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## Captured Artifacts

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# CAPTURED ARTIFACTS

by

CHARLES PEARSON BURCH

(Under the Direction of Patricia W. Carter)

## ABSTRACT

My art examines the possible existence of an unknown civilization through the presentation of sculptural art objects within the conventional practice of displaying artifacts in a public institution. Historically, artifacts have served as visual records of journeying to and returning from a far-away land, unknown territory, alien soil, or enemy battlefield. Whether that place is tangible or is a fabrication of our subconscious, the presence of an artifact represents validation of the existence of that place. When displayed, artifacts offer a pleasurable challenge to the viewer by evoking the possibilities of a lost civilization or adventurer's journey. I employ these concepts in a mixed-media installation of sculptural artworks titled *Captured Artifacts*. In this installation, the juxtaposition of the known with the unknown causes one to pontificate an unfathomable happenstance: the actual possibility of an unknown culture existing beyond the known civilization.

INDEX WORDS: Installation, Sculpture, Artifact, Conventional Practice, Alien, History, Subconscious

CAPTURED ARTIFACTS

by

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B.F.A., Georgia Southern University, 1997

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

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CAPTURED ARTIFACTS

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Electronic Version Approved:  
December 2006

## DEDICATION

In recognition for their patience and untiring support, both monetarily and emotionally, I dedicate this thesis to Jim and Marsha B. Wilson; to my friend and sister in art, Traci Shipley; and to B. Darlene Miller, tireless supporter and advisor.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INSPIRATION

I once had the privilege of attending a lecture at the Duval County Science Museum in Jacksonville, Florida. The guest lecturer was Sir Arthur C. Clarke. He has often been called the “Father” of the communications satellite. A foremost scientist and author, I had to go and hear him speak. At this time I was beginning to take an interest in engineering and was just beginning my studies as an apprentice draftsman. He began the lecture asking everyone in the room, “How many of you believe that life exist on worlds other than our earth?” A number of hands went up. He then asked a second question, “Should we attempt to make contact with them?” Several shouted that we should. Clarke said, “That would be the most foolish thing we could do.” Everyone in the room fell silent. Further explanation was required if we were to understand.

We must consider that any life form that we would potentially make contact with will have evolved from a predatory organism. Not that they would be hunters in the strictest sense, but we must assume these creatures may be bellicose. For a moment, let us put all other arguments aside and look at examples here on earth. Cooperative hunters such as lions, wolves, and killer whales possess the basic precursors of reason. These animals have a rudimentary capability to plan, implement, and adapt. On any planet it will most likely be the predators that will ascend to be the most intelligent beings on their world and the ones that will be most likely to make the leap outward in the universe. I do not wish to plant the idea that any extraterrestrials that we may contact will only be hostile, if we make

any contact at all. Given our own negative history of first contact with those of our own species who were less advanced, how can we expect any different. Should contact be avoided? I think it should be for the foreseeable future; until we are better able to protect ourselves. Even if we are cautious we are sending out directional locating beacons through our television and radio signals. Going one step further, the voyager probe is on its way out of the solar system into deep interstellar space. On this probe is a greeting recorded on a gold record and an astronavigational roadmap pointing the way toward earth. I do not fear for the fact that voyager may keep going for all eternity unfound and unnoticed. I fear that something will find it and follow the map back to our solar system and earth. There either is or is not life in outer space and I find either thought most frightening” (Excerpt quoted from a lecture given by [Sir] Arthur C. Clarke at the Duval County Science Museum located in Jacksonville, Florida 1989)

I remember that I was particularly captivated by one part of the speech. Television and radio signals go out into space and keep going like ripples in a pond. The fact that our signals could be used to triangulate our position and thus the location of humanity was astounding to me. We send out signals that may be received by beings we cannot imagine. These signals are our first contact with another civilization. Could it be that the signals themselves are intangible artifacts? By accepting the idea that there may be other intellectual beings in our universe, we broaden the possibilities of invasion, the need for

protection, and the procurement of artifacts made by the ‘other.’ Perhaps these are not artworks you see in this exhibition, *Captured Artifacts*, but are evidence of my journey.

Indeed, I believe that as a contemporary artist I have inherited the tradition of making the artifact. All of the artworks I have produced are an attempt to capture a snapshot of an environment, place, and time representing a mental state of universal existence. Throughout time the creative thinker, the skilled craftsman, and the artist have always made the visual objects that documented human experiences. Contemporary artists can document history through the works of art they create today that describe their personal experiences, and those of all humankind. How they are presented, as art or artifact, depends upon the perception of the viewer. Regardless of how they are perceived, both the artwork and the artifact remain stable while the world around us moves through constant and rampant changes that remain unchecked.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONCEPTS OF AN ARTIFACT

This thesis will examine artwork in the exhibition *Captured Artifacts* as aesthetically pleasing art objects, and concurrently, as counterfeit artifacts. When considering artifacts, the sculptures bring to life the potential of a surreal, unknown civilization within the viewer's imagination, while at the same time reassuring the artist's intellectual thoughts. Parallels between these sculptural artworks and the innumerable cultural artifacts found in the milieu of history museums around the world abound.

I believe an artifact, in its most broad definition, is an object described by its purpose and its documentation of a culture or society, which is further validated when the object is placed on public display. The artifact serves history by documenting products of a civilization. The artifact is most often an object made with deliberate intent by some form of artifice, mainly human physical labor powered by ingenuity. For instance, an axe, chair, or quilt does not appear naturally, these are items that must be made. In making them, the creator will resolve many complex problems related to their fabrication. While the intelligence and skill necessary to manufacture an artifact is essential in the creation of the artifact, equally so is the influence of the surroundings in which it is constructed. The material culture of a place, and to a greater extent the natural environment, dictates the substance of which an object will be made by virtue of the resources that are available. Some materials are readily accessible, while others are rare or totally absent. Throughout history, inventive humans have found existing materials in their environment and produced articles useful to their survival or comfort.

The material from which an artifact is made has much to do with its origins. Could it also be that objects from far away places are reminders of these places solely because of material construction? Items made from sealskin, rhino, and Nile crocodile, precious and semi-precious materials such as jade, pearl, coral, lapis lazuli, jet, gold, and silver evoke thoughts of far away countries. Rare and expensive hardwoods such as ebony, mahogany, bubinga, purple-heart and many others lend substance to a work of art. Through tangible material, and consequent substance, the tactile presence of the object is enhanced, enabling the thought process to take hold and allow the viewer's imagination to travel to these far away places.

On the other end of the spectrum there are the synthetics more commonly referred to as manmade materials. During my time in engineering, I designed mechanical components that used metals such as Hastalloy and Inconel, often called "exotic alloys". Consider the products of our industrial age, such as classic automobiles; there are some who would argue that a Bugatti *Royale* is just as much an artifact as an ancient Egyptian sarcophagus.

The artifact can be further defined by the workmanship that narrates the interaction of material and tool with humankind. Leather and wood are reactive to the tools that work upon them, that is to say some evidence of a tool mark is left upon the surface even after some sort of finish has been applied. The use of these materials stands out today because most everything is made of plastic. The organic materials are more precious today. Can the material be a rebellion against the plastic or the synthetic? My answer is yes. Artifacts can be made out of metal too. Aluminum did not come along

until the late nineteenth century and duralumin, an alloy of aluminum and magnesium used primarily for aircraft construction, did not become available until the mid 1920's.

The relation of the artifact to the materials is often related to availability. This point keeps coming up, but it only serves to emphasize the point of the relationship between common and uncommon materials as it relates to the art object in addition to the other factors of time and place. Given that some materials are available only at or in certain chronological time periods, the value of an article goes up because of the unavailability of materials such as ones that come from a species or material that may no longer exist.

