451

END OF INNOCENCE

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END OF INNOCENCE

Introduction

9-11. 9/11. These digits had no particular significance other than the emergency telephone number prior to September 11, 2001. This date is like December 7, 1941 when President Franklin D. Roosevelt referred to it as, "a day that will live in infamy." On this day the World Trade Center in New York City was turned into an inferno by planes flown by hijackers from middle-east countries. For some American, this day serves as a punctuation mark, a period, a comma, or an exclamation point that divides a much simpler time from a more complex and dangerous time. It divides *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* from the *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*.

My thesis exhibition entitled "End of Innocence" was an attempt to show this division. A child's toys, rocking horses, were transformed into something sinister: the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse - Death, Famine, Conquest, and War. [1] These four entities have been with us since the book of *Revelations* in the *Holy Bible* [2] was written, but are more omnipresent than before. The *Holy Bible* [2] and its writers describe them as descending from heaven to wreak havoc on the population of earth. They are mythical creatures, but their symbolism is very real. Death, Famine, Conquest, and War portend suffering for all eternity.

Art as a visual vehicle has always interested me. I tried to use the themes of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse to show the lost innocence of a child. After World War II, living in the USA was simple and easy. The economy grew with industries that manufactured goods for war. It was time of economic growth; a time of plenty. Soldiers coming home from the war were welcomed with open arms. This was the time of tract houses and the GI Bill. The United States of America emerged as a true world power, a title it has yet to relinquish. Because of this boom economy, many people had flexibility in incomes that allowed for more than creature comforts. Evidence of this trend can be found in television shows, such as *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* and *I Love Lucy*, that were made for and about white America. Some Americans, however, found their tranquil and idyllic life replaced by fear and terror during the McCarthy Era.

From 1948 to about 1956, Joseph McCarthy, a United States Republican Senator, led the charge to expose people in the media, the motion picture industry, politics, the military and academia for involvement in the US Communist Party. As Chair of the Permanent Investigating Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Government Operations, Joseph McCarthy conducted hearings in which individuals were summoned with blank subpoenas and examined without complete due process. Disputed evidence tainted the reputations of these people who

were blacklisted from employment, and shunned by others who feared similar treatment. It is estimated that 11,000 employees from federal, local, and private employers were fired as a result of anti-communist hysteria.[3]

Extreme fear and terror descended once again upon Americans on September 11, 2001. For many Americans, life changed from dot-com excess to one of suspicion. Air travel didn't require taking off your shoes at the check-in line or leaving your umbrella and backpack at home for University of Hawaii (UH) football games. Just 45 days after September 11, the US Congress passed the USA Patriot Act designed to arm law enforcement with new tools to detect and prevent terrorism. Many parts of the USA Patriot Act, however, take away the checks on law enforcement and threatens rights and freedoms without a warrant and without probable cause. The Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) now has the power to access private medical records, library records, and student records.[4] The USA Patriot Act can exert its power over all residents of the USA: white, black, red or yellow; citizen, immigrant or refugee; rich or poor alike. September 11, 2001 marks the end of innocence for all who live in the USA.

Planning

I spent most of my time thinking about the construction of the four horses. I wanted the horses to communicate raw power, a force that I

wanted the audience to feel. A rocking horse doesn't possess movement other than rocking back and forth, to and fro. However, I felt that the implied movement of the horses and the act of actual motion and scale would convey the idea of inert power from a basically static condition.[5]

To construct the horses, I chose steel because it connotes strength and would set the mood of the exhibition. Ironically, steel is a relatively easy material to manipulate and is very forgiving. In addition, it has a great strength - to - weight ratio compared to other materials such as aluminum. Steel can be bent, shaped, welded, burnt with a torch, and altered into many shapes to create four horses, each different in appearance and construction. Since I usually did not work with marquettes or sketches, the size of the gallery dictated the size of the horses, i.e. big room, big horses; small room, small horses. Size was important to my message; a bigger horse would make a bigger impact on the viewer. The Commons Gallery has four large panes of glass making up the front section, each pane is approximately 5' by 14' (see plate A). I imagined that one pane would frame each horse. To show the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse descending from heaven, I created an implied motion through the posture and position of the horses' appendages. Although the primary horse material was steel, I used other materials to break the monotony and added other visual features such as skin, bones, gums, teeth, and tails.

