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Origin Point

By

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University of Texas at San Antonio
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Thesis approved by:

Major Professor

Graduate Studies Representative

For the College of Fine Arts

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Vita

Sean Ibanez was born and raised in San Antonio, Texas. After graduating high school in 1998, he enrolled at The University of Texas at San Antonio as a BFA with a concentration in sculpture. After completing his BFA he took a year off to travel, find work, and raise money for grad school. Shortly after graduating he joined a welding and fabrication crew on a public art sculpture entitled "Tree of Life." Taking over a year to complete, the waterfall screen was installed at Trinity University in San Antonio.

In the summer of 2004, Sean Ibanez traveled to Italy and enrolled in the Santa Reparata School of Art in Florence. He traveled to Rome, Venice, Sienna and several other towns. Upon his return he found his acceptance letter to Texas Christian University's MFA program. Accepted as a sculptor with a full ride and stipend, he quickly moved to Fort Worth and enrolled in classes.

Before graduating from TCU he enrolled in teacher certification through Texas' Region XI. By the fall of 2006 he will have finished certification and will begin teaching. Despite the heavy work-load, Ibanez plans to continue his professional career as an artist. He will be showing work at the North American Graduate Art Survey in Minneapolis, and has been accepted into the I-35 Biennial at Dunn and Brown Gallery.

Vita written by Sean Ibanez

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“Origin Point”

Graduate Thesis by
Sean A. Ibanez

You find beauty in the simplest of things...

--Fortune Cookie, obliged by a friend

The above quote is the fulcrum of my work. I find that the simplest of circumstances create the most beautiful outcomes. While our favorite things are the simplest indulgences—a particular blanket, drink or locale—we rarely question why. I create containers that manipulate and house simple events that are primarily expressed through their material nature. The processes are unencumbered by visual reference, allowing materials to develop their own vocabulary. Through this modality I question the simple things. I uncover subtle nuances in everyday life that are strange and enriching.

The physicality of Origin Point leans towards the minimal. Simple geometry and truth-to-materials aesthetics enable viewers to recognize form and more easily identify material qualities. No shape is vague or contrived. No material is disguised or used in a way that thwarts its unique nature. The properties of MDF, plaster or flour are left available to the viewer. In this way I reinforce the real.

Remaining as open as possible to material qualities, I experiment and build upon the properties and behaviors of a given media. A unique vocabulary exists in the most mundane of things, even toilet paper. As a chain of units it can be broken down and

reformed into just about anything else. Its edges are perforated, it turns to pulp in water, and its transparency and texture vary from brand to brand. All of these become a vocabulary for my work.

I use MDF (medium-density fiberboard) to create the boxes and housings for much of my work. While it's looked down upon as a more temporal and therefore unreliable material, I find that its uniformity allows it to fall into the background, letting other materials stand out. A great deal of baggage comes along with mahogany, plywood or Home Depot's standard yellow pine. More often than not the art-viewer is enthralled by the "quality" (read: value) of materials like mahogany, yellow pine, spruce, etc. The aesthetic or monetary values—however contrived they may be—tend to overpower other, more pertinent subjects within the work. I try my hardest to keep such contrivances from my work.

By no means do I believe that MDF is free from reference. I wish only to point out the drawbacks of other woods. I am not concerned with the aesthetics of wood grain density or color richness. I'm more interested in MDF's visual homogeneity. Its color runs throughout, its surface is uniform, and it holds its edge. Typically used in cheaper furniture and covered in laminates—it is designed to be unassuming. In that respect, each box/form made of MDF becomes a support for, rather than a shadow over, other materials.

Other containers—coffee cans, storage bins, drawers, etc—carry with them strong references. Monetary concerns, place reference and gender issues are modifiers that I don't wish to deal with—especially for this show. In order to draw the viewer into the processes and circumstances within each sculpture, uniformity of color and product is

necessary. For *Origin Point* it is more important that I manipulate MDF to create the containers than it is to modify an existing object and have that dialogue overshadow the material events.

The limits of any material or circumstance are governed only by how far one is willing to take it. As such, experimentation is the backbone of my work. I enjoy how flour clumps and compressed into a form. Its surface cracks when it can settle no more, and under the slightest touch, it crumbles. Such attributes are discovered and exploited through a step-by-step process, where each step becomes a single sculpture. *Finger as Body* directly led to *Hemispheres*. I used a scoop to fill the container of *Finger as Body* with flour. The scoop compressed the flour into perfect domes. Each transition from bag to pedestal became poignant. Thus *Hemispheres* was given its name, and took on its own presence. The process becomes the meaning of the sculpture; the title reinforces that process.

