San Fernando Valley State College

THE SMOKING SYNDROME AS A THEME

FOR THREE-DIMENSIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS

An abstract submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sculpture

by

Geraldine Mary Louise Hulbert

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The abstract of Geraldine Mary Louise Hulbert is approved:

Committee Chairman

San Fernando Valley State College

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"If an artist is alert to what is becoming worn out through too much usage, or to what has become cliché, he can always count on being in a position to examine the fresher alternatives that still lie untapped."

Allan Kaprow
ABSTRACT

THE SMOKING SYNDROME AS A THEME

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CHAPTER I

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this study to determine a significant theme of social relevance and dramatize it through plastic form.

Smoking is symptomatic of an emotional and physiological human condition which is perpetuated by our hedonistic society. Attempts to combat this habit as a major health hazard have taken multitudinal directions, but the medical community has not been able to cope with this problem. Another approach is needed, one which is tangible and immediate.
As an artist who feels the need to involve myself in society's problems, I have selected fragmented objects and symbols from Madison Avenue's "bag of hard-sell tricks," and rearranged them so that the "smoking syndrome" can be viewed in its true perspective, as symptomatic of a wanton waste of human life:

"The consequences of the images will be the images of the consequences."  

The ironic and ambiguous aspects of this syndrome mesh with elements of - the Assemblage, Surrealist, Pop, and Absurd Theatre idioms, but subsequent development of my plastic dramatizations is heterogeneous.

Black humor was selected as a device to render the spectator vulnerable to realities he has refused to accept through other means.

Areas most conducive to plastic presentation were analyzed and determined to be: (1) the obvious puerile need for constant oral satisfaction once supplied by nipple or thumb; (2) addiction to a habit proven to be harmful; and (3) the damage caused to the human organism by this habit.

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II
Development

Vast in scope, the "smoking syndrome" dictated a varied approach to scale in the presentation of constructions. Selection of media was restricted to lightweight materials that could be easily manipulated.

Packaging and presentation were of prime concern, for it was my purpose to meet the spectator at a level of specificity and induce in him an attitude of participation in my works.

Adapting the assembler's method of working with found objects, I created specific relevant forms in exaggerated scale and arranged them to obtain emotively evocative constructions. Content has been greatly emphasized through the exploitation of forms which are, for the most part, recognizable by everyone.

"The assembler, ....can be both a metaphysician and a poet who mingle attraction and repulsion, natural and human identification, ironic or naive responses. Because overtones and associations as well as physical materials are placed in juxtaposition, it could be said that a constellation of meanings can exist independently of the colors, textures, and forms which are its carriers."2

The constructions which were developed during this study couch fact in imagery. This imagery retains traces of Freudian symbolism, but operates through symbols of Madison Avenue. The irrationality of the smoker is candidly illustrated. There is a purpose which transcends personal "free-expression" inherent in all of these structures, and it is to admonish and inform the viewer.

Scientific data has been utilized to create plastic forms which arouse immediate response. Medical texts and journals were used to provide technical data, and add a measure of authenticity to forms.

Content was not allowed to dominate structures at the expense of aesthetic considerations. Instead, a blend was sought which allowed both content and form to enhance one another.
III

The Relationship Of Theme To Form

The initial and culminating structures in this study both rely upon monumental scale for emotional impact. Perfectly Puerile Playthings, (Figures 1, 2, & 3), begins the series with a visual pun alluding to the childish nature of smoking, and Ultra Structure, (Figures 11, 12 & 13), ends it by illustrating one of the consequences of the "smoking syndrome," cancer. These completely divergent forms are thematically bound together by four structures which are developed in a variety of scale as complete entities.

The most obvious aspect of the "syndrome," a constant need for oral gratification, has been dramatized in three constructions.

Perfectly Puerile Playthings combines display techniques with giant toy-like forms, and attracts attention through the use of a huge baby pacifier. This object is garish in color, textured, and vulgarized in form. It operates as an icon of Madison Avenue.
The Precious Undigestable Appetite's Blue Plate

Special, (Figures 4 & 5), continues the theme with a deceptively innocent structure which combines found and made objects in a display environment. A giant plywood mouth hovers over objects which represent the heart and lungs, suggesting ingestion of all that is within its gaping presence. This ironic pun is black in content, but cheerful in presentation.

Succored by Madison Avenue, (Figure 6), counters the image of attractive sexuality suggested in smoking propaganda with repulsive voluptuous lips which are marred and stained by the habit. The bizarre arrangement of a smoking mouth overflowing the confines of a cylindrical bird cage littered with simulated cigarette butts works as a vulgar pun.