Production does not necessarily relate to factory type mass production, rather the word relates to the skill that is necessary to assemble materials and produce usable goods. However with this in mind another interesting point can be made. Does an artifact have to be a low volume production item made by hand? Art and artifact are interrelated by material and production processes. Material limits must be considered. For instance, wood has far different properties than steel. Wood has been used to build aircraft, but it would not be feasible to make an all steel aircraft. It would not fly due to its weight. However, steel and iron will make an excellent main battle tank. Does technological level have anything to do with the making of artifacts? There are two possible answers. One is that it has everything to do with the production of artifacts because only low technology levels can produce true artifacts due to the fact that only the interaction between human and simple tool can produce an artifact. The second answer is that any technological level can produce an artifact and that it is process and material that make an



object an artifact. In my opinion, it is the application of work by skilled hands and limited production that make the artifact.

The *Monolithic Stone Axe* (Figure 1) is a sacred item from Native Americans, Mississippian culture, and Georgia Mound Builders that is inscribed with indigenous depictions of birds and wind spirits native to the culture. The *Windsor Chair* (Figure 2) came from the Stephens House in Taliaferro County, Georgia. It is important because it was Alexander H. Stephens' personal chair. Stephens was a United States Congressman, Governor of Georgia, and Vice-President of the Confederacy. The chair form identifies the context in that its visible form defines its use. "*Bars*" *Work Clothes Quilt* (Figure 3) by Luticia Petway replicates the physical barrier of the pillow in that it isolates the user from the elements. These elements are interrelated with my concept of protection. The quilt batting layered between the fabrics adds density which provides the insulation necessary for physical warmth and protection.



Figure 1: *Monolithic Stone Axe*, Native American Weapons, Colin F. Taylor, AD800. Mississippian Culture, Southeast Georgia



Figure 2: *Windsor Chair*, Neat Pieces, Deanne D. Levison, 1850. Georgia

An artifact may be produced by individuals of a different time who now may no longer exist, such as the Boethuk Indians of Labrador. The artifact is a documentation of history and the passage of time. By the facts of age, material, and provenance in addition to the difficulty of procuring the object, the artifact is not disposable. Such an item stands in direct opposition to our age of disposability. Artifacts are retained out of the desire to maintain a link with the past. Another reason lies not so much in the artifact itself (the item may actually be mundane) but rather, the person that owned it. Some items that were once owned by a prominent historical figure or some other famous or infamous celebrity and are kept because of the connection it gives the collector to that person. In time the artifact assumes an importance that the object did not have in its original context. The key word, time, or better yet timelessness, is an essential part of the nature of the artifact.



Figure 3: *“Bars” Work Clothes Quilt*, Latisha Pettway, 1935-1940. Alabama

Personal artifacts fall into this description. Often they are objects that are of little value in terms of a broader context. Why do we keep our personal artifacts? Through the personal artifact we remember all the events that make up our lives. The artifact carries with it the thought of good and bad times. Through the artifacts we contrive a personal mythology that is unique to us alone. Over time we accumulate our artifacts and keep them longer than most other things. My personal artifacts are the 1/35 scale toy soldiers (Figure 4) I received from my father when I was a child. My father and I would occasionally ride to Savannah, Georgia on the weekends. On Habersham Street in the downtown area there was a small hobby shop. The gentleman who owned the shop carried a line of antimony toy soldiers imported from England that came already painted. My father would buy one or two of these for me when we went to the shop. I still have many of the toy soldiers my father bought me, thus making them artifacts of my childhood.



Figure 4: French Naval Infantry Trumpeter, 1810.

The object may become a symbol of a past that is known or a past that is lost to obscurity. Sometimes in the course of history artifacts and artworks are lost due to some catastrophe or devastating war. Some are deposited and simply forgotten after a vast migration of people away from a particular place. As an artist this is one concept that has always fascinated me, a place lost from a lack of evidence of its existence.

By the virtue of its form, material, and function, the artifact identifies itself with the region where it was made, which for the traveler, serves to document their journey to another place. The objects that are brought back from a journey, known commonly as souvenirs, become preserved mementoes, and with them the traveler can say, "I have been to a far away land. Look here and see what I brought back with me."

Humans are an adventurous species. Through exploration and travel, humankind has been moving about the earth, exploring and seeking the unknown as far back as memory extends. At first this exploration into the unknown served a practical purpose, the pursuit of food. Early humans began to follow the large herds of game animals along migratory routes. The earliest travelers discovered new territory simply by the action of following a food source. However, as time went on, humans began to deliberately seek out new places. Exploration, at this point in our history became a consciously planned activity.

As humankind continued to explore, new lands were discovered. The fact that these newly discovered lands were often inhabited was an unforeseen consequence. First contact can be tenuous at best; however not all situations of this type turned out to be detrimental. When these contacts occurred it is inevitable that goods or artifacts would have been exchanged, found, or seized. Thus travel expanded the material choices

artifacts could be made of. While this benefit of expanded material expanded possibilities, the cultural specificity of materials was diluted. With extended exploration and consequent disbursement of materials, an artifact could no longer be quickly defined by a particular quality unique to one place or time.

The idea of travel to a far away land has a somewhat hypnotic appeal. Thoughts and memories of exotic places take us out of our everyday existence and in that context may be perceived as escapist. Objects from places far away are evocative because the peculiarity of material(s) used, their construction, and more often than not, their final form stands out from items we know in our daily lives. Because of these qualities, we react to artifacts from far away lands in such a way as to give the object a reverence that may not be afforded a mundane item.

Viewing an artifact prompts a mental image of its origin, not just of physical location, but a vision in the landscape of the mind. When we view an ancient relic or an antique, our minds conjure thoughts of harsh terrain and primitive living conditions. In the case of a travel souvenir we envision the exotic physical place and recall the mental state of glee and relaxation experienced at the location. The surface texture of an object provides a tactile sensory experience. Through our sensory interaction with texture we experience the place from which the artifact comes. Place and time are as much a function of the mind as they are a concrete physical and temporal reality.

Although each of these cultural artifacts function as objects for survival or comfort, they are also aesthetically appealing. As an artist, I observe artifacts and record their purposes, the reasoning behind their creation, and the methods and materials used to create them. I use these records as inspiration for my own sculptural artworks and as an

artist, I consider myself an explorer of sorts. Explorers step beyond boundaries to discover new worlds. Similarly, the artist is responsible for pushing forward, expanding the frontiers of what we define as art. The artist, by his very nature, is like the explorer, constantly seeking to push outward, developing new theories and practices to further define art.

To summarize the role an artifact plays in a society, consider the narrative tale by author Gene Wolfe, in which he explores the aspect of the far future in his fictional work *The Book of The New Sun*. The protagonist, a man named Severian, becomes lost in a long deserted part of a vast city called *Nessus*. He is seeking a place to hide from his pursuers. Severian is exhausted and begins to search for a secure place to sleep. While searching, he pries open a long disused door located behind a section of wall that has collapsed due to age. The imaginary time in which Severian exists is almost five million years into the future from the present day. *Nessus*, the city in which he lives and eventually is forced to flee, is called “The city of a thousand foundations.” To say that the city is old is merely a descriptive term; *Nessus* is ancient. The city is built up layer after layer and in its past the city has been razed several times. Severian lived for a time in an actual artifact, the *Matachin Tower*, the hulk of a disused old starship.

