

THE MASS OF SOLITUDE

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The Mass of Solitude

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Abstract

Weathering, metamorphosis, heat, and tectonics are forces that form and transform the earth. Over millennia, these methods of abrasion construct captivating structures out of ubiquitous materials. I reference rock landscapes by using the same minerals to create new metamorphic rocks. By stripping clay down to its basic nature, I exploit the rawness of the material.

These craggy surfaces hold a presence of solemnity. The undulations and irregularities of these objects are what give them fortitude, encouraging contemplation in the viewer; a time to recognize the earnestness of life in comparison to the gravity of death. I have found myself in this capacity when hiking through desert landscapes. The massiveness of the rock formations combined with the expansiveness of the horizon, humbles me to a contemplative state. In these times of solitude, I have been able to resolve who I am and what is important to me. I replicate these experiences, evoking solemnity in the viewer interacting with my work.

Prologue

I find myself in a constant search for clarity and relief from my busy mind. At times, I feel I cannot decipher truth from fiction. I have found clarity by hiking in the Southwestern landscapes, practicing meditation, or through the act of creating pottery. In these activities, I reach a contemplative state of solitude and reflection.

While in these moments of contemplation, I have concluded that religions are mankind's attempts to justify, shame, gain power and money, belittle others, and cope with grief. For these reasons, I renounced the false security of faith and accepted the reality that I see in front of me. As an agnostic, I made the mountains my god and the earth my love.

When I was a child, I was taught that if I did not accept the gift of Christ and mimic his ways, that there would be hell to pay. The Earth does not care what I take or what I leave. The mountains need no praise and control no one. They stood before I lived, will exist after I die, and have taken no notice of my actions. In this simple act of existing, they exude more power, knowledge, and wisdom than all the prophets and gods combined. I find god to be insecure due to the need of praise, yet said to be all powerful. I often ask, "Why would the all-powerful care what I do?" It is these characteristics of ultimate control that I find oppressive and contrived.

I tie together the similarities between traditional Japanese ceramics and the Southwestern landscapes. Both exude the rugged natural world. These experiences have evoked soul searching, leading me to agnosticism. This body of work reflects the emptiness of our existence and freedom we gain from that knowledg

Chapter I. Objects of Contemplation

Tectonic forces are constantly molding the earth. Mineral abrasion is shaping what seems unshapable. After this process, minerals are forced deep into the earth. The heat within transforms old minerals into new. This is the act of metamorphosis. Water and the chemicals it contains cures mineral particles together to become one mass. This is the act of sedimentation. As seen in Figure 1, I mimic the million-year process of transforming clay into rock. I form clay into an acceptable shape. I choose the word “acceptable” because I am not in full control; I do not want to be. I shape the clay with dents, scrapes, and knicks to become a solid form, a form representing rawness, freedom, acceptance, strength, and unknown utility.

This new object is then made permanent by fire or chemical curing. This gives it new chemical and mineralogical properties. A sedimentary rock is now metamorphic. The firing process is at times untamable yet persuadable. It provides unknown surfaces that allow excitement and surprise. It helps the artist never tire, placing infinity before them.

I step aside to allow the clay to speak and exploit the material, showing the similarities between natural rock formations and my pieces. The objects are of the earth. They show that clay is mined not manufactured, portraying rawness, cragginess, roughness, irregularity, humility, the unknown, and the untamed (Figure 2 Adobe Sculpture). I force without appearing forceful, design without designing. By not letting my preconception of the piece be seen in the final product, my work obtains rugged characteristics by working swiftly. The clay and I have a conversation, making a mark and then looking, by reacting one mark at a time. I tear an edge and listen... “What does that tear say in relation to the rest of the piece? Does it speak too dominantly? Does it echo the other edges? Is it placed too symmetrically?” We converse

until we are in agreement that harmony has been found.

