

SKINNED

by

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SKINNED

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This thesis is dedicated to my fiancé Winter Rusiloski and my family.

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Art reminds us to appreciate life.

An artist should aim to create work out of that sense of appreciation.

The thesis artwork in *Skinned* followed my “discovery” of the material I currently use. I work with a mixture of a polymer and oil paint, which allows the paint to be controlled without the need for a substrate. This exhibition developed out of an interest in the potential of the material.

With this new medium I investigate ways in which my art can have presence in actual space, in contrast to being flat or illusionistic. I consider these works to be specific painted forms; I am painting, but no longer making paintings. Preceding the development of this new process I worked on canvas. I found the flatness, edges, and rectangular shape of a stretched canvas had become limiting. This new material allows me to create work that establishes its own boundaries. The painting, as a defined object, no longer restricts me.

Tied to a need for expression, physicality plays an important role in my work. A feeling can fade quickly, but movement has the ability to capture it before it does. The act of expression requires a simultaneous state of mind and action, not a thought followed by a movement, but movement as thought, demonstrative thinking.

In contrast to being expressive, a percentage of the physicality in my work is reactive to my ideas and/or intentions. A series of premeditated movements may be necessary to execute a specific decision regarding the refinement of an artwork. In process, the intuitive reactions typically happen first, followed by an analytical period. This method can continue as a cycle. The more times it repeats, the greater the sense of history in a work.

My art is informed by my previous work. Sometimes I refine or adapt what has been realized in earlier works. In other instances, I investigate unexpected occurrences that could develop into a new part of my vocabulary. There is a progression in this body of work, but it was not entirely linear, much resulted from exploring tangents. The work that I make guides me to what I should create next.

Line is a fundamental component of this work. When it is dripped onto a horizontal surface, the fluid medium reflects my movement. The line that I lay down demonstrates, records, and directs my movement. The immediacy of the formation of the line keeps me focused on reacting to the moment when the falling line meets the ground and becomes fixed.

The line is the texture and building element of the forms. It is a homogeneous unit that by amassing can develop a nature separate from itself. I find it fascinating that like components can be combined to create something essentially different, as in the cells of a plant. Even more interesting, developed forms have the potential to be

collected again to make yet another new entity. The more steps away from the essential building unit the greater the possibility for dynamic interaction of independent forms.

The work that I create has organic qualities. I am more interested in a shape that evolves in process, than one that is defined by basic geometry. It is more rewarding to let intuition and action give rise to a form, than to have mentally concluded one before its creation. I have a preference for art that has some irregularity to it, that's not too clinical. Also, when composing multiple shapes, organic forms relate to each other in a complex and less predictable way. For example, in *Surface Folded* (plate 1) the absence of sharp angles and straight edges prevents any of the several component parts of the work from being puzzle-pieced together. The sections must be overlapped and composed.

The natural world is a necessary inspiration for me. For the art in this exhibition, nature's influence was limited to brief encounters, and the memories of past experiences. Time spent removed from the influence of culture is significant to my work because it reveals the aesthetics and processes of growth and evolution. There are similarities between the way a work of art (or body of work) can develop, and the behavior of nature. The observation of natural processes illuminates truths that include, but more importantly, extend beyond the influences of humanity.

It is not only the behavior of nature that inspires me; it is also my mental state while in it. Separating myself from civilization for periods of time quiets my practical mind and opens it to creative possibility. It helps me to hear my own thoughts, clear from the bombardment of the intentions and distractions of society. My thinking becomes relevant to more timeless concerns. Art mirrors the state of the times, but being in nature helps me to prioritize the reflections. I try to make art that is both contemporary and informed by the enduring aesthetics and behavior of natural process.

For the majority of the work in this exhibition I chose to use vibrant and highly saturated colors. My choice of artificial colors might seem at cross-purposes to the organic characteristics of the work. The question arises, why make something that has qualities of being organic out of colors that do not? The creation of these forms is inspired by growth and natural process, but is made possible by artificial materials. The colors I mix are honest to the materials, invented and processed. I am interested in the objective qualities of color, and the relationships between different colors, independent of representation and symbolism. It is not my goal to make work that mimics natural objects. I create artwork from my *interpretation* of natural process, from the perspective of being part of a synthetic culture. The unnatural color in juxtaposition with the organic form is an attempted unification and demonstration of culture and nature.

