WHAT GOES ON

by

Ryan Goolsby

Bachelor of Fine Arts, 2001
University of North Texas
Denton, Texas

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Ryan Goolsby
107395519

Thesis Approved: WHAT GOES ON

Cameron Schoepp

Chris Powell

Nick Bontrager

H. Joseph Butler / Associate Dean / College of Fine Arts

Many thanks to my parents and friends for all of their support, my professors for pushing me to make the best work I could, and my daughter who is the best artist I know.

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ABSTRACT

The series discussed here was born out of my interest in knowledge, how we come to believe what we do, and where we ground our basis for understanding the world. Drawing influence from science and myth, both formally and conceptually, my work examines our belief and knowledge structure. I am interested in the relationship between symbol and meaning and their point of disconnection. When a new form of notation is encountered, we rely on the translation. In this, a level of faith is required to trust the result. That space between true understanding and the perception of meaning is what I seek to examine in the work.

VITA

Ryan Goolsby was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma January 7th, 1976 and grew up in Texas from the age of 5. He began to make photographs in high school, which led to a degree in photography at the University of North Texas in Denton 2001. He moved to New York City in 2002, about two years after moving to New York, he began working at Christie's auction house as an image processor, retouching photographs in their catalogs, and began using their photo studios at nights and on weekends to make new work. In 2011, he returned to Texas where shortly thereafter he enrolled at Texas Christian University in the Master of Fine Arts, Sculpture program.

Ryan Goolsby lives in Fort Worth and has a daughter, Charlotte (Charley).

VITA

Personal Background	Ryan Odell Goolsby Born January 7, 1976 Son of Michael O. and Pamela A. Goolsby Daughter (Charley)
Education	Diploma, Trinity High School, Euless, TX 1994 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Photography, University of North Texas, Denton, 2001 Post Graduate Certificate of Completion: Digital Image Management, University of North Texas, Denton, 2005 Master of Fine Arts, Sculpture, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, 2014

THESIS:

WHAT GOES ON

The series discussed here was born out of my interest in knowledge, how we come to believe what we do, and where we ground our basis for understanding the world. Drawing influence from science and myth, both formally and conceptually, my work examines our belief and knowledge structure. I am interested in the relationship between symbol and meaning and their point of disconnection. When a new form of notation is encountered, we rely on the translation. In this, a level of faith is required to trust the result. That space between true understanding and the perception of meaning is what I seek to examine in the work.

The forms I create often reference diagrams used to convey empirically derived information. As the layperson, the diagrams must be trusted as illustrations of what we are told. Two similar types of scientific notation influence much of the formal attributes of the structures in this series: Feynman diagrams (Fig. 1) and spin networks (Fig. 2). "Feynman diagrams were invented in 1948 to help physicists find their way out of a morass of calculations troubling a field of theory called QED, or quantum electrodynamics."[1] Spin networks were created by Roger Penrose after Feynman diagrams and shared a similar function. By explaining complex equations related to quantum mechanics in a simpler form, spin networks show the interaction of particles at a quantum scale. These networks are similar in form to Feynman diagrams, but they have a more three-dimensional depth. Both

[1] Kaiser, David. "Physics and Feynman's Diagrams." American Scientist 93, no. 2 (2005): 157.

of these illustrations enable scientists to communicate in a more tangible way, since it would be difficult to understand these concepts in the form of an equation.

