

MONUMENTS TO WATER AND AIR SYSTEMS

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

MONUMENTS TO WATER AND AIR SYSTEMS

presented by Matthew Moyer,

a candidate for the degree of Master of Fine Arts,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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ABSTRACT

Water and air are essential to life. Clean water and air, as well as the systems that deliver them, are undeniable necessities and conveniences within our lives. Conceptually, my work focuses on water and air distribution systems (both real and imaginary) and the ingenuity and dedication needed to design and maintain them. By combining seemingly contradictory and disparate materials, such as fired ceramics, air filters, found industrial objects and steel pipes, I present a whimsical and often simplified representation of these systems. Using the visual language that is created through this process, I encourage viewers to embrace the glory of mechanization and contemplate the expressive human qualities of efficiency, agency and ingenuity that are captured in mechanical systems.

Chapter 1

Introduction

...What we owe the future is not a new start, for we can only begin with what has happened. We owe the future the past, the long knowledge that is the potency of time to come. - Wendell Berry, as quoted in Wirzba, pg. xix

Water and air are essential to life. Clean water and air and the systems that deliver them are undeniable necessities and amenities of our lives. The intention of my research is to engage the viewer in an inquisitive dialogue about water and air distribution systems. I use sculptural objects to ask the viewer to question their relationship to and reliance on these systems, while recognizing the value of the people who install and maintain them. Though some argue that modern systems, their machines and the mechanization they utilize, are harmful to the environment (ecological footprint) and the people who work around these systems (sick building syndrome), I see in them a beautiful expression of ingenuity and efficiency. I acknowledge that our water and air systems do have certain detriments; I choose to explore the visual qualities found in the positive portrayal of them. I combine my fascination for mechanization with my passion to create objects. The product is an artistic journey that is disciplined through studio process and that explores builds and experiences the glory of the machine through the creative act.

I have not selected this topic for research on a whim. Two very distinct experiences caused me to explore it. During my time in the Plumbers and Pipefitters Union I observed people's general unwillingness to have their daily routine interrupted

for the maintenance of their heating, cooling and water equipment, yet they were eager to place blame on the worker when the equipment failed from lack of maintenance. Shortly after, while living in Taiwan in the spring of 2006, I was confronted by how much I take for granted the accessibility of drinkable water. Though the desire to incorporate water systems did not immediately occur within my work while in Taiwan, a seed was planted that later grew into the focus of a summer residency in Galesburg, Illinois in 2008 and this current body of work.

One of the opportunities art provides is the ability to express intangible human characteristics through objects that are, by their nature, tangible. Creativity, dedication, determination, imagination, organization, precision, control, hope and adaptability are some of the human characteristics abundantly expressed in our water and air distribution systems, yet many people do not recognize these qualities. Through my interpretations of these industrial systems, I hope to demonstrate to the viewer that these traits are evident in even our most basic systems.

Industry continues to provide a supply of inspiration for my research and creates resonance in my studio practice. As an artist, I find that my intrigue with industry, the machine and its place in our lives, is similar to the views of the Precisionist photographers and painters who worked from 1910 through the 1930's. The Precisionists set out to glorify the industrial expansion of the time through dynamic and intricately detailed compositions. A goal of the Precisionists was to establish a place and context for industrial elements in an ever-changing industrialized America. One of the ways they explored this was to physically immerse themselves in industrial environments. Photographers such as Charles Sheeler (documenting the inner-workings of the Ford

Motor Company assembly plant) and Photojournalists like Lewis Hine (documenting the construction workers assembling skyscrapers in New York City) placed themselves in the factories and construction sites, not only to document them but also to experience them through that documentation. Similarly, I try to immerse myself in industrial surroundings, whether in my day-to-day activities or my studio practice. This immersion encourages both a visual and physical reminder of my current task, promoting the intrigue and value of these places and their mechanized systems.

Through occupational experience and my studio activities, I draw the majority of my inspiration from factories, mechanical and boiler rooms and industrial systems in our everyday landscape. These places hold a rich history and relevance about where we have been as a society and where we might be going in the future. I am compelled to become a voice seeking recognition, acknowledgment and appreciation for these systems and, by extension, those who design and care for them.

Through my creative research I search for a visual language that will place water and air distribution systems, their materials, forms, functions and even their caretakers, in a place of prominence in today's culture. In order to establish such a prominence, I monumentalize these systems in both concept and form and attempt to educate the viewer about industrial standards and characteristics through educational elements in the individual works.

