

# Parts to Whole

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I always thought there was something magical about three-dimensional sculptures. They make me feel curious, playful, and explorative. I like being able to walk around an art piece and see how it changes with every angle, making the artwork seem ephemeral. In “Parts to Whole”, I combined threads of different colors, as an artist would with paint, to create color effects. The idea was derived from impressionists, who painted raw strokes of different colors next to each other. These strokes, as well as my threads, blend together when the viewer steps away. The forms of the sculptures were inspired by the female figures in impressionism, where hips were the focus of female beauty during that period. The three sculptures are meant to stand together and play off of each other’s colors and shapes.

Figure 1

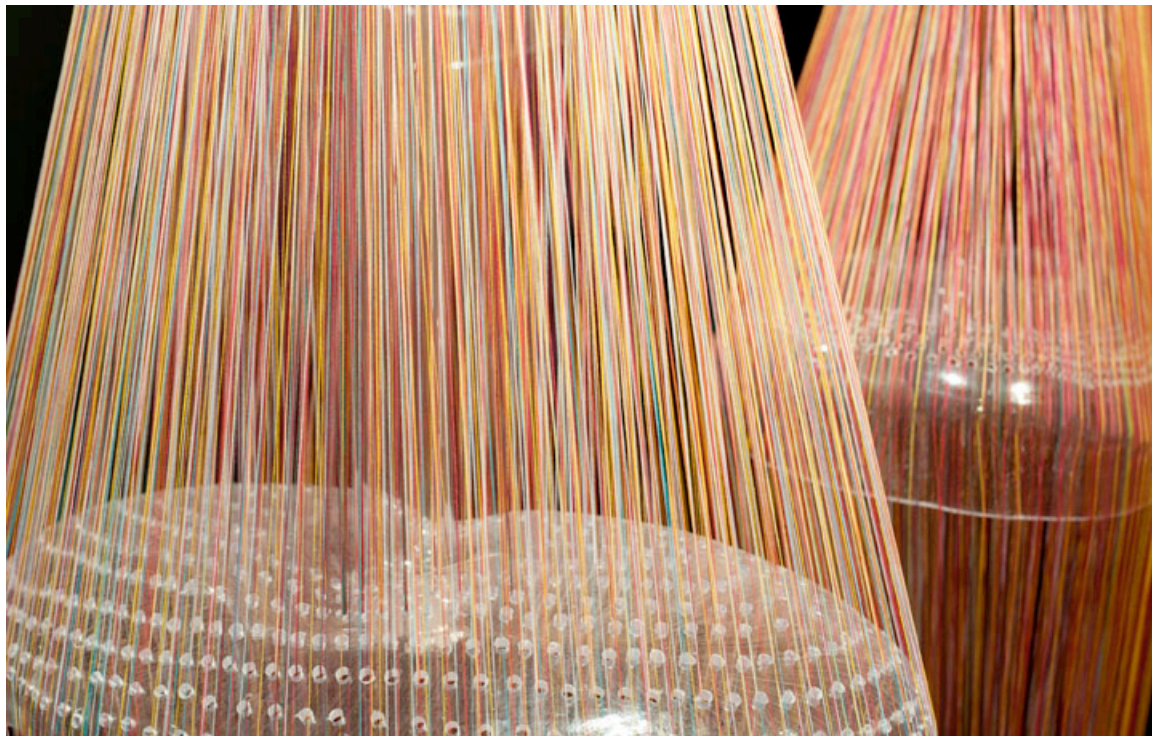


Figure 2



A driving philosophy behind my sculpture has been the notion of “active perception”. Being accustomed to our senses and the world around us, we often take for granted how much actually goes into perceiving ourselves and our environment. Before we see, hear, smell, taste, or feel, we already have certain emotions, previous experiences, expectations, biological predispositions, and many more factors that influence how we translate what our senses deliver to us. In the more explicable scientific realm of perception, color and form are influenced by our eyes and our brain as well as other objects in the surroundings. The after images produced by the cones on our retinas after looking at a certain color can change the other colors we see. The depth cues provided by other objects and their movements, the stereopsis of our eyes, our own

movement, and the translation of our brain create the forms we see in objects. Color is dependent on other color next to it, and eyes and brain, form and movement is dependent on other forms and their movement, our eyes, and our brain. What we sense is dynamic. It's influenced by many factors that are consistently changing and we actively participate in how the world presents itself to us.

