IT'S ELEMENTARY MY DEAR WATSON

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

University of Missouri

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts

by

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MAY 2010
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Have Examined the Thesis Entitled:

IT'S ELEMENTARY MY DEAR WATSON

Presented by Ian Matthew Shelly, a Candidate for the Degree of MFA

Hereby Certify that in Their Opinion it is Worthy of Acceptance

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Professor R. Bede Clarke

____________________________________
Professor Dr. Josephine Stealey

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Professor Dr. Mark Fine
DEDICATION

Well Dad, here we are...finally. This is as much yours as it is mine. The story within this work is your story, my story and I believe it to ultimately be the story of man on Earth. You got so close to hearing it.

As your son, I learned that the chemistry you devoted your life to researching is just a study of complex, yet real relationships. All along, and especially in the end, it is the relationships between all of those electrons, neutrons and nuclei that determine our paths. Unfortunately, these paths are impossible to map, navigate and teach, but you gave it a heroic and epic attempt. In the end, the same chemistry that could heal was the chemistry that harmed.
You were always looking for an understanding greater than that of your own scientific research. You must have found it by now.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To thank everyone for helping me get where I am would require more pages than anyone has time to read. I am fortunate to have been able to keep friends and family close and rely on everyone when the going got tough. Drew Williams, Joe Romero and Shane Blackwell - we have been through so much together and I look back on our years with elation and honor. I am truly fortunate to have spent my maturing years with you guys and look forward to where we go.

My graduate student colleagues here in the department are among the smartest and most interesting people I have ever known. Nancy Brown, Sloane Snure-Paulus, Eric Sweet and numerous others through these years have been there by my side in the darkest of hours and the most radiant of collective achievements. After moving to Columbia I was greeted by the warmest of hearts at the Marx Building studios. There was never a time, then and now, when the help of the Marx brothers wasn’t enough. Matt Moyer, Eric Zamuco, and Dominique Venzant - we were each other’s labor force, sounding board and psychiatrists; it has been an honor to have served with you all.

The faculty here at the University of Missouri has been warm and inviting. Among the most helpful were of course Bede Clarke and Jo Stealey, for serving on my committee and helping me find my own path, which would, at times,
become hidden and lost. Dr. Mark Fine, for your external and peripheral insight
and encouragement. Jim Calvin offered an insightful eye, a soft-spoken
appraisal, and free reign of his sculpture department. Matt Ballou and Chris
Daniggelis - you have both been my models for what I want to become as an
instructor. Your perceptive observation of my progress and wonderfully
articulated critique guided me to my current position; a position with a
commanding authority of my artwork and myself.

My family has been there for me at times when others could not help for
reasons easily imaginable. My grandparents have been figures to admire and
adore; your generosity and care forged the way for our family and this work.
Graham, I have safely navigated the horrifying and the spectacular in this work
by showing our childhood experiences and our adult relationship. You always
were and always will be my partner in crime and my most generous benefactor;
a brother’s love is something special and can only be truly understood by the
profoundly fortunate. Mom, you were given two boys and through your
nurturing touch, masterful insight, and by your glowing and patient contrast,
you transformed two overlooked relationships into two childhoods filled with
learning experiences and fond memories. You did it all yourself; you deserve all
the credit.
After high-school, I searched for father figures everywhere I went. There were many, but none as important as my ceramic teachers. Shane Christensen, Von Venhuizen, Dave Funk, and Bede Clarke, you opened your studios, your homes, and you opened your souls to me, which filled in the gaps and illuminated the path before me. For potters, genealogy is tremendously important, and I am undeniably honored to have learned from you and your families.

