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Artist Statement

In my artwork there lies a transformation, the actual object being represented becomes the art; this emerges every time we draw, paint, or sculpt from life. We are freeing the object from its function and elevating its existence. In essence I'm glorifying the banality of everyday objects.

Historically, everyday objects have constituted the subject matter or provided the motif for painting. These types of paintings have survived longer than the objects themselves. This fact is demonstrated in history with portraiture, landscapes, and still-life paintings hanging today in galleries and museums. The paintings serve as records for posterity. They suggest to us what a person looked like, the characteristics of a person, style of the time, what a particular area of land looked like, and shapes or colors of still-life objects. The paintings are only deceptive reminders, since the painted picture is not the actual object. The painting is, instead, a two-dimensional representation of the object but not three-dimensional. By utilizing the actual object in my artwork I can permanently capture every aspect of the object in all three dimensions.

I fuse representational art with the object's form in my painting studies. The object is literally used as a connecting bridge within the context of painting to be the form upon which I paint.

This converts its existence from just an object into the realm of artistic expression. Some of my paintings do not use canvas as the paint application surface, but they employ the actual medium of paint.

In the beginning of my artistic journey I was actually covering objects with paint, reproducing the look of their natural surface. I continued this style until it evolved into what I do today, making objects out of paint. An inventory of these various paint covered objects include:

paint brushes, soup cans, a still-life diorama, an outlet, a light switch, a milk jug, two taxidermy fish, a KFC bucket, a Heinz Ketchup bottle, a painted sculpture, and many different fruits covered with paint. These pieces led to the idea of the perishability, history, depiction, and significance of the object in art. In relation to my covering objects with paint I have learned that some people in the advertising world paint over objects like those seen in food magazines to make their appearance more enticing. When the photography is complete, the artists discard the items.

A brief overview of my paint covered objects that would demonstrate my concept the best would be that of the *Romanesque Mannequin*. It has the illusion of appearing to be a bronze sculpture with a patina. In this piece I am playing with the idea of a sculpture versus a painting. I am reminded of the Paragone debate that occurred during the Italian Renaissance about which method of art was better. Leonardo da Vinci discussed this at length in his *Treatise on Painting*.¹ Paintings were made which mimicked sculptures high up on chapel ceilings or walls. This technique of quadri riportati, quadratura, or also known as di sotto in su created the illusion that the structure appeared to have sculptures lining the walls or ceiling throughout the building. Very realistic columns could be painted that appeared to reach up to the heavens, but it would only be painting on a flat plastered surface. An example of this painting technique can be seen in the Farnese gallery in Rome. A similar faux painting style also existed in Etruscan villa frescoes. Trained professionals of the era painted frescoes showing scenes that appeared to be a view looking out into the wilderness from a window, but the window was painted on the wall. This mere decoration made the room appear bigger and more grandiose having such a “view.”

Another notable venue that I explored in my previous artwork is seen in my *Blob* series. I have taken an actual object, like a red apple, and have completely covered it in red glossy paint

¹ Mitchell, W.J.T. *Picture Theory*. University of Chicago Press, 1994. Pg. 227.

that is attached to canvas. This gives the effect of the object being forced into the two-dimensional realm and making it appear to be melting into the painting. In other pieces, the objects seem to be protruding out of the two-dimensional plane as if they are emerging in order to become real objects again. I created one of the apple paintings to have the effect of wet paint appearing to drip down onto the floor and invading our space. The paint “spill” is a solid object that is physically removable; a fake that can be easily picked up and moved to a new location. By fusing the actual objects into the paint and suspending them physically “between” the second and third dimensions, the setting becomes more truthful and provocative in its presentation.

By definition, most of my pieces are physically ‘paintings on three-dimensional matter.’ Some may seem deceptive to the viewer. The observer may not detect that the item is indeed made out of paint. This ruse is a playful ploy that I like to compare to the use of the trompe l’oeil painting technique as I regard the physical surface of the object becoming my canvas. Some pieces reveal the fact that my artwork is made out of paint and these visual cues are given away by the dripping appearance, the heavy use of impasto, or by the fact that they are cut to display the multiple layers of paint that make up the piece.

In one piece entitled *Artist Statement Summary*, the text is painted onto an 8 1/2" x 11" slab of acrylic paint. The slab size is similar to a piece of standard typing paper, but on the sides of the slab there are layers of colors from the multiple layers of paint. The artist statement is intriguing when presented this way as it functions both as a part of the artwork, an object to be contemplated, and as an explanation of my works.

