

Outstanding Achievement Award
In the Field of Excellence

By

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MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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Date

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Artist Statement

The trophy, when seen as a miniature monument to mark accomplishment, struggle, or travesty can be used in a subversive manner, transforming the trophy into an anti-monument to any manner of subjects.

Not unlike the trophies children received in little league or volleyball, the anti-trophy serves to commemorate an event worth remembering or perhaps not memorable over the passage of years. No matter how small or large the accomplishment was or how ridiculous, these rigid industrial structures are a gesture to the untested faultiness of modernity and implicate the temporality of modern technology and design.

Through absurd repetition, scale shifts, and appropriation of popular cultural and historical motifs, the work focuses on examining contemporary issues of unproven technology, communication, and consumption through a historical lens.

The Trophy and the Anti-Trophy

The traditional trophy is a ceremonial object that commemorates a great feat of strength, skill, or great bravery. Webster's dictionary defines the trophy as the following:

trophy (tr'Ōfé) n. pl. phies 1 anything taken from an enemy and displayed or treasured in proof of victory. 2 A prize representing victory or achievement: a tennis *trophy*. 3 An animal skin, mounted head, etc. kept to show skill in hunting. 4 Any memento. [Gk. Trope a defeat, turning] – tro'phied adj.¹

The Trophy

The trophy, in the western tradition can be traced back to ancient Greece. The English word trophy is descendent from the Greek tropaion, meaning turning point in a battle or struggle (figure 1). These early trophies were linked to battlefield exploits of the Greek warriors. A vanquished foe's armor and weapons would be ceremoniously arranged and nailed to a tree by the victor to create a monument to the fallen enemy. This memorial also served to appease and tribute to the Gods of war and also as a warning to potential aggressors. This sculpture would remain fixed to the tree until the next years fighting season. The vertical nature of a tree may be part of the reason why we see later in Greek and



Figure 1

¹ Webster's Pocket Dictionary of the English Language. Trident Press International. 1997. P. 609.



Figure 2

Roman societies the use of triumphal columns and monuments to commemorate great battles; or in the case of Trajan's column, the commemoration of the total annihilation and pillaging of an entire race of people, the Dacian's (Figure 2).

The contemporary trophy is dull, boring and cheapened when compared to its Greek predecessors. With most being made of lesser materials such as plastic, laminated particleboard, pot metal and corny



holographic emblems (Figure 3). These throw away objects are a far cry from the armor of the vanquished enemies of the Greeks. I

imagine that a tropane was probably still covered in blood, sweat, and the stench of death. What does this say about how today we as a culture reward accomplishment?

Figure 3

In youth sports and other activities like music and academics, these mass-produced objects are given to every participant of a competition, regardless of skill or merit. This gentrification of such a hallowed object is a product of the last quarter of the 20th century and a testament to our culture as a whole. This notion of political correctness and the treating of all children equally has been propagated by groups such as the P.T.O. The symbolic importance and reverence of these objects has been lost through the

multiplicity of cheap trophies. Evidence of this can be found at any thrift or second hand shop where there is sure to be a section dedicated solely to cast off bowling or soccer trophies. This change in attitude toward significance of the trophy has opened the door for the trophy to become an object of subversion and dissent.

The Anti Trophy

“The next MVP of the Super Bowl is just as likely to have been a full-time grocery store bagger last year as a Heisman Trophy winner”.

~Hunter S. Thompson

Now what did exactly did Mr. Thompson mean by this silly quotation? Could it possibly mean that any grocery store bagger could win a Super Bowl? Or did he mean that perhaps that the Heisman Trophy winner is as smart or as talented as a bag boy? Was Thompson reporting on a particularly bad Super Bowl game? I doubt any of these were actually what he meant, but rather that skill and talent come in all shapes, sizes and degrees and that all skill is subjective and can be rewarded.

We have all been to the grocery store and had the experience of when a young rookie bagger places the bread under your can goods, creating a wonder white bread flatbread. Or the classic over loaded bag that is too heavy and busts out the bottom (remember Kevin in the movie Home Alone). What I say is that a superb athlete deserves a trophy just as much as a grocery bagger that packs a grocery sack with the efficiency and precision of a master Tetris champion. The inherent value of a trophy can be subjective to the proficiencies of its recipient.