As an introvert, I create objects so the user develops a personal relationship with me vicariously through my work. I create vessels that accept the rawness of the material and the gesture of my hand. These objects embrace varied levels of utility, holding a quiet presence.

The limelight makes me uncomfortable. Many Post-Modern artists such as Andy Warhol did not make craftsmanship the forefront of their artistic process. Warhol's art was a representation of his personality. He was a strong craftsman but he wanted to be an icon more than a craftsman. However, my goal is to be a craftsman who allows the clay to be my icon.

Post-Modern artists try to emerge with “never before seen ideas.” This breeds self-aggrandizement rather than depth of feeling or emotion. It is naive to believe modern mankind is different from our ancestors, or that archaic modes of thought are irrelevant to our society. It is through traditions that we are nourished spiritually and emotionally. To believe we can disregard centuries of research is narrow-minded. To progress our field, we must embrace what came before us. Our greatest forms of success will reflect that of our predecessors.

I work similarly to historical 16th century Korean and Japanese potters, artists who were often peasants and slaves. They made work with a mindset of acceptance. Irregularities were accepted and often embraced as more beautiful than the symmetrical. When we are restrained to symmetry, the objects lose relatability. Restraint from gesture shows a lack of freedom and acceptance. We want to be accepted with our strengths along with our weaknesses, to have the freedom to be.

We are inherently drawn to flaws because they are relatable. The wise can recognize their flaw and still accept themselves as works-in-progress. This is why my objects have irregular contours and are slightly misshapen. These objects become timeless in what they communicate. They pass barriers of language and culture. Their form exudes an aura of rawness, fortitude, contemplation, and solitude. My

pieces have protruding impurities, undulating edges, asymmetrical contours, torn textures, process marks and fissures to express fortitude. It shows a quiet confidence. To be, is to accept ones self. This is the same confidence as the landscapes that inspire me.

The landscapes I reference exist with a dignified presence; they simply are. They hold themselves without being blown by the trends of humanity. Humanity is moved by the presence of the mountains. The mountains are moved by eons of time passing by, while standing with patience. Allowing the winds to blow and the rain to fall, these formations react one detail at a time. They hold equality to all who interact with them, having no prejudice.

I am overcome with solemnity and contemplation when in the desert landscape. I contemplate my solitude in these spaces. I ask myself existential questions. In this photo taken of Canyonlands National Park (Figure 3), one can see the mass of the rock formations and the expansiveness of space. These aspects humble viewers into feelings of solitude and insignificance; characteristics that liberate and give freedom to exist alongside the ancient natural architecture.

My works reflect contemplation and solitude. Through this contemplation, I accept my flaws, recognizing life is a practice and I am a work in progress. When hiking through the desert, I am surrounded by towering rock formations and vast horizons. The millions of years it took to create these beautiful landscapes humbles me. Being in the presence of the formations helps me understand my personal values and beliefs. I mimic the erratic rock architecture of the Southwest in my work. This can bring the one interacting with my work to a similar state of self-reflection. They meditate on life's questions of existence. One can find solace through the objects that I create. They have beauty within their own imperfections.

Chapter II. The Wood Fired Aesthetic

Potters choose between control and acceptance when making. Similar to hiking, the route is planned to an extent. Trails are subject to the topography; this requires one to scale boulders, balance on narrow pathways, and make one's way up inclines and over ravines. The wood-fire potter applies the knowledge of past mentors and personal experience. However, each wood firing produces results with surprises both positive and negative.

Unpredictability is evident in wood firing. I control without being controlling, I force without being forceful, I compromise with the kiln in humble confidence. A good fireman will flow with the kiln, listening, then reacting. The results of a good firing are ranges from yellow to red with blushes of blue gray. Over the clay, ash colors the work with green glass. These are the aspects I embrace. The unpredictable within my wood fired work as well as my adobe sculptures (Figure 4, *Adobe Sculpture*). It is this act of learning to compromise and flow, while studying the effects of wood firing that taught me how to achieve the adobe surfaces.

