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19 Feb 2018

### **Mutualism: The Answer to Human Happiness**

Through the last few years of my life, I have experienced a great deal of change in my environment. I have realized that even moving within a miniscule region of the world can completely change an individual's mindset and way of living. Through education and social experiences, I have acquired an awareness of the lost connection between humans and their natural environment. This realization has heightened my activism in the areas of environmentalism and minimalism vs. consumerism. I strive to take these passions and curiosities and create pieces that allow personal feelings to escape into something physical, bringing the viewer into the activism mindset. By exploring organic forms with common materials humans come in contact with on a daily basis (newspapers, water, concrete, ceramics, metal, etc.), I create an environment representing the origin of these materials. This gives the viewer an acknowledgement that regular materials, surroundings and possessions were once housed in a natural environment. My organic forms, mixed with the manipulated look of the human touch, demonstrate an environment where humans and nature are connected in a harmonious relationship. One can see that when the human species are brought back into a relationship with their source (nature), a beautiful environment is exposed. If humans can appreciate the source of their materials, mutualism can then occur where humans are benefitting from nature just as much as nature has given to them.

The results of this disconnection between humans and nature, and the unsuccessful relationship of mutualism, has created a significant impact in the ways humans behave. Many people suffer from depression, feeling lost, extreme doubt, and being overwhelmed. I feel this leads them to have a block to their realistic surroundings. With all of the advances humans themselves have created, there are many distractions in the world. The earth has become too overwhelming for many people and the special, important factors of life are often overlooked. Because of these feelings toward present human nature, I have recognized which art movements influence and present themselves in my art processes. My pieces are best explained with a combination of the art movements; process art, excessivism, and conceptual art.

Process Art “refers to where the process of its making art is not hidden but remains a prominent aspect of the completed work, so that a part or even the whole of its subject is the making of the work” (Tate.org). The most important material I can use to appreciate the process is paper pulp. Its process makes me aware of the materials and labor it takes to get to an end result. Its working procedure connects me to the understanding of what nature has done for us as humans. Instead of completely focusing on the end result of my pieces, I am also focusing on the strategic process of making the paper pulp and how it makes me feel. While collecting paper, I have completed research which has helped me understand how much paper is actually used by the United States on a daily basis. Approximately 68 million trees are cut down a year to produce paper and its products (*Facts About Paper: The Impact of Consumption*). This fact baffles me and makes me furious of the negative actions of humans. The paper pulp process eases this frustration as I feel I am recycling a material and then using it to bring awareness, rather than buying new and expanding consumerism. Along with being completely aware of the process and

my actions with the paper pulp, I also prefer the hand-touched process to be revealed at the end. Artists such as Richard Serra and Robert Morris (fig. 1 & 2) are known as famous within this movement as they were post-challenging Minimalism as an art movement, making the final pieces more about the space and relationship rather than the object just being an object. They felt this brought art back to art and its process (*Process Art*). Michael Fried also challenged Minimalism in “Art and Objecthood” where he felt just because the Minimalism artists challenged the viewer’s relationship with certain objects, this did not make the objects themselves art, just objects. He felt this made these artists theorists and literalists, rather than artists (Harrison, Charles, and Wood, Paul, editors). I feel the Minimalism art movement was crucial in bringing this relationship challenge between the viewer and the piece, but Process Art is a tremendous way to combine the relationship of the viewer and piece, while the piece is still about the process and the making it took to get there. Although I believe it is crucial to understand an object and view it as an object, I also realize it is important for a piece, as art, to reveal the making that brought it to its existence. I feel it is necessary to understand the background of something rather than just what it is in its present state.

This brings me to the art movement of Excessivism. This 21st century art movement consists of artists who work to explain the process of Excessivism as a humanistic tendency through their art pieces. Excessivism as an art movement is known as using abstraction and excessive tendencies to represent the same relationship as people and the materials and money they consume in today’s society (*Excessivism - A Phenomenon Every Art Collector Should Know*). Kaloust Guedel is known as the creator of this art movement. Guedel works with sculptural materials and focuses on the capitalist system (fig. 3). This system targets obtaining

money without focusing on the consequences of humans and the environment (“Kaloust Guedel”). Another famous artist considered in this art movement is Ai Weiwei, who also tends to focus on capitalist society tendencies through exaggerating certain political topics and bringing them face to face with the viewer (fig. 4). Many other emerging artists belong to this art movement, obtaining common materials (oil paint, vinyl, glass, metal, acrylic, etc.) to create sculptural and painterly pieces. In my own work, I also obtain these different materials, keeping the goal in mind to collect what most humans come in contact with daily. I then work these materials into organic structures and forms, while also keeping the look of human manipulation. Collecting these materials and then using them a certain way to bring awareness of the material’s origin are my way of executing Excessivism, representing the issue of humans and their materialistic tendencies.

