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... like animals.

Brandon Schnur

Thesis submitted
to the school of art and design
at West Virginia University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Art in
Ceramics

Robert “Boomer” Moore, committee chair, M.F.A.

Shoji Satake, M.F.A.

Kofi Opoku, M.F.A.

Gerald Habarth, M.F.A.

Jason Lee, M.F.A.

Department of Ceramics

Morgantown, West Virginia
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Slavery, Imprisonment, Dogs, Pets, Realism, Commodification, Tromp L’oeil, Plastic, Trash Bags,
Religion

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ABSTRACT

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Brandon Schnur

My work intends to expose the relationships we have with dogs as pets for its true nature of selfishness and general disregard for their welfare. Through the creation of ceramic and steel Trompe L'oeil objects that imitate pet paraphernalia and marble sculptures, I intend to draw in the viewer with intrigue and repulse them with a reflection of their lifestyle choices. My work is also an attempt to reveal pet ownership as a system of excepted slavery that is marketed as harmless tradition rather than a delusional non-consenting relationship. In revealing animals being restrained or trapped within consumer products the work is investigating the multifarious, ridiculous, and not always well understood relationship we have with the world outside of ourselves.

My historical story-telling and philosophy combined to indict the reader as a perpetrator of a problem at hand. As a species we have had the ability to protect and better our own lives, often through the exploitation, and general disregard, of others whom do so for us. Our power has both good and bad intentions, as ignorance often does, and has continued into an era that no longer requires protection, but demands comfort. This paper on its own is not a scientific study, and in no way, does it provide hope or answers.

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| Chapter One:

Philosophical Framework.

Existing equally in the light of rational thought and for the sake of personal entertainment, each of my works both critique and question the motives for domestication and ownership of dogs in contemporary America. Indicting the individual owner as the sole perpetuator of antiquated relationships that only benefit the owner, based on tradition and ignorance. The work and subsequent philosophies relish in the moments between the perfectly executed snarky rebuttal and the agonizingly silent self-doubt that can occur when questioning one's values. Holding a place of subjective opinion and critical allegations my ideals of pet ownership abolition challenge the most commonplace standards of ownership, consumption, morality, conservation and equality for pets. Being an experienced pet owner while in my youth permits me to reflect on the misguided and harmful standards that have normalized animals as play things and learning tools for children and adult. The futilely unrequited love for pets forces irrelevant excuses and depraved demand for ripping them out of their lives to become mantelpieces or topics of discussion in ours. I sculpt with the notion of skepticism for the current climate of pet ownership, project no solution, yet question humanity's role as the great deciders of these animal's fate.

In one hand, I hold the reins to a thorough argument for rational, intellectual and spiritual advancement, by expelling antiquated ideas no longer holding a function in contemporary society. Connecting and comparing this problem to important social issues like equality, women's rights, social justice, and slavery, I take an important stance for the equal treatment and freedom of animals. This work also forms a critique against Christian ideology and the notion of "progress", that uses trickling down shame, obedience and empty promises of forgiveness to demand whatever it wants. Followers of this ideology historically perpetuate the subjugation of anything that gets in

their way, while justifying it with God given rights and other subjective concepts. Proven continually through horrific acts, the way Howard Zinn¹ would describe manifest destiny in the early Americas. The slave trade, ethnical oppression, and the pet industry each share an astonishing lack of consent, fostering the destruction and gentrification of anything or anyone for the sake of convenience and “progress”.

While in the other hand, for the sake of argument and entertainment, I hold many sticks. By questioning the individual pet owner’s morality, an aspect which warrants debate, yet yields dispute, I intend to strike a nerve. I question the constructs of ownership perpetuated by media, pop culture and industry in a satirical way for my own peace of mind and sanity. *“Because, otherwise you are living under systems that don’t match who you are and you’ll be fighting that all the rest of your life.”* I question the assigned personality of the pet to be purely a reflection of the owner’s disposition, for the sake of humanizing and justifying the treatment of the animal. I also question a pet’s place as a luxury item, for the individual’s affinity for extravagance and leisure, while constantly being an accessible source of entertainment. I attempt to associate words used to describe pets, like love, family and friend with corrections based on subjective understandings of the pet’s situation. In my sculptural interpretation of these word associations love becomes convenience, family becomes product and friend becomes prisoner. Disputing pet ownership as mutual relationship and concluding that it is nothing more than human projected expectations and the animal’s adaptation to their situation with the inability to dispute.

Because the work exists in equal parts object, installation and language (wordplay) while incorporating both prior philosophies, the written work is equally important manifested through

¹ Howard Zinn, *A Peoples History of the United States* (New York: New Press, 1995).149-169

² Reggie Watts, *Spatial*, Video, directed by: Benjamin Dickinson, (2016, Los Angeles), DVD.

storytelling and narrative. Much like the work of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*³ and its allegorical nature to fight against Stalinism. My narrative intends to provoke and indict the reader to find purpose in their ownership outside of tradition and selfishness, and truly investigate their actions.

³ George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

| Chapter Two:

The Tool We Needed.

You are in the thick prehistoric forest, moving quietly, assumingly aware of your surroundings, when you spot the small animal you've been tracking slowly move into a clearing. After you arch your arm back and release the spear from your hand with a snap of your wrist and shoulder, it flees. Your massive weapon plunges into the ground just short of the animal's former position as it jumps and accelerates into a run far faster and more agile than you can accomplish. You look around dazed, the disbelief strikes you twofold when a massive beast leaps from the weeds to intercept the animal in its' long bearing teeth. The beast has taken advantage of your shortcomings, without you even noticing it was there. This is not your partner or your beast, but, what if it could be?

