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Artist and the process

David R. Dontigny

The University of Montana

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THE ARTIST AND THE PROCESS

by

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INTRODUCTION

The intent of this thesis is to show the relationship of the artist with the processes and materials and how ideas can form and grow through this relationship. With the development of new materials and methods, the artist can experiment, explore, and give new meaning to the arts.
CHAPTER I

THE ARTIST AND THE PROCESS

Taking the canvas from the easel, laying it on the ground and using a stick instead of a paint brush led Jackson Pollock to the solution of an idea through the process. With this approach to his material, he gave art a different direction—one of freedom and chance which let his material suggest the growth of the painting.

Ben Shahn once stated, "For me there would be little reason for painting if ideas were not to emerge from the work." These ideas of Pollock and Shahn have existed in many artists not only in painting but also in other media.

As an artist acquires more understanding of processes and materials, both ideas and their solutions may appear. There are many elements that enter into this, and the most important is the artist. But the approach that is taken here is to view some of the various possibilities of methods and materials which may influence the idea and its solution.

One of the most important influences upon contemporary art is the artist's experimentation with traditional and new materials. Through this he has opened up new avenues of direction and thought which otherwise may not have been opened. John Mason, a ceramic sculptor, has been able to build huge, thick sculptures as a result of a modification of the clay body. With this new clay body he has been able to build quickly, creating a spontaneous effect to his work.

Industry has played an important role in creative arts with its development of new materials and techniques, which have broadened

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1Ben Shahn, Shape of Content (Cambridge, 1957), p. 50.
the artist's scope and lessened the limitations of his material. With the improvement of paint, cast stone, cement, plastic, clay additives, and adhesives, to name a few, he has been able to perform tasks that normally took longer; and he can do things with materials that he could not do before. The techniques of welding and braising have added greatly to sculpture, enabling the artist to shape sculptures of metal more quickly and to gain dramatic effects in texture, as an example.

Adding to the growth of an artist are the significant effects which sometimes appear in the process. The artist should be able to recognize the value of these effects and to capitalize on them when possible. Some examples of such effects in sculpture are:

1. In the casting process, flashing or the seepage of molten metal into the cracks in the mold, can suggest new avenues of expression. This result usually is cleaned off, but in some cases it can add interesting textures and forms to the sculpture.

2. Slumping of clay in building clay sculptures is another example that can be capitalized on. This can suggest a form or a variation of forms which could be left or worked into a meaningful part of the sculpture. It may be noted that when a desirable accident appears, an artist learns from it and in many cases can reproduce and control it as Pollock controlled his painting. However, such accidents, uncontrolled by the artist, can result in complete failure.

3. Surface texture due to handling or marks left by tools is another example. Finger marks in clay or hammer and file marks in metal can add aesthetic contrast and retain the beauty of the building process.
The use of found materials has greatly widened the scope and
direction of sculpture and has added freshness and charm to many artistic
works. Some examples of found objects used as sculpture are Harold
Paris's chair cast in bronze and the European sculpture of Rauol d'Haesa's,
"A Lumumba," which consists of a tree trunk, what appears to be a
lampshade, a boot, and a few other objects arranged in a very unusual
and artistic manner.

The sculptures that are presented in this thesis are the result
of the artist's involvement in materials and the process, and the
association directly or indirectly with other artists and their concepts.
CHAPTER II

CERAMIC SCULPTURES

The following ceramic sculptures have evolved from an understanding of pottery and the methods and materials used in their construction. As the sculptures were constructed, new ideas and directions emerged. The glazing of surfaces of the sculptures is a direct outgrowth of pottery and was done to bring completeness and richer meaning to the sculptures.
The base of a ceramic sculpture will suggest at times the direction which the piece may be resolved. With this particular piece, "Burning Bush," the base was made in the shape of a half moon and in building the clay upward, an open-type form appeared. As it progressed, the open area became more interesting and invited the viewer to experience the interior as well as the exterior. The dots of color that surround the edge of the piece accent the finger marks in the clay and emphasize the void. The vertical strokes of glaze were made to give the illusion of height and to make the plain area more meaningful.
By building quickly, the clay in some parts of the sculpture slumped and suggested a single form which was then made into a meaningful part of the sculpture. The difficult part in building the piece was terminating it. "Number 3" in its finished state gives the appearance of a large, kernel-type construction that is growing and trying to push outwards. Because of the large, simple areas in the sculpture, a painterly approach was taken in glazing to add contrast and interest to it.
The intent of "Little-Big" was to construct a variety of shapes by building them out from a cylindrical base until the clay had reached its maximum stress. In forming the shapes, one would suggest another until the final conclusion was reached. The glazing was done quickly and with much freedom, letting the glaze flow over the shapes, increasing the activity in each one.
"Golden Brown" was first in a series of pieces that started from a small base and expanded outward with various flat shapes, letting the slumping of the clay and the finger marks work with the construction. In glazing an attempt was made to combine sculpture and painting, using the sculptured surface as a canvas.
In building "The Trap" it was desired to see how far the clay could be pushed and how the form could be resolved. This was done by building a tall, narrow base, mushrooming outward at the top. The construction of the sculpture was terminated when a few small cracks appeared in the lower part of the upper section, indicating that the weight was becoming too great.
Height was desired in this piece and, because of the properties of the clay and the size of the kiln, it was necessary to build it in sections. Further feeling of height in each section was obtained by elevating the clusters of forms.
"The Nude" was done from a live study, working directly with sheet wax, making cylinders and forming them together. The textured areas are the result of pushing the wax in the forming process and also flashing in the casting process. While some of the flashing was cleaned off, some was worked into the area to give more interest and an abstract quality. The open area at the top was left to give a spatial feeling similar to the "Burning Bush."
"In and Out" is a simple form with a variation of surface contours and textures, due partially to flashing. The surface reflects the quality of the material and the process. The open areas were left to give the viewer the experience of seeing the interior as well as the exterior as in "Burning Bush" and "The Nude."
The core of this piece was built first, and the sheet wax was then draped over the core. The texture that appears is the texture resulting from the joining of the wax and the filling with bronze of the holes left due to incomplete casting.
The construction of the bronze piece, "Mark," was done by pushing from the inside of a sheet of wax to form the half circle. The features were built up by adding soft wax to the main body. In doing it this way, the character of the wax and the force used in pushing show through, adding an interesting textural quality.
The construction of the bronze piece, "Mark," was done by pushing from the inside of a sheet of wax to form the half circle. The features were built up by adding soft wax to the main body. In doing it this way, the character of the wax and the force used in pushing show through, adding an interesting textural quality.
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