Alternative Methods

Hunter Stabler
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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ALTERNATIVE METHODS

A Thesis

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

in

The School of Art

by

Hunter Stabler
B.F.A., Maryland Institute College of Art, 2004
M.F.A., University of Pennsylvania, 2006
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ABSTRACT

In the realm of precognitive artmaking, the artist’s role is that of an antenna. One must be receptive to the subtle, invisible flow of creative novelty in order to participate in the involuntary channeling of new ideas, new processes, and alternative methods of creative production. Carving out new territory within the realm of static art is a primary objective for my artistic process. By utilizing digital fabrication tools, paired with my affinity for intricate craft and optical metagrobolization, I have created a body of work that invents alternative processes and unique aesthetic languages.

Digital imaging, digital modeling and digital fabrication offer unique opportunities to alleviate some of the manual burden of art making by relegating repetitive and/or strenuous tasks to machine operations. I am developing ways to reduce the physical burden to my hands of my artmaking by utilizing computers and machines. Digital imaging, modeling and fabrication also present the opportunity for artists to explore precision of interrelated parts in ways previously unachievable. I am developing the artistic possibilities of working with fitment, micro-accuracy of 3D modeling, height maps and tool paths, micro-accuracy of stereolithography 3D printing and the micro-accuracy of CNC machine operations.
INTRODUCTION

My artistic process has evolved from hand-made craft, drawing, and painting to digital imaging and digital fabrication. The foundations of my artistic processes are rooted in tactile practices. I was working primarily in painting and hand-cut paper from the beginning of my higher education and career as an artist. Since 2000, I was constantly using an X-Acto knife to cut paper. This contributed to the development of a repetitive stress injury to my dominant hand. By 2009, I had developed trigger finger, a type of tendinitis causing pain, locking and restricted mobility of multiple finger joints. This injury made my primary mode of artist production very painful and eventually made the practice unsustainable. This injury catalyzed my transition into digital imaging and digital fabrication as a means of mitigating some of the repetitive stress on my hands caused by artmaking.

In the years leading up to my decision to stop cutting paper by hand, I had begun to incorporate digital tools into my process of drawing and design. I would scan hand-drawn elements, mirroring and repeating them using Adobe Photoshop, then printing out these elements and tracing them back onto the original drawing using graphite paper and transfer paper. I began learning Adobe Illustrator in 2014 so I could develop vector drawings that could be cut out of paper using a Computer Numerical Control, CNC, laser. Adobe Illustrator also opened the possibility of designing colored elements that could be printed on paper and then cut out. I began scanning hand-drawn elements, digitally tracing hand-drawn elements, digitally manipulating hand-drawn elements, digitally generating original elements, and then bringing the digital elements back into the physical environment through printing and laser-cutting. This practice of bouncing between the digital work environment and the physical work environment provided relief for my hands and opened new aesthetic possibilities through new combinations of hand-made craft and digital tools.

The decision to significantly augment my practice with digital software and hardware was largely a pragmatic one based on health issues, but in doing so, I opened doors to what was technically possible. I have spent the bulk of my Master of Fine Arts degree research exploring the novel aesthetic possibilities of digital imaging, digital modeling, and digital fabrication to create physical works embedded with the same obsessiveness, attention to detail, and delicacy of craft contained in my previous works of hand-made art.
Beyond my formal artistic concerns, my art involves the conceptual gameplay of puzzles and secret codes. I am attracted to cryptological and symbolic art because it holds a secret and becomes a puzzle to play with the creative wit and knowledge of its beholder. I use cryptological and symbolic elements because I wish to hide things in plain sight and as a wink of the eye to fellow cartographers of inner space, conspiracy theorists, magicians, mystics, shamans, alchemists, and middle school goth’s who wish their parents would just get off their backs. I see parallels between the dissembling visual and textual languages of occult esoterica and the exclusionary visual languages and textual languages of contemporary and modern art; both occult cryptography and contemporary and modern art are often illegible and alienating to the uninitiated. These, at times, alienating languages bring up issues of accessibility. Who is meant to understand and who is meant to be left in the dark? Faith and accessibility are two primary concepts that I like to play with within my art. The seriousness and sanctity that canonically sanctioned art carries culturally is something that I have reverence for and faith in, but I also enjoy poking fun at it and questioning.

