VIA FIRENZE (A CITY IN ITALY, A STREETNAME IN TEXAS):

MFA THESIS EXHIBITION

by

NATHANIEL L. GLASPIE

Bachelor of Arts, 2007
The University of Texas at Dallas
Dallas, Texas

Submitted to the Faculty
Graduate Division
College of Fine Arts
Texas Christian University
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2010

VIA FIRENZE (A CITY IN ITALY, A STREETNAME IN TEXAS):

MFA THESIS EXHIBITION

Thesis approved:

Cameron Schoepp, Major Professor

Ronald Watson

Dr. Frances Colpitt

Chris Powell

Graduate Studies Representative
For the College of Fine Arts

Dedicated to the loving memory of my grandmother,
Blanche “Jeanette” Voglund
(1924-2010)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Via Firenze (a city in Italy, a street name in Texas), is an exhibition of sculptures that originates from found material. Taken from a larger structure (appliances, telephone booths, and other utilitarian industrial products) the found material is changed and its identity subverted through new construction. The resulting sculpture allows the viewer to become aesthetically involved in a heightened perceptual experience.

VITA

Nathaniel L. Glaspie was born December 23, 1980, Fowler, Indiana. He is the son of David Glaspie and Donna Voglund. He received his Bachelor of Arts from The University of Texas at Dallas, Dallas, Texas.

He actively participates in juried and curated exhibitions around the Dallas / Fort Worth area. He also donates works to charity auctions, such as the Dallas Museum of Art, *The Art Ball 2008: Land Sea*, and the past two years donating to the Dallas Contemporary annual *Wish! Auction*.

He recently has become a member of 500X Gallery, the longest lasting artist run cooperative gallery in Texas.

VIA FIRENZE (A CITY IN ITALY, A STREETNAME IN TEXAS):

MFA THESIS EXHIBITION

For me, the difficulty in making art often lies in deciding where to start. I feel stress even in making the first mark on a clean white sheet of paper. My approach to relieving this stress, three-dimensionally, is to allow a found material to act as the first mark. I scavenge these materials from various sources and locations, which in turn sometime become the titles of the finished work; the title of this exhibition, *Via Firenze (a city in Italy, a street name in Texas)*, includes the name of an actual street in Fort Worth, Texas, where I've lived during my graduate studies. The titles can be arbitrary, given the range I cover looking for prefabricated products (such as appliances, electrical box units, and telephone booths), but consistently these items and therefore the artwork itself are made up of industrial-metals, glass, wood, and synthetics. The found items and finished work share other characteristics: flat planes, rounded edges, multiple cut circles, unique placement of holes (threaded and otherwise), hinges, various bends in metal, and other identifiable and functional marks. By hand, I refurbish and renew these utilitarian products, which are usually worn down by a history of continuous use or abandonment. I wash off the dirt, remove the rust, and sand the surface until it shines again. I essentially remove the materials' history, without erasing its form.

The materials' prior identity is legible through its design, and two elements of the design that point to the unique identity of found materials are functional attaching points and the shape of the object. I take these attaching points into special consideration when choosing one found material over another, as well as its shape. The flat panel is a

recurring element, since almost any machine uses it; it discloses its function in a split instant. It reveals knobs, dials, levers, buttons, warnings and instructions. The flat panel shape is the billboard of a machine, and often the only one with a relationship to the casual passerby or user. It's the conduit of the machine-human relationship.

I subvert the found object's original identity through new construction. I re-purpose it, by using determined measurements and the grid, and juxtaposing it with additional pedestrian materials—wood, textiles, and fasteners—that I find in any hardware store. These common and readily available construction materials help me transform the material from its utilitarian past into sculpture: a new aesthetic object. Of course the measurements of the new parts and found materials determine overall size, proportions, and dimensions of each work. *Rottington Rd.* (Plate II) is built from a piece of scavenged frosted blue-green glass. The primed stretched canvas placed behind it is same height and length as the glass, which is framed with metal brackets that hold the two rectangular panels together.