My technique of audience deception reminds me of the children’s story *The Emperor’s New Clothes* by Hans Christian Andersen. The story tells of an emperor who is fond of new clothes and who learns of two weavers that make a special cloth that is invisible to persons who are unqualified for their office or they are simpleminded. The emperor hires the two clothiers

(who unbeknownst to him were con men) to make a suit of this fabric so he can weed out the incompetents in his court. The emperor's servants report back to him on the progress of the work on the clothes. The servants see nothing being made and out of fear for their jobs, they lie to the king and say all is going well. When the suit is finally completed, the emperor holds his tongue because he cannot see the clothing either and does not want to appear inept. He "puts on" the invisible clothes and parades through the town. The crowds all act as if they see the clothing until suddenly a child yells out that the emperor has nothing on. The entire crowd now acknowledges that the emperor is naked and they begin to laugh. The king still proceeds on with the parade despite the fact that he is naked and refuses to see the truth. As I present these objects in my artwork that are paint covered, the viewer will not see the 'clothes' that I have painted on the object. They will only see the object as it would look underneath. This story provides a commentary on the simplistic viewing of art. As in the story the con-artists, (pun intended) told the king that if you cannot see the clothing you would be unfit for office, translating to if the audience cannot see the art then they are unfit for viewing the art.

In my theory studies I have become acquainted with the works *Painted Bronze* (Ballantine Ale cans) by Jasper Johns. The first works of Johns that I had known as an undergraduate were of his *Flag* series. After I developed my idea of painting objects I became aware of Johns' *Painted Bronze* pieces. These are bronzed works of real objects and with the labels painted on. I questioned why Johns did a bronze of the can instead of using the actual can. Johns wants this imitated form to remind us more of the object he is representing. Perhaps he wanted to make it last even longer than the actual painted can by using bronze casting or wanted to elevate the object through transformative properties, using the 'aura' of bronze. This attempt at permanence is similar to what I have tried to do. By including an object's actual form imbued within the paint I challenge the viewer to question why paint is directly applied on the object.

Upon my discovery of Johns' works, I was shocked at the level of originality that appeared to be extracted from my own concepts. One of his bronzed objects was a light bulb and my first painted object was a painted light bulb. I then felt as if I was filling in the gaps of my own artistic development with previous artists. The development of my ideas on objects and painting in my mind was evolving with the increasing knowledge of art history and theory. After the artists were deceased, I felt as if I was continuing their studies. I find myself discovering that many artists' thoughts run parallel to one another in the evolution of art.

J. Seward Johnson is another artist whose works relate to my pieces. Johnson's *Beyond the Frame: Impressionism Revisited* exhibition at the Corcoran Museum, are all bronze sculptures that mimic famous paintings from the Impressionist movement. Johnson created scenes from famous impressionist paintings emulating the style of that particular painting by applying paint over the bronze sculpture. These sculptures then give the illusion of being created out of paint. By this type presentation Johnson enables the viewer to actually step into the painting to see more of what exists in the display. An example of this type of work is Van Gogh's *The Bedroom at Arles*, in which the viewer can actually step into his bedroom, lie on his bed, and "Step into another reality."²

Another multi-dimensional artist I discovered during the evolution of my artwork is Daniel Douke. Douke fabricated structured stretchers that are painted upon to look like every day cardboard boxes. Although he builds up the forms using canvas and wood, my emphasis is similar by just using paint to construct the objects that I "paint." All of my objects must be constructed out of acrylic paint. Some do require a base, pedestal, stand, or wood backing, but these additions are essential for display purposes only in order to prop the painted object vertically or for hanging hardware.

² Johnson, J. Seward, et al. *Beyond The Frame: Impressionism Revisited*. Bulfinch Press Boston. 2003. Pg. 15.

