

ABSTRACT

Kyle Rees, FACETACKS SEASON ONE: A NARRATIVE ON CERAMIC VESSELS. (Under the direction of Seo Eo) School of Art and Design, 2013.

This written report addresses the narrative objects created in the completion of the Master of Fine Arts degree. These objects consist of utilitarian porcelain pottery in the form of stacked cups, coffee sets, and tea sets. Comical stories on the surface of the stacks borrow the format commonly seen on television shows and are about a protagonist named Face. The coffee and tea sets are covered with imagery representing amusing commercials for fictional products that exist in Face's world. This creative thesis is a synthesis of the utilitarian object, popular media, and my own sense of humor.

FACETACKS SEASON ONE: A NARRATIVE ON CERAMIC VESSELS

A Report of Creative Thesis

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF EPISODES AND SETS.....	iii
INTRODUCTION: HISTORY AND OVERVIEW.....	1
THE OBJECT NARRATIVE: ASPECTS OF THE OBJECT.....	2
Object Making.....	2
Narratives.....	2
Utilitarian Aspects of Objects.....	3
Style.....	4
CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS: SPECIFIC OBJECTS AND NARRATIVES.....	5
The Cup.....	5
Cup Stacks.....	5
Tea Sets and Coffee Sets.....	6
METHODOLOGY.....	7
Imagery and Written Narratives.....	7
Metaphors within the Stories.....	7
Metaphors within the Pots.....	8
Process.....	8
CONCLUSION.....	10
REFERENCES.....	11
APPENDIX: EPISODES AND SETS.....	12

LIST OF EPISODES AND SETS

Episode One: <i>Crystal Vulture Buzzard</i> with <i>Slip Soaker</i> Coffee Set.....	13
Episode Two: <i>Dinosaur Car Wash</i> with <i>Rex Spex</i> Tea Set.....	16
Episode Three: <i>Face in Space</i> with <i>Shubaz</i> Coffee Set.....	19
Episode Four: <i>Shrimp Trizkit</i> with <i>Firestarter</i> Coffee Set.....	22
Episode Five: <i>Iface Face</i> with <i>Skull Where?! Drinking Sets</i> Coffee Set.....	25

INTRODUCTION: HISTORY AND OVERVIEW

Using vessels and telling stories are easily understood and accepted by cultures from different places and time periods. Both represent how we communicate our relationships and how we understand our world. The wheel thrown ceramic vessel has been part of culture since its earliest versions that trace back to 3,000 BC in Mesopotamia (Victor). Several examples of narrative pottery exist from our past with one of the most prevalent being the Black Figure Greek pottery from the Seventh and Eighth centuries (Cartwright, 2013). These vessels allow us to learn about these cultures from and how they communicated their narratives on objects.

Within the last century the television has been one of the most prevalent storytelling devices in the world, especially in the United States. *Watching TV was the leisure activity that occupied the most time (2.8 hours per day), accounting for about half of leisure time, on average, for those age 15 and over* (United States Department of Labor, 2012). Personally I have spent countless hours of my life absorbing narrative through the television screen and it seems only fitting that this method of communicating a narrative come to the surface in my creative work.

I am telling a story on vessels by interlacing a series of narratives on wheel thrown pottery. The sequence in which these stories are told mimics that of a TV series. With this process I am combining aspects from the contemporary popular media and a utilitarian tradition that has survived for over five thousand years.

THE OBJECT NARRATIVE: ASPECTS OF THE OBJECT

Object Making

Objects are things that are tangible to our senses and our cognition. They symbolize, represent, function, communicate, and facilitate our desire to engage in ownership. Consequently, we make objects so that we can own them. In addition to representing possession, we also make objects to communicate a relationship. Objects may symbolize our relationship with the maker or a previous owner. They may also show our relationship with the place or time the object was made. By making a particular type of object we are communicating numerous things about ourselves. Many objects are made for various types of rewards. Some make objects because of the cognitive stimulation involved in the process and the pursuit of its aesthetic quality. As an object maker who is a participant in a culture that values these things, it is not difficult for me to recognize the meaningfulness in making objects.

