

# **Friends from Isolation**

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A Thesis

presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School  
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree:

**Master of Fine Arts**

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School of the  
University of Missouri- Columbia, have examined the thesis enclosed,

entitled:

**Friends from Isolation**

presented by **Joshua Ryan Maier**,

a candidate for the degree of Master of Fine Arts,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Assistant Professor Joseph Pintz

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Professor Robert Bede Clarke

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Associate Professor Dr. Kristin Schwain

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This pursuit was a hard three years. The research conducted in the making was just as much an exploration of self; of personal limits, thresholds, as it was about the material or the concepts that fuel and support the artworks. In the winter of my second year, I lost a mother figure, my grandmother Darlene Maier; who even in near crippling debilitation and ailment always went out of her way to support me and my goals in any way that she could. She was steering me to look towards the hope of a brighter future I was seeking. I had always pictured myself imploding under the sheer strain of that sorrowful day, whenever it was to come. It came too soon. And it turns out that I am still here; still looking forward for something more; with Grandma still behind me. I had an enormous amount of support along the way; which I must take note of and offer my deepest and sincerest thanks to those below.

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I was attracted to the University of Missouri because every person I sought advice from said “Oh yeah, Bede Clarke is the guy to learn from if you want to teach.” The perception of him was that he was as old school as it gets – and I really wanted that as a source and a person to place my trust in the direction of my work and future. In a program described as “self-directed”, Bede is shockingly available. It could be any of a million technical questions one could ask; he puts you on the path to answers. He helped whenever needed; be it a ride around town to see to fixing a broken down car; or a warm note in the

heartbreaking days of loss. Bede is more than an instructor or professor, he's a mentor, and the best of sorts; much more than I had ever hoped for. Now, I can only hope to give a little pride in return and represent to the best of my ability in all the "real work" he insists that lie ahead.

## **Joseph Pintz**

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she gave it without condescension and with a voice of sound reason. Always available to help and assist in anyway needed. Always open to laughter; always willing provide the exact dosage necessary of cat stories. She is always apt at giving and receiving a fowl mouthed rant that lets you know that you are not alone! Best of all she is *relatively* accepting of the heaps of cocky, irritable, festering squall of highs and lows, and all around capital ridiculousness that comes with sharing a creative space with me. To my dear friend - I am beyond obliged.

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## **Family**

Graduate School is definitely a young man's endeavor. I entered into my studies here at thirty-four; hoping to position myself for a future of teaching my craft. This is an age where most educated men are already nestled into a career,

family, or some semblance of financial security; however I chose to roll the dice. I chose instability and to follow through on a dream I had been pursuing for close to a decade. My family – Ronald Bredemeier, Dee, Brian, Jordyn and Alora Robinson, Warren and Darlene Maier- never balked at supporting me in my goals, in any and every possible means. I must single out my father Ron Bredemeier; who has always been beyond supportive, and generous; always a saving grace when most would cut the metaphorical cord. I could not have even attempted any of this endeavor without his goodness.

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## ABSTRACT

*Friends from Isolation* is part science fiction tale, part exploration of form and surface through ceramic sculpture. The energy of each and the unity of the whole through strong individuality implies life and the wild possibility of the human imagination. This work's spirit is deeply rooted in my imagination as a storyteller and craftsman; unleashed to the world to tease the senses, to inspire and fuel the imagination of others.

Each *Friend* is alive in insectoid form; their dense and vibrant color palette, gestural and identifiable textures; and the puzzle of their meticulous and carefully crafted construction stir impulses of attraction and repulsion, wonder and whimsy, curiosity and adventure in the viewer. A variety of other materials such as paper, lace, fur, wire, steel, and polymer clays are present and easily identifiable; playing a role as a man-made grounding point in the puzzle of this visual adventure. The variety of materials present, the use of vibrant color and rich texture, the execution form and bold gesture masterfully balances unity and variety.

Each *Friend* has taken shape in my hands as a kind of character study; their form and surface completed in ways that instill each creature with a beautifully strange and mysterious individual identity. They are the companions of an interstellar traveler, the destroyer of Earth; hammered with regret and remorse, doomed to a self-imposed isolation; a seeker of redemption by the only means he can – the inspiration of new creation.

## PROLOGUE

My commitment to a creative life did not began in a fine art studio. I wanted to be a writer. I loved words and still do. I am continually fascinated by how words tumble out of us to be received, to shape humanity and every second of our lives, nearly involuntarily. It is the way artfully arranged alliteration architects adventure in just one sentence; always kept my hand to the page. I am sure that my obsessive nature that lives in me as an object maker started there.

EE Cummings taught me to question rules and then toss them right out the window. William S Burroughs gave me permission to shoot at them repeatedly on their way down because crossing lines is the best medicine for the times. Charles Simic showed me there is the subtlest magic in the whitest of lies. But in the end it just was not fast enough. The immediacy of *visual* art was of more appeal to me than trusting an audience to open a book and comprehend what was being attempted in the line on a page. The rapid response of the eye over the mind won out. I desired the immediate gratification that I found in the visual art, but the love of storytelling never left me; the desire to create characters to string along an alternate reality.

As a maker of objects, I have always approached my work like a writer would a story. I see a world, or just a room, or in the case of *Friends From Isolation* – a cold spacecraft, adrift among the stars. This catalyst takes shape in my mind and then, shapes everything born at my workbench. The story prods it along. Herein lies several key snippets, in short poetic, flash fiction form. They

accompany the sculptural work in a supporting role, presented in a digital projection at the forefront of the exhibition. They certainly set a set a specific tone and provide a backstory for both the work, and on my mentality as a maker.