Back in my undergraduate years I remember something that now seems uncanny. When I first started to paint observationally a professor recommended that I look at Giorgio Morandi because I was painting in his style. Morandi was a still-life painter and prior to his still-life studies, he started to paint some grouped objects on which he applied flat white or grayish paint to eliminate all of their reflections. His studio with these paint-covered bottles has been reconstructed in the Morandi Museum in Bologna, Italy.³

Artists and theorists who explore the realm of the object in relationship to art have been my primary influences. In particular, the artists, Marcel Duchamp, Rene Magritte, Edward Ruscha, Jim Dine, Joseph Kosuth, Andy Warhol, and Amedee Ozenfant have been strong sources of inspiration. The philosophies of Pliny the Elder, da Vinci, Plato, Jacques Derrida, and Jean Baudrillard have also made me think about new ideas and concepts. They have all provided works and theories for me to assess and contemplate in my artistic endeavors.

Plato's philosophy as presented in *The Republic*, with "Allegory of the Cave" and "The Forms," has played a big role in my painting philosophy. Plato talked of truth not existing in art and art using false images as imitations. In this way the images are never really true to themselves unless they progress through the three forms that Plato discussed. I try to incorporate all three altogether in my art; the actual form, the ideal form, and the picture of the form. Kosuth's work, *One and Three Chairs*, makes references to these different manifestations with the same meaning. Kosuth used a definition of the object, a photograph of the object, and then the actual object. *The Treachery of Images* by Rene Magritte projects a similar thought in the image of a pipe with the text below it saying, "This is not a pipe." This mimesis of the pipe was something I valued because this approach was a new way of viewing art to make us more self-aware. Magritte is showing us the relationship of pictures and words. I visualized a different

³ Wilkin, Karen. *Giorgio Morandi*. Rizzoli International Publications. New York. 1998. Pg. 16.

approach eliminating the use of words, but merely using the image and the object so that the words would not distract the viewer. Magritte's use of text with the image distracts because the font, size, and color pulls away the viewer's attention from the object. I see the relationship between the actual object and the idea of the object being depicted within Magritte's work. This is a key concept, because as an artist we deal with this relationship every day. Initially, I was interpreting every little painting stroke to create the exact likeness for the object being depicted. Then I incorporated Kosuth, Magritte, and Plato together into a single concept and included the actual object. By using Plato's approach to art as an imitation, I was making a playful response by creating a 'real' imitation in placing the real object into the realm of the imitated.

Extracting bits and pieces of the aforementioned artists along with Plato's forms, I decided to combine them altogether, to make an object out of paint. Although more sculpture-like, I deny the definition of the paint object as a sculpture but of one that is a painting as my medium is paint. I am trying to bring back painting, a painting revolution as it were, in order to resuscitate the medium and bring it to the forefront again. I am making a statement for defeating the new types of art seen so much today that are mostly installations and digital art. By making these objects, I am making copies of an original or even another copy which directly ties into Jean Baudrillard's discussion of the hyperreal, the simulacra, and simulation in art. Here I follow-through with creating an end to the readymade original (inspired by Duchamp), praising a counterfeit, replacing the real with a produced copy, and even making multiples as in my works with paint brushes or walnuts. With a Baudrillard insight to the copy and original I confuse the notion of what is real and what is simulated.

The method by which I create my artworks is facilitated through a silicone mold making process. By taking an object and creating a mold of that object, I can brush in layers of acrylic paint on top of another and allow each layer to thoroughly dry. These paint layers build into solid

pieces as each of the layers adhere to the previous layer, bulking up into a solid. When properly filled to a certain point, I can remove the built up impression from the mold. At this point I can work with the object that is now made entirely out of acrylic paint and visualize the final effect. I faux paint the object to look closely like the original and apply a visual cue through paint drippings, colored layers, or impasto markings to clearly show that the item is made of paint. Like historical paintings that are made for posterity, I am doing the same by preserving each object's physical presence with the paint. I feel as if I am creating artifacts for the public to view or items similar to the idea of readymades.

In researching the discussions about the utilization of the medium of paint as the pure substance, I have been pondering how the Purism movement concerns my works. As Braque and Picasso were trying to capture the whole form as seen from all sides onto the flat surface of a canvas in Cubism, other artists like Amedee Ozenfant interpreted Cubism as working towards the search for truthfully representing subjects or objects. Like Ozenfant, I am creating the truthful representation of the object, however, I am going beyond the two dimensional boundary that has been traditionally been set for painters. Now that I have created this more truthful object out of the pure medium of paint it can be viewed as the ultimate painting. It is how the very essence of the object should be portrayed. With the reconstituted object actually being made out of paint, I see my works as the final step in the evolution of painting. This progression of painting can be seen as the epitome of paint and can be claimed to be the quintessential painting.