The braille elements in my work as, as can be seen in *Alternative Healing Center* (Fig 1), serve as a connotative element that eludes interpretation for typical viewers of art. This element, legible only to those able to read braille, provides an additional reading of the work. This reading of the work is not contingent on an expensive education in the arts, or on induction into the fraternal order of blue chip gallery represented artists. I see this as a subversive gesture, providing art-savvy audiences with an alienating experience of art’s hidden meaning, and potentially providing Blind and Visually Impaired, BVI, audiences with an inclusive and somewhat exclusive reading of art’s hidden meaning. Inclusive because BVI audiences are typically faced with an alienating experience of visual art due to lack of tactile options and the inadequacy of visual descriptions, and exclusive because BVI audiences will be more likely amongst the very few who can read the text on the objects.

There are increasing expectations that artists explain themselves with words, whether it be in artist statements, thesis papers, gallery or museum wall text or artist talks. It is important to realize the futility of language to fully embody aesthetic ideas in legible ways. Art stripped bare of buttressing language comes far closer to being universally legible. It is distasteful and demeaning for the artist to define the meaning of their artwork. The meaning of artwork should not be corralled by the language of either the artist or the audience unless that language is physically part of the artwork itself; the meaning of artwork should be intrinsic yet subjective.

The snake and the egg are two recurring symbols in my work. Both of these symbols can be seen in *Alternative Healing Center* (Fig. 1). The snake doesn’t have a singular meaning, but rather references multiple meanings simultaneously. One interpretation might allude to the serpent in *Genesis*, a hero for the Naassene and Ophite sects of Gnosticism. Another interpretation might allude to the healing staff of Asklepios or to the Naga of the Symbionese Liberation Army. An egg might simultaneously reference Hermetic Alchemy, motherhood, the earth, and the movie

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Aliens. I am interested in the dualistic potential interpretations of these symbols and how their meaning can be flipped on its head depending on the viewers interpretation or prejudices. A common conceptual thread is that I am combining cultural signals of New Age culture and Social Justice Warrior culture with signals of martyrs, militant radicals, and genuine anti-authoritarians. Social Justice Warrior culture can represent righteous battles against long held injustices but also represents suppression of freedom of speech, battles over grammar rather than battles over class, and the importance of identity politics over the importance of ending war and imperialism. New Age culture similarly represents both meaningful alternatives and dangerous alternatives to corporate profit driven healthcare. It is not my aim to provide answers to any societal problems, but rather I enjoy playing with these cultural cues in ways that are poetically interesting and thought provoking. These cues can function as subliminal messaging, critical comparison, absurdist comedy, and poetic non sequitur simultaneously. I am uninterested in a singular legible translation of meaning.

Figure 1. Alternative Healing Center, installation featuring CNC milled toilet seats with inset stainless steel braille rasters, 2019-2020.

My thesis show contains a series of alternative portraits. The portrait subjects are Ingo Swann, John the Baptist, Philip K. Dick, Saint Denis, Milton William Cooper, David Koresh, Donald DeFreeze, Father Yod, and John Allegro. These alternative portraits, executed in low relief and mixed media sculpture using digital fabrication and digital imaging/modeling, individually embody the visionary spirit of each portrait subject in execution and phantasmagoric presence. A series of pieces featuring the emoji with a winking eye and protruding tongue accompany these portraits (Fig. 2). This emoji is also known as the “crazy emoji”. I have included this repeating emoji along with these
portraits as a sardonic mimicry of the cultural portrayal of certain visionary figures while other visionaries may be highly esteemed. I am interested in the arbitrary cultural lines between beliefs labeled as spurious and beliefs that have consensus acceptance.

I chose these portrait subjects because a Lyran voice-transmission, who I believe to be the disembodied consciousness of Bastet, informed me about an ongoing Osiris/Thoth/Imhotep archetypal mid-life reincarnation project that was first implemented during the rise of the Roman Empire. According to the inner-ear voice-transmission, this project has been ramped up by the Lyrans and the Galactic Alliance over the past century as a countermeasure against ongoing imperialism on earth. These portrait subjects are possible candidates for Osiris/Thoth/Imhotep archetypal mid-life reincarnation based on certain genetic traits, namely the presence of compulsory life instructions stored within their non-coding Deoxyribonucleic acid. According to the voice-transmissions, the varying degree to which these candidates were able to decipher these instructions and implement them, depended on their ability to decipher their phylogenic memories during trance states or dream consciousness. It is unclear whether the same set of instructions was given to multiple candidates, or whether any of these candidates were aware of the archetypal reincarnation program to which they were allegedly subjected. It is unclear as to whether the inner-ear voice-transmission is true or whether it is disinformation by the Lyrans to misdirect recipients from a Lyran role in earthly imperialism. It is also possible this voice-transmission is disinformation by the Central Intelligence Agency, Mossad, MI6, or other secret intelligence groups using High Frequency Active Aural Research Program related technology to remotely seed

