

CREAK: THE LAST LIVING TERROR BIRD

BY

C2009

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Design
and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

Chairperson

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Date Defended: March 24, 2009

The Thesis Committee for Jeffrey Robert McGee certifies
that this is the approved Version of the following thesis:

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Committee

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Date approved: May 1, 2009

From my background in animation and comic books to my current love of sculpting metal forms based on natural history, animals have fascinated me and



remain a constant in my creative exploration. They provide me with the wide range of sources required to create infinitely varied amalgamated structures. I can modify the given form--stretch or squeeze, add or remove. I can give an animal a

personality that it does not have in nature. I can use an animal and its form to represent an idea, an emotion, a specific person, or even use it to metaphorically describe friends, enemies, or relatives.

Employing my knowledge of natural history and the fossil record, my creative process involves either a construction of elements from different creatures, or a reconfiguring of a specific species' anatomy. Likewise, when the fossilized dinosaur Iguanodon was initially reconstructed in 1851 for the Great Crystal Palace Exhibition in London, one of its two opposing thumb spikes was affixed atop its nose. This arrangement had no precedent beyond that in the fabricator's imagination. However, why couldn't a fifteen-foot reptile have a spike on its head?

My early explorations creating amalgamated animals out of hammer-formed sheet metal naturally led me to fabricate



objects that implied movement. Over time I became more interested in tangible rather than illusory movement and began to develop my work's potential along those lines. I realized that puppets have all of the elements I was searching for in my work: live movement, narrative, and a three-dimensional form in space. They provided an



established genre that supports the formulation of a kinetic narrative. Like a hermit crab's abandoned home, I view my metal puppet, *Creak: The Last Living Terror Bird* as an exoskeleton, a

lifeless outer shell waiting for its next occupant. Enter the dancer, Wyatt Meriwether, a performer equally proficient moving his body as I am manipulating metal with a hammer. He brought to life what I could only imagine.

The mechanics of *Creak* tested the extent of my patience and demanded a considerable tolerance for trial and error. Fabrication flowed from an initial concept sketch into paper model templates and finally to raising, chasing, and a hammered finish. I constructed the body in a front-to-back sequence, head and neck first, followed by the chest and arms, tail, legs, feet, feathers, and finally *Creak's* egg with its mechanical womb. Once I determined each element's sculptural form, I focused on developing and securing the piece to fit the dancer's body. I added many components from necessity rather than design, constantly having to reinvent supportive bracket systems, straps, cords, and hardware after each rehearsal. This

process lent itself nicely to my reactive mindset, and allowed Wyatt to influence factors such as weight distribution and alignment with his own body.

Creak needed a personality, and a gender to go with it. Before the legs were fabricated it appeared to be a bouncy, quick-moving entity, possibly friendly but probably deadly if provoked. Like its formal engineered aspects, its temperament



went through a series of changes based on the stage of the suit's completion and Wyatt's impromptu choreography.

Once the legs were constructed, Wyatt's movements transitioned from quick and impulsive to slow and deliberate. Creak immediately became an old being. In an attempt to nail down its personality, we worked through a

number of archetypal narratives that could be used for Creak's debut performance: the dying mother searching for a home for her child, the dutiful father ever protective of his family, the monster lurking in the shadows.

In the end, Creak was all and none of these. The public performance was unpredictable in certain ways, which presented the opportunity for Wyatt to improvise his choreography. The end product allowed the audience to interpret Creak for themselves. Perhaps to most, it represented the marriage of biology and engineering, or simply a benevolent, six-foot flightless bird. To the four-year-old girl in the front row, Creak was a monster.



The revelation of Creak's egg embedded in its chest was the most dramatic element of the public performance. When the egg was released from its mechanical womb, Creak rolled it toward the audience into the arms of a young boy, as a gift for the future. The crowd's reaction indicated the empathy I was hoping for; from the seven-year-old boy whose laugh was 100% genuine, to the adults gasping in unison, they justified my efforts. The egg is the corporeal manifestation of the potential ingrained in us all; the potential to consume life or nurture it.

Creak: The Last Living Terror Bird is the culmination of ten years of artistic experimentation with animal forms. At the same time I hope it is the first page of a multi-volume adventure that never grows dull. I envision working in this manner for the considerable future, inventing new ways to create empathetic kinetic narratives. My head spins with possibilities ranging from structures that completely inhibit a performer's movements to those that accentuate them, but on a monumental scale. I am a maker because when I make, I write the rulebook. My approach to the creative process: observe, respond, adapt, and engage.