In this program, I have found someone that shares the same values, interests and heart as my own. Where we go from here excites me, Natalie, like nothing else. Strap in lady, the world is ours.
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IT'S ELEMENTARY MY DEAR WATSON

Ian Shelly

R. Bede Clarke, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This creative research explores connections between the fields of scientific research, weapons proliferation and ceramic art making. My work consists of a twisted world of these themes seen and told through childhood imagery and subjects. The juxtaposition of violence and destruction against innocence and playfulness and the cyclical way that I engage both intuitively and through calculation with my artwork are vital in impressing a notion of conflict’s early presence and danger in our lives. The overlap of weapons, chemistry and art is embodied in the relationships of the characters within these compositions and their iconographic meanings. This amalgamation is constructed through installations, sculptures and miniature models employing numerous kinds of ceramic and non-ceramic materials such as metal, wood, plastics and glass.

These works present conflict as similar to chemistry - omnipresent and unavoidable. The truths explored here feature a convoluted personal narrative, where family portraiture is seen through the lenses of our scientists and the imaginations of our children. Within the microcosmic worlds that the characters and environments in this work construct, the viewer is presented with simultaneous situations of destruction and unity. It is my intent through this imagery to lead my audience towards a greater appreciation of multiple views and non-binary biases.
INT. SMOKY BAR -- EARLY EVENING

The bar is crowded with the first wave of after-work professionals. The bar is filling up, and nearly all the surrounding tables in the surrounding rooms are full. After returning from the bathroom, IAN, 22, is joined by DR. SHELLY, 50, who places his light-colored pint glass on the table and takes a seat. Ian sits patiently sipping from his own darker pint while the aging professor situates himself in his chair. The two sit a few minutes just drinking, waiting for conversation to return to the table.

IAN
Can you explain how a nuclear reaction works?

DR. SHELLY smiles a little and looks into his drink and begins to answer

DR. SHELLY
Sure. It is a relatively simple thing.

IAN
My science teacher in tenth grade told me that all the destruction in a nuclear explosion is from the electrons circling around the nucleus...like, just a few but enormous. Is that right?

DR. SHELLY
I remember that guy. He isn’t wrong, but he isn’t exactly right either.

IAN smiles quickly and raises his glass to the air.

IAN
That doesn’t surprise me at all. He was really strange.

DR. SHELLY
Yes. Yes, he was. It’s not that the electrons don’t destroy anything, it’s that they destroy things exponentially. When that nuclear reaction is started it causes a chain of reactions that destroy things.

IAN
Ahhhhhh. Was that fusion or fission? What’s the difference?

DR. SHELLY
Fission - fission is a breaking down of a molecule into smaller parts, and fusion is a combining of nuclei to form a heavier mass.

IAN
Oh...so the destruction does happen because of the electrons moving around. Right?

DR. SHELLY
Well, yes and no.

IAN
So they do, and they don’t. Is this what a paradox is?

DR. SHELLY
No, that’s something else. Well, I guess maybe...interesting.

IAN
Well it seems to me that a lot of things in life are and aren’t. Right? I guess you could define a lot of things that way.

DR. SHELLY
I suppose so.

IAN
So much destruction and it can be explained so matter of factly, huh?

There is a long pause as the conversation replays in their minds. After a few moments IAN looks down into his glass and starts to talk. DR. SHELLY smiles.

IAN
One more thing - can you get this? I forgot my wallet.
I. ALCHEMY

Chemistry, as we know it now, has come a long way, with its earliest form being alchemy. This practice and study involved a rudimentary understanding of the world and the way things worked and was often less factual and more superstitious and spiritual. When I think about my childhood spent in the facilities of Stevens Institute of Technology and Texas Tech University’s chemical research laboratories, I was surrounded by countless volumes of scientific fact written down as part of the canon of scientific understanding. I am reminded of the way I perceived things in my world. I remember how I believed things were connected. This naïve understanding was like medieval alchemy. What I thought made sense was, in retrospect, nonsense. Reality was completely outside my grasp of understanding. This nonsensical environment is the place where a child’s imagination exists. A young brain is comfortable, functional and fertile in a world where objects and ideas are held together with naïve logic that is specific to them as individuals.