Figure 2. Installation view of Ingo Swann (left) and The wisdom of Immaturity (right), Hunter Stabler, 2020.
audio messages in subjects’ inner ear. Phillip K. Dick’s writing is the best concrete example that we have corroborating the existence of the program and what the contents of these instructions may have been. In his personal notes and writing, which were posthumously compiled and edited into *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick*, it is clear that the precept of the instructions involves the illusory nature of our experienced reality. It is also apparent that Dick is aware of the non-terrestrial origins of the information he is remembering.

“That I am in direct mind-to-mind touch with extraterrestrial intelligence systems has been obvious to me for some time, but what this means is not in any way obvious.”

“The world is unreal - not intrinsically - but in relation to something more real, which has the power to make the world plastic. So to view the world as irreal(illusion) is to (without knowing it) be elevated to the higher level of the saviour, even before you know he exists. Acosmism as a view is actually a partial nascent view of the saviour and his reality. This means that in my writing my grand theme of acosmism is already a partial road to the saviour”

Here Dick is not only telling us about receiving information from an extraterrestrial source, he is also alleging that by viewing the illusory nature of our world he is being elevated to the level of saviour, which within Egyptian mythology Osiris serves as the archetype. Dick also suspects that he has been in psychic communication with the Greek mythological god Asklepios, which Imhotep serves as the Egyptian archetypal equivalence.

“In further research I discover that Apollo was the god of the sun, the builder of cities, of music and art, and healing us through his son Asklepios, who is the patron god/saint of health, and to whom the Hippocratic Oath is taken. Also, I learned that the strong Pythagorean medical views entering the Greek healing schools after Asklepios held that harmony within and among all parts of the body constituted health. I learn, too, that the Greek Orthodox Priests in Asklepios' hometown still maintain sanatoria and heal as the patients’ forerunners were healed 2,600 years ago. This is no quaint, obscure person, Asklepios: only unknown to me. I can think of no more valuable intrusion into my psyche than that of the father and founder of western healing. It is just what I need. And, behind him, the civic strength of Apollo, the brother of Athene. This would explain the ‘photo’ I saw briefly: the ancient seated goddess with arms out that were coiled around with snakes; those are associated with all the healing deities. From Egypt, probably by way of Mycenae.”

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METHODS

My aesthetic of fastidiousness is dependent on meticulous process. Process is crucial to my practice, because it helps define the most important aspect of my work: the way the artwork looks and feels. My current body of work can be divided into 4 categories based on their processes: Digital/hand-made amalgam drawings, laser-cut-paper shadow boxes, CNC low relief paintings, and digitally augmented sculpture. My digital/hand-made amalgam drawings are generated by digitally creating a grid system (Fig 3). I print this grid system onto drawing paper and draw in pencil and pen on top of the grid, creating morphing patterns that follow the underlying architecture defined by the grid (Fig 4). I then scan the drawing and manipulate the colors and forms using Adobe Photoshop, after which I digitally trace portions of the scanned drawing using vectors in Adobe Illustrator (Fig 5). The manipulated drawing at this point may be printed again onto paper to be further drawn on by hand (Fig 6). The resulting drawings are finished and framed. The vector tracings are used to generate the shapes for the laser-cut-paper shadow boxes.

Figure 3. Digitally created grid.
Figure 4. *Melon Kali and the virulent madness*, graphite, felt pen, Gellyroll pen, and pigment print on cotton rag paper, Hunter Stabler, 2017-2018.
Figure 5. Adobe Illustrator vector tracing of hand-drawn line-work in *Melon Kali and the virulent madness*. 
Figure 6. Melon Kali and the virulent madness 3, graphite felt pen, Gellyroll pen, and pigment print on cotton rag paper, Hunter Stabler, 2017-2020.