Scientific fact is dramatized in Smoke Out,(Figure 7) and Hard Sell Sold, (Figures 8, 9, & 10). Both constructions are joltingly direct in content and form.

Smoke Out presents diseased lungs as a surrealistic object which has turned into an over-sized ash tray. Reality is represented by a counterfeit cigarette package which retains its identifiable aspect, a mute testimony of its role in the destruction of life.
FIGURE 6.

SUCORED BY MADISON AVENUE
Hard Sell Sold creates the illusion of reality in the complete simulation of a corpse contained in a clean white coffin. Action is frozen as the cadaver seems caught in the act of reaching for its last cigarette. Surfaces were treated to illustrate an on-going process of decay.

Both of these structures reach out at the spectator and draw him into them. The agony and tragedy inherent in the preceding works is made more immediate and tangible through the use of scale which provides increased surface area for an extensive use of textural and color effects. These highly charged surfaces act as carriers of an emotive message.

The culminating construction dramatizes the most frightening aspect of the "smoking syndrome," cancer. Ultra Structure as it is called, is varied in kind and form. It was necessary to create a symbolic, rather than factual replica of the disease. A microscopic cell was selected as a referent to the individual as a macro and magnified into monumental dimensions. Areas of morbid growth are implied by swelling volumes and twisted forms.

The cell and cancer are defined by differing forms and surface color and texture. The cellular form and the intermediary neoplasms are pink in color, but differ in
surface treatment. The cell is luminous, suggesting life, while the tumors are opaque and streaked with the dominant oppressive black of the cancer. The impending assimilation of the cell by the Ultra Structure, is suggested by the black tentacle which joins the two forms. The dynamic nature of the disease is illustrated at the rear of the malignant structure where a charred replica of the cell is imbedded. A passage of time is inferred in this structure which creates an aura of doom.

Ultra Structure represents a departure in presentation. Although the other constructions in this series confront the spectator directly with easily recognizable forms, here the imagery used provides more room for individual interpretation and the emotive power of form must make its message felt.
V.

Concluding Statement

The "smoking syndrome" provided a theme which proved to be most appropriate for the development of three-dimensional constructions. The measure of discipline enforced by the highly specialized nature of this study enabled me to find new forms within the clichés of commercial imagery.

The use of heterogeneous media greatly influenced the development of constructions. The combination of real and simulated objects has given me a greater latitude in which to develop significant shifts in direction, moving from cool display structures to emotively loaded images of pathological conditions.

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3Cool is used in the McLuhan sense to suggest participation in situations that involve all of ones faculties.
TECHNICAL REFERENCES

"The habit of smoking is often deep rooted and may become a true pharmacological addiction."


A standard reference for doctors which shows photographs of diseased tissue.


Cigarette smoking was reported to increase airway resistance and shortness of breath.

Smoking clinics were conducted for a period of five consecutive days, but results proved to be discouraging and the program expensive.

Standardization of instruments and definition of criteria, methods of gathering baseline data, and comprehensive exchange of information and literature established.


Results indicated effects of tobacco smoke appeared to be irritative rather than allergic.

GENERAL REFERENCES


DESCRIPTION OF PLATES

FIGURES

1-2-3.  PERFECTLY PUBLILE PLAYTHINGS - 7 1/2'x3'x4'

Plywood (3/8" & 1/2") was used to brace, enclose and support mache® forms. Plastic hosing wound to 6' diameter and braced with avery wire and plumber's metal tape form the ring of the pacifier. Armatures for nipple, pipe, and cigar were made with avery wire and mache, surfaced with white latex to seal surfaces, and painted with tempera, exterior enamel, or coating resin.

The simulated cigarette package was made with cardboard, white vinyl, aluminum foil, acrylic and spray paint, adhesive vinyl, and cellophane. A graph of a Kool cigarette package was enlarged ten times, traced to the vinyl, and painted.

FIGURES

4-5.  THE PRECIOUS UNDIGESTABLE APPETITE'S BLUE PLATE SPECIAL. - 3'3 1/2"x3'5"x22 1/4 x 35"

Plywood (1/4" & 1/2") was used for the mouth and smile silhouettes and stand. A plaster and flexible rubber mold was made from a clay sculpture of a scientific model,

"Instant Paper Mache—manufactured by Sculpturing Products Inc., 7715 Long Point, Houston, Texas. Available at local art stores. (List price $15.90 for 20 lbs.)
and poured with clear polyester casting resin. An X-Ray was cut in the shape of the rib cage and burned in the heart area for the inclusion of a package of Lucky Strikes. This was placed on top of an altered plastic display stand which fits over a metal rod inserted through the top of the silhouetted smile. Both ends of the rod are bolted to allow dismantlement for storage purposes. The clear resin heart has been hollowed to cover the top bolt. 1 1/4" wheels were added to allow ease of moving.