Awarding the Tetris champion bagger certainly wouldn't be considered a traditional accomplishment worthy of award. This subversive award would fall under the category of the anti-trophy. "An object that possesses physical attribute commonly associated with trophies but at the same time satirizes, misrepresents, or distorts the trophy by emphasizing the very thing that it ordinarily excludes".² This platform allows



Figure 4

the artist or craftsman to use the anti-trophy for a satirical purpose that could be used to facilitate a contemporary discourse outside the arena of athletics or completion. An anti-trophy doesn't necessarily mean that are politically charged, they could simply be humorous or as absurd as an ugly sweater trophy (Figure 4).

This is my interest in the anti-trophy, to use the trophy in a satirical way to point the absurdities in contemporary culture. With emphasis on themes such as over consumption, public trust in untested technologies, and what these new technologies mean for the future. It is the goal of this work to raise these questions to the viewer, but in a way that doesn't make the content at the first glance. I don't want to bang the viewer over the head with the work; I want them to scratch their heads and say oohhh, shit.

Planes, Trains and Bridges

This body of work is heavily influence by my longstanding obsession with post-industrial revolution architecture. With particularly attention placed on steel

² Brown, Glen R. *Metalsmith Magazine*. Vol. 34. NO. 1. March 2014.



manufactured objects and lattice iron framework structures such as iron and steel trestle bridges, roundhouses, construction cranes,

and radio towers. These objects were scattered over the landscape of the place where I grew up; mixed in with the pines.

Figure 5

Railway companies around the 1850's opened up northwestern Wisconsin for development and the logging companies came soon after. Growing up, these objects were in less than new condition by the time I came around. They were rusted out relics of a bygone era of prosperity and industry just teeming with tetanus. The rusted out cranes and bridges became playgrounds and swimming holes for me as a child and as a teenager they became havens for mischievous experimentation.

The pine stands did not grow in a natural order, but rather in perfect rows twelve or fifteen feet apart. They reached approximately 50 or 60 feet tall with no limbs. The only green foliage came at the very top. These were old trees planted long ago.



The roundhouse in my town was the second to last left in the country (Figure 6). I never saw it move when I was living there.

Even though our High School mascot

Figure 6

as a personified train, I

never known or meet anyone whom actually worked for said railroad. I didn't know any loggers either for that matter.

As a child, I was within an earshot of the train yard (even though I didn't think anyone actually worked the yard anymore). The sound of the train cars disconnecting and then slamming together had a great effect on me. It sounded like far off rolling thunder through the acres of woods that separated us and echoed and broke up across the lake that my family lived on. This mysterious boom-bang-crash coming through the woods is still with me till this day.

Being surrounded by all of these rusted dinosaurs, I felt very much connected to a mysterious past. This connection to the past has made my transitioning into the 21st century wary at the very least. I question as to what the future holds on its current trajectory. The exponential curve of growth can only travel upward for so long, until it bends over backwards.

i-Cultured

Another central component to this work is addressing issues of new and untested technologies and how they are affecting our daily lives and what the effect of new technologies means for the future. With particular interest in the current obsession with the communications industry, I wonder what affect smart phone's, i-pads and other smart devices will have on the human future.

Now, I am not a self-righteous crusader against i-culture or technological advance and I am not calling for a return to the good ole' days. I am just as guilty as the average

20 something year old American. I am connected to my phone almost the entire day. I have it my pocket all day, sleep two feet from it and I find my self in a panic in a split second if I think I've lost the thing. Usually only to realize that it is actually in my pocket, right where I put it. So the question I ask is: what is this devise doing to me? Physically and mentally, what are the effects of long-term exposure and use of these smart devises?

I am not a scientist. This question could fill volumes upon volumes of academic research, however this is not a scientific research project. I am an artist and I feel it is the job of the artist to create visual language and to raise a question and to say “look”. My position on this is simple; all I am trying to say is slow down, get your nose out of your phone and appreciate the people around you.

