

MARCO PALLI

The New Herd of Thoughts

The work in this exhibition, “The New Herd of Thoughts,” is considered a unit, in the sense that each piece belongs to the entire body of work as if pieces of a puzzle, and does not need labeling of the individual pieces. The pieces are made with water-soluble clay, except for the framed works in which the clay was applied directly on to oil paper, and the accessory use of orange plexiglass. Once the clay was dry, it was coated with translucent resin to protect the surface from being abraded. The work on display was made in 2018 and 2019.

I encourage visitors to view the entire exhibition prior to reading this text. Please engage your natural detective mode. Explore, experience and question the work. Thanks!

Artist’s Statement

“Life is all about circumstances and decisions. Through my work I embrace the transformation of materials as an adventure. The process demands meditation, and often leads to self-discovery.” – Marco Palli

“The New Herd of Thoughts”

In an effort to elevate the practice of sculpture beyond the purely physical, I have unintentionally switched my studio practice from being mechanical in labor to being experiential. This event has created an opportunity to develop myself parallel to the development of my work. Through personal reflection, I gradually arrived at the conclusion that “experience” is the story performed by any material, and it is perpetual. This is the law of the universe, it is nature. The simplicity of an event such as clay falling from a plinth onto the ground contained a wealth of reason, intelligence, lessons (to be learned), and even beauty (if you will) that often passes overlooked. Overlooking such events is commonplace, because we are usually on automatic mode.

The realization of this observation, charged with acceptance, and grounded in logic, has allowed me to explore, and to discover this: without doubt there are intellectual qualities within physical responses.

Arriving at the final, yet open, conclusion that intelligence is the result of a physical interaction, and the mind is factually material, this is a train of material/physical events which emerge into a “train of thought.”

My physicality itself changes the world around my thoughts, not only by exposing my surroundings to my presence but my understanding/misunderstanding of it will materially affect what surrounds me.

Physical power is directly related to intellectual power. One could go around touching the work in this exhibition for whatever reason, affecting how the next person will perceive the work I am presenting. The power of touch is rooted in its physical quality and transcends into the power of thinking, which becomes material when it becomes intelligence. This is also true in reverse, as I am sharing my intellectual achievements in this exhibition via the “thoughts” on display. Because these material objects have the physical power to touch one back (in reaction to one’s touch), they can also touch one’s mind.

*This bread was made from clay.
It fed me with a thought,
and became intelligence.
Am I satiated? – Marco Palli*

My hope is that by the end of the percipients' experience with this body of work, the "thoughts" presented would have interacted with the percipients' thoughts. I trust that interchange will empower percipients with the tools I use in my evolving studio practice. Consequently, these thoughts will enrich the percipients' life progressively, much as these thoughts have enriched mine.

This work is an invitation for the audience to ask themselves: "What am I doing in my own life that may compare to what is happening here in this exhibition?" And to try to distinguish those things in which we generally focus on doing, in addition to the things we do unaware.

Work and Process

A description of my process in this body of work – paired with thoughts/reasoning that generated each – follows.

"Slops" – "Blobs"

From the academic studio practice that focuses on rendering an interpretation of the human figure, one generally concentrates on the fabrication of a representation of the figure. As all attention is given to this process, there are events occurring simultaneously that are often overlooked. For instance: the leftover pieces of clay from which the sculptor "picks and/or puts," are directly, and intentionally, being transformed. They are always present on the board, yet to the sculptor they don't belong to the work (it is considered noise). After being aware of this phenomenon, I spent time looking for ways to attribute such events to the intentionality of consciousness, generating the philosophy behind other bodies of work that I have developed such as "The Universe's Language" and "Unfinished."

"The Universe's Language" is a series that aimed to use materials in a way that the cutout and the offcut were equally regarded, and the result of making these works would produce only the artwork and no left-overs.

"Unfinished," which is itself an evolution of "The Universe's Language" additionally explores the ability/disability to accept perpetual change.

I continued to sculpt academically, but saving the left-over pieces of clay for further visitation. Later, I treated them as found objects, and studied them by raising questions, such as: What is this? What happened to this? Rather than questions like: "What does it look like?"

Note: Find the two figurines in this exhibition, and do not overlook the blobs.

"Squeezes" – "Strangles"

For years I had accumulated many of these "squeezes," which were to me the containers of my physical strength. I always thought of these pieces as amulets. In the vernacular: If clay were carbon and I was strong enough, these "squeezes" would be diamonds. After the awakening miracle that resulted from accepting and appreciating the "slops," which are containers of the

unappreciated objects that resulted from a process that had previously discarded them, I began to pay more attention to the results of my actions.

These “squeezes” are actually casts of my hands, as my hands are serving as the mold. And the form is never the same because the clay is always looking for what seems to me a random way out.