My unwillingness to commit to a world governed by real understanding and consequences could possibly explain how my work has become a melting pot or amalgamation of scientific code, terminology and symbols. In this catalytic atmosphere exist the languages and gadgetry of our military, the field of commercial and academic biology and a generous helping of art and pottery-making. The recipe for this art-stew is drawn from the depths of my personal history and my interpretation of the world. The vessels that I use to prepare, cook and deliver this work are a collection of languages and objects that reference
my early education and play. This artwork is born out of a familiarity with science and an examination of its successes and failures. However, there is very little understanding of science that floats to the top. What is visible is a genuine wonderment and awe for all things chemical and geeky. Through making this artwork, my understanding of myself and my world is slowly expanding.

The identity of my work is seen in the baggage associated with vessel-making and science. The subjects of pottery, science and countless other components are like the variables of a never-ending, infinite equation with billions of possible solutions. These variables, formulae, values and solutions relate to the fields of weapons manufacturing (both ancient and contemporary), chemical and biological research, and art making. Like any chemical reaction, my visual influences and variables are always spinning around one another as if part of a charged particle or neutron cloud. Chemistry is omnipresent. Nothing exists in this universe that is not created by some kind of reaction. I find the atmosphere created by this constant reaction so real that it sustains tangible expression. The elements that make up my convoluted array of objects, images and atmospheres may change appearance and form or become effigies for one another, but they never leave completely. These elements constantly collide with one another in my work, producing battles and alliances. This work shows the nature of human relationships through the lenses of our society’s researchers and scientists.

In the coming chapters, I will discuss my use of simple objects and symbols to form the foundation for an entire mythology. The majority of my
studio practice employs different thought-processes revolving around play and analysis. This dichotomous relationship is one also seen in my juxtaposition of harmful and dangerous themes against playful and innocent ones. These amalgamations illustrate the ambiguous presence of conflict in the world; through the employment of scientific themes, a viewer of this work is able to see conflict as the direct result of two kinds of perennial human activities: misunderstanding – willful or otherwise – and the heroic yet flawed effort to understand through research and classification. The impossible task of greater understanding is shown within this work through the ever-shifting, illogical relationships between characters and environments, mutating as though planned out by a child. I will discuss these behaviors, when and how they are employed, as well as my choice of disparate working materials. I will shine light on my careful and neurotic orchestration of the odd relationships between an accumulating cast of characters, such as the scientist warhead and the soldier road cone. I remain interested in and inspired by the ways science and education influence the good as well as the bad in our world.

This document will take us to many places. Some of these will be familiar; others will be obscure. Some will make sense, and others will be ridiculous. We are going to a world governed by ten year old boys and guarded by plastic army men: A world without laws, protected only by flexible rules. This is a reality drawn with cartoon lines and colored in with the severity and tone of film noir and Sherlock Holmes. We are going to a world built to emulate our fathers’ world. Our first stop will be the cast. The different relationships at play in this
work will be defined to explain the structure in which the importance of the these figures is imagined, planned and implemented. Let us think about the moving picture show, what goes on behind the scene.
II. CAST LIST

The task of identifying and describing characters in this work is difficult, difficult because the differences and similarities between them change often. However, a few have remained quite constant. In this chapter, a variety of characters will be discussed based on their importance to me.

I often flash back to childhood when drawing inspiration for the design and arrangement of the personified beings in this work. These flashbacks make me six years old again and put me on the floor with He-Man and G.I. Joe action figures, plastic army men, candy machine trash and game parts. My younger imagination and logic assigned values to these objects and decided who was in charge, who lived in the imaginary blanket mountain fortress and which action figure was married to our only female G.I. Joe. This differentiation came easily to me as a child; but as an adult, my brain tries to assign natural and learned logic to the associations between characters. Try as I may to distance my 27 year-old brain from all of my “wisdom,” I create characters that are enigmatic and ambiguous in appearance and even more complicated in value.