## **AT THE BEGINNING, IT ALL ENDS**

### **#01. *ESCAPE***

Spaceship

Cockpit

Console

Keyboard

Clickity-Click

Sequence

Tick Tick

Tick Tick

Tick Tick

Tick Tick

Tick *Boom*

## **#02. PAYLOAD**

Letting go  
the good doctor  
makes the leap,  
to leave it all behind.

And once away  
above the Earth

lets go  
to leave us all

with

one

last

*innovation*

we so deserve.

**#05. THIS IS HOW THE BENDS BEGIN**

From a height where  
all he'd ever known  
spun as a blue spot  
of dying light,  
the doctor watched  
Earth implode.  
Oaths & ethics  
Ties & honor  
Loves & Loss  
all collapse  
to be swept away  
by tidal waves  
in one  
short, sharp, shock.

**#1094. AN ABYSS ABOVE, AN ABYSS WITHIN**

There is a kind of  
unknown silver lining  
out there.

And cold, she taps at the hull.

His reminder

There is no up  
anymore. anywhere  
has no end.

Out there, silence grows  
across empty space  
to resonate back  
in bright black  
solar waves.

Forever.

**#1010. WHEN REGRET COMES A' CLAWIN**

This thing will  
certainly not leave.

Not on your life.

Then... its  
somewhere else.

Within  
*Always* Within.

After all  
here, there  
is no escape.

And all devils will take  
any shape  
they goddamned please.



**#1006. AN ATOM SPLITS THE MOMENT OF RECOGNITION**

*I. Whimper & Scream.*

They sound like sisters  
enraged  
in a race, run reckless  
to catch that first fuck.  
A turn here  
a stair there  
They explode into a corridor  
where florescent light  
gobbles them both up  
indiscriminate  
leaving only their echoes.

*II. Consequence & Regret*

From the shadow  
take notes, meticulous.  
They let loose  
set after set  
to see if anything  
might change  
until the fluorescents -full  
flicker out.  
To let those last two  
run wild  
through the cosmos.

**#8001. SHADOW ON THE SUN**

The Good Doctor growls into the All Vessel-Intercom.

Speakers crackle, an LED blinks telling no one: TRANSMISSION

*"Its takes astoundingly little to destroy everything!!!"*

*"Just be yourself of course. Trust no one and nothing..."*

*"Use your manners and turn no heads."*

*"Use your brain and torch your notes!"*

*"Use the last WEAK spark of what was your soul..."*

*"...burn as you go."*

Darkness grins, licks its teeth in agreement.

No one hears the Good Doctor, caving in the cockpit.

**# 609,781. A PULSE / SO YOUNG**

There,

a pulse of

Gamma Rays of

Photons & protons is

The work of long days

around a quasar, so close.

You can see reality changing.

There, the 98-hour afternoons let

the quantifiably tired feel - so young.

Controlling a series of sub diffractions

of binary actions, into infinite reactions

until a lone protoplasm bubble breaks

in an emerald phosphorescent wave

up against the glass of a petri dish

labeled FRIEND.TEST. 1905-06.

There, a new life splashes

Exponential and slick

down the front of

his old Mylar

lab jacket.