Using what I know about perception, I have created my sculpture in a way that gives the viewers more space for their own translations. I have made my sculpture from many separate parts combined into a whole. The parts by themselves are non-representative and almost insignificant in an artistic sense. Yet, I have kept them exposed to the viewer. I took those individual parts and set them up as groups with in groups. Certain colored threads are combined with other colors to balance them out. These colored threads are put together with other layers of colors in the structure. Each of the three structures has its own general color hue and its own shape and is enhanced and defined by the others both in color and shape.

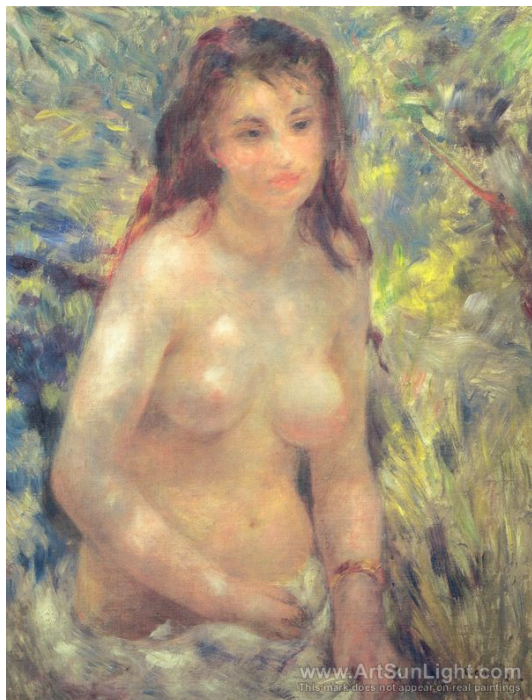
Abstracting and separating color and shape allows the viewer's brain to combine these factors as they walk around it, to, and way from it. The viewer can see individual threads and shapes and then step away and see how they work together. The viewer's brain blends the colors together as he or she steps away. The moire effect that exists due to the layered placement of the threads in the 3D space, creates an illusion that the art work itself is actually changing, making it seem alive (see fig. 1 and 2).

I decided to pay a homage to impressionism and cubism with figurative sculpture because these are the movements that first acknowledged the dynamics and subjectivity of human perception, by depicting the essence of form, color, movement and emotions. I wanted to

translate impressionism and cubism into a physical, three-dimensional form, pushing the discoveries of these movements onto a new dimension, both literally and metaphorically.

My mom's favorite art movement has always been Impressionism as well as Cubism headlined by Picasso. Every city and country we visited, she has taken me to the art museums in the area. We mainly focused on her favorite artists that naturally became my own favorite. Looking at impressionism, my mom always mentions how much emotion the colors and strokes evoke and how much movement and energy each painting has with all these factors put together. I always liked the softness and organic nature of the paintings. Particularly Renoir's nude figures that are so soft in texture and shape and the colors of their skin look so lively. I can see the blue, green, red, and yellow colors reflecting from the surroundings onto the skin of the women in the paintings. The whole environment and the figures seem to be so lively and full of interactions with each other (see fig. 3).

Figure 3: Renoir's "Nude in the Sunlight"



While Picasso's cubism has never seemed much aesthetically appealing to me, particularly the distorted human figures in his painting, I came to appreciate the idea behind his work when it was explained to me in art class. I learned that cubism is not just a random break down of bodies and objects in to geometric forms, but that cubists actually draw an object from different angles and layer each view on top of the other. I loved the idea of including in art not only the live aspects of emotion, light, and directional movement, but also artist's movement around the object. When we experience objects in the world, we not only see them from one side, but we see them from different angles as we walk around the room or just move our eyes. I appreciate Cubism's inclusion of the artist's own movement and its break down of forms into their simplest shapes in a way that still keeps the identity of the bodies or objects (see fig. 4).

Figure 4: Picasso



In an effort to represent impressionism and Cubism in my mixed medium sculptures, I decided to portray the soft, matte texture of skin as well as the soft forms of the full, feminine figures often found in impressionism paintings, especially Renoir's. For the form, I was particularly inspired by the accentuated hips of the painted female subjects, following the beauty standard of that time. With Cubism in mind, I extracted from the female figure the shapes I thought were the most basic representation of the hips and made a few separate forms to stand together. The color choices and arrangement for the threads was inspired by the impressionism's signature vibrant, unblended colors and visible brush strokes. As the viewer steps away, these threads blend into a more uniform color hue and tone once the viewer steps away, like Seurat's dot paintings. As in post-impressionism, some of the colors I decided to use are exaggerated and less realistic, making the painting more vivid and exciting; that is also something I wished to imitate.