When the clay is malleable, the skilled artist will find a compromise between rigidity and gesture. Geometry will give structure to the work. To give life to the work one must embrace the nature of the material. If the clay speaks louder than the maker, he/she loses validity. If the maker speaks louder than the material, the work becomes narcissistic. As the maker listens to the clay, they have a conversation you can see in the final product. First, the hand speaks to the material, then the material speaks to the flame. A potter becomes the mediator between the clay and the fire.

I begin with my clay recipe. Melting agents, stabilizers, glass formers, textural particles, colorants, and plasticizers form the clay body that I use. I have scrutinized this mixture for years, yet my work does not show the time that I spent mixing and testing. This recipe gives the clay a unique voice. My goal as an

artist, is similar to a director or playwright. I plan others to be the star of my creativity. The clay recipes I use are the actors on the stage. I form the piece but use little decoration, leaving the natural untamed characteristics of the dirt as the adornment. The clay is revealed to show the textures, inclusions, earth tones, and natural impurities.

This compromise is found in Modern art, design, and architecture. The maker directs the material to take shape while expressing the medium. In Modern furniture, natural woods are left exposed so the viewer/user can see the grain (Similar to the Eames Chair in figure 5). In modern architecture, steel, and concrete are polished, not painted or covered; designers leave structural supports exposed function and aesthetics.

In wood firing, each species of wood burned in a kiln has pulled different minerals from the ground. This causes the ash to vary in color when melted. Depending on traces of potassium, magnesium, sodium, and calcium the clay takes on shades of red to yellow. These soluble salts are found within the bark and outer fibers of a tree. This makes the outside rings most important for wood firing. As the organics are burned away, the alkalis remain in the form of ash.

Figure 6(*Calcium Noodle Bowl*) is an example of the high calcium ash of cottonwood. The calcium rich ash is opaque and yellow. In Figure 7(*Potassium Noodle Bowl*), you can see ash from pine, oak, and maple where the ash is green and transparent. This is the example of yellow potassium rich cottonwood ash. The ash is abrasive like rocks and sand beating the face of a cliff. Exposed surfaces can be both eroded and built up by the flow of ash. The volatile salts can deteriorate the surface of a pot in minute ways, revealing particles embedded within the clay. The ash adheres to surfaces, building up layer upon layer. At peak temperatures, the ash within the kiln melts and becomes viscous. This allows fusion of clay and ash. Figure 7 is an example of these effects taking place within the interior of the bowls.

Heat transforms sedimentary and igneous rock into metamorphic rock. Erosion breaks clay down into small particles, giving clay plasticity. When heat is applied, clay is chemically changed to ceramic. Plate tectonics move the earth forcing minerals deep into the center where they are heated and melted. Likewise, I am heating and melting minerals to become new objects with new characteristics.

The wood fired piece records the flame within the kiln. As the fire grows in size, the flame lengthens. The flame weaves between the vessels stacked inside. A skillful potter will control the positive and negative space when they load the kiln. This act allows the potter to direct the flame's path so the flame will touch the pots in a specific way. This process gives the work within the kiln "flashing." Flashing is the dramatic blushes, and varied hues found in wood firing. The shifts of color on the sculpture in figure 9(*Untitled Sculpture*) are examples of flashing. The flame will vary in velocity and change the contents carried within the flame. A fast-moving flame will hold more oxygen and ash particles. As the flame begins to slow down, there is less oxygen within the flame causing it to pull oxygen from the objects stacked inside. The slower flame will also hold less ash; this administers small particles and salty vapors to the work.

Each stoke causes the amount of ash, carbon, heat, and reduction in the flame to change. The flame moves and leaves flashing marks that build up a recording the fire. There is a sense of austerity in each piece that mimics the iron rich cliffs of Zion National Park (figure 10) These cliffs are speckled with small amounts of green vegetation covering the deep earth tones below. The surfaces of the clay become wild and untamed after so much control has been exercised to acquire them. This is how I relate my work to the natural without looking forced.