Most of the “buildings” in the section of the city called *The Algedone* (read as the bad part of town) are interstellar freighters and warships that were grounded and simply left there; others were sealed and buried along with their contents intact (Wolfe gives no explanation for this practice) or mausoleums were made to receive items that had been bought back. Many pieces of technology, of both human and alien manufacture, are preserved in reliquaries or found by “mining,” which amounts to little more than

archeological plundering. Shafts are sunk down into the huge necropolis located near *The Algedone* or other places in and around the city of *Nessus* in hopes of finding metal or other useful materials. At times these deposits are discovered accidentally as in Severian's finding of the mausoleum. Artifacts were also buried in bunkers all over the city, so at any point Severian could stumble onto an item of great antiquity.

Technological artifacts are considered miraculous in their own right and highly prized because the means to produce them are no longer understood. Wolfe wrote about what Severian remembered about such places:

I remember being told once that humanity had a driving urge to acquire new worlds. The sons and daughters of Earth built for themselves vast ships and set sail across the void. Traveling to distant suns these star farers found wonderful places filled with devices of cunning inhuman workmanship. Many stayed on the worlds they discovered and never came back. A small number returned to the Earth and bought with them the machines they had discovered and thus deposited them in such places as they had made to receive them. The carcasses of beached starships that had been buried or mausoleums of stone hewn out the sides of mountains; the artifacts were deposited in these places (Wolfe, 1980, p. 121).

Wolfe describes both the acquisition and disposition of the artifact. In the following paragraph Wolfe uses Severian's narrative to link memory and time with a collective fictional past. Wolfe further elaborates with the following description:

Brushing away the thick dust of ages long since past; I beheld all the objects arrayed before me. Some were set on tables and yet others were in



encased behind thick glass. Elaborate machinery of clockwork gears and flywheels made of metals unknown to me. From the table I chose a golden scaled culeuvre with multiple wings of crystalline jet. As I brought it closer to examine it; the tiny jeweled serpent leapt from my hands and flew off further into the chamber. I gave chase and followed it deeper past all of the cases. Finally it came to rest as if it were a down feather floating to the ground. It stopped in front of a round divan-like court. It was there that I saw him, behind the glass. A stark immobile cataphract clad all in white. He stood there alone as if deliberately set apart from everything else. A mask of featureless gold was set where the face should be.

Like a great lidless eye it stared accusingly back at me. In his right hand he held a fierce standard of red and gold, a sword in his left. The arms were held upward as in a gesture of victory. Backing away, I scooped up the tiny gold serpent and fled back to the entrance. I had conspired to take the little snake with me after my leave-taking from this place. But upon seeing the guardian, I thought better of it and placed the machine back on the table. Fatigue took me; I went back to one of the outer galleries and lay down to sleep among the exquisitely preserved corpses of the past (Wolfe, 1980, p.123).

What would lead these future humans to so diligently preserve the artifacts contained in the mausoleum? At first Severian considers taking the little golden snake with him as though he were shoplifting. However, upon seeing the “Guardian” he “thought better of it” and returned the item to the table where he found it. Could it be

that the sight of the guardian figure evokes some of the sacredness of the place because of its connection to the ancestral past? The answer is yes. A cataphract is a kind of heavily armored soldier. The presence of this symbolic protector coupled with the history of the items interred there makes it a sacred space and therefore worthy of preservation and protection. Another interesting question that arises is why were the items left in such places and seemingly forgotten? The answer is not easy to figure out. The artifacts were interred and left unguarded for anyone to take if they found the mausoleum. Wolfe does not go to any length to explain this strange behavior and really offers no further clues.

I will take the text and begin to speculate as to why the ships were grounded and left. As I have previously stated, we use artifacts to remember place and time. Through the artifact human beings contrive a shared cultural mythology and history. Through mythology we share our group memories, and not all of these memories are pleasant. The artifacts may have been left out of grief for something that was lost and could never be found again. I think that upon returning to earth these futuristic wanderers found that only a remnant of humanity had chosen to stay on earth. These remaining people were intellectually stagnated. They could neither comprehend nor appreciate the items that had been brought back to them. The ones who had traveled away to distant suns were by this time very different from their fellow humans and as such were considered a different race. Upon realizing that the populace left on earth did not marvel at the wonders they had returned with and had no interest in them, they buried the ships and guarded the artifacts as long as their lives lasted. Then they passed away to be interred with the artifacts forever. What force would compel these future people to exhibit such behavior? The artifacts are symbols. As humans, we respond to symbols. We use national and

personal symbols to distinguish us from others. As I have stated previously, these future people who voyaged out into the universe had become a separate race. The voyagers returned to earth after about fifty two thousand years of being away. The artifacts had become a part of their identity and a validation of their separateness. So it could be said that their society was bound to the artifacts they brought back.

## CHAPTER 3

### ART AS ARTIFACT

Several modern and contemporary artists have influenced the development of my artwork by demonstrating their aesthetic and theoretical responses to the concept of the artifact. Whether from a cultural or societal context, or implication of personal existence through the re-creation of a personal item, artists have used concepts relating to artifacts, or artifacts themselves, in their artworks to convey their message.

Artist Marilyn Levine produces ceramic sculpture that implies a human presence without actually showing it. Personal artifacts like jackets, handbags, briefcases, and pieces like *Johan's Jacket* (Figure 5a) and *RK Briefcase* (Figure 5b) are indicative of the personal artifacts we often leave behind without knowing. Levine's work uses illusory surface. The object appears to be a leather article of some sort, but upon closer examination, the sculptural piece is found to be made of fired stoneware treated with oxides. Levine uses complex chemical formulations to simulate the surface of leather upon clay. She is known to make up to twenty five hundred test tiles to determine the effect of stain formulations on clay. Levine has said of her work, "Leather shows the effect of age upon its surface just as we show our age upon our skin, a personal object is a silent story narrated by every fold and scar" (<http://users.imi.net/ml/index.html>). Levine's work details the importance of an artifact as a personal belonging.



Figure 5a: *Johans Jacket*, Marilyn Levine, 1990.  
Stoneware glazed with oxides



Figure 5b: *RK Briefcase*, Marilyn Levine, 1981.  
Stoneware glazed with oxides

A major artist who has influenced my work is Fluxist Joseph Beuys. His work was based on the somewhat apocryphal story of being shot down in the Crimea during his tenure as a Luftwaffe pilot in the German military air force during World War II. He tells the story of his life-changing event as taking place early one winter morning in 1942, when he set out on a mission to interdict an armored Russian supply train. He was shot down by anti-aircraft fire from the train and crash landed in a snow-field, where he was found by a group of Crimean Tartar tribesmen. Beuys was suffering from severe hypothermia and in order to save his life, the tribesmen slathered him in fat and wrapped him in felt. Beuys recovered from his injuries and wished to stay among the Tartars. According to his own account, he had asked for and received permission from the tribal hetman to stay with the Tartars who had rescued him. However, a Luftwaffe search group found him and “convinced” him to return to his flying duties until his surrender in 1945. Beuys both honors and documents his experience by using the materials indigenous to the experience in his artwork. He transformed the life-saving material used by a primitive culture to save his life into the iconic symbol, or artifact, of power in the western world, the business suit. Historian Nancy Kay Turner describes *Felt Suit* (Figure 6) as “Contemporary armor made out of humble cloth. It is no ordinary suit since it is not a suit at all—it is art. An empty shell, without human presence, this suit nevertheless vibrates with meaning and power.” (Turner, 2001, pg. 1). Additionally, Beuys would often create multiples of his sculptural objects, to allow greater access to his work. He said, “I am interested in the distribution of physical vehicles in the form of editions because I am interested in the spread of ideas.” (Turner, 2001, pg. 2). Beuys believed that the concrete object which could be seen had power as a relic that went beyond the abstract concept.