I chose sewing threads as my main material palette because they are thin, ephemeral, soft, matte, delicate, and they come in different colors. More so, the linear quality of threads and their colors allow me to draw or paint in a three-dimensional space. Because threads are individual strands but thin enough to be combined into a single object, I was able to create out of them an object whose parts could be visible when seen up close. Using threads also allowed me to create an object that can be seen through, one that looks light, fragile and ephemeral. Because sewing threads are so thin, I was able to blend many different colors together to create whatever desired effect I wanted. Also, because threads are used in clothing, they are a subtle reminder of the body.

Making threads into large, four to five feet sculptures required an under-structure, requiring me to experiment with materials, shapes, and construction techniques. After much



experimentation with laser cut structures, foam board, and other materials, I decided on a structure made of vacuum-formed clear plastic shapes with many drilled holes. I set these forms on a clear plastic tube. The vacuum-former allowed me to create forms that are organic and light, allowing the overall visual effect of the sculptures to remain light, and for the threads to be seen through the plastic. I set the plastic tub in an oval-shaped black base with hooks. I have also set hooks on top of the tube. The hooks allowed me to stretch the threads through and over the plastic forms in a modular way, allowing me to attach separate sets of threads and to retighten threads separately. I strung the threads through the concentric holes in the plastic in layers. I decided for each layer of thread which color combination would be best for its location on the structure. I spun the threads over a structure I set up to prepare them in terms of combination of colors, length and quantity (see fig. 5). I used glue to make sure knots would stay in place. For the exterior layer of threads in each structure, I stretch threads over the plastic form and used glue to make sure the threads stayed in place.

Figure 5: Process

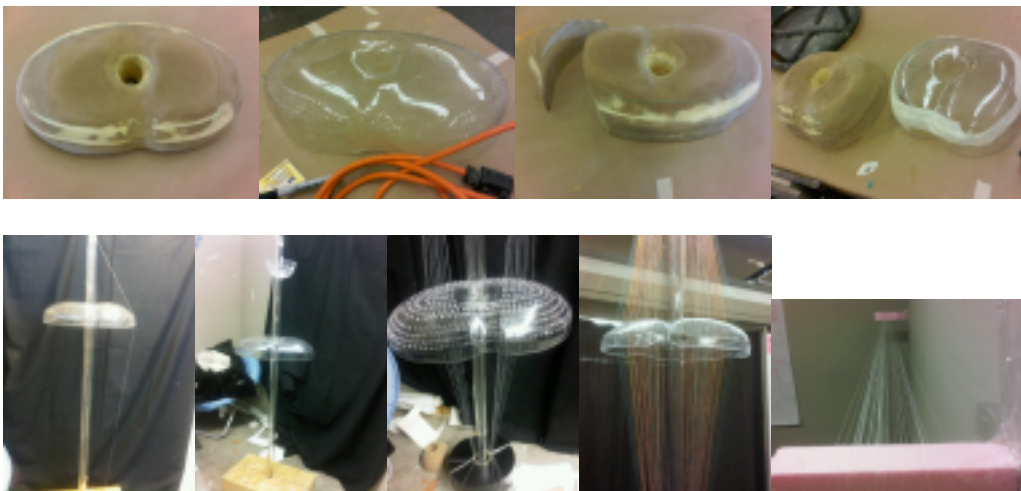




Figure 6: My color thread study



There has been a trend of string art recently. One of the artists of this trend is Gabriel Dawe. His installations explore what threads can do, including color effects, illusions, and spatial effects (see fig. 7). I was inspired by how his art fit in with “active perception” and by the color and shape illusions he mastered with string. I wanted to take these materials and techniques and make something that is representational and more subtle.

Figure 7: Gabe Dawe’s string installation:



Researching more artists for this project, I have come across a lot of contemporary art work, including sculptures, installations, and media art that seems to take full advantage of the possibilities of visual perception. These artists hang objects off the ceilings of galleries and museums. They attach objects in various arrangements to the walls. They use negative space and even shadows to create the forms they wish the viewers to see. Some artists intentionally include the viewers in their art like Jennifer Steinkamp who projects video and animation onto the walls of the gallery. Once the viewer steps in front of the project, the video and animation is projected on the viewer and the viewer becomes a part of that projected world (see fig. 8).