Artistic Process and Influences

My artistic process is rooted in working with world history, found images and objects. I use these elements to collage and assemblage my pieces together to create work that not only directly references the past, but also places these past experiences and events in a contemporary context and projects them forward into our own time. The collage component to my work is my way of sketching out new ideas (Figure 7). The images are usually sourced from old thrift store magazines or off the web. This sketching allows me



Figure 7

to arrange new composition using representational objects.

The work itself is representation, often using recognizable objects and components to facilitate a visual pun or satirical comment. I believe that by looking at the past we can possibly for see future shortcomings. The best indicator for the future is past experience.

My work has also been greatly influenced by the artistic movement of constructivism. Particularly influential to me is the work of Rodchenko and El Lissitzky (Figures 8 and 9). Simply, constructivism was a new art for a new society. That society, of course being the newly formed Soviet Union, which as history confirms was not perfect. This revolution freed the thought of the proletariat and allowed for a new school of thought in regards to the arts and design (if only for a moment).



Figure 8

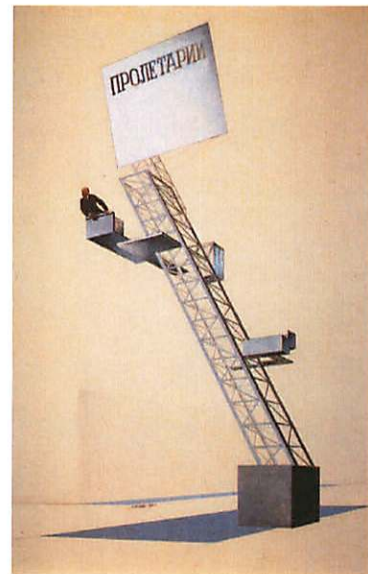


Figure 9

The Work and Conclusion

My final work in this series is a collection of trophies that are representative of all of my research to this point (Figure 10-17). The body of work has been fabricated in the style of industrial architecture that has been so influential to me, not only from my experience in my youth but also from my research into the movements of constructivism and modern architecture. Through much trial and error, collage and assemblage has proven to me the best way for me to work. It is a way of seeing that I am apt at, it is a way to sketch and create new ideas. What I want the work to do is to have the viewer take a moment and simply look, reflect and think about the potential future holds on our current trajectory.



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Ooohhhh The
Humanity!..."
-1938
2014

Patrick C. Walter
"Ooohhhh The Humanity
1938"
Steel, oak, spirit, soap, and
glue
MFA

