

The Importance of Duck Hunting: Making Connections

by

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My work shines a light on the values of hunt-to-table while also showing the many connections made. Hunting is knowing where your meat comes from, the importance of local, sustainable, and ecologically conscious meat, and acts as a reminder why hunting is so important to our world. Hunters make connections to the land and to the people they hunt with. The hunt starts in the morning at dawn and continues until dusk. During the hunt, you are surrounded by connections to the land and to your loved ones who are out in the swamp with you. Duck hunting is full of traditions that are passed down from generation to generation. I am showing these connections through a series of table settings. Walking the viewer through the day of the hunt starting with breakfast and ending with dessert.

The imagery on my work displays the connections and memories made out in the field during our annual hunt. Each ceramic piece has an important place in the day, a function to serve the connections. Breakfast, a quick meal. Lunch, a refuel meal. Dinner, a meal to supply the meat to the ones you love. Lastly, dessert, to sit and make memories of the connections made with the ones you love. The wares glazes represent the colors that are seen in the swamp as well as they sky during the different times of the day. Images that are taken during the hunt are individually hand painted onto the pieces, creating a connection through me and the work. I want my work to remind the viewers of memories they have made while supporting my personal research on connections I have made through duck hunting.

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A Thesis

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by

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family, friends, and boyfriend who all have pushed me to be the best version of an artist I could be. Giving me the ability to continue growing in what I am passionate about and allowing me access to come on hunts with them throughout the years. My understanding of hunting and connections would not be the same if it was not for these people.

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INTRODUCTION

Background of Duck Hunting

Duck hunting dates back as far as mankind. Throughout the years, many have chosen to continue the tradition of hunting, as well as create organizations to help the hunters and the land. Hunters play a vital role in wildlife management and habitat conservation. Waterfowl organizations such as Ducks Unlimited help with the conservation of land. The organization was created to protect the lifeblood that draws people and nature together. Their purpose is to protect the wetlands for our generation, but also for the generations to come.

Connecting Hunting to Self

Born and raised in a small, rural town in North Carolina, hunting is a cultural pillar in my community. Opening day of hunting season is met with the same reputation of a national holiday. Hunting is how my family and many others have been able to keep food on the table and provide for themselves. Hunting is a sport to some but essential to others for food. Many of the inspirations for my work come from various experiences from a hunt. My work supports the idea that one can supply food for a family, while simultaneously bringing joy, humility, and lasting memories to those participating. Harvesting one's own food can maximize quality, freshness, and nutrition. One goes out with friends and family, not knowing what the day will bring, but they do know that they will come back with tales to tell while connections are being made and strengthened.

Growing up, every year my uncle would deer hunt weekends through the season. He would come home with enough deer meat to give to our whole family. If our freezer ever got low, we knew that we could go down to my great uncle's gas station and there would be ample fresh meat for us, as well as a personal favorite, deer jerky. Hunting is also a wildlife management tool. It keeps nature in a healthy

balance of which the available habitat can support. Hunting also helps to maintain populations at levels compatible with increasing human activity and land use.

Waterfowl hunters are an important source of revenue for state and federal conservation programs. Support from duck hunters has been the foundation of wetlands conservations ever since the Federal Duck Stamp was issued in 1934. (“Federal Duck Stamp.”) Waterfowl hunters conserve land and keep track of the population, and make sure that the ducks are well nourished year around. Hunters are not solely focused on the harvest, but also preserve the populations and conservation efforts needed to ensure future generations will have the same opportunities to make lasting memories with friends and family.

