

RUINSCAPE: ARCHETYPES OF FORM AND SPIRIT

A Thesis

presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Fine Arts

by

KYLE HENDRIX

Associate Professor Joseph Pintz, Thesis Supervisor

May 2018

© Copyright 2018 by Kyle Hendrix
All Rights Reserved

The Undersigned, Appointed by the Dean of the Graduate
School, Have Examined the Thesis Entitled:

Ruinscape: Archetypes of Form and Spirit

Presented by Kyle Hendrix, a Candidate for the Degree of MFA Hereby

Certify that in Their Opinion it is Worthy of Acceptance

Associate Professor Joseph Pintz

Professor R. Bede Clarke

Associate Professor Michael Yonan

Assistant Teaching Professor Matthew Ballou

Acknowledgments

My journey would not have been made possible without the love and support of my grandparents Delbert and Betty Hendrix, my father Timothy, and mother Belinda. Their love and encouragement made it possible for me to push my boundaries and achieve my goal of obtaining a graduate degree in art.

I would like to thank my partner, Israh Qureshi for her support and guidance during my journey in graduate school. She never hesitated to assist in me in anyway she could.

I would also like to thank my thesis committee; Joseph Pintz, Bede Clarke, Matt Ballou, and Michael Yonan for their dedication and commitment to my education, graduate body of work and thesis development.

A special acknowledgement goes to Charlie Olson for giving me the guidance and foundation to succeed and the knowledge to realize my dreams in clay.

Thank you to all my teachers, friends, and studio-mates over the years for their encouragement and inspiration.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
List of Illustrations	iv
Abstract	v
Chapter	
I. Introduction	1
II. Collectors	6
III. Architecture and Landscape	9
IV. Ancient Marks	11
IV. Conclusion	14
Illustrations	17
Bibliography	25
Image References	26

List of Illustrations

1. Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado
2. Kiva, Balcony House, Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado
3. Stonehenge, Wiltshire, England
4. Callanish Stones, Callanish, Isle of Lewis, United Kingdom
5. Untitled: Ruinscape Series, Earthenware, 20x15x10", 2017
6. Untitled: Ruinscape Series, Ornamental Addition Detail
7. Untitled: Ruinscape Series, Earthenware, 15x15x9", 2017
8. Balcony House, Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado
9. Untitled: Ruinscape Series, Earthenware, 16x11x12", 2017
10. Untitled: Ruinscape Series, Earthenware, 17x10x9", 2017
11. Untitled: Ruinscape Series, Earthenware, 14x12x10", 2017
12. Untitled: Ruinscape Series, Detail of Ornament Addition
13. Thesis Exhibition, George Caleb Bingham Gallery, University of Missouri
14. Thesis Exhibition, George Caleb Bingham Gallery, University of Missouri
15. Thesis Exhibition, George Caleb Bingham Gallery, University of Missouri
16. Thesis Exhibition, George Caleb Bingham Gallery, University of Missouri

Ruinscape: Archetypes of Form and Spirit

Kyle Hendrix

Joseph Pintz, Thesis Supervisor

Abstract

The megalithic architecture of many cultures throughout history share a continuity of form language that is archetypal, and therefore independent of distance or location. I am interested in the distinct sense of the enigmatic, sacred and monumental presence that these ancient sites convey. My work focuses on the creation of sculptural ceramic objects inspired by ancient stone architecture. My aim is to create objects that imply a far-reaching perspective that has been imbued with a perceptible sense of sacred and mysterious utility. By echoing ancient architecture, my work points to our shared past as a way to bring focus to our common humanity and draw connections to historic cultures.

I. Introduction

When I experience ancient architectural sites, I am confronted with overwhelming personal questions regarding my own place in the world, my mortality, and my ancestors. Pondering these iconic locations creates a longing in me to seek a greater understanding of my existence and how I am connected to those who built such incredible sites.

