"DAY-TO-DAY"

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INTRODUCTION

We encounter hundreds of tactics that are used to vie for our attention and influence our thoughts and actions, often without our even knowing it. An example of this is advertising. By way of mass media, advertising uses tactics of presentation and product placement to attract attention and sell merchandise and ideas. Toy stores lure children by placing cute furry animatronic creatures in the front of the store and at the child’s feet. Web designers utilize graphic design techniques and interactive tools such as animation, sound, and directional link buttons to attract and manipulate web browsers. Similar techniques are used within the fine arts as well. Presentation, repetition of form, color, texture, material, and scale are just some of the tools used to strengthen concepts and create more visual impact. Other than the content or intent within the message, how are the techniques used by the artists and advertiser similar to each other? This installation explored and utilized visual techniques of communication to create points of connection and interaction between the viewer and the work. I sought to create an exhibition that used sculptural forms to raise questions about attraction and connection, and to examine established ideas that are used inside and outside of the gallery.
INFLUENCES

The painter Frank Okada and sculptor Isamu Noguchi are two artists whose artworks have influenced my work. Frank Okada was a painting professor at the University of Oregon. His abstract paintings grabbed my attention because of the large scale and boldness of the work. The paintings consisted of simple geometric forms, strong colors, clean lines, tedious brushwork and a complex layering of paint. Isamu Noguchi's public sculptures are on display throughout the city of Seattle. As a kid, I have memories of Noguchi's bronze sculptural forms looking completely foreign to me. They resembled something similar to gigantic worn out mechanical parts for a much larger machine. These paintings and sculptures, made up of elegant forms, clean lines, and careful use of color became my introduction to Modernist and Minimalist art. The artists' use of these formal techniques forced me to try to understand the intention of the work. I remember thinking to myself, "Why would an artist put so much effort and time into something so simple?" The reduction of the excessive and non-essential elements in my work is directly influenced by the work of Noguchi and Okada. Only later, through art school, I learned and fully appreciated Frank Okada and Isamu Noguchi's process of making, and in turn, began to appreciate the influence they had on me.

Transferring to the University of Hawai`i, I began studying graphic design. This direction in art also marked an important time in defining my work today. Design brought an awareness of the interaction that exists between the viewer and the work. It demonstrated the importance of how imagery is used to express specific ideas, and how meaning is created though the viewers interpretation of the images. Examining the
similarities between the designer/client relationship and the artist/viewer relationship made me interested in exploring the different aspects of communication through sculpture.

The third source of influence that increased my interest in interaction was exhibit design. Exhibit design brought to my attention how exhibition spaces and the presentation of objects, if done correctly, can reinforce ideas behind the theme of a show and the objects exhibited. One similarity that graphic design and exhibit design share is the concern for how the viewer will navigate through space, both two-dimensionally and three-dimensionally. On a website, navigation plays an important role in the success of the site. Clear and legible use of text, appropriate use of color, and proper placement and choice of images all allow for easy navigation and interesting interactions between the viewer and the site. Exhibit design utilizes similar techniques, incorporating all of these ideas into real space and time. The viewer physically moves from point to point, influenced by the design of the exhibit, deciding where to go and what to see next. Proper use of space, text, color, and placement enhances the experience. What is also interesting is how presentation and display are used as a way to enhance the viewer's perception of the work. Like graphic design, the presentation and placement of images or objects in a gallery communicate importance and influence the way viewers experience and interpret the objects presented to them.

Drawing is something that has stayed with me since I was a child. It continues to influence my work and has played an important role in the creation of my thesis.
exhibition. Unlike sculpture, which usually requires many stages of planning, I use drawing as a creative tool so ideas can be quickly conceptualized on paper before they are lost. The freedom that sketching offers helps to speed up the initial process of visualizing and adapting ideas.

Ideas for this exhibition evolved from sketches that combined abstract non-representational shapes with everyday objects. Examples of sculptures that derived from this sketching process include drive-thru intercom systems from McDonalds (Plate 1, pg.13), billboards (Plate 2, pg.14), geriatric mobility aids and gymnastic equipment (Plate 3, pg.15). I looked for ordinary objects that suggested some form of interaction with the eyes or hands. The objects were then reduced to their most basic shape and incorporated into the final sketches. After the idea for an exhibition began to take shape, I eliminated everything that was non-essential to the idea, or that had no function or purpose to the rest of the work. Often times, before using gallery maquettes, I rely on drawings of a virtual exhibit space, acting as a three-dimensional canvas for the work. (Plate 4, pg.16) (Plate 5, pg.17) (Plate 6, pg. 18) In this virtual space, form, line and volume can be easily recognized and changed.
INTERACTION

