



Theses and Dissertations

2005-11-14

Ideals and Realities

Pamela Bowman
Brigham Young University - Provo

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Art Practice Commons](#)

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Bowman, Pamela, "Ideals and Realities" (2005). *Theses and Dissertations*. 694.
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/694>

This Selected Project is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

IDEALS AND REALITIES

by

Pamela Bowman

A project report submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Fine Arts

Department of Visual Arts

Brigham Young University

December 2005

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a project report submitted by

Pamela Bowman

This project report has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

Date

Brian D. Christensen, Chair

Date

Peter Everett

Date

Martha M. Peacock

Date

Campbell Gray

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the project report of Pamela Bowman in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

Date

Brian D. Christensen
Chair, Graduate Committee

Accepted for the Department

W. Wayne Kimball
Graduate Coordinator

Accepted for the College

Rory Scanlon
Associate Dean, College of Fine Arts and
Communications

ABSTRACT

IDEALS AND REALITIES

Pamela Bowman

Department of Visual Arts

Master of Fine Arts

In order to produce work that prompts the viewer to undergo a process of personal exploration resulting in discourse and the understanding of feelings, it is necessary to balance ideals and realities, combine experience and creativity, and blend concepts and materials. Ideals and realities are discussed in this paper, using an approach that concentrates on foundational principles. The ideals of morality, beauty, goodness, acceptance, and unity form a foundation for the motivation behind my work. They are described in relationship to the philosophy of aesthetics.

Ideals are contrasted with realities of life which have patterns and rhythms. These repetitive patterns bring experience and predictability, which

can give us peace of mind and comfort. Predictability needs to be balanced with creativity, so that life remains interesting and challenging, and so that we can handle the unexpected. There is a natural tension when combining ideals and realities, experience and creativity. Alleviating that tension in my work necessitates working cognitively as well as using the skill of my hands – blending concepts and materials.

The balance and tension between ideals and realities, concepts and materials, is discussed in connection with my first installation, *Matter Out of Place* (2002), and my final project, *Perennial* (2005). By using principles as a foundation for my work, and incorporating a combination of experience and creativity, concepts and materials, I hope to successfully convey meaning to viewers in a manner that will cause discourse and reflection.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the help and support of my husband, Jerry. My sons Corey, Eric, and Trent and my daughter-in-law Liz also encouraged and assisted me. I would like to thank the Visual Arts Studio faculty who helped me a great deal: In particular Brian Christensen, my mentor and advisor who helped me all along the way - also Peter Everett, Brian Draper, Von Allen, Joe Ostraff and Gary Barton. Art History faculty Mark Magleby and Martha Peacock also assisted me. I would also like to thank Campbell Gray for assistance in understanding principles.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
ILLUSTRATIONS	viii
INTRODUCTION	1
CONCINNITY	2
RHYTHM AND BALANCE.	8
TENSION	15
CONCLUSION	33
WORKS CITED	34

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
1. Matter Out of Place, 2002	17
2. Matter Out of Place, detail	17
3. Perennial, 2005, installation view	21
4. Perennial, detail of grass	22
5. Perennial, detail	23
6. Perennial, detail of fruit, sink	24
7. Perennial, detail of bronze fruit.	24
8. Perennial (Presence)	25
9. Perennial (Promise)	25
10. Perennial (Persistence)	26
11. Perennial (Process)	27
12. Perennial, installation view	27
13. Gallery floor plan	30
14. Layout of Library Gallery, as installed.	30

INTRODUCTION

Metaphors are often used by artists to aid in the expression of ideas. I use visual metaphors in my work, and have used literary metaphors while writing about it. Concinnity is used to describe foundation principles, rhythm is used to describe practicalities, and tension describes the merging of the two. Tension is also part of the process of combining ideas and objects.

The task of combining ideals and realities, concepts and materials is challenging. In order to produce art that engages viewers, causing them to reflect and explore feelings, this challenge must be attempted. Skill with both the mind and the hands is needed in order to be an effective artist.

This project report has three sections. The first will discuss the powerful ideals that underpin my work – the principles of morality, beauty, goodness, acceptance, and unity. The next is about the rhythms of life and the need to balance predictability and creativity. Third, the tension between the ideals and realities, between the mind and the hands will be discussed in connection with two installations. The first, *Matter Out of Place* was created early in my graduate program. The second, *Perennial*, was my final project. The ability to merge ideals and realities, concepts and materials is more evident in the later work.