My first encounter with ancient stone architecture took place at Mesa Verde National Park when I was 10 years old. Walking around the Pueblo ruins changed the way that I viewed the world and thought about my personal history (figure 1). It also pushed me to reflect on the rituals and ceremonial activity that I participated in before and after that visit. As my family and I walked around the ruins, we were given a small glimpse into the past. Once in the heart of the site, I felt strangely overwhelmed. I understood that the people who built this place were long dead and gone, yet I felt a distinct connection to them. The ruins felt unmistakably human, and it was easy to imagine myself as being a part of that society. I was awestruck at the form and scale of the Kivas, the ritual chambers built into the stone in the center of many of the dwellings (figure 2). Immediately, I was in a place of wonderment, pondering the people who lived in the structure and what their daily lives and rituals were like. As I viewed the architecture, I conjured many narratives about how the ancient culture utilized that space.

These experiences at Mesa Verde have stayed with me. I remain interested in the sense of the unknown and awe that we experience when viewing ancient ruins.

When I encounter architectural ruins, I am bombarded with questions about how these spaces came to exist. I ponder the people that created them, their culture, and the forces that drove them to build such structures. I consider the engineering feats of these early cultures and how it was possible for them to achieve such architectural wonders.

Today, archeologists have many unanswered questions and often cannot state the exact dates that many of the world's ancient megalithic sites were created. I am interested in these unanswered questions and mysteries because they are the keys linking us to our past, our human history and how we came to understand and manipulate our world. Ancient stone architecture and megaliths are focal points of connection, drawing all of humanity back to the essence of our shared identity. There is something distinctly human that ancient megalithic structures symbolize, and I believe these heirlooms built by our ancestors hold a distinct power to break down the walls of alienation between contemporary cultures. They speak about what it means to be human and to be mortal, but they also hold many mysteries and unanswered questions that, once explored, could add important knowledge to the human story.

Ancient megalithic sites from across the globe were often focal points for ritual. Although the rituals and ceremonies undoubtedly varied widely from culture to culture, humans have spent countless days and nights building and curating spaces in which to conduct rituals. While the specific utility of most ancient megalithic sites elicits speculation, it is obvious that they were places of great importance to the cultures that built them, especially considering the time and care

that it took to for their construction. It is evident when observing an ancient megalithic site like Stonehenge in England (figure 3) that the structure and others like it were designed as sacred places with distinct intent. The power of these sites is not limited to the specific ritual or ceremony that it may have been designed for initially, but rather their formal presence in space. This power can also be witnessed when viewing the placement and arrangement of a site like the Callanish Stones in northern Scotland (figure 4), where many large-scale stones are placed in geometric patterns. The mass of stones confronts the viewer, eliciting a great sense of intention and suggesting hidden meaning in the formal composition. The significance of the site transcends language and time, and is comprehensible at a glance. It does not require an explanation to communicate that it is a place of great importance to mankind.

Ancient architectural ruins have served as powerful points of inspiration for human acts of creative expression for as long as they have existed. They represent the hard work of past cultures and of knowledge obtained by our ancestors. The visual arts have often taken on a similar role in echoing the evocative functions of ancient ruin sites in their attempt to touch on the archetypes of human emotions. They are analogous to ancient ruin sites in that they both shed light on what it means to wrestle with the mysteries of life. Just as we relay on the past artistic masters to teach us their wisdom, ancient ruins inform the world of what came before. The sentiments of passing time expressed within ruins remind us of the fragility and mortality of our own lives. The mysteries and lost stories of their

creators speak of progress and shared values. Ancient ruin sites connect us to the past and give contemporary makers a glimpse into shared history.

Inspired by ancient architectural sites, I seek to create a sense of the monumental and the enigmatic in my ceramic sculpture (figure 5). It is my goal to provoke the viewer to ask questions. How did these forms come to be? What do they represent? And finally, what is their possible utility?

Through the use of geometric forms, I mimic elements of prehistoric structures in my work in order to create unique architectonic compositions that resemble ancient stone structure and landscape simultaneously. The objects that I create are not intended to be miniatures or models of architectural sites; rather, they are sculptures that elicit similar questions on a more intimate scale while echoing places of ritualistic design.