Interactive, by Webster’s definition is the 1. acting upon one another. 2. (of a computer or program) characterized by or allowing immediate two-way communication between a source of information and a user. Artists Richard Serra and Maya Lin’s monumental public sculptures allow for two-way interaction between the viewer and the sculpture through scale, location and purpose. The two sculptures I’m referring to are Richard Serra’s large steel sculpture series “Torqued Ellipses” and Maya Lin’s “Vietnam Veterans Memorial.” Both sculptures require viewers to physically enter into the sculptural space, setting a balance between sculptural form and architecture. Similarly, by utilizing the architectural space of the Commons Gallery, I intended to elicit physical interaction from the viewer. In this installation, viewers interacted with forms through touch and an awareness of the constructed spaces presented to them. The installation communicates with viewers through sculptural forms, space, material, construction, and presentation, similar to the way objects outside of the art world communicate to us.

When mentioning interactive art today, what usually comes to mind is something similar to Webster’s definition of interaction, which states an “immediate two-way communication between a source of information and a user” by way of the computer or program. Interaction is often linked to websites. Web Art deals heavily with the layering of sounds and visual effects on the monitor. Many of the sites have a heavy graphic design influence. Sites offer viewers a chance to control narrative structures, edit music, manipulate images and interact with other web artists on projects. Most importantly, they are a place where the viewer plays an active role in the work.
MATERIALS

The use of particleboard for this installation was an important factor in the construction of the forms and the connection between the viewer and the work. The connection was created by making use of the familiarity and common knowledge of the material, similar to the function of the image of the handrail. Also, because particleboard is generally viewed as cheap and of low quality, it helped to challenge preconceived notions of what sculptural mediums should be, creating potential for viewer/work connections. Most people believe sculptures should be made of materials that are durable or have a history of art making behind them. Particleboard has neither of these. The decision to use it had more to do with its structural performance. Not only is it fairly easy to work with and relatively inexpensive, the material, once sanded, emits a soft textural quality, enhancing and softening the curves in the forms. After experimenting with several different types of woods and wood-like materials, I found that particleboard could be easily manipulated to fit my working needs. The process by which the forms were created through laminating small slices of particleboard together is similar to the way Lego pieces are connected end-to-end. I found that other natural woods and plywood, because of their end-grain and laminated layers, became structurally weaker or just didn’t look right. Because there is no end-grain and no particular front, side, or back to particleboard, when glued, each connection was structurally sound. Sheets of 3/4" x 4' x 8' particleboard were easily cut into strips and laminated into the needed sizes and lengths.
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FORM AND PLACEMENT

The installation was broken up into three objects; the handrails, the vessel form, and the sculpture on the floor pedestal. Each piece was visually connected to each other but could also be experienced as a separate entity. (Plate 10, pg. 22)

The object on the right, as one entered the gallery, represented the traditional formal sculptural situation, art placed upon a pedestal. This piece not only played the role of the conventional sculpture in this installation, but it was an expression of my interest in form and making. Through sketches, I attempted to capture a sense of flow and balance in the form, but during construction the sculpture took on a shape of its own. This can be directly attributed to the process used to assemble it. This consisted of cutting and gluing individual pieces of particleboard into various wedge-like forms to create curves. Attempting to force the form into directions it didn’t want to go resulted in unnatural lines and harsh curves. A constant battle occurred throughout the construction of the entire form. It was a balancing act between maintaining control and letting go. The control dealt with being able to begin and end the form in a specific area in order to connect the form to the handrails. Letting go is evident in the sculptural form itself, although it was not truly letting go.

Viewer interaction determined the scale of the form. Prior to construction, I knew that the sculpture needed to be a certain height and width for it to feel comfortable within the gallery space. I wanted it to be at eye level with the viewer, but it also needed to fill the space appropriately, allowing for ample walking space around the work.
The decision to place the sculpture on top of a pedestal provided a gallery setting that viewers were familiar with. Placement of the sculpture on the floor pedestal and away from the wall served to elevate and separate the sculpture within the installation. This helped to enhance the connection and tension that was created along the handrails, which formed a bridge between the wall-rail and the work. This space was also used as a way to create another area of connection between the sculpture and the viewer. The open space allowed viewer access to the sculpture, providing a point of entry into the work. This space was created to give viewers a place to touch the work without the apprehension of being reprimanded by gallery attendants. The sculpture, composed of many pieces, appeared to be somewhat delicate and soft. The rails appeared sturdy but became delicate once connected to the work. It is here that I wanted viewers to connect, both physically and mentally to the work. (Plate 7, pg. 19) I wanted the viewers to feel that they were being presented with an opportunity to touch the soft delicate underbelly of something that they would not typically have the chance to do. This was where connection was made.