CONCINNITY

This section will deal with ideals rather than practicalities – issues I am striving for but have not reached. The principles of morality, beauty, goodness, acceptance, and unity combined together form an elegant and graceful whole. Such a harmonious whole has concinnity, which can be defined as 1) harmony in the arrangement of parts with respect to a whole, 2) studied elegance and facility in style of expression, and 3) an instance of harmonious arrangement or studied elegance and facility.¹

One of the ideals I strive for is an aesthetic that is described more completely in the eighteenth century – one that includes morality. This is not without precedent. The philosophy of aesthetics in the eighteenth century was based on the building of comportment. Those external influences that would build right and proper behavior, inner grace and bearing and a sense of virtue were considered to be aesthetic. Comportment could be developed, then, through activities that affected one's positive being such as listening to good music, appreciating the beauty of the earth, and eventually in the nineteenth century, viewing art. This kind of thought can be seen in two key sayings of Kant, an early theorist in aesthetics. He said, "Beauty is a symbol of Morality"

¹ "concinnity." <<http://dictionary.reference.com> (accessed Sept. 28, 2005)

and “The enjoyment of nature is the mark of a good soul.”² Kant is not the only theorist that tied aesthetics and morality. Indeed Alexander Baumgarten, the German philosopher who first used the term to describe “the science of sensation,”³ grounded aesthetics in comportment.

By the nineteenth century the most accepted use of the word aesthetics referred to “the Philosophy of Taste, the theory of the Fine Arts, the Science of the Beautiful, etc.”⁴ Aesthetics at this point had become tied to the visual within the Visual Arts. In the twentieth century discussions about aesthetics became more complex because there were no longer standards of taste and beauty that were universally agreed upon. Those standards of taste and beauty that appeared to be agreed upon in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries became more diffused and fractionalized. Throughout the Modern era the idea of the aesthetic, along with all other internal relationships, went through a process of reduction. Eventually, the aesthetic lost its complexity and became a simple emotional response. Within the visual arts it came to mean an optical response that was separated from comportment and morality. After reduction reached its climax in 1965 and the reductive trend reversed, concept once again became an

² Slater, B.H. “Aesthetics.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, .3. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/a/aestheti.html> (accessed August 16, 2005)

³ Ian Hunter “Aesthetics of the Art of Life,” in *Aesthesia & the Economy of the Senses*, ed. Grace H. (Sydney, New South Wales, Australia: PAD publications, University of Western Sydney, 1996), 29.

⁴ Proudfoot, Michael. “Aesthetics,” *An Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1996), 831.

important component in the visual arts. Ideas, concepts, and content address moral issues on one side or another. Therefore comportment and morality are once again viable.

There are some recent theorists that agree that morality and aesthetics are tied together. “[David] Best saw artforms as distinguished expressly by their having the capacity to comment on life situations, and hence bring in moral considerations.”⁵ Michael Proudfoot says,

“The point I have been wishing to make is that to speak of tastes and preferences, and to recognize that individual and historical differences inevitably exist, is not to rule out any talk of ‘better’ or ‘worse’, of values. Even though works of art are difficult to evaluate because of their extreme complexity, that shouldn’t deter us from the task. The task of evaluation in morality is scarcely less complex. Criticism, and aesthetics, involve a sort of arduous thinking that isn’t usually asked of people, and is projected normally only by artists, and the very greatest moralists and psychologists (so often themselves novelists). In the end, questions of values are inextricably connected with our thoughts about works of art, for choices *have* to be made. In the end, we can experience only a limited amount of art. Consistent and repeated choice of the trivial or the corrupt in art will reflect something wrong with one’s moral values.”⁶

There is a connection between aesthetics and morality, beauty, and goodness. Such terms are difficult and complex, and deserve definition. Beauty within some contemporary circles has been dismissed as no longer relevant. For example Wittgenstein said, “‘Beautiful’ is an odd word to talk about because it’s

⁵ Slater, B.H. “Aesthetics.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 6.

⁶ Proudfoot, Michael. “Aesthetics,” *An Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1996), 850.

hardly ever used.”⁷ Within the bounds of this paper, beauty is that which gives visual pleasure and exalts the mind and spirit. The reductive thought of modernism conditioned us to think of beauty only in terms of formal elements such as line, form and composition. Over time a canon of acceptability has developed that helps us agree on such elements. Certainly art can meet the formal criteria for elements and principles of design and have an appearance that is pleasing to the eye, yet have disparaging content. Dave Hickey elaborates on this type of situation in a discussion of Robert Mapplethorpe’s work.⁸ Hickey feels it is the discontinuity between the formal beauty and the subject matter that makes the work so charged. In other cases works are visually appealing but contain no content at all. They fall into the realm of being pleasing to the eye, but do not move the viewer. Art must promote an exploration and discourse that concludes in feelings of worth, nobility, strength and even courage in the viewer in order to be truly beautiful. Beauty has consistency in form and content, and it is connected with goodness and unity.

Goodness is probity, virtue, excellence and light. It feeds the soul, enlarges and ennobles. Goodness gives hope, helps one to move forward, and can make it possible for one to look outward to others. Goodness is connected to reverence, benevolence, compassion and wholeness. In contrast, darkness

⁷ Ibid., 851.

⁸ Hickey, Dave. “Enter the Dragon, on the vernacular of beauty,” *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1993), 21-23.

drains energy, makes one lose interest in what is around, and turns thoughts inward to fears, inadequacies, and aspects that are incomplete. Darkness develops feelings that the path forward is hopeless. Goodness and virtue have been studied for centuries in the field of ethics, also called moral philosophy, which “involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior.”⁹ According to virtue ethics,

“a good person is one who feels like doing what is right. People who do good are aware of moral rules, but so are people who do bad. The difference is virtue. Virtue is the source of the feelings that prompt us to behave well. Virtue ethics takes feelings seriously because feelings affect our lives more deeply than beliefs do.”¹⁰

The fact that this has been an area of study for so long, and continues to be a viable part of academia attests to the validity and importance of morality, virtue and goodness in society.