After many years of wood firing and learning how the natural surfaces look, I have been able to direct that understanding onto the surface of my adobe sculptures. I have learned the aesthetic and

developed an eye to control a surface without firing.

When I hike through the desert, I often reflect on the aesthetic of wood fired ceramics and the weathered surfaces in nature. I see the rain-washing out mineral impurities that flow down the face of a cliff. Similar to the flow of minerals and ash that drip down the vessels. They both become a canvas of hues shifting in tone and texture, sprinkled on top with the green of cedar trees or green ash on the pots.

The successful collaboration makes a harmonized object, so that one element is not speaking louder than the other. This sets up a dialogue between the user/viewer and the maker vicariously through the work. The conversation has depth, meaning, balance, and compromise. When compromise is not found, the work will gravitate to one end of the spectrum or the other. On one end the artist's skill will overpower the piece. The maker's vanity becomes the focus. On the other end, if the material is dominating the piece; the work becomes flaccid, lacking structure. This would be similar to having an in-depth conversation with an inebriated individual. Often you will see a third extreme where you find a beautiful wood fired surface with no depth of form. The interaction becomes skin deep, lacking the bones needed for structure and substance. I strive to speak to the individual that interacts with my work in a meaningful way.

III. Mass and Form

The process of firing has its limitations. In order for my sculptures to hold a similar presence to the rock formations, I needed to increase the size. However, the mass caused the ceramic pieces to disintegrate during the firing. After months of testing and failure I left the realm of fired ceramics to unfired adobe (a mixture of locally sourced clay and cement). This was to avoid explosions during the firing process. Years of wood firing informed my process, helping me develop the eye for a natural surface without looking contrived.

By using locally dug clay that is raw and unrefined, I embrace a level of serendipity as I mix it with concrete to cure. This method of finding different clays and mixing allows me to achieve the irregularity and variation I used to achieve with a wood kiln. Different veins of clay have different mineralogical makeups. This can change the color and texture dramatically. The raw and unpredictable surface depends on where the clay was dug, and by not fully mixing the clay together with cement. With each mix, I practice an acceptance of characteristics knowing that it will fall into a certain range that I find satisfactory.

The years of testing clay formulation was left behind, yet I take a similar approach to building with adobe in that I wish the material to be the star. The time and labor of locating, testing, and digging local clay is not evident but it adds to the serendipity and raw natural state my sculptures embrace. The clay I dig often contains limestone rocks that make the work self-destruct post-firing the clay. Using this clay in a portland cement mixture captures the rawness I desire as well as the variation in surface, all while allowing the material to harden through curing rather than firing. This stops the limestone from causing my pieces to crumble after they have been fired. It becomes a compromise within surface and material, embracing the unknown clays to my advantage.

As seen in figure 8(*Adobe Sculpture*). Natural geological structures are often formed through chemical solidification and sedimentation. I synthetically recreate this natural process through the curing of cement. All these processes in geology or in my artistic practice use happenstance to create rugged and raw characteristics in objects.

With the adobe, I mimic flashing by smearing clay onto the cured adobe in an unplanned irregular fashion. I avoid looking at the piece as I layer the materials. Then, by smearing liquid cement over the clay and bare adobe I can build up layers of multiple materials to mimic the wood fired results.

These raw surfaces take weeks to achieve. I first build the basic shape of the sculpture out of adobe around a rebar armature on top of a plywood mold. I let this mixture cure to hardness and then dry thoroughly. I then add new layers of adobe onto the cured structure. This allows multiple colors of adobe to be present and exposed since I do not mix is exact ratios. The wet adobe shrinks over the adobe that has set to hardness, causing a rough and random cracking texture. This texture mimics the breaking of a dried up muddy riverbed. At times, I allow this texture to remain letting the first mixture of adobe be seen through the rough cracking pattern. Other times I will fill the cracks with clay and cement to lessen the drama of the surface. I do this by patting a mixture of adobe with less clay into the cracks. Using less clay lowers the shrinkage, leaving the voids filled. Each layer needs to set and cure before the next level can be added. Through patting and smearing, I have developed the motor skills to make my hand less present providing a natural rawness to the final texture. Alternating layers of pure clay and straight concrete I achieve a color palette that has depth. I often sprinkle dry concrete, aggregate, dried clay dust, and rocks over the uncured adobe to add to the randomness and gain variety in texture. Spraying these dry materials with water helps them keep a certain texture while allowing them to adhere to the sculpture.

