Individual Repetition
   And
The Potential for Change

by

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Mysterious Beginnings

Every moment of every day, our lives change. Something within us or outside of ourselves moves us in some mysterious manner, towards something higher, something better. In the ‘crack between the worlds,’ I enter a transcendental state where I relinquish control and allow the work to speak. Often the works is connected to my intense interest in ‘collective’ symbols and forms, the human psyche, and the void. The individual repetition of these ideas and their potential for change are at the heart of my work always...

My work has always been figurative in nature, even if unrecognizable. I begin with a basic idea like “I’m going to make some small figures.” As I begin to create, something moves my hands, something verging on spiritual guidance. “Press here,” “push there,” “push harder,” “let the surface bulge or rupture.” These are the thoughts that come into my consciousness from some other place, a place I call “The Crack Between The Worlds.” Within this frame of mind I experience what I can only describe as ‘guidance’ from some place other than my conscious mind. A change occurs within me which alters and moves me.

The earliest figures were small enough to fit into the palm of a hand. Their scale gave them a sense of fragility, yet strength in their possibility. Bulging and contorted, they contained something mysterious within, something that was changing them into something else. They were becoming something different...something more than they were before. Left to the imagination, their potential lay in the perception of the viewer. Each was created as an individual sculpture, yet the similarity in what each one conveyed to the viewer united the works as a group. This idea of ‘individual repetition’ would underline all of my future work. It is the common thread which weaves its way throughout my work. What appears as seemingly unrelated tangents in the direction of my work, enter again at some future point in time. Often these tangents were used in series of works which did not constitute a strong body of work, yet their basic formal elements and concepts would be added to my visual vocabulary and provide inspiration
for future series. Although altered to accommodate the intent of the new ideas for my work, the basic visual concepts and aesthetics of these tangent series would later prove their worthiness.
Cortona's Contribution

In addition to the concept of individual repetition, another aesthetic influence occurred during my study abroad experience in Cortona, Italy. I was very attracted to the warmth of the colors in the Italian landscape. I was also stimulated by the aged and textural architectural surfaces of Italian buildings. The ceramic roof tiles were of particular interest to me. The warm undertones of the red clay coupled with the mottled layers of sage green lichen growing on the surface were visually appealing. I was fascinated with the textures of everyday objects like mailboxes. The layers of paint were chipped and worn by the elements, exposing the age and timeless nature of the object which I found quite inspiring. Additionally, unlike many of the sleek, metal and glass architectural surfaces in the U.S., the earthy, matte surfaces of aged Italian structures conveyed a sense of time which I related to lineage and ancestry. These visual experiences, and my emotional response to them, provided the inspiration for the next period of exploration in my work.

While in Italy I was introduced to the ceramic firing method known as ‘sagar firing.’ Not only would this method provide interesting fired surfaces, but it contributed to my interest in environments and installation work as well. In this type of firing process, a wide variety of warm colors can be obtained which vary in tone as they cross the surface of the ceramic object. This style of firing is achieved by burning organic materials, i.e. chemical contents they possess, in a kiln. Placed against the ceramic object the chemicals contained within the organic matter, such as the potassium content of a potato, fume against the surface of the object. The differing chemicals ‘flash’ upon the surfaces with a range of colors particular to that chemical. A potato, for example, will produce variations of warm tones including pink, orange, and burgundy. Such things as bananas, dog food, and sawdust each offered different colors and interesting surfaces.

When organic materials are burned within a kiln they create a carbon rich atmosphere. This type of environment, achievable in a sagar kiln, tends to deepen the tones of the colors produced on the surfaces. In addition, the relative depth at which the object is placed is the kiln dictates its tone and color. In loading a sagar, I would
alternate layers of organics and sculptures. Unlike traditional ceramic kiln firings, the sagar does not require that objects be shelved, or that they may not touch. Tumbling work amidst organics in the sagar kiln is a perfectly acceptable practice. The deeper the objects are placed in the kiln, the darker the colors tend to be. A full range of grays and blacks are attained on pieces buried throughout the lower layers of the kiln, becoming progressively lighter and brighter color tones in the upper layers. This process avails me a method of attaining a full range of results within one kiln firing. By changing the organic materials in each kiln load, different firings would yield a multitude of colors.