Domestication has always been a part of modern humanity's existence and could arguably be one reason for our thrust out of the Stone Age. The earliest remains of domestic dogs were found in Eastern Europe and Siberia and are believed to be no later than 30,000 years old, with relative remains found in the Middle East and Asia no older than 13,000 years.⁴ The question becomes, has this ever been necessary? And if so, is it necessary now just because it was necessary then? Or has domestication always been about the luxury and convenience it presents to individuals?

Imagine the life of the early European humanoids in 30,000BCE, sleeping on stony ground, creating stony tools, and probably eating a stone or two on occasion. Early humans concern only consisted of eating and traveling to follow the herds of animals they wanted to eat.

⁴ Mark Derr. *How the Dog Became the Dog: From Wolves to Our Best Friends*. (2013, New York: Overlook Duckworth), 18.

Because we (they) also had a brain capable of foresight, the tools they created were for anticipation of its need, not just as they're needed. A distinction very important in understanding our (their) separation from the rest of the animal kingdom and part of an evolutionary trait related to our ability to assume and anticipate.

In 30,001BCE, (as we are today) humans were terrible at being predators in their natural state, clumsy, slow and weak, which would explain their omnivore tendencies, even though: "*A diet based on cereals is poor in minerals and vitamins, hard to digest, and really bad for your teeth and gums.*" They were, however, good at being the trappers, deceivers, or the bidders of time, traits that can be found separately in many different creatures on the planet. The spider traps, the chameleon blends, and the cat bids, yet, they each have a natural means to complete their objective once the time comes to strike: jaw, fang, claw. Humans have soft skin, feeble claws, weak teeth and most concerningly, exposed genitals, built more for the position of prey than predator.⁶ Their saving grace, much like the wolf, was their threat in numbers, even without the claws or teeth. Do to their intelligence and ability for complex thought, they could recognize, appreciate, support, envy, and spite the abilities of the wolf that they didn't possess.

Finally, the year 30,000BCE, as you watch the beast flail its head from side to side crushing every bone in the small animals' body, you imagine a combined effort, your intelligence and the beasts' capabilities. You realize the pack of beasts have been following you on each of your hunts and back to your camp, keeping their distance just enough to capitalize on your failures, or feed on your leftovers. "Those [beasts] animals most capable of taking advantage of the resources

⁵ Yuval Noah. Harari, *Sapiens* (Random House UK, 2017). 81

⁶ Yuval Noah. Harari, "An Animal of No Significance" in *Sapiens* (Random House UK, 2017). 2-19.

associated with human camps would have been the tamer, less aggressive individuals with shorter fight or flight distances.”

These savage killers of animals small and large alike are also strangely docile, some of them keep their distance, yet they do not fear you nor do they threaten you. You have been offering food to the beasts, each time bringing them closer and closer to the camp, coaxing the more docile of them to move in. Gifts, politeness and patients, all the things that you find endearing in other humans, seem to work in tempting them to your position. Therefore, you assume what they want is what you want. This is the perfect opportunity for what you envision (mistakenly) as a collaborative effort; get the beast (you now call wolf) to trust you and it can share in its’ bounty along with the added effect of protection and safety. This new addition to your human camp allows for less effort to rely on your feeble hunting skills. Yet how do we keep our new ally, that can’t communicate or be told what to do, from leaving us and hunting (selfishly) for itself? This day also coincides with the invention of the leash and that coincides with the immediate dismissal of a mutual relationship.

⁷ Melinda A. Zeder, "The Domestication of Animals," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 68, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 161-190.

| Chapter Three:

Leash: (Un)Assuming, (Mis)Led.

The leash as an object is not harmless in nature, nor is it necessarily a malicious tool and is often associated with civility. Yet it's primary function is a tool of control and control is not fundamentally good or civil.⁸ Control demands servants, and pertaining to the leash, if one animal is attached to the locking end and the other to the handle, the later becomes the controller. Without its' given function the leash is just a strap, meant to hold one thing to another, however, a strap called a leash is a very particular tool made for leading. Leading is an interesting and misleading word when it is applied to dogs. For a human to lead they must take charge and work of their freewill to achieve a goal. We have created a wondrous tool that has the illusion of leading while still restraining, giving just enough sense of freedom while relinquishing absolute self-control. Therefore, a leash, in many ways, represents a dystopic item.

Ayn Rand's novella *Anthem*⁹ depicts a simple world forced into as second dark age that discourages and outlaws individuality and freedom. Equality 7-2521 is the name of the protagonist, with no sense of self identity, each character exists numerically to discourage uniqueness. The citizens of this world in many ways are leashed by their controlling governance, although (unlike dogs) specifically knowing their position of servitude. Just like the faceless characters of the book, my fabricated leashes all exist individually but have very little discernable qualities.

⁸ Howard Zinn, *A Peoples History of the United States* (New York: New Press, 1995). 632-631

⁹ Ayn Rand, *Anthem* (Delhi: Kalpaz, 1995).



Brandon Schnur, *A 1-4683*, 2018, forged steel, acrylic paint, bolt snap.