**Eureka.**

## CHAPTER 1 | AN INTRODUCTION

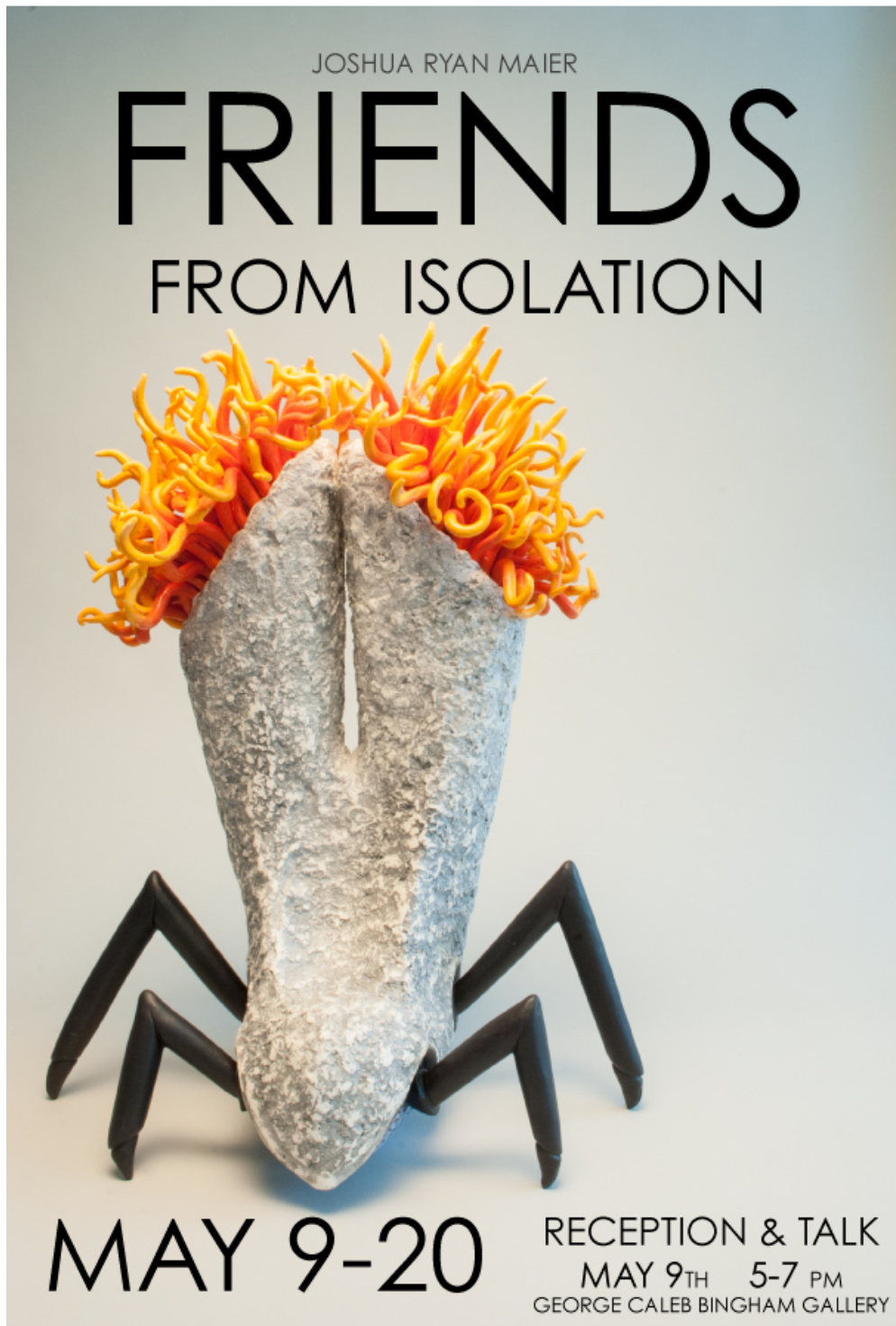


Figure 1-1. Promotional poster for the exhibition. Poster displays the rear view of one of the *Friends* presented in the show.

If the work that I make is about anything, it is about the mysterious, shimmering, interstellar idea of a future origin. The collision of a thought, with an emotion. The inevitable spark between an action and a reaction, and the infinite tidal waves that ripple out in response. I cannot form a single thought on the origin of my work, my goals, or my desires as an artist without recognizing the powerful memory of my own origin. Growing up, I was surrounded by the earthy farm land of the American Midwest. To occupy my time and my mind, I was entrusted to the magic box of our console television. The Muppets and the many other characters of Jim Henson's imagination fed my own.

When I got old enough to read, I wore the pages of Maurice Sendak's Where the Wild Things Are practically down to pulp. Sendak's story of a boy king and his monster subjects in the wild rumpus of his dreams was responsible for that first surrealist spark within me. On Sundays, my Dad and I would look over the funny pages. There, I could always find Calvin & Hobbes; a lonely yet wildly imaginative boy and his stuffed tiger who would escape reality and travel the galaxies as his adventurer alter ego, Spaceman Spiff.

Music filled the spaces in between. David Bowie's energy and space-age oddity, and Pink Floyd's grand cinema of the psychedelic colored my airwaves. I may not have had refined culture or beautiful objects around me; but the wild possibility of imagination, of other worlds, of raw creativity that told stories were the seeds sown for my future as a maker.

I see those early influences underpinning all of my creative endeavors of now. Of course, with age my aesthetic has been shaped through more and more

exposure to the Arts; through the learning of histories, and the experience of living. As I matured, my tastes grew to gobble up painter and sculptor HR Giger, modern Pop Surrealist Mark Ryden, and film maker Ridley Scott; as well as writers like HG Wells, Douglas Adams, and Clive Barker. Each and every one has provided me with permission to create the works of other worlds, as a means to, and for no other reason than to escape this one. And now with creative drive and an abundance of skill I work to take you the viewer with me to those other worlds.

The only truth that I am sure of is that as an artist, deep within, I am two different kinds of creative beings. The first is a craftsman, both spellbound and sustained by the wonder of his materials and the great puzzle of process and production in the hands. The second is a story teller; one that wakes to weave tales to blanket the world in wonder; an explorer of the wilds of imagination.

My inspiration lies in the magic and the sense of limitless possibility found in the dream theater of the imagination. When engaged in my materials, what takes shape wriggles out of the dream world, where a strange and sensual beauty growls from the shadows. I create work that comes from such a place, and looks like it. In that dark place, the yarns of the storyteller unfold, and the craftsman takes to the task of making his shapes. When bound together in creation, what hatches out are my own fictions in the third dimension.

This thesis exhibition *Friends from Isolation* has developed in two veins. The first is that of an origin story, one that has always been unfolding and transforming day to day in my mind, in the studio; influenced by memory, by

strain, by the exploration and discovery that happens in a maker with their materials; working in the methods that I do. On the page, these short poetic prose, playful in language, dark and dangerous in tone, illusive in implication, act as a kind of accompaniment; having set the tone and inspired these *Friends* that will emerge from the shadows of the gallery; to claw through the imagination – the wilderness within.

These *Friends* represent the creations of a flawed anti-hero; a man burdened by the madness of guilt and remorse, and the search for unattainable redemption. These are the spectacles of the evolution of a man-made companion, at the end of humanity, at the edges of the universe.

Crafting these companions has relied on ideas of variety; in form, texture, and color. After all, the wonder of life on this planet resides in the amazing variety abundant across every expanse, in every crack and crevasse, on every arid plane, and every rain filled puddle.

I have created each *Friend* as unique, singular individuals with a goal that each might exist with its own identity. I have used a variety of materials, sizes and shapes, textures and finishes to create layers of juxtapositions to tease the senses and curiosity. My genuine hope is that with this variety shaping individuality in each work, the body of works as a whole might come alive as curious, vibrant, and tactile characters to be explored. Their forms invoking sensations of attraction and repulsion, of curiosity and caution. They are meant to provide escape, to entertain, to open a hatch to the wonders of imagination

and the puzzle of *elsewhere*. This is always done for both myself as the maker and the viewers that receives them.