In my work, I use individual structural elements to suggest a liminal sensibility that relates to architecture and landscape simultaneously. This sensibility is achieved by arranging individual modules in geometric patterns, and by connecting structural elements of varying heights to adjacent pieces. I also use vertical variations from one module to the next in the composition to create greater visual interest and a sense of flow.

To communicate a sense of mystery and ritualistic intentionality to the viewer, I develop focal points on the surfaces of my sculptures (figure 6). These embellishments range from single units to multiples that are arranged in geometric patterns. These sculptural additions extend to the vertical edges of forms to resemble deteriorating walls and structural moments of decay. The embellishments

are constructed in such a way that they vary in scale and texture. The texture is created on their surfaces to give them the appearance of age and weathering, as if they stood the test of time.

II. Collectors

I come from a family of collectors and I was raised to value objects through the stories and relationships that are attached to them. As a young child living with my grandparents, antiques and handmade objects surrounded me. Most of the items were utilitarian in nature, such as tools and furniture. Over the years, most of the objects collected had lost their original usefulness, but my grandparents still saw great sentimental value in the old items. This was especially true for the things that belonged to their relatives. Many of the objects had stories that connected them to the people who originally owned them. Sometimes the object would evoke memories of a specific place or event from their past, or their relatives' past, that had been passed down through oral history.

Hearing those stories being told around the object was a powerful way for me to connect to my ancestors, people that I had never met. It was a significant way to find meaning in my own existence through an appreciation of lineage and to develop pride in the culture into which I was born. As the objects adorned our most intimate spaces, they reminded us of what it meant to be human. They reminded us of our lost loved ones and the pieces of our heritage that should be celebrated.

I believe ancient megalithic sites have a similar power. They draw points of connection to historic cultures on a much grander scale than simple family heirlooms. The sense of connection is greater than from one person to another, or from one individual to a family history. It is a grand association on a global scale, one that transcends our limited perception of time through the physical remains of the

lives of so many who came before us. Ancient sites of ritual and ceremony have the ability to connect us with our most historic ideas of culture and force us to ponder our ancestors. Ancient architectural sites from all over the Earth are cultural heirlooms that have the power to energize our sense of common humanity.

I seek to distill the evocative power of connection that is inherent in ancient architectural sites on an intimate scale in my sculptural ceramics objects. Just as I was raised to believe that there is power in objects, and that these objects have the ability to tell stories and stimulate emotions, my goal is to create sculptures that also operate in this way. By emulating the archetypal form language of ancient megalithic sites on an intimate scale, the objects I create are designed to adorn our most personal of spaces; our domestic space. My goal is for my objects to enhance a person's daily life and foster within them a greater sense of connection to the whole of humanity and our common ancestry.

In a contemporary society, ancient architectural ruin sites also function as powerful symbols prompting us to contemplate our mortality. Ancient ruin sites express their power through the display and evidence of thousands of years of erosion on their surfaces. Their original forms have been altered. The older a site is, the longer it has had to evolve and shift into its current state, and the more there is written upon it that we can attempt to decode. Ruins are generated and evolve through natural disasters, wars, or simply the passing of time.

Humans often give great value to things that have endured the passage of time. Our museums are filled with artifacts much older than the buildings in which they are housed. Ancient megalithic sites are some of the oldest man-made things in

existence. This ability of stone to endure creates a special continuity of form and meaning that allows us to glimpse the past. Experiencing these ancient sites gives us a chance to learn about the cultures that built them and to discover their values, hopes, and dreams. It is my strong conviction that ancient sites were meant to serve as symbols, to encode knowledge, and to pass down information to future generations. This allowed a form of direct communication from the building generation to those people who came afterwards. Was it the builders' goal only to distill a certain message into their structures, or to ensure the continuation of a certain belief system?

Humanity's desire to create impressive structures that would endure speaks about their awareness of mortality and their goal of value preservation. I strive to bring that same sentiment into my sculptural objects. By emulating the ancient ruin sites, I point back to the lessons they offer and the humanity of their creators. My goal is to remind the viewer of the passing of time and their own mortality. By creating objects that emulate ruins and ancient structures on an intimate scale, the viewer is able to interact with the objects in their most private space. The objects remind us of our humanity and that we are a part of a much larger story line of evolution that is not easily perceptible. At their core, ancient architectural sites represent our shared human values, and it is my desire to bring those values into a person's intimate space.