Narratives

A sequential series of events is typically considered as a narrative or a story. We create narratives to communicate fictional and non-fictional scenarios. They can exist in a multitude of forms and can live in one's thoughts and can be embedded in any type of object. We create narratives to document, entertain, and educate. Some create them as a means of personal expression while others make them due to professional or institutional parameters.

I create narratives that communicate my sense of humor and reflect a style that I am familiar with. Narrative fiction is a genre with billions of fans worldwide who experience it in a variety of mediums. I have chosen clay as my storytelling substrate because of its utilitarian aspects. My narratives borrow from fiction I have seen as moving images on screens and stories I have imagined as I have read words across a page. My goal is for the viewer/reader to experience text and imagery working together with clay in a way that encourages a resonating reminiscence.

Utilitarian Aspects of Objects

A utilitarian object is one that is concerned with usefulness or function. These objects communicate the intention of the makers when they are used as intended. Often times the intentions of the consumer come into play as well. Regardless of the original intended purpose, people may choose to use objects for other applications. There are also many objects that are designed to serve multiple functions. Certain utilitarian objects are seen as a necessity in our culture, while others may be seen as superfluous. All utilitarian objects communicate a status in our culture and the context in which an object exists determines value ranging from the basic necessity to the extravagant ownership. These objects have a lifespan that is determined by several things. Number and frequency of use, exposure to elements, and misuse are things that affect the longevity of these utilitarian objects.

I make utilitarian objects because they are readily accessible in our culture. The desire to own a multitude of utilitarian objects is seldom questioned. This provides a demand for them beyond what is actually needed which presents an economic opportunity while also creating a chance to explore different ways of interpreting the various aspects of the utilitarian object. I combine

utilitarian objects with narratives to comment on the unique aspects of material and popular media culture.

Style

I rely on the neutral shade black to help my utilitarian objects possess a particular style.

Throughout contemporary American history black has defined the style of several things. I see black leather shoes, boots, and jackets as stylish because of who or what they are associated with. Black vehicles and weapons seem tactical, serious, and fast. Black does not have an inherent style, but my associations with things that are black carry this ideology. In addition to using black, I also use humor and nostalgia to implant a particular style in my work. Personal style is something we begin to define early in our lives and refine as we grow old.

CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS: SPECIFIC OBJECTS AND NARRATIVES

The Cup

Cups are part of our everyday life and social processes due to how well they serve their intended function. For me, the cup is a doorway into other's lives. I am a collector of cups and each one I own carries a meaningful social connection as well as a link to a time and place. My wheel-thrown drinking vessels symbolize a connection to their maker and their presence in my collection represents the value I place on the handmade utilitarian object. Cups are a staple of our domestic interiors that speak volumes about who we are and how we live that are also accepted as art objects. This allows my cups to feel at home in formal and domestic settings.

Cup Stacks

Stacking cups is usually associated with saving of space in packaging and storage processes. My cup stacks serve the purpose of telling a story. They nestle into each other in a specified order creating a column of cups. When aligned correctly, narrative images on their surface create a unified illustration across the entirety of the cup stack. As the cups are unstacked, stories are revealed. These stories are comprised of handwritten texts on the bottom half of the cups, and with the illustrative imagery, they complete the narrative. A vase-like vessel acts as a cup-holder, elevating the stack and giving the cups a home while in storage or on display. These cup-holders serve a different purpose than the ones we see in our cars and at movie theaters.

Providing a specific place for stacked cups serves as a way of producing and reproducing the habit of stacking and unstacking these cups. An illusion is created when cups and holder are arranged as intended. Multiple parts seemingly merge, visually becoming a single form that is

neither cup nor holder, but a vase. In a domestic setting, this form allows the cups to seem appropriate in the living room or in the bedroom. Formally, this unification of cups and holder gives the set a scale and presence that a single cup would not have. Practically this relationship between forms allows more surface area for narrative imagery aiding in my synthesis of stories and utilitarian objects.