Construction

Building the first horse "Famine" was a hard task. I find doing anything the first time challenges my skill, perseverance, and knowledge (see plate B). "Famine" dictated the size, construction methods and materials used for the other horses. In my plan, I imagined that "Famine" would have a boney steel stature with skin made of cheesecloth and plaster of Paris. "Famine" was to look emaciated, but also alive. If I could show this, it would seem that "Famine" was supernatural not mortal. The research on the four horsemen dictated the color of each horse. [1, 2, 6] "Famine" is traditionally represented as black, and the rider carried a pair of scales. To interpret the injustice in food access during famine, I splashed and dabbed white paint on black. The black and white paint gave it a ying/yang effect which I liked because of the stark contrast.

"Death" was the next horse that I made (see plate C). It was completely built from steel cut with an abrasive saw and welded together. "Death" was constantly taken apart, repositioned, and rewelded. The rib section was steel flatbar formed on a metal roller. I formed the head with a grinder and bent it on a metal brake. I had problems with shaping "Death's" skull (see plate D). I made three skulls before I had something of acceptable proportion and expression. The treatment of "Death's" gums (see plate D) was pink paint to depict the horse's mortality. This was important because, although "Death's" symbol was death, in actuality it

was alive. I constructed "Death" to gallop on two legs, which led to problems of mounting it onto the rocker. I removed and repositioned it several times before I devised a strategy for permanent mounting. Instead of positioning "Death" on the rocker by hand, I used a crane to hoist and mount it. Although my research determined that "Death" is "pale"[1, 2, 6] , it was not easily translated into color. It is written in *Revelations* 6:8, "And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hades followed him."[2] In the movie, *Pale Rider*, Clint Eastwood's horse was a white and spotted black Appaloosa. By combining these references, I decided to make "Death" white.

After completing "Death", I made "War" (see plate E). While working on the first two horses, I thought about "War" many times. I thought about the materials and methods to construct a different horse, yet related to others of the group. Since the previous two horses were made from mild steel I used predominantly round stock (another shape of steel) to make "War". Creating "War" consumed more than a hundred hours. The steel roller and the Hosfeld bender were the primary equipment used. I had to figure out how to roll 1/4" round stock on the roller and how to make tiny pieces such as eyes and nostrils. In addition, achieving the correct proportion was difficult. I spent most of my time solving these problems. Repeated measurement with a ruler, however, gave way to using a toy horse to determine proportion. Using round stock was a

problem because a single rod would curve in the steel roller. I solved this problem by rolling three rods together to prevent curving. "War's" color is traditionally red. [1, 2, 6] After much consideration, I decided to evoke red with the natural color of rust.

"Conquest" was the final (see plate F), and the most difficult horse to create. "Conquest" was constructed entirely out of 16-gauge sheet metal to distinguish it from the other horses. This choice presented problems since the thinness of sheet metal makes it hard to weld, bend, and cut on machines available at the UH metal shop. I chose to blind rivet the sheet metal to piece the whole horse together.

I usually don't work from sketches but for "Conquest", this turned out to be almost like laying out a sheet-metal vent duct or cabinet. To construct a vent duct, it is usually laid out full scale on the floor or on template paper. I applied this method to determine true lengths and angles to construct the horse. The color for "Conquest" was white determined by my readings and research. [1, 2, 6] I pasted newsprint from the *Honolulu Advertiser* and *Star Bulletin* on "Conquest's" sheet-metal body. Newspaper is primarily white with black words. After reading different newspapers from around the country, I determined that the frontpages are primarily the same except for the editorials. They differ depending who owns it, what part of the country they come from, and who is the author. I used newspaper

headlines and articles that were pertinent to the theme of "Conquest". The articles I chose were deliberate and obvious, both covert and overt examples were used (see plate G). I pasted articles published in February 2003 about the USA's Iraqi conquest and reasons for war, such as it being a business venture.

