

“Charting The Self”

By

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Master of Fine Arts.

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The Thesis Committee for David Platter  
certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

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*Charting the Self* can be understood as a process of manifesting revelations of existence through the metaphor of large scale figurative sculpture. By focusing on three ways I understand the human experience I have developed an enduring understanding for the nature of our physical condition while simultaneously gaining a deeper understanding for consciousness through the implication of the mind as a void. Physical awareness, time, and mental capacity served *Charting the Self* as variables which informed the response to the question, “What is it to be?”

Perception was revealed as being local to the mind and altered through awareness to the self in time and space both as metaphors and in the action of realizing figurative sculpture ten times larger than life.

*Charting the Self* was a process of manifesting revelations of existence through the metaphor of large scale figurative sculpture. Within this process I created the physical expression of an internal sensation of the mind. By focusing on ways to understand the human experience an enduring understanding for the nature of our physical condition developed through diligent observation and discovery of the human form. In this process, a deeper understanding for consciousness as an outcome of perception of one's self through time and space was achieved.

The process of creating this work began by constructing and carving a nine foot by five foot by five foot foam substrate form. The form was then covered and modeled by hand with over 1200 pounds of clay. After the clay was modeled and formed into the appropriate gesture, a flexible silicon mold was created. Next, a rigid mother-mold was added. By making the mold in layers and sections I was able to dismantle and reassemble the mold. This allowed me to climb inside the physical negative void of the mold and proceed to apply, one handful at a time, polymerized stone (in a wet liquid state) into the negative form. The positive cast, the final sculptural work, is generally between one-half and two inches thick. As a hollow shell, it exists with both an outer and inner reality.

During the time I was physically inside the mold, I became aware of my physical confinement due to spatial limitations and realized that while the work was going through a transformation of "becoming," I too, was going through a transformation. I was sealing my containment and charting the way for my emergence. Time became un-definable as I literally transformed the work around me. Once I completed the process of creating the work, I was able to emerge from the void of the sculpture with a new awareness to the sensation of physical self confinement. I accepted that time was not relevant although it was the variable of existence which I most wanted to control while experiencing physical discomfort within the space. By letting go of

time I was able to refocus on completing the work. With all my abilities focused on the meditative act, I emerged from the work with a deeper appreciation for time and how perception of it creates illusions of physical limitations in space. The simple variable that shifted was my perception of the space I occupied over time. As perception changes, thought too changes. Awareness to an alternative thought through the process of internalizing physical experience created a different focus to which the task of physically creating an imagined outcome superseded the physical situation of discomfort. This ability to alter perception changes what is interpreted as real.

The work was installed in the Art & Design Gallery by suspending the sculpture in space by two aircraft cables mounted to the structure of the building about thirty feet overhead. The portraiture was hung four feet above the ground extending upward to about twelve feet and overturned in space. By inverting the head in space, several things were accomplished. First, perception and expectation was challenged upon encountering the installation. Second, the hollow sculpture maintained its reference as a hollow object by drawing attention to it as a vessel and void in space. Lastly, a metaphor of existence of time being comparable to the action of mass falling through space was presented. Through this metaphor, time was akin to falling which suggested that gravity, mass, and space are the forces of time. Existence is like free falling, and in this way, up was memory and down was imagining, further reinforcing that the variable of perception is one which serves to alter reality.

In presenting a highly rendered portrait of a middle aged man, the portraiture was somewhere in the middle of this perceptual journey. He was caught experiencing something physical and perceptual. His experience reinforces the internal perceptual shift that I experienced while I was inside the inner space of the sculpture.

Communicated through the eyes was an intent focus on a point in space. The brow also served as a clue to internal awareness of the unexpected happening. The eyes and the brow tell us the most with regard to the nature of this metaphor because this is how we interact with one another. Through facial recognition our perception is frequently being challenged. The mouth was slightly opened as if to be in a moment of gasping. We gasp when we believe that we need a breath. We gasp in a moment of surprise. We gasp when we realize that which is, is not what we had thought it would be. The gasping depiction allowed access to the void within the head of the sculpture again providing an opportunity for a perceptual shift and access to the illusion.

In order to draw the viewer in with an illusion of a human being, I strove to render the actual appearance of our species, avoiding traditional rendering techniques intended to give the impression of life. Such approaches do not render that which is actually physical but instead render that which is perceived. The fleshiness in the folds and wrinkles of the neck served to remind us that we are not static beings. Reinforced in the overall posture of the portrait is the suggestion that existence coincides with time but the essence of *being* has something to do with action through which awareness is made.

Traditional approaches of anatomy require a student to first learn the Latin names for each area, muscle group and bones. Through this conversion to language, the expectation is that students would be able to recall the placement and function of the identified bone or muscle. This approach to anatomy, while standardized and effective for communicating specifics with colleagues, lacks a directness and purity of form that I was interested in understanding. A bone existed prior to being given a name and if I could learn of its essence without the layer of language, then I would attain a truer understanding of what it is to *physically be*.

By altering space for the self, I allowed myself the opportunity to change perceptual illusions pertaining to physicality. Time became a foreign notion through which physical limitations were reduced to improbabilities which were overcome. *Charting the Self* as a work dealt with understanding the nature of our physical being in relationship to the void as the spirit or consciousness since these are uncertain ideas which challenge our capacity to perceive of something more than that which is verifiable. Questioning the power of the mind and seeking evidence of something greater than oneself focused my work. In observing variables that are determined and fixed as being outer physical realities, I recognized that *what it is to be* is an action through which altering perception changes what is real. This work revealed the mind as the variable which alters perception and one's reality through the recognition of awareness as the physical self in space and time in relation to the inner void of the self.