This doorknob is on the ceiling

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“A Thesis”

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In

The School of Art

by

Cody Arnall
B.F.A., Oklahoma State University, 2007
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ABSTRACT

This Doorknob is on the Ceiling is a thesis exhibition of sculptural works that explore the fusion of various domestic, industrial and commonplace objects. Some are new, but most of them are used and outdated. I explore and take advantage of the baggage that comes along with them, their history, their functions and what they suggest. My intention with these items is to both exploit and subvert the contextual boundaries which define them. I manipulate these objects in opposition to the way they are normally presented, encountered and understood, while leaving them recognizable. I am interested in obstructing function and creating unexpected associations between ordinary things.

These works investigate dynamic spatial arrangements and codependent evocative relationships between objects that typically need human interaction to become activated or purposeful. I force them to depend on one another for physical support by intersecting and embedding them, creating animated arrangements motivated by indiscernible forces and circumstances.
OBJECT ASSOCIATIONS

The objects I employ are mostly found in the home, work place or school, such as: suitcases, lamps, filing cabinets, tables, desks, makeup cases, plungers, and mops. The majority of the objects were purchased from local thrift stores, which was a way of limiting myself to chance material selections. I depend on the wide variety and randomness of the thrift store inventory. I gravitate to collect older manufactured, generic objects, which require a particular human interaction to fulfill their intended purpose. I also accumulate objects that imply use in a specific environment: a bathroom, kitchen, or office. An example is a mop, which suggests the act of cleaning, but is also recalls being used in the home. Another example is a school desk. It implies learning, but also brings to mind the classroom.

I began this body of work to explore commonplace objects as building material. Initially I stripped objects of their individuality by combining them into formal sculptural arrangements and by obscuring their surfaces with paint and texture. I chose not to think about their purpose or meaning as I was collecting and assembling objects together. My arrangements were based on their material and formal qualities. As I continued to work, I found that in my best efforts it was difficult to avoid the significance of the objects I chose. This was in them both individually and in the grafted hybrids I was creating out of them. As the work developed, I became interested in the suggestiveness of these objects and their new animated lives as hybrids. I continued to join objects and render them unusable, but chose to no longer hide their identities. In allowing them to remain recognizable, I wanted to exploit their evocative qualities and reinforce content intrinsic to the objects in an individual piece.
I elected to maintain individual object’s visual identity in order to use them in communicative dialogue. These objects I use recall memories of time, place and purpose. It is impossible for me to see a baseball helmet without remembering that I wore one of them many years playing in a league. The scuffed surface tells me that it has been used. Its color is the same as a particular team I played on. The objects I utilize are so abundant in daily life that most viewers have some form of association with them. When I combine two or more objects their identities collide and expand the range of their interpretative possibilities. In my investigation of objects as material I have found that if an object is over-processed, covered up, cut and rearranged, then it becomes only material and loses its ability to convey its inherent information, functional identity and interpretative life.

I employ a wide range of objects and diverse ways of physically combining them. The content of each sculpture is built from the associations created by the juxtapositions and arrangements of objects. In some arrangements objects are easily recognized as cogitatively related to one another and in others are they are more disparate. Even if the objects are incongruent, the fact that they are condensed and interwoven together invites viewers to find allegorical relations between them. My intentions in coupling objects together range from creating comical visual puns to much more somber relationships. I try to give viewers an invitation to create a narrative. The objects, the purposes and settings they imply and how they are connected visually and conceptually are all associative clues and questions for a viewer to follow. My titles are simply a list that identifies the objects I used in a particular piece. One such sculpture is titled *Table, Lamp Shades, Lamps, Light Bulbs, Wallpaper, Electrical Receptacle, Electrical Wiring, Door Hinges* (Fig. 1). This information is also repeated in the
materials list. I give viewers only what they can deduce from looking at the work, directing them back to the sculpture for further investigation. The title reinforces the primacy of the information that is right in front of the viewer and requires them to consult their personal experiences with the objects and resolve the meaning of my arrangements on their own terms.

Figure 1

Cody Arnall, *Table, Lamp Shades, Lamps, Light Bulbs, Wallpaper, Electrical Receptacle, Electrical Wiring, Door Hinges, Books*. Table lamp Shades, lamps, light bulbs, wallpaper, electrical receptacle, electrical wiring, door hinges, books, 7’ x 7’ x 2’6”, 2010
Table, Lamp Shades, Lamps, Light Bulbs, Wallpaper, Electrical Receptacle, Electrical Wiring, Books, Door Hinges, Books, is a sculpture where all of the objects are related with one another through an out-of-date domestic aesthetic. The composition consists of a dining room table that has been cut in half and propped up by stacks of encyclopedia yearbooks. One half of the table top meets the other half, forming a ninety degree intersection of table tops supported on the gallery wall. One of the table halves is arranged horizontally and on it rests a volumetric form of cut and slotted lampshades passing through the vertical table. The exteriors of these shades and some surfaces of the table are covered with wall paper patterns similar to those that might be found in a home circa 1970. Light fixtures, supported within the shade form, illuminate the paper’s blue, green, yellow and off-white colors. Two lamps are also embedded into the table tops, reflecting light and creating shadows on the wall, beneath and behind the work. The dim light emitted from the shades is akin to that of a cozy living room. It is as if living room and dining room objects amalgamated in someone’s attempt to rearrange their house or pack for moving. These objects are similar to things found in the home I grew up in and they are nostalgic for comforts of decades past. The impractical arrangement of the objects disturbs the desire to long for the past.