Figure 8 : Jennifer Steinkamp

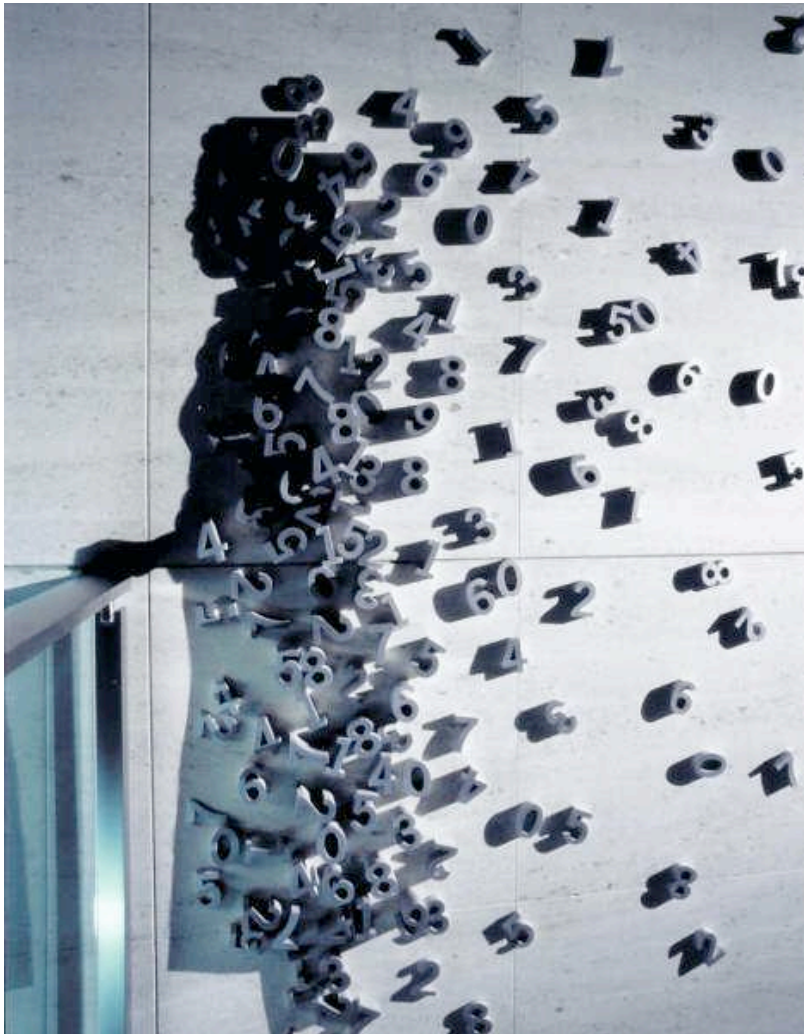


**Jennifer Steinkamp**, Jimmy Carter, 2002, 3 projectors, 3 computers, 35 x 18 x 14 ft., First exhibited at ACME, Los Angeles, CA

While there is so much artwork dedicated to open our minds to our perception and the dynamics of our world, I have noticed that it rarely includes the human body. Even impressionist artists who have broken down the visual fields into form, movement, light, and dots of color, have neglected to include these same “impressions” of the world in the sculptures they made. Degas’ sculpture of “The Dancer”, as lovely and full of facial and body language expression as it is, lacks the true liveliness his colorful, vibrating pastel strokes create. There is no grouping in the sculpture such as the groupings of strokes and colors and shapes in the paintings that create the gestalt of the object. Picasso seems to be the only artist where the connection between his paintings and sculptures is clearly there. Some of his sculptures even seem to be a physical re-iteration of the paintings.

In today’s modern art, Kumi Yamashita, Tim Noble, Sue Webster have gotten closer to making figure sculptures more dynamic and lively. These artists cast shadows of humans and animals using trash, metal sheets, number shapes, and other non-figurative objects. They use three-dimensional space and light to create art to make shadows that have a completely unexpected form since the objects that cast shadows appear to be completely random. This makes the shadows seem like they have a life of their own. While the idea behind these shadows comes close to my intentions, the figures themselves are not sculptures but flat shadow images on the wall (see fig. 9).

Figure 9: Kumi Yamashita



Aside from minor details of craftsmanship, and the shapes of my figures, I accomplished exactly what I wanted to accomplish visually and conceptually by my sculpture. My sculpture was reminiscent of female figures, ephemeral and full of life. It changed with every angle. The viewers curiously walked around my art piece, exploring it from different angles, as well as up close and far away, seeing how it looked at as a whole and also seeing each thread and how the individual colors played off each other. At some angles the forms of my structures seem a bit

awkward and if I were to revise my art piece, I would make sure the forms of the structures complement each other and are interesting and balanced at every angle. I realize that there are limitless amount of possibilities for creating art work using the same philosophy and representational intentions. I would like to further explore these possibilities, seeing what other materials I could use to create similar visual effects. I would also like to explore how I could take modern materials and processes artists use to create striking effects and make them into a more subtle, representational, fine art.

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