Overton Plaza (Plate III) is built by proportions derived from the found galvanized steel. A series of low, box-like sculptures attached to the wall, the overall depth and the cardboard added beneath is the same as the portion of steel protruding away from the wall. The height of stacked cardboard is the same height as a hidden part of the steel that mounts and support the protruding portion. The length of each unit is the width of the steel. Diagonally, the measurement of the top portion of the steel protruding from the wall is the same distance of spacing that is between each unit.

The diptychs *CR 2000* and *9 W. 57th St.* (Plate IV and Plate V) are easily describable: the canvas is built with the same measurements as the found perforated

white-painted steel. So, through simple multiplication, what was five feet by three feet becomes five feet by six feet. But I don't want to stray too far from the industrial qualities of the found material by doubling or otherwise extending it. A logical way to expand a structure is through the related idea of using strict ninety-degree angles (also inherent in the construction process), and the use of the grid with its continual lateral intersections. The viewer physically understands the stability of constructing this way, as basic and material as making a brick out of mud, all the way to the utilization of the steel I-beams that support high-rise buildings. According to Robert Morris,

> Rectangular groupings of any number imply potential extension; they do not seem to imply incompletion, no matter how few their number or whether they are distributed as discrete units in space.… From one to many the whole is preserved so long as a grid-type ordering is used.[1]

Morris's discussion of ordering right-angle units helps to describe my multiplied compositions. Not only do the scavenged materials have a grid-type quality, but each additional element also reinforces the grid structure. The diptych format of *CR 2000* and *9 W. 57th St.,* (Plate IV and Plate V) and the layering of materials in *Rottington Rd.,* (Plate II) are variations on the grid and carry through to the pieces *2nd and 59th St.* (Plate VI)

In Rosalind Krauss's book *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, the chapter "Grids" breaks down the use of the grid into two approaches describing its structural use in art. She writes:

[1] Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 3," in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 29.

> Logically speaking, the grid extends, in all directions, to infinity. … By virtue of the grid, the given work of art is presented as a mere fragment, a tiny piece arbitrarily cropped from an infinitely larger fabric. Thus the grid operates from the work of art outward, compelling our acknowledgement of a world beyond the frame. This is the centrifugal reading. The centripetal one works, naturally enough, from the outer limits of the aesthetic object inward. The grid is, in relation to *this* reading *re*-presentation of everything that separates the work of art from the world, from ambient space and from other objects. The grid is an introjection of the boundaries of the world into the interior of the work; it is a mapping of the space inside the frame onto itself. It is a mode of repetition, the content of which is the conventional nature of art itself.[2]

One rationale for describing my art work as centripetal is that the found materials are initially located outside the art work before it is constructed. The work itself calls attention to the grid-like structure of the built world. Another way to view a centripetal reading of the grid in my work is the phenomenological response: physical space that is known by the interaction and the dependence of the audience. The works' physical space and light, with their attendant shadows and reflections, give way to a similar reading of existence "outside" the actual materials of the piece.

The use of low relief in the diptychs continues the exploration and understanding of space, light, and the dependence of one thing on another. By positioning the material one or two inches away from the wall, like *CR 2000*, (Plate IV) a new space is created between it and the wall. The material itself reveals that space—the perforated steel

[2] Rosalind Krauss. *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), 18-19.

allows a partial view of the space behind the steel—along with the nature of the canvas fabric's expandability and understanding that woven material contains negative or empty space.

The nature and identity of the material are apparent on the surface of the work; nothing is disguised. The texture, the color, the matte or gloss surface, are all ways of identifying material, and to some extent, an implication of its age and history. *2nd and 59th St.* (Plate VI) is a two-unit work that presents multiple surfaces: a canvas sits behind two scrap piece of stainless steel perforated with a grid of four-inch circle cut outs. The stainless steel, polished to a high sheen, is a surface that changes with light and viewer position.

All of the works in the exhibition depend not only on their materials, but also the surrounding physical space they occupy to activate the perceptual space. With each of my works, the subtlety of reflection is important. Stainless steel varies in its ability to reflect; if it is sanded to a high-grit polish, it can, through reflection, claim an adjacent space. The two pieces of stainless steel in *2nd and 59th St.* (Plate VI) are sanded and polished to activate this kind of perception.