FIGURE

6. **SUCORED BY MADISON AVENUE** - 4'x3'10" (mouth)

A cylindrical bird cage 14 1/2" in diameter was altered to create openings in the sides. Metal portions at the base and top were scoured and polished. The mouth and cigarettes were made with every wire, and mache’. Cigarettes were surfaced with white vinyl glued to the mache'. Walnut shavings were used to simulate tobacco. Ashes were glued to the lit end of the cigarettes and the end was burned for a used effect.

The mouth was surfaced with pink latex, and fiber glass cloth was cut and fitted over the form and temporarily held in place with tape. Successive layers of thinned

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5Fiber glass is highly irritative to the skin and adequate precautions should be taken to avoid direct contact.
polyester resin\(^6\) were applied and rubbed with extra fine steel wool. Acrylic paints were used to duplicate nicotine stain, and a counterfeit cigarette (2 1/2 x 14") was glued in place.

FIGURE

7. **SMOKE OUT** - 4'8"x2'2"

A chrome bird cage stand was dismantled and an iron rod was inserted into the base and secured with plumbers tape and wire. This was covered with avery wire. Lung shaped armatures were wired to the iron rod with heavy gage wire. Clay slabs 1/4" were pressed into the armature. Both sides of the structure were worked together to maintain weight balance. This structure was dried slowly and mache' was used to cover the center section to create an even transition from stand to lungs.

Polyester resin was dripped and brushed over the entire clay surface. An ash tray armature was added to the central part of the structure and connected to the lungs with grey ribbed plastic hosing for additional support. Tumors were simulated by over-catalyzing resin and it to coagulate. Mache' was used in its natural grey state

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\(^6\) The fumes from resins are toxic. Prolonged exposure can result in liver damage. Care should be taken to remove resin from skin (acetone is a good solvent), but lacquer thinner will work also.
to exaggerate fissures in the clay body and covered with resin. Fiber glass cloth was draped, cut and adhered to the surface with polyester coating resin to add structural stability.

Mache' in the flesh and ash tray portions were paint-ed with red and black enamel and surfaced with resin.?

A package of cigarettes was duplicated from the Kool graph and crumpled to look used.

FIGURES

8-9-10. HARD SELL SOLD - 4'2"x22"x8'

The coffin and inner stand were made of 3/8" plywood and 1/2x1" pine strips for bracing the structure. Finishing pine-edging was used to overlap the wooden outer brace and open edges of the box. Surfaces were sealed with lead base shellac and finished with exterior white enamel. Hinges and wheels are brass.

The armature of the corpse was formed of avery wire. The skull determined the scale of the cadaver, (7' tall). The spine was made from a plastic vacuum hose and reinforced with avery wire and plumber's tape. This was

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7 Working during periods of extremely hot weather should be avoided when possible. Vapors can enter the body through the pores of the skin. Read pages 288 to 301 of Newman's Plastics As An Art Form for extensive information.
into the inner wall of the skull. All other parts of the skeleton were attached to this central core.

Surfaces were covered with mache', sealed with white shellac, and the fragmentary musculature was simulated with fiber glass impregnated with red mache'.

A heart was cast in plaster colored with acrylic paints, sealed with polyester resin, and placed in the open section of the cadaver's chest cavity on a wire support. This was surfaced with coagulated pigmented resin and thinned coating resin. Plastic dye and acrylic paints were rubbed into surfaces to enrich the textural effects of bone and flesh.

A black vinyl shroud covers the inner stand and drapes over the coffin.

FIGURES

11-12-13. **ULTRA STRUCTURE - 8'x5'x3'**

A wooden armature was made with 1x2" pine. Avery wire was stretched and formed over it. Neoplasms were formed separately and wired to the primary structure. Mache' was applied to create a stable surface for fiber glass. Areas were sectioned off with drop cloths to avoid splattering. Pigmented polyester resin (black) was applied to the fitted fiber glass. Subsequent coats were thickened
with thixotropic filler and thinned with styrene monomer for glazing purposes.  

An independent armature was made for the cell. Plastic drop cloths were draped, secured in place with cellophane tape, and fiber glass was fitted, cut, and secured in place with coating resin one side at a time. Edges were made to overlap to insure removal from the armature. Five coatings of polyester resin were used to achieve adequate rigidity. The armature was removed and wired to the primary structure and surfaced accordingly. The cell was overlapped and joints were filed, sanded, and re-surfaced with alternating natural and white pigmented resin.

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8 Gloves and Mine Safety Appliance respirators were worn during the course of this study.