Surface glazing (dull, sheen, and gloss) can also be achieved by adding salt to the sagar. I prefer two different methods of introducing salt to the kiln. Rock salt may simply be placed adjacent to a surface, creating an intense glossy area. I also use excelsior soaked in highly saturated salt water to wrap objects. This method produces a soft sheen across the entire surface area wrapped. The methods, rock salt, salt saturated excelsior, and using no salt, could be used alone or in combinations, providing a whole host of surface results.

Sagar firing became an essential aspect of my work. Early experimentation was preformed on some of the small figures which yielded interesting results. The sense of movement achieved when colors danced across the surfaces of the figures was quite pleasing. More importantly, the surfaces became more akin to those I had become so fascinated with while in Italy. I realized that this firing method offered great potential for my work.

Continuing my interests in individual repetition, I began forming small heads. Although typical repetition would have been easily achieved using mass production methods, I focused my attention on capturing a sense of uniqueness in each of the repeated forms. I am a rather obsessive person by nature so forming each head individually with individual features is a labor of love. Sagar firing enhanced this sense of individuality in that the surfaces, although similar, varied from head to head. I felt that the combination of sagar firing and repetition of form solved several aesthetic issues and allowed me to turn my attention to presentation. Again, the experience of ‘lineage’ and ‘ancestry’ which I found in Italy served as a starting point. I began experimenting by placing the heads in pairs, rows, lines, groups, and stacks. In one gallery presentation, I
created a narrow shelf along the wall on which heads were placed at regular intervals. Initially the viewer would simply see a row. On closer inspection, the objects in the row were recognized as semi-spherical forms and finally, as heads. Still further inspection of the heads would lead the viewer to the realization that these repetitive objects were in fact individuals. Each possessed its own unique personality. This conveyed the sense of lineage that I was looking for and also enhanced the idea of 'individual repetition.'
Souls, Strands, and Spaces

This emerging interest in presentation led to further consideration of space and spatial relationships. Although infantile in scope and understanding at the time, this development was instrumental to my budding interest in creating installations. Attempting to solve spatial relationships, in addition to presenting these objects, I turned the ‘row’ into a line. By stringing heads together, I could now suspend them as lines in space. Due to my intense interest in sacred spaces, and my interest in lineage and individual repetition, I decided to present these strands of heads as sacred circle. Suspended from the ceiling of the gallery, these strands dropped and then pooled upon the floor. The darkened gallery space surrounded and enveloped the circle. The lines of heads at once established a sacred boundary or space, and at the same time conveyed the boundless nature of sacred ceremonies which occur at fairly regular intervals or ‘repetitively.’ Strengthened by using the form of a head as the repetitive object, the circle takes on the concepts of humans as sacred individuals, as an unbroken circle of life, death and rebirth, and as the whole of humanity being made up of individuals. Based on the concept of ‘soul strands,’ the lines dropping from the ceiling formed a vertical cylinder which additionally symbolized a birth canal. Although I intentionally allowed enough space between the lines of heads to allow the viewer to enter the circle, of the viewers that I observed, none entered. From a psychological standpoint I found this very interesting. Did the viewer intuitively feel the sacredness of the circle and choose not to disturb the boundary, or participate in the sacred event within? Regardless, this gave me a new direction for further exploration which involved playing with the idea of how viewers move through spaces. Where and when do they enter…what keeps them from entering, what encourages entrance? Although these ideas would be addressed in later works, my attempts at using space would remain somewhat limited for the time being.

Although I was continuing to present objects in space, I had to alter the space in order to unify the presentation. Interestingly enough, part of the solution for creating an environment was actually, and quite accidentally, discovered while exploring the ‘sagar’ firing method. I created small vessels which I used to isolate objects within the sagar
kiln. After the firing, I would unbury the vessels and open them to reveal the results. A wonderful little sculpture, fairly light in color tone, resting in a charred, dark environment was pleasing to my aesthetic taste. I found the object and the container it was fired within to be as interesting as the object itself. Both the container, which I interrupted as a space or environment, and the object themselves were equally intriguing, but perhaps even more so when united as a single unit. This visual aesthetic would remain a strong influence in my artistic interests.

Although my earliest works were ‘object’ oriented, I began to examine the gallery space as a part of the art itself. Initially my exploration was quite simple; I began altering the color of the space, usually in darker, deeper tones. These dark colors were intended to add a sense of mystery or sacredness to the space. Within this newfound sanctum, I became increasingly concerned with the placement of the objects within the space. This was not meant to simply highlight the objects, but to establish spatial and emotional relationships between the objects and additionally, between the objects and the environment and between the environment, the object, and the viewer.

