

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: DRAWING TOOLS

Vincent Donarski, MFA, 2006

Directed By: Chair, John Ruppert, Department of Art

I am from a small town in Northern Minnesota where my father runs an aggregate production business. I grew up surrounded by the heavy equipment used to move and crush gravel. My earliest memories are of seeing this machinery and being fascinated by its size, power, and sound. My work borrows the imagery and scale of these machines to make abstract forms and tools. Through making these objects I arrive at some kind of nonsensical use for them. I will create a scene, or job site where the object is used to mark another material. The tool will be used until some kind of limit is met. I will either operate the tool until I physically can't do it, or the tool becomes stuck or broken.

DRAWING TOOLS

By

Vincent Donarski

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
MFA
2006

Advisory Committee:
Professor John Ruppert, Chair, Department of Art
Professor Foon Sham, Department of Art
Professor John McCarty, Department of Art

© Copyright by
Vincent Donarski
2006

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	ii
Chapter 1: Background	1
Chapter 2: Drawing Tools	2
Chapter 3: Future Work	5

Chapter 1: Background

I am from a small town in Northern Minnesota where my father runs an aggregate production business. I grew up surrounded by the heavy equipment used to move and crush gravel. My earliest memories are of seeing this machinery and being fascinated by its size, power, and sound.

As I grew older I started to run the equipment myself. On a typical day I would feed the crusher by operating a Front End Loader or Bulldozer for 12 hours. One cannot help but feel as though you are part of the machine after a while. I began to understand what it is like to be a machine, used for the same endless task every day.

My work borrows the imagery and scale of these machines to make abstract forms and tools. Through making these objects I arrive at some kind of nonsensical use for them. I will create a scene, or job site where the object is used to mark another material. The tool will be used until some kind of limit is met. I will either operate the tool until I physically can't do it, or the tool becomes stuck or broken.

In reviewing the work I have created for the Thesis Exhibition, I started looking back on my time in College Park to understand where this work came from. What is the purpose of these Drawing Tools? How did I arrive at making them? What do I see as the future for this work? These are all topics that I will address in this writing.

Chapter 2: Drawing Tools

The beginning of this body of work started at Franconia Sculpture Park in Shafer Minnesota. I was the manager of the Park for the summer of 2004. Having just completed my first year of Grad School, I arrived at the Park full of energy and very excited to have access to the materials and equipment available there. I had done an internship at Franconia while I was in undergrad, so I was already familiar with the Park and the people there.

The work I had been making in College Park that year was starting to integrate different materials. The Faculty had pushed me to work with something other than steel in order to get past my comfort zone. I was trying to capture stress visually in my work by putting materials under real physical stress. I ended up making a series of sculptural installations where sand and gravel were used as weight to make a form in cotton, canvas or burlap fabric. Tension was applied to the fabric by ropes that would hang from or attach to the architecture in the space.

I got really excited about these pieces, and was trying to understand what about them was interesting to me. In contrast to my steel sculptures, these pieces were allowed to be fragile, temporary, and flexible to the space they were shown in. They also visually captured real physical stress. The two materials were directly related to each other by the form that was made. These pieces would be filled until something broke, causing the piece to fall or crash in some way. I found the site at the end of the process to be the most interesting part. The way they would break down was unpredictable. The formal qualities of an accident were much more interesting to me than something that was planned. Working with the new materials allowed me to see what I was really interested in, and to get that gut feeling of making and seeing something for the first time.

So, back at the Sculpture Park, I was planning to make a piece that attempted to integrate my love for working with metal and the excitement that was generated by these sandbag sculptures crashing to the floor. The resulting piece, titled 'Wing Drop' exists as a video and a physical crash site at the Park. I built two large wing forms out of steel pipes. I then built two piles of gravel and had them covered with wet concrete. While

the concrete was still wet, I hung the wings one at a time over the piles with a crane. Using a hook designed for laboratory drop testing, I dropped the 4,000lb wings from about 20 feet in the air onto the piles. The result was a very exciting crash site, where you can see the forming of the concrete by the impact of the wings.

While every aspect of this piece may have not been successful, I have found it to be the most generative sculpture I have ever made. It combines all of the things I am most interested in, both conceptually and physically. The steel forms are beautiful and powerful things formally, and they are allowed to have a function by marking another material. The outdoor setting of the Park allows for a scale and public interaction that I enjoy. The 'site' of the sculpture leaves the viewer wondering what happened here and what the purpose or function of these wings could be. I enjoy the latent energy the wings have by being stuck in the concrete. They can now be enjoyed as formal objects because their work is done.