Keeping with my cinematic approach to presentation, I feel that it only makes sense to organize my characters by activating their crucial roles. They are all performers, and we are here to see their show.

**Starring Roles:**

This body of work began with conical shaped vases and then Erlenmeyer flasks (figure 1). Their nagging persistence and presence in my studio caused
them to morph into sculptural objects and icons. This shape evolved into literal traffic cones, and after months of pondering, their status as a harbinger of caution became a metaphorical representation of the worry and danger within my family concerning the chemical imbalances in my father's brain. The bipolar disorder is one that is started by a chemical predisposition for chaos and illogical, erratic behavior and is exacerbated by stress. This dangerous scenario became the impetus for my work, and the traffic cone became the star of a constantly changing project of threat and worry.

This cone had an army of others at his side and existed without an antagonist. The only threats to these figures were themselves or large inanimate objects as we see in *It's Elementary My Dear Watson* (figures 2 & 3). In the months to come, this cone continued to change into the funnel, bullet and flask, and never lost its center-stage presence in a violent tale of destruction. However, this all changed when the cone mutated into a toy warhead.

The scientists in *Research* (figure 4) are Weeble-Wobble toys in design and function. They have heavy bases that keep them upright and are rather indestructible because of their dense, hearty construction. Like scientific understanding and discovery, these scientists are resilient. Throughout the work and in the world, it seems the tougher the scenarios and circumstances are, the stronger and more concentrated they become. This is true when science is controlled and knowledge is persecuted; it finds a way of continuing despite hardships. In *Research*, the scientist figures are huddled together despite their confinement at the end of a steep and precarious board. Their attention is fixed
upon a large, ominous cluster of shapes that they are working to decipher. This work is an example of the scientists set at an innocent task with a beneficial purpose. The decision to represent the scientist as a toddler’s toy was easy. The presence of science is so elementary to our lives, and conflict is so much a part of our history and education that this form can serve as a representative for human development and advancement.

The traffic cones and scientists in this work are all soldiers. Although the traffic cones appear most often as troops in battle formations and aftermaths, the scientists are always at work researching or championing their study, as seen in Propaganda Crew (figure 5). No matter what the activity may be, it is subservient to a higher authority. The activities of these scientists and traffic cones are autonomous and seem to occur without orders at all, as if for the greater good, which is what humans function for on the most basic level.

The work of Tom Otterness illustrates a similar organization of class groupings and a playful personification of figures. In Microscope (figure 6), we see a figure arranged at the lens and one at the base of a microscope. These figures interact with one another, and their difference in class and social standing is implied by their positions on the microscope; the top figure is observing the second, where the specimen would be. The details of this relationship are ambiguous, however, the impression on the lower figure’s stomach allows us to assume that the microscope has made this indention and the elevated figure is responsible. This work embodies the playfulness and seriousness that I seek to show in my work. Although Otterness’ work displays different caste systems
based on social structures and monetary hierarchies, the way that he separates and displays the interactions of his figures is similar to my approach.

**Supporting Roles:**

This is where things get complicated, as if they weren’t already. The starring roles are simple to see in this work. They are the personified protagonists. When we think of characters that are secondary in importance, we must look to those that are antagonistic. I list the antagonist as a supporting role, because I want to be optimistic when thinking about these themes. The bullet shape is such a numerous and unchanging character that it never becomes personified like the scientist and traffic cone.