INSPIRATION

Understanding the Why

The purpose of my work is to show the viewers the importance of hunting through ceramic place settings. Surrounded by hunting my entire life, it was something that everyone did, but I did not know why. Students would show up to school still decked out in their hunting gear, we even had a camouflage day in our spirit week where I wore my best friend's deer hunting pants that still had the fake smell of deer urine on them. Growing up, my uncle and Pawpaw would go hunting and bring home whatever they shot, supplying us with the meat for the season. My favorite snack will forever be deer jerky, the memories it sparks will always be with me. When I'd go visit my Pawpaw in the shop or at my family run gas station, he and his buddies knew to always save the deer jerky for me. I would sit with them all as they told stories and empty yet again another bag of deer jerky. The older I became, the more interested I was in understanding the importance of hunting. Not knowing where to start, I began researching the land conservation that hunters participate in. Waterfowl hunters are the leaders of land conservation. If waterfowl do not have proper nesting, water, or food, there would be no waterfowl to hunt.

My first Thanksgiving here in Greenville, my boyfriend and his best friends came to town to go duck hunting. During that time, I was not interested in going out with them in the swamp, just the time spent afterwards. I stayed back, took many trips to the store for freezer bags for the ducks, and saw all the memories we all were making. After that hunt, it sparked something in me. I knew it was never about the number of ducks brought in, but the joy that being together with the ones you love brings. From then on, I requested every picture they took while hunting. The next Thanksgiving comes, and it was my turn to join. I put on my many layers of clothes and grabbed my new, way too thin, waders and experienced it all. I do not have a hunter's license or even a shotgun to shoot a duck. None of that mattered to me as I sat on the stump in the middle of the swamp. I watched the sun come up while being surrounded by only the noise of nature. I was able to take every picture I wanted. I saw the boys having the time of their lives

standing in a 4-foot by 2-foot area, squished together. I studied the wing pattern of the ducks to see what species it was. Most importantly, I was making a memory that I will have forever. I have now participated in three annual duck hunting trips, while being out in the swamp for two. I have made the connections to the land and to the people I love most, while not once shooting a single duck.

I make artwork that can be viewed as a painting, but you can also enjoy your morning coffee or afternoon dinner with my pieces. Placing images of the waterfowl, land, and memories on the wares sparks memories maybe one has had of their own, while also showing nonhunters what happens during the day of hunting. Functional table setting pieces bring the idea of bringing the hunt to the table. Hunters and their families consume the hunts meat year-round, they also supply it to locals who want fresh, non-preservative laden meat. Hunting keeps our world balanced, gives opportunities to be with the ones you love, and a chance to sit in nature alone and just take in the scene.

HOW TO MAKE THE CONNECTIONS

How I Translate Hunting into Artwork

My vessels are functional forms that you could use in an everyday setting. The use of local clay from Asheville, North Carolina ties my pottery back to my hometown located right outside of Asheville. Buncombe White clay gives the appearance of nature to my work while also giving me a blank light background to use as my canvas. The clay body is plastic while also having tooth to allow me to make my large plates and tall pitchers. When the clay is fired, it gives the appearance of a light speckled white background. The speckle in the clay gives dimension that adds to my pointillism painting technique. Wheel thrown wares give me the control I need to have for the smooth background to display my paintings. The wheel allows me to control the shapes I am making from my 15-pound platter to half a pound ramekin.

I use underglazes to paint the scenes onto my wares. The scenes consist of images I have taken while on the hunting trips, duck species and details, plants found out in the swamp, as well as detail shots of loading a shotgun. The underglaze technique ranges from pointillism to realism. Understanding the colors and color combinations is a must when using underglazes for my designs since they are the primary design element of my wares. I mix the underglazes as if they are acrylic paint to achieve the colors I need for my image. After many trials and errors with colors, I paint black and white detailed designs. Understanding the size of the dot, as well as the space between each dot helps my pointillism become three dimensional. My work goes through two bisque processes. After the first bisque, I then paint the ware and bisque again to ensure no smudging during the glazing process. All my wares are then clear glazed and fired in an electric kiln at cone 6 to keep the colors bright and vibrant. Some wares do not have paintings on them but have specific color of glazes to tie them to the hunt. I choose colors that remind me of the sky, ground, swamp, whatever natural surrounding I see while out on the farm hunting. All glazes I have made and tested the color combinations to achieve the appearance of my vision of a

hunting day colors. I bring hunt to the table, making it important to have my wares be able to be eaten from and machine washable.