Rottington Rd., (Plate II) built from a piece of frosted glass that acts as a translucent mirror, has a blue-green frosty tint. The space reflected in its surface shows a milky version of what it faces: the physical architecture, the movement of people, the light, shades and colors of everything nearby. The mirrors in *Overton Plaza* (Plate IV) are used to reflect into the actual space. As light shines through holes in the galvanized steel, the mirrors below the steel reflect the light back onto the wall that each unit is mounted on, which makes this underside of the work crucial. The shadows cast onto the

wall and floor under the units are considered part of the work; the color shift of light and shade produce a perceptual experience. Without the physical material and without the gallery light shining directly onto the each unit, these shadows would not exist. So, the inclusion of pre-existing physical space and the reflectiveness of the material point to the fact that all of this is dependent on the sensations that the body incurs and how the mind interprets what is experienced. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-61) was appointed in 1952 to the chair of Philosophy at the Collège de France. His writing details the ways in which we experience, through sensations, the everyday and moment-to-moment occurrences with the world. An example of his theory is that,

> The sensible has not only a motor and vital significance, but is nothing other than a certain way of being in the world suggested to us from some point in space, and seized and acted upon by our body, provided that it is capable of doing so, so that sensation is literally a form of communion.[3]

This perceptual space, the look of material, and the surroundings reflected (which includes the image of the viewer) onto and into the work is pervade the consciousness and the body of the person who experiences all of these things. The centripetal notion of the work is implied in the materials' prior existence; found material displays utilitarian purpose that includes a prior purpose and/or anticipation to function once more. The mechanical look and feel remains in the work to reference its previous existence.

The act of seeing is crucial in the everyday; much of what we can see is not materially present, like color, shadow, light, reflection. I want my work to create

[3]Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge: 1962), 212.

heightened perceptual experiences provoked by the often overlooked material of the built world, enhanced by the equally overlooked phenomena of immaterial reality.

WORK CITED

Krauss, Rosalind. *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986.

Merleau–Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*, Trans. Colin Smith. (New York, NY.: Routledge: 1962.

Morris, Robert. “Notes on Sculpture, Part 3,” in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993.

Installation View of VIA FIRENZE (A CITY IN ITALY, A STREETNAME IN TEXAS)

Plate I

Rottington Rd.
Canvas, Frosted glass, Hardware, Primer, Steel
44 ½” h x 30” l x 3 ¼” w

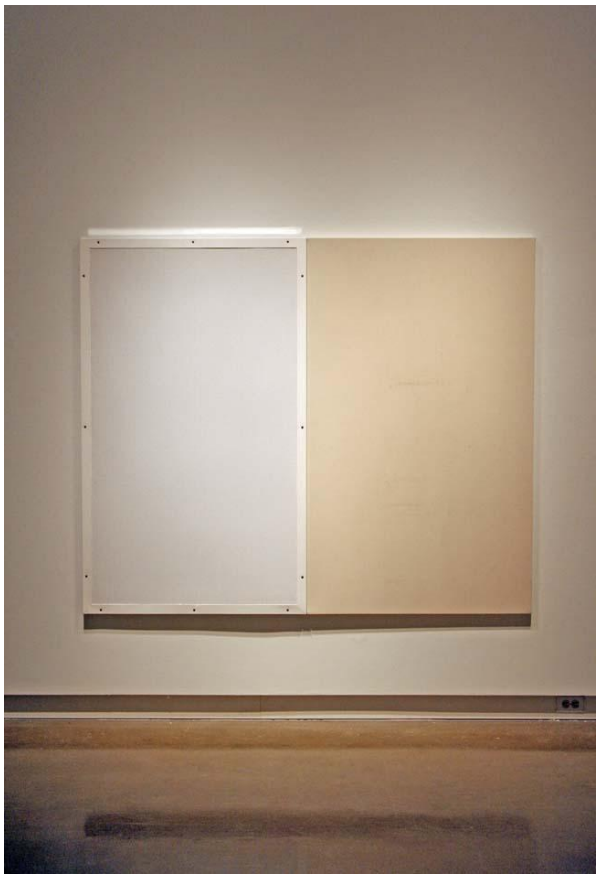
Plate II

Overton Plaza
Cardboard, Galvanized Steel, Hardware, Mirror, Steel
7” h x 172” l x 12” w