I never would have been able to achieve a natural surface on my adobe objects if I had not spent

an extensive amount of time studying wood firing. Through looking, creating, and eventually controlling surface development of my wood fired ceramics, I have been able to develop a surface for my unfired sculpture that looks natural.

Many potters speak of the beauty of clay at the leather-hard state (not fully dried). At this stage, the clay captures light and shadow in beautiful way. The sheen from the moisture content reflects light in a way that wet clay shines too strong and dried clay becomes too dull. I strive to recreate this appearance of wetness with my final step. At this stage, I add multiple coats of polyurethane to the cured and fully dried sculptures. This process of drying takes anywhere from one week to one month depending on the humidity and temperature.

The semi-gloss polyurethane reflects the light and gives the appearance of wet clay. The arc of my sculptures in contrast with the appearance of being wet adds a level of beauty, drama, and uneasiness to the work. A feeling often described as the sublime. The sublime is a contrasting emotion of beauty and threat. My forms embrace this on multiple layers. The precise arc of my forms speaks to elegance, levity, and buoyancy. These characteristics act as a sense of relief to lift one's soul. The elegance is a necessity to become a counterpoint to the girth and rough texture. The craggy patterns and heaviness of the work acts as a grounding point, causing the viewer to feel empowered.

I find these opposing forces in some existential philosophies. The absurdness of finding meaning to life becomes heavy to digest. However, there is an empowerment that brings freedom to live openly. The finite quality of death gives earnestness to the way one lives. I speak this visually to my viewers through these counteracting forces of simultaneous levity and girth. These philosophies are better explained by Albert Camus in his book [The Myth of Sisyphus](#).

"To work and create 'for nothing', to sculpture in clay, to know that one's creation has no future, to see one's work destroyed in a day while being aware that fundamentally this has no more importance than building for centuries- this is the difficult wisdom that absurd thought sanctions. Performing these two tasks simultaneously, negating on one

hand and magnifying on the other, is the way open to the absurd creator. He must give the void its colors. If I convince myself that this life has no other aspect than that of the absurd, if I feel that its whole equilibrium depends on that perpetual opposition between my conscious revolt and the darkness in which it struggles, if I admit that my freedom has no meaning except in relation to its limited fate, then I must say that what counts is not the best living but the most living." (Camus)

Lastly, my forms address human activity in juxtaposition to the natural aspects of my work. I create voids within the top plane of my forms, these voids are crisp right angled holes I space evenly and centered. This shows a small level of humanity that embraces my hand in the work. This is the third counterpoint to the rawness and untouched look my forms embrace. This brings the question of utility and purpose to the user. The viewer then questions the human interaction with the natural, becoming self-reflective of their own interactions with earth.

IV. Wabi-Sabi and Modern Design

Finding mental solitude through meditation is deeply rooted in the philosophy of Eastern cultures. In Japanese culture, contemplation is often inherent to their arts and crafts. One source of meditation stems from the philosophy of Zen Buddhism. Zen philosophers found knowledge through traveling by foot, raking gardens, writing poetry, chanting, staring at rocks, and drinking tea. Drinking tea became an act of therapy, contemplation, and health.