When titling this exhibition I temporarily settled on *Movement Skinned to Form*, and then reduced that to the word “skinned”, which implies both movement and form. There are a few reasons why the title is appropriate for my thesis exhibition.

One interpretation of the title is that I have skinned paint from the canvas. Also, because I work on the floor, I scraped up most of these pieces with a trowel, slicing and skinning them off of the concrete. For works such as *Thin Rhythm* (plate 2) and *Northwest Mound* (plate 3), in which I covered a skeleton structure, the title can denote an additive process. Skinned, by this definition, means the laying on of a skin.

The title also signifies a skinning of my bias toward the acceptable direction of art. At the time that I entered graduate school I believed in the modernist ideal that there could only be one right art, relevant above all others. For me that was Abstract Expressionism. My exposure to the academic art world opened my eyes to how narrow-minded this way of thinking was. I came to realize that the New York School was not an apex, but rather a foundation. To not build upon their achievements would be disrespectful to those artists, and a dead end for myself.

I've learned from this body of work to see the wall as negative space, in addition to being a support. Some of these artworks both rest on the wall as well as contain it. It's sometimes difficult to establish the negative space of the interior from that of the exterior. *Smoke Fire Laughter* (plate 4) is an example of this. It helps if I

envision the wall in motion, as a liquid space flowing behind the art and being temporarily captured or diverted by it.

Many of the works in *Skinned* are composed while being placed, so the installation of them is a part of their making. This is the only rationale for my work being considered installation art: that it has to react to the space while being positioned on the wall.

From Stendhal to Central America (plate 5) is the most expansive piece in the exhibition. Its scale is grand and the palette is vibrant. It's the largest piece that I've ever made, and it has a strong physical presence. As with large Abstract Expressionist paintings, I hope the viewer will experience it before analyzing it.

From Stendhal to Central America is to be installed a different way each time that it is shown. How the many separate parts are composed, is a temporary unification of them. This work of art has the attributes of being transitory and permanent. Its creation continues beyond its initial making to the numerous formations that it can realize. However, it does not evolve, it is only re-organized. For the viewer, knowing that it is dynamic may cause an imagined involvement in the compositional possibilities.

In *Not to Talk to* (plate 6) I set up a conversation between the two and three-dimensional forms. I can't specify exactly what that conversation is about, but it involves a form having the ability to exist in different states. The piece raises questions of similarities and differences, and growth and origin. The likeness of

color and material suggests the possibility that forms on the floor were skinned to create the wall pieces. It could also be the opposite, that the wall pieces condensed into the three-dimensional forms. If one is derived from the other, then the viewer might imagine that other transitional forms could exist. The quadrants are crossed to distract some attention away from the above interpretation. The growth and transformation analysis is less dominant than if colors were associated straight up and down. There is unity, but no resolve to the piece.

Clear of Age (plates 7 and 8) is a rising, branching form, emblematic of a tree or vine or large flower. I'm interested in the idea of something multiplying itself as it grows, and moving toward or around something.

Like *Not to Talk to*, the two parts of *Clear of Age*, one on the wall (plate 7) and the other in a pile on the floor (plate 8), bring up questions of growth and relation. Did this larger form grow out of the pile? Are we seeing two states of its development? Is the pile a collection of seeds that have fallen? Is the situation just a coincidence, a chance relationship? These are questions the viewer might ask. I know that these once-completely-separate pieces were not made with any thought of each other. After completing the large form they gravitated into one piece.

The pile in *Clear of Age* is the second life of an abandoned project. The idea was to create a hill of thousands of abstracted flower forms. The repetitive act of making each unit, and the project's control over my focus, caused me to abandon it. I would not have made the majority of the work in this show if I hadn't. This piece taught me a lesson about the kind of artist that I am. If I have mentally completed an

idea, then I'm physically done with it as well. It also reminded me that what is learned from an idea, and how it informs future work, can be of greater value than realization of the idea. A sacrifice of original intention can initiate possibilities.

Skinning Egos (plate 9) was a breakthrough piece for me. I had made work directly on the concrete floor prior to this, but not at this scale. The piece directed my attention to ways in which I could use the ground to make larger work.

I originally intended it to be a floor piece. When I decided to present it on the wall I realized that I could gather and fold it, like a thick fabric. Manipulating the piece while installing it, added another dimension of texture, and helped to bring the piece out into actual space. The installation of *Skinning Egos* opened up possibilities of conferring three-dimensionality on something created flat. For instance, in *Him and Him Now* (plate 10), a piece completed a few weeks later, each of the three parts was shaped from a flat circle. I'm at the beginning of exploring this process of folding and gathering.

