

MASKING MEANING

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Chapter I describes the purpose of the project, which was to develop a body of work that exhibits my current thought process. The questions presented to myself consisted of the following:

1. How effective was the expression of my ideas socially and politically after the change to the work?
2. Was the minimal approach a tool that contributes or detracts from this effectiveness?
3. Did an increase in scale successfully act as an element of confrontation?

Chapter II describes the inspiration behind the making of my work it also discusses problems encountered with an understanding of the viewer concerning imagery.

Chapter III summarizes the methodology behind the execution of the new body of work. It also discusses how simplification of imagery works as a solution to my problems.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

My evolution in ceramics began with making utilitarian objects. Repetition and a high volume of production has always been important in my mind because of its positive influence on discovery. Sculptural objects with reference to utility came next in an effort to make my work more art based. Eventually eliminating utilitarian concerns provided a product that better suited my personal expression. In this transition, I experimented with many new methods in fabrication and focused on mold making and its use in appropriating imagery and raising production levels. This method is best suited to my work due to the speed it allows me in fabrication and its relationship to the objects my work emulates.

As an artist, I believe in expression through appropriated imagery. It is common for me to use icons such as Mickey Mouse™, handguns, rubber ducks, etc. The fact that any created image will be freely associated with preconceived ideas the viewer has is a phenomenon that I wish to take advantage of so I use images of commonality and popular appeal. I also choose objects that fit into this realm because of their relationship with my life. My goal is to create images that have visual appeal on a mass level that embody my thoughts socially and politically.

Looking for objects in second hand stores provides me with endless inspiration. The house that my father owned when I was growing up was full of

objects that were collected from all over the world that represented different times and feelings in his life from places in time that will never be again. Some of these objects were of monetary value and others were cheap and inexpensive. All of these objects had sentimental value of some sort and have a strong connection to my life in the cluttered and diverse world that I grew up in and it is the disposition of collective taste that drives my work aesthetically.

### Statement of Problem

The focus explored in this body of work deals with using a minimal approach to refine the initial impact of imagery. I wanted to change my work visually to express my thoughts socially and politically in a more subdued and artful manner. My previous use of appropriated imagery has tended to alienate the viewer by initiating personal disagreement through blatant combinations of icons. The use of specific cartoon characters and weapons, for example, leaves the viewer with little to create in his or her own mind concerning their relationship. It has become evident that hiding my message through simplification of imagery will open the lines of interpretation and create more appeal. Possible solutions included basing each piece on a single object and concentrating on using surface decoration for conveying my ideas, using scale as a basis for confrontation instead of the raw image its self, and using surface treatments that deviate from traditional methodology to challenge the viewer aesthetically. The following questions were addressed towards three pieces in the completion of this project:

1. How effective was the expression of my ideas socially and politically after the change to the work?
2. Was the minimal approach a tool that contributes or detracts from this effectiveness?
3. Did an increase in scale successfully act as an element of confrontation?

### Methodology

The method of carrying out this project was to first select imagery that has mass appeal and represents an element of commonality and happiness. After this was decided, scale was increased. Modeling the object out of clay or finding a larger replica of the object and making a mold from it achieved that. The pieces were then fired and the surface treated with a combination of glaze and paint that depicted iconography that stimulated the before mentioned ideas concerning my expression.

## CHAPTER II

### DESCRIPTION OF WORK

The objects selected for the project were found a number of different ways. The first object was an old big screen TV that I found on the side of the road near the studio. The TV as an icon worked quite well for several reasons. First, when I was growing up, the TV was the centerpiece of the family room. Many of the programs I saw when I was younger had a great effect upon how I thought of the world around me and who I am today. I think this is true for many of the people that belong to my generation and those before it. Our culture gets its style, news, politics, products, and many other things that dictate what is considered normal from TV. Many people in our country hold the television in such high esteem that it has a giant element of sentimentality and adoration.

The image of the puppy dog was important for several reasons. Nearly everyone wanted a puppy when they were a kid, if not at least for five minutes and I am no exception. The discovery of the dog that I used for the enlargement of scale happened when I was wandering around in a hobby ceramics shop where bisque fired ware is sold. People buy these pieces, paint low fire glazes on, and they are fired for a fee. Of course, this produces a regular product that has enough appeal to keep people coming back for more without any in depth knowledge of the process. This type of appeal is what I wish to generate with my work. In addition, young animals look cute as a biological survival mechanism.