The first serious exploration of this spatial concern was attempted at my BFA exhibit. At that time, I was creating figurative sculpture on the scale of children. Although mature in appearance, the scale of these sculptures conveyed a childlike innocence. As mysterious as the palm sized figures of earlier periods, these larger figures possessed a similar sense of inner, spiritual potential. In order to reinforce these qualities of the sculptures, the placement of the figures within the confines of the gallery walls became vital to the spatial and sacred relationships of the figures which I wanted the viewer to experience. In order to set a mood for the work, I painted the space with a deep, yet warm, tone of gray paint. I find that dark tones establish a greater sentiment of intimacy in a space, and more intentionally, a womblike environment. Establishing a sacred quality to a space, and the potential for something to occur or be altered within it, is as important to me as the work itself.

I continued to explore the idea of creating a sacred space by arranging the figurative sculptures in such a way as to establish relationships between the figures themselves and between the figures and their environment. Some figures faced and engaged one another, while others, consumed by their individual experiences, ignored the
others. A few figures confronted the viewer head on, while others, disinterested in their surrounding, turned their backs on the viewer. I was intrigued by the amount of nonverbal communication that these works could convey to one another and consequently, to the viewer. The figures were created as singular objects with which I explored the idea of capturing of an emotive ‘moment’ in time, a moment of awareness, a moment of change. However, together the sculptures created a unified environment of collaborative moments. Like a sacred event or ceremony, each of the group was experiencing its own moment of epiphany. It was my intention to imbue each figure with the breath-holding stillness and sacred nature of a moment of awareness and the realization within that moment of its own potential, of its potential for change.
Bags and Books

The idea of ‘contained potential’ would merge with the concept of ‘individual repetition’ in the work completed for my thirty hour review. To discover our potential, we must examine who we are, the good, the bad, and the ugly. When looking into my own rabbit hole, I realized that, like many, I carry around a bagful of things that I don’t like to look at or even think about. Yet, I have not been able to simply drop my bag…that would be like disowning some part of who I am or giving up a part of my soul. I explored the idea of ‘holding’ emotional baggage and the potential to transform that baggage into something better, something greater than itself—this became the impetus for this group of works. Still hanging on to the idea that much of my sculpture had to be figurative, I added ‘bags’ or ‘containers’ to the figures to represent individual baggage/potential. The method by which the bag was attached to the figure, as well as its material, texture, color and contents, all symbolized something unique about baggage.

From a psychological aspect, baggage contains that ‘stuff’ which many consider as negative experiences. Yet, it is those experiences which shape and mold us just as much if not more than our positive experiences. Therefore, the baggage -to me- represents the ‘stuff’ that makes us who we are. Although each figure was different (individual), each was similar (repetition) in that each carried baggage unique unto itself. Potential and change enter this work by the manner in which each figure interacts with its baggage. Some embrace their baggage, while others are weighed down by the burden of the bag. Some contained objects that were light, others heavy. Some bags were dense, protected, and hidden, while others were transparent, fluid, and expressive. Some were relatively empty, while others were stuffed beyond what seemed their capacity. As I made this body of work, I became increasingly interested in the ‘bags.’ The figures became irrelevant.

The last, and most important, work created for this show was a large latex bag, stuffed to the point of rupture. Stitches created an incision across the surface to mend a past wound, and yet the impending sense of the next rupture was sensitively achieved. This overstuffed bag was suspended in space, weighing down towards the floor. Below
the bag lay a tangled web of latex covered cording, indicative of intestines or umbilical cords, sprawling out across the gallery floor. At the end of each cord, a tiny head was attached. The frayed edges of the cord enveloped the head like veins feeding an organ. One cord was lifted from the floor and attached to a ball of heads which floated on the surface of the wall. Here again, the bag was the ‘individual,’ where the cords and the heads established the ‘repetition,’ creating a united whole. I realized that this singular unit could have been ‘the entire show’ by itself. The other works in the show, although interesting, were as irrelevant to the show as the figure had become to the bag. I felt that I had, with this single unit, completely ‘used’ all of the ‘space’ in the gallery. The bag interacted with the ceiling, the surrounding space, and the work that lay on the floor. The work on the floor spread out on the floor space, interacted with the bag, and attached itself to the wall. My sensitivity to spatial relationships was taking a more mature turn. I found myself considering not only the empty space of the room, but I was additionally considering the ceiling, floors, and walls, and ways to unit them all. I also became acutely aware of the ‘movement’ of the bag that hung from the ceiling. This movement implied ‘time’ and ‘change.’ All of the ideas and imagery that I had been working with over the years, were beginning to coalesce.