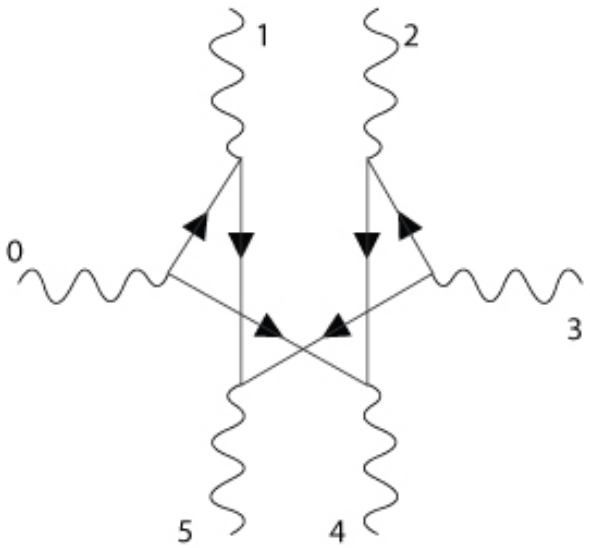


Fig. 1

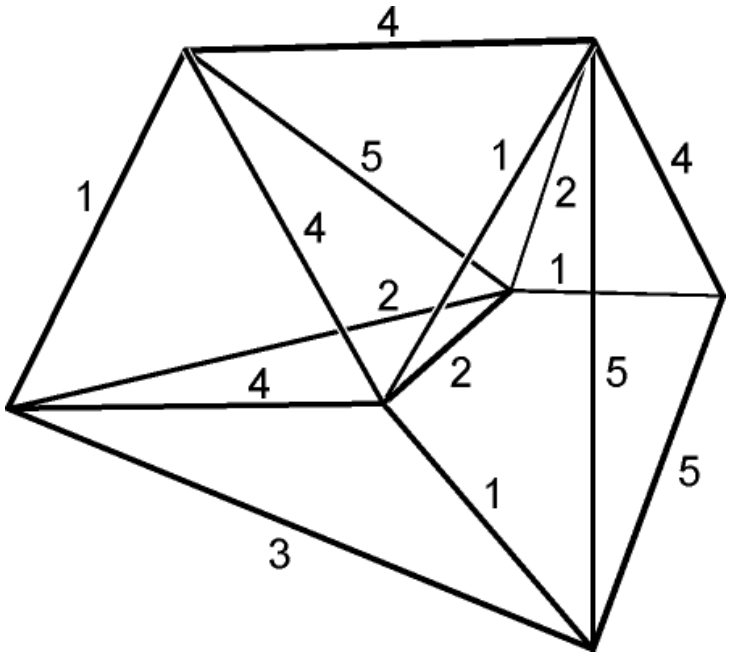


Fig. 2

Feynman diagrams (Fig. 1) and spin networks (Fig. 2) have been a source of the work's formal composition. Conceptually the illustrations are tools for making complex equations visually simple. They are used as an easy way of grasping a concept (for a scientist) that may be difficult to comprehend while looking at a complex string of letters, numbers, and symbols. When we approach the illustrations as laypersons, they are faithfully viewed as we do not have the related knowledge necessary to completely grasp their concepts.

Feynman diagrams are most visible in the base of "Stack 3" (Slide 7) in which I incorporated Fig. 1 in its design; the diagrams also informed a lot of other choices that I made in the construction of these works. Spin networks were never quite so literally used,

but the three dimensionality of them combined with the hard geometric shapes informed the formal decisions in many of the pieces, namely "Stack 2" (Plate 13). The overall structure of interwoven shapes lends its origin to the composition of the spin network (Fig. 2).

Formally, I find the imagery beautiful and classic (most of them were made before I was born). They are somehow contemporary if not futuristic. Aesthetically, they work as they are. For my process, the images provide a jumping off point to work in their vein formally. Both Feynman diagrams and spin networks have been points of interest and catalysts for my ideas relating to the work. By representing things at a quantum level, and being based purely in theory, this remains especially true. Things of this scale cannot be seen through any aid of magnification, all surrounding work must be done through mathematics. We must again rely on faith in this method to explain something that we cannot see or understand.

I acknowledge my position as a dilettante; this is important in referencing a layperson's position in understanding information presented from a specialized context. I intend to draw attention to the taking of faith in a concept that should rely on observation. This reliance depends on using most information's unobservable nature as license to respond to them, whether accurate or not. Though my work is not intended to be a facsimile of these referenced concepts, this brings into question the models we take as true. These questions delve deeper into their genesis and the irony of faith.