III. Architecture and Landscape

There are many cases where we can see that the initial designs of ancient megalithic sites were dictated by the landscape. Historically, architecture was necessarily more closely integrated into the landscape. Ancient civilizations did not have the global supply chain or earth moving machines in order to easily alter their environment like we have today. As a result, cultures had to work with what the landscape offered in order to construct their architecture. If a culture lived in a dense rocky landscape, it would be far too difficult to dig into the ground and displace the landmass for a level footing. Those ancient cultures built on top of the land, integrating their buildings with the naturally uneven surfaces. In desert regions, cultures would not have had certain raw materials to use for their construction. For example, wood was a scarce material so architecture was often constructed out of adobe that was dried in the sun.

In order to emulate our species' historic relationship with the land when constructing ancient structures, I aim to visually bridge the gap of architecture and landscape in my work by creating forms that have the capacity to represent both simultaneously (figure 7). Although the modular units in my compositions have a strong visual reference to architecture, the overall composition is meant to refer to landscape as well. This double reference occurs when the modular units combine to form varying geometric shapes and shifting relationships of scale and dimension between connected forms. Each individual form in the composition is able to identify with many different functions of an architectural space or landscape at the

same time. A taller rectangular form has the ability to reference both a tower and natural stone outcropping simultaneously. Smaller scaled forms are able to represent both domestic dwelling spaces and landscapes such as hills and rock outcroppings. The integration of architecture and landscape in my work gives the objects a liminal quality. This formal duality also lends a sense of timelessness to the compositions. The objects that I create appear as if they could exist in any culture throughout our architectural history. By referencing both landscape and architecture, my work is able to reach a broad audience by visually relating to a vast variety of time periods, cultural regions and utilities. In this way, my sculptures implicitly speak of human agency through architecture.

IV. Ancient Marks

I was strongly influenced by my early experience of the Mesa Verde cliff dwellings. That journey to such a powerful piece of human history propelled me on a path to deeply ponder human's need for sacred spaces and the mysteries of ancient sites that are still unknown to us. At Mesa Verde, I found myself drawn to the heavily textured surfaces of ancient construction sites, especially where one could see the tool marks cut into the stone. To me those marks spoke of history and individual struggle. The marks made me feel connected with the site, knowing that, long ago, a person had stood in that exact place.

The trip to Mesa Verde pushed me to seek more opportunities to view ruins and ancient architectural sites. In college, I visited an ancient Christian catacomb in the city of Rome. While exploring the hand-cut tunnels and viewing the gravesites I felt moved by the tool markings that showed where people had originally excavated the space. The most distinct tool marks were on the ceiling of the catacombs. During the continued construction of the catacombs as excavators needed more space in the burial site, they would dig further into the ground, making the graves on the highest levels the oldest. I found the marks extremely beautiful and inspiring. Viewing those ancient catacombs propelled me to ponder the individuals who originally dug the holes over the years.

Those ancient manmade marks in stone had a lasting effect on my consciousness. I had another powerful experience while viewing the Balcony House ruin site (figure 8) during a second trip to Mesa Verde National Park. I noticed on a short wall made of stacked stones that was facing the canyon, a series of small faint symbols carved into the surface of the stone. The Park Guide remarked that researchers still did not know what the symbols represented, but clearly they were of definite importance to the maker for them to take such careful effort to place them there.

These moments of viewing ancient markings around construction sites made a deep impression on me that pushed me to emulate ancient manmade stone structures in my sculptural work. Ancient marks in stone represent the past coming into direct contact with the present. They remind us of the connection between ancient peoples and ourselves; that we are not all that different from our forebears. We foster the same need to create and the same desire to connect with others in our culture. By emulating ancient stone architecture and surfaces altered by humans, I prompt the viewer to ponder long past generations and to feel a relationship to our ancient ancestors. I want the viewer to feel a bond with our collective pasts as humans and to be reminded that our ancestors left information to be decoded in their ancient structures.

