

PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS OF SCALE RELATIONSHIPS

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I proposed in my paper to use juxtaposition of unexpected scale in my sculpture, with the expectation that it would create an unexpected tension that is visually stimulating to the viewer. I achieved this by creating disharmony in scale between an object that is perceived as miniature and an object that is perceived as gigantic within each sculpture. I then asked three questions of these sculptures: Was I able to alter the viewer's preconceived notions of the miniature and the gigantic through the manipulation of the size relationship between two objects within each sculpture? Which of these preconceived notions of the miniature or the gigantic became dominant as the main focal point in each sculpture? Did this intentional use of disharmony in scale stimulate enough of my interest to continue investigating this idea? I wrote about three sculptures that had been made for this project. The first was *Manifest Destiny*, a seven and a half foot tall bronze piece depicting an oil drill with a platform in the shape of the state of Texas. On the platform a gigantic bronze figure rides a miniature bronze donkey across the platform. The second bronze sculpture I wrote about was *Gulliver in Suburbia*; standing seven and a half feet it depicts a large bronze figure trapped within a miniature ship that stands on stilts. The last piece I wrote about was *I've Outgrown This One House Town*, a seven foot three inch tall bronze sculpture which depicts the frame of a house with a frame chair and bed inside. On top of the house a bronze figure sits on the roof as if it were riding a horse. I judged all three pieces to be successful and they answered all of the questions affirmatively.

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	
Methodology	
2. DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS	4
Manifest Destiny	
Gulliver in Suburbia	
I've Outgrown This One House Town	
3. CONCLUSION.....	12
REFERENCE LIST	13
INDEX OF ILLUSTRATIONS	14
ILLUSTRATIONS	15

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the past year or so, I have made small-scale sculptures in bronze where the figure and environment are approximately the same scale. I placed small figurative sculptures into an environment such as a house or a landscape, and created a figure/ground relationship between these two elements, which is reminiscent of romantic painting. Wood has played an important role in my recent work. It gives my work a texture and tactile quality that I could not capture by carving an imitation of what occurs naturally. That is not to say that I have been casting found object sculptures. I carved the figurative elements in wax and manipulated the wood in an assemblage type manner. I built small worlds where stairways are made with raw, broken, chunks of wood, and houses are framed with sticks. All of these combined elements give my sculptures a dream-like or surreal quality, as if they came straight from my subconscious.

Recently I have been introduced to the ideas of the miniature and the gigantic that Stewart (1984) talks about in her book *On Longing*. According to Stewart... “the miniature represents such things as: interior space, craftsmanship, history of the individual, proportion, impenetrable surface, and the female” (pp. 44-69). On the other hand, she states that, “the gigantic represents landscape, disorder, disproportion, public life, movement, natural history, and the male” (pp. 70-103). Stewart also believes that the miniature has a nostalgia about it that attracts the viewer to it, while the gigantic has a

sublime or grotesque quality, which repels the viewer from it (pp. 78, 80, 86). While Stewart assigns these qualities to both the physical and the image aspects of two-dimensional works, such as books and paintings, she only gives these qualities to the physical side of three-dimensional representation. For example, a book can contain descriptions of the gigantic or the miniature no matter what the book's physical size; a painting can depict something gigantic even if the painting is only six inches square. It is the disharmony in scale between two objects which creates this illusion in painting and literature. Stewart (1984) gives her explanation of this in her book *On Longing*, "In painting and in literature the gigantic is a matter of the readjustment of depicted figure to depicted landscape, but the sculpture's three-dimensionality forces it to account for the immediate relation between its materiality and the human scale of the viewer" (pp. 89-90).

Statement of Problem

I proposed to use this juxtaposition of unexpected scale in my sculpture, with the expectation that it would create an unexpected tension that is visually stimulating to the viewer. I achieved this by creating a disharmony in scale between an object that is perceived as miniature and an object that is perceived as gigantic within each sculpture.