I am pleased with the density of *Skinning Egos*. The weave of it is not too tight or too loose. The color also works well. It's warm, but the green areas and the white of the wall showing through cool it to a comfortable visual temperature. There is also a layer of clear polymer lying under the color that gives the piece a slight shimmer. This particular batch of plastic was extremely clear. It was also used on *Tap is Try* (plate 11).

The form of *Skinning Egos* is very much like a flayed skin that has been pinned up. Unaware of it in the making, I now see a relation to Native American

painted animal skins. This allusion influenced the title of the piece and, indirectly, the title of the exhibition.

This material and body of work is still relatively new to me. I'm at the foundation of understanding it. Most of my effort has been absorbed in the possibilities of the medium. With the culmination of this exhibition, it's becoming clear that the potential of the material is of less importance than the forms that I'm creating. It helped me to overcome the limitations of the canvas, but I now perceive this medium as secondary to a new methodology of working in actual space, and investigating questions regarding the relationship of culture and nature.

Plates



Surface Folden
polymer and pigment
8' x 4'
2006



Thin Rhythm
polymer and pigment on wood
108" x 6"
2005



Northwest Mound
wood, polymer and pigment
4" x 14" x 10"
2005



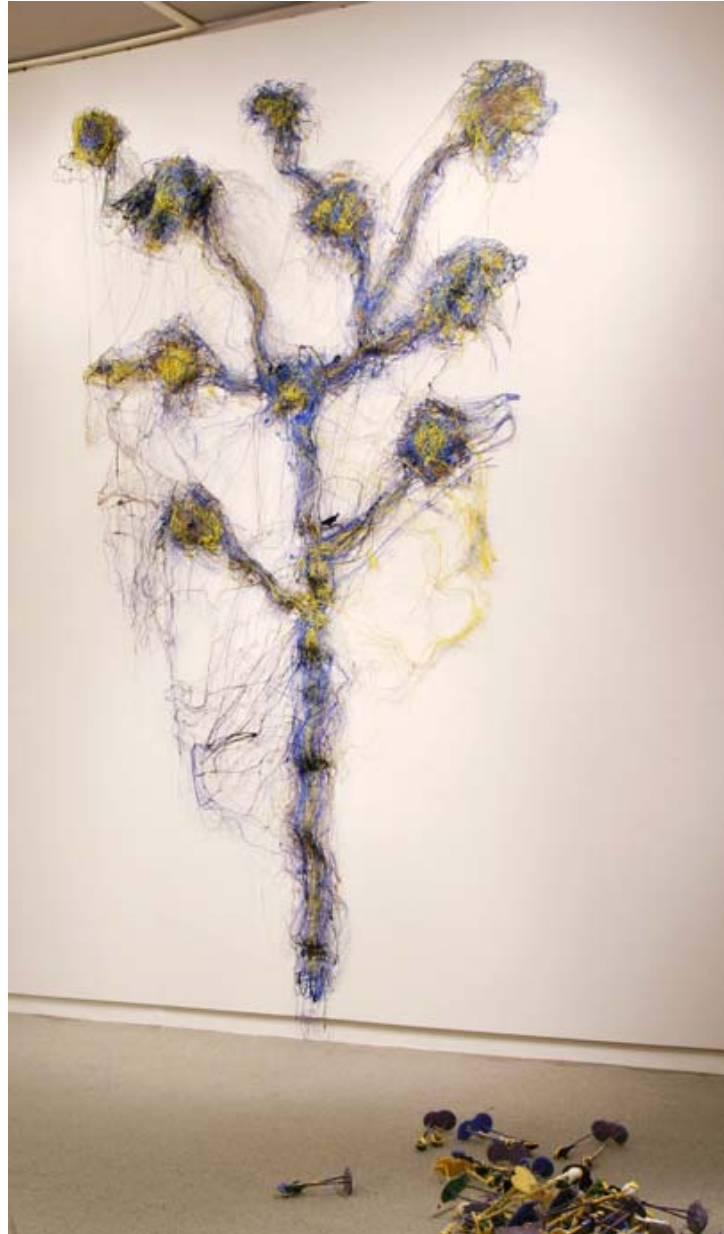
Smoke Fire Laughter
polymer and pigment
12' x 10'
2006