When I first began exploring architectonic forms, I tried to emulate a color spectrum most closely related to stone (figure 9). Browns, reds and gray made up my predominant color choices. I wanted to stick closely to a rock-like color spectrum to speak clearly to the viewer that I was indeed emulating stone

structures. After exploring this palette for a few months, I began to branch out into a wider range of colors that more closely resembled landscapes of other stone varieties, such as sandstone. I also began to consider emulating the plant life that might occur on ancient structures. This led me to begin exploring colors in the green and yellow tones (figure 10 & 11). I began to layer this range of colors to emulate stone sites that may have been taken over by the landscape, and now have moss and plant life growing over them. Or, structures like that in the Egyptian desert that were cut into the sandstone where it can be difficult to decipher where the manmade structure stops and the landscape begins.

One of my major goals pertaining to the exploration of color was to push my palette to a wide enough range so that a series of my sculptures being shown together have a large scope. I want the individual pieces of this series of work to be visually diverse in order to reference a wide range of geographical regions. By focusing on a wide range of potential locations for my works to reference, I hope to appeal to a larger audience and not limit my work to identifying with a specific place and time in history. I also apply brighter hues to specific focal points on my sculptures. To highlight the small ornamental additions as a way to push the viewer to notice them quicker and to have those moments visually separate from the rest of the composition (figure 12).

V. Conclusion

The ancient architectural sites of our past have served countless generations of humans, reminding us of what it means to be mortal while fostering a sense of connection between past and present cultures. Although the people who created our ancient sites are long gone and their reasons for being compelled to accomplish such monumental constructions can only be guessed at, their creations still hold significance. The need for feeling connected and finding uncommon beauty in everyday life has driven humans to imagine and perform creative acts since our beginning. In order to come to terms with our mortality, we construct funerary objects and burial sites that revere the dead and console the living. In order to foster beauty, we decorate and create art objects to adorn both our public and private spaces. From the first cave painting to the first decorated vessel, humans have demonstrated their desire to understand and improve their lives through the act of creation. The remnants of ancient architectural sites help me recognize that we all are apart of a larger story. Even though a great amount of time has passed, we are still connected to those ancient creators through the deep-rooted values and needs that make us human.

Through the creation of sculptural objects that mimic the forms of the ancient architectural ruin sites, my work echoes the sense of connectedness evoked by ancient architectural sites. This can be seen in the presentation of the sculptural works in the thesis exhibition. When the viewer enters the gallery space, they are confronted with sculptural objects placed upon pedestals throughout the gallery arranged in clusters. Darkness fills the empty voids of the gallery space with light

focusing solely on the sculptures. This creates a tone of stillness and spiritual reverence in the room.

The pedestals raise the sculptures closer to eye level with the viewer. Instead of looking down onto the objects from above, their height in space forces the audience to be face-to-face with the work. The objects confront the viewer as they approach, taking on a perception of scale that is greater than their actual size. The sculptures evoke a tone of monumentality and fortitude (figure 13). The pedestals are designed with two legs placed in a triangle shape with an open gap. This allows for a large amount of open space between the top of the pedestal and the floor. This openness makes them visually light in order to not weigh down and overwhelm the object that rests upon it. The open legs elevate the work, but do not visually outweigh it.

The tops of the pedestals that the objects rest on are circular. The curvilinear form of the circle echoes the soft organic curves of the edges of the sculptural compositions. It also allows the viewer to walk around the object in a fluid manner.

The pedestals are comprised of three sizes that correspond with the size of the object that each holds (figure 14). This categorized composition allows the largest of the objects to be elevated the most in order for them to become focal points in the space. The middle and smaller-tiered sculptures orbit around the largest in clusters to mimic how civilization often spread out from central geographical locations as they grew over time. The largest objects are also placed near the center of the smaller tiered sculptures in order to draw the viewer into the space (figure 15). As the viewer enters the gallery, they are first confronted with the

shorter displays that gradually ascend to the taller and larger objects. This juxtaposition also echoes how focal points of ancient architectural ritual sites were often the geographical focus in societies.