Equal parts push and puzzlery, these works are my own means of a deep space fiction. Flashy and bold, they are in many ways all that I can never be but can only push to achieve through making in ways many others would not, or could not imagine. Their construction is part of the puzzle that keeps the craftsman in me making, rising to the challenge. I certainly have more ingenuity than brains, and I have patience in spades. I have always been prepared and willing (begrudgingly) to fail far more than I succeed because I want my work – which will outlast me by a century- to be anything but commonplace. After all, the exotic and alien is never simple, nor boring, and certainly never commonplace.

I am using the work of my hands, these sculpted alien beings, elaborate and tactile, appealing and dangerous, to make an artistic union with the words within that have hatched from the same egg. It is the only way I can feed both parts of my artistry; the storyteller and the craftsman. It is a *union*. Both do their parts, play their roles in the tale that is always present and churning in my mind. The heart and the hands of a craftsman, steered by the mind and the motive of a story teller.

While it has never been easy nor simple creating like this, my desire to tell a story in my own way, to create a path of escape, and to entertain is something that sustains me as both an artist, and an individual. The story and the creatures alike are made to imply a rich life, exotic, and unknown; alien and untold. In their

making and in their release to the world; the enigma becomes both mine and yours, as the story unfolds.



## CHAPTER 2 | A Wilderness Within...

“The role of the artist is to always deepen the mystery” – Francis Bacon



Figure 2-1. *Mac Search Engine*. Stoneware, acrylics, wire. 17 x 12 x 14 ". 2016.

## Imagine

Imagination turns the world. It is really the only thing that divides us from the rest of the animal kingdom. The presence of *soul* is not a definitive fact. If anything, the human concept of soul proves how both wonderful and wild the human imagination truly is. To imagine that our intellect and self-awareness makes us so different from a cheetah able to achieve speeds of up to seventy miles per hour; or a chameleon able to change color involuntarily to blend in with its surroundings; or lightening bugs and deep sea invertebrates able to emit light from within their bodies. Intellect is just another brushstroke in the Earth's wondrous vein of extraordinary biological variety.

What separates us from them is not our brain power but our ability to dream, and to give those dreams physical shape for no other reason than the sense of satisfaction that the action and the end result provides for us. The imagination and our response to it provides us no biological stability, nor any heightened advantage in survival and natural selection. In all likelihood, it is a defect, residual of intellect. Strangely the spark dwindles in so many, as age and circumstance sadly smoothers our reason and logic down into quiet, tame, conformity. But for others it lives on, and fiercely. The ability and fortitude to make their dreams real, a matter of sustenance required from within, in order to flourish and prosper.

In the past, as an artist with an obsessive-compulsive streak, my practice included a great deal of time in drawing and planning. The order of operation in each work was meticulously planned and neatly crossed off my mental list.

However, I have found that in my time here, once committed to the idea and concept of these creatures, my work has begun to take shape with a sense of urgent spontaneity. Now planning is no more than the crudest sketch. Any drawing that might precede the work is typically just a series of marks that indicate the orientation of space, the gesture of a form, the shape of parts, or thoughts on how it might be held together.

I find that while I am building I am thinking of the form in a particular way; only to give it a turn to more easily work at a different vantage point and find that such a simple change opens up new doors of thought and inspiration as to how the final form takes shape. The catalyst could very well be a note or tone in a song I am listening to, a conversation had with someone in the studio, or an interest gleaned from a resource image for a completely different work or project. The science fiction tale churning in mind does not dictate the shape or their function, only lay the path on which they form. It's a practice of freedom and wildness in making that sketching and over planning often hinders by setting limits and shutting doors.

The art that I make is an attempt to continue to break my personal bonds and to create the kind of art that I like and moves me. The art that inspires me; the visual, literary, or performing arts has always been those works seeded and grown from pure imagination. Unbridled. Unleashed. The works of surrealism, pop surrealism and magical realism, all hold the most truth for me because they all have a foundation on an idea that the hand and imagination can together create the language of dreams.

For me, the imagination is much like a faith - it is something to believe in. In thinking of my work, myself as an artist and craftsman, and my role in the world as such, imagination is and always will be both the beginning and the end. Staying immersed in the imaginary is a return the headspace of children. Where nothing depends on worldly judgment, only how thick the pudding is from the elephant's trunk as it paints the world in chocolate. Where sadness and strain are a pair of turnips, worn by fat happy wombats, in top hats. Where all adulthood fades when the tune that's hummed changes, and the hand begins to color outside the lines.

The healthiest imagination is completely independent of rationale and exponentially bolstered by the beauty of the *illogical*. Imagination is the ever transforming wilderness within us all. A lawless land of wondrous, limitless possibility. The land of absolute escape. There I will always stake my claim, until I can make no more.

## **ESCAPE**

All creation, truly starts in the hands. The handmade is a curious thing. It is a communion between the intangible, ethereal images of the mind, aligned with the muscle memory of the hand. With clay it is absolute. The physical connection of the clay to the maker's hand is the truest communication possible between a maker and a material. All progress depends on the simplicity of touching.

This communion, the process, hitting each step in the order of operation to watch the intangible take shape at the fingers – is my own private escape hatch out of the chaos and the uncontrollable issues of the day to day, into a realm all of my own, under my control. The quality of life found in making is paramount. The work is freeing - the essence of escape.