From Stendhal to Central America
polymer and pigment
11' x 25'
2006



Not to Talk To
polymer, pigment and foam
8' x 7' x 2'
2006



Clear of Age (part)
polymer and pigment
13' x 7'
2006



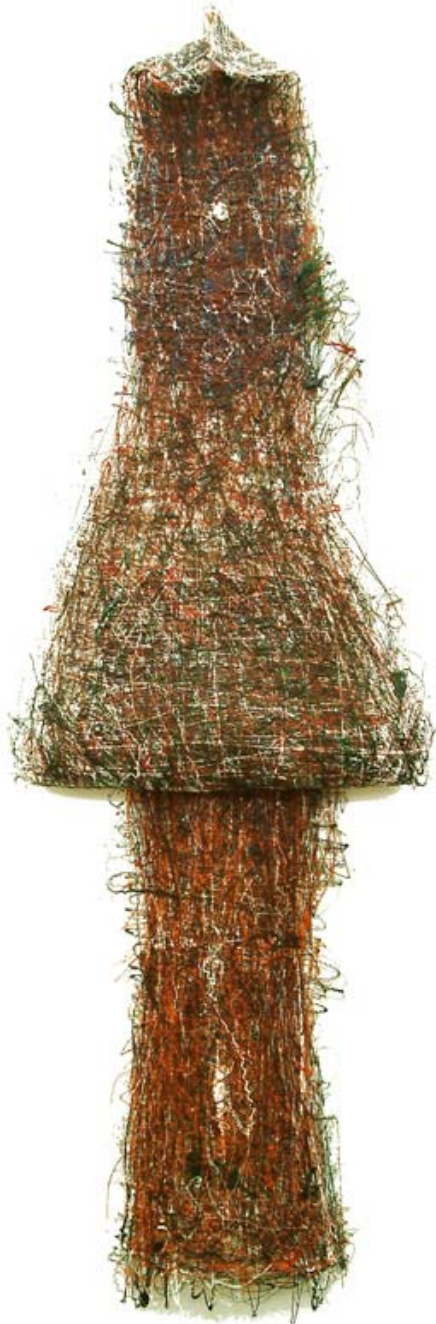
Clear of Age (part 2)
polymer, pigment, and wire
2006



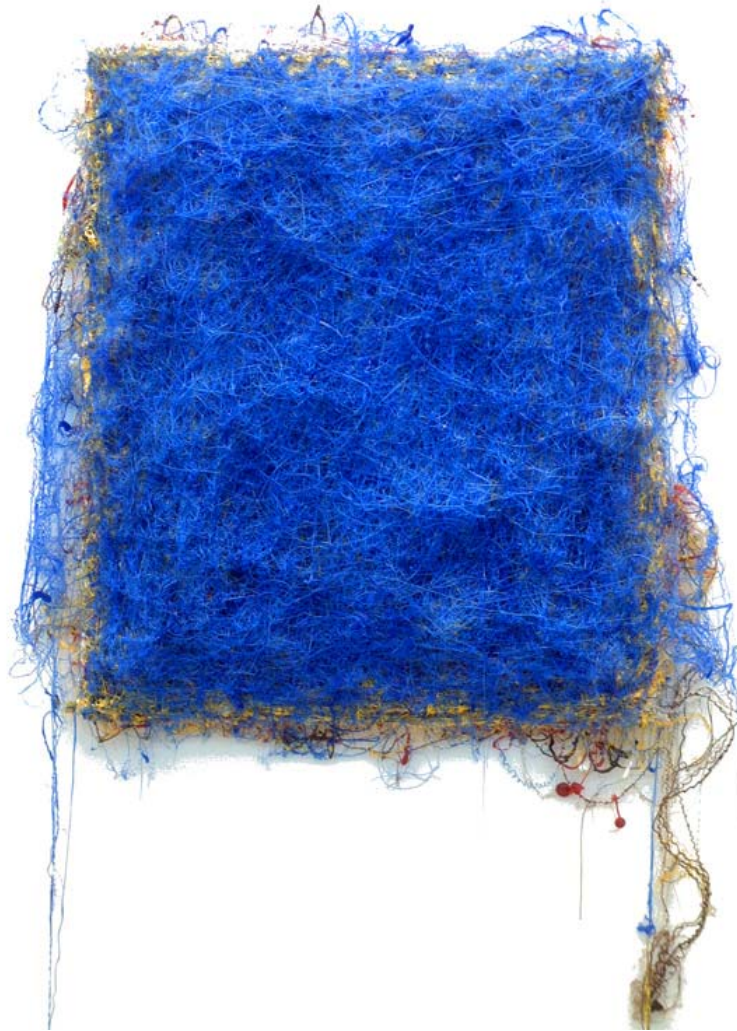
Skinning Egos
polymer and pigment
5' x 8' x 3"
2005