This element of appeal is another important factor in how I wish to attract the attention of my viewer and provides a canvas for the more serious elements of my ideas.

The Darth Vader™ image was made directly from an action figure carrying case that I had when I was a kid. I had several types of toys that I loved to play with as a child that were associated with war. I was terrified with the threat of nuclear war; nevertheless these were the toys that interested me. That basic fear was used during the cold war by the media and the leaders of the world to influence public opinion. The same tactics are used with the current situation in the Middle East. Darth Vader was the perfect symbol for this idea. The image is common in the family household, easily recognizable, and represents malevolence in a cartoon type of way. The evil element of the image does not fit with the cute and happy concept previously discussed but it did provide me with the opportunity to switch the role of the object and the decoration that adorns it.

*Friendly Foe* (color plate #1) embodies all the charisma of a powerful leader in its form. The piece is three inches thick and made out of solid clay. It is a little harder to move than other ceramic pieces its size due to the fact that it was made out of solid clay. That fact parallels the idea of a leader that has no need for compromise, immobile, static, and unforgiving. I took this rendition of a rather popular image of evil and gave it a surface that conveys the element of a split personality. The black side, with its lead glaze, depicts the standard Darth Vader. He is an enigma of darkness, cold and ruthless, relentless and unyielding but polished and perfect in his own right. The white side, with the nice

arrangement of flowers shows the other side of him, bright, pretty, and beautiful. This contrast is meant to pose the viewer with the idea of split personality or fake facade, one that might be used part of the time to change perception. People love to hate him, but what will they think when he wears love on his sleeve.

*Protest Puppy* (color plate # 2) refers to using the dominant benevolent puppy to carry the less dominant malevolent symbol of the lightning bolt. The use of the lightning bolt in terms of meaning is directly referencing the blitzkrieg or lightning war campaign of Hitler in World War II. Quick, decisive, vengeful, and potent, this symbol of violence in war can be compared to the dropping of an atomic bomb in Japan and is the essence of sweeping death. This idea was repeated on the dog image as a bright and appealing pattern like hard candy spread over a table. The goal of this piece was to hide the evil, hate of the lightning bolt in the package of the dog that represents sweetness, and cuddle. This marketing of a bad idea in a beautiful and sentimental package represents how I view modern diplomatic efforts in our country when it comes to foreign policy. Those who embrace the piece may not do so after the true meaning is revealed.

*Test Pattern* (color plate #3) is a piece that opens the viewer up to a wider spectrum of interpretation because of its use of simple color. The colors of the piece are separated in a manner that represents the late night test screen that appears on TV when there is no program to be seen. Often times I feel that when I do watch TV it is just like watching the late night test pattern. There is nothing valuable to be seen and your brain goes into a shutdown mode and the

sound of the hum or endless beep takes over. The cracks in the piece represent quite well how I feel when my mind enters this state. Stress and angst take over when my mind begins to do this because of my unwillingness to be apathetic to my surroundings. Ultimately, that apathetic concern as depicted on TV is what this piece represents. The viewer may choose to interpret the work based upon associations between color and meaning but the use of color in this piece and the rest of the work is strictly for contrast and commanding attention.

## CHAPTER III

### SUMMARY

In the end, I feel the ideas that I have are built into the piece quite well but I do not think they can be extracted from the work without some serious analysis. Some knowledge on the part of the viewer concerning how I condensed my ideas is necessary if the social and political message is to be completely understood. In terms of the subversion of these ideas, the work is quite successful. The effectiveness of my expression holds true but takes on a subliminal nature. Visually the concentration now lies in the breaking up of space within the form of the object by the depiction of symbols using contrasting colors. The purposeful negation of colors as symbols in the work changes the focus to a more formal concern visually. Yes, I can now express myself freely without telling the viewer the whole story. This raises the level of acceptance by eliminating viewer alienation if he or she does not agree with my opinion concerning the issue at hand. The minimizing of my concepts into simplistic shapes contributes to ambiguity in the piece and affords the viewer more room for interpretation. However, it does detract from the piece as an illustrative art form. Concept takes the lead and the work fits into the more dominant realm of modern art. The confrontational aspect of my work is now replaced by scale as opposed to reliance on the illustration of my ideas and forcing the viewer to accept or reject them. The larger the piece, the more successfully it confronts the viewer. Size

and weight relationship in comparison to the average human being is simply factual and does not beckon for acceptance or rejection.