Even though the first “squeeze” happened back in 2012, and I would make more of these every time I had enough leftover volume of clay that would fit in my hand, it was not until 2016 that these “squeezes” gained a different meaning. I was talking to someone when a phone rang, the person said: “I got to get this, hold that thought.” I understood: “hold that ‘thought’” The most elemental thing you can do to clay is to hold it. Well, I had been holding to those “thoughts” lying about in my studio like an infestation of what they seem to resemble: miniature ruminants.

Further, I gave myself the task of thinking about something specific while I was holding the clay – or rather “strangling” it. I thought there was a way of creating a symbolic kind of Rosetta Stone through which I would discover that different thoughts look different. But this idea did not last very long, because I could not appreciate (visually in the resulting squeezed piece of clay), the difference between a comforting thought, such as “peace,” from a disturbing thought, such as “hunger.” They accumulated in my studio over the years; as “the herd” began to grow it began to demand attention, and stimulating me to investigate/experiment further.

Note: Find and count the ruminants in this exhibition.

“Splotches” – “Spills”

This series is an evolution from “the squeezes,” but in this case I was removing my touch from the work. In the “squeezes,” the print of my hand conforms the entirety of the outline. I wanted to find a way of making something that had my mental touch rather than my physical touch.

I started out having the clay on the plinth, and then I let it fall. Depending on the force of gravity and the fluid quality of clay, the mass would morph by reacting against the pressure upwards that stopped the fall (the floor). I repeated this event countless time until the I found the right moment to stop (usually when all my fingerprints had disappeared). So, a new enterprise was born.

I had the opportunity to immerse myself in the geological formations of the Grand Canyon in 2018. While the splotches do not aim to represent those formations, the Grand Canyon’s formations, in parallel with my splotches, demonstrate a language of being subject to processes. I have the sense that my process has stimulated and expanded my awareness of physical outcomes.

My experience of Lake Powell, at the Four Corners of the Navajo Nation later led me to position the “splotches” on the reflective orange platforms.

Note: Find these splotches and explore the landscape they offer.

“Strongholds” - “Towers”

The offcuts from any project in clay (which were actually “Blobs”) are generally put back into the clay bin for recycle, which is the common use of the clay remnants. To achieve this, the remnants must be allowed to bone dry, so rehydration is faster. Once this has been done, the

clay is introduced to a Pugmill (a mechanical clay mixer) that process the clay to make it uniform. At this point, the clay reaches its limit between solid and liquid, which makes it very difficult to handle. Then let out to dry until it reaches its an “ideal” consistency for sculpting.

The “Strongholds,” are the aftermath that resulted from the philosophy applied on my earlier works “The Universe’s Language” and “Cutouts and Offcuts” in combination to this process of recycling clay.

“Cutouts and Offcuts,” which is itself an evolution of “The Universe’s Language” and “Unfinished” combined, additionally explores the ability/disability to stand.

When I held the first sample of clay that came out of the Pugmill, the material embodied the fragility of a baby. Inexplicably, I felt the need to help the “baby” stand (perhaps influenced by circumstances that also inspired my earlier body of work).

The first trials demonstrated that having a standing cylinder (“stronghold” or “tower”) was unlikely, therefore, I explored a grouping. Eventually, after sequential explorations, I was able to achieve my intention of having some “babies” stand (evidently, as water evaporates from the clay mix, the clay become less fluid making it more likely to realize these works).

Only recently, I began to accept that things can be allowed to be what they are, and we don’t have to impose meaning, narrative, allegory, and/or the like to everything we do. I began to enjoy questions like: “What is it? “What is it doing? Rather than “what does it represent? Or “what is does it seem to be doing?

These pieces are standing, they cannot pretend or seem so, the honesty and simplicity of them is pure/clear. And I think it is worth reiterating: “These pieces do not represent the ability to stand, they are standing.”

Note: Find the fingerprints on these towers; you can see a memory of hands holding the clay—or is it the clay holding the hands?

“Smears” – “Splatter”

This work is an evolution from the “Strongholds.” If clay is liquid enough, you could “write” with it; but I did not want to write anything in a linguistic form. I wanted to explore and experience something that my previous investigations in clay were not covering. With the strongholds, the clay is fluid and the challenge is for it to stand. With an even more fluid clay, the material has greater qualities conferred by water, like cohesion/adhesion, but as the water evaporates, the clay is thin and brittle and demonstrates other characteristics of clay that until now had not been made evident. After dry, the smears struggle to stay adhered to the paper, the work is very fragile and the appearance of the work evolves as it disintegrates.

The “smears” speak of cohesion, fragility and change.

Note: Find these qualities in the framed works.

More information at: marcopalli.com

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