramic bodies went through two separate kiln firings. The first firing was the bisque fire. This cures the clay into a firm rigid material. The second fire was the pit fire, which creates the sporadic surface. I use the analogy of ceviche to explain the difference between the firings. In making ceviche, one chops up the raw fish, then uses lemon juice to cure the fish so that it is edible. This preparation is like the first firing of the bisque fire. Then the chef can add various seasonings for flavor, which is similar to the second firing in the pit fire.



Pit Fire/BonFire

I am curious about the intense/rapid evolution of a flame of a fire. Fires are spontaneous. The flame of a fire sheds an intense range of colors: reds, sanguines, magentas, alizarin crimson, cobalt blues, cadmium reds and oranges. The color red, in particular, is associated with both danger and sex. A fire itself contains the contradictory feelings of passion and violence. It is chaotic, yet tranquil.

Fires are natural and occur for various reasons. The results of a fire are often traumatic yet revolutionary. Burning a field of crops is a method of insinuating new growth. I exposed the fragmented ceramic bodies to this intense heat through the pit fire and bonfire process.



Touching Material

My body's interaction with material is intimately sacred. I sacrifice myself to the material and allow it to guide me through the journey it must endure. I am curious about the tension of my body's youthful power in flux with the easily fracturable clay. I am guilty of inflicting cracks to

the ceramic bodies due to my stubbornness to not ask for help when my body is not strong enough to handle it on my own.

Breakdown

I recall one pit fire getting out of hand. I had a critique the next day and attempted to rush the normal “slow” pit fire burn. It was about 9 pm on a cold nasty winter evening. I opened up the metal top to the pit fire and began to poke at the wood and splash the bodies with cold water. The scorching hot ceramic bodies began to glow as the water activated the fire. The fire began to turn violent. I rushed inside to grab fire proof gloves and coat to rescue the bodies out of the flame.

As I inserted my hands into the wild fire and quickly began to lift the heavy ceramic bodies out of the erupting fire [alone] my body experienced pain and fatigue. My body was not strong enough save these bodies. And as I lifted the hot ceramic bodies out of the flame, they broke. In the end, I felt broken. Just like the ceramic forms.



Views of death and the desire to live

Using oxidation showcases the way the body becomes fragile with time. “The body often contains emotional truths that words can too easily gloss over,” which explores the tension between the need for security and the need for freedom in human relationships.⁵ The effect made by the dismembered bodies develops only through the completeness of the sculptural form whose works use familiar forms to play with time, memory, death, and spirituality. Their works serve to remind us of the violent undercurrents in our history, but their ephemeral qualities show us that the power the artist holds in her creations has an impact on others and can even influence others ideas.

Body Overdose

The human body is a temple that holds memories as it marches on. The construction of rendering myself into clay negatively took a toll on my physical body; however, emotionally the result changed my view on life, specifically listening to what my body needs and wants are and paying closer attention to personal encounters with others. Since all of the ceramic bodies duplicated my personal body, I strove for permanence by immortalizing myself into clay. Yet, during the process of translating my body into clay, I embraced the cracks, chips, and surface burns of the creative process. My youthful ‘idealized’ body became brittle, similar to broken clay bodies and I juxtaposed them with the neon that contains an exaggerated sense of excitement. The initial visual ecstasy to the eyes delivers a combustion of sight, which serves as the entrance to the disjointed bodies. My body is my sacred space. This installation is my way of sacrificing myself to my creative muse

⁵ Perel, E. (2007). *Mating in captivity: unlocking erotic intelligence*. 1st Harper pbk. New York: Harper.



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