These principles of morality, beauty and goodness build upon each other and create an elegant harmony. This concinnity of ideals that influence my work would not be complete, however, without including acceptance, and unity.

Acceptance can mean contentment, peace of mind, resignation and reconciliation. This is useful when dealing with difficulties such as chronic illness. Acceptance within a relationship entails respect, patience, forgiveness,

⁹ Fieser, James. “Ethics,” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/ethics.html> (accessed Sept. 30, 2005)

¹⁰ Woodruff, Paul. *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 6.

and unconditional love. In relationships between parent and child, and between person and God, there is also an element of submission. If family relationships have acceptance and unity, they can move closer to the ideal of “home.”

For a moment, let me describe such a home. It is a place where one has feelings of comfort, familiarity, and security. One feels free to be one’s self and express ideas because it is safe to do so. Family members do not control or manipulate each other, and their communication is open and thoughtful. It is a place where one feels valued and needed. One likes to be at home because one feels happy there, and happiness enables one to reach out to others instead of being self-centered. The ideal home has a feeling of sacredness within it. The possibility of this type of “home” is something that influences my work. It is a harmonious whole.

Morality, beauty, goodness, acceptance and unity are ideals that together create a harmonious arrangement with grace and elegance – one of concinnity. This studied elegance and facility is a part of the aesthetic restored to its complexity. This definition of aesthetic, one that includes morality, is available today because ideas and discourse are viable, even essential, tools for the visual artist.

RHYTHM AND BALANCE

The realities of life surround us with patterns, rhythms and cycles. The earth and the heavens have regular cycles. So do our bodies. We structure our lives around daily and weekly routines. Holidays, birthdays, school calendars and the seasons give structure to each year. The repetition of those structures gives stability and rhythm to our lives.

In nature rhythm can be seen in the rotation of the earth, giving us day and night. The revolution of the earth provides a yearly cycle. The moon and the stars have predictable patterns. Giving respect to the differences in weather, we feel assured that the sun will rise in the morning and we will have a day similar to other days that came before. Such predictability gives us peace of mind. We have the confidence to make plans on the upcoming calendar because experience tells us that the days, months and years ahead have an order that corresponds to that calendar.

A certain amount of predictability in our lives is necessary. However, it needs to be balanced with creativity, which permits us to explore new experiences and by so doing we break away from the repetitive, thereby enriching our lives. This engagement with creativity amidst the regularity of our days and weeks builds skills and attitudes to accommodate the unforeseen challenges that come to us.

Some people like more structure in their lives than others, preferring very routine lives without surprise, and there are those who thrive on new experiences, chaos, and challenges. Regardless of where our personalities fit, some predictability gives us a sense of order, peace of mind, and the confidence necessary for accomplishment. Creativity helps us cope with new situations, and provides interest and excitement. A balance between the two is needed, and the way that balance is weighted is a personal matter. The balance needed is not a constant, and shifts from time to time. When we are presented with new situations, a general accommodation of the unknown is needed until new patterns, rhythms and order become apparent.

These principles can be applied to many aspects of our lives. For example, over time experience has helped me to develop an understanding of the rhythms of my body. I can tell if my heartbeat feels irregular. Familiarity with my body tells me to keep repetitive patterns of exercise and nutrition a part of my daily practice. By using experiential knowledge developed from repetitive patterns I can keep my health practices ordered. This helps me to feel well, freeing me to accomplish things, which enriches my life.

Predictability that comes with experience gives us comfort and security in many ways. Home is a place of familiarity and comfort because we know what to expect there. A favorite chair is a place of comfort and habitual pathways

make navigating within the space of home routine. Objects of familiarity make our homes personal. Ours was a military family for 20 years. Each time we moved, unpacking familiar objects and placing them in our new space helped that place to feel like “home.” This made our new home more predictable therefore more familiar and comfortable.

Most types of work have elements of recurrence. This helps us to develop efficiency and skill at our jobs. Repetitive labor is described by Rebecca Solnit:

“Many makings are so drawn out, so repetitive in their realization that they become routines, rhythms that echo bodily rhythms rather than creation’s break from rhythm. Long after the idea of making the brick has transpired, there are bricks to be made, and so making becomes doing, becomes rhythmic, laborious, cyclical, repetitive.”¹¹

Much of the work within the home is repetitive. Cleaning, laundry, cooking, dishes, weeding the garden, mowing the lawn are all tasks that are performed over and over. The performance of such tasks involves the body and its capacity for rhythm, while the mind transcends the need to be involved in the mundane. The brain is then freed for higher thought and creativity. During my years as a stay-at-home mom, the ability to free my mind while performing the mundane nourished me to a degree. Even still, the acceptance of the tasks was important for emotional health. While I might not have embraced the work, I did accept it and I enjoyed the results. Does satisfaction with repetitive work

¹¹ Rebecca Solnit, “Landscapes of Emergency,” *Ann Hamilton: Sao Paulo/Seattle: a document of two installations* (Seattle, Washington: Henry Gallery Association, 1992), 45.

come from familiarity with the rhythm, from completing the task, or from awareness of one's service? Can there be satisfaction from the path of the task?

