Playground in-between

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Playground In-Between

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of 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 Arts

By
Yoojeung Park
B.F.A., Ewha Womans University, 2005
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ABSTRACT

I want to create my own Utopia that is, as a system, not an ideal community but fun in appearance, like castles in the movie Alice in Wonderland, the land of Rivendell from Lord of the Rings, or the Archigram’s architectural drawings¹. Even though those scenes are fictional, viewers can picture themselves into that visualized description. Once my Utopia is visualized with its detail, it is the human imagination that makes the Utopia come alive. The one who gives function to unfamiliar things are viewers not creators.

Playground In-Between was my first active attempt to construct my Utopia, which was composed of unique buildings and unfamiliar views. In the process of creating, I focused on the shapes – shapes of individual buildings and shapes of the finished composition – rather than thinking of function. My main task was breaking my stereotype of architectural form so that I could come up with a unique design. I could fulfill my task using unintentionally shaped building blocks made by others – scraps of wood. I combined those negative parts of wood together to form architecture. The process of assembling was as fun as if I played on the ground. This is why my work was titled, “Playground In-Between.”

INTRODUCTION

Where I grew up boxed me in. A conventional standard of behavior was generally understood. I did not dare to break that standard, but only tried my best to stand out in the limit of the rule. I had buried many of my emotions from experiences that I thought may not interest people. I never spoke out, thinking there would be no reason to express what people did not want to see. I designed art that people traditionally expected; I took it for granted that my artwork met public expectations. I do not deny there was a happy feeling to see people’s satisfaction with my work, but at the same time, I felt a hollow feeling in the fact that my satisfaction depended on others’ satisfactions.

I remember the chaos thundering in me as I faced the challenge, for the first time, to express “the real me” when I moved to United States. Nevertheless, I was trying to figure out what this western culture wanted to see from me so that I could create my artwork according to their expectations. Much to my surprise, their expectations were that they wanted to see was who I really was, and not who they wanted me to be. This led me back to my buried emotions and memories that were part of me yet previously ignored. When I carefully expressed them, I was surprised to find that people responded with appreciation and delight, and having these new experiences let me soak into my memories of past. I dug up a grave of my memories to detect the emotions that I had felt but long forgotten. Whether I found them or not, the searching process healed the wound caused by hiding myself, and it became a reward in present time to appreciate the single moments of movement, sound, smell, and all the senses triggered by my surroundings. The end of my hiding brought enlightenment, and gave me a sense of freedom.

With this freedom, I was able to see who I really was, and what I wanted to create. My artwork was freed from depending on the expectations of others, and I focused on my natural inclination– articulating the hidden value of abandoned objects in the form of art. In fact, my propensity for appreciating trash was not new to me; as a child I used to gather trivial objects such as nuts and bolts that I found laying upon the street. I became an active collector of abandoned objects to form something, anything, with them – it was how I expressed my freedom.
I now realized that my assignment was to determine what kind of art that I could come up using the discarded materials that I collected free from any expectations. Once again, I searched sources from my memories and found my excitement in creating spaces in which I could joyfully stay. Thinking back to my childhood as I used to play with piles of books to simulate my own paradise, I decided to recreate that excitement again by designing a joyful space that was miniaturized instead of life-sized so that I could focus on making detailed information rather than rough structure frame. Like a diorama in a museum or travel center represents a whole scene with figures in miniature so that observers can explore the scene virtually, viewers may experience my work in a similar way as they explore my Playground In-Between.
MATERIAL

Material for my work is strongly engaged with my surroundings. I have collected abandoned objects and trash on the flow of my traffic from my house to LSU campus. Those waste objects were wooden pieces, papers, cardboards, styrofoam, silicone, cans, bottles, plastic packages, paper boxes, snack packages and such. I found that what they had in common was their recyclable or half-permanent character, and this re-useable value was what I wanted to take advantage of. Often, materials used by art school students are easily trashed regardless of recycling. Once the students finished their art projects, they forgot how valuable the materials were. By creating artwork that showed precious quality of their wasted materials, I hope that they realize the value of the materials. Among the abandoned objects, I found interesting characteristics in wooden scraps: brown-based color, natural grain, unintentional shapes created by random people, easy to alter the original shape. I tried to show those characteristics by transforming them into valuable forms – my architectural models.

