

# A Few Things

Senior Thesis by  
Nick Squadere

## First thing(s).

My work as of late has focused primarily on the art object as simulacra. I have been honing my mold-making and casting skills to produce exacting work that is indistinguishable to real life objects and materials. I am always trying to pursue some level of humor while simultaneously allowing metaphor in each work to address issues of American social and cultural identity.

Material transformation is at the root of my practice. I transform familiar objects from my own working class background into sculptures that look the same but are integrally different in material, scale and weight; allowing for universal concepts and experiences to pierce through. In transforming banal, overlooked objects and materials through the process of casting, the work begins to challenge traditional modes of perception, experience and expectation. It is the “rags to riches”, the “don’t judge a book by its cover” metaphor; those old cliches we roll our eyes at yet weave a fundamental vein through contemporary ideologies. I use many different methods, from hand- sculpting clay to computer aided design. By combining aesthetically opposing processes and materials, tensions are created to give each work conceptual mobility; while mold making and casting complete the transformations. Working with familiar, found and collected objects in combination with a new material, such as plastic or bronze, the given importance of the objects themselves are re-examined. I hope to arrive at objects which



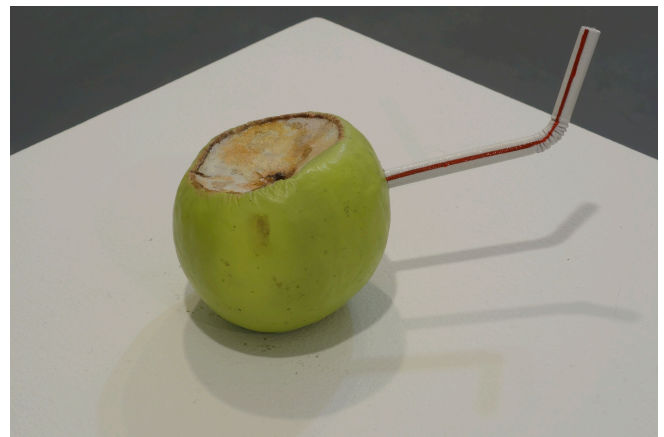
Naughty, Naughty (A Rejection), 2018  
painted bronze, steel

invoke references that may not be immediately apparent, but wriggle their way to the surface to create a dialogue that asks viewers to question their perception or experience.

## To be, or not.

“To be, or not to be...” etc. etc. Arguably the most famously quoted soliloquy that has seeped its way into even the thinnest cavities of popular culture. Here, Shakespeare, through Hamlet, reveals his ideas on Life and Death and the notion of “Being”. Hamlet (proxy of Shakespeare) avoids the more lame approach of asking whether life is preferable to death, but rather blurs the lines between the two. In this way “Being” becomes much the same as “not Being” and vice versa. When you break it down, this issue of life and death is the truest form of opposition there is in the world, it was the first, it is inherent in our existence as human beings. I would propose that any and all opposition in the world exists, primarily, because of how our existence has been set up on the basis of this contest.

I admire Hamlet’s blurring of the lines. It outlines an attraction I have to the idea of a “middle path”, a challenge to perception and a questioning of what is traditionally believed (“this” or “that”) that I bring into my process and my work as an artist. I believe a questioning of “the real” is essential, what do we see as real, or perceive as being real or not. (Fairytale are told and, as such, need to be treated with a level of reality). To give credibility to the “unreal”, to legitimize the “unknown” is a necessary exercise in Be-coming.



This is a Pipe, 2019  
painted bronze

In the painting “The Treachery of Images”, Surrealist artist Rene Magritte paints the image of a pipe centered on the canvas and underneath it writes "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (“This is Not a Pipe”). He challenges the way we assign significance to images/objects; our perception of what is and what is not. Magritte’s painting of a pipe is not a pipe, its a painting of one (the punchline). Yet, we cannot separate the image from the object, or the object from the function, or the function from the ritual (the act); thus, we come face to face with the absurdity of our own ingrained, preconceived ideas and perceptions of “what is”.

## Apples to Oranges.

My parents separated when I was very young, before the reaches of even my earliest memory. I do not think there could be two more opposite people that are alive today and throughout my life I’ve operated, one way or other, between two separate worlds. As a child it was never a conscious thought, these two separate and combative entities outside myself, I loved. My life-

givers, the world. Both have made their impressions, both, in part, exist within me. Looking back, this tension has always been first and foremost within the fabric of myself as a participant in the world and the driving creative energy in my life. My thoughts. The way I try to conduct myself. My view of successful work and ideas of what art and life should be. I feel as if I had been set up, inherently, with the love *AND* the hatred of both sides. The understanding that: both are *real*, neither are absolute, and the “true path” exists in the reconciliation of the two. In many



Idiom, 2019  
painted bronze

ways I believe, and I hope not too narcissistically, that my life exists as that reconciliation (at least metaphorically).

This tension of the opposites is a powerful psychological factor in the unconscious of everyone alive. It is an archetypal function in the human psyche, It just so happens I've lived out the physical allegory throughout my personal experience. These opposites that are so inherent in us are represented by (in one way) the ouroboros, the serpent devouring its tail; the back and forth between them that we all experience, inevitably as we do as humans, is the wellspring that brings forth the flow of life energy.