A great deal of attention must be paid to the processes involved in each work. When are there too many processes or too few, and how far do you push them? One piece that didn't make the cut, *Crumble*, was as simple as stacking toilet paper so that it leaned to the right. The process ended when the toilet paper collapsed on the box—too simple. *Entries* consisted of a waxed clay cylinder with holes in it, inserted into cement, all of which was placed on a plywood stack. On the opposite end of the spectrum, there was simply too much.

While the overall formal composition of *Entries* wasn't particularly cluttered, there were too many processes competing for attention. There wasn't enough room to focus on the minute, and in the end the scale and presence of the work was foiled.

So one has to strike a balance. In the latter example, there were enough events within the work to complete several pieces. Many of those elements went on to inform other pieces like *Slice* and *Weld*. It's difficult to ride the edge and remain open to the countless possibilities within a handful of media. Asking questions like "how simple can a shelf with sand be," becomes the mode of production.

Pushing the limits of those concerns is essential—as is my concern with formal convention. With my focus on process, material reality, and the easy identification of shapes and structures, I leave the bias of image at the door. I don't wish to make a cut in MDF that looks superficial or unnecessary to the processes. It detracts from the simplicity of the moment, and that visual weight competes with the importance of the process.

I have worked to eliminate the overstated from my art because the simplest of things hold the greatest truths. All too often life becomes too difficult, too wrapped up in complexities. Through my work I seek the value of the simple, typically obfuscated objects and relationships that permeate all corners of experience.

By making relatively unnoticed events (scooping flour, folding paper...) the subject of my work, the viewer shoulders all of the meaning—especially when we've all seen toilet paper and masking tape. While I approach the meaning of my work in my own way, so too must the viewer, over whom I attempt hold no influence.

Able to recognize the events taking place within each sculpture, the viewer is left to ponder why the artist created it and why he or she responds to the piece. The lack of referential narrative and imagery puts the viewer entirely within the "now."

Many of the sculptures, and all of the tape drawings, must be replicated for viewing. As such I won't be the last to construct them. The flour in *Finger as Body* may take on bugs and *Take Note's* papers might be blown away by the air conditioner. While such things shouldn't be avoided, someone must restore the relative order of the piece. (Relative order being the stacking of paper towards the middle of the pedestal of *Take Note*. In other words the order of process, not the tight-fisted order of aesthetic formalism.)

Certain processes must be replicated for the opening of a show and even throughout the length of an exhibition. *Finger as Body* must be mounted, filled with flour, leveled, and a finger inserted—each time it is made available for viewing. Upon completion of the show it must be dismantled and the flour removed to be replaced for the next show.

As I've said, though I created the first evidence of the process behind *Finger as Flour*, others must take care of it in my absence. Instructions for those processes are provided, but are in no way the actual piece. These are not Conceptual pieces (strictly speaking). There is an object; the MDF housing exists as a receptacle for the flour and the finger. The object exists as evidence of those events. The instructions exist in a similar fashion, as evidence of a tried and true method for the work.

What is seen during the exhibition is a finite point in the life of such an object. A unique experience is created for different viewers. With each exhibition a different person makes their mark in *Finger as Body*. Consequently, the visuals of the work are slightly altered so that what a viewer sees on opening night may not be identical to what

is seen a week later. The cracks in the flour, the size of the hole and the fingernail indentation at the bottom of the hole will be different every time.

Such minute changes in appearance may seem insignificant at first, but given the reduced and refined aesthetic of my work, the seemingly inconsequential is anything but. In lieu of my straightforward, no-glitz-or-glam approach to color and value, the finite details of an object fall into sharp focus. The surface of powder becomes velveteen. Warm white turns cool whites to gray. What was once just a scoop of powder is now its own universe.

As such, the microcosm is turned into the macrocosm. Given the discreet nature of each work, the viewer must confront the object well inside their personal bounds in order to absorb the piece. At an intimate distance the wall becomes a field whose only figure is a singled-out sculpture. Everything within the piece takes on a greater scale. With the work stripped to the core processes, nothing goes unnoticed by the seeing eye.

With simple relationships like container and contained, absorbed and coated, I've pushed my work towards the fundamental. By fundamental I do not wish to imply the religious, merely the undeniable physical relationships that occur everywhere. Whether in religion where the body is a container for the soul, or in the stroller that cradles a child, shell and interior are undeniable facets of our existence, and therefore our thinking. It can be seen in cars, clothing and psychology.

A spiral galaxy is distinguished by its outreached, spinning arms. At a smaller scale we find the same revolution occurring in each solar system. Even the earth and moon share this relationship. The weather on our planet, the creamer in our coffee, even

atoms and subatomic particles share such motion. The more we look, the more we find such simple relationship in the various parts of our universe.

My tape drawings seem fundamentally different from my sculptures. Yet many of them deal with mathematics, geometry and rhythm, all of which are universals. To mankind, numbers are grasped a priori. We know there are two objects in front of us without ever being taught that. Though we assign the concept of two the name ‘two,’ the value in our mind will never change. One can hear rhythm in the ocean, see geometry and order in trees.

