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Artist Statement and Research

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Zopfi-Do and Zopfigo-Do: the Visual Heredity of Hybrid Objects

Once upon a time, I found myself on the floor of the Palazzo Vecchio staring up into the ceiling of the Lily Room. The gilt and painted ceiling glowed with a preternatural light reflected from the standing candelabras on the floor. After the awe had dissipated and I closed my mouth, I began to look at the intricate ceiling in a different light. I came to realize that the ceiling was made of the same pieces replicated over and over again to create the impressive arboreal effect. I found this to be more impressive than the ceiling itself. I was overwhelmed by the design and the experience of the ceiling has clung to me like a bur after a mountain trek.

The longer the experience stuck with me, the more I began wondering why. It took 5 months and a week of exams, gallery installations, and a long car ride home for me to figure it out. It was when I was driving under the 695 off ramp when it hit me. I remembered a moment from my childhood when I was laying on a trampoline after a long afternoon of bouncing. I remembered the experience of laying on that woven nylon and staring up into the interlocking pattern of branches and gently fluttering leaves. The experience of looking up into a living canopy was the same as looking up into the ceiling of the Lily Room. Then I knew what the Medicis were doing. Yes, the gilding and the lapis lazuli were a statement of wealth and the deep looming presence of the ceiling was a statement of power but there was something more to the ceiling. The ceiling was a monument to nature in a renaissance fortress.

A similar realization occurred much more recently, though the above only happened

two short months ago. I understood what I was doing with my aggregated objects. I was creating a situation that modern humans haven't experienced in a long time, well at least a generation or two. I had unknowingly created a situation where people who interacted with the objects had no clue what they were and what they were meant to do and they resorted to context clues of prior experiences in order to make sense of what was going on. I found the experience of wandering through the forest only to find a new delicious berry, or digging in the sand and happening upon a fossilized creature of the deep or artifact from the ancient past.

I then started seeing things as things. I began to hold them and feel their pulse. Then, I knew what I could do with things. I knew neoplasticism and understood the plastic nature of even the most resilient objects. The object is present with the viewer but the forms, the essences, are mine to play with.

I am a genetic engineer of things. I take essential bits of one thing, or several things, and stick them in, with, or on other bits of things. However, unlike an engineer, I am not solving a problem and I am not working in a small box pushing buttons and kicking machines when they misbehave.

I'm working under a broad umbrella of hybridization. I take a few things, distill them down until I extract their essence, and then merge them to create a new object. I am like a breeder of things. I am not collecting things and gluing them together, but mating them and seeing what I get as a result.

I use the term hybridization rather than breeding, alchemy, or wizardry because it connotes efficiency and a utilitarian purpose that is a result of human design. Toyota would

have less success marketing a chimera car because nobody wants to fear being eaten by an automobile. Talking with the artist Bonnie Rychlak when she was visiting St. Marys, I learned that I share an idea with Isamu Noguchi. It's the idea that because sculpture exists in space it can serve a function in the way that a painting or a photograph cannot. He intended for many of his outdoor works to be engaged with and tread the line between art and design when I seem to be finding myself treading.

The first step in creating my new species of things is finding things to take from. I am using mostly simple life forms or organisms that have adapted to extreme environments. Nature has already done a lot of the work making these organisms very efficient so it makes my formal distillation process easier. In the future I hope to add more complex things to my catalog of formal essences. The errant vacuum cleaner, shoe horn, or foam clog also wind up in the mix.

Once I have found things and distilled them I begin to work them together to make my hybrid. This is much like the process of using stable strains or original wild specimens when breeding orchids. The combination process may result in many forms, many of them not viable or formally stable, but eventually one form works out and I have my hybrid.

I felt irresponsible creating without a purpose. I try creating my objects with a purpose in mind but found it to be cumbersome. Instead I found if I let them come to be they eventually work out for something or other. It takes a bit of experimentation sometimes to get it right. The forms are conducive to certain actions so I endeavor to find the best role for my critters.

When I have my stable and balanced form I begin to find its purpose through a

process I call synthesized adaptation. In this phase, the hybridized forms are tested in various materials while I ponder their utilitarian or aesthetic application.

After I've adapted the form I begin propagating them through mold making and cast making. I create my molds with a silicone that has a relatively low life. This means that over the course of my propagation the mold that I using degrades and begins to affect the object that I have created. I call this objective mutation. This effect is most evident in Zopfi-Cling, where five different mutations arose from a single form.