Some of the pieces I have made out of paint include: a staple gun, paint brushes, pipes, Twinkies, flowers, walnuts, a Starbucks coffee cup, a fish head, strawberries, a Ballantine ale can, a can of Spam, t-bone steaks, various chocolates, cakes, pretzels, Roman heads, an African head mask, a King Tutankhamen head, a small totem, a Buddha head, picture frames, and a giant sunny side up egg. Most of these pieces have puns attached to them, as the brushes are referred

to as *'Paint' Brushes* and the ale can alludes to Jasper Johns' *Painted Bronze*. I have entitled my piece, however, *Painted Johnze*, using semiotics. In breaking down the word, we see 'John' which is my name, along with the ending –'nze' that is the same last three letters in the word 'bronze.' Phonetically 'Johnze' sounds like Johns, again another inference to the artist Jasper Johns. I feel that my objects out of paint are the final evolution in my artwork showing a transformation that exists in art making.

There is an integration of the real and unreal with my work *Going Nuts*. The walnuts are made from acrylic paint being contained in a real wooden bowl with metal tools. I chose English walnuts as they have an interesting texture in the shell to reproduce and are small in size for ease of initial experimentation with technique. I began to realize that most of the items I choose to paint come from everyday encounters or from my diet. The object becomes more deceptive as I include real objects with the piece, like Baudrillard in order to make the audience wonder even more to discover what is real and what isn't. This work on the surface makes the viewer believe that it is just display of an object and that nothing is fabricated within the composition of the piece.

The *Sunny Side Up Egg* is completely made out of paint, again alluding to the perishability of food items. In retrospect I found this piece, in particular, relating closely to *Sculpture in the Form of a Fried Egg* by Claes Oldenburg. The initial idea of making the egg came as I was choosing things that I used in my daily habits. Every morning I wake up and fix a sunny side up egg as a part of my routine along with a cup of coffee. During the production of the egg, I was researching artists who came close to making objects out of paint and Oldenburg was one of them. Oldenburg progressed to the point of making a complete store that had objects that appeared to be made out of paint, but they were not solely made out of paint. He used plaster and different resins to make his objects. At this time I discovered that Oldenburg had also made

an egg that was much like what I had envisioned, but his was made out of cotton and polystyrene. Like my coincidence with Jasper Johns, I felt that my originality was fleeting, but perhaps I was on the right track. I was picking up the pieces where the other artists left off and I was going down the path where the medium of painting needed to proceed.

The other food piece that appears past the days of being ripe is my work, *Vanitas Strawberry*. Again, the strawberry is made entirely of acrylic paint. Strawberries are very common perishable household food items. The impermanence of the strawberry relates to idea of the vanitas in still-life painting that influences my work. This gives the audience a clue about the various objects that I have chosen and ties it all back to the ideas of the vanitas and the memento mori. The aforementioned concept is further evidenced by my *A Still-Life Rendered* consisting of a wooden table holding a wide variety of objects: chocolates, flowers, pretzels, steaks, books including a Bible, head of a fish, a Star buck coffee cup, a light bulb, nails, a bunt cake, carrots, Twinkies, strawberries, coins, an ale can, canned ham, and a pineapple upside down cake. These items are all made out of paint, even the tablecloth on the wood table. This work parallels the idea of iconology seen in 17th century Dutch painting rendering it within a contemporary context by the use of updated items on the table. The purpose of *A Still-Life Rendered* is to illustrate the transformative qualities in a regression from the two-dimensional painting, producing a permanent still-life model.

This 'real' imitation clarifies the illusion of perception I present to the viewer. I feel as if I am reenacting the story of Zeuxis and Parrhasios as told by Pliny the Elder in *Natural History*. Pliny tells of Zeuxis, a famous Greek painter, who painted grapes so realistically that birds tried to eat them. Due to painting such realistic pieces, Zeuxis declared himself the best painter in all of Greece and was regarded as the first trompe l'oeil artist. Other artists competed against him demonstrating their skills in order to show him up because of Zeuxis' claim of superiority. Not to

be outdone in the competition, another Greek artist, Parrhasios, created a trompe l'oeil painting of a curtain and showed the work to Zeuxis. According to Pliny, Zeuxis asked Parrhasios to draw the curtain aside to reveal the painting that Zeuxis assumed was behind it. Zeuxis realized that he was fooled by the realistic painting of a curtain and he declared Parrhasios the winner because the curtain had tricked a connoisseur artist, while Zeuxis' grapes had only fooled birds.⁴