Gallery Space: Installation

The use of the Commons Gallery in the UH at Manoa, Department of Art and Art History was a particular challenge. I thought of many different strategies to properly show my thesis work. Would I need walls? What color should they be? Would I have to alter the space to convey what I had to say? Did I need other props to enhance the basic exhibition? I have seen many shows in the Commons Gallery where the manipulation of the space was the show and not what was *being* shown. I did not need different color paints, props or walls to create a sense of a paradigmatic shift in our world view. The gallery was the container, not the exhibition itself. Painting the walls white gave the gallery a neutral look and feel, while allowing the horses to stand out. If the viewer could use the power of my apocalyptic horses to comprehend my message, I was successful.

I thought about the signage for the exhibition a long time. I wanted it to be hand painted to show that I did everything from concept, production, and exhibition. Several graphic design students

offered to design the invitation, but in the end I did it myself. I am glad that I created the invitation; I felt I did as well or better than they would have done. It did not occur to me to use the same font and type style for both the signage in the gallery and the invitation. If I had done this, there would have been visual continuity to make a better exhibition (see plate H).

Reflection

During my time at the University of Hawaii, I felt I have grown as a person and as a maker of objects. I began with ceramics and made or tried to make pretty things. I asked myself questions about the glaze: what glaze to use? how thick? how thin? I was into "pretty". In upper division art classes, my main concern was to win the art contests. Like golf or bowling, I was there to beat the crap out of everyone. Then, one day, I went to a slide presentation by a visiting glass artist. His glass was perfection; it was beautiful. There I was in this darkened room, awed by the prettiness of his work. Then it hit me in that darkened afternoon that, although the work was pretty and beautiful, it didn't say anything. It was tongue tied. It was a book bound in Italian leather with blank pages. That afternoon I vowed to make things that had something to say; issues to be recognized, and causes to shout about. I have taken on issues such as the *Rape of Nanking*, spousal abuse, local Hawaii politics, suicide bombing, and

Korean Comfort women. More recently, I took on issues about President George W. Bush. "The End of Innocence" is one more project to communicate my political voice through art.

Graduate school hasn't been all that rosy, but I am certain that I enjoyed making these objects. No, I truly loved making these objects (see plates I and J). I honed my skills and learned that, for some projects, sketches and models help in project construction.

"The End of Innocence" is not a new term or concept. It seems that you could hang this term on any event of great impact on society. Several world wars, conflicts, and many natural disasters could bear this label. But, the destruction of the World Trade Center was an end of innocence for many Americans of our time. This act was more horrific to me because innocent Americans were killed on American soil by foreigners.This was a preview of things that could be possibly happen again in the future. The scale and magnitude was unprecedented, and surely an end of innocence.

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3. Mark Wood (2004). *McCarthy era offers cautionary tale for post-9/11 America, Stone says*. Retrieved September 2, 2004, from the University of Virginia School of Law. http://www.law.virginia.edu/home2002/html/news/2004.

4. *US Patriot Act, HR 3162, October 25, 2001*. Retrieved September 3, 2004, from the United States Department of Justice. http://www.lifeandliberty.gov/

5. Deborah Butterfield, Donald B. Kuspit, and Marcia Tucker, *Horses: The Art of Deborah Butterfield.* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1992).

6. Vicente Blasco Ibanez, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (Bethesda, Maryland: Indypublish.com, 2002).