Connecting the Two

Functionality is the foundation of my art process. Being able to use my work is what drew me to ceramics. Ceramic wares have been used on the table since humans discovered that clay can be found in abundance and formed into objects by mixing with water then firing. The first known ceramic artifact dates all the way back to the late Paleolithic period. (“Brief History of Ceramics and Glass”) There is a marriage between hunting and ceramics- both concepts from long ago that still matter today. There are clay skeets to use while skeet shooting to help with hunting as well as ceramic plates that have been used to serve meats since the beginning. Being in nature and taking in the scenery is what influences me the most. While I am in the field on the edge of the woods or in the swamp, I look around, taking in all the colors and wondering how I can create those in a glaze. I capture the memories made during the hunt with the images that I paint. Not only does the imagery bring people together, so does the idea of making wares that are used in a family setting.

SHOWING THE CONNECTIONS

After all my personal research, I am going through our typical hunting day through my work. The hunting day and being out in the swamp is where I draw the inspiration for my work.

Breakfast

It is 4 o'clock in the morning and our alarm just went off. It is time for the hunt. We make our way to the traditional Hamilton Beach Coffee machine and hit the brew button. As we wait for the coffee to brew, we sit and watch Meat Eaters. We need to get to the farm before sunrise to get our waders on, make our way through the woods to the swamp, and set out the decoys. Shooting light is 30 minutes before sunrise. On our way out the door, we want something quick. With these thoughts running through my head, this is how I chose the pieces in the breakfast set. I have my place settings of four. Everyone gets a coffee mug, orange juice tumbler, and a small plate. On the table is a syrup pitcher and plate to give some variety to the morning menu. Morning meals typically consist of something quick. It could be anything from a waffle to a breakfast sandwich. This setting is glazed darker due to the environment during the time this meal is consumed. Walking through the swamp super early in the morning there is minimal color. Everything is dark and light up with a head lamp. Everything looks black and brown with few shades of green shining through. The mugs have painted details of a duck, the bill, foot, butt curls for maturity of a drake, and wing. Everything shown on the mugs are detail features that helps hunters identify what kind of duck it is. A dialog takes place presenting these utilitarian vessels to the viewer on a small table, informing the viewer of the quick, grab and go, style.



Plate 1: Breakfast Table Setting



Plate 2: Breakfast Mug Detail

Lunch

The time has come to take a break from the swamp and head back to the apartment for some lunch. Our lunch on hunt days is not a large gourmet meal, it is a family style meal focused on refueling the body for the last hunt of the day. The meals typically consist of quicker and easier meals since the morning has been spent standing in a swamp. Things like chili, pasta, grilled chicken, and of course choice of beverage are things that would be consumed during lunch. While making the lunch set, I gave options of what can be consumed during the time. Lunch usually is a relaxing time in the middle of a day's hunt. During this time, we may want to enjoy a beer or seltzer in our tumbler. The images on these wares are about connecting to nature. The swamp is bright again, shining through is the green colors in the swamp as well as on the trees and ground. The glaze colors in this set show the greens and dark browns and blacks that are seen in the walk back to the truck. The bowls and tumblers have identifying features of the nature around us in the hunt. The vessels have cattail, button bush, tree branches, and swamp sawgrass painted on them. As a hunter, it is important to know what is surrounding you. It is relaxing to just be standing in the swamp, looking around at the beautiful nature that is before you. Now is the time that we take in what we saw during the morning, make decisions on the afternoon hunt, and relax while enjoying everyone's company before going back out for the last hunt of the day.