Bullets are the physical embodiment of destruction and chaos, however, their role is complicated. In these works bullets penetrate and support as we see in *Cheese Bullets* (figure 7) and *Mindfield* (figures 8 & 9). While one illustrates bullets as helping to support a stool and traffic cones, another shows bullets harming and altering the shape and integrity of a form. These roles move around and change often. At times the bullets are used for the good, and a week later they are carving holes through the bodies of traffic cones. The scientists from *Propaganda Crew* appear diligent in their work yet also seem determined to lead the destruction of all other characters in their midst. These good and bad definitions change regularly, because the notion of good and bad is relative. This theory applies to scientific research, military occupation and weapons proliferation.
Characters are the only objects that I can define; however, with a broad enough imagination, one can see all the object groups and attributes in this work as characters. The traffic cone, scientist and bullets are the actors in this project; all others are extras and crew members. These three are the only objects given the attributes of people. It is the shifting responsibilities and activities of my characters that reinforce my thesis, while also providing an arena for conflict. Whether intentional or not, I see the cause of conflict best illustrated through the lens of childhood icons and a language of play.

Our second stop will be shape, more specifically, the cone. After all, where would we be without the bullet?
III. SHAPE

The last two years of my life have been filled with cones. These have been traffic cones, vases, funnels, warheads and bullets. Unknown to me at the time, I was drawn to objects that were fundamental to the world, objects that are a part of our early education as individuals. Just as a toddler’s life is full of bright colors and elementary shapes, my work shares these early influences. The making of cones is also a fundamental assignment in learning to make vessels. I understand the cone to be a form that is no more interesting than any other three-dimensional shape but one with an obvious presence in objects that were present in my graduate life.

The conical-shaped bullet emerged in my work as part of a system and is one that I am drawn to because of my interests as a potter. A bullet consists of a vessel (casing) and a lid (projectile). Between these two parts is a substance whose sole purpose is to deliver part A from part B to a desired location. We will call this location X. Location X can be many things. It can be something close, as well as something very far away. When far away, what is between the bullet projectile (part A) and location X is also a factor. I am of course speaking of destruction, but I arrived at this through the language of pottery. This language is one that rarely speaks of the negative, and I was drawn to utilitarian vessel-making strictly because of the undeniably positive effect that pottery can have. However, it was the encroaching proximity of our nation’s military usage and industry and my brother’s escalating responsibilities in this field that helped
introduce the shapes and imagery of my vessel work. Figures 10 and 11 illustrate the similarities seen in the appearance and function of vessels and bullet projectiles. Until recently, the vessels in my work existed only to serve as utilitarian wares.

In *Mindfield* (figures 8 & 9), bullet projectiles are used to prop up and support a stool upon which small traffic cone sculptures rest. My intention is to use this conical shaped bullet projectile as a precarious foundation for furniture and other cones. In this work, furniture serves as a metaphor for the idea of human technology and progression. Although a simple, humble stool, its invention and specialization is a product of technological advancements in technique to add comfort and utility. Without these bullets providing support and foundation, the stool would not work; yet with these bullets, it is also made questionable in its use to the consumer. Herein lies a double-edged sword; the destructive bullet is an undeniable part of our world, even part of our educations, yet this object is used to damage things, and often the intent of this damage is to ultimately impede or stop progress.

Our society also employs other symbolic objects that direct and demarcate in a safer way. For instance, the traffic cone is perceived by our society with jeering sarcasm (figure 12), yet when placed in linear succession, it can determine where things go and where a path begins and ends. Traffic cones can be used to warn of danger where human presence cannot be maintained. Unlike the bullet, the traffic cone in this work personifies danger and creates a treacherous narrative that is seen in the arrangement of objects. The inclusion of this cone in
my work brings a sense of danger and introduces the possibility of hazards within the work itself.

*It’s Elementary My Dear Watson* (figures 2 & 3) explores a make believe world where two unimportant but related groups are at conflict with each other. Here the small traffic cones are under attack by a larger object displaying cinderblock characteristics. The destructive implement dropped upon the cones is peppered by unique and individual hexagonal shapes covered with a finish that relates to a different handmade, personal style. This style is different from the cones, which appear as mass-produced and mold-made in large quantities. In this piece, great care is taken to create an “after the fact” and “scene of the crime” idea through the heaviness of the largest objects, their clear dominance over the cones and the chalk outlines around the bodies. *It’s Elementary My Dear Watson* and *Mindfield* work together in different ways to compose a paradoxical relationship between both bullet and cone. In these works, the cone shape also appears as another object that is used for a benign yet helpful purpose - focusing and distilling.