PLATES

DOCUMENTS CAPTURED AS RECEIVED

PLATES

plate A

Commons Gallery, University of Hawaii at Manoa

END OF INNOCENCE

plate B

Famine

plate C

Death

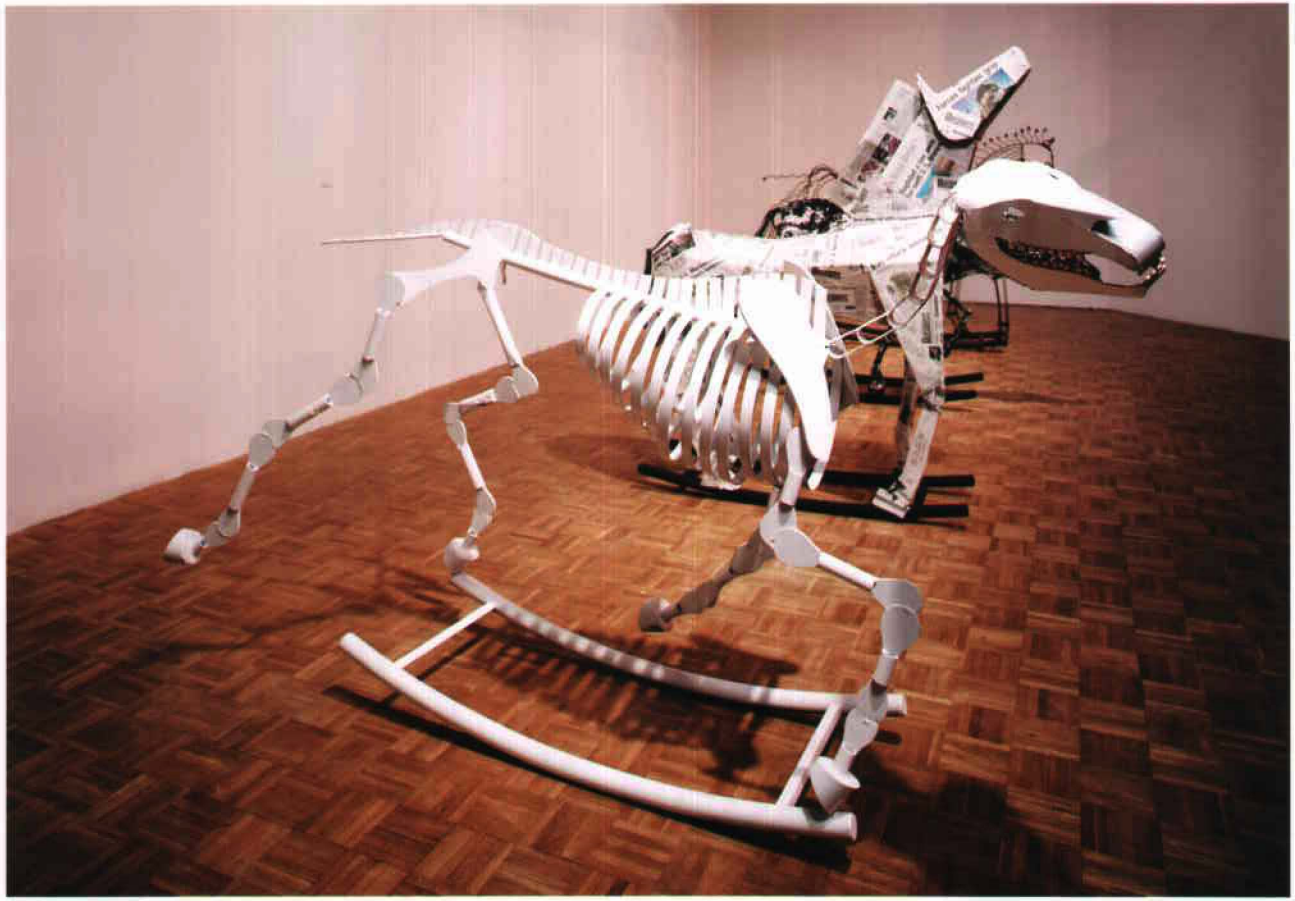


plate D

Death's Skull

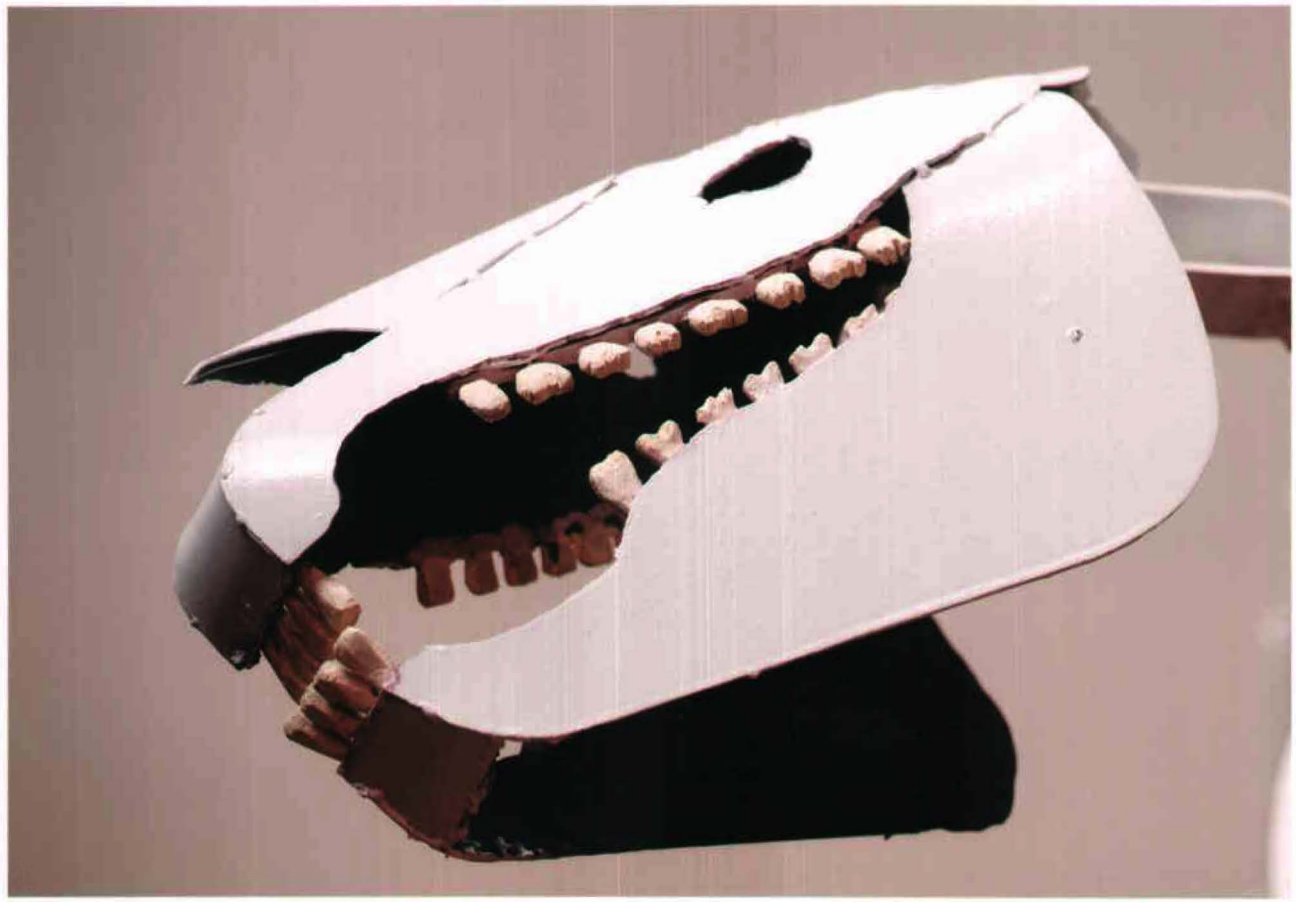


plate E

War

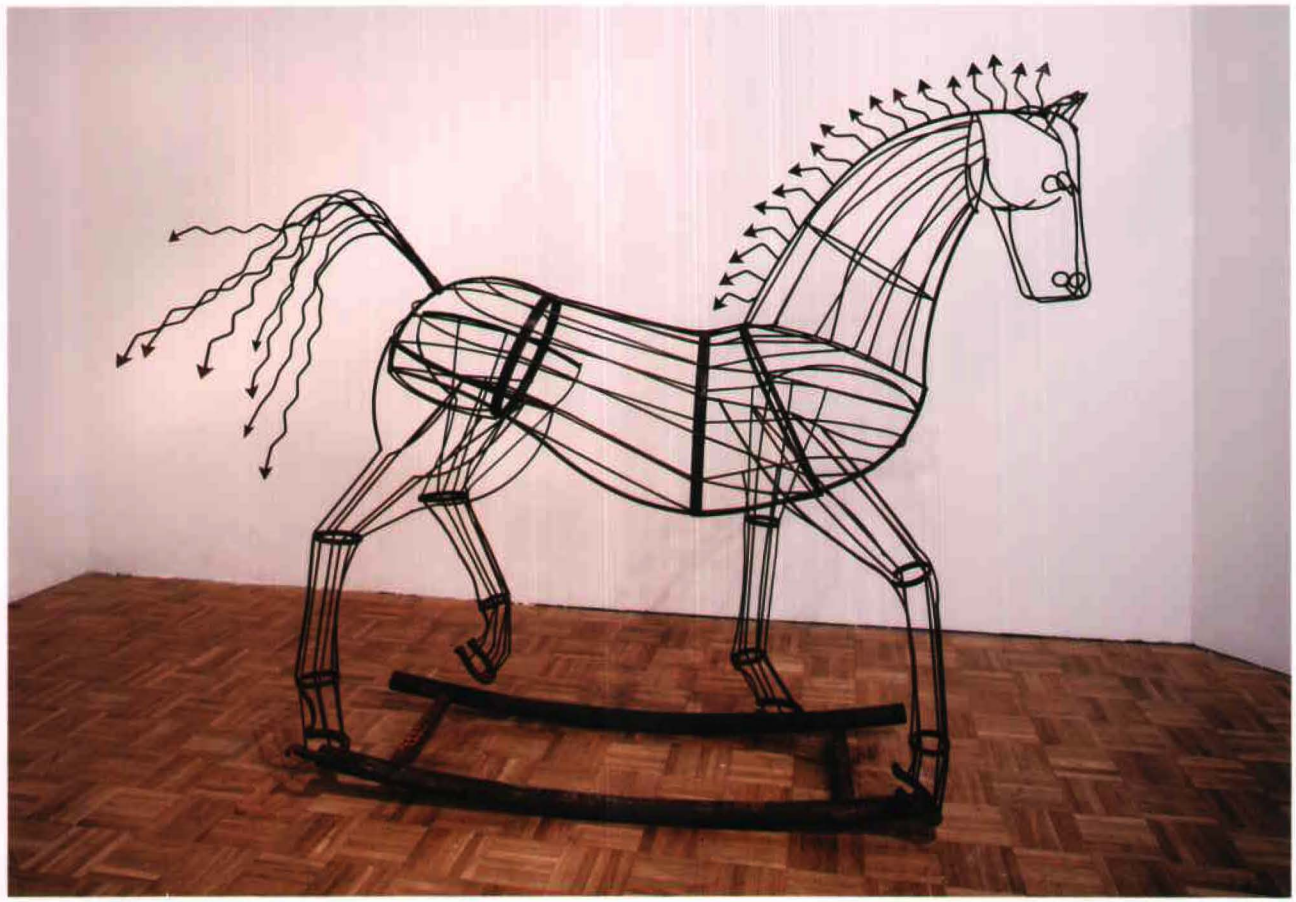