The importance of the object came to the forefront of my vision when I began working with Sanders Museum Services. I was a mount maker, designing and creating armatures for artifacts in displays at various museums across the country. Working intimately with various artifacts made me realize that these items were once just everyday items and are now significant articles. By making these specialized mounts, I realized that I was glorifying these items for public display. Essentially, we were honoring the artifacts by placing the objects in exhibits because they all had a beauty or were a rarity from the historical past. I learned that some items used in the museums were actually replicas or copies of the original artifacts. This did not seem right to me because people were looking and learning from inauthentic articles and they did not know the difference. A museum director explained that their key goal was for the patrons to experience what a rare artifact did indeed look like, even though it was a fake, so that more people could be exposed to it and learn from the model. I learned from conservators that they often put a forgery of a painting on display when a piece goes under restoration. Painters are paid to replicate these museum pieces to look exactly like the originals. My whole world was turned upside down at this point by knowing that I was probably deceived somewhere previously by a museum. I noted also at this time the importance that we, as a society, place on the idea of the “original.” The learning from a model in a museum policy is evident today in the Art Institute of

⁴ Pliny, *Natural History*, translated by H. Rackham. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952. Pgs. 310-311.

Chicago. They have an exhibit called the Touch Gallery where they have replicas (and originals they say) out on display for the viewers to engage with by the sense of touch.

Upon visiting a museum and seeing a painting of apples, as in a Cezanne, I view the painting as a rendering of the original objects. It is these mementos that are the actual artifacts, paintings, sculptures, and etcetera that the public ends up respecting and revering. After this realization, I chose to stop creating these renderings of still-life objects in paint and focus on items, like artifacts that are respected and valued for their own sake. Within my *Artifact* series I have created two Roman heads, two African tribal head masks, a bust of King Tutankhamen, a young Buddha, and a totem all composed of acrylic paint. This series also comments on the forgeries that museums display by some items revealing their true composition of paint by viewing them from the frayed edges that reveal swirling paint layers or from the backside view. In this venue I made one of the African tribal head masks warped with coloration to show that it is truly made out of paint. This piece functions as a 'fake' or faux historical object, but is still very much an 'artifact.' It now functions as a 'work of art.' Other notable 'artifacts' that I created are two pipes made out of paint, one of which is faux painted to resemble Magritte's pipe, and the other is the same design with multiple layers of colored paint warped to reveal its construction. The faux painted pipe is labeled as *Artifact: 'This is not a pipe'* directing the viewer by again alluding to the aforementioned piece entitled; *Treachery of Images* by Magritte.

Another development in my artwork is seen in '*Paint*' *Brushes* with the creation of a series of the same brush all made out of paint. This multiple production shows the evolution of the brush in a linear format from the multi-colored object in multiple layers of paint to the final faux painted object looking like a real paintbrush. The motivation behind the series allows the viewers to perceive the object as the real thing in a progressive format instead of just an object made out of paint; alluding again to the discussion of visual reality in *The Emperor's New*

Clothes. The audience receives a greater visual cue by seeing the steps evolving from the sporadic color sequence brush, to a localized color patterned brush, and finally to the "normal" looking faux painted brush.

One of the first mentionings of a frame being an object was documented by Michelangelo's *Doni Tondo*, whose frame was individually created for just this piece. It was represented as part of the artwork and was noted as being vitally essential to the whole vision of the work expressing the notion that the frame was just as vital as the painting. As I create my 'paint' objects I observe a direct correlation to the theory of Derrida and his parergon discussion. Parergon, meaning additional, (Greek for 'outside the work') is like the frame around the artwork. It is seen as neither inside nor outside the work, but as a co-existing peripheral to the artwork.⁵ The parergon is a perfect way of explaining my artwork since a frame is normally considered to be an external part of the painting. I, however, have placed no actual internal body of work within the frame but utilize the "frame" itself to embody the total composition of the painting. By this definition, my *Artist Statement Summary* can also be considered a parergon. I was exploring these concepts without ever being exposed to the parergon theories and suddenly I find my pieces matching documented literal sources. I have entitled the frames I created *Derrida's Frame, Parergon, and Derrida's Frame (Warped)*. The warped frame is very much like the imagery of Salvador Dali's melting clock, giving the audience the visual clue that something is awry and leading them to discover that these frames are made out of paint. Another frame piece is entitled *100% Paint*, which mimics Jackson Pollock's painting style, gives the viewer another visual and literal cue. While working on the frames I was researching the Purism topic concerning Ozenfant's 'Golden Ratio' or the Greek symbol known as ϕ . The golden ratio was also being called a 'golden rectangle' or the same shape contained within my frame. This