In particular, Minimalist sculptor David Smith has demonstrated a distinguished level of combining all of these qualities as they pertain to materials, forms, concepts and monumentality.

“In my own procedure, along with the material, a new concept process has developed...where the distant whole or finished work consists of the sum of its parts. This is much like the industrial method of building a machine but without a blueprint, and where the function is only visual...where the end is never seen until the final part, and the finality [is] realized when each part in unity works up to the whole. The sculptural entity never takes place until summed up by its parts. (David Smith as quoted in Gray, pg. 45)

Much like the Precisionists and Photojournalists before him, some of Smith's art is about paying homage to the process and physicality of making the work. I parallel this concept in my own studio practice, and at times it is the driving force behind my subject matter. Cutting and threading pipe, making and firing ceramics, and figuring out how such disparate materials can be assembled informs and invigorates my studio practice and subject matter respectively. Materiality and technique, though independent aspects of my studio practice, dually inform and are informed by my subject matter. The integration of my studio practice and this subject matter offers me unique and exciting opportunities to grow as a sculptor and as an informed citizen of today's society. These opportunities range from unexpected results in the ceramic firings, exploring the temperamental nature of fastening clay to steel and the need to pause in my studio practice and take time to clean out a sink trap or change the air filter in the ventilation system. I am often energized and inspired by the similarities of my studio work to real world industry, and at times find it amusingly ironic that running water, ventilation and the filtering of water and air are such staples of a ceramist's daily practice while also playing such an important role in my ambitions as an artist.

Through my own personal experiences both in and out of the studio, as well as my observations as a union laborer and as an artist, I attempt to establish the duality of our relationship to water and air systems and highlight the too often unexplored creativity and

ingenuity expressed in their forms and materials. Our relationship to water and air distribution systems is ongoing and evolving. I have a positive outlook on these systems that I push to the forefront of my research. I believe that, though some look and see an ecological footprint that is damaging, many recognize on an unconscious level that life is arguably better because these systems exist. The latter is what I draw attention to in my work by exaggerating connection, operation and aesthetic improvement to the space.

Chapter 2

Materials and Techniques

Today, we can only begin to imagine the emotion that must have accompanied the initial discovery of nature's material properties, the paradoxical twin characteristics of malleability and permanence of clay, for example. Surely, this dichotomy appeared as one of life's first mysteries. How could a material so plastic and soft become durable and substantive, or how could metal, at first indistinguishable from rock, under heat and hammer come to bed and be forged into a thing made? This power of transformation must have captivated the imagination of the first craftsmen. That artists have continued to build on tradition-and still make pottery and metal sculpture today-is nothing short of miraculous. Other human endeavors have come and gone, while craftsmanship has remained part of a phenomenal continuum, a genealogy of sorts, extending back more than 8,000 years. A creative triad is reenacted time and again: maker meets material on the stage of process and through the application of technology-old or new-an object is created

*-M. Anna Fariello, *Objects and Meaning: New Perspectives on Art and Craft*, pg. 148*

My thesis works are mixed-media sculptures containing varied materials and surface treatments that include patina and paint, as well as glazed and unglazed ceramic surfaces. Upon closer examination, these surfaces provide unexpected discoveries regarding combinations of steel, fired ceramics and their gaskets. Within these combinations of materials and surfaces I seek to create tension between the components. This inherent tension throughout the work is most obvious when steel pipes are connected to ceramic objects. Initially the ceramic components take on the appearance of the other materials but upon closer inspection reveal their true substance. Through this realization the viewer is prompted to ask questions about how and why such seemingly contradictory combinations are fastened together and what purpose they might serve.

The ability of ceramics to record the maker's touch, its endless surface possibilities and the ability to stretch expansively are the driving forces for its use as my

primary material. Fired ceramics have been used for thousands of years for the containment and delivery of water and food. Within this idea of utility, fired ceramics relate to my subject matter in both expected and unexpected ways. In the thesis exhibition, I set up the correlation that fired ceramics can contain and deliver in the same manner as actual water and air distribution systems. Therefore, each sculpture consists of several ceramic components, usually two clay halves joined by gaskets. When coupled, these halves take on the appearance of ceramic vessels as well as the industrial containers that would be found in water and air systems. Though these conjoined halves do not have a recognizable foot or rim in the way of a traditional ceramic vessel, other visual vocabulary is still there. I ask the viewer to imagine similarities to the ceramic vessel rims, handles and spouts directly associated with historical and contemporary functional ware. Through this association, I hope the viewer acknowledges the similarities in function and form that water and air systems share with ceramic vessels.