plate F

Conquest

Forces tighten grip
Business
Iraq attack intensifies

plate G

Conquest's Newsprint of the Iraq War, February 2003

Forces tighten grip
Business
Stock Watch
to 16 million
swift U.S. troops

plate H

Exhibition Signage

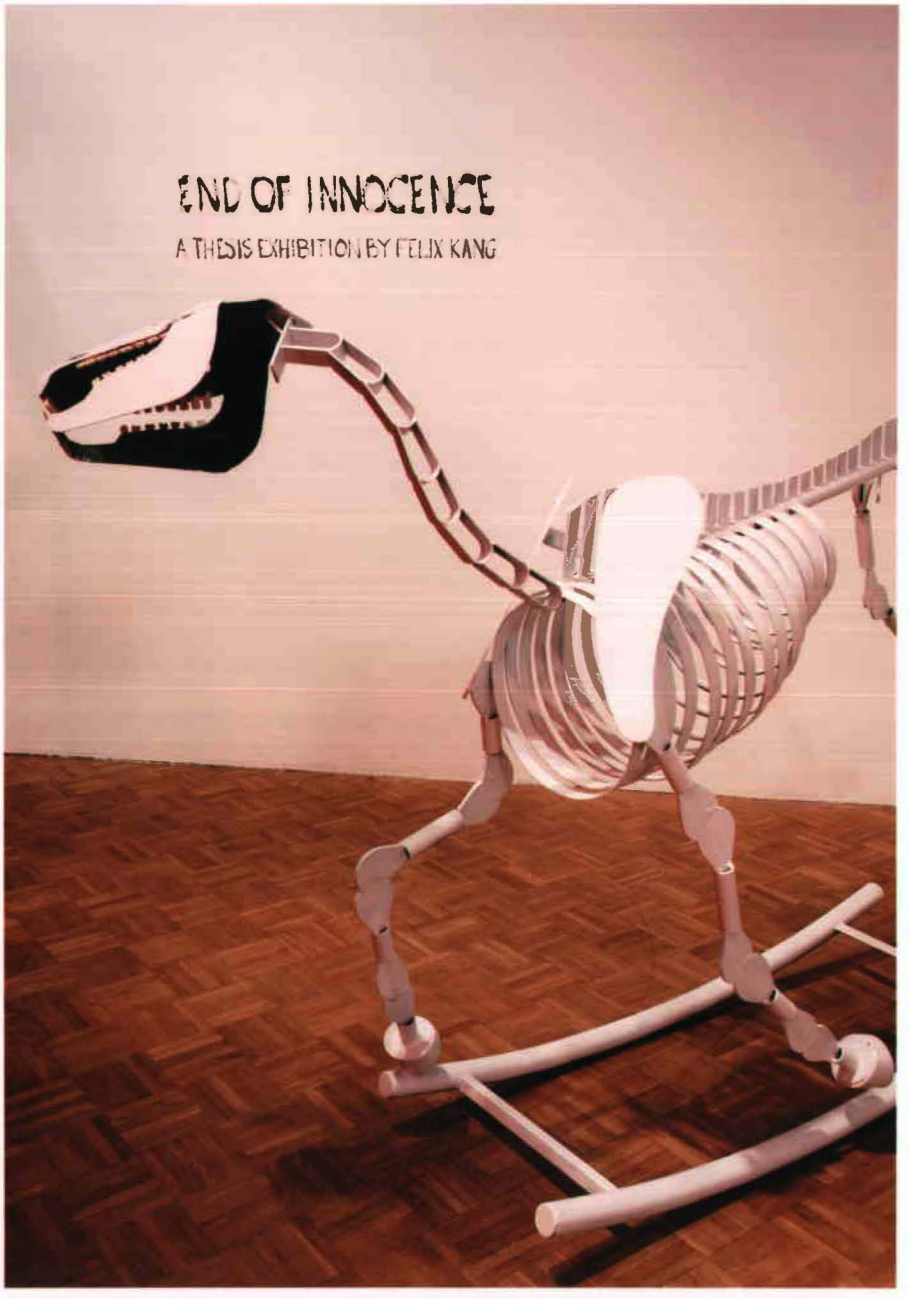