My laser-cut-paper shadow boxes layer curvilinear hand-drawn patterns with digitally generated rectilinear patterns. These pieces explore the illusion of space, physical three-dimensional space and the two-dimensionality of paper. I design an improvisational rectilinear pattern using digital imaging software, including Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator and Rhinoceros 3D (Fig 7). The rectilinear pattern is printed onto paper. The simultaneously developed digital/hand-made amalgam drawing (which eventually results in the vector drawing in Figure 5) is used as the shape to laser-cut the improvisational rectilinear pattern print on paper. This cut paper print is mounted to clear acrylic glass and floated in a shadow box frame above another rectilinear digital print (Fig 8). The overlay of patterns creates moiré and parallax effects. The optically jarring nature of the patterning creates optical rifts that illuminate the qualities of both digital and handmade pattern-based abstraction.
Figure 7. Digital drawing created in Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop.
My CNC low relief paintings incorporate a technique I devised to translate a two-dimensional image into a three-dimensional tool path. I use a V-groove router bit in the CNC router to engrave patterns of undulating depth in a sheet of material. The shape of the bit creates a wider stroke the deeper it is plunged into the sheet of material (Fig 9). When carved by the CNC router, the tool path recreates the image in light and shadow (Fig 10), or in binary color excavation (Fig 11). Physical shadows and highlights from the varying depth and varying stroke-width of the engraving create a two-dimensional pictorial, volumetric rendering of the source image. This spectral rendering coalesces
into pictorial form or dissolves into patterned abstraction depending on the viewing angle, lighting and distance of the viewer from the artwork. Like the overlay of patterns used in my laser-cut-paper shadow boxes, this technique allows for two images to exist in the same visual field; there is an overlay pattern (the planar tool path design in Figure 12) and a disparate image which is rendered through the varying width/depth of the engraving (Fig 9). The striped quality of the planar tool path design draws reference from non-objective geometric abstract painting. Conversely, the images rendered through the tool path allow for figuration, content and pictorial space. The planar tool paths are created using a combination of 2D design in Adobe Illustrator and Rhinoceros 3D.

![Figure 9. V-groove CNC router bit and example of varying width/depth of cut.](image)

The source images for the engraving are generated from black and white images. In the case of Move, West Philadelphia, 1985, the source image is an appropriated photograph. The black and white image is converted into a virtual 3D topology known as a height-field or height-map, with the grayscale values corresponding to determined height measurements (Fig 13). The planar tool path design (Fig 12) is projected onto the height field, and the resulting topological lines are the path that the V-groove bit will follow in order to render the image (Fig 14). The routed image results from the intersection of a cone: the router bit, with a plane: the surface of the stock material. In Figure 15 we see a simulation of the cone shaped router bit passing through the planar stock, following the topological lines (Fig 14). The pitch angle of the V groove cutter, the depth of the heightfield and the space between the lines of the tool path are interdependent variables that affect the value range and readability of the rendering.
Figure 10. The Asklepiian Lens 1, CNC milled MDF board, Hunter Stabler, 2020.

Figure 12. Digital drawing for Move, West Philadelphia, 1985.
Figure 13. Heightfield topology for Move, West Philadelphia, 1985.

Figure 14. Projection of digital vector drawing onto heightfield for Move, West Philadelphia, 1985. These topological lines are used to create the tool path for the V-groove CNC milling.

Figure 15. Simulation of conical V-groove bit following the topological lines.
In the case of *St. Denis* (Fig. 16), rather than an appropriated photograph, the source image is a digital rendering of a virtual 3D model I created in the digital modeling software Zbrush (Fig. 17). The rendering has to be altered in Photoshop in order to create the appropriate height-field for machine tool path projection (Fig 18). In this case, the image’s values are inverted in order to create a tool path that cuts away more in areas that will ultimately be lighter in value. As you can see, the shadow on the ground in figure 18 is white and the highlights on the hat are dark. When carved into the acrylic mirror this value relationship inverts once again with highlights appearing lighter and shadows darker. We see a similar reversed value relationship used in the creation of *David Koresh* (Fig. 20). An inverted value image is used to generate the height field because the top layer of the stock is black and the core is white (Fig 19). So, the lighter values must be milled away by using deeper paths.

*Figure 16. Saint Denis, CNC milled tinted acrylic mirror, Hunter Stabler, 2020.*
Figure 17. Zbrush digital 3D sculpture render.
Figure 18. Adobe Photoshop altered image of digital 3D render for St. Denis.
Figure 19. Altered image used to create heightfield for David Koresh.

