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## Ordinary perspective

Autumn Rose Higgins

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*

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ORDINARY PERSPECTIVE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts

in

The School of Art

by

Autumn Rose Higgins  
B.A., Southern Oregon University, 2008  
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## Abstract

*Ordinary Perspective* is a body of ceramic work that shows a representation of a typical day, highlighting ordinary moments and creating a portrait of everyday life. This work distills down experiences into still images that sum-up the experience of the "In-Between" moments. These are the times that are not committed to memory, but are an essential part of our everyday lives. In this body of work I am addressing places where people are expected to take on the role of a loner. By observing people who are together, but not in a group allows me to observe the details of (anti)social situations without any actual interaction.

Focusing on idiosyncrasies within the monotony, I suggest narratives through imagery drawn on ceramic forms. This body of work contains panoramic images spanning across multiple functional vessels, small wall tiles, which show more intimate moments inside the home, and large jar forms, which show portraits of people in their daily routine and make eye contact with the viewer to form a personal connection. By focusing on the "In-Between" parts of the day I am able to show the vulnerability, loneliness, and isolation that can fill much of our daily life.

## Introduction



Image 1. Installation view of *Ordinary Perspective*

Our lives are filled with moments that one would not normally expect to see as a main scene in a movie. Moments of anticipation are often perceived as boredom, and although they are not thought to be committed to memory, they are the moments that when included in a movie, give it the feeling of real life. Our lives are filled with slow scenes and only speckled with the bits of excitement, humor, anguish and disappointment that shine brighter in our memory. In this work, I am filling in the slow gaps between these moments.

Monotony carries the rhythm of the day. I find beauty in monotony as I see people floating through the space between the plot points of their life. This is where I notice a quiet daily rhythm. I am emphasizing "in-between" moments, the mundane, quiet, or unnoticed experiences that are the filler of life.

This body of work shows my observations of the "in-between" times in an urban setting. The images I use capture people in a their raw state where they are unaffected by trying to be anything, impress anyone, or achieve something. The settings and activities illustrated are commonplace, and there is absence of a climax in the narrative like imagery. This leaves a sense of ambiguity in the plot, allowing the viewers to relate to the imagery and fill in the scene with their own stories.

## Ceramic Forms

*Ordinary Perspective* uses the format of ceramic vessels such as cups, bowls, and plates as well as small tiles to illustrate observations of day-to-day life. The use of three-dimensional vessels in the round along with wall pieces viewed only from the front encourages movement around the gallery space. Passing through the gallery is like taking a walk down the street. One can move between watching the people engaged, or mostly disengaged, in the “in-between” moments, to actually feeling like they are the person waiting for the bus or finishing their lunch. As a person engages with the space, they are put in the same vulnerable position as the characters drawn in the work. They are then being watched by the people in the drawings, or perhaps by the others in the room.

Each vessel is a contained environment used to highlight specific parts of daily life. Each moment is expanded as the viewer moves from one vessel to another. The vessels embody both a physical space and create a new environment for the surface drawings. A 2-dimensional representation of 3-dimensional space is presented on the 3-dimensional surface. The ceramic vessel in the round gives me the chance to manipulate visual perspective. It works as both a flat and a continuously curved surface to present the imagery, which is used to show a portrait of every day life. I am creating drawings that can be interpreted in multiple ways depending on the angle in which they are viewed. This gives the opportunity for there to be hidden moments, which are not found from every angle.



Image 2. Yellow Line West, Yellow Line East

Image 2 shows two vessels. These two objects paired together give a in both directions down a subway tunnel, the stairs to exit in one direction, and the train leaving in the other. The larger vessel titled "Yellow Line West" shows a grey-haired man standing alone in a subway tunnel with a train pulling away behind him. Moving around the piece gives alternate viewpoints. Another view shows a woman standing behind the grey-haired man, perhaps she is standing with him, or perhaps she is merely looking down the tunnel to see the train. From another viewpoint one can get glimpse of a figure on the other side of the smaller vessel, titled "Yellow Line East". He holds a book and a Manila envelope under his arm as he waits for the train.

A singular image of one person or object tells part of story but it can change within a broader context. Because of this variation in meaning the viewer is able to become part of the scene and interpret the meaning as a participant. On many of the pieces in *Ordinary Perspective* the image extends beyond the individual vessel to the one next to it and even to the viewer.

## **"In-Between" Observations and Voyeurism**

As a voyeur one gets sense of pleasure in watching others engage in intimate activities, or actions usually considered private. Modern reality TV shows and gossip magazines take advantage of voyeuristic tendencies of society. In this body of work I am also taking advantage of these tendencies, but unlike the excitement of reality TV I am focusing on what is seen in the down time. The imagery in *Ordinary Perspective* focuses on my observations of human interactions, intentional non-interactions, and isolation. It is about voyeurism, anonymity, loneliness, and intimacy.