I primarily employ the wheel-throwing technique of forming the clay in all of the fired ceramic elements. The act of turning the clay on the potter's wheel is used throughout the world, an age-old technique to produce all types of functional vessels. In my work, throwing or the act of pulling, expanding and stretching the clay conveys the notion of containment that is needed to perform a function. Expanded bulbous forms promote the impression of filling and fullness, while implying that these objects might come to life, expanding or contracting. My goal is to provide several stages of implied "expansion and contraction" throughout the exhibition. Some works explore the idea of elements expanding, while others imply the notion of complete expansion. In other

works, the ceramic elements represent retracting motion, or the expelling and delivering of the object's contents.

Within these multi-component assemblages exist several different surface treatments of the clay, metal pipe and gaskets. These surfaces, ranging from enameled or peeling paint to rust, explore ideas of durability, longevity and past use. Depending on the object's material, surfaces are achieved through chemical patina, heat or the application of oils, graphite and grease. Using these techniques, I manipulate the surfaces until I reach a rich surface that fits the form and concept. My decisions pertaining to ceramic surfaces are derived from my experience examining the naturally occurring patinas on various metals. I constantly search my surroundings for new and interesting colors and textures that result between nature and metal interact.

This examination of the natural patina on metals began while I was working for the Plumbers and Pipefitters Union, where my duties involved working with materials that had been designated as scrap during renovation and demolition processes. One of those duties was to sort scrap metal into categories for recycling. Though that task was considered mundane, I enjoyed it immeasurably. Those scrap piles presented a wealth of information as I examined objects and deciphered one material from another, pausing in my task to make sketches of the objects with interesting forms and surfaces. Through close examination of the varied natural surface possibilities that occur in scrap piles, I better understand the effects of chemicals and heat in my metal working processes and can apply that knowledge to my sculptural works.

In addition to my search for interesting and naturally occurring patinas, decisions about the metal surfaces in these works evolve from the various possible surfaces

achieved in the ceramic firings. I have developed a vocabulary of slips, glazes and post-firing manipulation techniques that emulate and imply a variety of metal-like surfaces. These surfaces that form from the ceramic glazes are based on observations of naturally occurring patinas and often are the result of varying quantities of differing metallic oxides within those glazes. In other instances, I rely solely on iron within the clay body in various stages of firing reduction to achieve specific surfaces. Ultimately, despite a vocabulary of surface techniques, sometimes the most appropriate finish for a compositional situation is found spontaneously, and within this spontaneity lays the found object. Because of the natural occurrence of surface patina, as well as its real world association, found objects offer both a unique and insightful solution to certain compositional questions.

Within the thesis works, I employ found objects to create a recognizable correlation to real world components. These found objects offer a pause at a particular place in the piece initiated by changes in surface, material and sometimes movement. The change in motion and movement associated with these found objects can be discovered specifically in *Retraction Device* (Figure 1). This piece includes two found objects that are included because of their real world associations, as well as their distinguishable characteristics. The two found objects are a defunct pressure gauge and a peach-colored spigot knob. Both elements ground the overall abstractness of the piece in a recognizable reality, yet each component also adds to the imaginary utility of the piece. The pressure gauge (Figure 2) seems to pop out of the top of a pipe unexpectedly and signals apparent damage from heavy use and the vulnerability of its location. However, the spigot knob

(Figure 3), that seems to demand manipulation, is recessed in a steel ring that protects it from the fate met by the pressure gauge.

Through the entire body of work in the thesis exhibition, I employ the additive or assemblage method in my building process. The assemblage method is representative of a positive, growing and expanding exploration rather than the depleting and retreating characteristic associated with the subtractive method. Given the physical characteristics of my fictitious water and air systems and the fact that they are multi-component entities, the assemblage method has a direct relationship to my subject matter. Interconnectivity of seemingly disparate parts assembled to perform a function is the essence of water and air distribution systems. Though the real systems are complicated, my goal is to simplify them through abstraction. I express the organization of these systems' components while working loosely within a series of construction industry standards. When building the pieces, the assemblage method allows me a degree of control to examine and re-examine the necessary varieties of form, color and function needed to explore and express my ideas while staying roughly within the confines of established industry standards. The positive characteristics associated with the assemblage method are connected to my interest in monumentalizing these water and air systems as well.