The satisfaction that comes from completing the task is fleeting because the work is very soon undone. Satisfaction associated with the path or the *way* of the task is lasting. There is fulfillment in the doing that makes it worth the sacrifice of time and energy. It is helpful to remember that order and peace of mind are results of the predictable and repetitive, and when we break away from the repetitive, one of the more extreme results is chaos. A balance is needed between the repetitive and the creative, or in other words between order and chaos.

It would not be healthy in my home to totally eliminate chaos. It is always filled with projects. In the garage a car is being restored. In the wood shop a son is experimenting with wood turning. In my studio I am using a sculptural process that is new to me. When a project is completed another is started – that part is predictable. But each project brings new experiences, excitement, frustration, and challenge. As certain processes are repeated, skills are developed and confidence increases.

The development of skills and confidence is a goal that parents have for their children. Adults feel a moral obligation to prepare the next generation, and so society has constructed many ways to help accomplish this. The activities that

keep moms driving here and there are available to benefit the child, and parents sacrifice to give children the opportunity to learn and develop skills.

There is much to gain from involvement with sports. Training the body has value, and learning to work with others (which is needed for both team and individual sports) is an important skill. Music lessons require daily practice and the principle learned (experience and repetition bring mastery and confidence) can be applied throughout life. Educational opportunities, both in and out of school, prepare children and enrich their lives. Parents, being aware of the value of such activities, and feeling a moral obligation to provide circumstances that will develop character, too often go overboard. Once again balance is needed.

Rhythm and repetition are evident in family recreation. Each family chooses types of recreation that are enjoyable to them. Experience, habits and patterns develop as they enjoy hobbies together. Of all our family hobbies our favorite is river running. There is a wonderful combination of predictability and the unknown. Preparing to go on a river trip is a familiar routine, as is putting away the gear when we get home. There is a certain routine to a day on the river, and a recognizable feeling of rhythm from the water itself. But you cannot predict the weather, and variations in water conditions make it necessary to respond to each situation. As we balance the predictable and the unknown, we work together to have a fun yet safe day together, and enjoy the sharing of

mishaps and other humorous occurrences.

More important is the feeling of oneness we experience as a family while on these trips. It seems that everything that is powerful about “family” becomes evident. We feel unity as we work together to accomplish the necessary tasks, as we help each other progress down the river safely and as we enjoy each other’s company. Each member of the family is needed and important. We depend on each other and we have learned to stay calm while handling difficulties together.

Dealing with adversity in all aspects of our lives is another way we balance experience with creativity. We cannot predict crises or accidents, and we do not choose problems. In time the situation reveals new patterns and rhythms and builds experience. As our experience grows we become better at handling problems. It also gives us the compassion and understanding to help others in times of need. The processing of afflictions is a continuous cycle that is rarely performed alone. Adversity helps us to learn and progress as we encounter difficulties, as we serve others and as they serve us.

Learning, as we gain experience through repetition, is a lifelong process with its own patterns. There are so many opportunities for development that the choices are usually not between what is good and bad, but between what is good and what might be better. Such choices are personal and not universal. The decision I made to stay at home to raise my children was that type of choice. I

appreciate the complexities of women's lives and the difficult choices they have. Kathleen Gerson says that whatever a woman's choice (between domesticity and work) she faces social disapproval and significant obstacles to achieving goals.¹² A generation later, there is less disapproval and more support from men for the sharing of roles. Young couples are working to balance their roles. At least that is what I see around me at the campus of Brigham Young University. Such sharing makes for a complicated but rewarding rhythm that can develop over a lifetime into harmonious counterpoint.

According to Harold Miller, Professor of Psychology at Brigham Young University, the patterns that we establish in our lives now have temporal dimensionality and extend over time. Rituals and routines, although boring, help us to be efficient, even graceful, with our use of time. Miller says that repetition is virtuous.¹³ Experience and repetition builds order, confidence and peace of mind. One should be thoughtful about the development of rhythms and patterns because the routines of today affect tomorrow's future. Pairing routines with creativity gives needed balance that helps one handle life's surprises.

¹² Gerson, Kathleen, *Hard Choices: How women Decide About Work, Career, and Motherhood* (University of California Press: Berkeley, CA. 1985), 193.

¹³ Miller, Harold, "Managing Time and Multiple Responsibilities," lecture given at Brigham Young University on 10/20/2005.

TENSION

I have used concinnity as a descriptor for the ideals that feed my work, and I have discussed the rhythm and balance that are a part of the realities of life. This section will talk about the tension between principles and pragmatics as I apply them to my work. Having a desire to portray goodness and beauty, and having the ability to do so are two different things. A balance of skills developed through practice and repetition, creative experimentation, and reason is needed to be able to successfully combine concepts and objects.