⁵ Derrida, Jacques. *The Truth in Painting*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod. Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1987. Pgs. 54-55.

knowledge of Purism and Ozenfant's research led me to title one of the frames, ϕ (*Golden Ratio*) *Ozenfant discussing purism.*

My exhibition show surroundings will mimic a museum setting. The "artifacts" will be on pedestals, while the frame pieces and the brush collection will be displayed in a linear format on the walls. I will use professional title cards on the wall alluding to the concepts of the art and "artifact" issue found inside and outside of the museum world.

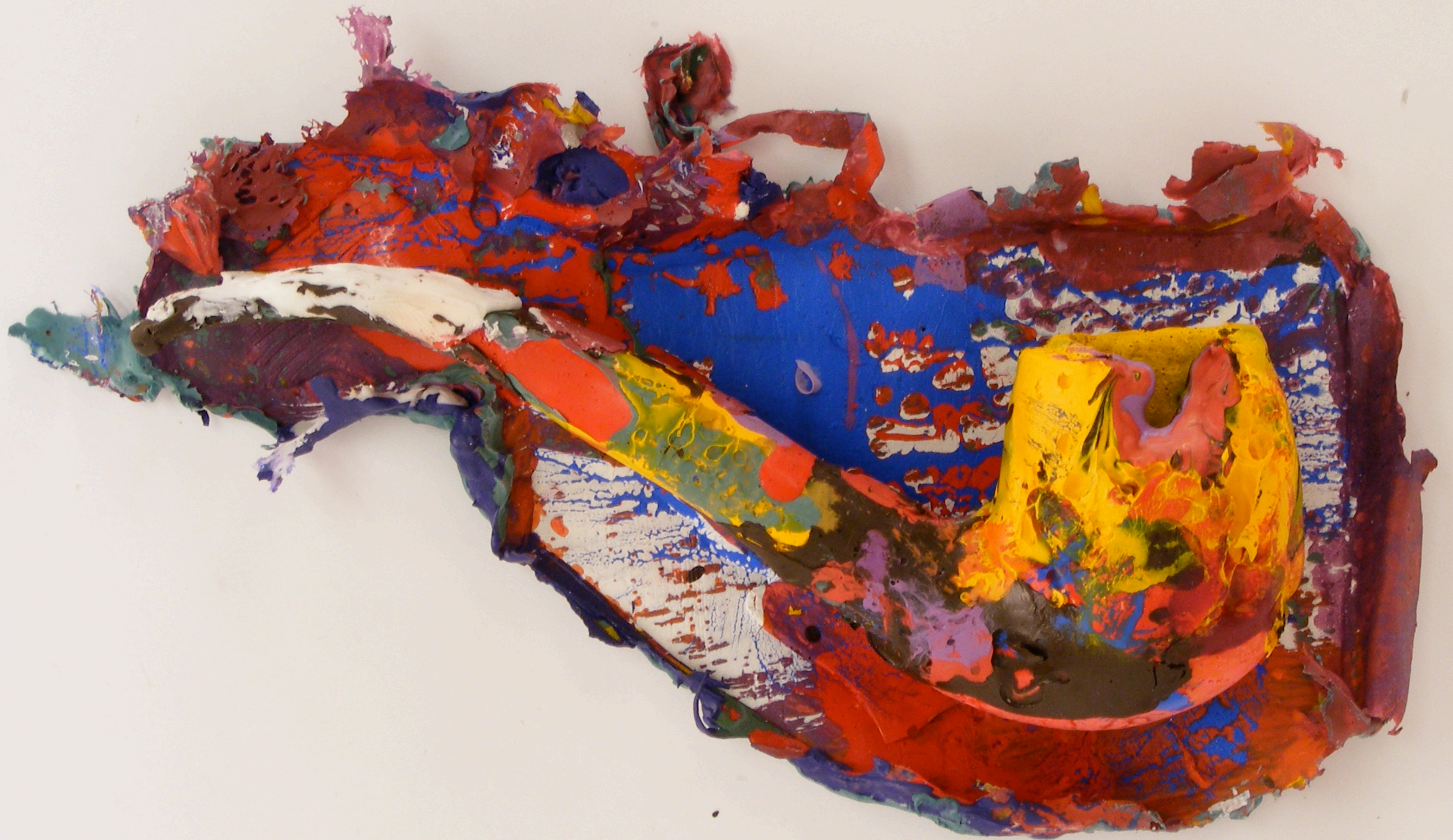
The books *Art & Illusion* by E.H. Gombrich and *The Defense of Art* by Christine Herter are other valuable resources that have assisted me in the further development of my work. The first art theory book I read was *Picture Theory* by W.J.T. Mitchell. I was fascinated by an image included in the text entitled, the *Duck-Rabbit*. In his chapter, "Metapictures" Mitchell talks of this image and refers to it as a "multi-stable metapicture, a self-referential image." He then defines the metapicture as "pictures that show themselves in order to know themselves: they stage the 'self-knowledge' of pictures."⁶ Gombrich and Mitchell both talk of the *Duck-Rabbit* and give different views and comments on pictorial representations in art. All of these resources hold valuable theories and philosophies that I can integrate together to help develop a firm concept that embodies my works.