The vessel-like form was intended to do the same, although in this case, when placed at an unusual height, the more recognizable vessel shape developed into something more abstract. Two reasons determined the placement of the vessel form: to balance the negative space created on the left section of the gallery and to literally and figuratively place the object out of reach of the viewer. Again, the handrail became a point of interaction whereby the viewer could still be connected to the vessel form.
through touch. The construction of the form, by revealing the layering and building up of material to create the shape, echoes the construction and assembly of the entire exhibit. (Plate 8, pg. 20) The form was left crude and unfinished to contrast the smoothness of the sculptural form on the pedestal. Balancing between familiarity and abstraction, this form provided a contrast to the linear forms that ran throughout the gallery.

The handrails were intended to perform the same function, presenting viewers with something familiar, something with which they could visually and physically connect. (Plate 9, pg. 21) The decision to build handrails as an extension of my sculptural forms served several purposes. To begin with, I was capitalizing on people's understanding of the functionality of handrails, which are typically used in areas such as stairs and ramps where a person may need support when walking. First, the use of handrails in this installation provided the viewer with an object that spoke of touching, interaction, grabbing on to, holding on, and connection. Second, to install a handrail in a location that doesn't ordinarily need one raised questions of functionality and purpose. The image of a handrail became a tool used to communicate an idea. Why is it here and what purpose does it have in relation to the rest of the work? This was done with the hope that viewers would trace their thoughts back to the functions of a handrail: support, guidance, an aid, touching, etc. When juxtaposed with the two sculptures, it acted as an object of contemplation.

Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades were statements about his philosophy on the absurdities of art and life. By doing this, either knowingly or unknowingly, his ordinary
objects that were displayed in galleries raised questions about the role of the art institution itself. I'm interested in Duchamp's use of common everyday objects to serve a specific purpose. I was trying to do a similar thing with the handrails. By using the recognizable handrail, albeit not a found object, to serve as an object of contemplation, it became something to be deciphered by the viewer. In this case, the rails had a particular purpose, mainly to serve the rest of the installation. The final reason to utilize handrails in my work was to provide the viewers with different entry points into the work, either physically or psychologically. This became a means by which the audience was able to engage the work through recognition of form and association through touch. In this case, the rail did not physically aid the viewers by helping them walk through the gallery, but it functioned as a visual aid, helping viewers connect to the work conceptually. Again, the goal was to explore different avenues of attraction and connection. Handrails are universal and instantly recognizable. The choice of forms and placements of objects in this gallery setting explored ideas of interaction and connection between art forms inside and outside the gallery.
CONCLUSION

This exhibition represented an attempt to express ideas about subjects that relate to art and the world outside of art. The work dealt with ideas of connection, attraction, and presentation. Attraction and art is something that is often not talked about in art school. This work pointed out the larger question of how the use of attraction is employed not only within the art world but also outside of it. I attempted to utilize aesthetics and presentation, not as a secondary thought, or a secret ploy that people rarely talk about, but I wanted to bring them to the forefront of my work.

A connection exists between the tactics of art and advertising that is neither good nor bad. As in advertising, both conscious and subconscious choices are made when creating art, about how ideas are presented, how they will look. How does presentation affect the way we perceive things? How does it manipulate our perception of what is truly in front of us? How does art capitalize on the tactics used in marketing?

The main goal of this exhibition was to help people become more aware of the way things are presented and constructed, thereby reiterating the many approaches to communication. The exhibition was developed in a way that the viewer was aware of the presentation of the forms, but not aware of the reason behind the work. The people that came to the exhibition were people within the institution, people who were interested in art, and people passing by. Viewer's reactions seemed to indicate that they responded to the material, forms, and presentation. Much like advertising and its use of subliminal and evasive messages, the main issues behind the work were only alluded to, and as a result,
possibly overlooked by the viewers. These ideas could have been clarified, or somehow be more obvious in my work, but I chose to take a more cautious approach rather than being blatant and overly obvious in its relationship to advertising.

This discussion about my intentions for this thesis has led me to see that this exhibition represents my own art morals, and how I chose to present them to the viewer. Through the initial conception of the idea, and all of the subsequent choices made in the making of the piece, the work came to be a reflection of me, and presented the issues that I felt were important in comparing art and advertising.
Plate #1

Devices, 2003
wood, paint, pencil, polyurethane
8' x 5' x 3'
Plate #2

untitled, 2002
wood, halogen lights, steel
8' 1/2" x 8' x 3'

Photo: Brad Code
Plate #3
untitled, 2002
wood, paint
4' 1/2" x 4' x 2'

Photo: Brad Gock
Plate #4
(sketch for thesis exhibition I)
pen and ink
8 1/2" x 11"
Plate #5
(switch for thesis exhibition II)
pen and ink
8 1/2" x 11"
Plate #6
(sketch for thesis exhibition III)
pen and ink
8 1/2" x 11"
Plate #7
Installation view I
(detail of floor sculpture and handrail)
Plate #8
Installation view II
(detail of vessel form)
Plate #9
Installation view III
Plate #10
Installation overview IV