Questions

1. Was I be able to alter the viewer's preconceived notions of the miniature and the gigantic through the manipulation of the size relationship between two objects within the sculpture?
2. Which of these preconceived notions of the miniature or the gigantic became

dominant as the main focal point in each sculpture?

3. Did this intentional use of disharmony in scale stimulate enough of my interest to continue investigating this idea?

Methodology

I utilized several sculptural methods in order to make these sculptures. Some parts such as the legs and arms of the figures were cast from found objects such as sticks and branches. The torsos of the figures were carved from wax or wood. Seldom is it possible to find natural objects that resemble an entire figure. The environments I constructed from a variety of cut pieces of wood and sticks. I kept a journal and a sketchbook to record this process and document my results.

CHAPTER 2

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The first piece that I want to write about is *Manifest Destiny*. I believe that this is the most successful piece of the three sculptures I will be discussing in this paper. That is not to say that I think the other two are unsuccessful. All three sculptures met the objectives that I put forth in my proposal; however, *Manifest Destiny* seems to have more of the qualities of exaggeration, which help to define the miniature and the gigantic. The second sculpture that I will write about, *Gulliver in Suburbia*, is also successful in creating a feeling of the miniature and the gigantic, but does so in a more minimal fashion. The last piece, *I've Outgrown This One House Town*, is also successful in displaying the miniature and the gigantic through the manipulation of scale, but I think that there could have been more variation in scale between some of the objects within the sculpture.

Manifest Destiny

Manifest Destiny is a seven and one half foot tall bronze sculpture depicting an oil derrick where the platform is in the shape of the state of Texas. On the platform, a small donkey carries a large male sculpture that has a pipe for a neck and a spurt of oil for the head. The first question asked is if I would be able to alter the viewer's preconceived notions of the miniature and the gigantic through manipulation of size relationships. I think that this piece does alter a viewer's preconceived notions of the

miniature and the gigantic on several different and opposing size relationships. First, there is the relationship of the figure to the overall sculpture, which is what the viewer notices initially. Since humans judge scale by comparing objects we are familiar with, the human body is often used for comparison, because it is the object most familiar to us. In this piece, the figure appears to be gigantic when compared with the scale of the miniature oil derrick this piece represents. The figure is almost too large to be contained within the framework of the oil derrick, yet the stance of the figurative element and the forward pointing arm suggest movement, as if it has a determination to burst through the front of the structure.

The next comparison that the viewer makes is between the figurative sculpture and the donkey on which it is standing. The donkey is much smaller in scale to the figurative element making the donkey appear to be miniature. The donkey appears to be struggling to walk against the great weight on it's back, making the element on top of it seem gigantic. The viewer will then notice that the figurative element and the donkey are moving across a platform in the shape of the state of Texas. The cast bronze wood chips comprising the platform make it appear as if this is a low relief representation of the state of Texas, rather than a map or cutout. It appears to the viewer that a gigantic figure and donkey are walking across Texas. In comparison to the wide expanses of Texas, the figurative sculpture and donkey would be gigantic as represented here. This calls into question whether the donkey in this piece is to be seen as miniature or gigantic, further altering the viewer's preconceived notions of what is miniature or gigantic. For these reasons I think that *Manifest Destiny* does alter the viewer's preconceived notions of the

miniature and the gigantic.

The second question asked of this sculpture is; which of the elements of the miniature or the gigantic will come to dominate the sculpture? I think it is the miniature that dominates this piece. All of the elements in the sculpture are miniature; it is only the comparison between the elements that make them either miniature or gigantic. In that comparison of elements, only the figurative element is always seen as gigantic. There are more objects that are perceived to be miniature in *Manifest Destiny* than the one object that is concretely gigantic, so the miniature has come to dominate this piece.