An early philosopher, Sen no Rikyu, transformed the act of drinking tea from a mundane to a meaningful activity. He traveled with Zen Buddhist monks, seeking enlightenment by practicing very simple deeds with intense thoughtfulness and concentration. The Chanoyu, (Japanese tea ceremony) was transformed by Rikyu. He designed the ceremony to be rigorous in ritual, to make it a profound experience in protest to a vain and money conscious culture.

At the time, it was common for teahouses in Japan to become elaborate and placed in prominent spaces in public. Rikyu promoted the placement of teahouses in solitary spaces, to be small, and have little decoration. It became a simple structure that exploited the materials it was made from. The historical teahouses are similar to the Northern Arizona University teahouse seen in Figure 11. To get to the teahouse, one was required to walk a long winding path that meandered through rock gardens and trees. This encouraged contemplation through walking and being surrounded by natural objects. When the patrons arrived, they could only enter through a small door, encouraging them to bow in humility and equality to each other.

“Wa” meaning harmony is a term referencing becoming connected to the natural world. This was done by leaving the wood of the teahouse unfinished, there would be no covers over windows allowing the breeze to pass through, and the birds could be heard from inside. Solitude was found physically and

mentally through these characteristics.

“Kei” meaning respect, was achieved by placing of individuals in a small area together to converse, causing them to understand their differences by learning the perspective of others. “Jaku” meaning tranquility and “sei” which means purity were the overall goals Rikyu had for the ceremony. To promote jaku and sei, Rikyu found that the tools used for the tea ceremony were crucial. Tea was not to be made with highly adorned or elaborate ceramics. Instead, the tea bowl was used, designed to be un-designed, controlled to be uncontrolled, finding the balance between acceptance and regulation, that allows serendipity and mastery to exist together. The gestural markings from the process were celebrated rather than hidden. The pottery became worn over time from being stained, chipped, and mended. These qualities were embraced accepting that what is around us is impermanent, imperfect, and incomplete.

Similarly, I find contemplation by hiking through remote landscapes. When I am alone, quietly walking and observing the rugged southwestern landscape, I become self-reflective and seek identity through a contemplative practice.

With my artwork seen in Figure 12 (*Adobe Sculpture*), I mimic the natural landscape. By doing so, I bring *Wa, Kei, Jaku, and Sei* to those interacting with my pottery and sculptures similar to the experience of interactions with natural rock formations. In Figure 14 (*Druid Arch*), the roughness of the clay and how it mimics the weathering process is seen.

Rikyu also coined the compound term “wabi-sabi.” Wabi means to be satisfied with simplicity and austerity; sabi is the appreciation of the imperfect. The wabi-sabi philosophy and the Modernist art movement both celebrate undecorated, humble, and authentic qualities, leaving the natural characteristics left as the only decoration. (0001)

I often think of the phrase, “Simplicity is complexity resolved.” The less that I do to a piece, the louder it speaks. When I lessen my hand in the material, the clay or adobe is allowed to have its voice

noticed. This is how Sabi is achieved in my work. The material can crack, warp, reveal impurities, allow marks to be rough, and imperfections become the voice of my work.

It is important that we make aspects of our everyday lives more tangible through rituals. The beauty of natural object and small practices can help us become contemplative and find our own personal sense of solitude. My sculptures replicate natural rock-like structure to invoke contemplation and a feeling of solitude. I create metamorphic and sedimentary rocks through the process of heating or curing clay, copying the tectonic process of melting and/or forming minerals. I mimic the natural with my hand, and strive for an unplanned and serendipitous surface though great control is required to obtain it.

Rikyū also collected *Suiseki*, or landscape stones. These were naturally formed stones admired for their beauty and power to represent nature. Figure 13 is an illustration of *Suiseki* style stones at the St. Louis Botanical Gardens. Rikyū would collect these stones and place them in a corner of his teahouses. Veneration was held for the stones with deep folds, hollow passageways, irregular cavities, highly eroded surfaces, and vertical lines from strata or erosion. The *Suiseki* with natural shapes, rugged textures, and irregularity were desirable because they brought on a philosophical predisposition in the viewer. This caused the viewer to become intuitive, enlightened, spiritually refined, and to reach inner awareness.