The naming structure in the book allows for distinction between characters, but little else. Based on similarities noticed between these characters and pets, I have titled each of the leashes based a search of Petharbor.com (nationwide animal shelter search engine) that assigns a numerical name for each animal. Searching with criteria for dogs under a year or over 8 years old, I choose a name to replicate for each leash. This criterion is important in representing dogs either born without individuality or being stripped of a life that was forced upon them. This system also resembles the numbering system used to dehumanize the imprisoned at Auschwitz during World War 2. “A” and “B” series number were ascribed to Jewish men and women specifically to separate and degrade them further.¹⁰ In my work the “A” and “B” differentiation is used to systemize two distinct parts that work together, A: the leash, B: the collar, further removing individuality for the objects. *A 1-4683* is the numerical assignment of a puppy sheltered in New Mexico.

¹⁰ www.auschwitz.org, "AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU," Polski, , accessed December 20, 2017, <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/auschwitz-prisoners/prisoner-numbers>.



Marilyn Levine, *P.H.V. Strap*, 1985, unfired clay.

Marilyn Levine's trompe l'oeil works hold an apparent use and wear that brings with it a sense of memory. The movement and weight of her objects reflect the deterioration of the object it imitates, reminding me of the power a single utilitarian object can hold for recalling emotion and feelings. The less information an object gives and the more apparent use it has, the more information that is projected onto it by the viewer. These are the memories and feelings I want to invoke (need) from the viewer.



Brandon Schnur, *A 0-27833*, 2017, forged steel, rust, bolt snap.



Iron Slave Collar, 1800's, cast iron

Designed in forged steel, each of my leashes are finished to appear as worn leather or faded colored fabric. Because the leash is, after all, made for the human, it is easy to read and interpret them as representations of personal items. The worn patina of rust or acrylic surfaces intend to add sentiment to the object, allowing for remembrance of a dog that may now, only exist in memory. Rust as a color emulates usage, however, as can be seen on iron slave collars, the rust can also invoke the horrors of the past through the lens of servitude. And who's hard work does either of these tools represent? The numbering system then removes and contradicts any individuality that is projected onto the leash through the viewer and is reflective of the truly artificial path we've laid out for every dog. Giving the leash both nostalgia and calculation, revealing that dogs are not special until they are ours.

The philosophical and political climate of *Anthem* suggests that the individuals only purpose is to serve the state. In many ways this idea is suggestive of the way we breed and own dogs. We never assume or imagine a free-living dog, they all exist in the same way as slaves in the

early Americas. Chattel slaves never exist for anything else than being a piece of property and/or a worker and themselves along with any offspring are fated to servitude indefinitely. The complacency of pets correlated to the effects of capture bonding, a symptom of and explanation for the human phenomenon of Stockholm Syndrome. Those that are captured and resist are not worth the effort of keeping alive. An interesting parallel to the animals we think we give the perfect lives to are only complacent based on a blunted fight or flight instincts.¹¹

Another story reflective of this idea is Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*¹² that assumes any human perception is initially based on our senses and can only be categorized as opinion. Any person that only thinks empirically about the world presented to them is hindered by misunderstanding. In many ways both Dogs and ourselves resemble the prisoners of the story, living in a reality unwittingly forced upon us. With humans being the more advanced animals in this scenario, we have the capacity to expand our understanding outside of the world presented to us, if we so choose. The choices must come with both questioning traditions and exploring examples of new possibilities. My philosophical position resembles the return of the escaped prisoner to free the rest of the enslaved, in a hope to enlighten them of the world outside of compromise. Once we understand our possibilities and recognize the opportunity of enlightenment, why would we wish any other life on others? The only reason for keeping dogs in their current predicament is for the want of authority, tradition and property, and the selfish truth is no matter how well you treat a piece of property, you are still the owner and ruler of it. Never an equal.¹³

¹¹Mark Derr. *How the Dog Became the Dog: From Wolves to Our Best Friends*. (2013, New York: Overlook Duckworth), 86.

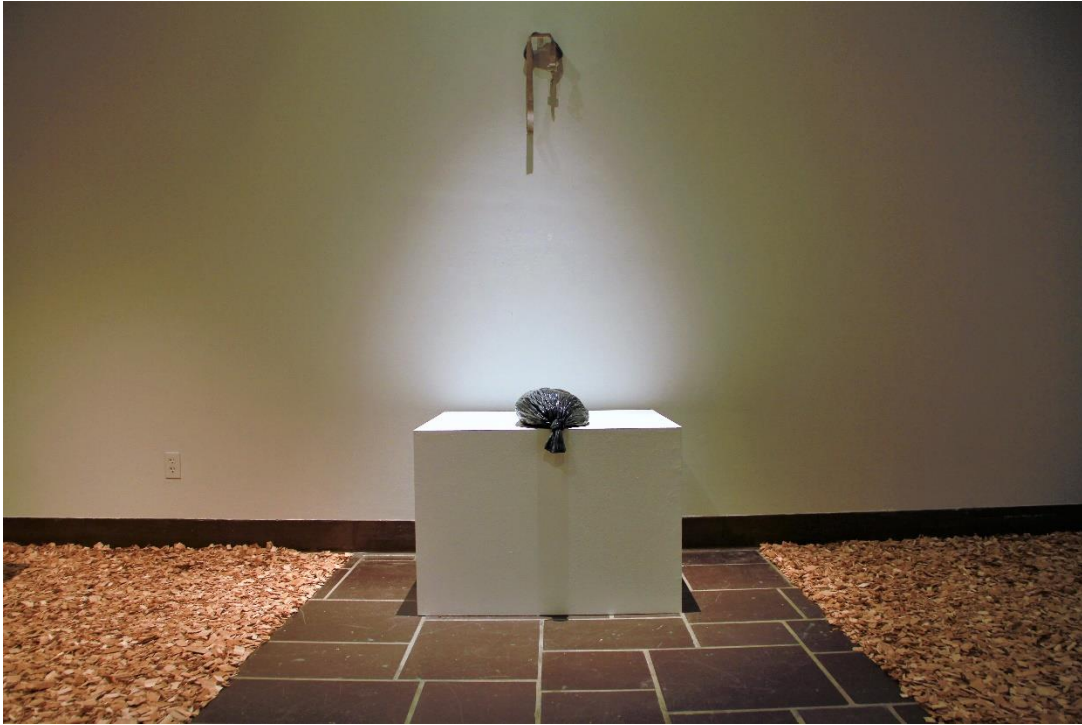
¹² Plato, *Allegory of the Cave*, (S.I.: LULU COM, 2012).