When the summer was over I returned to College Park. In my work I reverted to formal steel objects again, not wanting to deal with all the issues I had uncovered with 'Wing Drop'. I felt it was a powerful piece, but I didn't know what to do with it, or what the next step was. I made some formal steel sculptures again for a while, but soon became bored and started looking for the excitement I had found previously.

The work I was doing that was holding my attention all had a common theme that pointed back to the 'Wing Drop' piece. I was making steel forms and then smashing them, lining them up, and dragging them through other materials. I was looking for some kind of relationship between the object I was making and the material it was to effect.

Drawing Tool #1- The Tumbler, was the first of the Drawing Tools. I finally sat down and decided to try working with the issues of the 'Wing Drop' piece and figure out the best way to harness that energy. I decided what I needed to do was to make a tool, an object that would be sculptural, but would have a function in forming another material. I wanted this tool to interact with a vehicle and a crane. In a proposal drawing in the show, you can see how it would work. The crane would hold the tool over wet concrete while the truck pulls the cable. The tumbler would spin itself down into the concrete until it becomes stuck.

Drawing Tool #2- Churn, is a tool made of steel and cast iron. I felt the first tool became too overpowered by functional looking parts and symmetry, so this tool has more of a human element in its scale and through the feel of the cast iron handle. I built this tool to have a direct effect on the concrete it went into. The shape of the concrete is carved out by the tool. The video in the show is of me operating this tool at 400% faster than real time to exaggerate the absurdity of what I am doing.

Drawing Tool #3- Cone, is a form generated by looking back at the gravel pit and the piles that are made there. Thinking back on my childhood, and looking at all of the sculpture I had ever made, I realized that the form of a pile, as in a pile of dirt, was something that reoccurred in my work. I did some research on piles and found that all materials have a specific 'Dumping Angle' or 'Angle of Repose' that they will naturally rest at when dropped from a single point. I calculated the angle for a pile of loose gravel and made the Cone to this specification. This was done mostly to better understand the form of a pile. Having a steel pile allowed me to turn it on its side, put it on the wall, hang it upside down, and roll it around. This sounds absurd, but it really helped me to understand the proportions and shape of that form.

Drawing Tool #4- The Big Wheel, is designed to be used by a large crane. In a proposal drawing in the show, you can see the wheel being hung over a smooth, prepared 3 foot thick slab of concrete. The wheel is spun by me while the crane operator slowly lowers it into the concrete. The wheel would be operated until it is stuck or I fail to move it any longer. The piece would be shown with the scaffold I am standing on and the crane removed. This piece is largely designed with the crane in mind, giving the crane the ability to play with the tool and the material.

Drawing Tool #5- Doughnut, goes back to a formal exploration of a shape. This piece is more of a visual puzzle where the viewer can observe that the sculpture was made by simply removing the middle of the form and flipping around.

I just got done saying that all these 'Tools' were designed to complete their tasks, but should point out that none of them were drawn before hand. I work in a very intuitive way with the steel, just responding to the materials I have until I have generated a form. The use for the form comes along as it is being made, or after it is completed.

Chapter 3: Future Work

I am moving to Chicago immediately after the Thesis Exhibition. I see Chicago as an exciting city for a sculptor to live and work in. My work has always been pointed in the direction of large-scale outdoor sculpture. In a lot of ways I feel like Chicago is the home of this kind of work. There are multiple venues in and around the city to support it.

What I would like to see happen with my work is for it to continue to grow in scale and to be accessible by common people in public spaces. While I do enjoy showing work in galleries, I often find it to be problematic with the size and weight of the materials I work with. I prefer that my sculptures be observed outside where they are actually able to interact with the ground as a plane and a material.

As far as the Drawing Tools go, I feel I have just scratched the surface of possibilities in this work. I want to let go of more control with these projects and see them unfold into large-scale planned accidents. My goal is to see the objects have complete integration with the drawing materials, to arrive at forms and sites that have not been seen before. I would also like to find a way of using actual earth moving equipment in the process.

I think my struggle with realizing these goals will be that the formal beauty I see in the objects sometimes prevents me from pushing them to their physical limits. It is also difficult to find public spaces where something like this can occur and remain on display. For now, I will concentrate my energy on starting a studio in Chicago to further explore this work.