Tea Sets and Coffee Sets

Tea and Coffee Sets work in harmony with the cup. The cup completes the set allowing it to function as a social tool. This lets multiple participants share the tea or coffee experience while also personalizing each person's role in this social act. It is about sharing the same drink while having one's own drinking vessel to personalize the tea or coffee using the provided sugar and creamer. Coffee and tea pots are also machines. A drip filter for the coffee and an infuser for the tea use hot water and time (with coffee grounds and/or tea leaves) to make a new liquid that is hot and ready for pouring and consumption. Lids help to contain the heat of these traditionally hot drinks while spouts allow for a small exit hole that helps direct the respective liquid into its cup. Making coffee or tea in a vessel that is also handmade connects to the romanticism wheel-thrown pottery provides as a tangible connection to another person. By unifying my sets with a humorous theme that relates to a narrative on a single cup stack, a relationship between cup stack and tea or coffee set is forged communicating another layer of meaning to the viewer/user of these narrative utilitarian vessels.

METHODOLOGY

Imagery and Written Narratives

A character named Face who deals with problems that are relevant to contemporary people is the protagonist of the narratives that play out across the surface of my cup stacks. In each episode Face decides to solve the problem in a way that seems right to him, but is obviously wrong to others, then Face proceeds to deal with the consequences of his bad decisions. As a reference to the ever present product placement on television I have included a fictional product that plays a role in each narrative. In turn these products become the subject for the surface decoration of tea and coffee sets, thus connecting each cup stack to a particular set.

Imagery on the cup stacks depict Face at a humorous and/or important moment in the given story and will also illustrate different characters, objects, and graffiti-esque text relevant to each episode. The title of the episode will also reside within this imagery making the surface of the cup stack read function similarly to a movie poster. Imagery on the surface of the coffee and tea sets is inspired by the ever present television commercial. Each piece of the set will advertise a different version of a single brand of product. For example, the *Firestarter* tea set will show different types of fictional lighters on each piece of the set. An altered version of the *As Seen On TV* logo on each piece helps communicate the inspiration for the series.

Metaphors within the Stories

Metaphors are used in this body of work as a symbolic narrative device. The protagonist Face can be seen as a metaphor for me and I relate to several different aspects of his character. He is

also seen as a metaphor for the modern man and is used to address things that I think are strange, illogical, or humorous that we tend to fill our lives with. Face's life and deaths in several of the episodes are a metaphor for how television, and the entertainment industry in general, has desensitized us to death. Due to this Face is allowed to come back to life at the beginning of each episode as if he never died in the previous story. Settings and characters within these episodes symbolize how we view the environment, the economy, our politics, and humor.

Metaphors within the Pots

Within the pots that make up this series there are also metaphors. The cups that are part of the tea and coffee sets represent the impetus of the other vessels that rely on the cup to transfer their contents to the person's mouth. Without the cup their purpose would not be fully served. Tea and coffee sets also serve as metaphors for the social situations they enhance. Teapots and coffee pots carry more liquid than a single cup can carry and are intended to be used in social situations where relationships are developed. The cups that are part of the cup stacks are a metaphor for a scene or a chapter which is a sequential part of the larger episode. Cup holders serve as a metaphor for home or a place where the cups live and fit comfortably.

Process

The process for this series of work begins with a story about Face that incorporates a fictional product. Once the story is written and the product is developed (along with a catchy jingle) the object making begins. All coffee and tea sets and cup stacks are formed on an electric potter's wheel using moist porcelain clay. Tea sets consist of a two stacking teacups, saucers, sugar bowl, creamer pitcher, teapot, and tea infuser. Coffee sets consist of two stacking mugs, sugar

bowl, creamer pitcher, coffee pot, and drip filter. The cup stacks include five stacking cups and a single cup holder. Once formed these vessels' exterior surfaces are covered with a black slip or under glaze. Then their parts are assembled and handles are added. Using the sgraffito technique images and words are carved into the black slip revealing white lines made up of the underlying porcelain. Once carved the dry pots are fired to 1751 degrees Fahrenheit in an electric kiln. Post firing a black underglaze pencil is used to write the text of the episodes and jingles on the bottom half of the stackable cups. Colored underglazes are used to highlight parts of the narrative imagery and a clear liner glaze is applied to the cups and sets before the pots are fired again to 2232 degrees Fahrenheit fusing the underglaze and glaze to the vitreous porcelain.