The mutation process results in many morphs. I don't keep all of them but when I am pleased with a mutation I make a mold of it and begin propagating it along with my other objects. This creates generations of objects that continue to mutate this is also most evident in Cling.

All of my objects were created from forms in my visual catalog. My catalog consists of every visual and tactile experience I have encountered and logged. Sources from catalog enters from objects and places I have encountered from places and books, both seen in picture books and imagine while reading text, videos, visits to Ikea, theme parks, museums, and other such places and things. Purely imagined things also exist in the catalog but I only use them if they are stable enough to be distilled and hybridized.

The catalog is used in the descriptions of my objects. I use the language of biological descriptions and hybrid plant tags to describe the new hybrid species I have created. This establishes the lineage of the objects and the fragments of identity they share with other objects and places. Here I present the relationships that compose of each object. The sources tend to be far-fetched and dissimilar from each other, but I bring them together into

a form. There they exist in a dialog with a purpose. The dialog and purpose is reflected in conjunction with the binomial nomenclature and the action the objects play in space. Genus-Zopfi, species-purpose/instruction. I hyphenate this to reflect my hyphenated and hybrid identity. This marks them as my own.

I'm aware of my hybrid identity. Upon marrying my father, my mother chose to integrate her maiden name with my fathers in the form of the hyphenated form. She is a Turc, like I, but is now taxonomically identified with Zopfi. I exist as a Turc-Zopfi like my mother. But I am also a Zopfi like my father. The way children are named reflects the hybrid's root in the parents' genetics. It establishes a lineage, normally patrilineal, that can be traced back to discover the hybrids that contributed to the new specimen.

My identity is hybridized because it is an immigrant identity. My genes, or essences are Slavic, Germanic and Roma but I am not the same as those who are not hybridized. I came to realize this quite quickly when I was in Europe.

I looked to artists that were using identity in making their work. Anish Kapoor, an Indian born artist who works mainly out of the UK, uses pigments from his native India to adorn the surfaces of the objects and installations he creates in the formalist language prevalent in the UK. Takashi Murakami, a Japanese artist, uses traditional and modern pop imagery and processes from Japan to create a uniquely Japanese visual identity that he uses to preserve Japanese culture and in doing so critiques Japan's westernization is a idea that he calls SuperFlat.

I like many, have a new identity. It is an immigrant identity so far removed culturally from the essential cultures that make up the hybrids. This type of identity is common in the

United States where I was born. My objects reflect this in their hybrid forms. Ascribing to multiple cultural identities within a greater culture creates tensions. My objects combine disparate and sometimes far-fetched sources into new objects with new objects with new identities where all of the component parts contribute to its designated purpose. The tensions are dissolved into the whole of the form.

The objects I've created work in space like a community of things, which I had only hoped I could achieve but never anticipated. The presentation of the objects at different levels of sight and interaction created a microcosm of Zopfi. Clings inhabit the high and middle, glows occupies the low middle, Plod occupies the ground and entices viewers into the space and Erode also occupies a middle level. At this point I'm going to deviate from the overarching concepts in my work and talk about the individual objects.

Referring to the objects chronologically would place Erode first. After the fall semester I was looking for ways to force viewer interaction with the objects by using different usable materials. I came upon soap as a material because its experience with the hands and typically the experience is a solitary intimate one. People use soap in the shower to clean their bodies and also use soap to wash hands in a bathroom following a bowel movement or before eating. These solitary moments were moments I wanted to accentuate with textural and curiously formed objects. I added essential oil of jasmine to the soap to add a tranquil and calming sensory experience to the soap that wouldn't have happened with a material that didn't take scents well.

Erode is displayed on staggered stands at different heights in order to mimic a store display. I decided to mimic commercial presentation in order to give the viewer a sense of familiarity in approaching the objects and also to underline the consumable nature of the

work. I want the work to be taken away and experienced alone or in an intimate situation where the subtle curves and dense accumulations of the piece can be appreciated.

Cling was the first object I made upon arriving to school after the winter break. Erode uses a form that I already had shown last semester and was an experiment in how I can recycle forms I've made and give them a new presence with a new material and a new context. Cling is a direct reaction to the lily room ceiling I mention at the beginning of this document. I wanted to innovate upon the established form of the ceiling with its few replicating parts covering the ceiling surface in a tessellation. Cling adopted the blue and gold color of the ceiling but utilized an acrylic spray and masking techniques instead of the lapis and gold leaf present in the ceiling. The masking technique resulted in the gold paint being adorned with a vein pattern that is a result of the tape crumpling on the three-dimensional form. The blue spray paint I put on top of the gold has a unique nebulous flatness that countered the liquid metallic properties of the gold spray paint.