¹³ Yuval Noah. Harari, "A Day in the Life of Adam and Eve" in *Sapiens* (Random House UK, 2017). 40-62.



Brandon Schnur, *A 0-47369*, 2018, forged steel, rust, bolt snap.

Much like the shackles of early American slavery and the leg irons of the Civil War era chain gangs, the leashes only function is for restraint and control. The difference being a direct connection to the controller. Dogs offer promises humans can't fulfill and have no way to argue or oppose anything projected on them. Because the leash appears worn and cast-aside, but with no distinct use, it opens the way to viewer interpretation, of memories, feelings and concerns. The bending of the plain they sit on suggest the same idea as leading, they seem to have the ability for movement, yet have no room for change. The draping and weight of the leashes are reflections of how we envision ourselves as owners, we think there is flexibility but the true relationship is rigid and structured, with no give.



...like animals. (Installation close up), 2018, Paul Mesaros Gallery.



...like animals. (Installation Shot), 2018, Paul Mesaros Gallery.

There are multiple hand-forged leashes strewn about the gallery space, with only one of the leashes holding a place on the wall above the viewer and above one of the other sculptures, forming a hierarchy and resembling a crucifix. I think of this as a symbol of false hope or false

identity and I want the viewer to reflect on it empathetically way through the lens of the pet. *“how do you cause people to believe in an imagined order such as Christianity, democracy or capitalism? First, you never admit that the order is imagined.”*¹⁴ How would a dog view the leash when their average day consists of being stuck in a house for hours on end? The leash for a dog is strictly for their needs, as it goes on they go out. They would not resent this object, they would see the leash as an object of salvation. Just as those that believe in biblical stories observe salvation through an object that does nothing but promises everything.

The leashes are each placed into a position that can directly connect them the one of the plastic bag sculptures. Playing off the word “passion” often used to describe the suffering and death of Jesus, I intended to associate the leash as an object of suffering. This is an interesting parallel because of the excitement that a leash can stimulate in a dog, something that can almost resemble the word passion in its correct use.

¹⁴ Yuval Noah. Harari, *Sapiens* (Random House UK, 2017). 112

| Chapter Four:

The Beast Un-Burden.

As an upper/ middle class European aristocrat of the 19th century your time moves slower than others, you can take a stroll around your garden and spend time ordering your servants to maintain the household. You have time for yourself, you are what is important, but how do you keep yourself entertained while still maintaining the air of sophistication? Your ranchers and farm hands have maintained your farms through the help of their worker dogs. They have found ways of breeding their farm dogs to bring out the best utilitarian qualities in their brood. Could the same idea be applied to aesthetic qualities? If they can breed a dog to be exactly what is needed to retrieve, shepherd, defend or hunt, why couldn't you, the more sophisticated person, do the same thing for your desired effect.

The problems you run into are, the farmers are breeding the animals to do what they do naturally, but for the human's benefit, breeding is easier for them because one worker dog bred with another makes a worker dog. You need to figure out how to make the best dogs that maintain a standard of image, dignity and beauty. However, this is not the function of an animal, human beauty standards are unimportant in nature, only functionality, and through the mixing of types and diversification they become more functional. Through the lens of beauty, your choices for breeding become limited and you resort to inbreeding your favorite animals from the same family. This also guarantees animals that all look alike, a standardization that is best for your sophisticated disposition. Because you don't have to work, or exert, or even leave the house, why would you want that for your property? Your role is to be beautiful, fashionable, leisurely and lavish, these now quickly become the standard for your pets.¹⁵

¹⁵ John Homans, "Beyond Breeds" in *What's a Dog For?: The Surprising History, Science, Philosophy, and Politics of Man's Best Friend* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013). 155-165.

Elite organizations like The Kennel Club came about with the popularity of the eugenics movement. And somehow can continue to operate. With *“The fact that breedism can be traced to eugenics can be too close for comfort among champions of pedigree dogs.”*¹⁶ And have resulted in horrific health problems for the sake of beauty.