Figure 6: *Felt Suit*, Joseph Beuys, 1970.  
wool, felt

From specific objects to site-specific places, Charles Simonds' tiny ceramic sculptures are haunting and, like Beuys's artwork, evoke another time and place. Simonds invented a society of little people, and although they are not visible, the little people are implied by the often half finished state of the structures, or they are presumed to be long vanished. In pieces like *Floral Font* (Figure 7a) and *Abandoned Observatory* (Figure 7b), we can see that the architectural influences Simonds drew upon ranged from the cliff dwellings of the American Southwest to Dogon Architecture from the Sudan.



Figure 7a: *Floral Font*, Charles Simonds, 1989.  
unfired stoneware, sticks of wood, bone



Figure 7b: *Abandoned Observatory*, Charles Simonds, 1975.  
unfired stoneware, clay, sticks of wood, bone



The selection of varying materials is a necessity to the creation of my work. I chose my materials in an intuitive manner, exploring beyond one medium in my search for visual impact to best present my theme. A contemporary artist I wish to reference in relation to this intuitive use of materials is Do-Ho Suh. I am drawn to the themes of invasion/protection and artifact/showpiece that he vividly portrays in his works. For example, in *Some/One* (Figure 8), the large coat constructed of dog tags is reminiscent of individual lives and the interrelation of protection/deterrent. As with the work of Levine and Simonds, human presence is implied but not shown from a distance. From a distance, we see the item merely as a coat. It is not until closer inspection that we see the elaborate sculptural garment is composed of metal dog tags, implying that the individuals were conquered to become one, one showpiece of protective armor.



Figure 8: *Some/One*, Do-Ho Suh, 2000.  
metal dog tags, brass, mirror glass

Another exciting work by Do-Ho Suh, *Paratrooper 5* (Figure 9), presents a toy-like paratrooper frozen in an active stance. The metal sculpture is directly contrasted by long vibrant red threads and wrapped fabric that stretches across the gallery wall while being pulled taut by the small figure as though he has just landed and is pulling in his parachute. He has landed to conquer, to protect, or to invade. Exactly what or where we do not know. What we do know as viewers is that the materials that the artist has chosen brands this image in our memory and presents us with a captivating narrative of time and place.



Figure 9: *Paratrooper 5*, Do-Ho Suh, 2005.  
cast iron, silk cord, silk-polyester blend fabric

The artifact is more than time and place; it is narrative as well. Narrative is a recorded sequence of events like a film or comic that is continuous and flowing, almost like a conversational account of events that have taken place. The contemporary artist often uses installation as a sort of theater. According to the painter Trenton Doyle Hancock, “the gallery becomes a theater of heroic scale.” I do not consider my artwork story-like, such as the plot of a novel, play, motion picture, or other fictional narrative work. I feel that my artwork has more to do with the epic narrative of traditional tales and legends. I pursued concepts I perceived to be the most real, and visually presented them accordingly. The stories of reality are often the tales of tomorrow.

The story goes beyond the surface to delve deeper into the human condition or is a satirical commentary that lightheartedly parodies us so that we don’t take ourselves too seriously. In some of my work I began to notice the satirical element that often lay just beneath the more somber element. These elements were the opposite of what I had intended. I began work on a piece called the *Artist Protection and Mobility Module* (the piece no longer exists, and unfortunately no image is available), originally intending to parody the reclusive and fragile nature of the artist, in essence turning him into a jackdaw, making the artist an object of even more scathing ridicule. The module was designed to transport the individual artist in a sealed environment. However, the artist was forced to rely on a staff of people to facilitate the transport of the artist from place to place on a device like a palanquin. The attendants were there to change the artist’s air and water filters which were mounted on the outside of the module along with the feeding, watering, and waste removal ports. The module could also be mounted on a trailer for long distance trips. A number of modules could be mounted on a semi-trailer affecting a

kind of mass transport for artists. The real world applications could include the transport of highly dangerous prisoners or hospital patients that must be kept in sealed environment due to suffering severe burns or respiratory illnesses.

One contemporary artist that is successful in presenting the issue of protection is Kenji Yanobe. Yanobe visualizes a post apocalyptic world in which the population is compelled to adopt the wearing of suits in order to protect them from nuclear fallout and often must resort to travel in tanks filled with salt water. Two examples are *Radiation Suit Uran* (Figure 10a), which features eight Geiger counters, and *Tanking Machine* (Figure 10b), onto which propane tanks are placed to fuel burners that heat the salt water inside to body temperature. The key element is the liquid filled tank. It is a womblike environment that protects and shields. In essence the womb is a serene place.



Figure 10a: *Radiation Suit Uran*, Kenji Yanobe, 1997.  
polycarbonatate plastic, Plexiglas, aluminum



Figure 10b: *Tanking Suit*, Kenji Yanobe, 1990.  
polycarbonatate plastic, Plexiglas, saltwater, brass, steel, propane

Machines can also be artifacts, and Tim Hawkinson's *Uberorgan* (Figures 11a & 11b) is a giant construct assembled in a number of rooms. The organ has a keyboard activated by photosensitive switches. The switches can be activated randomly by a viewer stepping into the space of the room where the mechanical components are located. Thin membranes filled with air power the organ and allow it to emit sounds. The *Uberorgan* seems like a machine that has been left in one place to act according to a predetermined program long after its makers have gone elsewhere. Its purposes could be many when one takes into consideration Hawkinson's potential science-fiction narration. The works of Tim Hawkinson are machines built to an epic scale. Through his art the mundane is mutated into massive contraptions that exaggerate unnoticed functions such as the moving of machinery or the turning of gears. Hawkinson describes himself as a "Surreal Tinker," radically restructuring the familiar. By using materials such as plastic, bottles, latex rubber, packing tape, and dog toys, he transforms objects into apparatuses that enhance his sense of satirical humor. *Uberorgan* is a massive machine set up throughout six rooms. The organ is one piece of sculpture, a massive complex of detailed parts that make up a functioning whole. I seek the same with my installations, through the synthesis of material and form; I want to transform the gallery into a massive epic tableau.

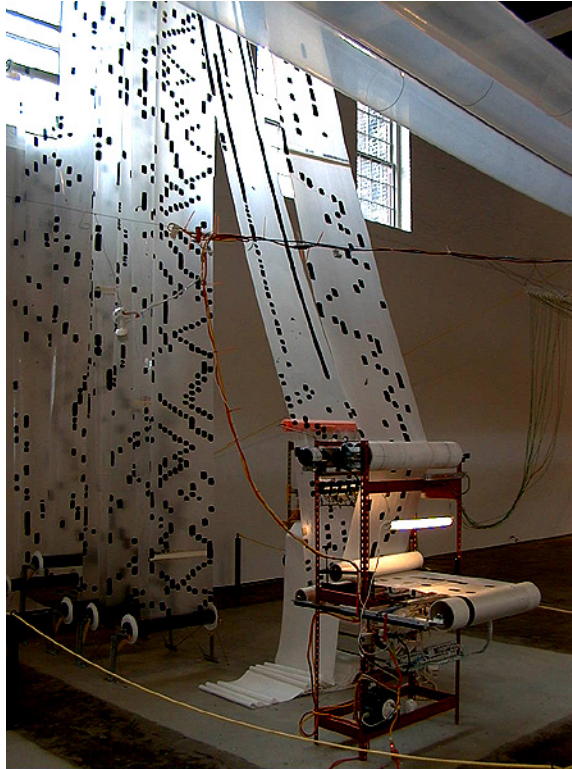


Figure 11a: *Uberorgan*, Tim Hawkinson, 2000-2001.  
plastic, steel and copper wire, aluminum, paper, glass, light bulbs



Figure 11b: *Uberorgan*, Tim Hawkinson, 2000-2001.  
plastic, steel and copper wire, aluminum, paper, glass, light bulbs

All the artists in this chapter, Levine, Beuys, Simonds, Suh, Yanobe and Hawkinson, create artworks to convey place, time, and experience within the forms of pseudo-artifacts. Humbly identifying myself with this esteemed cohort, I would say as we make our experience have a tangible form through our artworks, our experiences become validated.