CONCLUSION

I have synthesized the long history of the narrative ceramic vessel with the contemporary model for telling stories that is the television series with this body of work. I feel it has the potential to infiltrate the formal setting as well as the domestic, thus communicating my narratives and their fable like messages in a wide variety of places. The reason for the success of this communication is the use of contemporary symbols, humor, and styles as well as the domestic objects that are relatable and recognizable to a wide variety of people. This familiarity creates a relationship between my work and the viewer in which they are entertained and educated. With this body of I have been provided an opportunity to continue to grow as an object maker and storyteller within the framework that I have created in which Face lives and learns.

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APPENDIX: EPISODES AND SETS

FACETACKS EPISODE ONE: *Crystal Vulture Buzzard*

With *Slip Soaker* Coffee Set, Text of Story and Jingle



Crystal Vulture Buzzard (stacked)
Porcelain, 19 inches, 2012



Crystal Vulture Buzzard (unstacked)



Slip Soaker Coffee Set, Porcelain, 2012

Facetacks Episode One: *Crystal Vulture Buzzard*

One Day, Face was'a hunting groceries with his skills and SlipSoaker Ten-Squared weapon.

The weapon failed so Face pilfered some turtle's eggs. He fried and ate those eggs, then he stole some milk from a cow and washed them down. Delicious!

Face forgot how to hunt, sustaining life by stealing groceries from others. Guilt overtook him because he was not using his SlipSoaker, a Christmas present from Mom. So he taped it and a flamethrower to his wrists and he had weapon-hands. Hybrid!

Face knew he could become a better hunter by using the science of ceramics! 1. squirt slip onto his unsuspecting prey 2. Fire the slip with his thrower of flames. This created a vitreous white hot shell that would cook his groceries with the same energy that took the groceries lives.

Efficient!

Face was ready to hunt Crystal, the legendary Vulture Buzzard. Since she was the oldest Vulture Buzzard she should be especially delicious. . The top of the highest mountain was where Face went for the hunt. He saw Crystal swooping towards him and prepared his skills and weapons.

Conflict!

Normally Face was not food for Crystal. Missing meals of young turtles had lowered her standards. Time for Mortal Kombat. The slip soaked her and the flame vaporized the water while it fused silica. Crystal was roasting! She pulled her wand and cawed Ceramicablasta! She escaped and turned Face into a baby turtle and ate him. Lesson!