In my sculpture Briefcases, Plungers, Name Badge Stickers (Fig. 2), I combine dissimilar objects together to create a more humorous and emblematic pun. In this piece I have intersected two briefcases, one on top of the other. The inside of the top case is cracked open to reveal an interior lined with blank name badge stickers and the handles of five plungers that spear the surface. Four more plungers pierce the bottom case and two of the handles act as legs that support the tilted cases at a forty five degree angle. The briefcases and name badges
bring to mind the monotony of a desk job and the uniformity of office culture. The toilet plungers impale the suitcases with a violent gesture that communicates the frustration of a company man and his juvenile, futile desire for rebellion.

Figure 2

Cody Arnall, *Briefcases, Plungers, Name Badge Stickers*. Briefcases, plungers, name badge stickers, 2’6”x 1’6”x 2’, 2010
I also combine unrelated objects together and correlate symbolic relationship between them in *Igloo Cooler, Baseball Helmet, Ketchup Bottles, and Plastic Bathroom Cups* (Fig. 3). A cylindrical column of stacked white plastic bathroom cups stands two and a half feet high. They are a thin post, supporting a small rectangular blue and white Igloo cooler that is intersected by a red baseball helmet. The top of the cooler is absent acting as an open window, revealing the crown of the helmet and tip of a ketchup bottle that pierce it. The smooth red plastics of the helmet and bottle are vibrant against the white cooler surrounding them. Four more plastic bottles are cut open and spread like skin over the surface of the cooler’s blue exterior and the helmet. They are pinned down by yellow corncob holders that spike up in various directions.

The cooler, baseball helmet, ketchup bottles, corncob holders, all are reminiscent of things I associate with summer; memories of going to the ball park, and having cookouts; being among friends and family. The piece encourages a feeling of a togetherness that may also be a little too close for comfort and suggest menacing undertones. The objects are densely grafted and sinisterly pinned by the needles from the corncob holders. The cut open ketchup bottles that are also pinned down and suggests blood flowing from wounds.
Figure 3

_Igloo Cooler, Baseball Helmet, Ketchup Bottles, Corncob Holders, Plastic Bathroom Cups_. Igloo cooler, baseball helmet, ketchup bottles, corncob holders, plastic bathroom cups, 3’ 9”x 1’ 3” x 1’ 4”, 2010
LIVELINESS

It is one of my goals to make my sculptural arrangements appear to be animate or activated by mysterious forces. The objects are anthropomorphized, assuming life-like characteristics, as they engage in unusual, but purposeful tasks and seem to be unaffected by gravity. I want viewers to experience these objects completely outside their familiar setting: in the back of the closet, on a garage shelf, or stashed in the corner. I want to exploit the fact that they can present a surplus of information by making them a lively center of interest. I rally the objects into energetic compositions where they are impaled, stitched and grafted to each other. They appear upside down, vertical and horizontal and diagonal, often relying on each other for support.

In my piece, Chests of Drawers, Lamps, Light Bulbs, Crutches, Surge Protector, Circuit Taps, Artificial Flowers, Paint, Sawdust, Wood Glue, Extension Cord (Fig. 4), crutches become prosthetic legs that are sutured to the sides of the chests of draws with zip ties. The chests appear to be bodies that are slowly limping away from the lights that tie them to the wall. Cords extend from the lights and plug into a receptacle embedded into top of one of the sets of drawers. More lights are fixed into the planes of wood of the chests and seem to be trying to overtake them. Some of the drawers are opened to reveal a crusty, earthen-like interior of paint and artificial flowers that are highlighted by lights that shine inside. This looks as though it could be the chest’s guts and/or a growth starting to take over.
Another sculpture that assumes an animated quality is Mops, Makeup Case, Artificial Flowers, Light Fixture, Light Bulb, Paint, Sawdust, Wood Glue (Fig. 5). A makeup case punctured by eight mop handles is lifted into the air, suggesting a body supported by delicate legs. The mop heads drape over the sides of the makeup case like unruly hair. All the visual and physical weight of the makeup case and mop heads are supported by four skinny legs. The rest of the legs kick out in various downward directions. The disproportional visual weight between the case and legs give the impression that it could topple over at any moment, like a dancer on toes that must keep moving in order not to fall.

Figure 5

Cody Arnall, Mops, Makeup Case, Artificial Flowers, Light Fixture, Light Bulb, Paint, Sawdust, Wood Glue, Mops. Makeup case, artificial flowers, light fixture, light bulb, paint, sawdust, wood glue, 4’x 3’x 3’6”, 2010
One of my works, *School Desk, 220v Plug, Rubber Conduit* (Fig. 6), seems almost weightless in its liveliness. I offer the illusion that a very naturally laid, unplugged ten foot 220 volt extension cord supports the weight of an old wooden school desk suspended five feet in the air. The desk bobbles at the lightest touch, as it floats like a slowly leaking helium balloon tied to the end of a string. The cord comes directly out of out of one of the desks legs, fastened to it like the end of a power tool. The plug is nowhere near a socket, but the desk remains full of life and ready to move or collapse at any moment.