## CHAPTER 4

### EVOLUTION OF THE ARTWORK:

#### EXPLORATIONS IN MATERIAL AND CONCEPT

Through experience we assemble a diary of events that make up our lives as people. I believe that art is a tool of universal human expression; through art we voice the full range of our experiences. My work has always attempted to invoke a sense of place and time. Whether that place and time be real or imaginary, current or historical, remains up to the viewer.

When I came to Georgia Southern to pursue the Master of Fine Art degree program, I was predominantly a two-dimensional artist, drawing and painting. During the first few months of my studies at Georgia Southern University, I experimented in many media, making art objects ranging from paintings to mixed media assemblages. As the content of my work progressed, I began to re-evaluate the presentation of my ideas in three-dimensional media of ceramics and sculpture. Although at the time connections to this thesis exhibition work were dim, the threads are now apparent. Iconography of rabbits, bugs and flowers, and miniature ‘artifact-ual’ installations began to evolve in my first years of study and would become key elements in my thesis exhibition.

The small matchbox installation, *Bar Fly* (Figure 12a), is exemplary of my move towards desiring an installation format to present my concepts. Similarly, the creation of *Little Man in a Box* (Figure 12b) indicates my initial attempt at creating characters that would become vehicles for my content. The pleasure of working in mixed media, and the application of varying media to create human-like forms quickly moved my imagery to animal and non-objective forms.



Figure 12a: *Bar Fly*, Charles Burch, 2003.  
Mixed media assemblage, 1'' x 2'' x 1/4''



Figure 12b: *Little Man in a Box*, Charles Burch, 2003.  
Mixed media assemblage, 10'' x 8'' x 2''

A serious study in the fourth dimension of time took place, and the possibilities of narration followed suit, in *3am* (Figure13). In this experimental, photo-documented installation, I began to make small wax and fabric figures, place them in small constructed environments that I erected in the studio, and then photograph them. This series was an effort aimed at capturing the surreal atmosphere that is the late night world. Why is late night so important? Night is the time for dreaming and drifting thoughts. The surreal world has the capability to depict what the waking world cannot. So, with the *3am* series, an avenue of creative thought processes began for me that would lead into the vastness of my subconscious. Although the series was working in terms of photographic depiction, it was not very useful beyond being photographed. The burning of homemade candles and the fact that most of the figures were wax and plaster did not lend well to a permanent display. In addition to the above considerations, the action of the figures had to be staged and captured by photograph to achieve permanence. The entire series became a dead end for my purposes simply because of its transitory nature. It was like an hour passing in time. Unless captured in some way, the hour or the image that it represented would never be seen again.



Figure 13: *3am*, Charles Burch, 2003.  
Images from the Series.  
Plaster, wood, wax, pigment, oil clay, cotton cloth, hair

The large paintings of *THE RAT AND THE RABBIT* (Figure 14) were some of the last paintings I created. However, they are essential because they are identifiable iconographic imagery that became leading characters in my thesis exhibition roster.



Figure 14: *THE RAT AND THE RABBIT*, Charles Burch, 2003.  
Oil paintings on drywall, 8' x 4' each

*Rabbit Fort* (Figure 15) is a major transitional piece that confirms my goal of creating an interactive sculpture that the viewer not only responds to, but co-exists with on a daily basis. The powerful effect of the three-dimensional object on the viewer became quite apparent to me with this piece.



Figure 15: *Rabbit Fort*, Charles Burch, 2005.  
low-fire earthen with chemical stain, cotton cloth, linen, copper wire

The world I sought had to be more permanent in terms of three-dimensional forms. The first items I designed were garments. The garments were an extension of my themes concerning protection (more on that subject and the means of protection in the next chapter) and were often heavy, unwieldy, and difficult to wear. Throughout the period of garment construction, the garments became heavier. I noticed that as the weight increased, the more fortress-like the garments became. A new word was stuck in my head, and that word was fortress. I thought that the garments were becoming more

like mobile fortresses rather than clothing. So I started looking at the idea of a mobile fort that the artist could put on and move around in, protected from the outer world.

As the work on the mobile artist fort progressed I started asking questions as to the purpose of a fortresses, heavy garments, and protective devices of all kinds. All of these seemed to have one thing in common: the devices aid people in repelling an attack of some sort. What is an attack? An attack is a form of invasion. Now I had my opposite competing idea to commence building with and I was on the road to the artifact, but I wasn't quite there yet. The idea of invasion was an artistic progression that came exponentially off of the idea of protection.

Throughout my various experimentations with texture and material, I conducted in-depth research in order to seek out forms that were best suitable to the applications I had discovered. I adopted a multi-process approach to my work. My choice of material is deliberately broad, from wool, silk, cotton, hemp, linen, leather, bronze, iron, to clay, along with the two dimensional mediums of drawing, painting, and video. I began comparing form and material composition. My findings concluded the simplest forms, garments, tools, weapons, furniture, and other items, were made of very simple, almost humble materials that possess a substance of purity that modern materials lack. I began to take these forms and modify them while still keeping their recognizable function. However, the forms lacked a context in which to exist, and at that point seemed to lose even an implied function. So I developed a new context, another world.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE EXHIBITION, *CAPTURED ARTIFACTS*

The public display of artifacts is more than an exhibition of physical evidence documenting time and place; it is an exemplar of narrative story-telling. Narration is a recorded sequence of events like a film or comic that is continuous and flowing, almost like a conversational account of events that have taken place. I did not initially consider my work story-like; rather I sought to express issues that I perceived to be quite real. The narrative fictional story can be too easy to discount as a communicative medium, but in my case it proved to be an effective means to convey my point of view.

The conceptual themes of the sculptural objects in the installation *Captured Artifacts* (Figures 16a-18) vary from protection to invasion, and are based on my own experiences that have taken place within my reality, enhanced through my creative imagination. Why are protection and invasion such important issues? We protect that which we value most, family, hearth, homeland, and treasures. Protection is very important to us as a people. We like to feel secure and safe. As discussed in depth throughout this paper, the artifact is an evocative icon that conjures meaning related to place and time, good and bad, trust and suspicion. In this time of global warfare and terrorism, ecological instability, and unpredictable human living conditions, there is great sense of uneasiness and unrest in our civilization. Questions of 'how and why' outweigh answers.





Figure 16a: *Captured Artifacts*, Charles Burch, 2006.  
*Flying Dart*, 2005



Figure 16b: *Captured Artifacts*, Charles Burch, 2006.  
*Vests*, 2001, mixed media