Fig 3.

Obelisk of Thutmosis in Karnak, Egypt.

Another form that appears frequently in the exhibition is that of the obelisk. An obelisk is a symbol that does not have a function other than to convey a meaning, and that meaning has been appropriated by many cultures over the course of time. Originally obelisks were "…found in pairs at the entrances to tombs. The emperor Augustus brought back several obelisks to Rome where their incised hieroglyphs attracted considerable speculation during the Renaissance. Obelisks were also a common feature of northern European Mannerist architecture and are found in funerary monuments to the present day." [2]The power of their form appealed to many cultures. These cultures did not know the original intent but borrowed obelisks' form to create new ones. In their mythos I found an important metaphor for the relationship I saw with the scientific symbols and the

[2] "obelisk." *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms. Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed May 2, 2014, http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t4/e1183.

confusion of viewing them as the layperson. Many original Egyptian obelisks were inscribed with hieroglyphics not fully understood until the discovery of the Rosetta Stone. These parallel texts in hieroglyphics and understood languages allowed researchers to decipher the inscriptions. Though the hieroglyphics were not understood, and the true meaning of the obelisk unknown, the form was appropriated over the years by many cultures. Each culture brought a different idea to the meaning of this form, it was not understood but nonetheless deemed important.

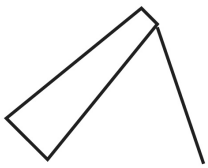
Walking into the exhibition you are led down a narrowing corridor that is unlit, but not dark. At the end and most narrow part of the corridor you are allowed entrance into the gallery space. The room is filled with minimal wooden structures, they are seemingly simple. As you try to understand their construction the simple structures become complex. Further investigation reveals bits of color evident on the faces of some of the interior framework. The forms are understood individually but can become complicated when seen together as a group. Other sculptures can be seen through the form in front of it, setting up a perceptual confusion that keeps the viewer moving to isolate them visually. Almost all of the individual works rely on balance or a prop to keep them standing. This provides impetus for further investigation by the viewer in determining if this is simply for visual effect or if these braces serve a legitimate purpose.

By propping this work up or stacking it, a sense of impermanence is conveyed that reflects the nature of interpreted and reinterpreted data being gathered anew as technology improves. The prop or the brace denotes that this is a temporary structure; it will eventually either be made more permanent or deconstructed and moved.

Some of the conditions of instability are more easily determined than others: "Stack 4" (Slide 12) is made up of a complex network of balanced, cube-like forms held erect by 6

thin supports. "Stack 4's" construction is intricate but after careful consideration it is obvious that all of the elements of its structure are working together to keep it from falling over. Other pieces' equilibrium is less evident, as there could be opportunity for hidden support. "Lean 4" (Slide 10) is composed of a tall thin board that intersects the front of a tilted oblong cube that leans against the wall. As the name implies the piece is beholden to the wall to keep it upright, yet there could be opportunity to hide an armature to the back of the piece. Because the back of the structure is flush with the wall there is no way to determine its means of support.

For the title list I created symbols similar to those of the Feynman diagrams and spin networks. (Fig. 4) Simultaneously, these could be seen as hieroglyphics that would be found on the side of an obelisk. I brought these forms back into the realm of illustration and force the viewer to use the symbols as a means for identifying the works in the show. Upon entering the show, the viewer would pick up title list sheet and be led down the corridor having no idea as to what these symbols represented. It would only make sense when they turn the corner and see the symbols as simplified representations of the actual pieces in the show. The illustrations take on the same function as the diagrams that the work was formally influenced by.



Lean 3, 2014
Wood, Paint
56" x 38" x 12"

Stack 4, 2014
Wood, Paint
66" x 27" 27"

Fig. 4 Two examples of the illustration on the title chart (Slide 15).

The use of the symbols served to give the viewer a segue into my conceptual practice, showing them symbols that made no sense until the information was provided for them to become comprehensible.