Plate 3: Lunch Table Setting



Plate 4: Lunch Detail



Plate 5: Lunch Serving Platter "Companionship"

Dinner

The last meal of the day, to us, the biggest meal. Now is the time that you get to prep and then enjoy what you supplied to your family. The meal will consist of duck breast, duck wrapped jalapeno poppers, brussels sprouts, potatoes, macaroni and cheese, and whatever is decided on. Everything is served family style. We all sit together and enjoy each other's company. The wares presented on the table are a combination of paintings and glazes. The glazes are blues, greens, and subtle pinks, all to remind you of leaving the swamp and seeing the sunset on your way back in. The dinner plates consist of image stills of someone loading a shotgun shell into the rifle then transitioning onto the duck platter which is of the hunter taking aim after the gun is loaded. The pitcher image consists of a wood duck being posed in the barrel of the gun, a very common pose for duck hunters to show off what they got. The large bowl is a painting of the swamp that I took right after sunset, this is the swamp that we stand in for hours in most of our hunts. Each painting has a special meaning, as well as the glazes. The special meaning of the ware's decoration translates to the special meaning of the dinner. The idea that one supplied the food for the people that they love and had the opportunity to sit down with them and enjoy the home cooked meal.



Plate 6: Dinner Table Setting



Plate 7: Dinner Table Plates



Plate 8: Dinner Table Painting Details

Dessert

During our hunt days, our dessert does not consist of something sweet, most the time it consists of liquor. The main choice being bourbon and the second being tequila. For the bourbon, you have the option of Daviess County limited edition, double barrel bourbon partnership with Ducks Unlimited, or the classic Eagle Rare. For tequila, there is one option, Lunazul Reposado Tequila. How you choose to drink your liquor is up to you. With the size of the tumbler cups provided with the liquor sets, you can have the option to drink neat, or mix up a cocktail of your choice. This is the time we completely unwind for the night, sit around telling stories and simply enjoying each other's company. The paintings on dessert represent looking up and drinking down. When out in the swamp when you look up you see the bare tree line but when you look down you see the tall swamp grass you treaded through, this was the connection I made to display on dessert.



Plate 9: Dessert Set



Plate 10: Dessert Detail

CONCLUSION

The imagery on my wares gives the viewers a dialog to tell the story throughout the day of the hunt. The four-piece place setting shows the intimacy of the smaller group. I walk the viewers through the day of the hunt, showing the connections made while out in nature and when coming home for a meal. My work allows users to share the endless memories being made throughout the day. Making dinner the largest place setting, it celebrates the importance of supplying the ones you love with what you were able to receive from the hunt.

An interaction takes place through the transition to each meal. Breakfast being a quick grab and go, lunch a more sit down but family style meal, then to dinner, the biggest meal of the evening. The different place settings for each meal gives the viewer the idea of what is to be served at the specific meal as well as imagery to show connections. To start with breakfast, a quick meal before the sun rises along with some caffeine to get the day started including details of a duck. Then to lunch, a family style meal with details of the swamp for glazes and imagery. Finishing off the day with dinner, the meal you supplied the protein for with details about loading and firing a shotgun and what is received from doing so. After dinner is my form of dessert, drinks. For the imagery in dessert, it connects to looking up and drinking down with the tree branches along with the grass. Each meal has specific ceramic wares in them to support the food that would be served, anything from a breakfast sandwich to a bowl of chili at lunch, and of course your filet duck breast at dinner. Each place setting brings the hunt stories to the tables.

I was able to complete this body of work while making the hunting memories and connections in the swamp. I woke up at the 4:30 am and helped in every way possible to make the day successful and memorable. Cold mornings carrying a sack of decoys with a headlamp through the woods, sitting quietly to not scare off the ducks, as well as simply enjoying nature and the people surrounding me. I experienced coming home and breasting out a duck, even if it was in my apartment complex parking lot with feathers flying everywhere. I got to join in on the connections during and after the hunting day, seeing everything

for myself as the researcher. I gathered all the information needed for my body of work without shooting one duck. This helped me understand the importance of the connections. I was able to watch the ones I love enjoy the day and supply for us. There is no feeling like preparing food one supplied and sitting down with the ones you love. The connections and memories will always be there. This body of work can bring me the memories of these hunts for years on. The connections will continue to be made when a plate is pulled out of the cabinet or when coffee is poured into a mug. My work will continue to bring the connections from the hunt to the table through imagery and ceramic wares.

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