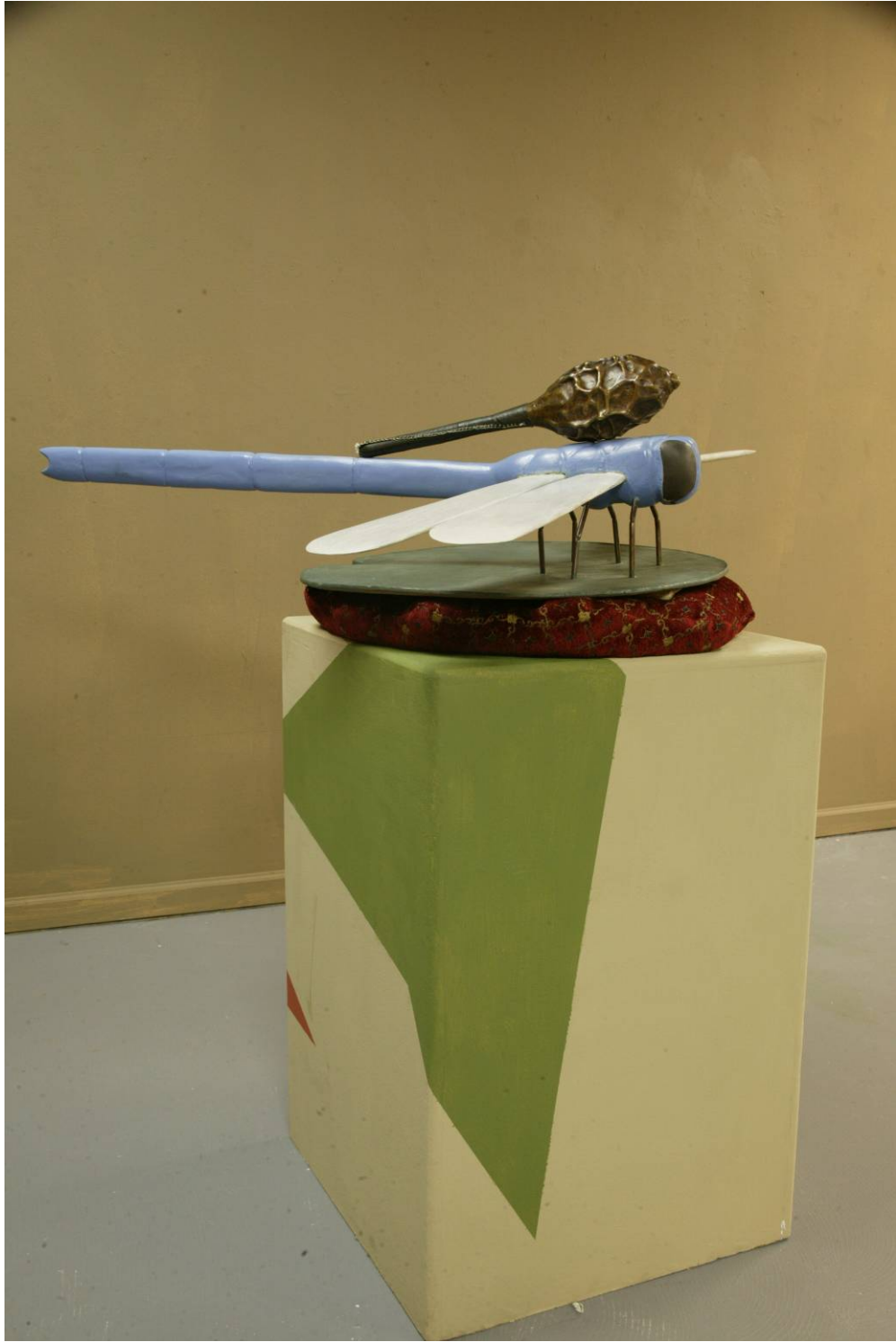


Figure 17: *Captured Artifacts*, Charles Burch, 2006.  
*Dragonfly Stand with Squash Mace*, 2005



Figure 18: *Captured Artifacts*, Charles Burch, 2006.  
*Silk Armor Suit*, 2003

The link between protection, invasion, and artifact is not easy to establish without considering the key word “capture.” Protection comes from the desire to guard that which we value from interlopers who would take it, and invasion is, at its most base level, an intrusion that seeks to take something. During an invasion, artifacts are taken away to another place and removed from the cultural context in which it was found. In my research I wanted to discover more about invasion and exploration along with how the interaction between two civilizations as an invasion unfolded. To visually portray the action of invasion, there needs to be a vehicle in which to arrive. There also needs to be artifacts awaiting capture. Finally, there needs to be protection from invasion, a defense force.

The Fur-Trade era (1600s-mid 1800s) is one that I have always had an interest in as it yielded a number of interesting artifacts, some gained passively, and some brutally. The territory ranged from upper New England, south to Arkansas and Missouri, and west to the Great Plains. It swept up to the Northwest Coast around Washington State to Alaska, and finally out to the western Arctic Circle, the Aleutian Islands and further westward onto the shores of far eastern Siberia. The parties involved were after the furs of beaver, fox, ermine, and the most prized of all: sea otter. Many items were traded for the furs: steel knives and axe blades, various brass items, wire, tacks, kettles, thick copper plates and coins, woolen cloth of various grades, silk, bronze coins, glass beads, blankets, guns and black powder, tea, sugar, and in the case of the Chinese trading with the Yakut, even metal scales that were manufactured in Tibet, and then laced together in sheets and stored on bolts like cloth. The materials obtained resulted in artifacts being made and

then acquired or traded back and taken away to curiosity cabinets or royal museums all across Europe.

Warfare is the dark side of the acquisition of artifacts. Artifacts are most often acquired through warfare and invasion. They are carted off as loot and displayed as an enemy object. Here is where the artifact can be used as a tool of psychology. The object can be used to display the strangeness of an enemy, it could even be said to show their “otherness” and thus justify a campaign to be sent against them.

I considered all of these thoughts as I designed three initial pieces that I wanted to present in an exhibition about invasion and protection. Of great importance is the form that these objects took and the inspiration and iconography associated with each of the pieces. Material choice is vital to my work. By consciously choosing materials that I consider artifact-worthy, I further enhance the status of the object by turning it into a contrived artifact. The choice of design is deliberately drawn from historical sources. Through the emphasis on antiquated forms, I draw a contrast between the modern and the ancient. The tradition of history validates the design because of its utility and survivability.

*Sword and Leaf* (Figure 19), a small bronze sword, was the first component of the installation to be completed. I had intended to present just the sword by itself. However, the sword lacked context and was incomplete. The sword by itself seemed to be no more than a piece of interior decor and I felt that it could not rightfully be placed within the contextual definition of artifact. I found that there was no quality of rarity or preciousness to the piece. How could it be elevated to the level of artifact? I did more research, and then had a breakthrough. Objects that are important are often placed on

pillows, so by placing the sword on a pillow it became elevated and had at last taken the label of artifact.

As a conceptual work of art in the exhibition, the sword is a symbol of aggression. Throughout history the conqueror carried the sword as he pursued his conquest, yet the sword is also a symbol of resistance to invasion. In this regard, the sword plays a role of duality, carried by both conqueror and defender. I have often considered the sword more a tool of the defender, representing bravery, honor, strength, and all that is good in men. The ginkgo leaf form, serving as a sheath for the sword, is carved from rich mahogany wood with bronze embellishments. It was inspired by a Welsh myth, in which Muyaonwy, a prince/hero, lost his sword in battle and sat under an oak tree and wept while the goddess Muya, his mother's spirit, came into a tree and provided a new sword by dropping a leaf onto the ground which took the form of a sword. While the tree in the Welsh myth is not ginkgo, I have chosen the ginkgo leaf specifically for its symbolic iconography representing the mirror of truth in Japanese mythology. The pillow that the wooden ginkgo sheath rests upon further elevates the sword from the mundane earth and presents it to the sacred.



Figure 19: *Sword and Leaf*, Charles Burch, 2005.  
mahogany, bronze, cotton cloth, poly-fiber fill

In addition to the sword, I also cast three maces from plaster casts of three gourds I had found. The *Bronze Squash Maces* (Figure 20) are striking weapons used to hit an opponent with blunt force. More of a weapon of defense, they are actually passive, used by monks and priests who would carry them as defense weapons because they could use them without drawing blood. I have cast three from bronze for this exhibition, and applied wrapped leather handles made by using Morocco leather stitched with linen for comfort on the grip. Once again a context was needed for the object, so I designed the *Dragonfly Stand with Squash Mace* (Figure 21).