As construction progressed, other kinds of materials were added, as long as they didn't break the unity of the whole composition.
SINGULAR INDEPENDENT OBJECTS (Place I - XI)

These ten pieces show how random scraps were articulated into objects. Each object represents a different space, and little human figures placed on them accentuate the spatial quality of the places. The assemblage of some scraps, without altering their shapes, turned the scraps into prerequisite elements for the place structure. Stretched-out pedestals for these works give them bigger space to interact with. The Places can possess as much space around them as viewers want them to in their imaginations.

Figure 1. Overall view of Place I – Place XI

*Place I* was assembled with eight building blocks. A cubic block among them was intentionally picked as a platform for a human figure to stand on (Figure 2). As with the cubic block, a flat surface was an essential element to transform the other object into places. The other ten objects also have at least one flat component and one figure (Figure 3 – Figure 8).
Figure 2. Place I, wood and ceramic

Figure 3. Place II, wood, ceramic, and twig

Figure 4. Place III, Place VI, wood and ceramic

Figure 5. Place IV, wood and ceramic

Figure 6. Place V, wood and ceramic
These works could be used as building blocks for other bigger structures. For example, *Structure I - III* were composed with some independent objects that could stand by themselves as a completed piece.
FOUR PRINCIPLES OF SEEKING IN FORMS

One. Miniature and imagination

Playground In-Between was composed with diorama-like architectural models. The diorama was introduced from Europe as “a miniature representation of a scene made life-like by clever application of foreshortened perspective and realism.” The miniature display was an effective way to describe my virtual space. A life-size structure limits viewers’ interaction within physical reality; on the other hand, miniature form extends viewers’ scope of activities within their imagination. John Bachelard states in his essay, The Poetics of Space, “miniaturized representation becomes nothing but a body of expressions with which to communicate our own images to others.” Each individual would have slightly different experience in Playground In-Between even when seeing the same manifestation of it. Bachelard said, “he enters into a miniature world and right away images begin to abound, then grow, then escape.” What we get from diorama is not what we have seen but what we have imagined, so it becomes a device to connect the scene to our imagination.

Unlike true dioramas, my architectural models do not include their background scenes or information about where they belong – there are no trees, hills or lakes. I wanted to leave the forms in a vacuum-space, thus leaving the possibilities for expansion open to the mind.

Two. Structure expansion

The structures have unlimited finishing point – more elements can be added to the main structure as long as the gallery space allows. The method I used most frequently to suggest the possibility for expansion was to leave negative space around the forms, which

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4 Gaston Bachelard, pp.148-182
suggested vacancy for other structures. For example, cardboard tubes raising-up the whole structure above them, created empty space (figure 12). The possibility of expansion implies that there have not been, will not be, planned designs for these works; in other words, the structures design their formation by themselves depending on what kind of shapes of objects were found to use.

Three. Three-dimensional composition
I composed structures as part of a larger unified form, keeping in mind the principles of organization: balance, proportion (the comparative relationship between parts of a whole or units as to size), dominance, movement, economy, harmony, and variety. More than the other principles, “balance” was the most important in the building process. Visually heavy and light elements were posed against one another to balance the whole composition. Because the physical weights of elements were not proportional to their size, some composition looked off balance. That problem was fixed by applying colors to balance their visual weight. Use of predominantly one kind material, wooden scraps, naturally helped the finished formation to be harmonious (Figure 13).

Four. Presence of myself
I explored the structures during the building process. Placing visual source of myself on the structures gave me different perspectives from which to enjoy them. I printed pictures of myself on decal paper and applied them onto small ceramic forms, which I spread out on the Structures.

