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Primal Matter

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PRIMAL MATTER

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
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in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Art

in

The School of Art

by
Lucas Allen Bush
B.A., University of Southern Mississippi, 2015
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Images.....iii

Abstract.....iv

Introduction.....1

Purpose2

Energy.....5

Influence.....8

Conclusion.....12

Bibliography.....13

Vita.....14

LIST OF IMAGES

Figure 1: <i>Introvert</i> , 2018.....	3
Figure 2: <i>Extrusion</i> , 2018.....	4
Figure 3: <i>Interior Thoughts</i> , 2018.....	5
Figure 4: <i>Fifth Birthday</i> , 2017.....	6
Figure 5: <i>Subliminal Anxiety</i> , 2017.....	9
Figure 6: <i>Funeral March</i> , 2018.....	11

ABSTRACT

Primal Matter is a physical representation of the intuitive process, through two and three dimensional forms. The pieces convey motion and tension while telling the story of their own creation. Working instinctively has always fascinated me, in the way of allowing our subconscious mind to make decisions in the place of preconceived planning. My work is heavily influenced by Intuition and the transformation of energy. I am constantly searching for the underlying image or object through scraps of wood and pieces of charcoal, and this body of work is the visible evidence. It explores the curiosity of our unknown ideas, demonstrating a process of creation through organized chaos.

INTRODUCTION

I can still remember the smell of fresh pine sawdust, and watching it drift across the streams of afternoon sunlight. Mississippi has a way of warping things, like the humidity that took to those old plywood floors, giving them the perfect sound. You know, the kind of squeak that an old rocking chair gives when you lean back in it. The kind of squeak that would make you nervous if you didn't know the hands that built it. I may have only been four and a half years old, but I knew those hands. I remember those hands.

Nestled in the make-shift storage room that my father converted into his wood shop, I remember watching him cross cut board after board. This is the part of childhood where the father tells his son to follow his dreams, and that he can be whatever he wants when he grows up. As most children age though, their parents must remind them of the importance of getting a job, making money, and having a family. When reality sets in, the parents themselves are forced to go back on their word out of love in hopes of their children being successful. They must remind their grown children that the time and place for dreams is over, and that they must be adults and get a real job. I am very blessed to never have had to experience that. My father passed away two months after he told me in that wood shop that I could be anything I wanted when I grew up, so he never had to contradict himself. Everything happens for a reason, and there are forces working in my life and in my art that I will never comprehend. In my work, every mark made must be with the same unhindered curiosity as my four-and-a-half-year-old self, trusting my intuition and instinct. Each piece has its own energy and life, and every mark made has a reason and purpose.

PURPOSE

In my work I am creating forms that show movement, energy, and tension. Once you can see the mark of the tool, you immediately gain the human scale. Each piece presents its own history while demonstrating the importance of the intuitive process. My sculpture and drawings demonstrate a simple conception, the transformation of shape, that invites the viewer into each intricate detail. The viewer's eyes follow around the full 360 degrees of each piece in order to gain an appreciation of the work.

I have been developing my work here at LSU for the last three years. My interests have always revolved around an untraditional approach to carpentry and blacksmithing. I was drawn to woodcarving because it immediately registered as a three dimensional approach to my two dimensional process of drawing. In the same way that I was able to search for images in the eraser marks of my charcoal drawings, I was able to search for forms by chipping away at the surface of the wood. Only when I started assembling the wood did I discover its gestural ability, each piece revealing the link between the lines in my drawings and the shapes in my sculptures. This brought my drawings and sculpture into the same cohesive body of work.



Introvert, 2018, wood

Building three dimensional work takes planning, and must be approached in a different way than drawing. My sculptural pieces must hold the same balance as my drawings, while still being self supporting structures. In order to do this, I have developed a strategy to begin each Piece. My planning requires gathering supplies from almost every imaginable outlet; sea shores, demolished buildings, thrift stores, and dumpsters. The mild color pallet of my pieces depends on the found materials themselves. The washed out colors of old fence posts and porches blend into the earth tones of the naturally aged wood underneath.

The search for a color pallet can be very challenging when dealing with reclaimed wood, so it varies with each piece. Using a variety of tools, ranging from chainsaws to torches, I explore my materials. There is an excitement to these discoveries, uncovering the beauty under the years of tarnish. The pieces tell their stories through the layers of paint and chipped edges. After gathering and preparing mass amounts of materials, I am prepared to begin building.



Extrusion, 2018, wood

ENERGY

When creating my work, I trust the energy that comes from following my instincts. Listening to my own intuitive process taps me into a power source that is greater than myself. I have been developing this process since my undergraduate studies at the University of Southern Mississippi. My drawing professor, James Mead, explained to me how my charcoal drawings could have their own energy, without actually being alive.



Interior Thoughts, 2018, ink / charcoal

“Energy comes from the search for the underlying image,” he said. “Your process is just as important as your finished piece.” When I had tried to predetermine the subject of a drawing by planning the final outcome it became stagnant and boring. Only when I trusted my own intuitive process, was I able to create work that showed the transformation of energy that professor Mead was trying to explain to me. This would later lead me to apply the same process that I used in drawing to create my sculptures.