Gao Xingjian describes the difficulty of combining reason with art.

“While it cannot be denied that reason plays a part in artistic creation, forcing art and ideas into a direct relationship will, in addition to creating a short circuit that spells the death of art, reduce reason to a handful of sterile concepts that in turn will diminish art to little more than pure conceptual speculation. . . Reason in art needs to mature, develop a calm gaze capable of shedding light on the sensations that breed in the darkness, of ordering the sentiments that emerge in the heat of creation; only then will reason begin to take form and beauty appear.”¹⁴

Xingjian also talks about an idea as a prompt, a starting point.¹⁵ Usually my work begins with such a prompt. One side of the work is cognitive, thinking about the idea, related principles, possible meanings, and researching background information. The other side of the work is the time in the field or the studio, gathering materials, experimenting, building and assembling. Much

¹⁴ Xingjian, Gao, *Return to Painting*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 23.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

of the production work is intuitive. There is a natural tension that comes between the two sides of the work, just as there is tension between ideals and realities. A description of the development of my first installation illustrates the process.

When I started graduate school I wanted to pursue ideas relating to domesticity and the ideals of home. *Matter Out of Place* was the starting point. The idea for this installation germinated when I saw a photograph of a Brazilian woman making natural fiber hand dusters. The fiber itself drew my attention. The fact that a poor woman thousands of miles away was earning money by making a product for cleaning houses interested me. I was struck with the universality of people eliminating dirt from their homes in different parts of the world. At the same time, I was aware of the importance of soil for our sustenance. The irony of humanity's fight against dirt while we are also dependent on dirt was palpable.

Having decided to juxtapose Brazilian hand-made fiber brooms against a collection of soils, I started in earnest to collect and document a variety of soils. I began to experiment with containers to hold the soil, and decided on ceramic press-mold bowls to hold the collection. The selection of materials, experimentation and building continued, until the installation developed into its final form of 100 brooms, 27 different types of soil, the documentation of the

gathering of those soils, a poem by Emily Dickinson about sweeping, and three lithographs relating to the poem and the brooms.



Figure 1: Matter Out of Place, 2002



Figure 2: Matter Out of Place, detail

Meanwhile, I developed the cognitive side of the work by reading background information such as *Domesticity and Dirt* by Phyllis Palmer,¹⁶ by looking at the work of other artists, and by working with Martha Peacock, studying Feminism and domesticity. The research increased my knowledge about the history of domesticity and the history of women's roles within the structure of the family.

The implementation of this knowledge into my work came later. Very little of my background research was evident in *Matter Out of Place*. The concept portrayed remained close to my original idea. It engaged the interest of viewers for a long time, and I was pleased with the appearance of the work. However, it was my intention that the brooms and the dirt be in equal tension. The collection of soils and their documentation turned out to be more powerful than the brooms. In spite of these shortcomings I felt that the exhibit had material integrity and successfully created dialogue.

The next year I created *Complex and Layered Structures* (2003) and the year after that *Endlessly Happy* (2004). Based on feedback from the faculty, from viewers, and from self-evaluation, the integration of reason and art was stronger with each exhibit, and the principles I want to express are becoming more evident in the work. I still struggle as I continue to make new installations.

¹⁶ Palmer, Phyllis. *Domesticity and Dirt* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989)

Understanding principles and expressing them in a way that will be understood by the viewer is not easy nor is it exact. With more experience I hope to build confidence and skill. It is my desire to create high quality, beautiful work that successfully represents concepts, yet does it in a poetic way with layers of meaning that create discourse.

In March of 2005 I exhibited *Perennial*. The summer before, while weeding my flower gardens, I felt that I could represent the repetitive work in the home with an installation about gardening. With that idea in my mind, certain images I came across had an impact and stuck with me. One was wheat grass at the health food store. Another was a potting table with a copper dry sink that I saw on a television do-it-yourself program. These images combined in my mind, and I could visualize a long line of grass leading to a potting table.

I had spent quite a bit of time researching and thinking about repetitive tasks for previous installations. Once I began working on *Perennial* I started thinking in terms of rhythm and cycles, and then life cycles. It was a natural progression of thought since I was thinking about gardening and plants as metaphors. As I developed the cognitive side of the work I also researched the design of Shaker work tables and potting tables. I started the production side of the work, experimenting with materials. I built ceramic trays for the wheat grass, gathered weeds and rose petals, tested different methods for processing of

materials, and built tables. I designed six elements for the exhibit, each representing an aspect of life's journey. I wanted the viewer to walk through the gallery, encountering the different elements in turn. The concept, materials, and overall experience within the gallery space would unify the installation.