This brings me to the art movement Conceptual Art. Because my pieces all have a particular meaning and concept and are not primarily based on form, they can be considered Conceptual Art. This thought of bringing the common materials back into the viewer’s eye, only also putting it back into more of a natural state, is my way of making the viewer aware that their materials were natural resources. As stated in *Conceptual Art, Ideas and Ontology*, “the medium is the idea.” The idea behind my work is what is most important. I want the viewer to take what they have become aware of from viewing my senior thesis, *Mutualism*, and keep this in their mind. My hope is they may, in turn, eventually partake in some action to help the environment, rather than harm it. My work is conceptual because without a particular meaning and explanation behind it, it could change. The specific conceptual meaning behind it is what I want the viewers to take from it, this is my ultimate goal. I have specific meanings behind everything I make and

every process I execute. The main concept is the mutual relationship that should be existing between humans and nature, resulting in both benefiting from one another.

I have learned that in order for someone to actually acknowledge something, they must learn how it directly affects *them*. I aim to bring people face to face with a harmonious relationship of humans and nature, showcasing that this relationship can, in fact, exist in healthy terms. Sometimes we, as humans, are too caught up in the materials and what they are not, rather than where they originated from and the path that has been made along the way to their new purpose. If the environment displayed in *Mutualism* is able to bring the viewer back to nature, even for just a little while and make them think about where the materials are actually coming from, part of my goal has been met. If my whole goal is met, people will continue thinking about nature in relation to materials and try to make a difference in the way their materiality may impact the earth. Sometimes all it takes is some education and acknowledgement to make humans not so caught up in this crazy, advanced world. My work displayed in *Mutualism* aims to represent commonly used human materials in an organic and natural state. The processes, ideas and finalized pieces strongly show evidence in the art movements of Conceptual Art, Excessivism and Process Art.

Images Cited:

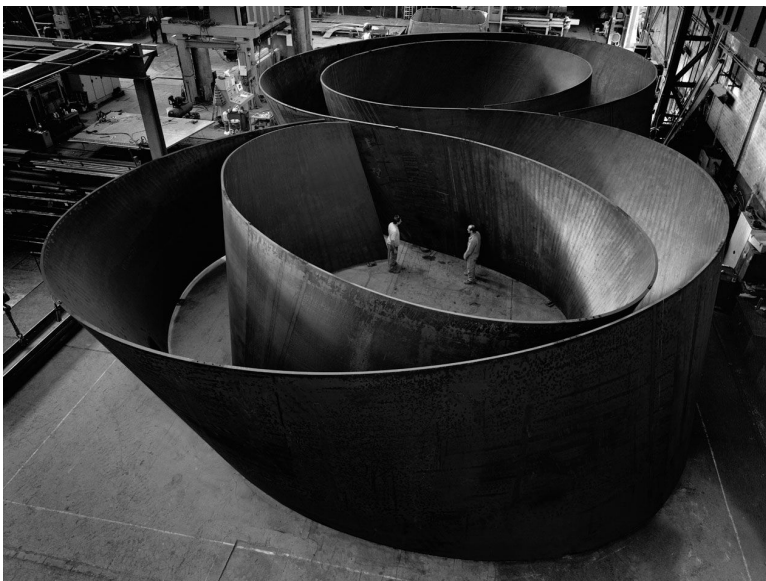
*Figure 1 - Robert Morris*

<http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2012/08/ar-robert-morris-at-sprueth-magers/>



*Figure 2 - Richard Serra*

<https://alchetron.com/Richard-Serra#->



*Figure 3 - Kaloust Guedel*

<https://www.artcopyblog.com/kaloust-guedels-excessivism-speaks-to-trumps-popularity/>



*Figure 4 - Ai Weiwei*

<http://unrtd.co/ai-weiweis-laundromat-exhibition-makes-you-stop-to-think-about-the-syrian-refugee-crisis>



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