Slip Soaker Jingle

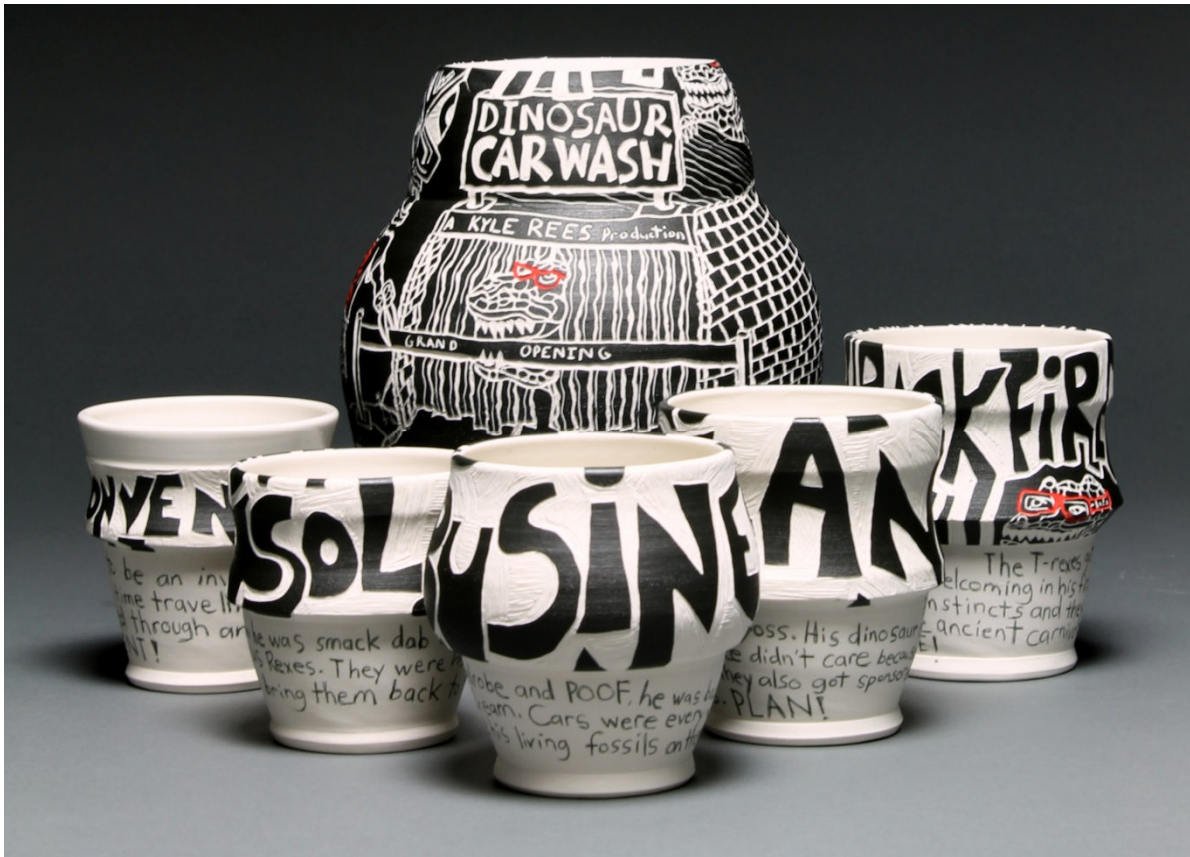
Rappin bout vampires like Bram Stoker
Splurge on a deck of cards you better pull the Joker
If you eat a chicken bone you might become a choker
So go ahead and buy yourself a new *Slip Soaker*

FACETACKS EPISODE TWO: *Dinosaur Car Wash*

With *Rex Spex* Tea Set, Text of Story and Jingle



Dinosaur Car Wash (stacked)
Porcelain, 20 inches, 2012



Dinosaur Car Wash (unstacked)



Rex Spex Tea Set, Porcelain, 2012

Facetacks Episode Two: *Dinosaur Car Wash*

One day, Face decided to be inventive and capitalist. To get inspired he used his time traveling island that traveled randomly. To get back to the present all he had to do was walk through a big old smelly wardrobe. Convenient!

Face made it to the island and realized he was riding a T-rex with a USB port on its head. He plugged his ipod into it to control the beast with a dino app. It was obvious that he needed to bring back these creatures and use them to make money. Solution!

Face found the wardrobe and walked through it with his tyrannosaurus rexes and POOF, he was back and ready for his American Dream. Cars were the most important thing in the world so it made sense to use his living fossils on them. Business!

Face bought a car wash and he was ready to earn capital! His dinosaur employees did not know what cars were or what washing them was, but he didn't care because they were big and rare and attracted customers. They also attracted a lucrative sponsorship with Rex Spex glasses for dinosaurs. Plan!

Then, those T-Rexes got hungry while Face was cutting the ribbon and welcoming in his first customers. The dinosaurs appetites triggered their instincts and they saw there were surrounded by groceries (people). Those living fossils ate him and turned him into fuel. Backfire!

Rex Spex Jingle

Rex Spex

Yo Tyrannosaurus Rex

Better place them bets

Go out and cash them checks

You know you want some new Rex Spex

FACETACKS EPISODE THREE: *Face in Space*

With *Shubaz* Coffee Set, Text of Story and Jingle



Face in Space (stacked)
Porcelain, 21 inches, 2012



Face in Space (unstacked)



Shubaz Coffee Set, Porcelain, 2012

Facetacks Episode Three: *Face in Space*

One day Face decided he was ready to go to space. Television had shown him everything on Earth. So he bought some Shubaz Moon Shooz that would make his horse Garth jump super high. ELEVATION!

Face nailed the Moon Shooz to Garth's hooves and they were on their way to the moon. Unsurprisingly, Face had failed Science and did not know Isaac Newton and his apples. Garth only bounced. EDUCATION!