Figure 20. David Koresh, CNC milled Color Core Plastic, Hunter Stabler, 2020.
My digitally augmented sculptures incorporate a wide variety of techniques and materials often used in conjunction in a single work. The common thread throughout these works is that they use digital 3D modeling as a tool to help generate physical 3D works. *John the Baptist* combines digital 3D modeling, CNC machining and vacuum forming to create the family of plastic oxen, but the rest of the sculpture is purchased objects and hand-crafted pieces (Fig. 21). The oxen are first digitally modeled (Fig. 22). This virtual model is used to generate CNC CAM to machine the left and right master forms (Fig. 23). The CNC machined forms are used to vacuum form the series of oxen in plastic. Those digitally and mechanically manufactured pieces are assembled along with a purchased kiddie pool, hors d’oeuvres, and a built and painted foam block. The variety of sculptural parts, some quite laborious to create and others simply purchased from a store, highlight the lack of material differences in Duchampian (shopping based) sculptural practices versus labor/time intensive digital fabrication practices. Therein lies the double-edged sword of digital fabrication processes; you are able to create works that materially resemble industrially or commercially produced products, but the time and effort of production is more similar to manual modes of production.

*Figure 21. John the Baptist*, mixed media, Hunter Stabler, 2020.
In *Augmented Reality 15/Allegro Archer* I combine CNC routing with found object sculpture and laser cut acrylic. The found object cross has been CNC routed to perfectly house an AR 15 rifle (Fig 24, 25, 26). The lower of the rifle has been CNC machined and manually inset with braille rasters. The handle of the AR 15 is 3D printed in plastic and also manually inset with braille rasters (Fig 27). These parts are assembled with factory gun parts to make a functioning rifle. The rifle is then placed in the CNC routed recess in the cross. *Augmented Reality 15/Allegro Archer* and several other pieces explore the use of 3D printing and CNC machining to create experimental works containing braille text.

Digital modeling used in conjunction with 3D printing and CNC machining offers new opportunities for tactile art catered toward blind and visually impaired, *BVI*, audiences. Because of its proclivity for mathematical precision, digital 3D modeling presents the opportunity to work with braille in unique and under-explored ways. Braille
is a fixed size with a fixed spacing between characters, but within these parameters it is possible to create legible phrases that dimensionally wrap around objects and/or diverge from the straight and horizontally parallel conventions of braille text. This shaped braille can serve as an aesthetic element and gestural experience while functioning simultaneously as text. Text functioning as aesthetic design is commonplace for 2D applications for sighted audiences as seen in topography and graphic design, but aesthetic design is under-utilized in the realm of braille. By working with braille as an aesthetic element and simultaneously as a connotative element, it’s possible to make art which is equally accessible and aesthetically experiential for both sighted and BVI audiences.

Figure 24. Augmented Reality 15/Allegro Archer, mixed media, Hunter Stabler, 2020.
Figure 25. Augmented Reality 15/Allegro Archer, mixed media, Hunter Stabler, 2020.
Figure 26. Augmented Reality 15/Allegro Archer, mixed media, Hunter Stabler, 2020.
The braille dots can be created with 1/16 inch balls recessed into shallow holes drilled by a CNC machine. This CNC drilling method is how the braille was created in the lower of the AR 15 for *Augmented Reality 15/ Allegro Archer* and also for *Alternative Safe Space Sign* (Fig 28). These 1/16 inch balls also known as braille rasters can be made of a variety of materials and come in a variety of colors. It is also noteworthy that the recessed method of friction-fitting rasters into holes can be utilized within 3D printing using a process I developed. In this case tapered holes are created in the digital 3D model and then 3D printed (Fig 29). Then the stainless-steel balls are individually manually forced into the tapered holes using a magnetic nail set. Friction and the taper of the hole keep the braille rasters from falling out. This method can be seen in the AR 15 handle grip in *Augmented Reality 15/Allegro Archer* and in *Lance/Sculpture for the blind*, 2019 (Fig 30). Working with fitment in this way would not be possible without micro-accurate 3D modeling, micro-accurate 3D printing and CNC machining tools.
Figure 28. Alternative Healing Center Sign, CNC milled Colorcore plastic with inset stainless steel braille rasters, Hunter Stabler, 2020.
Figure 29. Rendering of 3D model containing recessed tapered holes.
Figure 30. Lance/Sculpture for the blind, stereolithography 3D resin print with stainless steel braille rasters, Hunter Stabler, 2019.
The ADA standards for braille allow for a dot of 0.059 inches (1.5 mm) to 0.063 inches (1.6mm) in diameter and a height of 0.025 inches (0.6 mm) to 0.037 inches (0.9 mm) (Fig 31). This can be accomplished in a few ways using the digital fabrication processes that I employ. Within 3D printing the braille dots can be modeled in a 3D modeling program with a round dot or a domed dot (Fig 32). This digital modeling method can be seen in *Uterine Faberge Ovum/Sculpture for the blind*, and *Unlegible Faberge Ovum/Sculpture for the blind* (Fig 33, 34). The circular braille featured on *Unlegible Faberge Ovum/Sculpture for the blind* runs in two different directions on each face of the piece. Because a circular object has no explicit top and bottom or left and right, I presented the text in two ways (Fig 35).