Where do I go from here? I continued grappling with the following questions: What does potential look like? How do you capture a sense of change? Where does change occur? Where does it come from...is it always within us, waiting for the moment that we realize its presence? What is the soul? What does it look like? Does it have form? What is sacred? What makes something sacred? On and on the questions went. All that I knew about where the work was going was where it had been. I had ideas and the ever present mental questions, but these only seemed to lead to more ideas and more questions. The need arose to begin to define the essence of my work. The following list comes directly from my sketchbook as I pondered this issue:

- Texture
- Grid vs organic
- Repetition
- Symbolism
- Representative
- Layers/surfaces
- Structure vs fluidity
Opposing forces
Spiritual
Mystery
Internal dialogue
Inside out
soul
Isolation v group
Collective experience
Feminism
Balance
Evolution
Stimulation
Responsive
Self imposed
Biological
Birth
Viscous
Relinquish
Void
Sacred
Visceral
Moments
Full v empty
Mutual
Acquiescence
Impetus
Psyche
Distill
Inevitable
Intuitive
Perpetual
Emerge
Mystic
Journey
Infusion
Trace
Still...

In scribbling down these words, thoughts, and ideas, I noticed that the terms consistently related to the idea of ‘the potential for change’ in things, in me. I see the process of change as something magical, as a spiritual shift in consciousness which can be known or unknown. This potential for change would be the focus of my new work. In
addition to change, my beliefs and interest in the sacred, the spiritual, and the soul had to be addressed and incorporated into the work and the space. When I thought about these aspects, I returned to a familiar source, the ‘heads’ which I created early in my undergraduate work, and which continue to pop up in my work. I always viewed these heads as representations of the essence of humanness, the soul. Since ‘the eyes are the windows to the soul,’ it makes sense that the soul is somehow connected with the brain. *The brain is the soul’s fragile dwelling place—William Shakespeare.* Observable only through the eyes, I imagined looking through someone’s eyes and viewing their brain. If I could remove the organic tissue, what would it look like? I envisioned the brain’s connections firing off like streams of light-twisting, bending, glowing, and pulsing. They created a web of light, a fractal, organized like a magical sphere of light. This, I thought, is the essence of the soul. This beautiful light was constantly transforming itself. It was growing, and changing into something greater than it was only a moment ago... because it learns, adapts, and forms new connections. It transforms. To me, this entire process is mysterious. Although the field of science can explain every nuance of the process, I see this process and my vision of the soul as a one of the mysteries of life. Although this vision is only one example of the process of change, the mysterious and spiritual nature of change is the reason that I chose the title *Transmogrification* for my MFA work. From this source, I could begin working on a way to combine the terms, concepts, and beliefs into an installation which would successfully convey the ideas.
Transmogrification

*Transmogrification* is the result of months of intense work filled with trials and errors, spiritual guidance, and a lifetime of bizarre experiences. With it, I tried to solidify the concepts which I have been working with throughout my career. I wanted to create a womb-like, spiritual environment which boarder on the edge of mystical, in which the potential for change would be sensed. I had hoped that I could create a silent space within the gallery. This place was meant to feel meditative and peaceful, yet I also wanted to establish tension, the tension of something impending. I created the strong vertical forms with this tension in mind. The fact that all but one are suspended from the ceiling, established an immediate sense that they could fall at any minute. This sensation was emphasized by the one piece which lay on the floor. It was just as important that these verticals also exude the prominence and power of a gathering of ‘spiritual beings.’ Set in a sacred space, these ‘beings’ were literally, symbolically, and ceremonially changing or altering their form. They have immediately ceased shifting their shape because of the viewer’s impending presence. A few continue to move which indicate that the spirits have only recently paused their state of change. Those which barely move were intentionally installed to hang just above the floor. They spin very slowly, moved only by the air flow in the room. The air flow that the viewer creates while walking through the space, contributes to the movement, or change, in the work. At no point will all of the suspended pieces be aligned in exactly the same manner. At first glance they may appear a bit static, but they are actually in a state of perpetual change. Like the brain or the soul, the work continues to change throughout its exhibition time. Once removed from GMA, the latex surfaces will continue to decay causing a constant rate of irreversible change.