Poetry was often written about each stone, as well as calligraphy, paintings, and literature. The stones were often placed in gardens surrounded by raked gravel and bonsai trees. They represented clouds with mountains peeking through, water with islands, firmness and softness. The Yin and Yang were opposites working together collaboratively providing contrast and clarity. These aspects speak to the fact that all things finite are truly infinite, this gives the contemplative and solitary individual perspective on life's trials.

Shadows are embraced in Japanese architecture to achieve similar states of mindfulness. The emptiness of shadow is seen as a place of rest and ease. Rooms are built with empty alcoves that remain

unadorned and unlit. These spaces give rest to the mind when one is occupying the room. To quote the Japanese architect Jun'ichiro Tanizaki,

“I marvel at the comprehension of the secrets of shadows... Though we know perfectly well it is mere shadow, we are overcome with the feeling that in this small corner of the atmosphere there reigns complete and utter silence; there here in the darkness immutable tranquility holds sway... shadows form a quality of mystery and depth superior to any adornment.” Junichiro

The exteriors of Japanese houses have deep overhangs stopping the sun from penetrating the windows and doors. This provides darkness and rest as one is looking at the face of a building. These shadows become important to the presence of the architecture, the voids of rock formations, or the hollow carvings and under arcs of my sculptures.

Getting people into a natural surrounding proves these principles. Through studies clarity of mind can be found. I have experienced this often through rocky rugged landscapes and vast desert horizons such as the image of the Druid Arch found in Canyonlands National Park featured in Figure 14.

Modern doctors in Western society have studied ways to increase euphoric moods, clear thinking, and creativity by shutting down specific areas of the brain for periods of time. The most effective way of achieving this was to be engulfed in remote areas with natural surroundings and repetitive, low heart rate, physical activity. The studies found that people who hiked in the forest for 1.5 hours had a substantial decrease in brain activity in parts of the brain directly linked to psychological illness. The people who spent multiple days in remote locations surrounded by natural landscapes received an increase of clarity and creative thinking. (Ketler)

Ritualistic habits have also found substantial benefits in modern research. Harvard behavioral scientist Francesca Gino and William Saletan, NPR's Nature correspondent, conducted a quantitative study on ritualistic habits. Their studies concluded that when rituals are performed, the subjects

experience more pleasure when eating, better performance when carrying out tasks, more confidence in athletes, and less grief when coping with loss. Having handmade pottery to use, or objects in one's home that induce contemplation can also achieve these benefits of mind and spirit.

When conducting the research on rituals, Gino and Saletan found that pleasure was increased when consuming food in a ritualistic way. The rituals tested spanned from opening chocolate packages a specific way to knocking on the table before eating a carrot. If the ritual was completely obscure, the ritual had the same effect. The studies concluded that more pleasure was received in both foods. This was measured by how tasty people found the food, how long they savored the food, and how much money they would be willing to pay for the food.

When rituals are performed before conducting a task, participants stayed focused longer, experienced less anxiety about the task, completed tasks faster, and produced higher quality results. Athletes were similar in that they performed better and had more confidence when ritualistic behaviors were performed before competing. The quality of the results was equally effective with sensible and nonsensical routines.

When rituals were performed accompanying loss, the amount of grief was reduced in severity and duration. When rituals were performed with religious meaning as a coping mechanism within people of faith, the benefits were equal to atheists performing obscure ritualistic tasks, proving the results can be achieved without superstitions of god. Simply the act of ritual has benefits within the human psyche.

(Vedantam)

These studies from history and contemporary psychology show that we can receive benefits from both ritualistic practices, moments of solitude, and natural objects or settings. Wabi-sabi objects and ritualistic practices promote mental health, calmness, and clearness of thinking. My sculptures exude these visual characteristics to help individuals interacting to find themselves through solitary

contemplation. When performing ritualistic habits, my work helps people achieve clearness of mind. The physical presence, raw rock-like characteristics, ambiguous forms, and quiet subtleties promote a mental state of contemplation and reflection.