As new breeds became more popular in the late 1800’s larger price tags started to accompany the exquisitely manicured dogs and their offspring. Between toys, accessories, and medical bills the pet industry eventually became a billion-dollar business. *“...They (dogs) cost their owners a whopping £10 million in Vet fees a week.”*¹⁷

By taking the mentality of royalty, and bloodlines into consideration you see the importance placed on something pure and rare. Rarity equals importance. This idea became the bases for the concept of pure breeds, for lack of a better term. Really only meaning that it was a unique mixture of breeding that happened exclusively and enough for an elitist breed. By the latter half of the 1800’s yourself and other elitists started to take an interest in the new sport of dog breeding, the sport dubbed “dog fancy”, the term having both implications of the identity of people as fans of dogs and the selective status of the participants. Once you start to categorize breeds as species unto themselves you start to make them special and when they are special and yours, they become more superior. And we do to them the same thing we want for ourselves, an elevation in status, a feeling of importance and justification. We place them on a pedestal because they are ours.

¹⁶ Michael Brandow. *A Matter of Breeding: A Biting History of Pedigree Dogs*. (Duckworth Overlook, 2016) 49-50

¹⁷ Pedigree Dogs Exposed, <https://vimeo.com/17558275>

| Chapter Five:

The Object, The Plastic, The Fake.

The bust is a classic object, meant to showcase importance. Or at least meant for the viewer to assume importance. Throughout history we have seen heads of gods and philosophers, spiritual leaders and royalty, artists render those perceived as influential of their time. From the earliest adaptations of human form, the head has always been immediately recognizable, from the round bulbs depicted in cave paintings to the remaining shards from full figures in the Archaic Greek period. And nothing could compare to the beautiful renditions of the Hellenistic Period, through the realistic structure and expressive features. Yet, only through the Renaissance did the bust truly become a staple of beauty in fine art.



Head of Aphrodite, Hellenistic, 330-300 BCE, marble.

Just as quickly as the perfect depiction of the face came about in art, so did the removal of the features through the imitation of the veil. The veil has held many purposes in history, but none

so significant as a tool of subjugation of women. In the book of Exodus, it is described as a mask in the presence of the Lord.¹⁸ Traditionally it can be an object of prevention, to save one from themselves and to hide the wearer from the rest of the world. Or to be put more directly it is to protect the female wearer from the uncontrollable urges of the male gaze. The veil is also used as a denouncer of ownership those that lift the veil are the proprietors and those who wear it are the owned. This is one relationship that I intend to show as analogues through the veiled dog head, the relationship of the disenfranchised and the controlling master.¹⁹ Yet somehow in artistic depictions we find the veil as a sensual object. The veil has always hidden something, a sense of intrigue, mystery and wonder. We look at a face to see beauty, we look through a veil to try and unlock a mystery. There is something intangibly beautiful to the interpreted figure. When you reveal just enough figure under a layer of cloth, fabric or plastic you can assume the rest of the figure presented would have been precisely sculpted. Something that again suggests to the viewer what they want to see and not what they are seeing. By depicting an animal head in a place that is historically reserved for the human head it draws on empathy.

¹⁸ Exodus 34:33-35

¹⁹ Genesis 24:65



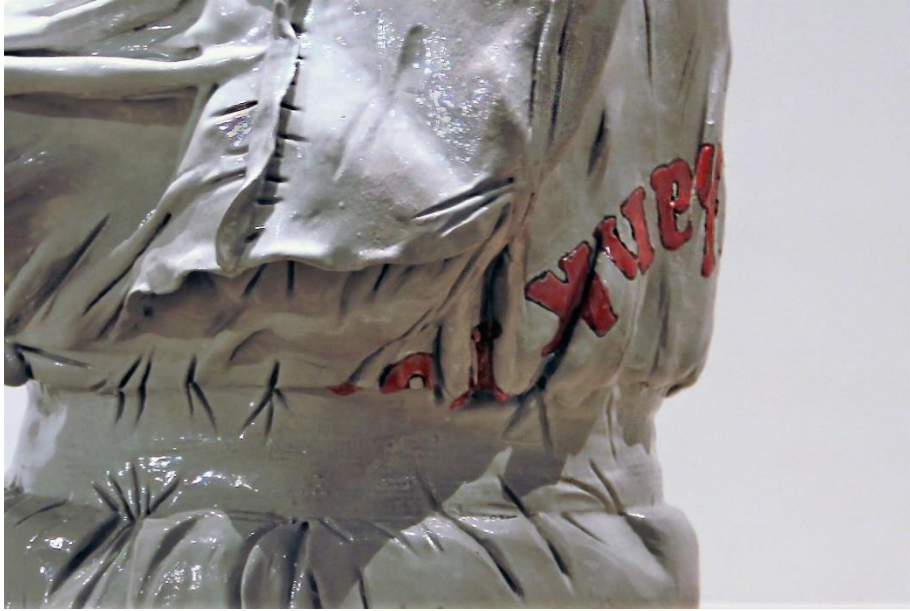
Veiled and Masked Dancer, Hellenistic, 3rd-2nd Century BCE, cast bronze.



Brandon Schnur, *The Embarrassment of Artemis*, 2018, earthenware, glaze.

The imitation of marble through clay is indicative of perceived value of both objects in their respective time. Throughout history both porcelain and marble have been the highest artforms of the day, with porcelain even being used as currency in certain parts of the world at different times. The use of stoneware clay made to look like porcelain is telling of the façade of importance we put on our relationships with pets. There is also a comparable color similarity between marble and plastic that is more interesting when considering the value of one and the disposability of the other.