Does the intentional use of disharmony of scale in this piece create enough interest to continue investigating this idea? I think that *Manifest Destiny* does create enough interest to continue investigating this idea of disharmony in scale altering the viewer's preconceived notions of scale relationships. Adding the ideas of the miniature and the gigantic to this piece has added another surreal quality that my work lacked before. It has contributed another disharmonious element in a sculpture made from disharmonious elements such as bronze, wood and unnaturally structured nature. The many different scale relationships in this piece also create more of a surreal figure/ground relationship that I was trying to achieve. The varied elements give the viewer more references with which to build an interpretation of this sculpture. Because of this I believe that this piece generates enough interest to warrant further investigation.

Gulliver in Suburbia

The second sculpture that I will discuss is *Gulliver in Suburbia*. It is a seven and one half foot tall bronze sculpture of the framework of a ship standing on long stilts.

Inside a sculpted figure is pushing it's arms through the frame and it's legs dangle out of the front of the ship. While not as successful as *Manifest Destiny*, I believe that this piece still answers all three questions affirmatively. This sculpture needs a few more elements to vary the difference in scale as in the previous sculpture I wrote about, yet the singular comparison between the two major elements seems to work well enough to alter the viewer's sense of the miniature and the gigantic.

I believe that this piece succeeds in altering the viewer's preconceived notions of the miniature and the gigantic through the manipulation of scale relationships. Here I believe that the framework boat element is so dominant in this sculpture that the first scale relationship the viewer notices is the boat and the figurative sculpture contained within it. I don't think that the first comparison is made with the overall size of this piece because structure, which holds the boat and figurative elements, does not represent a recognizable object. The most obvious in scale juxtaposition in this sculpture is between the framework boat and the figurative elements. The boat in *Gulliver in Suburbia* is meant to represent an old wooden sailing ship, a galleon. The representation of a figure inside of the ship is too large for the scale of the ship. The arms of the figure protrude through the sides of the boat structure, and the legs dangle out of the front of the boat. The figure is contained, yet not quite contained. It is as if the sculpted figure is trying to push through the bounds of the miniature into the gigantic. Even though the whole sculpture is a miniature, the figurative element manages to become gigantic through the comparison to the ship element. Thus, *Gulliver in Suburbia* manages to alter the viewer's preconceived notions of the miniature and the gigantic.

In *Gulliver in Suburbia* the gigantic dominates the miniature. Because the support structure under the boat does not represent a recognizable object, the overall height of this piece, at seven feet six inches, makes the sculpture read as gigantic when it is contained within the gallery. The viewer has to look up to see the top of the piece; therefore, the viewer is miniature in comparison to the sculpture. When the viewer compares the sculpted figure to the miniature boat, the figurative element becomes gigantic rather than miniature. The piece has a feeling of the miniature trying to contain the gigantic, but the gigantic is bursting through the seams. The sculpted figure also has a rudder for a head, implying that the figure has control over, or dominates the ship; further solidifying the figurative element's role as gigantic. Because there are two gigantic elements in the sculpture, compared with the one miniature element, I think that the gigantic has come to dominate *Gulliver in Suburbia*.

It is my feeling that this sculpture generates enough interest to continue with this experiment. While I feel that the multiple comparisons of scale made in *Manifest Destiny* created more interest in this project, the singular disharmony in scale in *Gulliver in Suburbia* has its merits as well. I think that this could be explored further to really work out what creates the most disharmony in scale between two objects. The more minimal imagery in this piece also gives the viewer an isolated or trapped feeling. This is another thing that I think creates interest in continuing this experiment because it is a new element, which was not prevalent in my previous work. The colors used in this sculpture are also a point of interest. The intentional use of a complementary color scheme heightens the difference between the miniature and the gigantic in this piece. For all these

reasons, I feel that *Gulliver in Suburbia*'s intentional use of disharmony in scale creates enough interest to continue investigating this idea.