Another basic shape prevalent in my work is the funnel. These conical shapes exist in the real world to serve as an agent for focus. Unlike the cone and bullet, a funnel is a vessel which is open at both ends and is used to deliver a material that is difficult to move from here to there in a gentle way. The funnels in *Mindfield* are made of porcelain clay. This clay is the same material used by the pharmaceutical and scientific world because of its density that is known for unparalleled durability in extreme conditions. Although porcelain is relatively
unaffected by normal handling and high temperature, it is susceptible to damage from force and abrasion. Unlike the bullet, which is meant for an eventual abrasion, and the traffic cone, which flexes to withstand massive amounts of both, the porcelain funnel serves a specialized use in more specific applications.

These conical objects are the storytellers speaking of a place where things help and assist but also hinder and destroy each other. This give and take illustrates the way I believe the real world works. I see all things as part of a paradox incorporating every atom in the universe. This complicated reality is hypothesized, explored, analyzed and justified by the language of chemistry because of the ever-present and fluid nature of this category of science. It is shown here in the problematic and wavering relationships between objects and icons.

Fundamental shapes permeate all aspects of our lives. Of course everything has a shape, but the bullet, cone and funnel are three shapes that provide context and meaning to my work. When someone sees my work, I hope that they think of science and where their life has been touched by it in the past or could even be affected by it in the future. When I think of science I think first of the objects that are used in this field, and I then think of the scientific method. I must admit, however, that I am not as interested in the steps of the scientific method as I am in the way that all the individual steps are explored and negotiated.

Before I can work, I have to play.
IV. THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

My studio practice is negotiated through intense, intuitive play followed by a period of classification and analysis. Therefore, I see my working method as related to that of the scientific researcher. Instead of following an organized list of steps, I use these steps in an organic and nonlinear way, borrowing a little from each in an unpredictable cycle.

Conflict is a theme that has always been at the center of my work. While not always showing a clear protagonist and antagonist, there is a consistent struggle between materials, stylization and subjects. This struggle is sometimes as simple as the nature of material itself - for instance, the repulsion of water-based media by oil-based compounds. Other times adhesion between two or more like substances creates tension and a problem to be explored and understood. Through a large enough lens, it is easy to imagine that any task or academic endeavor could be negotiated through playful experimentation, then understanding. This process is in constant support of not only my artwork but in my relationship to the work as maker and researcher.

*Playtime*

For me, the beginning of any artistic event is begun with play. This component is integral to my studio practice because of my work’s mischievous, childish subjects and the mood cast by the placement of objects and imagery. This work suggests to the audience, viewer and participant that danger could be present where my characters and objects connect. Danger is present in the real
world and is recreated and told in this work using childhood imagery, toy references and the mischievous interactions between the anthropomorphized figures and objects. This is the interaction between the objects in *It’s Elementary My Dear Watson* (figures 2 & 3). The act of play provides a way of connecting with my work. The fertile state found in this activity guides me through the calculations and decisions in my work concerning material choices and the architecture of the compositions.

*Rocket Parts* (figures 13 & 14) began with the intent to create objects that reference my childhood and heritage. This artwork is made up of a drawer that is a platform and home to a crated, miniature rocket, pry-bar and launch pad. These miniatures are scattered about the way a child would arrange them as toys, and the Estes model rocket appears as if it was a sidewinder missile. Underneath the precariously balanced drawer is a pile of scientific masses and objects, such as molecule models, hexagons and tea bowls; this piled matter is the support structure for all that is important on top of the drawer. The rocket, launch pad and pry-bar were constructed by hand from found materials like wooden dowels, stir sticks and scrap metal to separate them from other objects in the composition. This separation occurred because these particular objects are rooted in memory and firsthand experiences. Their construction relied on my ability to improvise with material and surface, which is a method born out of necessity rather than education. This craft I associate with childhood. The remaining drawer, crate and sprawling, scientific mess require more traditional
methodology and practice, like ceramic hand-building, furniture building and metal fabrication.