Buddha says "Life is suffering", also, in buddhist teaching, the fourth and final "noble truth" of Buddha's "Four Noble Truths" says that "*The Middle Path leads to the cessation of suffering*". Suffering in life is a positive thing, "suffering" (in my translation I guess) merely means you are experiencing the back-and-forth pull of the opposites of day-to-day life, life on-par (so to speak). The Middle Path is the ultimate goal, life is suffering ( experiencing the back-and-forth). So if we desire life we must celebrate with joy the sorrows of this world, and try to eat healthy in the meantime.

## No dejes que termine así. Diles que les dije algo.

(WHATCH)

as the dying bird  
looses its sky:

a  
dancer w/out legs

tracing choreographies of the unknown

\* a voice without words

narrating the invisible act that  
shows us even the un-  
seen is r e a l .

The story of Pancho Villa, the Mexican revolutionary, has long been an obsession of mine; particularly as it relates to his death. It is said that the now “famous last words” of Pancho Villa were: “Don’t let it end like this. Tell them I said something”. This is pure make-believe. Villa died in a hail of gunfire as the vehicle he and his compatriots were occupying was unloaded upon and certainly died instantly. And so, this epitaph holds the last words of a dying man who never lived to speak them.

Much of my work falls in line with the traditional art object. However a few works (and actually I could make a claim that possibly all of them) I see as being a non-performing performance; or an object that formally existed as performance. They exist as evidence of a scene or random happening; the touch left on an object being a performance. A performance no one saw. A performance in which there is no witness, or any knowledge of performer, only the subtle remnant of an act that *may* have happened; like a silhouette through heavy mist that is indiscernible from shadows of the landscape.

For example my sculpture *Keepsake* contains a heavy element of the previously performed. It is epoxy, made to look like gum, and squished on the corner of a large, pristine pedestal or, in other iterations, on a spotless expanse of wall space. This silent object alludes to a life, an action, which happened in secret (*the performance*) before anybody enters the space.



Keepsake, 2019  
two-part epoxy, oil paint

Seeing the object we instinctually, of course, know what has transpired. Any number of a group of people can say they have placed their used up gum somewhere on the fly, not thinking anything of it. They know the motions of the act, they have been the performer themselves, and remember the history this object holds.

As is the case in another work "*Naughty, Naughty (A Rejection)*" (image shown in First thing(s).) where I cast a bitten bar of soap in bronze and nail it to the wall of the gallery. Using these classed items (Dial soap and a rusty nail) I aim to challenge authority and question the hierarchy of "Power"; who holds it and in which arenas.

Not taking away from "free will", there are performers behind us all that are unseen. These archetypal characters create the fabric of our psychic lives and are the generative force behind our passions and creative energies. They speak in voices we cannot hear but, if listened for, can sharpen our awareness to life.

## **Out've the Trash, Into the Gallery (Permanent Provisionality).**

Growing up, I used to take the train tracks home from school. I remember the excitement I would have in the discovery of some of the unique detritus I would find along the way. It was really the coolest thing for me.

I have always had an attraction towards provisional works of art and materials. The provisionality that certain objects and materials contain has a kind of poeticism for me. I like the unorthodox-ness of it, its a care free, slapped together kind of style that I believe comes largely from intuition, like a magnetism to a certain material. I also see it as a sort of challenge to the art world, a challenge to archivability and the championing of the fleeting nature of life.

Although most of my works are cast in materials that will last for longer than I ever will, I also believe it furthers the celebration of that fleetingness. By casting styrofoam or cardboard in bronze and rendering them exactly as they were, I aim to elevate those materials to the level of what people believe a traditional “art object” is. In this way I believe it can make viewers question their perspective and have them start to question what is *real* and what is not; and what *does* it mean to be real, what does “realness” entail?



Landscape for David Smith (On the Exactitude of Science)  
painted aluminum and bronze

It’s an allegory of the archetypal story: “rags to riches”; taking what’s been cast aside and taking it through a process, a transmutation of material, and having it come out the other side in a new light. If I take a moment to turn the lens on myself, I can see that what I am really working out here, on an unconscious level, are my own questions about *my* belonging and *my* place in the “art world” and my feelings of being very much “outside” that arena.

## Mean(ing)time.

I have always associated visual art very closely with poetry. A good piece should be able to stand alone like the allegory of a poem in three dimensions. Many of the poets that have excited me, like Paul Blackburn, William Carlos Williams, and Charles Bukowski, all deal with the banality of the everyday event. Focusing in on details, widening the scope of the image to incorporate philosophies of the world and mind. (WCW’s “The Red Wheelbarrow” for example). They give poetry to the mundane, thus elevating it and giving it meaning.



My sculptures convey this through choices of objects and materials. I too try to give poetry to the mundane. I believe that the banalities of life are a more important aspect than people normally award them. They are what happen in the meantime of a compartmentalized existence. Through the process of casting and the trompe l'oeil technique, a simulacrum of the everyday object can be created to imbue the real with meaning and importance.

I like to think that I am incorporating a nostalgia of my experiences; growing up in a working class town with kitsch aesthetics in every home, the 9-5 tradesperson, college dropouts with dead- end jobs and mouths to feed; the sulfur stench of the cement plant or plumes of steam coming from the paper mill. I've had to find meaning in the mundane in real time, which has informed the dialog I wish to initiate in my work.