I've Outgrown This One House Town

The third and last sculpture that I am writing about is *I've Outgrown this One House Town*. This sculpture stands seven feet three inches and is made of bronze. It represents the frame of a house with the frame of a bed and chair inside. A bronze figure sits on top of the house as if it were riding the house like a horse. While I think that the piece has enough disharmony in scale to make the objects seem miniature and gigantic, I feel that there needs to be more variation in scale between the objects in this sculpture. If the objects inside of the house were made either larger or smaller in scale than the house in which they reside the piece would have been successful. I think that *I've Outgrown this One House Town* meets the requirements of the first question. The piece alters the viewer's preconceived notions of the miniature and the gigantic through the disharmony between the size of the house and the figure riding on top of it. The figurative element is larger than the size of the house; it could not fit inside, let alone live in there. The sculpted figure appears to make the roof of the house bow in from the weight pressing down on it. All these things make the figure appear to be gigantic in scale in comparison to the house element of this sculpture. The only part that failed to alter the viewer's preconceived notions of the miniature and the gigantic was the bed and chair elements inside of the sculpted house. They are not far enough out of scale with the house or with each other to alter the viewer's preconceived notions of the miniature or the gigantic. However, I feel that the disharmony in scale between the sculpted figure and house are

enough to create a feeling of the miniature and the gigantic in the sculpture. So I feel that the viewer's preconceived notions of the miniature and the gigantic were altered through the difference in scale between two objects in this sculpture.

The miniature has come to dominate in *I've Outgrown this One House Town*. This piece has similar qualities to *Gulliver in Suburbia*, but the house element in *I've Outgrown this One House Town* does not stand as high, therefore does not miniaturize the viewer, giving the overall piece a miniature feel. The addition of the bed and chair elements provides two recognizable miniaturized objects; this is in addition to the miniaturized house element. All of these miniature elements in this sculpture outweigh the one gigantic feature, which is the comparison between the figure and the house elements, so it is my feeling that the miniature has come to dominate this piece.

I think that this is the only question that one of these sculptures falls short of answering affirmatively. I think that the disharmony in scale does not look intentional enough between the bed and chair elements, and the house element in *I've Outgrown this One House Town*. These two elements should have been made larger or smaller to give them more disharmony with the house or with each other. The disharmony in scale between the house and the figurative elements is successful, but I feel the similarity in scale between the house and the two elements inside makes the one gigantic element feel as if it is the one thing which does not belong in this sculpture. It does not have the immediate relation of being inside of one of the miniature elements as in the other two works. The sculpted figure feels as if it were stuck on top of this sculpture as an after thought. If all the elements in this sculpture had a disharmony in scale with each other, I

think this would have tied the piece together, rather than looking like two separate parts.
For these reasons I think that this sculpture does not create as much interest as it could
have in continuing to investigate disharmony in scale in the manner in which it was done.

