

Extant Fragments

By

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Edward P. McKenna

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Chairperson Tanya Hartman

Norman Akers

David Brackett

John Pultz

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The Thesis Committee for Edward P. McKenna
certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

Extant Fragments

Chairperson Tanya Hartman

Date approved: May 11, 2016

Abstract

Extant Fragments explores the social context of the artist's studio space and the importance of developing an art making process that is personal. The studio becomes a metaphor for the confines of daily life and the art making process a metaphor for ritualistic and behavioral patterns. In exploring a litany of qualitative and perceptual experiences within the artist's social space, it is the present materials that are addressed and reassessed – incessantly and obsessively – the 'left-overs', the minutia, bits and scraps, detritus... This process of dealing ONLY with what is presently available leads to a profound self-discovery: to examine ones process of art making is a way to remain invested in the present. What exists' in the present are [the few] historical remnants – *Extant Fragments*.

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Extant Fragments



Studio Image photo Brian Hawkins 2016

“The best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men gang aft agley [go often awry].”

– Robert Burns (Burns, 1855)

i. An Orientation

I am interested in the visual aftermath of building thick layers of detritus and then breaking and tearing those layers apart. In doing so, I witness previous strata and rebuild with bits and scraps, excavating the terrain to expose its formation and history – a history both familiar and strange to me, as ‘something’ has changed within it. Assemblages of found material and the agglomeration of layered paint reveal and conceal a vibrant, yet tense, relationship between the harmonious and discordant forms, textures, and colors. For me, incongruent materials examine a personal and ongoing struggle to try to fix what is broken, to bring back what left, to try to hold together what will inevitably fall apart – divorce on a canvas – a futile embrace of ‘transient’ comfort. Physical and mental frustration, disappointment and mishaps within the process help to animate the picture though, often being the catalysts for unexpected outcomes and personal discovery. I am visually intrigued by the subtle nuances of tonal shifts on a weathered surface, thickened and enriched by the buildup and deterioration of past layers – visual evidence of *what once was* – an emergent intersection of the present and the left-behind traces of its former state. To me, this process is a metaphor for the daily messiness and triviality of provisional solutions – a litany of seemingly hurried decisions that permeate my inner world creating an uneasy pleasure that reflects a surface condition of both feats and follies, collectively alive and bursting apart intensely. And concurrently, resurrections of ‘previously’ riven scraps; a reintroduction to the

once ‘let-go.’ Multiple lines of interpretation direct and focused, yet expansive – an incessant reassessing of the present: what has left, what is present, and what could stand to go. Material relationships manifest into new commentaries of its place and time, concluding as re-contextual identities of traces left like wrinkles and scars on a tired old thing; battered vestiges – *Extant Fragments*.



Larger Needs (pendently) detail photo Brian Hawkins

a. Assemblage Art

One could say that the value of Assemblage hovers between its conceptual meaning and its visual attributes. Leaving aside the issue of fine art, one might ask: what is the artist trying to achieve, and how visually effective is his method of achieving it.

– visual-arts-cork.com

ii. Oil paint to assemblage

I am interested in a process that allows for impulsive decisions. I am an impulsive person. Ideas come at me very fast. I need a process of making art that can handle the speed of these ideas.

Oil painting no longer makes sense to me. Oil paint dries very slowly. Layers of oil paint take a long time to create. I want those layers. I want to create layers with my hands and then pull them apart with my hands. Assembling paper, floor scraps, detritus makes emotional sense to me right now. A corner of a painting that needs to have a cool blue tone can have a piece of blue paper glued to its corner in a matter of minutes. The speed of collaging paper, twine ... any materials in my studio resonates with me. The mixture of materials on the surface changes so fast! Building up the painting surface in a few hours is meaningful to me. Why? Because: I want my studio process to keep pace with the speed of my ideas. The result is a surface that looks like a million impulsive moves were made. One after another, now on the wall, the paintings are a chorus of all of those impulsive marks.

- collecting assemblages
- affects
- relational on one plane

At an early age, 2 or 3, I began my ~~fascination~~^{obsession} with puzzle pieces: putting them together in their meant composition, as well as reconfiguring new pictures by mixing multiple boxes of pieces into one. I carry that desire to compose and reconfigure, and am fascinated by the different meanings of transformations. ~~can create.~~

iii. Communication

Intuition is important to me and thus the work communicates an impulsive process.

Impulsiveness communicates a faith in my present ideas; in my present decisions. I have faith that I will make the choices for an art-object that I will be satisfied with. I trust that every decision can be corrected, changed, removed. This trust takes a lot of fear out of making work.

It is important that I have confidence in my decisions. I want the work to communicate that.



Extant Fragments photo Edward P McKenna March 2016

iv. Transformation and Expectations

“So much does mixture change them.” – Empedocles (Laertius, 1925)

Is transformation possible? And what of expectations? For me, the ‘making’ process is replete with these two questions. It is also constrained by each. To ‘transform’ a material into an art object infers certain expectations for assured results. However, expectations possess inherent flaws and risks. They are inorganic designs for a future brimming with uncertainty. An educated artist has tools to confront these concerns: conceptual design, content, and context can all help mediate one’s process of making, but again, what of expectations? Can they ever be reached, or will the results always fall short? In the late 18th century in rural Scotland, Robert Burns began plowing his field. He had designs, just as he did every late spring, to lay harvest seeds in the ground – a harvest that would be bountiful and sustain him and his family until

winter's end. His plow dug up a nest that a field mouse had slowly built that spring for winters pending freeze. Burn's plow did not directly kill the mouse, however it destroyed its chance to survive a brutally cold winter season – a death sentence, in essence, for the mouse. Burns and the mouse had logical designs for the future, but in the process of transforming their shared social space – creating expectations necessary to their survival – their schemes went awry.

Back to the first question, “is transformation possible?” In this thesis you will not find a ‘suitable’ answer regarding this question. Rather, I pose this question rhetorically.

v. Conceptual-Personal

There exists in the work personal modes/extensions – conceptually rigorous – that are not discernable or even laudable; however, the work asks these qualitative/perceptual questions. Not everything that enters the works is on the surface. There are elements in my work that hold an important conceptual commentary, but only on a personal level. To this question, “Does then your work not speak for itself?” Answer: no, my work hardly speaks at all, if ever. Conceptual-Personal is just that: there are components that are hidden from the viewer and only known to the artist. Perhaps this relay between artist and viewer supplements the art viewing experience; perhaps it does nothing at all. I am content with either outcome, for after all, the Conceptual-Personal components of my work are just that: personal. All I can ask from myself is that I attempt to share what I can bear.

Deleuze of Baruch Spinoza
who merged matter & mind into one

Desire will propel towards greater
or lesser states of wholeness
depending on whether the material
enters into composition, or not.

- No Development or organization
 - collective assemblages
 - affects
 - relational on one plane

vi. Future works

I am interested in seeing how my process of making work translates in a different social-context.

I am interested to see how new experiences and places affect my process and the visual outcomes.

vii. The end



Studio Image photo Brian Hawkins 2016

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