

Abstract

ARTICULATION OF BALANCE

By

Graham Erisman

December 2012

Chair: Carl Billingsley

Sculpture Area

This is a report on my creative research. It is supplementary to my thesis exhibition of works of sculpture, images of which are included in this report. These sculptures explore the idea of balance through articulation of focus. The idea of balance is expressed as a state of mind, as well as a visual equilibrium. My work embodies this concept through the use of color, geometric abstract forms, and the use of permanent material.

ARTICULATION OF BALANCE

A report of creative thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of

School of Art and Design

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Art

By

Graham Erisman

2012

©Copyright 2012
ARTICULATION OF BALANCE

ARTICULATION OF BALANCE

By

Graham Erisman

APPROVED BY:

DIRECTOR OF THESIS: _____
Carl Billingsley, MFA

COMMITTEE MEMBER: _____
Jim Tisnado, MFA

COMMITTEE MEMBER: _____
Erick Yates Green, MFA

EXTERNAL COMMITTEE MEMBER: _____
Maria Modlin, MFA

DIRECTOR OF THE SCHOOL OF ART AND DESIGN:

Michael H. Drought, MFA

DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL:

Paul J. Gemperline, PhD

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF PLATES	vi
INTRODUCTION	
VISUAL LANGUAGE.....	1
FABRICATION	3
BALANCED.....	4
ARTICULATED BALANCE.....	6
ARTICULATED COLUMN	8
KT ARTICULATION	10
ON THE WALL	12
CONCENTRIC CIRCLES #20	15
CONCENTRIC CIRCLES # 27,30,31	17
ARTICULATED CIRCLES.....	19
CONCENTRIC ARTICULATION	21
CONCLUSION	23

LIST OF PLATES

BALANCED.....	6
ARTICULATED BALANCE.....	8
ARTICULATED COLUMN	10
KT ARTICULATION	12
CONCENTRIC CIRCLES #20	16
CONCENTRIC CIRCLES # 27,30,31	18
ARTICULATED CIRCLES	20
CONCENTRIC ARTICULATION	22

INTRODUCTION

Visual Language

The term “balance” is used in this paper as both the concept and the expression of the theme and variation of the work. As the concept, balance becomes my state of mind through maintaining my mental equilibrium. My work embodies this expression through the use of formal elements in the fabricated and cast object, as well as through the use of color, form and material.

Balance as a state of mind refers directly to a mental state of composed, driven creativity. To articulate, the connection of different points refers directly to the process of metal fabrication, the physical act of welding. Welding is the process of connecting pieces of metal with a welder, using high heat to fuse separate pieces of metal into one.

Our lives are in a constant state of movement, articulation, in other words. The balancing acts of life’s elements are problematic at times. During the process of fabrication, metal “Flow” becomes the ability to connect to the Muse of this work. The work moves from a place of reaction to an action; one line or mark dictates the placement of the next. This awareness is from a place of the Muse. During this interaction with the Muse, my notion of time changes with each breath I take. The tempo of time becomes the pace at which the work is created. All of these elements; time, process and state of mind; are in a constant state of movement, directly affecting and impacting the work being created.

My expression of creation requires the juxtaposition of color and form. By embracing traditional patinas combined with oil-based paints, the color palette is expanded. The color is used as a tool for highlighting the illusion of movement as well as for creating tension. The use of color in the direct carve casting technique is a treatment to accentuate the textures and flow of

the cast surface. Allowing the material to be left raw, in some areas I am allowing the material to retain its own natural state and highlights the illusion of movement within the sculptures themselves.

The body of work is composed primarily of aluminum as a material choice, due to its physical qualities. It is easily manipulated, because it has the essential ductile and malleable properties of steel, at half of the weight of steel. Aluminum is extremely resistant to corrosion and is easily cast in a studio foundry. Both steel and cast iron are subject to corrosion, and are melted and cast at twice the temperature of aluminum. Most sculptors' studios are not equipped to melt metals at these high temperatures. In terms of metal fabrication and casting, aluminum is easier to cast due to its lower melting point, yet it is more difficult to weld; special equipment is needed when aluminum is welded. Due to Aluminum's lightweight physical mass, as well as being readily available as a recycled material for casting, I feel I am being aware of environmental concerns by reducing the footprint of consumption.

The molds are completed using resin-bonded sand; mixing dried and screened sand with an alkyd resin and catalyst allows for the sand to become a material similar to sandstone. It is imperative that the sand used for this process be dried and screened. By drying and screening the sand, the superfine particulate known as "tramp" is removed, which allows the resin and catalyst to properly set and cure. After curing, the molds are carved, using power and pneumatic tools to create the desired texture and imagery.