CHAPTER 3

Conclusion

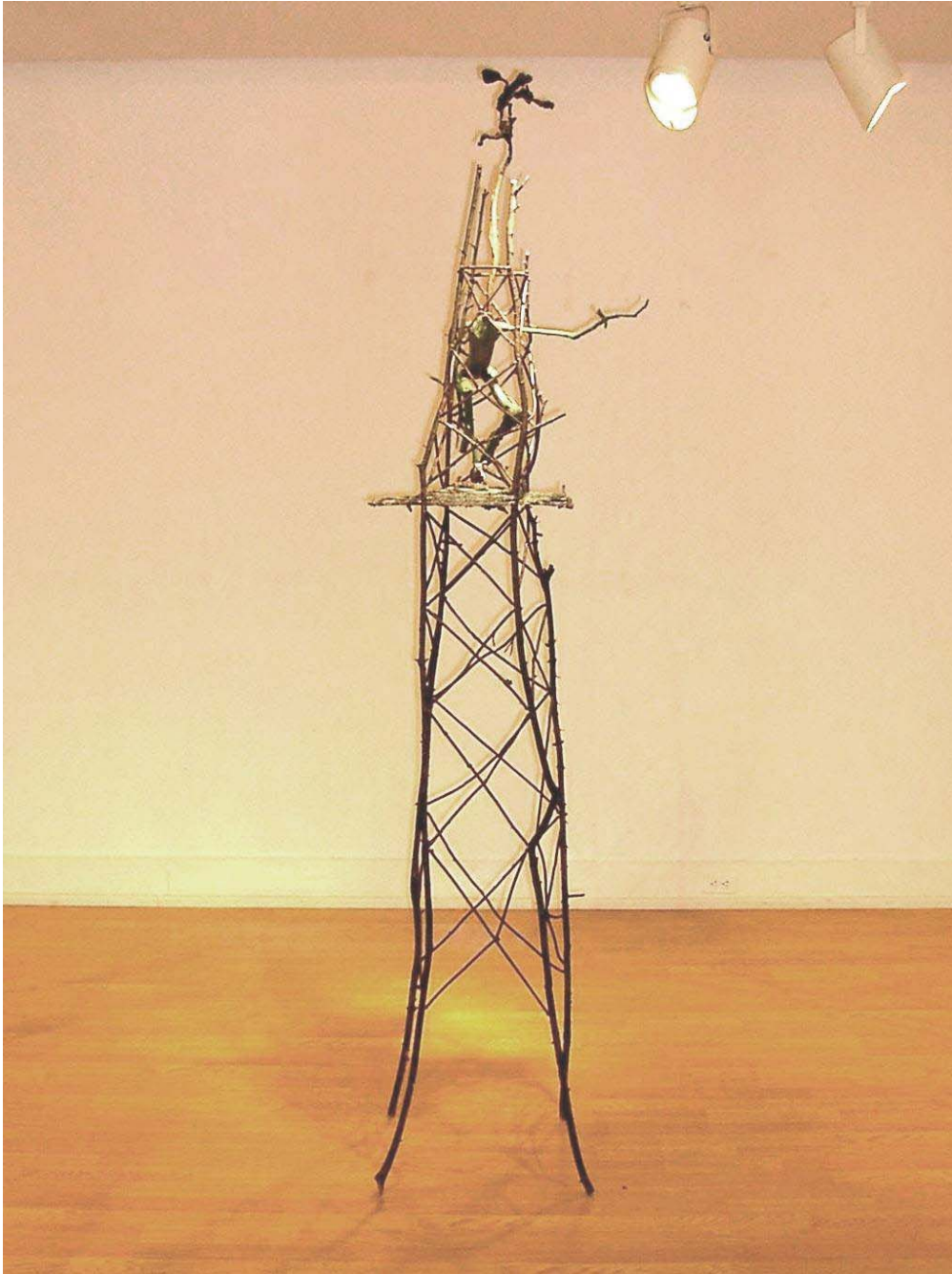
In my opinion this experiment was successful in altering the viewer's preconceived notions of the miniature and the gigantic through the manipulation of scale. All three sculptures achieved this by utilizing varied degrees of scale in each piece to create a comparison between the miniature and the gigantic. The relatively large figures in comparison with the environments on which they reside, create a tension not formerly seen in my work. Because most of the imagery in these sculptures, when compared with the real object they represent, becomes miniature, I would say that the miniature has come to dominate all three of these sculptures. There is no practical way to make these sculptures larger than life size, and therefore make the gigantic come to dominate these pieces. These three sculptures have generated enough interest in my mind to want to continue experimenting with these ideas in the future. I feel that this series of sculptures was very successful at accomplishing what I set out to achieve in this experiment, and has created a new direction for me in my artwork.

REFERENCE LIST

Stewart, S. (1984). *On longing*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

INDEX OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration	Page
1. <i>Manifest Destiny</i>	15
2. <i>Manifest Destiny</i> (detail)	16
3. <i>Manifest Destiny</i> (detail)	17
4. <i>Gulliver in Suburbia</i>	18
5. <i>Gulliver in Suburbia</i> (detail)	19
6. <i>Gulliver in Suburbia</i> (detail)	20
7. <i>I've Outgrown this One House Town</i>	21
8. <i>I've Outgrown this One House Town</i> (detail).....	22
9. <i>I've Outgrown this One House Town</i> (detail)	23



Manifest Destiny
Bronze
7.8' x 2.5' x 2.5'
2002



Manifest Destiny (detail)