Chapter 3

The Monument Form

If you ask me why I make sculpture, I must answer that it is my way of life, my balance, and my justification for being. If you ask me for whom do I make art, I will say that it is for all who approach it without prejudice. My world, the objects I see are the same for all men of good will. The race for survival I share with all men who work for existence.

–David Smith as quoted in Gray, pg. 132

Within the historical context of art, monuments serve to showcase and commemorate important events and people, encouraging viewers to remember them. I define the term monument as an object that represents a person, product or event worthy of re-creating in likeness or abstract form to commemorate and remember for future generations. I feel that water and air systems, their elements, and the people who design, install and maintain them, deserve such commemoration.

Monuments come in a variety of shapes and sizes. My work and its role as monument is investigated in both the gallery and public domain. For the purpose of this thesis I describe these works as either “public monuments,” those works installed outdoors, or “gallery monuments,” those shown in more traditional gallery installations and formal exhibitions.

In order to establish monumentality within the work it is necessary to promote and showcase a feeling of stability, purpose and prominence within the given space. This prominence can be achieved on a pedestal, attached to a gallery wall or placed unexpectedly within the community. Historically, monuments are usually safely and predictably placed atop a plinth or pedestal meant to showcase the object. However, my goal with the gallery monuments is to break with the tradition of plinth and pedestal in favor of installations that utilize the wall and floor as if the work is one with the gallery,

emerging from behind walls, out of closets and up from basements. Investigating these alternative display options provides me the opportunity to have the work speak to the flexible nature of water, air and mechanical systems. Beyond my artistic renditions, these systems can and do occupy many different spaces. My fictitious interpretations of them seek to expand the viewers' presumptions about where, why and how these systems are incorporated into our everyday surroundings in both expected and unexpected ways. In addition to floor-mounted and wall-mounted works, certain pieces explore situations where portions of pumping systems actually emerge from below the floor and appear to be permanently mounted to gallery pedestals.

Public Monuments

Through the public monuments, I explore exterior open spaces within the community with placements that both relate and dissociate with the surrounding environment. The placement and installation of each work (monument) enhances its overall meaning, while promoting accessibility and extending the dialogue with the viewer about the endless possible locations and opportunities to explore these wonderful systems. I feel that my work is best viewed with both the eyes and hands, fully exploring together the illusion and reality that is contained in each piece within their space.

Within the Public Monuments series, two works in particular define my goal of inhabiting unexpected public spaces while providing viewers opportunities to interact intimately with these systems. For example, *Waterworks* (Figure 4) is placed on a lawn just inside the entrance to the Galesburg Municipal Waterworks on grounds that flow into an adjoining city park. In this instance, the sculpture is mostly associated with the park

but also set against the backdrop of the waterworks' storage towers and pump houses. My goal, through the placement and installation of each work (monument), is to enhance its overall meaning through location and interaction opportunities. My philosophy for this work is guided by the idea that it is best viewed using both the eyes and hands, allowing a full experience of the illusion and reality within the same piece.

Waterworks is a public monument that stands nearly nine feet tall and close to twenty-five feet long. Primarily made of steel, it is both rigid and flowing in form. The unique geographical situation of the Galesburg Municipal Water System and events that occurred in the summer of 2008 directly inspired *Waterworks*. The piece was constructed on-site in Galesburg and utilized actual fire hydrants (Figure 7), vintage brass water meters (Figure 8) and steel drainpipes (Figure 9) donated by the city. Due to a great flood in the spring of 2008, a citywide boil order was implemented in Galesburg for the first time in recent history, a surprising development considering that Galesburg is nearly 45 miles from its water source, an aquifer under the Mississippi River. During that summer I observed a disregard by Galesburg's residents for their water system and the employees who keep it running. Despite a dire potential for the contamination of the aquifer, it was not compromised (thanks to prior planning and employee dedication), yet Galesburg residents felt inconvenienced by the need to boil their water five minutes for the duration of one week that summer. Many simply abandoned the city water in favor of bottled water. On Wednesday June 18, 2008 the front-page headline of *The Galesburg Register-Mail*, read: "The Day Water Turned to Gold". (Loewy A2) I believe that headline should have read: "Waterworks saves aquifer; Galesburg water is *still* gold (it just needs to be boiled)".