Value is also suggested in the transformation of the standard depiction of the veil to the plastic bag. As contemporary consumer products, dogs have become almost secondary to the accessories that are demanded for them; This is perpetuated by the corporations that have turned pets into products. Although I use bags that represent PetSmart, this is not for the sake of damning the company, but for the recognition properties of the logo. If individuals would heed the problem the companies would subsequently dissolve. The other image depicted on the plastic bags represents the generic Thank You bag, as a satirical way of suggesting the dogs' complacency and willingness to suffer for the sake of their owner.



Brandon Schmur, *The Embarrassment of Artemis (Thank You, detail)*, 2018, earthenware, glaze.

One of the more important comparison made in the sculptures is that of ceramics and plastic, through the similar and conflicting properties of both. With both ceramic and plastic objects existing presumably forever, there is an interesting comparison between the harmful and harmless nature of the everlasting. There are also terms like plasticity that is used to describe both and the ways of heating that make both permanent objects and inherently not recyclable. I equate this to the apparent permanent state of pet ownership and the harmful nature of its continuation. Can our history be brought back to a natural state? The interesting characteristic that I want to question with the example of plastic and ceramics is the natural verses the humanmade. How do we really know if our relationship was forced or natural?



Brandon Schnur, *The Embarrassment of Aristaeus*, 2017, earthenware, glaze.

There are two distinct kinds of direct tension that exists in the bagged head busts. One is very direct with the use of taut handles and the resistant animals within them. The other is a bit subtler with the subject seemingly inhaling to no avail, the plastic pulls into the mouth with the pressure of the lungs, yet stops any air from passing through. Although the asphyxiation aspect is obvious in each of the heads it becomes enormously concerning when the dog is assumingly fighting for air. The artistic vehicle of the bust, that can easily depict such beauty and grace, now renders the subject in a state of suffering, or perpetual dying. A last breath that continues for eternity. The suffocation invokes a metaphorical sense of urgency as I am trying to suggest the urgency in altering human and dog relations. This tension of the plastic is suggestive of the burdensome life we intend to remove dogs from, yet perpetuate through our misguided relationships. We suffocate these animals in a life of leisure when they should be roaming, we suffocate them in mountains of food pellets when they want to be hunting, we buy for them everything we want them to have with no concern of what they need.

There is a level of difficulty to sculpting an object to imitate tension, both visually and psychologically. This effort is hindered doubly by working with a material that skews, shrinks and settles through the finishing process of firing. The special attention and precautions that must be considered when turning clay into ceramics is only truly understood by ceramic sculptors. And yet *“Certainly we must judge figurative porcelain (ceramic) modelling –as is too seldom done–by normal sculpting standards”*²⁰ Two artists that work in ceramics, the concept of tension and with animal motifs and do so very well, are Russell Wrangle and Beth Cavener. Each of their individual styles exhibit masterful attention to detail and the ability to depict struggle and restraint.



Russell Wrangle, *Prehensile Muzzle*, 2014, ceramic, glaze, underglaze.

²⁰ Philip Rawson, *Sculpture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991). 202.



Beth Cavner, *Obariyon*, 2013, ceramic, paint, metal.



Brandon Schnur, *Starving for Tension*, 2018, earthenware, glaze.

Although still referencing the same suffering and commodification as the aforementioned busts, the trash bag pieces hold even more significance in their depiction of the full body. They also have direct references to *The Veiled Christ* by Giuseppe Sanmartino. The body of the dog appears to be vacuum sealed inside the trash bag. This references wet-drapery that was popularized

in Classical Greek art.²¹ However, just like the others this animal has no suggested life left in it, only a dying corpse left as garbage. These just like *The Veiled Christ* are suggestive of the inevitability of death at the hands of humanity. When our pets die, they die because of us, much like Jesus in the biblical stories, they die for us. Not for our sins or to save our souls, due to our desire for our entertainment, comfort and amusement. If the beginning of the dog's life cycle is based in consumption, then the end cycle of consumption is waste.

²¹ "High Classical Greek Sculpture (c.450-400 BCE)," High Classical Greek Sculpture, accessed February 17, 2018, <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/antiquity/greek-sculpture-high-classical-period.htm>.



Brandon Schnur, *(Come)Passion*, 2018, earthenware, glaze.



Giuseppe Sanmartino, *The Veiled Christ*, 1753, marble.

| Chapter Six:

Installation Space.

Woodchips within the installation space exist as the backdrop, the foreground and the boundary, the two former aspects exist in the physical realm as necessary visual cues. The later exists just as powerfully in the mental state of the observer. There is no wall, or signs that tell, or ever suggest to the viewer the need to keep off. Yet it works as a concept of order, of following the rules, or in this case assuming the rules. With the woodchips placed in a manicured and intentional way, and with it being such a different material than the flooring, it is suggestive of a pedestal. An object to be observed but not interacted with. This idea is resembling of dog training and our desired place into their minds and unconscious structure of behavior. This can work the same way with humans, in a gallery setting there is always a sense of being watched causing resistance to touch the art and anything that is directly connected to it. I used this concept to train the viewers to consider and question walking on the woodchips.



Brandon Schnur, *Installation Shot delineating ground from cedar chips*, 2018, Paul Mesaros Gallery.

The use of woodchips is both a visual and olfactory experience. The human sense of smell is associated with the strongest recollection of memories, and for anyone that has ever stepped foot

inside of a pet store can easily recall the odors associated with it. The odor of cedar chips directly relates to pet ownership, yet the secondary point is the harmful nature to dogs that is often ignored. Although praised for the ability to keep bugs away, including flees, which directly affect the human as well, cedar chips tend to cause most dogs upper respiratory problems.²² A selfish problem often ignored due to the unaffected owner.