For the moment however, the vertical pieces are formally strong. They possess a mysterious nature, even though there are figurative indications throughout the forms. Oddly enough considering my past work with the figure where emphasis was often placed on the head or face, here the emphasis is on body parts or portions. I have focused on overall change and expression, as opposed to a specific ‘area’ of the figure. There are many pieces in which limb-like extremities expand and contract, or elongate and retract.
Many have portions of hips, buttocks, and breasts in a state of alteration, or which alter as the viewer moves around the piece. Although they verge on repulsive, they are quite seductive and sensuous. The viscous nature of the skin-like latex surface adds to lifelike quality. The layering on the surface of the latex sheets created depth in some areas, while others were left intentionally thin. These thin areas allowed the ‘inners’ to create bulges in the surface producing the tension of an impending rupture. The transparency of the rubber is at once skin like, and yet allows a glimpse through to the interior. Stuffed within the forms, the simplicity of the cording creates an intestinal or umbilical effect. I intended the latter in order to indicate the life contained within, and I sense that they are very much alive. In fact, the entire space feels still, yet alive. It is the ‘potential for change’ which creates this atmosphere.

Alone, the vertical forms are strong. However, when literally embraced by central feature, the ‘individual repetition’ aspect, the whole space is united in a state of equilibrium. These two aspects of Transmogrification work in unison as Yin and Yang energy. The Yin being the wall feature, the Yang is the vertical forms. The wall feature Untitled is composed of latex sheets folded in a manner which embodied feminine form. Wrapped within each latex form is a small, glass vial. Each vial contains a natural element or an organic material, such as dirt, flower petals, salt, and seed pods. Each of the 120 vials contains a different substance. Each vial is also capped by a piece of latex wrapped with a ‘prayer tie.’ (This is a style of knot used by Native Americans in a ceremonial manner. It consists primarily of two, interlocking, infinity loops.) Each time a prayer tie is formed, the person tying the knot says a prayer. I will not go in to what my prayers were because they are very personal. However, my lack of disclosure on this point should not diminish from the fact that 120 prayers were made while capping the vials containing precious little pieces of Mother Earth.

Each substance contained represents something that is created and which changes over time. The only thing within each repetitive unit which will remain relatively unchanged over time is the manmade glass vial, and even those molecules will change over a substantial period. All of the 120 materials encapsulated, swaddled in latex, and presented are from the earth. This symbolizes the idea of birth and the precious nature of life. The latex form is shaped after the feminine labia to reinforce this point. At the same
time, the overall unit has an altar like, idol, or religious quality. It is as though each repetitive form were its own private ceremony. This makes even more precious or sacred, the encapsulated material.

In order to present this work, I referred back to the linear heads that I had displayed during my undergraduate work. I saw the small latex forms and vessels as one unit which represented the person and the soul. This is exactly like the small heads representing souls. In fact, the two are very similar in every respect, so I established a horizontal line of regularly spaced latex forms to emphasize the individual repetition of both the importance of the object repeated, and to establish a sacred, embracing, perimeter. The focal point was the group of the latex/vials on the rear wall. This aspect of the work created tension by seeming at once to be gathering, and then dispersing. This grouping is both chaotic and ordered which play off of one another, which is true of the entirety of the installation.

I feel that this is the strongest work that I have ever produced. From a strictly formal prospective, I believe that I have successfully addressed numerous elements including: space, form, repetition, scale, color, texture, tension, balance, rhythm and movement. Not only are the formal elements addressed, but I feel that I was able to capture and articulate the major conceptual aspects as well. These included; sacredness, the soul or psyche, lineage, collective experience, ceremony and ritual, mystery, spirituality, change, and potential...like a thin layer of translucent rubber, stiff yet pliable...viscous...drooping...twisting...tangled...quiet...still...waiting...receptive...potential...
Image List

Page 1:  Left image, Pregnant Figure, 1997
        Right image, Bound, 1997

Page 2:  Heads, 1998

Page 3:  Untitled and details, 2000

Page 4:  Detail, Moments BFA Exhibit, 1998

Page 5:  2 views from Moments BFA Exhibit, 1998

Page 6:  3 Untitled selections from New Work, 2003

Page 7:  Untitled Installation view from New Work, 2003

Page 8:  Left image, Head 1998
         Right image, Untitled 2004

Page 9:  Top image, Untitled, 2004
         Bottom image, Heads, 1998

Page 10: Transmogrification, 2004

Page 11: Left image, alternate view, Transmogrification, 2004
         Right image, detail, Transmogrification, 2004