All I am looking for; all I can see as a maker is the escape. It is all that I am interested in communicating, or offering the world. I have never been naïve enough to think that my work would bring me notoriety. I never wanted to make a statement, nor use the things I create as a commentary on society or the times. Social media now rules that realm and I don't care much for it. Perhaps my desire and drive to make the work I do, in the way that I do, with the goals I have is a subtle commentary in itself; about the person I am, the type of artist that I strive to be, and my view on the society that will receive it.

The work that I make is all the voice that I need to say what I stand for and what I find important in this life. Precision. Attention to detail. The unleashed imagination. These are indeed the key for my escape; in both viewing the art of others and in my own handiwork. Over the course of these three years of focus and study, I have learned as much about myself as I have about the materials I use in my practice. I see art as entertainment, plain and simple. Entertainment is the base definition of escapism.

Escapism is very much a new religion of the world. Its temple the movie theater, the gaming console, and the web that shrouds the world that is the internet. Each a billion-dollar industry growing on the premise that the world

demands a way *out*. With the advent of the smart phone, the world has made its demands for each of those industries to be readily accessible at the fingertips.

The world wants to conveniently slip away every second that it can.

The transforming experience of art is found in the questions that the very object or the image presented provide or even instill in the viewer; the *what*, and the *why*, and the *how*. The viewer is a kind of seeker, looking for the moment of escape into wonder, into fascination, into inspiration that just is not happening enough in their day-to-day lives. They find that in the Arts. That is the simple way that I see my own role as a maker, and what I want the work to be. Just a ticket to ride. I make work to take the viewer away; to find themselves pondering an object right in front of them that acts as a trap door into a realm unlike their own. Anywhere but here. Born of pure imagination. Made for escape.

## **ATTRACTION & REPULSION**

I remember the first time that I saw Ridley Scott's movie *Alien*. I was pretty young. It scared the hell out of me. I was in love. There could not have been a more appealing, mystifying, wondrous thing as that slick, snarling, acid spitting, killing machine *being* that leapt out of the cold, dark space. All that infinite cosmic possibility, corrupted by adrenaline and mortal threat. I am sure I was too young to see it, too young to have been exposed to the bloody violence, or the graphic language; and certainly old enough to know the trouble I would be in for helping myself to the delight.

At the time I knew little about art, or that an artist (H.R. Giger) had designed such a thing. But it certainly added something to the appeal of the strangeness I had recognized in Henson and Bowie and Waterson. This experience and the world it opened in my mind may have, more than the others, impregnated a kind of foundational concept in how I form my works and my ideas about artistry. Repulsion is a potent sensation. Fear, threat, morbidity can be every bit as appealing to the imagination as safety, comfort, purity. It's the opposite side of the same coin.

This idea is plainly seen in the earliest paintings by those artists the world upholds as Masters. Depictions of the bloody torture of the innocent Christ; the truly inspiring and purely imaginary images (taken from no source material) chronicling the settings of Hell and damnation by Hieronymus Bosch, Dore, or Blake; or the dismemberment and cannibalization of children by Francesco Goya. The paintings of Alex Grey would not be nearly as engaging or impressive with the figures cloaked in their skins. *Body Worlds* by Gunther Von Hagens would be nothing but boring human diorama.

While I certainly approach my compositions without the blood and violence of the standard setters before me, the means and the end are a similar line of thought. The basis of my forms are steeped in the identifiable imagery of insect life most people are happy to swat at, step on, or pay a fortune to exterminate; like the cockroach, the termite, the mosquito that are associated with invasive threat danger or discomfort. I know grown adults with paralytic fears of spiders small enough to fit on a pencil eraser.

While repulsion is a response I aim to strike with the work, a balance must be achieved with attraction. Repulsion alone often implies ugliness or disgust. Why would anyone hope for a purely negative reaction to their work? Success lies in the aesthetics of the work; its appeal, its calling of the senses. Art scholars through the ages have insisted that a number of Principals & Elements dictate aesthetic strength in artistic works. As much as I like to buck authority, a number of these I find to be undeniable. I imagine the involuntary reliance on them is part of the process of becoming a professional artist; that these Elements and Principals of Art and Design become ingrained, almost second nature; where you do not think about their application, they are just attached to muscle memory. Their absence just as uncomfortable to the senses as a watch on the wrong wrist, a shoe on the wrong foot.

When I construct work, I aim to strike a chord with *balance* through symmetry; and variety through texture and color and shape. I also have a faith that the method of construction presented, and the rarity of my methods in the field of ceramics adds to the appeal of the work.



## CHAPTER 3 | VARIETY OF LIFE

I shape each of my *Friends* as unique singular individuals to give an identity to each piece. Each is born out of the same womb as a curious, vibrant, and tactile form for the audience to explore, similar in origins but strikingly different from the next. Their viewing is a visual adventure that comes alive in the viewer's imagination; sexy and threatening, alive with vibrant color and texture, juxtapositions in the feel and finish of the flesh; implying possibilities, inviting the viewer closer. Their curiosity is enticed by the sheer volume of visual variety my methods allow in the work.

The basis for decisions that I make to achieve those two all begin and end with an eye on variety. The wonder of life starts with the variety it holds, and so carries over into the deep space fiction from which this body of work comes.

### ASSEMBLY



Figure 3-1. *Memnoch*. Body Parts /in progress Detail #1

Mine is the art of parts. I make my creatures through meticulous measurements. I do so because possibilities in their design often changes, transforms as features and my understanding of its path develops. They evolve. The body of the sculpture, its legs, the textural embellishments are all created separate from one another; as isolated singular objects. Each form takes shape as seemingly unrelated, possibly interchangeable parts; always existing in disconnected piles of shapes and colors and textures. Then swiftly there is a being, gestural and ominous, full of possibility and curiosity.