Figure 20: *Bronze Squash Maces*, Charles Burch, 2005.  
linen, bronze, morocco leather

The dragonfly stand serves a similar function as the pillow and elevates the mace to a sacred level. As a child, I recall the insects that would gather around the pond on my



family's farm in South Georgia. Dragonflies were the most interesting to me simply because of their design. Their colors were always the most striking, ranging from blue to red to emerald green and black. In my sculptural recreation, I used white poplar wood for the body and mahogany for the lily pad. The scale of the dragonfly is monumental in comparison to its actual life-size. The final element was the creation of another pillow that I made to echo the scalloped edges of lily pad leaves. The body of the pillow was made of Indian velvet-chintz and was large enough to set the dragonfly on with enough left to jut out from underneath the lily pad. The squash mace could be placed on the stand and displayed as a relic. Because of the dragonfly's wings, he symbolizes divinity, and brings deliverance to the helpless needing defense. Within the context of the exhibition, his presence emphasizes both the artifact he carries, an aid of defense, and portrays his highly important character within the narration of the installation; the symbol of divine intervention.

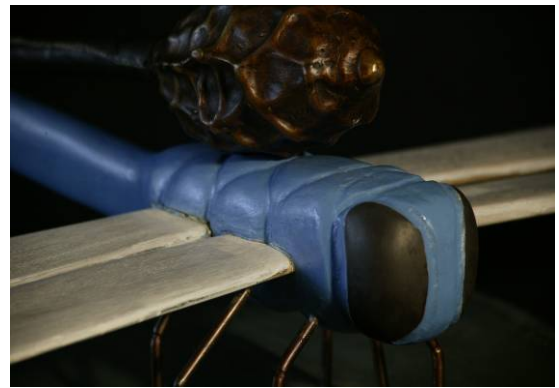
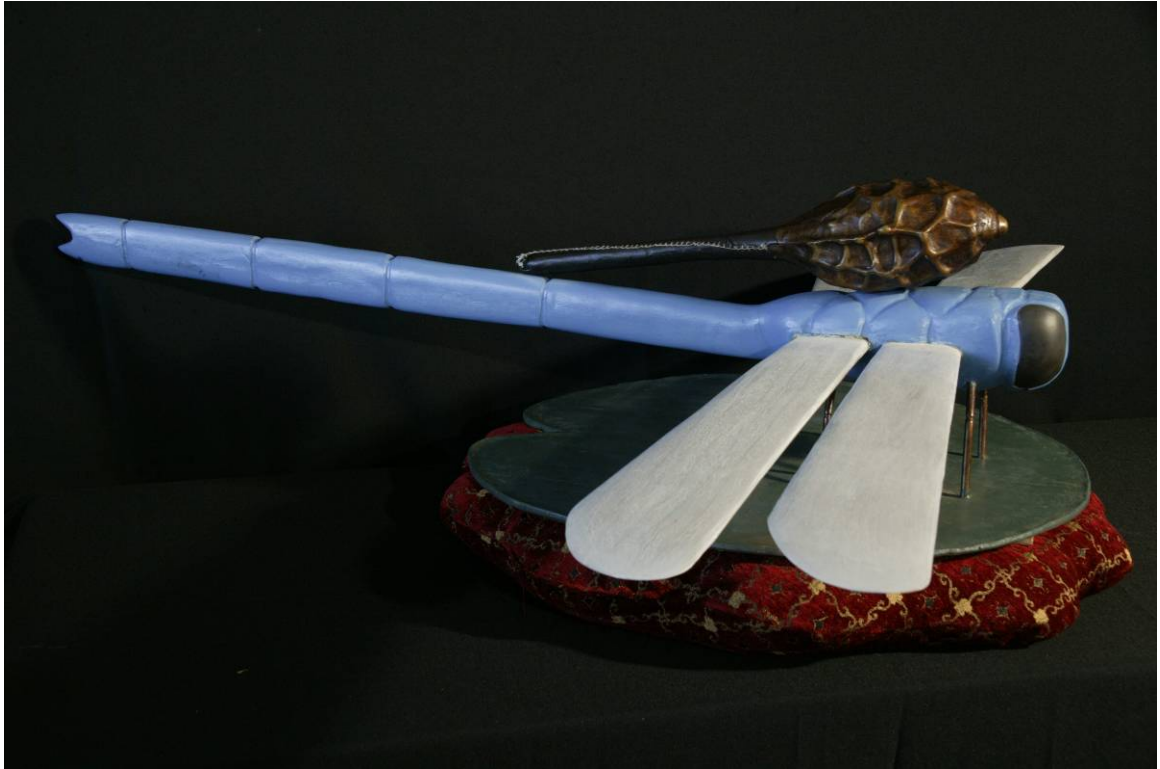


Figure 21: *Dragonfly Stand with Squash Mace*, Charles Burch, 2005.  
bronze, morocco leather, mahogany, white poplar, Indian chintz velvet, boxwood

I sought other natural forms with which to build other artifacts, as I believe natural forms are primal symbols that are universal. The flower is a symbol of peace, fragility, and the transitory nature of beauty. The flower's symbolism is deceptive however, most often associated with the wonder and strength of growth and life when beautiful and powerful in its colorful glory, yet it is also a symbol of tragedy as it wilts

and browns when approaching death. We rarely identify the fragility of the petal/stamen construction and the fleeting temporary existence of the flower when attaching meaning to it. However, I did use this contrast of beauty and fragility when spacing the petals in *Daisy Shield* (Figure 22). They are long, angular, and sturdy looking upon first glance. Under closer scrutiny, however, one will see that the petals are spaced too far apart to provide much of a shield or support for one another.



Figure 22: *Daisy Shield*, Charles Burch, 2005.  
Mahogany, wool, leather, Indian chintz velvet

*Daisy Shield* is part of the suite of objects entitled *Rabbit Helmet*, *Daisy Shield*, and *Polished Stick* (Figures 23a & 23b). Helmets and shields are protective devices designed to resist aggression rather than promote it. The rabbit is a symbol of speed and fertility, timidity and prey. In fiction and myth, the rabbit is often known as the trickster.

Within *Captured Artifacts*, the rabbit symbolizes an empowered character that turns from being the oppressed, hunted victim, to the leader that boldly resists the invader. With protruding teeth and tongue symbolic of natural weapons, and disproportionately large scale, the rabbit deliberately shows aggression. Its red coloring implying force, the rabbit in the installation provides another item in a cast of characters that become guardians of the homeland. I sought to build this element of paradox into my work: timidity versus aggression. Or perhaps it would be better to say that I used symbols that bespeak timidity and built them into aggressive forms.

