

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Be Sure to Get the Ones You Want

A project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts in Art

Visual Arts

By

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Dedication

For my Father, Mother, and Sisters

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Abstract

Be Sure to Get the Ones You Want

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Personal mythology perceived through adolescent desire, and quotidian events inform my work. Through a variety of media, I explore themes of mark making, identity and environment.

By dissecting and reassembling the elements that comprise a painting into a three-dimensional whole, I undermine the medium's illusive identity and instead create abstract physical forms. I work with oil, acrylic, resin and other mediums to create sculptural paintings that protrude from their respective surfaces and invade the environment. These surfaces include wood, steel or pre-existing walls and function as visual and conceptual counterweights. I am interested in the contrast between materials; this juxtaposition creates tension between anticipation and reality.

Everyday Romanticism

My parents migrated to the United States from El Salvador during the mid-seventies. Strangers to Los Angeles, their paths serendipitously crossed within two weeks of their arrival in the winter of 1974. Without these series of events, my existence as I know it never would have been. As a result, I pay close attention to chance and the subtle nuances that fill daily life with romantic qualities. My work reflects ephemera and experiences from my childhood, adolescence, and my daily presence in Los Angeles.

In my youth I often accompanied my godfather, Marlon, to the local carwash in his brilliant blue 1978 Chevrolet Camaro. Walls neighboring the carwash served as canvases for Mexican-American murals depicting Aztec men and women, and I studied these paintings while polishing the streamlined form of the Camaro. The remarkably reflective bright blue paint refracted sunlight and temporarily blinded me when I wasn't careful. For me, this was Art experienced through a variety of senses and physical processes and the beginning of my interdisciplinary investigations.

I am drawn to the Abstract Expressionist architectural forms in Franz Kline's large scale, black and white paintings. His work informs the gestural and sculptural components in mine. The nearly infinite scale of Richard Serra's drawings and sculptures, as well as his endurance and process videos influence my approach as well. I look to the materials-based work of Steve Roden and Tim Hawkinson for permission to create seemingly absurd, yet conceptually resonant work.

Thesis Work

Be Sure to Get the Ones You Want is a site-specific installation that investigates identity and the intersections within a shared environment. The genesis of my thesis work comes from *Dreamcatcher* (fig. 1), a painting I made in 2010. Utilizing the aesthetics of Minimalism and the conceptual framework of Dada, *Be Sure to Get the Ones You Want* consists of several Central and South American hammocks in varying lengths and colors. I suspend the hammocks from one end of the gallery wall with a drilled eyebolt. The other ends of the hammocks are weighted on the floor by a cement anchor. The convergence of multiple hammocks in the gallery metaphorically parallels the matrix of brushstrokes on a canvas, or the marks of graphite on paper (fig. 2).

I am interested in the formal and contradictory relationships between the hammocks and their cement counterweights. Making the objects unusable is not my intention. By liberating the objects from their functionality, they transcend their utilitarian identities and become something else. Installed this way, the hammocks function as empty cocoons for the figures that they formally engulf and become a body bag of sorts. The concrete casting of a trash bag's volume solidifies an ephemeral form and subverts its function. It becomes negative of its original and the antithesis of what it suspends. The detritus becomes the anchor.

Influenced by chance and cosmic fate, I selected the eyebolts' placement based on the seven major stars of the constellation Orion, which adorned the night sky of Los Angeles during the winter of 1974 when my parents came to the United States.

The cocoon, swaddle, mummy and hammock are vessels created specifically for the body and its phenomenal aspects of being, growth, rest, and death. I am interested in

the void, and a palpable presence infuses the work and is implied through its very absence. The hammocks are places for bodies to contemplate the stars while tethered to the earth.

Mythology of Selected Works

Dreamcatcher, 2010 (fig. 1)

Scrap Garden, 2011 (fig. 3)

Big Black Nothing, 2011 (fig. 4)

Written by Crockett Johnson in 1955, *Harold and the Purple Crayon* is a children's book in which the young protagonist lives within the white utopian pages of the book itself. Carrying a purple crayon, Harold draws his moon and his environment. On the surface, Harold creates drawings with which he interacts. The profound activity of manipulating the visual field around him allows Harold to control his reality; and in order to change his reality, Harold controls the imagery around him (fig 5).

Millions in Cash, 2010 (fig. 6)

My grandmother, Gilma Portillo, visited the United States during the fall of 2009. Nearly everyday she asked me to buy her lottery tickets, specifically "scratchers." She never won, and was never discouraged. Spending her meager winnings on more tickets, she participated in a cycle filled with hope and potential, yet lacking substance. For this work, I use a hospital sleeve that contained the X-rays of my grandmother's lungs. I inflated the sleeve to imply an air of anticipation, a gasp for good luck.