Figure 3-2. *Memnoch* Parts Detail #2.

This method holds its own curiosity; one that I cannot pinpoint a source of inspiration. Its origin in my work comes from my past work and practice as a glassblower. Even then, I was not looking *at* anyone's work or practice to emulate. It developed out of necessity and ingenuity. Creating with hot glass leaves little opportunity for reflection, or any changes; ambitiousness in form or process

requires an immense amount of choreography, communication, and trust in the skills of others as assistants. I am not built for dependency. I am in all respects a fussy maker with borderline obsessive needs for exactitudes and precision.

The nature of this beast forced me to experiment in ways of making exactly what I wanted; completed in stages; without the need for anyone else's hands, skill, or attention. I began developing a practice of assembling works from compiled parts; that could be mixed and matched; cut and fit for careful construction using epoxy. All of those possibilities are exponential when applied to the cool, relaxed means of creating with clay. The versatility and freedom to change the direction of the work, the scale, the color arrangements opened new doors to creative possibilities. The process, honed by using the far more forgiving and versatile material of clay has allowed me to tackle scale and dramatic juxtaposition in surface and forms. Creating this way allows me to make



Figure 3-3 *Memnoch*. Earthenware, glaze, feathers, steel, acrylics. 36 x28 x 18 ". 2015

And evaluate; thus allowing more possibilities for change and transformation in the work as it comes together. Building a strong understanding



and practice of fabricating parts for later assembly has allowed me to break out of the mindset of using only ceramic materials. By designing the works construction, based on parts – I can make parts out of a variety of materials, with a limitless possibility of texture and color.

## TEXTURE



Figure 3-4 *Memnet*. Earthenware, handmade paper, copper wire. 12x 24 x10". 2015.

Reality is found in the fingers. To touch a thing is to tell it is as real as it gets. So much security is found in the human hand; to confirm a fear or a suspicion, to explore a curiosity, to experience comfort – to *know*. I love to see viewers approaching my work, leading with their hands. It is almost an

involuntary impulse; an inquisitive communication between the curiosity of their own imagination making a request for more information from their fingers; about the strange thing before them.

Ceramic materials have an extraordinary range of tactile possibilities. However, as I construct these works with my focus almost entirely on the principal of variety; using the methods of parts fabrication and assembly; I have allowed myself to step outside of the puritanical approach to using clay. Variety is contingent on juxtaposition, contrast and differences. In a number of the works in the exhibition, I have employed parts made of other materials; feathers, handmade paper, faux fur, beads, copper wire, and/or lace to achieve both physical and visual textures. I use these separate parts of very different tactile materials to break up visual areas and organization; this allows me to amplify the differences between materials. For example, the delicate pleats of handmade paper, the trembling tendril-like appearance of long strands of thin wire, and the ridged ceramic components of the body segments are unified in a curiously identifiable caterpillar form as in *Memnet* in figure 3-3.

By taking cues from forms found in nature; and employing a variety of tactile materials, easily identified by all, I am able to imply a strange surrealism of the creature; further establishing a sense of curiosity and imaginary possibility in the form. Whether it is done with modeled ceramic materials alone, or with addition mixed media parts, the end result is the same. That application of texture is used to imply the feel of a creature simply through the look of thing, through recognizable visual cues. I believe the curiosity present in the work

hinges on the tactile variety in each; it goes hand in hand with contrast and juxtaposition of the multiple textures carefully presented together, in unison, with the color and overall forms. Each create an illusion of life, of these facets I undertake feverishly in my use of multiple parts of the curious and weird; sheer intrigue at the possibilities alive in the work, formed in the mind of the viewer.

## COLOR



Figure 3-5: *Matilde* (detail). Earthenware, wire, lace polymer clay. 10 x 10 x 10 inches. 2015.

The spirit of the *Friends* lives on their surface. While I am drawn to the tactile, versatile life of clay; I depend on color and finish to play a role in the *Friend's* appearance, play a role in the implication of life in these imaginary forms. Color has an amazing power to set tone and a visual 'feel' for all objects. The human mind makes free associations of color. Even animals connect and respond; it's why our world of creatures looks the way they do; they all either

attract, conceal, or repel. I am fascinated by the wild surfaces of the animal kingdom. I seek out and reference a lot of patterns and color arrangements found

in nature; jungle insects, venomous snakes, reef dwelling invertebrates, and salt water fish. I am never trying to copy, but use them as a basis to help me understand how evolution has ordered the appearance life. I can only use this perception as a means to establish the rhyme and the reason possible in the origin and evolution in the imaginary space of my story.

When finishing these *Friends*, I like to place large areas of opaque colors, rich of texture, up against areas of contrasting colors, texture, and/ or finishes. Smooth and polished areas break against course textures. Shallow, incised, lines ride up against vibrant organic patterns.

I came into this creative endeavor as a purist; set on making ceramic works with all traditional ceramic surfaces. I used commercially available underglazes for its similarity to the vibrancy and mixing capabilities of paint. I tried traditional glazes and colored terra sigillatas (ultra-fine slip) to achieve the sheen that I am always looking for. I could not find what I was after, and then somehow I lost of my puritan goals along the way. Deep down, I really wanted these traditional means of coloration and surface treatment on my clay works to be as consistent and as vibrant as paint; without using paint. It was an uphill battle. After three years, I have realized a large amount of excellent and capable historical and contemporary ceramicist have utilized paint; making paint just as traditional a material in ceramic sculpture as glaze. Now I feel free to employ vibrant colored slips or underglazes, only where a base tone is needed. After the firing process, I use the versatile, broad color spectrum of acrylics available; in either opaque or transparent; finishes applied through an airbrush, in layers, to

create pattern and imagery; further moving the work into realms of the fantastic and the imaginary fictions of my creativity.

