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Travis Novak

March 27th, 2012

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Memory lacks. It's a tease, always leaving information out, no matter how important. Imagination is forced to pick up the slack. Flawed memory is a tool that allows an altered reality to exist in the disconnect between a past reality and a present fiction. My work starts with scenarios that evolve into things bigger than themselves, going beyond nostalgia to become celebrations, landmarks, or memorials. Exaggeration, embellishment, adornment, stylization, modification, and customization are methods I use to move through these scenarios and often arrive at a transformative shift. Earth tones become fluorescent; small becomes tall; physical becomes metaphysical; and creatures survive physically altering states and deadly evolutions. At times my work seems dark or the situation may seem bleak but only through this sense of absence or falling away can the transformation take place. Only then can a story be retold and preserved. This preservation process begins the moment a thing dies. Its optimum resides in the past allowing the function of the memory to operate as a preserver. This is the human longing for greater satisfaction and fulfillment. We experience loss, supplement it with celebration and spectacle, and then attempt to preserve it all.

In the effort to preserve, sometimes a layering or blanketing of cultural and personal experiences occurs, much like a mummification process or the entombed city of Pompeii. It seems the more we project to preserve, the more ambiguous and watered-down the integrity of the original experience becomes. That continual failure to preserve and immortalize is a natural wonder in itself. It's the complex of Mt. Vesuvius: simultaneously destroying yet preserving the city of Pompeii and propelling it into its current state of wonder.

Borrowing from taxidermy has become a regular part of my process. Both taxidermy and story telling share a romance with the commonplace, making myths from the real. Death is essential to taxidermy, which functions by making lifeless forms appear to be living, more dramatically and powerfully than in actuality. It's a form of resurrection; a way humans immortalize, sometimes theatrically, stories of wonder. It embodies the human desire for something greater than what we're given, an inexplicable or spiritual experience, a rapture from the earthly, something that amazes us or takes us to a sublime moment of enlightenment.

This is what my works do. They often function like memories and dreams. Objects are casted to repeat, freeze time, or indulge in an idea, much like the retelling of a story. Often, a copy of a copy is made and ambiguity increases with each attempt. Material longevity is not important because memories and dreams never stay the same and the past is constantly eroding and falling away. Likewise, a flex, bend, movement, or implied movement has become important for my work. Urethane rubber, latex rubber, and fabric have all been part of maintaining this literal movement and flux. These are strategies that create a transitory state and allow the viewer to feel as if the sculptures are living stories and not just inanimate objects or icons. My work reveals the human desire to constantly resurrect the past and the complications and implications that come along with that, sometimes for the best and sometimes leading to its demise, but always shifting.