Figure 10. Cluster of human figures, cone6 clay, unglazed

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Figure 11. Structure I, detail
STRUCTURE I: From the very initial rule to new rule

My rule of using scraps of wood was to keep the original shapes of them as much as possible because I found value in those shapes. As the structure got large, I modified certain shapes in order to achieve a more intentional over-all effect. When a part of central structure was formed, I needed some specific shapes such as rectangles and half-circles to accentuate the central formation. For example, the large flat-form that lifted up the main structure was intentionally designed to meet the main goal of the construction which was to create an adventurous space. Also, I found that multiples of one shape created strong emphasis on the structure. Since multiples of one shape were rarely found, I needed to generate the copies of the prototype. Even though the structure was started from unintentional shapes, it ended up with additional formations that were intentionally designed – which became a new rule.

Figure 12. Structure I, 91”(h)*94”(w)*48”(d), wood, ceramic, and cardboard tubes
Structure II: Momentary interest

Collecting wooden scraps was as enjoyable as building. Whenever I found some uniquely shaped scraps, I imagined them in various possible compositions. In general, it usually took a while to decide the most intriguing composition. On the other hand, the composition of structure II was decided instantly. I found that a cluster of long wooden straps created a beautiful composition itself when they were piled up unintentionally. Structure II was a recalled memory of when I encountered the beauty of piled wooden scraps.

Figure 13. Structure II, 46”(h)*105”(w)*23”(d), wood, ceramic, and chipboard
Structure III: Bricolage

Bricolage is a term used in several disciplines, among them the visual arts and literature, to refer to the construction or creation of a work from a diverse range of things that happen to be available, or a work created by such a process. Structure III was a Bricolage built with various materials. Beyond wooden scraps, there were other abandoned materials that I had been collecting, such as a fan, plastic packages, acrylic and paper scraps. It was not hard to compose independent architectures with these materials; however, I was afraid to compose bigger structure using them since I knew that it would be hard to achieve unity from mixed-matched materials (Figure 14, 15). On the other hand, that a variety of materials could create a more joyful sense in my structures, appealed to me and challenged my building process. There are eleven vertical components in Structure III, and nine of those are non-wood. To achieve unity, I bridged all the components with only one kind of material – long wooden straps. The straps not only created unity but also expanded their space. Moreover, pastel blue and pink colors were applied onto various materials in order to mute a whole structure harmoniously.

Figure 14. Place VII, wood, ceramic, metal, bark, and beads

Figure 15. Place VIII

6 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bricolage
Figure 16. Structure III, 65”(h)*119”(w)*56”(d), multiple mediums
CONCLUSION

My Utopia became a miniatured life through my work. This finished presentation of my work shows routes of exploration of the new world, while in construction, my desires to possess and give a second life to abandoned materials were satisfied as well. All of these motivations, conceptual sources, materials, constructing processes, and finished appearances became coherent. Since works of Playground In-Between started with the freedom of feelings, I could be honest to my natural temptations and emotions. From beginning to the end, I had played in Utopia.

Utopia is a joyful place that I always want to go back to, expecting new explorations. In order to satisfy the expectation, my structures will constantly need to have new shapes of buildings. One of the principles of seeking in forms, Structure expansion, is a key to how the shapes can go further, for example, combining the elements of Structure #1 - #III together and adding more details and more buildings. When the work expands to a bigger scale, it may not be a miniature anymore. In other words, explorers may actually be able to get in there and physically interact with the space rather than imagining only.

Freedom goes through my work as a spine. It was an engine for the beginning of the work and gave me sources of forms, materials, and a joyful construction process. It still opens further possibilities to my work.

My three years of graduate program at LSU were a journey to find myself through my work. I am thankful that I got to find my reason for generating work as an artist. The form of my work may change in the future depending on what kinds of materials people throw away in the places where I will be living. I can not wait to face a new environment and challenge myself again.
REFERENCES


http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bricolage
VITA

Yoojeung Park was born and raised in Seoul, Korea. While she was attending Seoul Arts High School, she experienced not only fundamental fine art structures but also music and dance. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in ceramics in Ewha Womans University in 2005. Four years at college helped her to build up the strong foundation in ceramics, and she graduated with an award given to the best student of the year. Leaving college, backpacking in China, Russia, West and East Europe, and North Africa introduced her extensively to different foreign cultures. The taste of the new world encouraged her to study abroad, and she started her Master of Fine Arts at Louisiana State University. In August of 2010 Yoojeung received her Master of Fine Art in studio art.