The separation of floor and cedar intends to make pathways that lead to either end of the room, both of which have the two trash bag sculptures. These are presented much like alter pieces, with a dramatic spotlight directly overhead. Just like the heavy-handed imagery, that leaves no room for doubt, in Christian art, these too undoubtedly represent alter pieces. *B 1-28351* is a hand forged color that alludes to the “passions” of the Christ once again, as an object of suffering and control.



Brandon Schnur, *Installation shot, Passion(Less) / B 1-28351*, 2018.

²² Ann Compton, "Can Cedar Chips Be Toxic to Dogs? | Cuteness," Cuteness.com, February 09, 2017, accessed April 20, 2018, <https://www.cuteness.com/article/can-cedar-chips-toxic-dogs>.

| Chapter Seven:

Modern Family.

With your television mindlessly blaring in the background of your downtown Manhattan studio apartment, you see an advertisement for the new animated children's movie with the talking dogs. You open your laptop that loads the last cat video you watched on YouTube and the side bars are filled with ads for Chewy.com because it was the last place you order the new toy for your teacup Chihuahua. an animal that was breed specify and only for its miniature handheld qualities with no regard for its needs to survive.

We ignore survival needs for dogs because they are now only in existence because we want them. The breeding system was designed to showcase perfect examples of different dogs and has resulted in the horrifying degeneration of each of the breeds. This selfishness and shortsightedness is evident in many aspects of human advancement. We advance completely without concern for anything that may be harmed in the process. When we want buildings we destroy forests, when we want industry we destroy our atmosphere. We kill what we don't want and use what we do. Dogs have been murdered for having undesirable quality even when the desired qualities are the sole reason for their health problems.²³ The old saying 'beauty is pain' has never been truer than when it comes to dog breeds.

And just like listening to Pop music or buying those shoes you don't like for the sake of mindless repetition of advertisements. Pet culture has become a standard in your life, even when living in a small house with a dog that needs constant attention is more of a chore than a friendship. "Consumers are stupid, goofy, gullible vultures."²⁴ We do these things because of our

²³ Pedigree Dogs Exposed, <https://vimeo.com/17558275>

²⁴ Schaffer the Darklord, "Fuck This Song," 2013, MP3.

*disposition to do as others do and think what we are told is correct. Your relationship is never questioned, in fact, you justify it by mentioning that you walk your dog three times a day, or you buy them organic dog food. Maybe they were a stray that needed you, or a rescued dog, or it would have been put down without you. You justify and confuse your wanting of a dog with the excuses that it was them that needed your intervention in their life. You treat your dog like it is your child, the only problem is a dog is not your child, nor is it your family. It is an object that you control the life of due to an industry that tells you to do so. "The pet industry has tripled in the past fifteen years. The APPA estimates pet spending will reach \$45.4 billion this year, an increase of \$2 billion since 2008."*²⁵ The relationship is not natural it is forced, people have been forcing their will on everything they can with no concern for the future, probably sense the beginning of time.

²⁵ Jenna Goudreau, "The Pet Culture," *Forbes*, July 11, 2012, , accessed April 20, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/2009/10/15/pets-dogs-cats-forbes-woman-time-children.html#d5369003372e>.

| Conclusion:

“... We won’t pay to have animals skinned alive, experimented on, beaten, or imprisoned just so that they can amuse us or we can eat their flesh or wear the skin they were in. No more than we would allow this to be done to our neighbors, family members, or friends. Bigger cages and longer chains aren’t enough by any means. Animals need to be protected from harm and, where possible, permitted to live their own lives, forge their own relationships, raise their own families, and choose their own habitats and homes, just as you and I are free to do these things.”²⁶

...like animals. Is a collection of thoughts, philosophies and objects made to expose a cultural phenomenon for the selfish and cruel habit that it is. The work does not provide optimism or a solution, only a retracting plea of reform by enlightening the viewers of personal understandings of pet culture. The cruel accusations of this thesis are in no small part for my concern that nothing will change otherwise and a continuation of ignoring real problems will persist even when presented with facts. A flaw in human nature is our regard for humanizing the things we own and our curse is the immediate dehumanization of those things. We may be human, but that means nothing when we constantly act like savages. And dogs will never truly have their own lives until we let them live... *like animals.*

²⁶ PETA, July 21st, 2017 <https://www.peta.org/features/2017-animal-liberation/>

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| **Brandon Schnur**
| (816) 382 9617
| BrandonDSchnur@gmail.com
| Brandonschnur.wordpress.com

| **Education**

2015-2018 MFA, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV
2016-2017 MFA Summer Research, Jingdezhen, China
2015 WVU Study Abroad, The Pottery Workshop, Jingdezhen, China
2011-2014 BFA, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO
2008-2011 AFA, Grand Rapids Community College. Grand Rapids, MI

| **Teaching Experience**

2017-2018 The Pottery Workshop, Jingdezhen, China
Materials and Safety

- Improving personal studios to correlate with U.S. health standards
- General Electrical theory
- General clay material safety and precautions
- Ceramics studio maintenance including kiln and ventilation repair
- Glaze, Clay, Slip formulation

2016-2018 West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia
Instructor of record
Visual Foundations
Drawing
Ceramics for Majors
Ceramics for Non-Majors