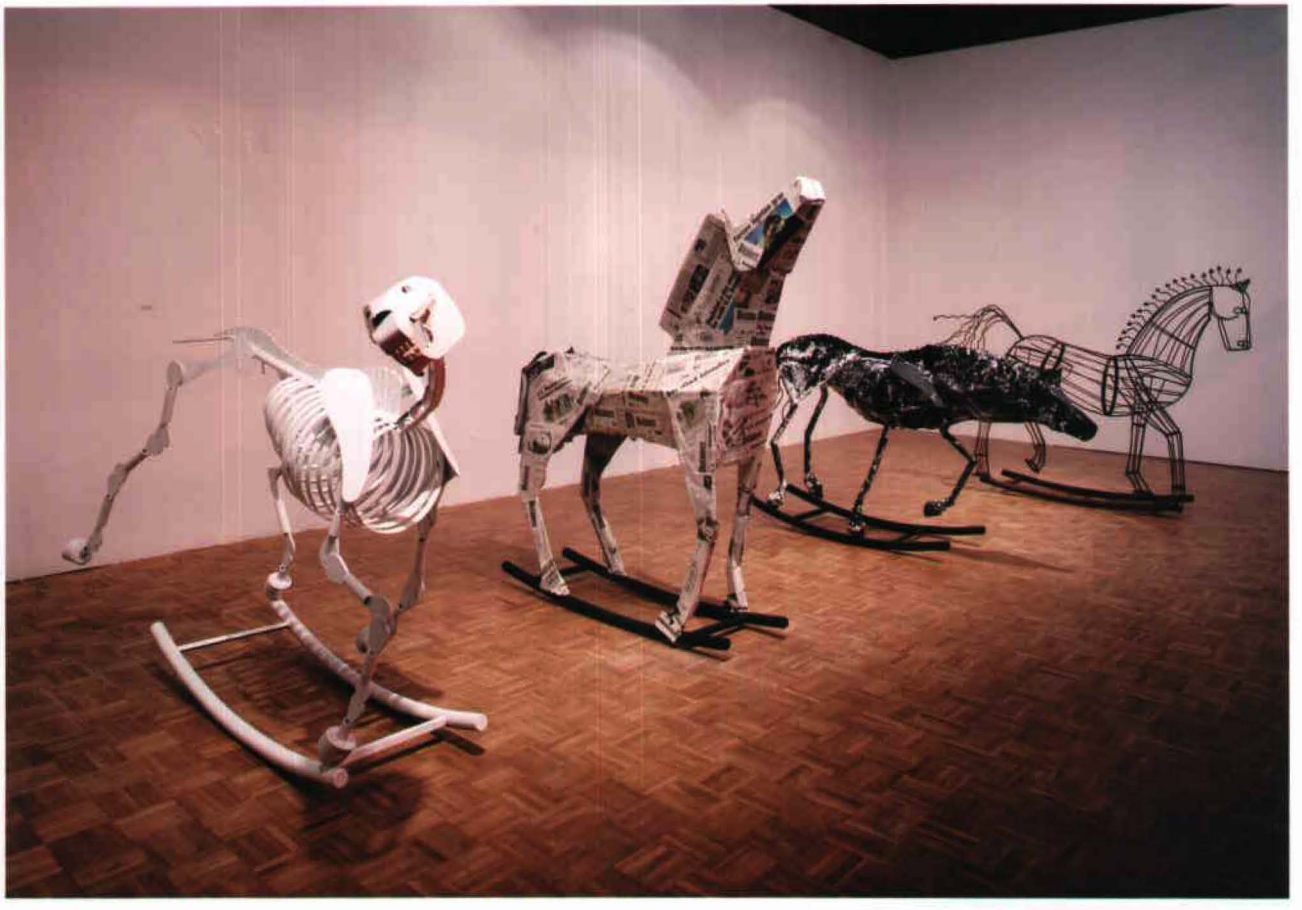

END OF INNOCENCE
A THESIS EXHIBITION BY FELIX KANG

plate I

End of Innocence: Overview

plate J

End of Innocence: Overview