For both the fabricated forms, as well as the cast sections, I am primarily using the circle and parts of the circle as imagery. The circle is the symbol for the infinite or unending flow. It can reference the sun, moon, and stars. It is the wheel of life, constantly in a state of movement. Circles have been thought of as perfect, due to the unending nature of the geometric form. The

circle can be divided, using mathematical methods to create all of the other geometric shapes found within my work. The circle references the divine and the cycle of life. I use the circle to indicate life, time, and as an illusion that a stationary object is in a state of motion. I am creating a sense of completion which references perfection of the circle.

My work is composed of two separate, yet similar, series of work. The first series is the large-scale, fabricated work, which is created for outdoor, public juried sculpture shows. The second is the “On the Wall” series. These sculptures allow a more intimate interaction with the viewer due to the smaller scale and its placement in interiors, both public and private.

FABRICATION

The fabrication theme and variation of my work addresses balance through the process of metal fabrication, the physical act of manipulating metal. The work starts with creating a small-scale model of the sculpture. This model is usually made of cardboard or of a stiff design paper, such as card stock. The small-scale model allows for alterations to be made to the design. By working in this small scale, the circle can be dissected, bisected and investigated to create a sense of movement. This playful practice of investigation allows for both theme and variation. Once the models are complete, measurements are taken and the selected the model can then be scaled up to whatever size is needed. The same sculpture could be made at 6 feet, 8 feet or 20 feet depending upon the site budget and other factors. The process of metal fabrication than becomes as simple as following a template to create the large-scale outdoor work.

My goal with this first series was to compete in nationally- juried sculpture exhibitions. It has been a dream of mine to show my work across the country. When I was an apprentice with sculptor, Glenn Zwegardt; we spent a great deal of our time on the road. Moving his sculptures from one show to the next, every day was a new and different challenge; I never truly knew where I would be by the end of the day. This large-scale work was my attempt to honor the lessons and fond memories that I received during my time with him. I took a risk by investing my time and money into equipment and permanent materials. I transformed my ideas from a small, four-inch paper model to a 12-foot-tall sculpture.

BALANCED

“Balanced” is a fabricated steel sculpture, of the larger public series. Standing 12 feet tall, it is finished with an oil-based enamel and powder coat. Being the first in this themed work, this piece investigated the circle as a three-quarter view. An incomplete section of the whole, combined with a slight lean, indicates that competition is on the horizon. The white bands around the piece confine the column from expansion – creating an impression of tension, thus imposing a sense of struggle.

Attempting to use the powder coating technique in a new and innovative way created the surface of this piece. The powder coat technique requires baking a plastic powder on the surface of the material. This process requires the use of a kiln, or large oven. By trial and error, I managed to heat the surface using a propane weed burner, while applying the plastic powder with my other hand. I found that by applying layers of different colors, I could create a wonderful depth of color. This process was an excellent opportunity to learn about the fundamental properties of powder coating outdoors on a large scale. However, the amount of powder needed to coat the piece, in even a light wind, was very wasteful and expensive, so I decided not to continue this process. Returning to the surface after it cooled, I used a grinder with a wire brush and removed layers of the powder coat in the imagery of the circular form. I was successful in creating my first large scale work for the national-juried competitions. This sculpture is currently displayed on Delta State University’s Campus, located in Cleveland, Mississippi. Delta State exhibits works juried into this national competition for 2 years.



Balanced

PLATE 1

12'H x 4'W x 4'D

Fabricated Steel, Powder Coat, Oil-Based Enamel

ARTICULATED BALANCE

“Articulated Balance” is an 11-foot fabricated steel and cast iron sculpture. The second piece in this theme and variation, addresses the uniqueness and clarity of balance. This is conveyed through form in the sculpture. As this sculpture is not kinetic, the point that is brought into focus is not moveable; it is a static point in time and space. An incomplete circular band, reiterating a need or desire for completion, highlights the stasis of the sculpture. The structure appears out of alignment due to the lack of perpendicularity of the encircling form, lending a sense of chaos. By contrast, the surface treatment of the vertical elements, consisting of overlaying circles and grids, describes a desire for regularity and completion. The application of color in “Articulated Balance” is used to highlight the formal elements of the sculpture, as well as indicate the illusion of movement. This work is a visual symbol of a conversation about an ongoing struggle to maintain the equilibrium of mental awareness.

This piece was an experiment in the combined language of both fabrication and the casting. The hourglass form is comprised of four, 125-pound cast iron sections. Each of these castings is welded to a vertical shaft; this shaft is both the lifting point, as well as the central structural support. The four castings are made by using the resin-bonded sand method. This piece, being the second of the large-scale, outdoor juried sculpture variety, was also a successful attempt in a national juried show. It is currently in Salisbury, North Carolina on the Rowan Cabarrus Community College campus.