As the viewer moves through the space, the clusters open and shift along a meandering course. This enables one to walk into the grouping for closer inspection allowing sentiments of mystery and wonder to develop. The overall room takes on the tone of an expansive landscape with architectural entities spread throughout the geography of the space (figure 16).

Figure 1: Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado

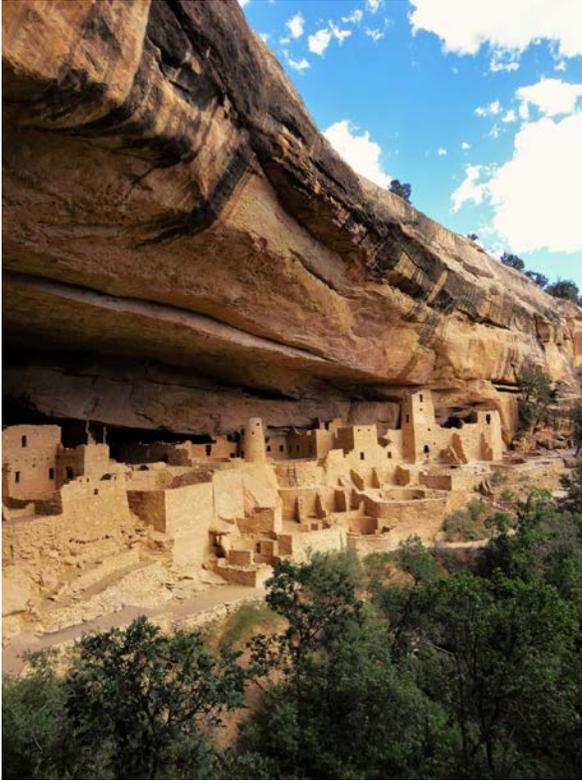


Figure 2: Kiva



Figure 3: Stonehenge, Wiltshire, England



Figure 4: Callanish Stones, Callanish, Isle of Lewis, United Kingdom



Figure 5: Untitled: Ruinscape Series, 20"x15"x10", Earthenware, 2017



Figure 6: Untitled: Ruinscape Series, Ornamental Addition Detail



Figure 7: Untitled: Ruinscape Series, 15"x15"x9", Earthenware, 2017



Figure 8: Balcony House, Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado



Figure 9: Untitled: Ruinscape Series, 16"x11"x12", Earthenware, 2017



Figure 10: Untitled: Ruinscape Series, 17"x10"x9", Earthenware, 2017



Figure 11: Untitled: Ruinscape Series, 14"x12"x10", Earthenware, 2017



Figure 12: Untitled: Ruinscape Series, Detail of Ornament Addition



Figure 13: Thesis Exhibition, George Caleb Bingham Gallery, University of Missouri



Figure 14: Thesis Exhibition, George Caleb Bingham Gallery, University of Missouri



Figure 15: Thesis Exhibition, George Caleb Bingham Gallery, University of Missouri



Figure 16: Thesis Exhibition, George Caleb Bingham Gallery, University of Missouri



Bibliography

Collins, Andrew. *Göbekli Tepe: Genesis of the Gods: the Temple of the Watchers and the discovery of Eden*. Rochester, VT: Bear & Company, 2014.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane; the Nature of Religion. Translated from the French by Willard R. Trask*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959.

Ginsberg, Robert. *The Aesthetics of Ruins*. Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2004.

Hancock, Graham, and Graham Hancock. *Magicians of the Gods: the Forgotten Wisdom of Earths Lost Civilization*. London: Coronet, 2016.

Makarius, Michel. *Ruins*. Paris: Flammarion, 2004.

Peet, Preston. *Disinformation Guide to Ancient Aliens, Lost Civilizations, Astonishing Archaeology & Hidden History*. San Francisco, CA: Disinformation, 2013.

Schoch, Robert M. *Forgotten Civilization: The Role of Solar Outbursts In Our Past and Future*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2012.

Image References

Figure 1: By Rationalobserver - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=40948864>

Figure 3: By garethwiscombe -
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/garethwiscombe/1071477228/in/photostream/>,
CC BY 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=13278936>

Figure 4: By Chmee2 - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=21785005>