Waterworks is a simplified abstraction of the complex water distribution system that pumps water to the town. The Mississippi River follows the western Illinois boundary and the small town of Oquawka, situated approximately forty miles west of Galesburg, is home to one of Galesburg's water pumping and treatment plants. There the city of Galesburg has tapped into an aquifer located under the Mississippi River. At Oquawka the water begins its forty-five mile pipeline journey to the Galesburg Municipal Waterworks' main facility. This forty-five mile journey is a significant part of what makes Galesburg's water delivery situation unique and inspired my creation of *Waterworks*.

Raising public awareness of the value of the waterworks facilities and its employees became very important to me. As an artist, I had a unique and timely opportunity to encapsulate my studio research, and my personal artistic interests, engaging the public in a visual conversation about their water system, into one sculpture. With this opportunity came two primary goals for this piece: First, bring two distinctive parts of the community together--art supporters and waterworks employees--in a unified cause. Second, create a lasting message in the form of a monument commemorating Galesburg's Waterworks facilities, workers and their relationship to the historic situation of the summer.

Conversely, instead of a natural disaster inspiring a public sculpture, *Ventilation System* (Figure 5) was inspired by my time spent working for the union in heating, cooling and ventilation maintenance. *Ventilation System* was temporarily installed on the University of Missouri campus. It is made from old military cabinet tops rich in patina and texture from years of extensive use. In addition to these cabinet tops, embedded at

each end are steel exhaust filters harvested from a demolition project at the University of Missouri Hospitals and Clinics patient kitchen.

This piece is a physical and conceptual exploration of the adage "out with the old; in with the new". Additionally, the piece explores the transportation and transformation of air from the state of "been used" to that of "ready to be used" which is a service most of us do not commonly notice. Such unobserved actions lie hidden in rafters, tucked behind closed doors, concealed in ceilings and basements, on roofs and in out-of-the-way places that are mostly ignored (Figure 11). Few people ever navigate these spaces, despite the history and important machinery located there.

Rusted and worn yet identifiable by its telltale institutional green skin and partially exposed wooden structure (Figure 12), *Ventilation System* looks as though it has strayed from any of the mechanical rooms or basements from the surrounding institutional buildings. My goal was to imply years of service, as evidenced by its rusted and paint-peeling surface. An intake filter at one end and an exhaust filter at the other represent a beginning and ending.

Through the use of wooden timbers, rusted steel piping and worn metal end caps (Figure 13), I hope to elicit a feeling of appreciation for the services provided by these ventilation systems and the people who design, install, and maintain them. In the end, my goal was to direct the attention of MU students to the existence of these systems in the many buildings that surround them so that they might also acknowledge the importance of them in our culture.

These public monuments are particularly important to me as unique opportunities to interact with entire communities rather than a limited gallery audience. There is

evidence of water and air distribution systems in the landscapes of towns and cities everywhere. Backflow preventers (Figure 6) are located along streets to prevent flooded drain water from mixing with cities' potable water sources. Fire hydrants, water mains, curb box tops and water towers are part of each town's unnoticed infrastructure and landscape. With even a casual glance around the landscape of most modern cities, one can discern ventilation and water systems, yet they garner little if any acknowledgment from a passerby.

We spend significant time each day in buildings and cities. These places: factories, homes, schools and streets, have intricate water and air systems that embody our reliance on the ingenuity and mechanization of contemporary systems. Ironically, these systems and their beauty are often in plain sight, but we still do not “see” them. I strive to teach the viewer how to “see” these systems--their history, ingenuity and beauty--by bridging the gap between the real and imagined, as well as the hidden and exposed ideas that encapsulate our water and air systems.

Gallery Pedestal Monuments

Double Pumps (Figure 14) is a work made of several materials with multiple patinas, fastened to a gallery pedestal. This work pertains specifically to my investigation of the gallery monuments beginning to encompass elements of the gallery space. Unlike the other gallery monuments, *Double Pumps* has incorporated the traditional gallery pedestal to a point where the piece and pedestal have become one (Figure 15).

My goal with *Double Pumps* is to establish the notion that these water and air distribution systems can and do exist anywhere within buildings. Having a certain degree of flexibility in form and location, they are able to perform their important functions in unexpected places, even attached to a gallery pedestal if that were necessary.