The tape processes is fundamentally experiential—as is working geometry and the rhythms of more complex mathematics and music. One must perform the actions in order to solve and create. *DESIGN/design* is created from a few simple strokes. A triangle houses a series of curves based on the few point of the triangle. The longest leg of the triangle is traced from tape that spans the lengths of my arms. The designs I use in my tape drawings are not obscure or puzzling. The geometry is simple, evident and self-referential.

Linear thinking—and therefore linear history—endeavors to assign a progenitor for every idea or event. This originator is fundamental to providing history with value and meaning, insofar as creating a star system for people to believe in. Yet I work to the contrary. While its “common-knowledge” that Hippocrates was the first “historian,” it could just as easily have been someone else’s work that simply didn’t survive the years.

So the *who* isn’t as important as *why* or *how*. And so I work to remove myself as a star from the eye of the viewer. I am not trying to influence the audience as a purveyor of original thoughts. I prefer to let the work stand upon its own feet, bereft of any

contrived, heavy-handed symbolism or biographical connotation. Thus, what is left is the real, as opposed to what could be conjectured as intended by the artist.

Then, I would suggest that *Origin Point* is posited within the viewer, just as the comprehension of a book is the responsibility of the reader. I've created a series of events for the viewer to take in. Governed primarily by the materials, the beauty of those events remain real and un-tidied. My real experiences are handed to the viewers. Their experience belongs entirely to them. I do not dictate the value of the work to the viewer.

While it could be said that those pieces in the show have the most value to me—as opposed to those that didn't make it in—I'm not pushing a subjective clause on the viewers. I attempt only to hand them the real. By allowing the materials to perform as they will, I remove myself—a variable—out of the equation. A one-on-one relationship exists between the object and the viewer, creating a sharp focus on the subtle. Ultimately, all is left to be valued by those who have experienced the work.