If We're lucky, we'll be found stuck together, 2011 (fig. 7)

In 1993 during a trip to El Salvador, I burned a bed. While visiting a relative, I retreated to a single bedroom and began playing with a ball that rolled under the bed. Not having a

flashlight, I used the next best thing; a candle and a match. I did not consider the candle flame to be large enough to burn the bed, so I used it to illuminate my way underneath. I immediately noticed a smoldering and darkening piece of fabric above the candle flames. I decided to make a painting of it. This work is motivated by the idea that an innocent act of play would result in something so destructive.

Present, 2011 (fig. 8)

Sunday, Sunday, Sunday, 2011 (fig. 9)

In my video work, I explore presence and absence, identity and environment. Often found in first-aid kits, Mylar survival blankets function as formal and conceptual camouflage. The blanket allows the figure beneath to become visually and aurally intrusive and blends into the environment whether it is a gallery, desert, or suburban rooftop.

Effigy, 2012

In May 2011, my girlfriend at the time moved in to a new apartment. She found a vintage Art Deco vanity and mirror she wanted to furnish her new bedroom with. She bought it, and I was to transport it in the bed of my pickup truck. The mirror shattered on the 101 freeway, creating an explosion of glass that refracted sunlight and headlights. She had to use a completely different, cheap mirror in its place. Every time I entered the bedroom, I found myself staring at my *self* in a sub-optimal, stand-in-mirror. *Effigy* is a swaddle of nylon fabric that wraps around a small sheet of faux-marble Plexiglas. The work is a memorial to the broken vanity mirror, and, formally the shape suggests to a cocoon or package wrapped up for transportation.

Conclusion

Subverting utility elevates of the mundane. I am motivated by and attempt to capture the nuances, undertones and possibilities contained within a life and within my identity.

Appendix



1. *Dreamcatcher*, 2010
Urethane Resin, Maple Wood, Glue
32" x 32" x 35"



2. Study for *Be Sure to Get the Ones You Want*, 2012
Hammocks, Concrete, Eyebolts, Carabineers
Dimensions Variable



3. *Scrap Garden*, 2011

Urethane Resin, Lexan, Oak Wood, Glue, Burnt Matches

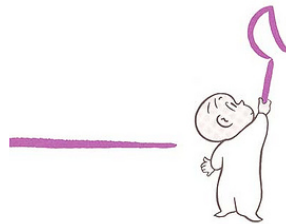
29" x 29" x 21"



4. *Big Black Nothing*, 2011

Urethane Resin, Maple Wood, Glue

31" x 30" x 27"



There wasn't any moon, and Harold needed a moon for a walk in the moonlight.

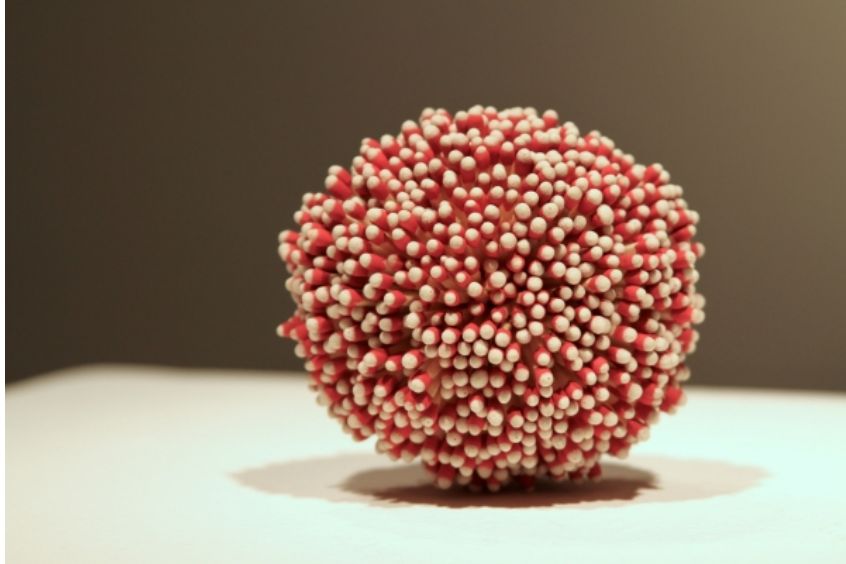
5. *Harold and the Purple Crayon*



6. *Millions in Cash*, 2010.

Acrylic on X-ray Sleeve

14" x 17.5"



7. If we're lucky, we'll be found stuck together, 2011

Diamond Strike Anywhere Matches, Glue.

Approximately 4" in diameter.



8. *Present*, 2011

Single channel video still

9:56



9. *Sunday, Sunday, Sunday*, 2011

Single channel video still

2:49



10. *Effigy*, 2012

Nylon Fabric, Plexiglas, spray paint.

38" x 14" x 7"