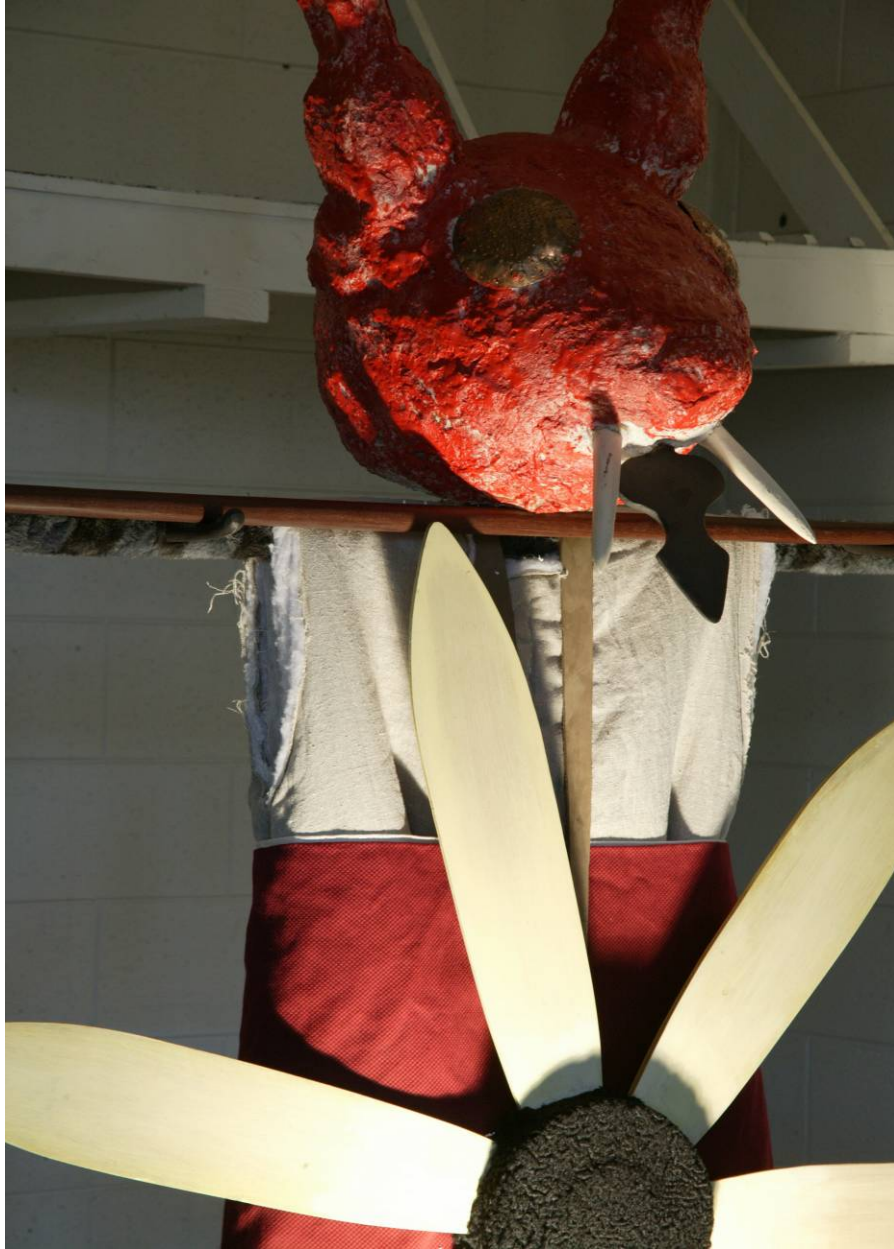


Figure 23a: *Rabbit Helmet, Daisy Shield, and Polished Stick*, Charles Burch, 2005.  
wool, Styrofoam, cotton shoddy, wax, pigment, linen, cotton cloth



Figure 23b: *Rabbit Helmet, Daisy Shield, and Polished Stick*, Charles Burch, 2005.

Finally, *Flying Dart* (Figures 24a & 24b) is a composite sculptural form depicting a vehicle for transporting an individual soldier. It is a large spherical ceramic container weighing close to 150 pounds and is studded with mirrored eyes. The protruding tongue is a dark red-brick color upon which green teeth have been drawn. Half of the container is painted khaki-tan with sky-blue eyes and black pupils painted on the surface. Twelve 18-inch darts, cast from iron, are housed within the container. In the installation, the darts are seen as spilled out of the craft, spoiled from use as they have spilled out of the container upon crash landing. There is a cloth cover on the back end of the pod with a line passing through a metal tube to a tail made of wood with eight control surfaces that act as a stabilizer. The *Flying Dart* is a delivery vehicle for a soldier, and its item of delivery introduces a very important character to this installation, the invader.



Figure 24a: *Flying Dart*, Charles Burch, 2005.  
(Parachute only).  
cotton cloth, cotton tape, linen





Figure 24b: *Flying Dart*, Charles Burch, 2005.  
Additional views

Armor is one of the most mobile and usable forms of defense. It was through armor-like garments that my first thoughts began to move toward creating an installation describing our unstable and somewhat paranoid state of existence. The first armor garment I designed was long, stretching to just below the knee. I borrowed the design from an old Byzantine military garment called a *Klibanion*. The design was historically-based, and I sought out linen and cotton batting with which to construct it. The garment consisted of four layers with the outer facing composed of two layers of linen with cotton batting in between. With the armor garments representing protection, my thoughts transitioned to the mythology of the artifact, or what was being protected.

Armor is a passive defense; it absorbs blows and protects the wearer. To be armed is to be protected, but being armed is also a way to be aggressive. Which of the two is most important to my artwork? I would say the ability to resist invasion. Arms and armor are demanding on the resource base of any group. Armor and the other habiliments of war require skill to produce the more sophisticated examples. Armor has taken many forms, from simple shirt-like garments to very sophisticated suits of plate armor. The simplest and most early type of armor was animal hide. Today we use synthetic composite ceramic and composite fiber armor. Many indigenous people continued to use animal hide up until the early part of the twentieth century. The form varied from place to place. Leather was used during the High Middle Ages to form armor for various forms of jousting. Further research began to yield a vast amount of information on different forms of armor. Quilted armor has been used in one form or another for the past two-thousand years by almost every culture that could obtain or produce cloth. Heavy garments of quilted cotton and linen have been used from Europe to China. Quilted

garments along with chain mail made their last appearance as a protective military garment in 1894 at the battle Omdurman in the Sudan.

The long *Klibanion* (Figure 25) was originally designed to stand on its own as a unique piece. However, the precise context of the piece kept cropping up. I chose fabric as a counterpoint to metal armor. Metallic armor lacked the subtlety with which I wanted to quietly communicate my ideas of defense. The protective quality lies in its covering length and thick construction. The linen was intuitive because linen is a historically available material that at one time was cheaper than cotton and was considered a humble material. I decided to make it part of a garniture to better incorporate it and give it a context.



Figure 25: *Klibanion*, Charles Burch, 2000-2001.  
linen, cotton shoddy, cotton cloth, poly-fiber fill

*Silk Armor Suit* (Figure 26) is a suit that includes a padded Jupon, a helmet, leg defenses, gauntlets, and a mantlet, along with other items. The design of the silk armor is a synthesis of material and design. Using my heavily intuitive style of design, I sought to follow my idea of fragility/aggression by choosing fabric as a medium. The suit is designed as a garniture, which is a number of components that make up one whole piece or set. I chose silk for the suit's construction because I consider silk to be an artifact-worthy material. The suit is made so that it covers the entire body from the head down to the feet. The armor is intended to be a contrived indigenous form made from materials that could be obtained through channels such as trade. Along with the daisy shield, squash maces, polished stick, and rabbit helmet, the silk suit is intended to stand as an artifact analogue.

Quilted defenses are simple and easy to produce. Often such defenses have the battle dress of poorer soldiers. The strength of cloth armor lay in the number of layers that make up the garment. Such quilted defenses are joined together by stitching in multiple layers with some sort of material stuffed in-between, such as tow (the outer pith fibers of the flax plant) or kapok fiber in most African garments, wool shoddy (coarse wool combings too stiff to spin), or cotton batting. The number of layers composing the garment might vary from four to thirty layers in thickness. Often the garment is covered with deerskin as an outer sheathing. Cloth defensive garments even extended to the Aztec and Maya of Pre-Columbian Mexico and Central America. The armor made use of available material to enable the makers to adapt to a particular situation, or context. It proved itself adequate to the limited warfare needs of the group that adapted that

particular armor design, and it was deemed to be remarkable enough to warrant collection and description of manufacturing methods.



Figure 26: *Silk Armor Suit*, Charles Burch, 2003.  
Japanese sashiko silk fabric, cotton designer cloth, leather, copper screen, wood, faux fur

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