To further develop the cognitive side of the work I read volumes of poetry, looking for poems that expressed thoughts similar to those I was trying to express visually. I read essays in *Art in Theory: 1900-1990*, and had discussions with studio faculty about the concepts I wanted to portray. I studied the thesaurus at length, and carefully chose a title for the exhibit, then selected meanings of the word Perennial that I wanted to emphasize. The result was this list:

Perennial

Continuous

(ceaseless, endless, perpetual, cyclical, repetitive, recurrent, periodic)

Durable

(lasting, enduring, persistent, steadfast, evergreen, permanent, long-lasting)

Constant

(continual, steady, regular, unbroken)

I had selected the auditorium gallery in the Harold B. Lee Library for my exhibit, but needed approval from the library gallery committee. They had concerns about some of my ideas, and those concerns needed to be addressed. They did not want dirt piled directly onto the floor. It needed to be on something, and it needed a barrier around it to prevent any dirt from sliding onto the carpet. They did not want trays of grass directly on the floor, or anything else on the floor. Everything needed to be elevated, and care taken so that no one could trip. No nails were allowed in the walls, and nothing could be hung from the ceiling. Some of my designs had to be modified in order to satisfy their concerns, but eventually they approved the exhibit.



Figure 3: Perennial, 2005, installation view

Perennial is about beginnings, endings, and transitions in life. This installation holds a feeling of reverence for the earth, for life, and for life's trials and rewards. When the viewer enters the gallery space he sees a long, narrow path of wheat grass that leads to a table at the end of the room (fig. 3). The



Figure 4: Perennial, detail of grass

green, growing horizontal column of grass is contained by eight ceramic trays, each a punctuated phrase. The ceramic trays look ancient, grounded, and experienced. The grass grows and changes during the exhibition, showing returning viewers evolution and progression (fig. 4).

The table at the end of the path is designed in the manner of a potting table or Shaker work table. Because of its placement in the room it is reminiscent of an altar. The backing, where tools would normally hang, becomes an

altarpiece. The potting table has a copper dry sink that is partially filled with water which becomes a sign for washings. The materials ground the table to the earth. Visible through the open back of the table hangs bronze fruit that is suspended in the space beyond the altar (fig.5).



Figure 5: Perennial, detail



Figure 6: Perennial. detail of sink. fruit



The space “beyond” is metaphorical as well as literal, and represents a new journey, rebirth, or another beginning. Viewers wonder if the fruit is ceramic, stone, concrete, or actual fruit. The fruit can be thought of as a reward for good deeds (the fruit of labors), and the white patina can represent

a touch of the Divine, the white fruit in Lehi’s dream, or the beginning of decay (fig. 6, 7).

Figure 7: Perennial, detail of bronze fruit



Figure 8: Perennial (Presence)

The mound of soil, *Perennial (Presence)*, (fig. 8), represents another beginning point. It is also the earth, our place of existence and a source of nourishment. The seeds, *Perennial (Promise)*, (fig. 7) are hope, the promise of a new start, the importance of posterity, the promise of things to come, the cycle of growth, the promise we hold for the next generation, and the faith we carry in our hearts.



Figure 9: Perennial (Promise)

Perennial (Persistence), (fig. 10), is a pile of weeds, carefully cradled. The weeds are noxious, pokey, itchy, tenacious and overbearing. They are life's afflictions, trials and problems. Seeds from these weeds have been carefully picked and stuffed into pillows. This shows the processing of our afflictions or dealing with our problems. They are turned into something soft, useful, and more alive.



Figure 10: Perennial (Persistence)

Another table, piled with rose petals, is a further representation of the processing of afflictions and transgressions. A ceramic bowl holds ground rose

petals, and another bowl holds white rose petals. Step by step the crimson becomes white. The processing is another continuous cycle (fig. 11).



Figure 11: Perennial (Process)

As the viewer walks through the gallery and encounters these different elements, they are tied together by content and consistency of materials. They are all a part of a whole that represents the journey of life, its cycles and transitions.



Figure 12: Perennial, Installation view

The viewer has the following artist statement to guide them:

My hands are cold and clumsy as I pull the white balls of seeds from the vine. "I should do this later in the day when it is warmer." But I have the time right now. The seeds feel cold and slightly damp from frost. "I should do this later, after the sun has dried them out." I keep picking, having developed a rhythm. But it is not the rhythm of Gershwin or African drums. It is not the rhythm of machinery. It is the natural rhythm of weeding a garden, weaving a basket, sharpening a knife or chopping wood. It is the cadence of countless quiet conversations in a large room. I continue plucking at this pace. My son says he has noticed that seeds up high are of better quality. I acknowledge his observation for I have discovered the same thing. "Is it necessary that we gather high quality seeds so I can hide them inside stuffed pillows?" No, it is not necessary. I continue to reach high for the "better" puffs of seed. I am compelled to do so.