When I was consulting my catalogue of experiences during the sculpting process of Cling, I was looking to objects that have similar surface orientation in the world and naturally disrupt planes, such objects being: sea urchins, snails, vacuum cleaners, and doorknobs. I combined these things into creating two forms for cling, one that is shaped like an igloo and is very hemispherical and another that pushes out from the wall surface more that resembles a blimp or an egg. I treated the surface of the two forms differently, one with spots and other circular forms like the snails I had been looking at, and the other was treated with segmented lines and Eastern European traditional egg designs that are reminiscent of the patterning of sea urchins.

The sheer volume of glows produced resulted in a few molds being made, some

from the original clay model and others from mutations that arose in the objects. Some of the mutations, which occur as a result of the mold degrading as I use it, are aesthetic like the spiny ridge that occurs on some clings and others were functional like the clings that have little feet that allow them to stick to the wall better. The wall orientation of the clings is a result of my innovation of the forms of the Lily Room ceiling and not a translation of the ceiling itself.

The next object I produced in this project was Glow. Glow occurred as a result of the faculty urging me to work larger. Previously, I had been using one block of clay for each of the objects I was producing. This led the objects to be the same size only differently configured. With glow I didn't constrain myself with volume of clay and allowed the curved bulbous form erupt in space organically. I was looking at egg cases, jellyfish, and mollusks when sculpting glow. The sources all share a curvilinear quality and bioluminescence.

I found the form of Glow to be very comforting. To emphasize my comforting response to the object I decided to emulate salt lamps in the purpose for Glow. I keep a salt lamp near my bed and gaze into its glowing pinkish-amber depths before I go to sleep. Nightlights are comforting objects for children and functional objects for adults that don't see well. This is something I wanted glow to possess.

The use of sugar as a medium happened purely out of happenstance. Carrie had mentioned a piece in a show that she juried over the summer that used sugar as its medium. This mention of sugar being an art object broke a kind of functional fixedness I was having while trying to emulate the salt lamps formal qualities, I was impregnating toxic resins with expensive salt. The sugar, when melted, can be cast into a mold which was familiar to my working process so it was easily integrated into my work and conveyed the formals aspects

to the piece which I was hoping for.

Plod occurred in the opposite of the process I had established in my other work, a process of consulting my catalogue, distilling the forms, merging the forms, molding the forms, and casting different experimental materials into the mold to extract the objects purpose. After the midterm critique I knew I needed an object to show that both accentuated my other work but also formally counteracted the glowing gleaming intricacy. I needed a bulbous, heavy object that had a nebulous surface coating similar to the blue that was on the Clings.

Plod's formation in space came from a visit to the Hirschorn Museum in DC where I saw Ai Weiwei's exhibition. In the exhibition there was an arrangement of painted pots that, through the similar forms of the pots presented en masse, abstracted the pots and offered an animation or a personification to the objects. I sought to emulate this in the display of Plod. The material to Plod also harkens back to this arrangement of pots in that its made from a ceramic pottery plaster. The plaster is hollow like the pots but I turn the form upside down so that the aperture of the pot is hidden. This gives the object more weight in space because there is no clue as to its hollowness or solidness. The presentation of a heavy appearing form in a lightweight medium also lends a tension to Plod that I hadn't anticipated but ultimately appreciate.

When I was naming my objects I wanted to reference innovation. I looked towards companies that were marketing genetically modified organisms. I name my objects much like how these companies patent their new creations and hybrids. I use my last name as a brand and substitute the patent number associated with the genetically modified organisms with a purpose that I assign to my objects. This is also similar to the way Ikea names their

products. Ikea assigns humorous names to the objects that offer clues to their use or to their forms. I look to Ikea also because they are innovating living like the genetic companies are innovating life.

Art and science progress and inform the world of our humanity and human identity. With this in mind I have a seemingly endless well to pull from. I'm interested in exploring more cultural identities present in the United States other than my own cultural subscriptions. I hope to gather a greater understanding of my country and countryman and also a greater understand of my humanity by studying the relationships and cultures of others.