There is something that interests me about watching people who do not think anybody is looking. When they are themselves lost in their routine of the "In-Between" moments. There is a sense of anonymity in sitting in a waiting room or walking through the grocery store with lack of awareness of a potential audience. Settings like this are public, but the people in them can be anonymous by avoiding the intimacy of conversation and acknowledgment of those around them.

When a person sinks into their personal space while waiting, they often forget themselves and let their guard down. This gives me the opportunity to be a voyeur to witness, perhaps with a sense of guilt or shame, a subconscious or personal act. When I take walk in the evening and I can see into lit windows of buildings, or when pulling up to a stoplight I sometimes have the opportunity to see someone picking their nose, or squeezing a blemish in the car next to me. Looking into the window of a house or watching the person in the next car I am granted an intimate and somewhat voyeuristic interaction with the subject.

I have a natural curiosity about other people's lives. I like looking at people, and am interested in contemplating what and who they are about based on what I see. This makes me feel some guilt at times, but I am fascinated by the beauty and visual quality of people in their raw state within these ordinary settings. While waiting in line for coffee or sitting on a bench waiting for something I often find myself staring at another person. Perhaps I am judging them, wondering where they got their sense of style, or what they must eat for breakfast. I could also be admiring them and wondering where they are going, now and in life. In *Ordinary Perspective* I make these observations permanent through drawn images on ceramic forms.



## Voyeurism and Intimacy

Image 3, "Rush Hour," shows a set of bowls with the familiar theme of rush hour traffic. The street, filled with cars is placed in front of the three plates, titled 52<sup>nd</sup> & foster. These two groupings paired together give a common view of a city street. When the bowls are approached the inside becomes visible. Image 4 shows the more private view of the inside of the cars, showing what one might only see if they are inside the car, or looking closely from the next car over.



Image 3. Rush Hour, 52<sup>nd</sup> & Foster, installation view



Image 4. Rush Hour, alternate view

When walking at night peering into lit windows or when a neighbor leaves their curtains open, we are granted the opportunity to anonymously look through the windows and get a glimpse into the lives of the subjects. The small wall

tiles arranged in the grid reference lit windows of apartment buildings and houses. Image 5, titled "8235 E. 32<sup>nd</sup>", shows a grouping of these tiles. These windows give the viewer/voyeur the opportunity to be a "peeping-tom". Most of these tiles contain ordinary imagery of everyday household items, and some have scenes of people talking or interacting. While they are hanging on the wall, these tiles do not show the details of what is happening on the other side of the window. An image of a coffee pot, Image 6, or a man looking out the window, Image 7, could spark the curiosity of a viewer, or prompt a conclusion. By taking the tile off the wall to read the caption written on the back, the viewer is, in a way, entering the scene. They are given a small written clue as to what is happening and becomes more intimate with the piece. For example, the caption for the tile in Image 6 says "You left the coffee pot on again", and in Image 7 "he's in my parking spot".



Image 5. 8235 E. 32<sup>nd</sup>





Image 6. "You left the coffee pot on again."



Image 7. "He's in my parking spot."

The text on these pieces acts as a blurb that describes the drawing. The backs of tiles have the dialogue or thoughts of the characters drawn to give context to the illustration on the front. I choose the captions by imagining myself behind these windows. I invent a very short story about what is happening and choose the dialogue or words that can best describe my story. The text I have chosen is specific to each window and specific to my own story, but also vague and open enough to prompt memory or thought in others.



Image 8. "Add Friend"

## Vulnerability in Isolation

I see isolation and vulnerability during “in-between” moments. When people are sitting in a waiting room at the DMV, or waiting for the bus to go to work they begin to fall into the act of sitting or waiting. They let their guard down, their mind begins to wander, their eyes loose focus, and their bodies slouch as they melt into the chair, becoming unaware of the world around them as it begins to blur. There is a sense of disconnection among people as they dissolve into their own personal blur of thoughts, or lack thereof. During these times people can be surrounded by others, but they become isolated in their own thoughts and subconscious actions becoming somewhat vulnerable to the world around them because they are unaware of it. They are mentally closed off but are physically open to the surrounding environment and vulnerable to others’ judgments, to people in their proximity, and to everyday mishaps.

Most of the time when someone is in a social situation they are expected to interact with the people around them. Standing alone in the corner at a party, or never talking during class or in the hallway during breaks at school they may be considered “the quiet one” or a loner. The places depicted in *Ordinary Perspective* are public spaces. These could potentially be social atmospheres, but they are usually places where people are expected not to interact, or to engage in minimal interaction with those around them. One may even be a little “put-off” or wary of overly friendly people in a bus stop or waiting room. In much of this body of work I am addressing these places where people are expected to take on the role of a loner.