Articulated Balance

PLATE 2

11'H x 4'W x 4'D

Cast Iron, Fabricated Steel, Oil-Based Enamel

ARTICULATED COLUMN

The next large-scale fabricated piece in this theme and variation is “Articulated Column”. This piece continues with the cast and fabricated idea, yet moves from steel and iron to aluminum. “Articulated Column” is 10 feet tall. It is comprised of eight cast aluminum panels, welded to a fabricated aluminum substructure. This piece references balance through the twisted movement of the form alluding to the conceptual meaning of maintaining balance through a struggle. The capital, comprised of triangular forms, references the infinite. The triangle form is found through the dissection of the circle. In contrast, the surface treatment of the vertical elements, consisting of overlaying circles and grids, describes a desire for regularity and completion. This piece appears to be out of balance. The green and yellow oil-based enamel contrasts the raw aluminum, visually balancing the form; while simultaneously keeping the viewer in a state of movement. This is the third piece in this theme and variation; it was requested for a commercial establishment and is located in the Villedge, a restaurant in Greenville, North Carolina.



Articulated Column

PLATE 3

10'H x 2'W x 2'D

Cast & Fabricated Aluminum, Linseed Oil Patina, Oil-Based Enamel

KT ARTICULATION

The fourth piece in this theme and variation is a fabricated aluminum sculpture. Titled “KT Articulation”, this sculpture is a broken column, split and open, exposing the interior. The diamond plate represents the internal—the polished, emotional state of human interaction. The visual balance in contrasting surface treatments alludes to a personal sacrifice to achieve balance. This piece is seven feet tall, the scale referencing the human figure. The contrasting elements of the diamond-plated, polished surface to the raw, aluminum exterior represent balance when it is torn, twisted, and contorted. Objects in a state of motion are a challenge to balance.

“KT Articulation” represents a continuation of the struggle of balancing the forces of our lives, which are constantly in a state of distortion. These elements indicate the beginning of a metaphysical awakening of rebirth, allowing the inside to return to the light. “KT Articulation” allows for the awakening of the understanding of self, after a great change of life cycles. Similarly, with every winter comes spring; these life cycles allow for the developing of the change of seasons.

The fourth piece of this theme and variation, this was also a successful attempt at large sculpture, as it was requested to be shown in a commercial establishment. It is also located in Villedge, a restaurant in Greenville, North Carolina.



KT Articulated

PLATE 4 8' H x 12"W x 12"D

Fabricated Aluminum

On the Wall

The next theme and variation is “On the Wall”. This work was inspired from a need to retake the walls from 2D artists. As a sculptor, it is difficult at times to market and sell monumental-size work – due to both size and scale. In an attempt to create a series of work that was more obtainable for collectors, the “On the Wall” work addresses the need to allow sculpture to exist on the wall. In continuing with articulation and balance as a metaphor, the “On the Wall” work implies movement, perspective and the action-reaction of the pursuit of the Muse.

The work is created through a direct carve technique, which I was introduced to in upstate New York, while I was apprenticing with sculptor, Glenn Zwegardt. In his work, he used a dinner fork as a tool to carve stories of his life into resin-bonded sand. Once the work was cast in bronze, these stories took on a whole new light when contrasted by his larger stone fabrications. His language of carving was dictated by his history as a maker. His process, love, and passion for creating have become a great inspiration for this theme and variation.

In keeping with the tradition that I was taught, this work is carved, not with a fork, but with a variety of power tools. This work is from a place of reaction to an action; one line or mark dictates the placement of the next. Artists classify this moment as multiple terms: tweaking, the art of now, being in the moment, and existing in the here and now are only a few terms to describe this state of mind. All of these elements are in a constant state of movement, directly affecting and impacting the work being created.

The action of putting sculpture on the wall allows for a more intimate interaction of the viewer with the art. These pieces are directed toward the public audience in space as defined by

walls. This work allows for the intimate interaction between viewer and art due to the scale, size, and variation of forms and colors that are experienced in the context of interior spaces.

CONCENTRIC CIRCLES #20

“Concentric Circles #20” is a piece that continues the idea of maintaining mental flow. Allowing the Muse of the energy of the day to direct the imagery created this piece. The center wavy rectangle was the starting point for this casting. The offset wavy rectangle pattern was removed from the resin sand, and the remainder of the piece was then carved using the direct carve technique, assisted by power tools, starting with the large circles, ending with the perpendicular lines. The gridlines and circles appear to transcend the white space of the wall.