- Teaching foundations level drawing skills, design, and sculpture
- Material use in a range of different medium

2015 Red Star Studios, Kansas City, Missouri
Date Night

- Beginning wheel throwing

Over Do It: China Paint and Luster

- Painting and design
- Advance overglaze painting, enamel and luster work
- Electric kiln firing variations
- Post firing surface modification

| **Professional Experience**

2017-2019 *Student Director at Large*, National Council for the Education of Ceramics (NCECA)

- Student advocacy and student exhibition assistance
- Awards solicitation assistance

- Student perspectives selection
 - Conference programing selection
- 2017 *International Presenter*, The Pottery Workshop, Jingdezhen, China
- 2016 *Onsite Coordinator*, WVU Summer China Ceramics, The Pottery Workshop, Jingdezhen, China
- Coordinating visiting students
 - Organize workshops and travel throughout the country
 - Help acclimate students to Chinese customs and modes of thought
 - Help with translation
- 2015 *International Presenter*, The Pottery Workshop, Jingdezhen, China
- International Presenter*, Xi'an JiaoTong University, Xi'an, China
- 2014-2015 *Associate*, Belger Art Center, Crane Yard Clay, Kansas City, MO
- Providing extensive knowledge of ceramics materials
 - Maintenance, installation and repair of ceramics equipment
 - Assisting in gallery organization
 - Assisting in exhibition instillation/deinstillation
 - Sales
- 2013 *Work study*, Teaching assistant for Paul Donnelly, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO
- Helped sophomores advance wheel throwing skills
 - Helped with glaze mixing
 - Throwing demos and providing instruction
- 2013 *Work study*, Assistant to Tom Binger (ceramics department technician), Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO
- Assisted with maintenance of spray booth, clay mixer, pug mill, sand blaster
 - Minor electric and gas kiln maintenance
 - Organization of department inventory
- 2012 *Teaching Assistant*, College of Lake County, Grayslake, IL
- Taught mold making skills and slip casting to intermediate students
- 2011-2012 *Work Study*, Glaze Room Technician, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO
- Maintained school appearance and organization
 - Handling and organization of inventory
- 2011-2013 *Exhibition Planning Committee*, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO
- Planning and preparation of studio wide exhibition
 - Promotional equipment design
- 2011 *Studio Assistant*, Professor Scott Gerard, Grand Rapids, MI
- Clay and glaze mixing
 - Maintained department appearance
 - Assisted in electric and gas firings

| Solo/ Two Person Exhibitions

- 2018 ... *like animals.*, Paul Mesaros Gallery, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV

- Separation Anxiety*, (George Cho, Brandon Schnur) Paul Mesaros Gallery, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV
 2017 *"Bound"*, #3 Window Gallery, Jingdezhen, China
 2016 *Given Function*, Mufei Gallery, Jingdezhen, China

| Select Group Exhibitions

- 2018 *Last Call III*, Companion Gallery, Humboldt, TN
Standard Ceramics Container Show, Standard Ceramics, Carnegie, PA
 2017 *Salon II*, Cerbera Gallery, Kansas City, MO
Last Call II, Companion Gallery, Humboldt, TN
Student Juried Exhibition, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV
Create +, Montana University, Bozeman, MT
 2016 *Beyond the Work: The Fun Side of The Work*, View Gallery, Sanbao, Jingdezhen, China
Pop-up Shop, Cerbera Gallery, Kansas City, MO
Confluence 2016, Artist Image Resources, Pittsburg, PA
 2015 *Transition Translation*, Mufei Gallery, Jingdezhen, China
UrbanSuburban XI: Transition, Experience, Adventure, The Epsten Gallery, Overland Park, KS
 2014 *Merge*, Belger Crane Yard Gallery, Kansas City, MO
Nebraska National Undergraduate Juried Art Exhibition, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE
2014 Annual B.F.A. Exhibition, H&R Block Artspace, Kansas City, MO
Add/Mix, Stern Ceramics Building, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO
 2013 *Objectivity*, Stern Ceramics Building, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO
The Gilding of Nature, Leedy-Voulkus Art Center, Kansas City, MO
Hotbox, Stern Ceramics Building, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO
 2012 *Expo no.82*, Stern Ceramics Building, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO
Flux, Stern Ceramics Building, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO
 2011 *Strata*, Stern Ceramics Building, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO

| Residencies and Internships

- 2013- 2014 Intern to Tommy Frank, Belger Crane Yard Studios, Kansas City, Missouri
 2013 International Resident Artist, International Ceramics Studio, Kecskemet, Hungary
 2013 Museum Lighting Intern, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri

| Private Collections

Philipp Erich and Melanie Sherman Collection
 Margit Silva Collection

| Honors & Awards

- 2017 WVU Travel Grant, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV
 2015- 2018 GTA Scholarship, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV
 2015 WVU Travel Grant, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV
 2014 Mckeown Special Project Award, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO
 2011 Dean's list, Grand Rapids Community College, Grand Rapids, MI

| Skills

Ceramics:

- Advanced Clay and glaze formulation
- Atmospheric, electric and gas kiln firing
- Plaster mold making and design

Digital:

- PhotoShop
- Illustrator
- Maya
- Fusion 360

Practical:

- Basic construction
- Welding -arc, mig, tig, gas
- Metal fabrication and forging
- Woodworking
- Gas and electric kiln maintenance
- Clay mixer maintenance
- General motorized and electric equipment maintenance