The sign reads “No Cellphones Please, “No Phone Calls or Texts”. Bad TV is on and magazines are on the table. Someone picks up a magazine, looks at the pictures and puts it back. They scratch their head. Clean under their fingernails. The person next to them won’t stop shaking their foot. A name is called and someone is ushered away. How Much Longer?

By surrendering to the act of waiting people can begin day dreaming, fading into the act of sitting, staring off into space, with their gaze fixed, and at the same time becoming mentally disconnected from their location. What are these people looking at while they wait for their number to be called, what do they stare at while they ride the bus to work?

Much of the imagery in *Ordinary Perspective* shows groupings of people having as little contact with each other as possible yet being physically very close in proximity, like at a bus stop or in a grocery store. By observing people who are together, but not in group I can read into the (anti)social situations without any actual interaction. Image 9 shows a grouping of cups titled “7<sup>th</sup> & Main”. This piece shows a group of people waiting at a bus stop. There is a girl sitting on a bus stop bench between two people. She sits with her knees together and her toes touching, staring down at her cell phone as she attempts to mentally remove herself from the scene. She has protective posture, closing herself off and shielding herself from her surroundings. To the right is man in a red sweater sitting in an open position showing a relaxed and confident sense of power in his body language. His arm is draped over the back of the bench encroaching on the girl’s personal space. In contrast to his energy and posture, the woman on the left is making herself as small as possible, practically falling off the bench. She is staying in her own space, showing sensitivity to personal space the girl in the middle.



Image 9. 7<sup>th</sup> & Main

In situations like these the subject can become alone a public place. While waiting, people commonly choose to sit alone, and not interact with others around them. By looking at a cell phone, a book, a newspaper, or simply “spacing out”, they isolate themselves from the others who are also in the transitional space. In letting their guard down they become somewhat vulnerable, often doing things that they would not do if they were aware that their actions were being watched. *Ordinary perspective* gives a way for people to take a closer look at this behavior, and to feel as if they are in the position of the characters in the work.



Image 10. We'll be with you shortly

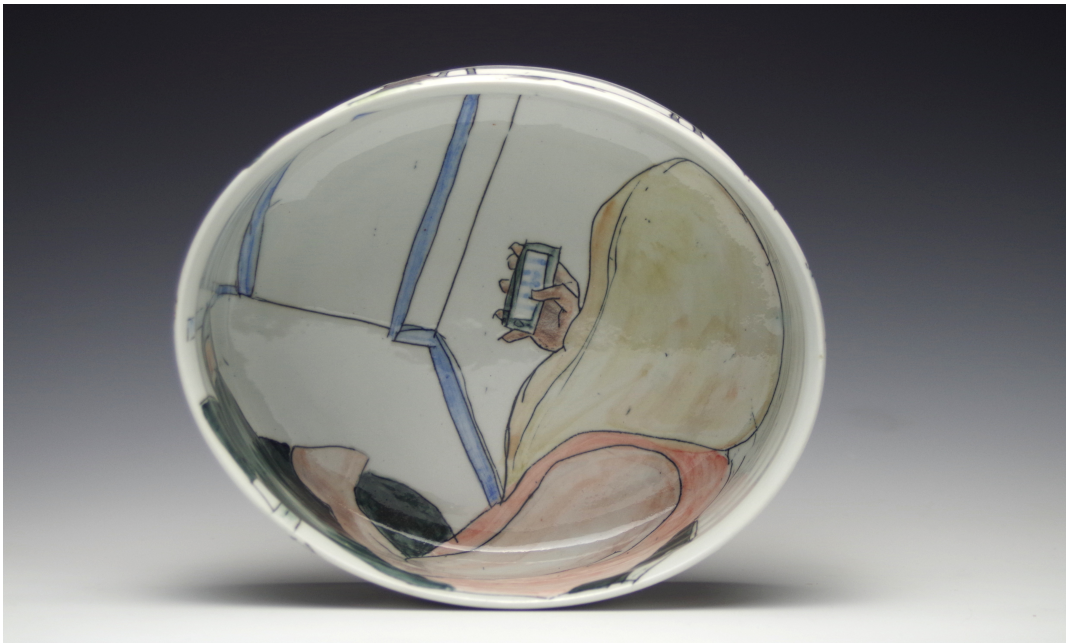


Image 11. We'll be with you shortly, alternate view



## The Use of Functional Objects

The format of functional objects such as cups and bowls also reflects ideas of vulnerability one can be subject to as they fall into their daily routine. These people I have drawn are at the bus stop, waiting at the DMV and stuck in traffic and have surrendered to the moment. They become closed off from the world around them, but the world has not closed them out. They are there, and open. The functional format puts the subjects into an even more vulnerable position while the user of the object handles and touches, each piece, analyzing the people and the scene depicted.