![Image of School Desk](image)

*Figure 6*

*Cody Arnall, School Desk, 220v Plug, Rubber Conduit, Steel. School desk, 220v plug, rubber conduit, steel, 4’9”x 3’x 5’, 2010*
ARTIFICIAL LIGHT

I use artificial light in the majority of these sculptures. Unlike most of the objects I use, I exploit the function of light fixtures and lamps. Based on its intensity and color, light can act as either a barrier or an invitation in my work, sometimes pleasing and sometimes uncomfortable. Incandescent light bulbs and fluorescent tubes usually hang over our heads or under lampshades. In my pieces that use light, I confront viewers with light and lamps at or below eye level. Some of my pieces use light’s ability to invite viewers to discover hidden contents and others use it to engulf audience and space beyond the actual pieces themselves.

I explore light’s intensity in attempt to define the space and overwhelm the audience in Suitcases, Fluorescent Fixtures, Fluorescent Bulbs, Name Badge Stickers, Electrical Receptacles, Electrical Wiring and Box (Fig. 7). The piece is constructed from six intersecting plastic suitcases. Four of the suitcases are pierced by lit fluorescent fixtures. The lights appear to have punctured the suitcases with such great force that the cases are left intact suitcases’ surfaces are covered by hundreds of red, white and blue name badge stickers. This gives the piece a sense of intimidating energy, heightened by the strength of light directly in the viewers face. It is necessary for this piece to be contained, or its light would pour into the rest of the gallery. Shown in a small dimly lit room, as a set up in the gallery, the lights take over the space, reflecting off the gallery walls and floor. The stickers mask nearly the entire surfaces of the cases, making their surface characteristics almost unnoticeable. The colors and writing on the stickers are completely bled out in some areas by the strong light that bounces off of them.
Figure 7

Suitcases, Fluorescent Fixtures, Fluorescent Bulbs, Name Badge Stickers, Electrical Receptacles, Electrical Wiring and Box. Suitcases, fluorescent fixtures, fluorescent bulbs, name badge stickers, electrical receptacles, electrical wiring and box, 4’x 4’6”x 6’, 2010

In Makeup Case, Foosball Parts, Telephone Wiring, Lamp Post, Light Fixture, Glass Light Covering, Electrical Wiring, Paint, Sawdust, Wood Glue, I investigated light as an element to attract a viewer’s attention in order to encourage them to discover hidden element in the piece. A makeup case is penetrated and fastened vertically to the end of a lamp post. The case is cracked open like a door, to reveal its interior. A light fixture and oversized glass covering are mounted to the inside of the lid. A fifteen watt, easy on the eyes, light bulb illuminates the interior of the case to reveal a foosball handle with its plastic men embedded into the bottom of the case surrounded brightly painted rough blue texture. The inside of the lid is wrapped
with rainbow colored telephone wire and is encrusted with rough repaint and texture. Without the light, the intricate interior of the case could easily go unnoticed.

Figure 8

*Makeup Case, Foosball Parts, Telephone Wiring, Lamp Post, Light Fixture, Glass Light Covering, Electrical Wiring, Paint, Sawdust, Wood Glue.* Makeup Case, Foosball Parts, Telephone Wiring, Lamp Post, Light Fixture, Glass Light Covering, Electrical Wiring, Paint, Sawdust, Wood Glue, 3’8” x 1’6” x 1’6”, 2010
CONCLUSION

Upon entering the gallery viewers are able to see my all of the sculptures immediately. I have also arranged the space so that viewers can easily focus on one individual work at a time. Light from illuminated sculptures causes them to reflect off the walls and floor, making the space completely affected by the work. Each sculpture explores dynamic spatial arrangements and suggestive relationships between objects that require a human activity. I have forced the objects to dependent on one another for physical support, in order to create lively arrangements motivated by indiscernible forces.

*This Door Knob is on the Ceiling* is the only hint at a narrative title in the exhibition. I use this title to encourage an imaginative way of thinking when people enter the gallery and view my work. This title is used to suggest a scenario that could not exist, unless there were a door to the knob and it opened. Entering that door, a viewer crosses over into a ‘parallel reality,’ a place of free associations between objects, my show, a place where they reinvent their own identity and agenda.
VITA

Cody Arnall was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He received his undergraduate degree in fine arts from Oklahoma State University in 2007. With the encouragement of close professors he developed a great appreciation for craftsmanship and became dedicated to the studio arts. He graduated a member of Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society, and was selected outstanding senior for the art department in 2007. He moved to Baton Rouge in the summer of 2007 to pursue his Master of Fine Arts at Louisiana State University and is currently working to complete this degree. Over the past several years his materials for making art has grown to include everything from wood, steel, rubber, found objects, to video and performance.