In making *Mother Minx* (figure 3-6) I was very intrigued by the idea of losing the endless big blue Kansas skyline I so loved from my childhood. I spent a lot of time thinking how no matter where an Earthling might find themselves, that big blue sky is always above, it was only everything else that changed. However, in the story moving just behind the sculpted works, my scientist has destroyed the Earth, and with it that consistent theater of the sky. I can imagine that beautiful, blue expanse would surface like light in the memory of someone; out there, never able to be seen again. So *Mother Minx* is cloaked in a bold pattern; much like that of a venomous snake. Her pattern's shape is a number of diamond points and acute angles, in cool colors that run down her tail in a deep blue gradient behind thick lumbering clouds.



Figure 3-6 *Mother Minx*. 36 x 42 x 30".  
Earthenware, steel, acrylic. 2016.

These painterly areas are ultra-smooth in texture, allowing the clouds to roll across her flesh uninterrupted. I framed these diamond back pattern, all points and sharp edges, with jet black blistery round scales, deeply incised, closely packed, and highlights of hot vibrant color.

The juxtaposition that happens between the almost scenic patterns and the black expanse surrounding these areas



create a jagged run of portal like frames showing the long lost rarity of the Earth's sky. This is what I imagined my isolated, regret filled, mad scientist character missing, regretting, imprinting on new creations. *Mother Minx* embodies the sensation of longing what I imagine a lone, doomed human would regret.

*Mother Minx's* form is overtly sexual; as sex would certainly be something the lone human in the universe would be missing. It was only appropriate that her skin speak a similar language, telling another tale of something what might be longed for; her flesh appearing wet and soft to the touch.

To imply a living form, appealing and repulsive at once, I use both acrylic medium and glaze to achieve a soft damp look on each of the works. I do this in juxtaposition to a dry matte finish next to, under, or protruding out of a slick wet semi-gloss. I use a number of materials to handle this task. I achieve glossy, satin, or matte by mixing the overall finishing techniques, in different parts that make up their whole. A number of matt glazes (primarily black) are used for hard rigid surface implications; such as spindly spider, legs, antenna, and claws. Areas that I wish to have a wet gooey look, like damp flesh, are achieved with layers of an extremely versatile, poly-acrylic blend applied in multiple coats.

All of these juxtapositions in color, texture, and finish are made possible by my practice of post-fired, parts assembly. Each area of color and texture are designed and applied, separate from the whole. This process, in both the construction and on the surface provides me many possibilities to build up an array of differences in all areas of the work; to build variety, to allow transformation of ideas and in many ways rail against the permanence of clay.

Areas can be glazed and fired and assembled, if found unsatisfactory they can be re-glazed, re-fired, painted or even remade. The staged assembly in regards to color applications allows for areas to be handled differently; masked of and painted, patterned, sealed – everything is capable of being addressed separately.

My process does extend production time; requiring everything to be done in stages; to exist in incomprehensible piles. However, this is the way that I ensure the possibility of change and alteration, continued and forced transformation until my imagination is satisfied that my work will have all that I have set out to achieve - an implication of an alien life. They are energetic and wild in their opaque vibrant colors and patterns, their rich textures, and their-flesh like finishes that give my work the attractive though apprehensive presence that implies to an audience that each colorful *Friend* could leap right off the pedestal and click-clack scamper off into the shadows at will. In that, an audience can find the tease of imaginary possibilities, feats, and responses that they experience within themselves; experiencing a handcrafted form, labored over, created meticulously unlike little they have encountered; in this dimension shaping a narrative to puzzle; opening doors for a curious momentary escape.

## CHAPTER 4 | EXHIBITION & IMAGES



Figure 4-1 Exhibition Image from the installation of *Friends From Isolation*. Hosted by George Caleb Bingham Gallery, Fine Arts Building. University of Missouri – Columbia. May 9<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> 2016.

Even in its earliest development, deep in my mind, the exhibition was to be an exploration of space. The venue of the show did not matter too much to me, only the ability to have control over the environment cast by light and shadow. I could see the viewers moving about in the dark, encountering little pools of light. Each *Friend* to be cast as lonely lit island in a sea of shadow. Each creature exposed as a deep space icon, bold and flashy, mysterious, like a doomed tragic rock star; presenting all who encounter them with other worldly possibilities made sacred by the lime light and shadows. Each work was designed and constructed even with the intent of being presented in a dark

space, hit dramatically by spot lights, centered directly above. The intention influenced a great deal of decisions in regards to the colors and the textures applied; knowing how that shadow play would set the tone for viewers in relation to the story and mood that I wanted to establish. My only regret is that I could not afford to take the measures to eliminate the ambient light surrounding each work, altogether. Darkness is the womb of apprehension.

The largest wall, the crown of the gallery space was left in relative darkness, void of sculpture and distractions. It was here that I projected a continuous loop of the prose chronicling the story and mindset of the antihero and conceptual creator of the sculptures. This was a successful effort to highlight that storyteller with me; his contribution to the development of the works. The prose works were presented in a digital projection of white text on black cosmic backgrounds. I had earlier explored a number of ways to achieve the integration of the writing. I find it so important; to my past, and my practice; to the very life of the sculptural works, their imagined existence, the arc of their story. The digital projections, framed by cosmic images were a stroke of perfection. They created a cinematic, technological touch to an environment telling a science fiction tale. The prose to center stage, and capped the adventure present out in the gallery space before it.