All of these parts function metaphorically to speak to a whole through their formal elements to discuss the nature of information and knowledge. I believe that the empirical understanding of the world is the only genuine way that we can make sense of our surroundings. People have looked to religion or supernatural phenomena throughout time in trying to explain life, yet I feel that observed or deduced knowledge is the most honest information we have in understanding the natural world. This evidence-based information takes a certain amount of faith to believe; it is a largely not understood in detail by the amateur and relies upon illustration to convey its substance. We have to trust that those who decipher this information relay it to us accurately, and that the peer review process keeps the original findings honest. In the same way, we must rely on a basic line drawing of my works in the exhibition to determine if what appears to be described is actually happening.

There is a level of faith required to believe that these things that I am making are in fact representative of what I say they are. This parallels how I feel art in a broader sense is approached. We take artists at their word that what they say is a true catalyst for what they make and not later applied to the work. As an *insider* in the art world, faith is taken that higher levels of thought are being poured into these pieces and it is not simply an illustration in the character of the Emperor's New Clothes. We are asked to come to a conclusion based on a set of visual cues and references. Either the artwork is accepted as interesting and of merit, or we question it and decide it is not a work of quality. As the work becomes increasingly complex, the layperson will have no point of entry to

understanding these works that are laden with history and references they may not see. They may generally see these forms as confusing, strange, or unskilled and write them off as either not of quality or question their status as art. There is a basic level of understanding that is never reached; this is similar to a non-scientist with information that requires that same fundamental level of expertise to grasp.

I keep thinking of our collective reality being a fundamental element in this series and thought process. I consider how humans relate to the world on a basic level and form our ideological constructs of it. I do not see this as an issue of perspective as much as an issue of our individual realities. If we believe that an entity created the world and everything in it, we live in a fairly different reality than those who claim not to know anything beyond what we can deduce through the information that we can experience. I feel our most logical course of action should be to step back and look at the world or what we can know though our senses and then extrapolate from that. Not that the theoretical is wrong, but we must use information that started with an a posteriori position and built upon itself to get where it is.

Art, like language, is not a perfect mode of communication. Both have multiple interpretations, with various ways they can be construed and read. There is a distance that exists between the work and the audience; it is impossible to make a perfectly clear statement. Familiarity with both art and language supplements the information that we can glean; it narrows the gap between confusion and understanding. But without years of study some information remains at a distance. I found this distance in the diagrams I reference; they represent an equation that would take years of study to understand. It's a gap between symbol and understanding that I would like to examine. As this series continues I

will continue to analyze this distance while refining my visual language to better communicate these ideas.