The materials used to make *Double Pumps* are primarily soda-fired stoneware, steel and copper piping elements. The specific firing of the stoneware components produced a hammered copper-like surface (Figure 16). This finish is meant to imply age and a patina of usage. This aged copper-like surface juxtaposes newer copper pipe used in conjunction with contemporary stainless steel flex-line, establishing a level of tension and harmony between the old and new elements.

Occupying what used to be a pristine white gallery pedestal, this combination of new and old, poses a question of value between the sculpture/system and the gallery fixtures. The value comparison of mechanical systems, art objects and gallery pedestals explores their interconnected relationship and invites the viewer to make the correlation that cherishing the intrinsic value of all of these objects and systems is equally important.

Gallery Demolition/Save (Demo/Save) Monuments

Within my interest in educating the public about the importance of our water, air and mechanical systems lies the need to preserve their rich history. This history is represented by the markings of years of service, patina and rust. Their history also coincides with the efforts of the people who have installed and maintained them, recorded by the pipe-wrench markings they have left behind. This versatility and longevity are important characteristics of these systems. To understand their value now means that we must understand their importance in the past. The ability to survive years of use in caustic

environments is a testament to the permanence of these water and air systems and their importance in our lives.

Often, the permanence of the components and entire systems in caustic environments can seem fleeting and in need of refurbishment to be used in the same or new applications. I have long been interested in conveying the idea of rejuvenation of the forgotten industrial artifacts that inspire my work. This series of *demo/save* works within the *Monuments to Water and Air Systems* collection is the most recent incarnation of that interest.

Through information contained in the title, *demo/save*, the viewer can conclude a direct correlation of terminology to the construction industry's policy of "remove and save" procedures, salvaging materials for later use. Additionally, I include specific references to the inspiration for each work within the title. Some examples are *Demo/Save Softener with Cleanable Filter* (Figure 17) and *Demo/Save Expansion Gas Loop* (Figure 18).

One of the ways I explore the idea of *demo/save* is by fastening the works to pallets as a storage or shipping reference. The pieces on the pallets are not meant to signify new components or systems but rather to embrace the idea that an old and used component can and often should be used in a new application. Additionally, the storing and shipping reference is an extension of my desire to abandon the traditional gallery pedestals and displays for alternative presentation methods.

Through a storing and shipping reference and the fact that these works are not tethered to a wall or pedestal, the objects communicate to the viewer the idea that not only have they been removed with care from their previous locations, but they are in

transit, ready to be shipped and reinstalled at their next destination. Though the pallet infers value in the context of industrial components and machines, I feel it is also important to acknowledge the context of historical value associated with pedestals. By placing these works on their own pallets, I explore the exaggeration and comparison of the intrinsic value of the systems' components by contrasting them to the values associated with gallery pedestals. This contrast occurs through the blurring of the spatial boundaries of the water and air systems with that of the gallery space.

Demo/Save Softener with Cleanable Filter on its pallet is a direct reference to the water quality in Columbia, Missouri. The work is made from painted steel pipe, an air filter with iron patina, gaskets, pallet, cast iron curb box top, and oxidation-fired glazed stoneware. The notion of age, use and longevity play an important role in this piece and is conveyed through the yellowed and dirty off-white painted pipe and the textured enamel-like surface of the ceramic components (Figure 19).

On the municipal end of a water system, the softening filters (simple objects in complex systems) used for removing excess iron can be cleaned and reused for several cycles. At the household end of the system individual water softeners are inherently simple and typically operate without the need for electricity, subsequently having few moving parts. I respect the simplicity and efficiency of both large and small softeners. Because they are intricate yet also durable, I feel that a moment taken to monumentalize them and their contributions is justified.

I choose to make *Softener with Cleanable Filter* a *demo/save* piece to reinforce the fact that these water softeners are a universal and transferable component of all water systems found in mid-Missouri and most of the rest of the country. Within these systems,

the softener serves a specific function but is also universal and can be transferred elsewhere. When “*Cleanable Filter*” is added to the title of this piece it introduces the educational element that some individual water softener filters can and should be cleaned and reused, minimizing waste in their daily operation.

Demo/Save Gas Expansion Loop is a self-contained freestanding piece assembled from wood-fired stoneware, steel pipe, gaskets and wood pallet. This piece leans towards a heightened degree of abstraction. Its form is minimal with fewer components and increased cohesion of surface treatment; it is lacking a found object inclusion and is a completely enclosed structure.