Just as Jacques Derrida's book is entitled *The Truth in Painting*, so is my show entitled *The Truth in Painting*. In focusing my works on the idea of exploring the context of 'what painting is' I provoke the audience to make their own investigation of the concept of painting as they enter the gallery. They must examine these pictorial artifacts created within the medium as defined by the boundaries of 'painting' as they progress through my exhibition. Philosophy and art theory provide a multifaceted approach to motivate my work propelling the idea of the fusion of painting, the object, and the artifact.

⁶ Mitchell, W.J.T. Pgs. 35-82

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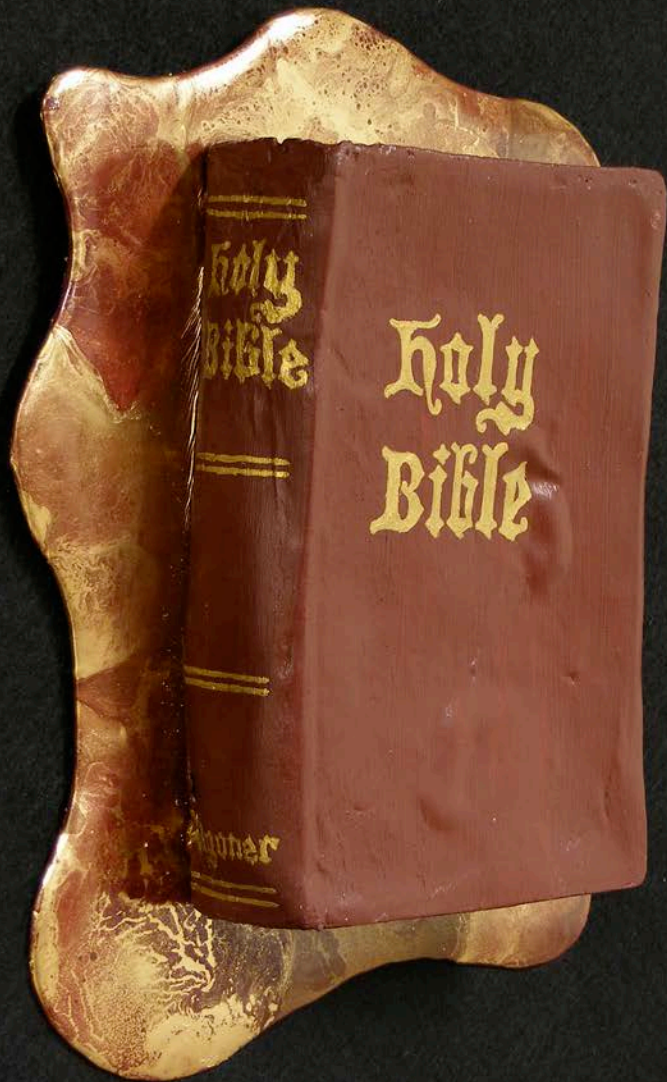




























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