Danielle Englesby 24252116

Visa 482: Research Thesis

Fern Helfand, Samuel Roy-Bois

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As an artist my interest closely revolves around the state of my surrounding environment- more specifically the result of the collision of the organic landscape with the rigidity and harshness of man-made materials that coincide with the expansion of industrialism. These unnatural elements, such as metal, plastic, and glass, give way to toxicity, waste, and decay- the most unsettling and intriguing side-effects of the modern condition. The accelerated rate at which ‘things’ are produced, consumed, and abandoned have created an imposing over-flow of debris- layers upon layers of the remains of materials that are resistant to deterioration. These objects hold the idea of perpetuation and permanence that both add to and starkly contrast with the natural cycle of decay in earthly matter. Photographer Bjornar Olsen has stated that “Decay is usually understood in a negative way; things are degraded and humiliated through material alteration, while the information, knowledge and memory embedded in them becomes lost along the way ..we suggest that things actually may release some of their meaning or generate a different kind of knowledge precisely through processes of decay and ruination” (Olsen). I feel that this declaration speaks to the importance of our relationship to our environment and how the process of decomposition from form to ‘nothingness’ can generate recognition of largely over-looked facets of our surroundings. Additionally, consideration of this subject can prompt the question of whether or not is possible to achieve unity and balance within an environment that contains elements that hold such opposition to one another.

My art explores this concept by combining experimental methodologies with compositional structuring and controlled paint application in order to embody a collapse of formal representation; depicting the aesthetic of degeneration and reconstruction in a manner that unifies the various components as a cohesive whole. My abstract works aim at visually capturing the co-existing of the natural and unnatural by utilizing materials such as industrial paint, plastic, oil, and rubber to layer, manipulate, deconstruct and rebuild- ultimately revealing a certain tactile physicality that references three-dimensionality.

The act of creating a piece is of equal importance to the resulting product- it is a raw, chaotic, and involved practice where continuous metamorphosis takes place until a sufficient record of buried evidence is visible. It begins with pulling material and matter from my immediate environment (such as dirt, sand, wood ect.) to utilize as a foundation and inspiration to build subsequent layers. I combine brushwork with pouring, burning, imprinting, and scraping to embody a mimetic reproduction of archeological documentation. The choice to begin with found material is a way of creating an organic connection to my immediate environment and give purpose to discarded waste. That being said, much of my process can be rooted in the writing of Yve-Alain Bois’ essay *Formless.* It touches on the rejection of modernist painting ideals in place of a visceral and metaphysical approach to painting. It explains George Bataille’s categorization of ‘*informe*’; a movement of artists working in the 1950’s-60’s such as Jackson Pollock, Robert Smithson, and Alberto Burri- who produced work that rebelled against the ingrained notion of form and content enforced by traditional painting procedures (Bois, 15-32). They believed that “Man is definitively overrun by what he creates and what little by little boundlessly destroys him. The obsessional idea of construction, the ordering of stones or of machines… Carried to an extreme, open an infinite vista of nightmares and of multiplied punishments wrought by the automatic law…there is no reason to stop (totality, form, existing only on human scale, man is outstripped by the vary need for representation..” (40). Within this paradigm art is viewed through the cohesion of four operations- two of which strongly correlate with my artistic practice. Base materiality and entropy describe the importance of choosing ‘waste’ matter that functions on its own as a foundation of a work (31), and the incorporation of a deterioration of order (37) that occurs within the realm of decline of material form.

Artists that have assisted in situating my work within a contemporary frame of reference are Justin Stephens, Jean- Francois Lauda, and Jose Parla. A common theme throughout their work is their approach to creating- they emphasize the act of painting itself and let the piece guide them as it takes on a life of its own. Stephens’ work is experimental, which allows for his materials, strategies and results to vary from piece to piece. He prioritizes process over results, which informs his process of “working, re-working, scraping away, and adding and subtracting diverse materials and objects” (Bélisle et al.),while Lauda practices a similarly intuitive approach that emphasizes improvisation and imprecision. Parla specializes in mural work- creating immersive life-size installations that reference the decaying walls of urban centers. “Time is a part of (his) paintings as their creative process simulates the passing of time on city walls and their layers of history with layers of paint, posters, writing, and re-construction (Parla)”.

Although my material, palette, and approach may differ from piece to piece, as exhibited in works like ‘*Red*’and ‘*Steel*’- there is an underlying current of collapse and unearthing that flows through my work and unifies it in representing ruination within a current society comprised of an accumulation of excess.

**Works Cited**

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