Fifth Birthday, 2017, ink / charcoal

The actual process of creating these assemblage pieces is much different than the preparation. The organization and planning takes a back seat to a vigorously focused and chaotic construction process. Having everything already in order, I avoid losing my rhythm of working, and begin orchestrating pieces with an ongoing beat. My methods of working allow me to stay focused on the form. Just as in my drawings, I use all of the materials at my disposal to create work at a very fast paced manner. Regardless of whether I am working on a drawing or sculpture, the process is about the experience of wrestling with the ideas and materials, free of any conceptual boundaries or preconceived images. Much like a dance, there is no pause, but a continuous flow of intuitive creation. I perceptively create shape and space by converging forms. Each piece being brought to life from the wooden rubble that surrounds it.

INFLUENCE

I have found many influences for my work over the years, both in two and three dimensional forms. The style of drawings by Rico Lebrun has always fascinated me. When I discovered his work, I was amazed at his use of multiple layers and the use of paint to make these large gestural figures. I was shocked by how much my own work resembled his, so I began studying his actual process and reading his letters, hoping to find the next stepping stone in my body of work. What I discovered was that the only way to approach a drawing is with raw emotion and leaving everything on the canvas, and that it is possible to draw for 5-10 hours without stopping. I had thought I had an intensive work ethic, but studying this Italian from 1930 really showed me that I was capable of so much more.

In undergraduate, I also discovered the works of Francis Bacon and Mauricio Lasansky. The series by Lasansky that changed my view of art was called the Nazi Drawings. Another example that not only is it possible to put emotions into a drawing, but that one could actually make the viewer feel emotions from real life without realistic depictions. The strangely sized skulls and contorted bodies actually gave more of an explanation than I felt realism ever could. I suddenly realized that if I was going to have a future in art, that I needed to find a deeper connection with my canvas.

I was in Italy one summer studying Marble Carving, when I finally stumbled upon what it was that Francis Bacon was about. After my neck grew tired of looking up at the Sistine chapel, I began exploring the room of paintings of the Pope. It was there that I came face to face with an actual normal depiction of the Pope done by Francis Bacon. I then saw his use of color that I was unable to see in the printed pages of the books in the library. Seeing the way he juxtaposed all of

the black in the scene with one white dot that must have been six layers of oil paint thick suddenly made sense to me. If I had never seen that piece in person, I do not think I would have ever studied Bacon, but sometimes we have to see for ourselves, what cannot be captured in textbooks. I had a preconception of Bacon that his work was odd, with themes that I had little interest in at the time. Bacon showed me that you could have the composition of an Edward Hopper Painting using only lines and a dot. It helped me to understand what I was missing about the actual process of composing a piece. I now understand that, it is not about how many lines you show, but how few you can use to get your point across. It was not until I came to graduate school that I began to study contemporary sculptures.



Subliminal Anxiety, 2018, wood

In three dimensional work it is more difficult to pin point which artists have influenced me the most. Though the ones who inspired my ideas and taught me to think deeply, are just as important as the ones who taught me the actual skill of construction and fabrication. Discovering Martin Puryear was like finding a professor in my own style of assemblage and made me begin to wonder if I understood a material until I had truly seen how far it could be pushed. Studying Puryear also helped me understand that just like in painting, you can have chaos, as long as you know how to organize that chaos. Because of him I was able to start finding the themes that presented themselves to me through my own work.

When I was searching for the missing link between my two dimensional and three dimensional work, I found the the series “Family affair,” by Alexander Calder. Although our styles may not seem the same, it was his exploration of the mobile, and his understanding of balance that drew me to his work. In his wire sculptures of the figure, I discovered the true definition of drawing in a three dimensional space, and began to understand the possibilities of the link between both mediums.



Funeral March, 2018, ink / charcoal

CONCLUSION

Some pieces capture the energy, cage it inside of their own forms, giving volume through the expansions of their interiors, hinting that something is trying to escape. Other pieces are exploding with energy, bursting from the tops and sides, demonstrating the escape of an interior force. All of which transferring this motion and energy into the rest of the work. Although these expressions came about first through my drawings, I understood that that the energy they possessed came from the process of working instinctively. I have spent three years at LSU searching for a way to give three dimensional forms the same energy and life force that my drawings possessed, in order to bring them together as one unified body of work. Energy was the key element that became the connection between my two dimensional and three dimensional work. It invites the viewer into its own rhythm, while demonstrating movement and transformation. These pieces show the importance of the intuitive process, and trusting our own instincts to create something bigger than ourselves. Through this process I have created my thesis show, *Primal Matter*.

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VITA

Lucas Allen Bush was born and raised in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. From 2010 to 2015, Lucas attended The University of Southern Mississippi, studying sculpture and drawing under professor James Mead. In 2012, he furthered his education at The University of Georgia, utilizing their transient program to study marble carving in Cortona, Italy. While in Italy, he studied bronze casting and mold making, strengthening his studies in sculpture.

Upon returning to the University of Southern Mississippi, Lucas finished his degree of a Bachelor's of Fine Art. After graduation, he attended Louisiana State University, pursuing a Master degree in Fine Art.