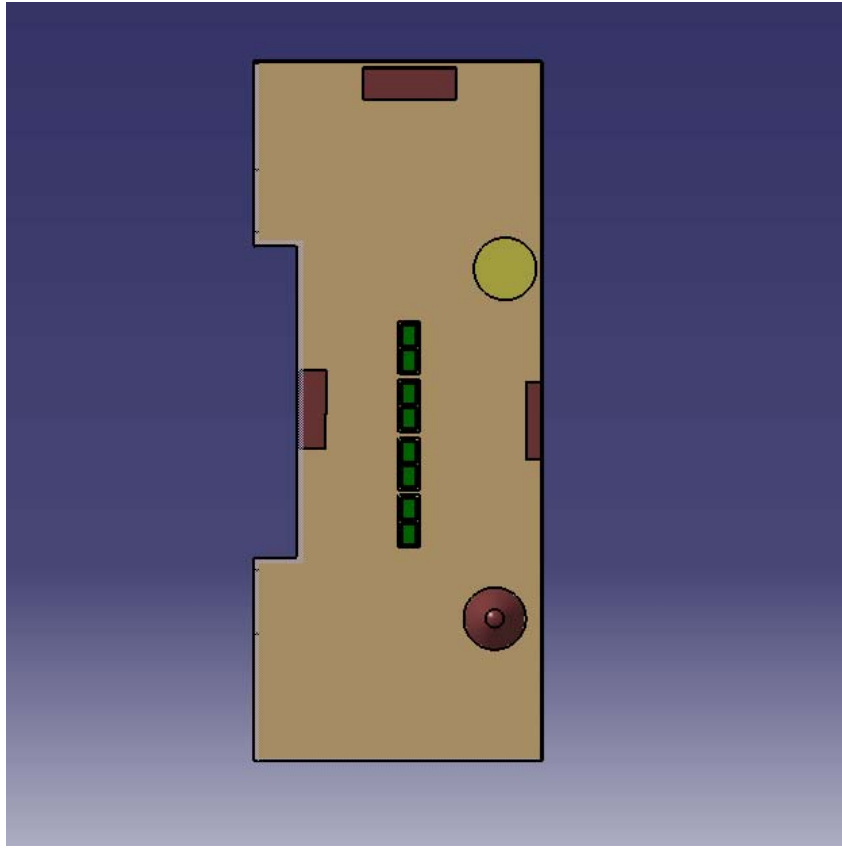
Through my compulsions for gathering, processing and building I have created this installation. I have included poetry as text to give context. This exhibit holds a place that is in between that of single objects and what Robert Morris referred to as "mutable stuff."¹⁷ More significant than any object in the gallery is the collective meaning that is imparted because of the whole.

¹⁷ "What art now has in its hands is mutable stuff which need not arrive at the point of being finalized with respect to either time or space. The notion that work is an irreversible process ending in a static icon-object no longer has much relevance." Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture 4: Beyond Objects," in *Art in Theory: 1900-1990*. eds. Harrison, Charles, and Paul Wood, 868-873. (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1999), 872.

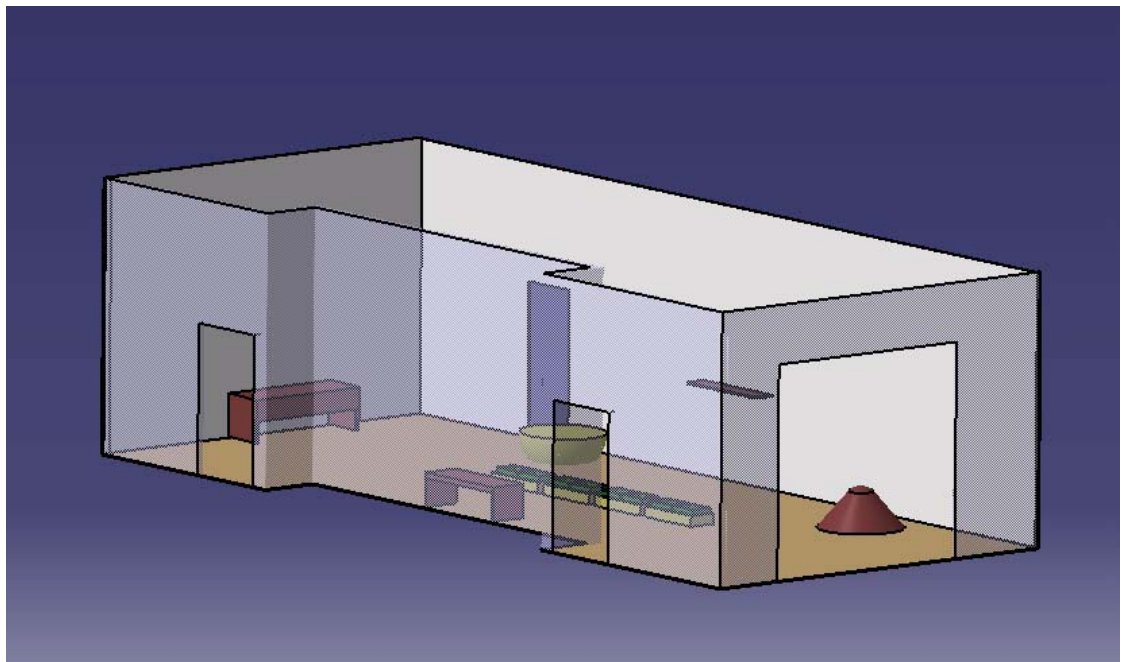
Once the work was installed and I had a chance to respond to it in the gallery, I made a few changes. In retrospect, the biggest problem was the use of space. The elements were fairly equidistant from each other. It would have been ideal if I could have spread the elements into a series of small rooms, but of course that option was not available. Although the gallery did not feel crowded, the way the viewer had to negotiate the space to view all of the elements did not reinforce the concept of a journey through life, or the idea of the circular paths of cycles.