Figure 13

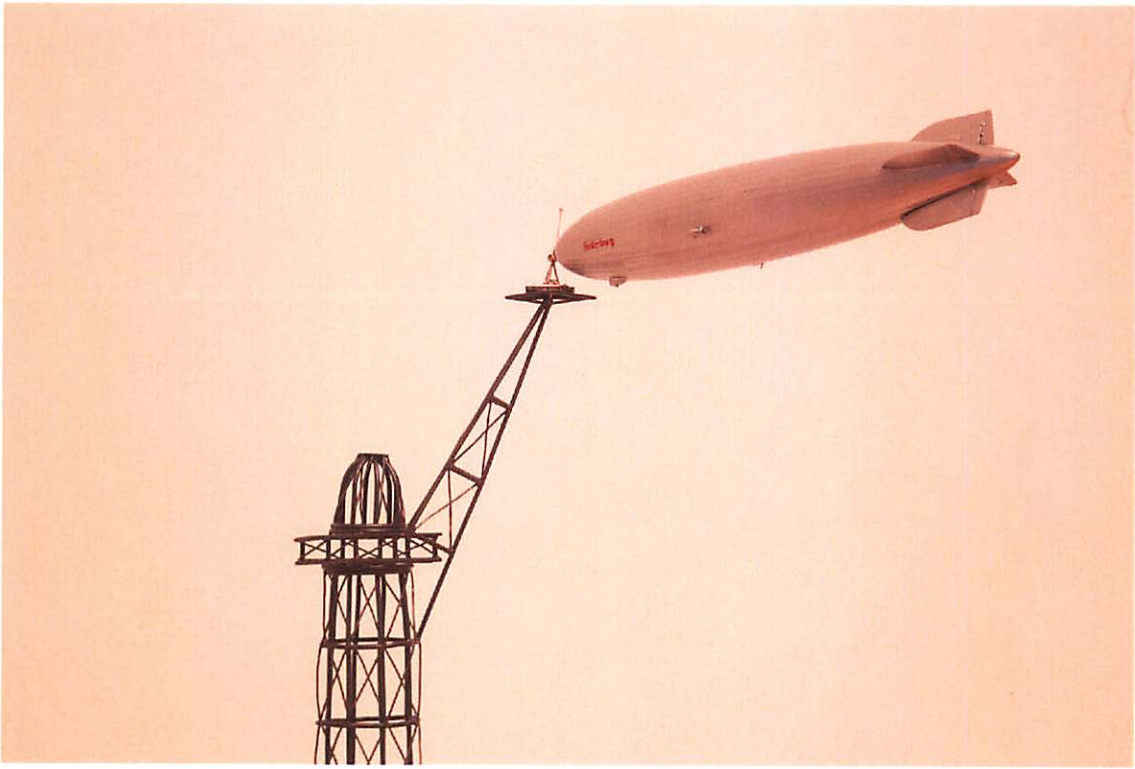


Figure 14



Figure 15