These characteristics give the piece a sense of symmetry reinforced by the subdued colors of the wood-fired surface on the ceramic elements. In some of the wood-fired parts, the texture is smooth, while in others it is rough. The changes in texture correspond to changes in color. The more muted and gray areas are rougher than the smooth warmer gold and brown areas. This change in color and texture resulting from the firing process gives this particular piece a depth of age different than other works. The addition of the rough texture is a direct reference to the effects of heated metal in stagnant mechanical rooms, baking on layers of dust and dirt (Figure 20).

The color yellow, faintly visible in some of the crevices of the steel pipe (Figure 21), in *Demo/Save Gas Expansion Loop* is subtle in appearance. However, in content, yellow paint on the pipe is quite significant. When found on metal pipe, the color yellow distinguishes it as a natural or propane gas line per the American Public Works Association Uniform Color Code System for identifying utilities. The inspirations behind this piece are the expansion loops found in self-contained piping applications that have

long runs or cycle through extreme temperature fluctuation. In this case, I am combining two distinctly different industrial elements into one piece. These expansion loops are used to absorb temperature fluctuations primarily in steel pipes, which are a vehicle for piping fuel gas. Typically in industry, the loop is twice as high as it is wide, allowing for necessary expansion and contraction. This piece adheres to those standards. The ceramic elements in the sculpture express durability, wear and the various effects associated with temperature fluctuations.

Wall-mounted Monuments

The last group of works in the Gallery Monuments category is multi-component systems that attach to the gallery wall. These works refer to both water and air distribution systems. They employ similar materials, building methods and levels of abstraction, but explore the integration of object and gallery space on a different level than previously discussed. The realization that water and air systems can coexist on both sides of a wall furthers my exploration and investigation of their spatial relationship to the surrounding architecture. The investigation of the notion that these systems could be attached to or pass through the gallery wall can be found in the piece *System with Hartford Loop* which explores the spatial relationships of these systems to their surrounding architecture (Figure 22). Consideration of the implications of objects on either side of a wall poses the question: What other area might this system serve? Within this question is the realization that these water and air systems are widely utilized in a given architectural space and that the benefits people in another rooms might be experiencing are a product of the systems' form and function within different spaces. I feel that in order for the viewer to establish a relationship to these systems they must first

realize the physical extent to which these pipes, filters, ducts and other components inhabit the surrounding architecture. I hope the implication of these large systems presents the viewer with an opportunity to feel humble about their reliance upon and physical relationship to the services that they provide.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

Water and air systems are vital components of our existence, deserving of conscious appreciation and respect. Overlying my interest in the objects and their materials is my concern that society as a whole does not recognize the important role they play in our everyday lives. A renewed acknowledgement of our reliance on them is necessary, especially because in recent years many artists and some of the general public have chosen to focus mostly upon negative environmental aspects of these systems without dually acknowledging our dependence on them and their contributions to society.

The journey of making these sculptural objects has afforded me the opportunity to create a visual vocabulary and then use that vocabulary in dialogues with viewers of my work. Using this visual vocabulary, I have memorialized these systems, projecting them in a positive light but acknowledging both their good and bad qualities.

A viewer once recounted to me how his eleven year old son “thought the work was cool” and wondered about how things were assembled together, while his eighty year old mother expressed nostalgia relating to the old hammer-enameled objects that “reminded her of the family’s old home-place.”

At that point I realized the value and power the work had in reaching a wide and diverse audience. Because we all rely on mechanized systems and have a specific reliance on clean water and air, I feel it is important that, despite scale, color and texture, the work expresses an accessibility and familiarity to all who enter the space. The monumentalizing of these systems as art objects--their materials, forms and principals--is my way of critically exploring society’s, as well as my own, relationship to them. This

intellectual and physical examination creates a broad and sweeping opportunity for interaction, allowing a general audience to feel comfortable approaching the work and contemplating the systems.