Bronze

7.8' x 2.5' x 2.5'

2002



Manifest Destiny (detail)
Bronze
7.8' x 2.5' x 2.5'
2002



Gulliver in Suburbia

Bronze

7.8' x 3' x 2.5'

2002



Gulliver in Suburbia (detail)

Bronze

7.8' x 3' x 2.5'

2002



Gulliver in Suburbia (detail)

Bronze

7.8' x 3' x 2.5'

2002



I've Outgrown this One House Town
Bronze
7.4' x 2' x 2.5'
2002

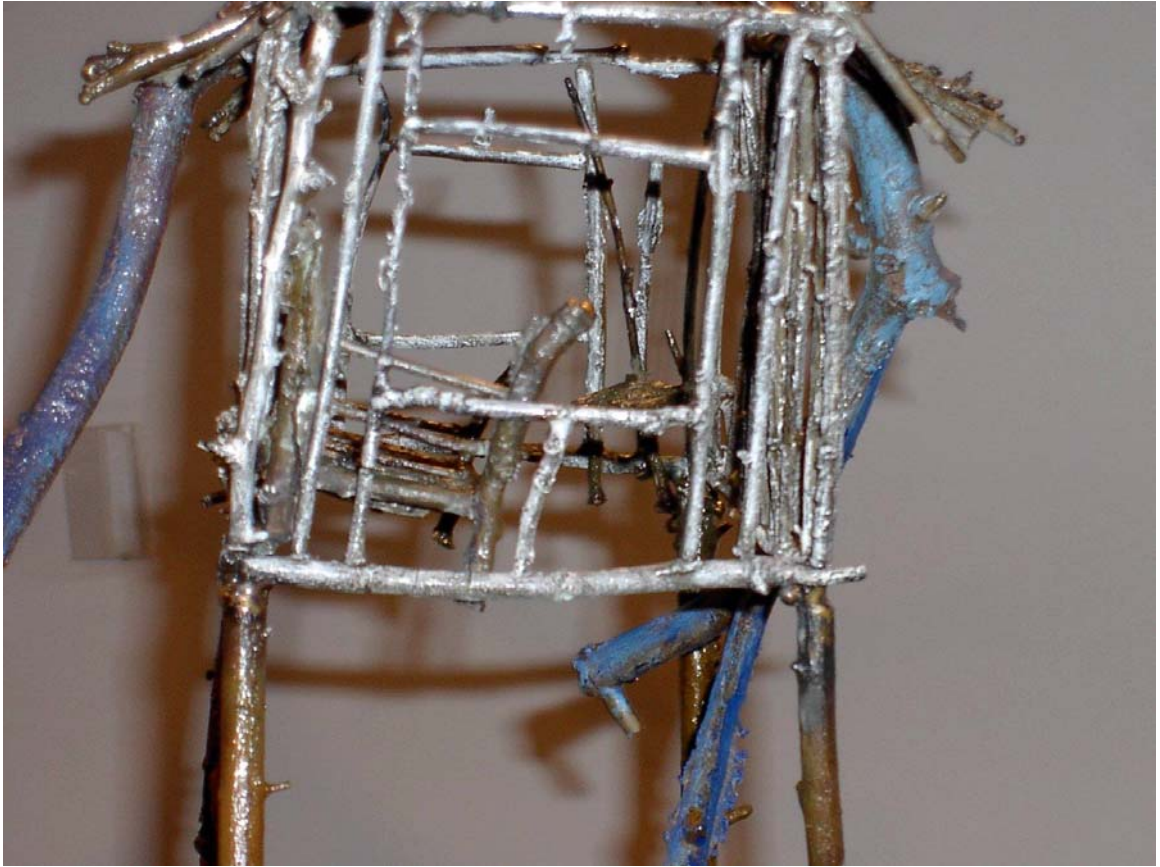


I've Outgrown this One House Town

Bronze

7.4' x 2' x 2.5'

2002



I've Outgrown this One House Town (detail)

Bronze

7.4' x 2' x 2.5'

2002