Undeterred, Face ran to the NASA and broke into a space shuttle with his sledgehammer. Then the shuttle took off and he saw his fellow astronauts were monkeys. They taught him about Newton, and other dead white guys. Face was a genius when they reached the moon.

COLONIZATION!

He explored the moon and he could jump really high plus, there were no politicians telling him what to believe. It was cool there, but he was ready to get back to earth so he could see his family, play some baseball, eat some nachos, and hunt some deer. SEPARATION!

Those monkeys had begun to hate face because he was a know it all jerk and he picked his nose. They told him about a Baseball stadium on the dark side of the moon. Face went to search for it and they got on the shuttle and left him there by himself with all of his now meaningless knowledge. ALIENATION!

Shubaz Jingle

Yo horse, you're gonna need at least four shoes.
Shoppin at the horse shoe store, it's so hard to choose.
What would you wear if you were a horse
nailed to your hooves with a hammer and force?
Wear SHUBAZ! They make horses cool

FACETACKS EPISODE FOUR: *Shrimp Trizkit*

With *Firestarter* Tea Set, Text of Story and Jingle



Shrimp Trizkit (stacked)
Porcelain, 19 inches, 2013



Face in Space (unstacked)



Firestarter Tea Set, Porcelain, 2013

Facetacks Episode Four: *Shrimp Trizkit*

One day, Face wanted to be cool and start a band. He had been rocking out his whole life since his parents were hippies. He needed an axe to slay with. He got a Gibson flying v from the pawn shop and it was on!

He knew the guitar would make him cool but he needed a band so the crowds would freak out and raise their lit Firestarter lighters. Face went to art school with a whole heap of hippie offspring who could play instruments. A plan was crafted.

Two of those crazy dirty art kids joined forces with Face and played bass and drums. Face, the leader of the band, wrote songs, played guitar, and rap-yelled. They called themselves Shrimp Trizkit and they toured the world until they were famous.

In the bowels of the earth a giant shrimp named Shrimpy D. Trizkittle googled himself and saw Shrimp Trizkit was trending. Their rap rock music made him sick. How dare they disgrace his name by associating it with their weak fusion sounds! Shrimpy got tickets to a show.

The band came out for the encore fans held their Firestarter lighters aloft. Just then, Shrimpy D., the giant shrimp, showed up and snatched Face with his net. He dipped Face into some cocktail sauce then ended his days as the leader of Shrimp Trizkit.

Firestarter Jingle

Well, you're eating fried fish and you're dippin it in tarter
For your tasty meal that innocent fish was a martyr
Eat some beans with that fish, you may become a farter
Watch out! It's that creepy Helena Bonham Carter
Stranded in the woods? Strike a flame with your Firestarter

FACETACKS EPISODE FIVE: *I face Face*

With *Skull Where?! Drinking Sets* Coffee Set, Text of Story and Jingle



I face Face, (stacked)
Porcelain, 23 inches, 2013



I face Face (unstacked)



Skull Where?! Drinking Sets Coffee Set, Porcelain, 2013

Facetacks Episode Five: *Iface Face*

One day, Face wanted to be cool and start a band. He had been rocking out his whole life since his parents were hippies. He needed an axe to slay with. He got a Gibson flying v from the pawn shop and it was on!

He knew the guitar would make him cool but he needed a band so the crowds would freak out and raise their lit Firestarter lighters. Face went to art school with a whole heap of hippie offspring who could play instruments. A plan was crafted.

Two of those crazy dirty art kids joined forces with Face and played bass and drums. Face, the leader of the band, wrote songs, played guitar, and rap-yelled. They called themselves Shrimp Trizkit and they toured the world until they were famous.

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The band came out for the encore fans held their Firestarter lighters aloft. Just then, Shrimpy D., the giant shrimp, showed up and snatched Face with his net. He dipped Face into some cocktail sauce then ended his days as the leader of Shrimp Trizkit.

Skull Where?! Drinking Sets Jingle

Combin my hair with a golden dino bone

I'm a multimillionaire

Making nachos, sellin gummy bears and pop

I'm a concessionaire

Drinking a hot beverage from a critters cranium

I'm using Skull Where?! Drinking Sets