Him and Him Now
polymer and pigment
6' x 2.5' x 1'
2006



Tap is Try
polymer and pigment
9' x 3.5'
2006



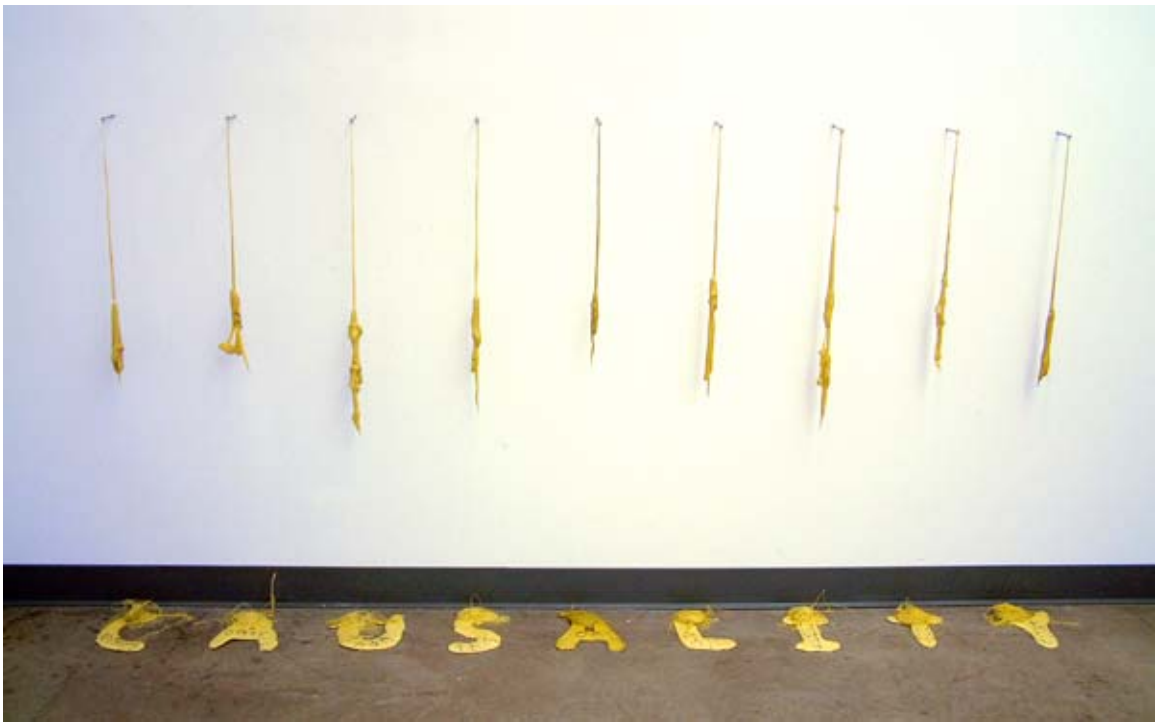
Gustov's Blue
polymer and pigment on panel
30" x 26"
2005



Ashland Findings
polymer and pigment
4" x 96" x 72"
2006



cutMon Findings
polymer and pigment
5" x 40" x 48"
2005



Causality
polymer, pigment, and ink
48" x 96" x 10
2005

VITA

Personal Background

Stephen James Battle

Born May 27, 1976, Mt Clemens, Michigan

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Married Winter Rusiloski June 16, 2006

Education

Diploma, Western Hills High School, Fort Worth,
Texas, 1994

Bachelor of Arts, Anthropology, Texas A&M
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Abstract

The thesis artwork in *Skinned* followed my “discovery” of the material I currently use. I am working with a mixture of a polymer and oil paint, which allows the paint to be controlled without the need for a substrate. This exhibition developed out of an interest in the possibilities of the medium.

With the culmination of my graduate study, it is clear that the potential of the material is of less importance than the forms that I’m creating. It helped me to overcome the limitations of the canvas, but I now perceive this medium as secondary to a new methodology of working in actual space, and investigating questions regarding the relationship of culture and nature.