V. Conclusion

Through the use of mass, texture, color, and form, I create sculptures that exude a presence of solemnity. My sculptures achieve this by mimicking experiences I have when I am engulfed in the desert landscapes of the Southwest. Hiking through these landscapes brought me to a meditative state where I contemplated the existential questions of life. These moments of solitude stand out in my mind as breakthroughs of personal discovery that have shaped my life in powerful ways. I found a similar presence embraced through Japanese ceramics. They mimic the rugged and irregular as a catalyst for clearing the mind. I embrace the connection between these two influences to reference the history of Japanese ceramics while embracing my own personal growth through meditating rugged landscapes.

The vast expanses and towering rock formations are essential to arriving at this state of mindfulness. Both the rock formations and Japanese vessels embrace irregularities and undulations. These characteristics are simultaneously beautiful and harsh. I mimic ruggedness and irregularity to help the viewers become meditative. The mass of the forms provides a weightiness of being. The rugged textures provide a sense of harshness and urgency. These aspects in comparison to the elegance of the arc shapes and subtle nuances of color act as a counterpoint of beauty and relief.

It is in these juxtaposed energies that my sculptures provide an aura of balance and harmony. The viewers are to contemplate opposing forces within themselves to become present in their lives. Meditation and natural surroundings help people look inward to find their own truths of life. Likewise, my sculptures promote these feelings of solitude as one becomes engulfed in the vastness of nature.

By placing my adobe objects in a meandering path, one can have a meditative experience as they weave through my sculptures, figure 15. They provide healing to the soul as one removes the worries of everyday life from their mind. When they bring their focus on the shapes and textures of my forms, they

become present in the moment and find an ease of mind as I did through the act of hiking.

Figure 1: Untitled Sculpture



Figure 2: Adobe Sculpture



Figure 3: Canyonlands National Park: Needles District



Figure 4: Adobe Sculpture



Figure 4: Eames Chair



Figure 6: Calcium Noodle Bowl



Figure 7: Potassium Noodle Bowls



Figure 8: Adobe Sculpture



Figure 9: Untitled Sculpture



Figure 10: Zion National Park: Angel's Landing



Figure 11: Northern Arizona University Tea House, Flagstaff, AZ



Figure 12: Adobe Sculpture



Figure 13: St. Louis Botanical Gardens Seisaki Stone, St. Louis, MO



Figure 14: Canyonlands National Park: Druid Arch



Figure 15: Gallery Installation, The Mass of Solitude



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Vita

Scott McClellan was born in Brigham City, UT. He first found ceramics at Box Elder High learning from Lee Burningham. He continued ceramics in college at Utah State University where he studied under John Neely and Dan Murphy, where he found a connection to wood firing.

After graduating with a BFA in ceramics, Scott moved to Edinboro, PA to work as a ceramics studio technician at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania under the direction of Lee Rexrode and Chuck Johnson. While there, he developed multiple clay bodies for soda and wood firing.

Scott then moved on to work as a resident artist at Taos Clay in Taos, NM. There he continued his research of firing wood kilns in differing atmospheres. He also took on the responsibilities of a studio technician, gallery attendant, ceramics instructor, and show curator.

After his residency, Scott moved to Columbia, Missouri to study under Bede Clarke and Joe Pintz in pursuit of his Masters of Fine Art. At Mizzou, Scott experimented with a variety of technical processes, primarily focusing on wheel thrown pottery and hand built sculpture. He fired his work in a variety of different wood kilns researching multiple firing patterns. His research eventually led him to the correlating thesis and body of unfired adobe work exhibited in his show *The Mass of Solitude* at the George Caleb Bingham Gallery. Scott has exhibited his work in invitational and juried shows both on a national and international level.