PLATES

Plate 1

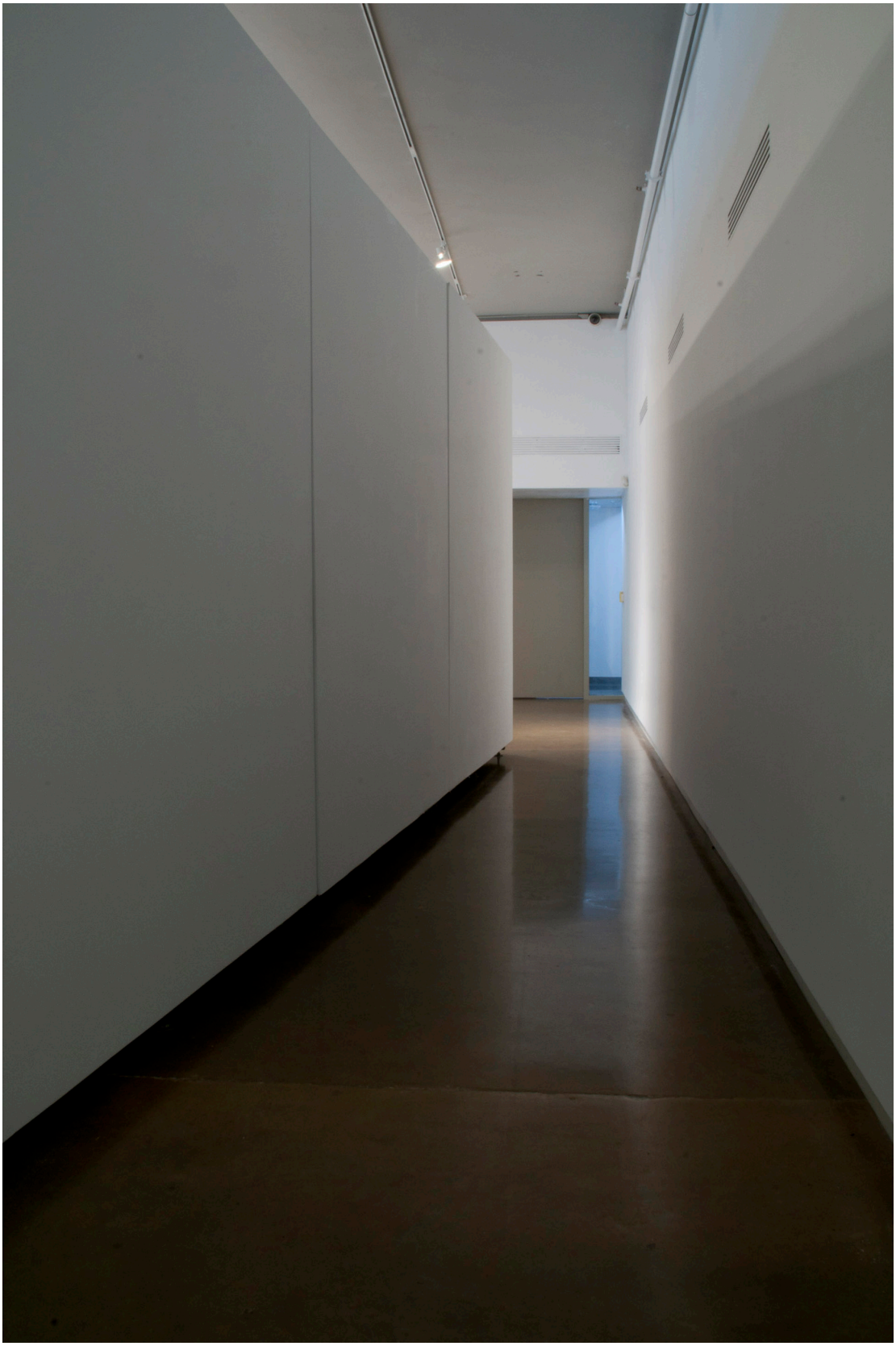


Plate 2.

Plate 3.

Plate 4.

Plate 5.

Plate 6.

Plate 7.

Plate 8.

Plate 9.

Plate 10.

Plate 11.

Plate 12.

Plate 13.

Plate 14.

Ryan Goolsby

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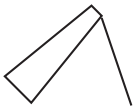
ryan@ryangoolsby.com | ryangoolsby.com | 347.423.8154

Untitled, 2014
Wood
8' x 6.5'

Stack 2, 2014
Wood, Paint
80.5" x 24" x 10"

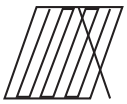


Lean 3, 2014
Wood, Paint
56" x 38" x 12"

Stack 3, 2014
Wood, Paint
64.4" x 19.5" x 13.5"

Stack 1, 2013
Wood, Paint
56" x 24" x 6"

Lean 1, 2013
Wood, Paint
56" x 17.5" x 12"



Lean 2, 2014
Wood, Paint
4' x 4' x 16"

Lean 4, 2014
Wood, Paint
89.5" x 30" x 10"

Stack 4, 2014
Wood, Paint
66" x 27" 27"

Plate 15.

WORKS CITED

Kaiser, David. "Physics and Feynman's Diagrams." American Scientist 93, no. 2 (2005): 157.

"obelisk." *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms. Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed May 2, 2014, http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t4/e1183.