**Figure 31. ADA Standard for Accessible Design (ADAAG) Braille Dot requirements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEASUREMENT RANGE</th>
<th>MINIMUM IN INCHES MAXIMUM IN INCHES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dot base diameter</td>
<td>0.059 (1.5 mm) to 0.063 (1.6mm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance between two dots in the same cell²</td>
<td>0.100 (2.5 mm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance between corresponding dots in adjacent cells¹</td>
<td>0.300 (7.6 mm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dot height</td>
<td>0.025 (0.6 mm) to 0.037 (0.9 mm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance between corresponding dots from one cell directly below¹</td>
<td>0.395 (10 mm) to 0.400 (10.2 mm)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Measured center to center.

² Distance between corresponding dots in adjacent cells.
Figure 32. Digital 3D model featuring modeled round braille dots wrapping around a surface.

Figure 33. Umbilical Faberge Ovum/Sculpture for the blind, stereolithography 3D resin print, Hunter Stabler, 2018-19.
Figure 34. Unlegible Faberge Ovum/Sculpture for the blind, stereolithography 3D resin print, Hunter Stabler, 2018.

Figure 35. Example of text wrapping along a circle in counterclockwise and clockwise orientations.
CONTEXT

I am interested in creating art that shows a playful awareness of art history, particularly the history of non-objective painting, minimalism, and abstraction at-large. I am very interested in the history of abstraction as applied to various indigenous weaving practices, Eastern latticework, Islamic tile design and architecture, Illuminated manuscripts, Gothic architecture, Buddhist architecture, Hindu architecture, and filigree and decorative metalsmithing. For individual artists, I am most influenced by the work of Bruce Conner, Bridget Riley, Frank Stella, Robert Morris, Richard Artschwager, Valerie Jaudon, Wim Delvoye, Are Mokkelbost, Jen Stark and David Chaim Smith. These artists have all explored aspects of abstraction that are visually dense and repetitious, often utilizing symmetry. Like these artists, I am invested in the reclamation of decorative aspects of abstraction: symmetry, stripes, pattern and repetition. Except for repetition, these aspects might seem antithetical to the tenets of minimalism, but one only needs to look at the breadth of work created by Frank Stella and Robert Morris over the course of their careers to see the interactive aspects of minimalism play out in a wild array of visually dense aesthetics. The audience’s body and how they might move in relation to the artwork is still of primary concern. I explore activating the audience’s body by having the artwork look very different depending on viewing distance and viewing angle. I also try to bring the viewer in close with a lot of surface details, but the total size of the work is often such that you must walk across the work to follow the detail. You cannot take in all the surface detail at the distance at which the piece can be entirely seen. Modernism and specifically minimalism are foundational aesthetics within my work. Unlike minimalism, my work is visually dense and imbued with imagery; but like minimalism, my work is austere in its worship of imposed order.

Some of my art pays homage to canonical abstract artworks and pokes fun at them simultaneously. For example, *The wisdom of immaturity* takes visual cues from Frank Stella’s black paintings and from Bridget Riley and Sol LeWitt’s work but features a winking eye emoji with its tongue stuck out. This youth oriented silly icon is a disruption of the cultural pretense of seriousness espoused by non-objective geometric abstraction. Another example is my piece *John the Baptist* which references Richard Artschwager’s *Table (somewhat)* (Fig. 36). I believe Artschwager is referencing minimalist sculpture, but mapping simplified abstract forms of artificially laminated furniture onto the cube. These 2D elements reference the appearance of modernist geometric non-objective painting, such as what you might see by Sol LeWitt, Joseph Albers or Ellsworth Kelly. The sculptural form references the minimalist sculpture of Tony Smith or Donald Judd. Artschwager’s multi-referential box appears to be a table or at least a symbol of a table, but is a non-functional object like Tony Smith’s *Die* (Fig. 37). *John the Baptist* displays a similar visual conundrum to Artschwager in which the head of John the Baptist has been reduced to a comically oversized cube floating in a kiddie pool of artificial blood (Fig. 38). The features of the face and hair have been executed in a highly pixelated style recognizable to the popular video game *Minecraft*, but also visually similar to the work of Byron Kim (Fig. 39). *John the Baptist* combines elements of minimalism, post minimalism, and youth oriented cultural references to create an unstable and uncanny sculptural assemblage that highlights some of the similarities among youth media aesthetics and canonical art aesthetics.
Figure 36. Richard Artschwager. 2007, Image: 2012. Table (Somewhat). [Link]