Plate III

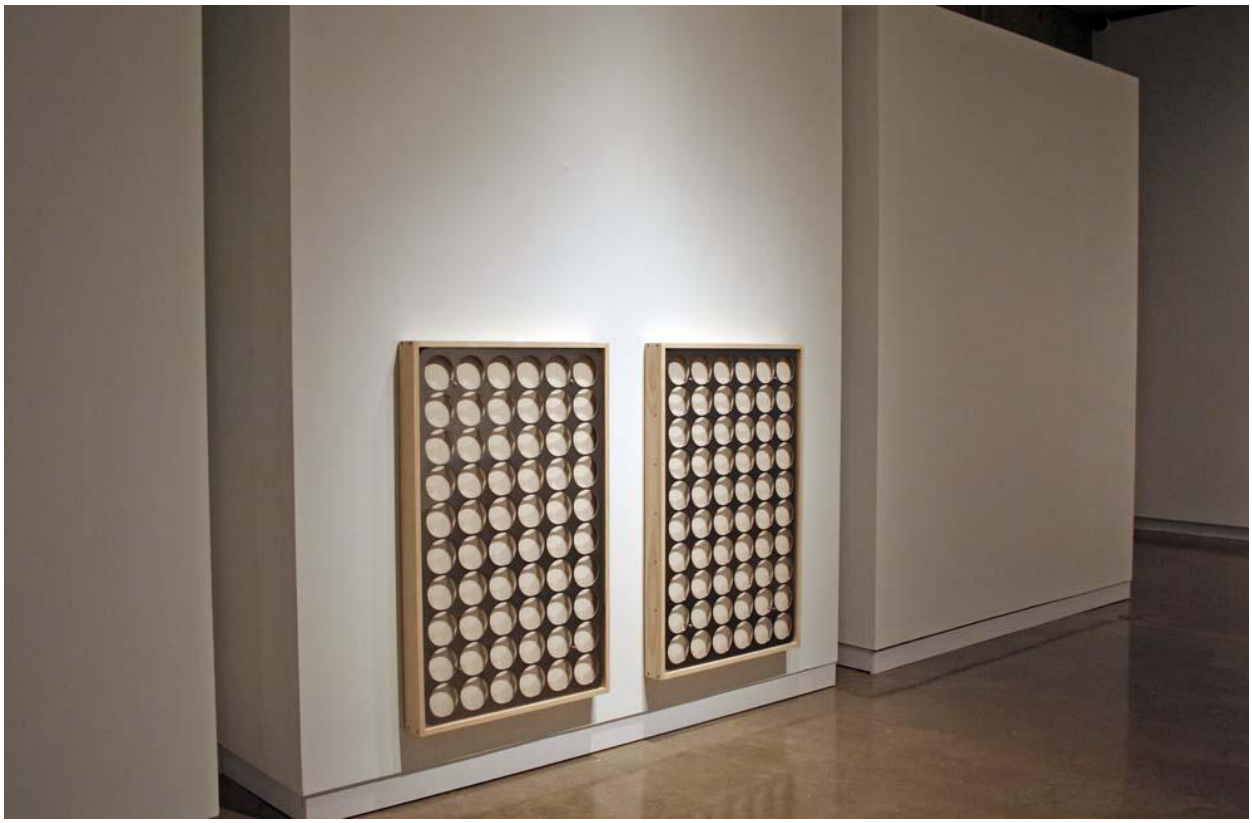
CR 2000
Aluminum, Canvas, Hardware, Oil Enamel, Perforated steel, Steel, Wood
60” h x 72” l x 3” w

Plate IV



9 W. 57th St.
Aluminum, Canvas, Hardware, Oil Enamel, Perforated steel, Steel, Wood
60” h x 72” l x 3” w

Plate V



2nd and 59th St.
Hardware, Canvas, Steel, Wood
58” h x 70” l x 4” w

Plate VI