The gallery space was organized and controlled in as similar a way as the meticulous construction of each work. For each of the twelve works I installed, eleven were on pedestals exactly three feet tall, with their other dimensions designed and constructed for each works specifically. *Mother Minx* (Figure 3-6)

was designed to protrude from the pedestal, chasing loose eggs down the front, while *Marvel* (figure 4-2) was designed as a wall hanging piece.

Twelve was the perfect number. I had about 18 works to choose from; however, in the end, the richest in texture, the most vibrant in color, and those I felt to be the most visually engaging found a place in the exhibition. The sculptures presented, fortuitously represented works spanning each year of my projects development. Two works from year one; three works from year two; and seven from my third and final year. Each is so very different from the next. In the clean and quiet space of the gallery, surrounded by hazy dim shadow; hit by the drama of the spot lights; isolated from one another by nearly ten feet of open space, the spirit of the story of isolation was captured. The light and spacing gave each work center stage to be explored, instilling a sense of the loneliness of the fictional maker and the theme of isolation into the rich and curious identities of each of my strange creations. Each has come alive in the light as a visual adventure into the imaginary world I have worked so hard these past three years to create.

## SELECT EXHIBITION IMAGES



Figure 4-2 *Magdalena*. Stoneware, feathers, wire, polymer clay, glaze.  
26 x 15 x 12 inches. 2014.





Figure 4-3 *Marvel*. Earthenware, acrylic, polymer clay, wire. 50 x 24 x 10 inches. 2016.



Figure 4-4 *Mayhem*. Earthenware, acrylics. 20 x 24 x 16" 2016.





Figure 4-5 *Sister Midnight*. Earthenware, glaze, acrylics, wire. 18 x 32 x 14 inches. 2016.

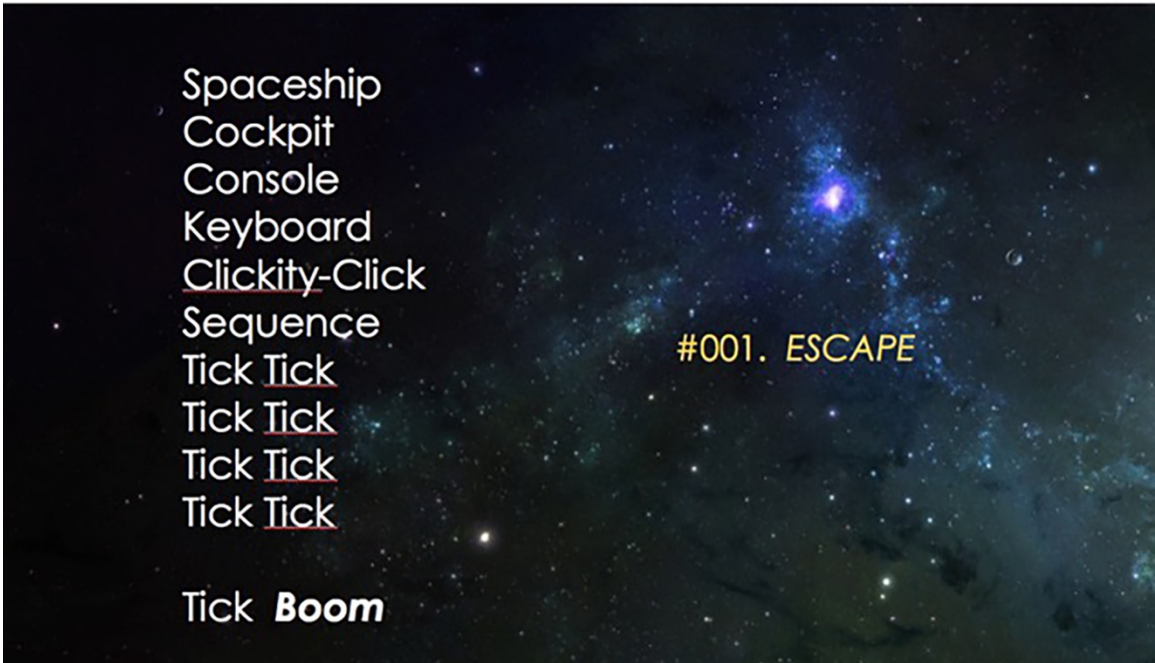


Figure 4-6 Digital projection image of prose on north wall of George Caleb Bingham Gallery.

## Conclusion

The imagination and the escape that it provides is the pulse of my work. In all of my works; whether it is the words written or the work made in the hands; I find a much needed escape hatch into other worlds. The fulfillment in seeing the faces of viewers explore the forms before them is energizing and a source of motivation to continue in the style and medium that I work; to make more; to push the envelope in how I make, and how I embrace and push the puzzle of it all.

These past three years of creating this story and the characters from it has been every bit of the challenge that I sought in coming to graduate school. It has been almost an equal exploration of my own will, my threshold for strain and my ability to adapt and evolve as a maker with an idea. In many ways as a maker and artist, I have been forged under fire through the experience; and very much by own hand, always digging in to meet personal expectations and attempt in every task to meet those of mentors, and set high standards for my peers as well as my students. At least that was always my commitment and goal.

I believe that in the exhibition and the works produced that goal certainly shines through. The works are all individual. They all scratch claw and chirp the language of science fiction. They each command attention, create sensations of attraction and repulsion, and wild imaginary possibility. As individual works, the way they will unavoidably have to exist outside of the gallery setting, in the environment of the patron and buyer; they each hold a kind of subtle beauty and strength all their own. And insure that path to imagination and escape stays open for ages to come. That is all I could ever hope for from such friends.