Establishing the monumentality of water and air distribution systems, and opening a dialogue about the involvement that trade workers play in the longevity of those systems, provides me the opportunity to further research the role of the workers in my future work. Continuing the physical direction of my work is a starting point for this future research. With those objects as a beginning, I will plan to explore the inclusion of kinetic elements within the sculptures. I believe opportunities for other materials will arise. The inclusion of water and moving air seems likely for added levels of interactivity. These systems and their need for someone to perform maintenance on them might become apparent. In addition to the art objects within a gallery space, the inclusion of tools (such as pipe wrenches) could also be involved in the installations. Through an implied need for ongoing repair, and by providing willing viewers the tools to make those repairs, I can provide reasons to monumentalize trade workers.

The society which scorns excellence in plumbing as a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will neither have good plumbing nor good philosophy: neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water.

-John W. Gardner, American Activist, pg. 86



Figure 1. *Retraction Device*, steel, paint, pressure gauge, spigot knob, 2007.



Figure 2. *Retraction Device*, detail, 2008.



Figure 3. *Retraction Device*, detail, 2007.



Figure 4. *Waterworks*, Steel, stainless steel, iron, brass, water meters and fire hydrants, 2008.



Figure 5. *Waterworks*, detail, 2008.



Figure 6. *Waterworks*, detail, 2008.



Figure 7. *Waterworks*, alternate detail, 2008.



Figure 5. *Ventilation System*, Steel, wood and air filters, 2007.



Figure 11. Photograph of an air handler.



Figure 12. *Ventilation System*, detail, 2007.



Figure 13. *Ventilation System*, detail, 2007.



Figure 6. Backflow Preventer.



Figure 14. *Double Pumps*, Soda-fired stoneware, copper, steel, stainless steel, paint, MDF, rubber, and brass, 2008.



Figure 15. *Double Pumps*, detail, 2008.



Figure 16. *Double Pumps*, detail, 2008.



Figure 17. *Demo/Save Softener with Cleanable Filter*,
Wood, steel, oxidation-fired stoneware, paint, MDF, brass valve,
air filter and cast iron curb-box top, 2008.



Figure 18. *Demo/Save Expansion Gas Loop*, Wood,
wood-fired stoneware, steel, MDF and paint, 2008.



Figure 19. *Demo/Save Softener with Cleanable Filter*, detail, 2008.



Figure 20. *Demo/Save Expansion Gas Loop*, detail, 2008.



Figure 20. *Demo/Save Expansion Gas Loop*, detail, 2008.



Figure 22. *Untitled System*, Reduction-cooled earthenware, steel, paint, rubber and MDF, 2009.

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APPENDIX A

Exhibition Images















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VITA

Education (select)

- May 2009 Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.), University of Missouri
2001 Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.), Illinois State University

Gallery Exhibitions (select)

- 2009 M.F.A. thesis exhibition *Monuments to Water and Air Systems* Bingham Gallery, University of Missouri Columbia, MO
Group 4 Award Exhibition Foundry Arts Centre St. Charles, MO
2008 *Mechanical Advantage*, Bucktown Center for the Arts, Davenport, IA
Industrial Artifacts, Quad City Arts Center, Rock Island, IL (two person)
2007 *Ceramic Abstraction: Exploration and Evidence*, Creative Arts Workshop, New Haven, CT (juried)
National Wood-fired Exhibit, Thrown Together Clay Center, Louisville, KY (juried) NCECA
2006 *A Closer Encounter of 3 Kinds*, C-Space, Kaoushiung, Taiwan
Time and Decay, Our Industrial Situation, Quad City International Airport, Moline, IL (two person)
2004 *Vitrified Clay National: Form and Content*, Rockport Center for the Arts, Rockport, TX (juried)
2002 *Pitchers, Plates, and Platters*, Clay Art Guild of the Hamptons, NY (juried)

Public Art Placements (select)

- 2009-2010 Art on the River, Dubuque, IA (*Wedges II*)
2009-2010 Eastern Illinois University Charleston, IL (*Retracting Wedges*)
2008 The City of Davenport Davenport, IA (*The Wedge*)
The City of Galesburg Galesburg, IL (*Waterworks*)
2005 The Department of the Interior, Herbert Hoover National Historic Site West Branch, IA
2006 Blank Honors Building, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA
2000 Career Resources Center, Illinois State University, Normal, IL

Residencies (select)

- 2009 Eastern Illinois University Summer Sculpture Residency Charleston, IL
2008 Studios Midwest Residency Galesburg Civic Art Center, Galesburg, IL
2006 Artist-in-Residence, Tainan National University of the Arts, Tainan, Taiwan
2004 Artist-in-Residence, Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, West Branch, IA