Image 12. 9:27AM



Image 13. 8:33AM

Cups, bowls, and plates are objects that often accompany daily routines. People use these objects everyday but as eating a bowl of cereal in the morning or having a drink of water after brushing their teeth become habitual activities, they rarely take the time to consider their meaning of the objects used. In illustrating primarily normal and mundane activities I am giving the viewer a humble view of an ordinary day. The washy and muted color pallet used reflects the modesty of the actions depicted while I use the format of functional vessels to reflect images of routine moments of daily life.

## Panoramic and Alternating Views

The imagery in *Ordinary Perspective* uses a variety of viewpoints to add a visual rhythm to the body of work and to bring focus to the various actions of the people drawn on the forms. The panoramic format used in the groupings of cups is reminiscent of standing in a doorway and looking down the street, or around the room. These settings, shown throughout this body of work, are where I find people in their “in-between” moments. Alone the vessel acts as window, snapshot, or an isolated portrait of a moment, focusing on the simple composition of the setting or the posture of the subject. Each group of vessels shown together creates the panoramic view to show a larger scene, where each section of the panorama tells its own part of the story. Looking at these groupings the viewer is given a transient point of view, as if they are glancing down the street as they cross or looking around the grocery store for the correct aisle.



Image 14. Just Picking Up a Few Things

Alternating the perspective of the illustrations adds variation to the imagery of the zoomed out perspective. I have done this by adding close-up drawings that highlight the viewpoint of the subject (the person sitting the locations) and break up the monotonous rhythm of the small drawings of full figures.

The close-up images contrast the panoramic and more “zoomed out views” of the subjects. These alternate views bring a more intimate connection to the content of the scene, showing the subject’s point of view. By seeing a woman’s clasped hands, or a sink full of dishes the viewer is seeing what can be looked at in these mundane places. Rather than being an outsider looking in on the scene, viewer becomes part of it.





Image 15. Windshield Repair

## Jar forms

The larger forms have a more confrontational interaction with the viewer. The vessels are meant to be seen as if they are people milling around the room. Looking into the gallery these forms act as people interacting with the space, and sometimes with each other. Image 16 shows an installation view of "Yellow Line West" and "Yellow Line East" during the reception. Jar forms like these are placed on pedestals throughout the space and blend in with the people in the room. While in the gallery people can pass these forms as they approach the bus stop cups or the window tiles on the wall. Perhaps there is an acknowledging nod as their paths cross.



Image 16. Yellow Line West, Installation view during reception



Image 17. Yellow Line East, Installation view during reception



Image 18. Spaghetti or hamburgers, Installation View During reception

While still alluding to a functional vessel I am bringing these forms into a more sculptural format. I give these vessels a primary focal point or a starting point by adding the faces in relief. Altering the rim of the piece assists the perspective of the drawing and adds variation to the format of the piece, and variation to forms throughout the entire body of work.

## Conclusion

The slow “in-between” times allow people to be in their relaxed and raw state. In observing the slow scenes of the ordinary day I notice a beauty in the ordinary things. In this body of work I am showing my Perspective of an Ordinary day. *Ordinary Perspective* highlights the loneliness, vulnerability, and mundane qualities of the day and shows beauty in these moments. As the viewer walks through the galley, they pass the larger vessel forms making or avoiding eye contact with the figures, they continue down the street, or around the corner, walking passed bus stops, and peering into the windows as they apartment buildings In this body of work I have created portraits of these familiar scenes, and I have given the viewer a chance to look into the work and to study the scenes and see the variation among the images drawn. The varied forms and viewpoints of the pieces in *Ordinary Perspective* engage the viewer and allow them to become part of the space.

## **Vita**

Autumn Higgins was born in Portland, Oregon, to a family of artists and creative people. Her mother is a painter, her father a carpenter, and her grandparents both worked in ceramics for over 50 years. Autumn places great importance on having art objects in one's life, and has always known she would find a career in the arts.

Beginning with small projects in her grandparent's studio she has always had an affinity for ceramics. Her formal pursuit in ceramics began at Southern Oregon University in 2004-2008. In the summer of 2006, Autumn apprenticed under the French potter Jean-Nicolas Gerard in Valensole, France. In 2010-2011 she studied at University of Florida as a Post-Baccalaureate student. She enrolled in the Master of Fine Arts program at Louisiana State University in 2011. She has just finished her final year in the ceramics department and has earned her graduate degree.