Fig. 13 and 14 show the layout of the gallery space, with doorways and the elements of the exhibition in place. I wanted to provide a rich experience with many things for the viewer to absorb, and I also wanted to represent different aspects of life's journey. In those regards each element in the exhibit was important. However, the relationships between elements might have been improved by eliminating some of them.

The issues I had to deal with due to restrictions from the library committee turned out to be positive in some respects, and negative in others. Creating a way to hang the bronze fruit was challenging but turned out well. I elevated the grass off the floor with large fire bricks, which actually improved its appearance. In other cases I think the work was compromised. I had to maintain



Figures 13 and 14: Layout of library gallery as installed



the grass myself, and the library would not give me access to the neighboring kitchen area which they keep locked. This meant I had to keep the watering can in the gallery space where it was a distraction. Another compromise involved the hanging of the shelf that held the seed pouches. A simple wedge on the wall was my first choice, but that was not possible. I designed a way for the shelf to hang from the track, making it as clean and simple as I could, but the wires were still obtrusive. I wanted the pile of rose petals to overflow onto the floor, but I had to keep the carpet free for vacuuming and instead had to contain the petals onto the table. This made the edge of the petals against the edge of the stone table top harsher than I intended.

That being said, there were many good things about the installation. Based on evaluations from my committee, other faculty members, visiting artists, the library committee, and other viewers the exhibit was resolved and very well done. Those evaluations echoed my personal feelings. I thought it was beautiful, and I felt that concepts about life cycles were evident. Many viewers agreed. Here are just a few of the comments about *Perennial*. "Somehow like a ceremony! I felt like praying at the entrance by the green and growing column. Every one of the images holds mystery – which I love. The 'universe of fruitfulness' (the central pear moving – but not quite) is brilliant. A wonderful and successful attempt to find meaning and unity and hope." -Dawn Brimley. "I

don't have the words to express the joy your art brings to my soul." – Alan Groesbeck. "I love the rhythm and repetition of the art works tying into the theme of the natural, spontaneous repetition in gardening and working." Elliott Wise. "This exhibit was really very soothing and thought provoking. I enjoyed the peace and wonder that came from nature and the development of life and death." Katherine Williams.

Although there were some problems due to the restrictions of the gallery space, the overall result of the exhibition was positive. Based on my own evaluation, the evaluation of the faculty and of my peers, *Perennial* combined concepts and materials in a way that promoted thought, feelings and discourse.

CONCLUSION

My final project, *Perennial*, was the culmination of my graduate program. Over the past few years I have become better at taking principles that inspire me and incorporating them into my work. It is challenging to balance ideals and realities, blend thoughts and materials, and create something of sophistication that the viewer will understand. Gao Xingjian says, "The process is a complex one. It cannot be brought off in one fell swoop. And regardless of whether the ideas are still in gestation or the artist is already deep into the work, he will have to revisit reason again and again until it is seamlessly embedded into the work and becomes spirit emerging as a visual image."¹⁸

I am attracted to certain materials. I gather and assemble them intuitively. Materiality is one of the most obvious things about my work. But it is principles that give the materials value and meaning. Having the ability to successfully portray goodness and beauty, acceptance and unity, through a combination of experience and creativity is my desire. By developing this ability, my hope is to create installations that merge reason and art, resulting in spirit.

¹⁸ Xingjian, Gao, *Return to Painting*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 24.

WORKS CITED

- Fieser, James. "Ethics," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/ethics.html> (accessed Sept. 30, 2005).
- Gerson, Kathleen. *Hard Choices: How Women Decide About Work, Career, and Motherhood*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985.
- Hunter, Ian. "Aesthetics and the Arts of Life," in *Aesthesia & the Economy of the Senses*. Ed. Grace H. Sydney, New South Wales, Australia: PAD Publications, University of Western Sydney, 1996.
- Hickey, Dave. "Enter the Dragon, on the vernacular of beauty," *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty*. Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1993.
- Morris, Robert. "Notes on Sculpture 4: Beyond Objects," in *Art in Theory, 1900-1990*. eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, 868-873. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1999.
- Palmer, Phyllis. *Domesticity and Dirt*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989.
- Proudfoot, Michael. "Aesthetics," *An Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Florence, KY: Routledge, 1996.
- Slater, B. H. "Aesthetics," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/a/aestheti.html> (accessed August 16, 2005).
- Solnit, Rebecca. "Landscapes of Emergency," *Ann Hamilton: Sao Paulo/Seattle: a document of two installations*. Seattle, Washington: Henry Gallery Association, 1992.
- Woodruff, Paul. *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Xingjian, Gao. *Return to Painting*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002.