Figure 38. John the Baptist, mixed media, Hunter Stabler, 2020
My CNC low relief paintings are phenomenologically indebted to the paradoxical abstract/photorealist portrait paintings and prints of Chuck Close. In Chuck Close’s paintings the portrait subject becomes more abstract the closer the viewer gets to it. At arms distance concentric bands of verdant greens and lush oranges read as purely non-objective abstract paint strokes. But as one steps backward from the giant painting, the colors optically blend into believable and photographic flesh tones of the face (Fig. 41). I am playing with a similar optical blending phenomenon but utilizing the value range of actual light and shadow rather than color. Because of the dimensionality of the CNC routed surface, the viewing angle becomes an additional variable in the abstraction of
the image. So as Close’s paintings might inspire the viewer to walk towards and away, prolonging their gaze, my low relief paintings might also inspire the viewer to walk across the work, panning and twisting their head to see the rendered image sharpen or dissolve into abstract patterning (Fig. 42, 43).

Figure 41. *Quaternity*, Four interlocking CNC routed melamine MDF panels and hardware, HunterStabler, 2020

Figure 42. Detail of *Quaternity* (above)
Robert Lazzarini is another artist whose work has informed my practice. Our analogous approach to creating artwork involves the necessity of bringing a virtual object into physical existence. The disorienting or confounding nature of the object is only fully realized when it is made physical. The object retains its imaginal perplexity but becomes tangibly real. This can be seen in his piece telephone (Fig. 43). As a digital image or virtual three-dimensional model, it can not hold the same presence because the illusion on the attenuated screen is not subject to physics or the complexity of optical phenomenon as experienced by the body in three-dimensional space. It is because the object is distorted in ways we are accustomed to seeing on a screen, but are jarring to our sense of perspective and space when we can walk across the piece in person.

CONCLUSION

I have taken the realm of digital imaging, digital modeling, and digital fabrication and personalized it for unique artistic purposes, using rigid and mechanical tools to create subtle and visually rich, tactile physical objects. Some of my alternative methods have birthed new ways to explore the aesthetics of braille design and the augmentation of existing objects with dimensional braille. Some methods have simply functioned to alleviate a portion of the manual stress of artmaking. Other methods I have developed take simple industrially produced materials such as MDF panel and radically transform their material and tactile presence by carving a pseudo-lenticular image using digital imaging, modeling and fabrication in concert.

I transform the materials I use into visually, technically or conceptually confounding matter. When I look at art, I rework in my mind how the piece was ostensibly made. I reverse engineer the process of creation through the material evidence left behind. I bring that analytical, obsessive, detail oriented, piecemeal view to my process of creation, where the differences between an inkjet printed vector line and the subtle indentation of a slightly wavering handmade graphite pencil line become some of the visual fodder I like to play with. It is my aim to create spatially complex art that is in conversation with ancient, canonical, modernist, and contemporary ideas of spatiality in art-making.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


VITA

Hunter Stabler is a multidisciplinary artist living in the United States. His work has been widely exhibited across the United States and internationally including exhibitions at the Morbid Anatomy Museum in Brooklyn, NY, The Shelburne Art Museum in Shelburne, VT, the Hunterdon Art Museum in Clinton, NJ, and the Islip Art Museum in East Islip, NY. His artwork spans hand-craft, pattern making, intersections of the manual and digital, and the effects of digital imaging and fabrication on emerging aesthetics. The themes in Stabler’s work deal with accessibility, class politics, alienation, paranoia, paranormal activity, mysticism, the New Age, conspiracy, and cryptology. He will receive his Master’s degree from LSU in August 2020.