This work is cast iron, which was not a good material choice due to the physical weight being hung on the wall. Cast iron is twice the physical weight of aluminum. Aluminum has become the choice material for this body of work. The oil-based enamel applied to the work highlights the textures of the cast iron, allowing for the red, raw cast iron to regress to the background as the applied enamel visually lifts the texture from the surface.

I wanted to create an interesting illusion of movement of the circles and lines. The elements of the design are superimposed on each other, creating layers of relief and color. There is no single focal point or dominant form or color. The eye flows from one place to another in and around the relief, finding balance in the contrasting shapes and colors.



Concentric Circles # 20

PLATE 5 18"H x 19"W x 3"D

Cast Iron, Fabricated Steel, Enamel

CONCENTRIC CIRCLES # 27, 30, 31

The next work selected for this document is a combination of multiple aluminum castings. This piece, entitled “Concentric Circles # 27, 30, 31”, was an attempt to create more of a visual dynamic within a private space. These three pieces were originally carved as a series and were all treated with the same mental flow. The large half-circle was carved first which became the template to be removed from the lower piece. The middle circular form was then a dissection of the original half-circle. The action-reaction of this process is best seen within the interaction of these forms. These pieces were treated with a boiled linseed oil patina, which allows for heat treatment coloration of the metal to be highlighted within the casting itself. With the addition of the enamel, I tried to create an illusion of movement within the stationary object, by using the intensity of the color to “push and pull” elements of design.

This piece is a successful attempt at creating work that is at the right scale for collectors while maintaining an intimacy through the geometric forms and relationships of the three elements of the sculpture. This piece was chosen for a permanent collection of a private residence in eastern North Carolina.



Concentric Circles # 27, 30, 31

PLATE 6 5'H x 4'W x 4"D

Cast Aluminum, Fabricated Aluminum, Enamel

ARTICULATED CIRCLES

The next piece in this series is “Articulated Circles”. This piece, or series of pieces, was an attempt at meeting the needs of a client. This work is again created in the same manner as the others in this series, yet at a much larger scale. The Flow, or mental presence of creation, was generated from the center half circle, as the starting point for this piece. The client requested that this work be floor-to-ceiling in scale, as well as reflecting the pre-existing architectural language of the space. The half-circle, with the two large arch pieces above it, is a design motif that is found throughout the restaurant in both windows and doorways.

“Articulated Circles” is, to date, the largest wall casting I have completed. It would not have been completed without the assistance of Carl Billingsley, in helping pour the aluminum into the molds. This piece was created for a commercial establishment. It is located in the Villedge, a restaurant in Greenville, North Carolina.



Articulated Circles

PLATE 7 9'H x 6'W x 4"D

Cast Aluminum & Enamel

CONCENTRIC ARTICULATION

“Concentric Articulation” is the fourth of this theme and variation. It was also constructed for a client, with specific scale requests for their wall. Although being almost six feet in height, it retains an intimacy due to the action-reaction of the gridline and visual language of the circles. The circles begin on the edges of the two outer panels and continue until ending at a conclusion within the center panel. It was created using the direct carved technique and is cast in aluminum. Aluminum is the preferred material for this wall installation due to its light-weight. It was also chosen for a commercial establishment. It is located in the Villedge, a restaurant in Greenville, North Carolina.



Concentric Articulation

PLATE 8 5.5' H x 6'W x 4''D

Cast Aluminum & Enamel

CONCLUSION

The term “balance” unifies the concept and the expression of the theme and variation of my work. As a concept, balance is articulated as my state of mind and the maintaining of my mental equilibrium. My work is continuing the legacy of my mentor. This work is a continuing investigation of symbols and objects in my life.

The expression of both the large fabricated sculptures, as well as the intimate, “On the Wall” reliefs; uses color, form and material to embody the contextual articulation of balance. While I am creating my large exterior works, I explore real physical balance as a structural issue. Using the imagery of the twisted column, the illusion of movement and the leaning object, I am striving to maintain my balance. Sculptures that I create for interior environments do not focus on actual balance; but focus on compositional balance, through the use of formal design elements. In particular, the complimentary colors create the push and pull of the visual dynamic, sustaining the illusion of an ongoing struggle. Through my use of multiple panels I have been able to expand these works so they suit both interior spaces of public and private venues.

This research has concluded that self-promotion and self-reliance are the two most important factors of a professional career as an artist. This work has been inspirational to my continued pursuit of finding new solutions to traditional sculptural problems: such as the transportation of sculptures and the investigation of use within interior spaces. My arrival to these conclusive solutions helps maintain my professional and personal sense of balance and mental flow.