PLATE 1



Ascension
MDF, Plaster

PLATE 2



Ascension (detail)
MDF, Plaster

PLATE 3



Finger as Body
MDF, Flour

PLATE 4



Hemispheres
MDF, Flour

PLATE 5



Slice
MDF, Plaster, Paraffin

PLATE 6



Weld
MDF, Paraffin

PLATE 7



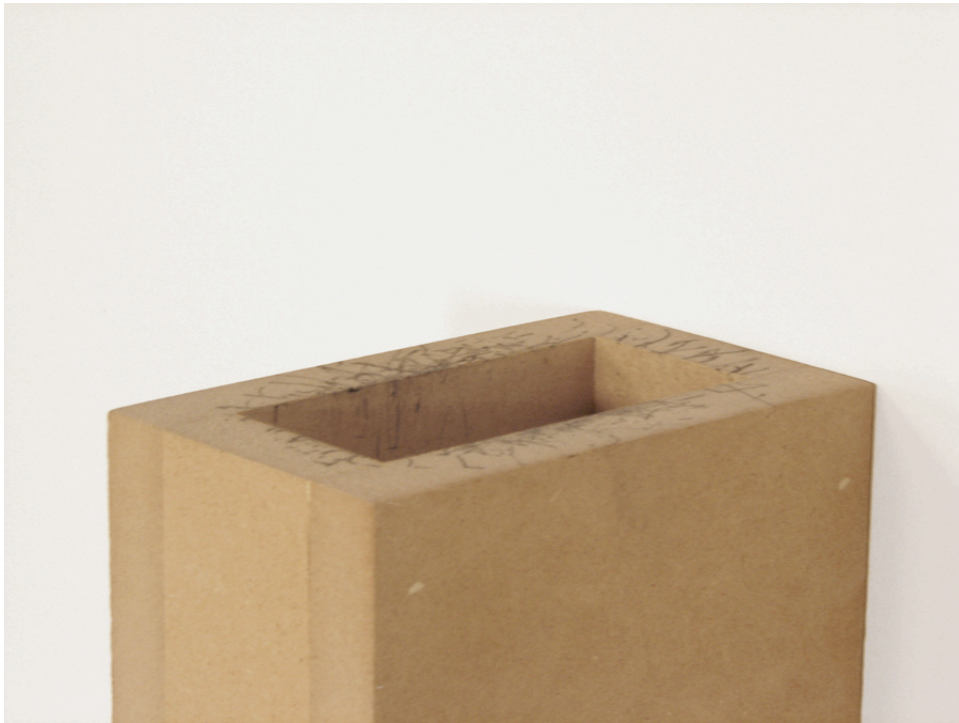
Take Note
MDF, Paper, Steel

PLATE 8



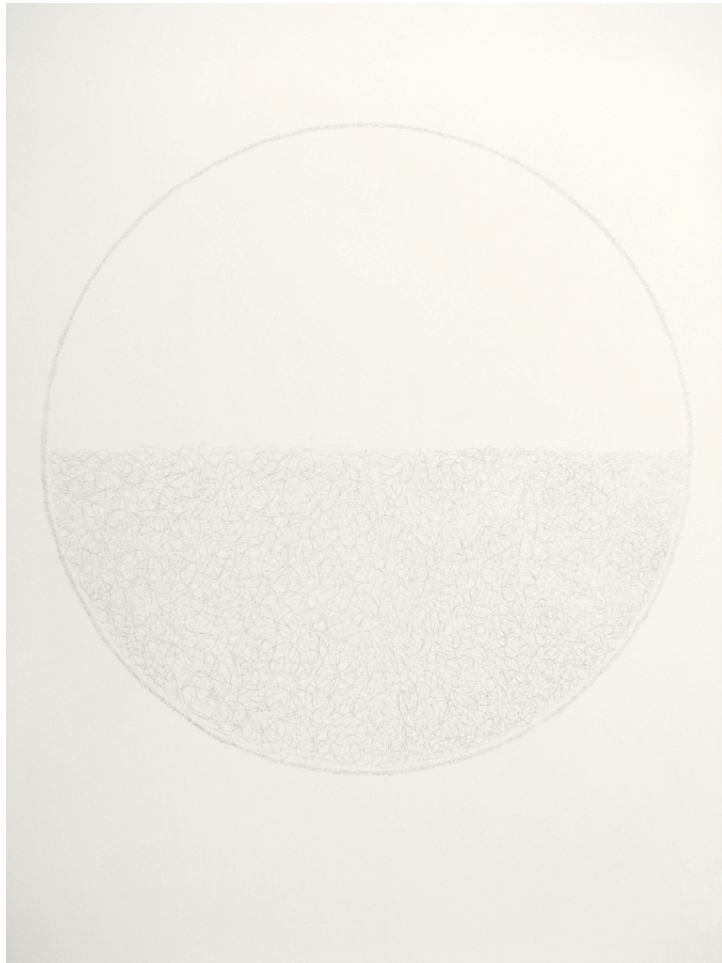
Compress
MDF, Bee Pollen

PLATE 9



Drawn
MDF, Graphite

PLATE 10



Hemisphere
Graphite

PLATE 11



Hemisphere (detail)
Graphite

PLATE 12



Lanced
Toilet Paper, Pin, Thread, Steel

PLATE 13



Path and Body
Masking Tape

PLATE 14



Pour
MDF, Sand

PLATE 15



Pour (detail)
MDF, Sand

PLATE 16



Something and Nothing
MDF, Glue

PLATE 17



Slippage
MDF, Plaster

Curriculum Vitae

Education:

- 2006 MFA – Sculpture
Texas Christian University (TCU)
Fort Worth, TX
- 2003 BFA – Sculpture
University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA)
San Antonio, TX

Professional Experience:

- 2006-present Alternative Teacher Certification (High School Art)
Region XI
Fort Worth, TX
- 2005-06 Basic Sculpture Teacher’s Assistant (Under Cameron Schoepp)
Texas Christian University (TCU), Fort Worth, TX
- 2005-present Drum Instructor for Dondoko Taiko
Fort Worth Japanese Society, Fort Worth, TX
- 2004 Installation Crew and Art Handling
Fort Worth Modern Art Museum
Fort Worth, TX
- 2004 Fabricator, Bronze Welding and Detailing
Tree of Life Public Art Work, Trinity University
Williams Sculpture Works
San Antonio, TX
- 2003 Internship, Bureaucracy and Art Handling
Finesilver Gallery
San Antonio, TX

Exhibitions: (solo shows marked by asterick)

- 2006 I-35 Biennial
Dunn and Brown Gallery
Dallas, TX
- 2006 “North American graduate Art Survey 2006”
University of Minnesota, Regis Center for the Arts E201
Minneapolis, MN
- 2006 Graduate Exhibition
Texas Christian University
- 2004 *
*“Rigid Yet Flexible Materials”
I2I Gallery
San Antonio, TX
- 2003 *
*Three Months of Solo Shows
Studio 357, Blue Star Art Complex
San Antonio, TX
- 2003 “NEXT” BFA Exhibition
UTSA Satellite Space, Blue Star Art Complex
San Antonio, TX
- 2003 UTSA Annual Juried Exhibition
Bismarck Gallery, Blue Star Art Complex
San Antonio, TX
- 2002 “Works on the Permanent Collection”
UTSA Juried Exhibition
San Antonio Museum of Art
San Antonio, TX

ABSTRACT

I create containers that manipulate and house events that are primarily expressed through material nature. The processes are unencumbered by visual reference, allowing materials to develop their own vocabulary.