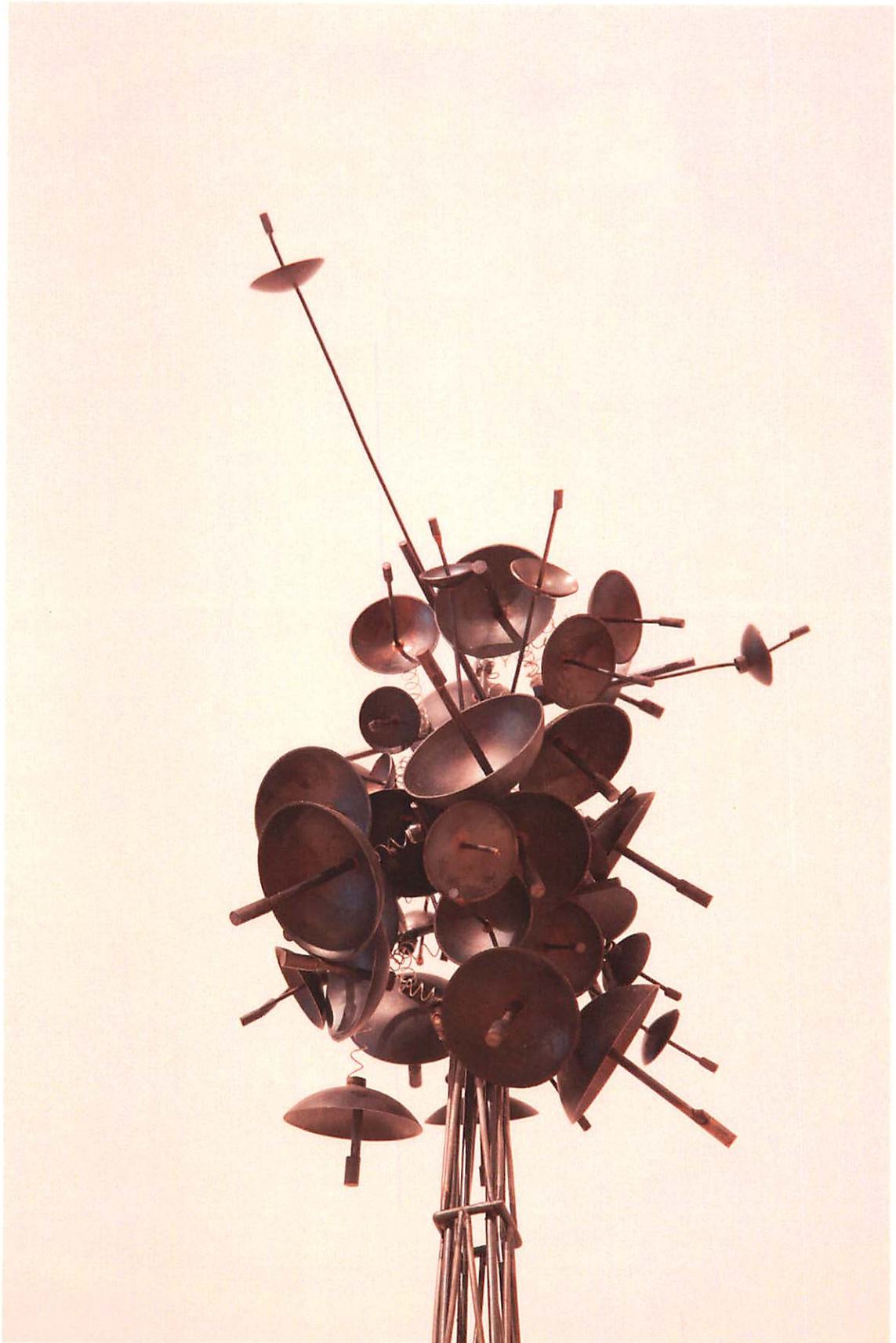


Figure 16

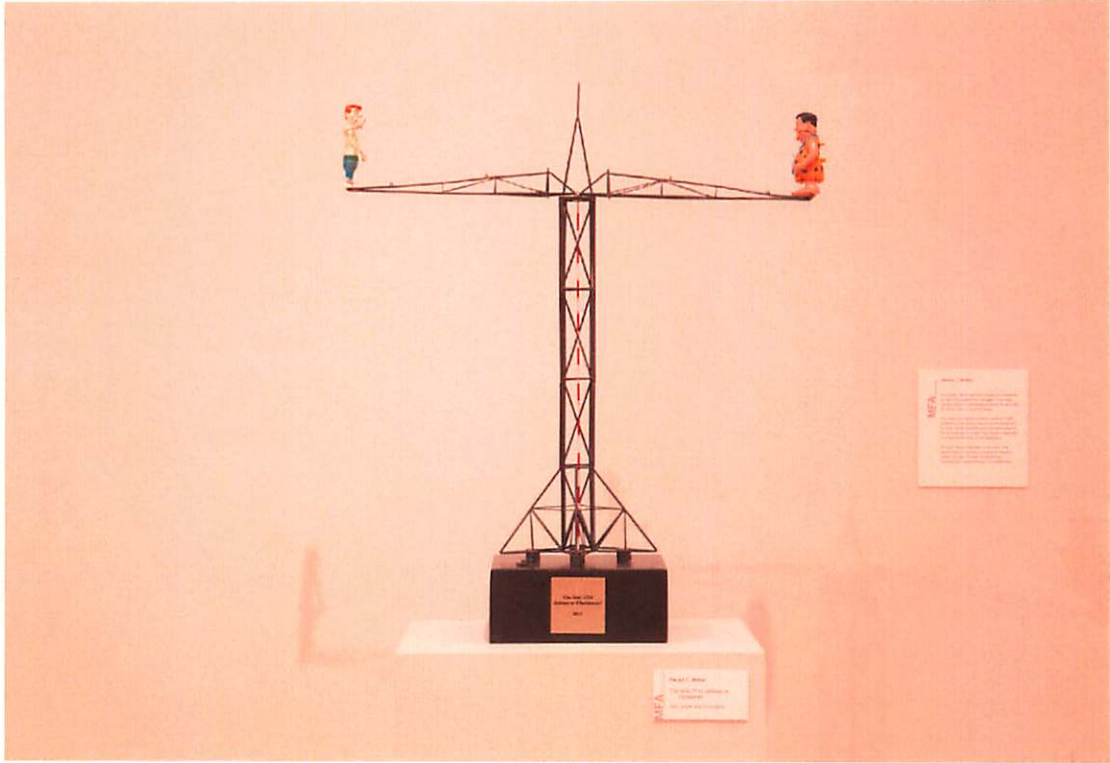


Figure 17