

Action

By

Scott Michael Phillips

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of Fine Arts

May 2010

To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the thesis of Scott Michael Phillips find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

Chris Watts, Chair, M.F.A.

Marianne Kinkel, Ph.D Art History

Nickolus Meisel, M.F.A.

ACTION

Abstract

By Scott Michael Phillips, M.F.A.
Washington State University
May 2010

Chair: Chris Watts

The work is about bodily memories, specifically and generally. Memories by chance experience, while others are quite the opposite. I try to sync the memory visually in terms of what is happening now, my world, compounded by the years of filters that have grayed that memory. The remake of the memory manifests in the form of a painting as a permanent entity both physically and emotionally. The initial emotional period is a search for clarity of memories and the neglect of convention as a measure of individualism. My process allows room for emotional engagement, which strengthens the bond between self and painting.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
TAKE	
1. TAKE ONE.....	1
2. TAKE TWO.....	1
3. TAKE FOUR.....	5

Take One

The following paper was dictated through an audio/video recording and transcribed verbatim, with a few exceptions. Video recording is intriguing as such it records a single point perspective. This perspective is unchanging, but can have multiple perspectives when viewed by an audience. Ideas in the recording can be overlooked by some and caught by others. As time passes the memory of that recording begins to gray. Yet we are always able to revisit the digital recording to regain clarity. Memory is refreshed and often times refined with a new perspective. Without this technological aid, the memory slowly fades and has the potential to be forgotten. My work fits in a similar alignment. The only visual recordation of my memories are the paintings, which are generalized remakes of lost information. This method is fitting, because the work is about engaging oppositions of specificity and generalization in remembering my body. As a result, the work walks a delicate aesthetic line between unease and balance.

Take Two

You know this almost seems fitting, actually, it is fitting, that this is a second attempt at recording thoughts

through video. The first attempt, the memory of the video card only had 53 seconds of space remaining. So, it is only appropriate that this mishap happened. It seems that life is full of experience: not entirely scripted by any means, but quite often at times uneasily pleasant. Because experience is there, it will happen. With that in mind, it is only fitting that my work stems from the bodily experience. It is by no means a definitive example of my experience, but merely a sampling of my close relationship with the body.

My early childhood was full of misfortune. The first real bodily shock was breaking my femur; falling out of a tree tends to break bones. Because of this, there was a close relationship that I had garnered with pain, the reality of learning how to walk again and the ties of my brothers who had helped me to safety after the fall and stayed by my side at recovery. There was something more in life than play and fun, I had experienced bodily pain and along with that a process of mental repair. At the time gathering sticks from dead tree limbs made for an excellent day in building a childhood fort.

This seemingly innocent act of playing in a tree had a life altering experience tied with it. Because of this, I wonder if some chance experiences are truly unintentional or if they are quite the opposite. My work stems from memory. They are memories of mishap and unfortunate events that have somehow

engrained themselves into my memory. They can be called flashbulb memories, events so severe that they sizzle the moment firmly into your mind. Some people can talk about their experiences and tell outlandish stories. These are verbally expressed experiences that form to tell a great story, my stories come through the paintings, and these paintings are my outlandish stories.

My process is such that there needs to be an emotional connection to the work. An emotional engagement, that if it were not, a disconnect would force my hand away from the paintings. If this occurs, the work is shed from the wall and joins the bone pile. This intense awareness to maintain a connection when producing a work causes the process to lengthen prior to the start of the actual work. Tied to this connection is my will to avoid any idea of current conventions. The initial emotional period is a search for clarity of thought and the neglect of convention as a measure of personal transparency.

This period of emotional connection of past memory continues until something sticks or has some sort of holding point. Once a memory catches a personal interest, there is a time of thought and reflection about that memory, a digestion to extract every moment of that memory and to ponder different angles of that memory. There is then a search for relation to what is happening now, the surrounding world, compounded by the

years of filters that have grayed that memory and how that memory can be visually represented. There is a vagueness of recollection about these specific experiences, both visually and emotionally, that creates a window for expression. The remake of the memory in the form of a painting refreshes the memory both physically and emotionally.

This process of thinking and finding, filtering and remaking can be long and tiresome. The memories that are worked from are found by systematically scanning through my visual catalogue of bodily trauma. They are mentally churned while simultaneously preparing to do the actual piece of art in a brief episodic window. There is an immediate rush of work as though the memory wants to be recreated and disposed of as quickly as possible. It is quite disturbing that the immediacy of the trauma is the polar opposite endured by the longevity of the emotional strain. It is similar to the memory being recreated, a painful experience that wants to quickly vanish and disband once the experience is laid down on canvas. Similar to any other experience that has been bottled up, once it has been talked about, all active engagement ceases. My work is about visually exploring past memory through filtered experiences. This represents a visual communication of memory and past experiences in relation to now.

There is nothing set in stone. As we have our memories, we

are free to reinterpret them. This is how my work should be looked at, as a reinterpretation of my memories. Depending on what happens to me tonight, tomorrow when I wake up, the next moment, if I cross the street and drop my pencil, depending on what happens in the future the painting may change. A painting's title may change. Nothing is set in stone. The memories are recreated as they are seen now and the now is not going to be the same tomorrow. The passage of time compounds the lenses in which the memory is viewed. There is an extreme amount of versatility coming from this point of view while at the same time rooting individual works in a very specific memory.

Materials are but not limited to when recreating memory are: leftover strips of canvas, discarded latex, bargain bin paint, left over yarn and garbage. Finding a use for reclaimed materials is seen as a metaphor. This is revitalizing the old, discarded material and reshaping it into the form of past experiences as current memory.

Take Four

This would have been take three, but my battery was dead so we can call this take four. About a day has passed and someone has asked the question: Why does your work shift, why does it

change so often? What it comes down to is that I always feel like I have to create something new. It goes back to experience; each experience is something new and different. For example, even though you have taken the garbage out a hundred times, you might take it out at different hours of the day. Maybe your garbage can is a little fuller on certain days than others, making it heavier or lighter than previous garbage days.

It is these small nuances that people may notice but often overlook, to where they think they are taking out the trash week after week and doing the same experience over and over, rendering the act mundane. It is really about the individual making this action an experience and feeling the world around them while in the act. The sounds of: cars, quail, squirrels and the rustle of the leaves all contribute to the weight of that garbage can. It is all these subtle differences per act that make each experience different, but you have to recognize this.

This is something I recognize, each painting I do is going to be different. The shifts that occur in my work primarily depend on the emotional shifts in my life. Mental shifts that deal with environment, personal interactions and intake of information. I have no intentions of continuing particular veins of work for any extended period of time. I will continue to explore new experiences. I don't ever want to become stuck

in a particular style of work where I start to believe the act is becoming mundane, and I stop noticing the subtleties of the experience.



Cross Section



Opening I



Tied Up



Intake and Exhale