There was a place in the exhibition for a work that would easily say that this body of work is about ideas such as: pretend warfare (childlike), games, three-party conflicts, potentially lethal and calculative strategy and finally, a carefully constructed arena for play/experimentation activity. From this need and a childhood spent arranging and carrying out elaborate battle strategies with similar anthropomorphic objects like plastic army men, *Slab-Construction* (figure 15) was born. This work is composed of a simple slab of wood that references one that would be used in a laboratory to support an experiment in progress. Above this board is an arrangement of tiny, plastic military figurines. At first glance these figures are arranged in the way they would in the game Risk, from which they were removed. Upon further inspection, the viewer sees that there are three groups represented here. The first is red and waiting, untouched, at the corner of the battlefield. The second and third are gray and black, and because of the similarities in their color, they are engaged in a battle where gray shows more casualties than black. The relationships between these three groups represent three influences in my work; science, military and art, but also illustrates a relationship between groups where two fight while one observes. While the details of this piece will be better discussed elsewhere in this document, it shows a relationship that inspires the characterizations and poses in many of my art works.
Toy objects cover my studio, and I spend a fair amount of time enjoying them. Art making is a problem solving exercise; therefore, everything that is a problem solving exercise is art making. In this work, problem solving tasks like planning, gaming, measuring, mapping and listing eventually get thrown into the mix and labeled “play.” Slab-Construction is an example of a work inspired by playtime, and the resulting piece shares the same language of the whole body of work, yet speaks a different dialect - in this case, it is the preparation and formation of a battleground.

While playfulness is an activity that is important to my studio practice, it is also an dispensable state of mind where I excavate personal imagery from my childhood to clue my viewers into the severity of this subject matter. This dichotomous relationship between gentleness and severity is prevalent in my work and operates to illustrate a primary and dangerous presence in the world. This is only half of the equation; during and after the artwork is made, analysis completes the stories and solidifies relationships between my subjects and their environments.

**Calculations**

Without a sustainable and logical methodology for analyzing this work, it would only be re-creations of a messy room belonging to a 7 year old. The relationships between my characters, are carefully created during “logic assignment sessions” where I remove myself from the ether flowing around my work and make sense of “Who is who?” and “What is going on?” It is never my intention to craft entirely arbitrary artwork. Despite the random placement of
personified objects, the work is anything but arbitrary. These works are a distillation of my life and experiences; this is seen in the 7 year old logic, visible in the way objects and characters are arranged.

Conflict is an inevitable outcome when two parties misunderstand each other, as we have seen gruesomely in *It’s Elementary My Dear Watson*. I say this because the personified objects in this work represent such a conflicted relationship. Tension is also created by constantly switching back and forth between intuitive play and analysis; its beginning in one and ending in the other. This reinforces my goal of casting an atmosphere of doubt, worry and uneasiness concerning the relationships involved between weapons manufacturing, scientific research, ceramics history and people.

*Supply* (figure 16) demonstrates the thoughtfulness taken in organizing and making relationships between concepts and objects. This work was constructed from parts in the studio belonging to previous compositions and unrealized, future work. Its purpose in this thesis is similar to that of *Slab-Construction*; to give context to the other sculptures. Supply brings to the whole a reminder that quantitative and qualitative organization and classification is as much a part of any research or journey towards understanding as art making.

As a tinkerer, understanding the relationship between play and analysis, and how to use them to my benefit has been immensely helpful and has been the hardest part of this work to come to terms with. The three remaining chapters will illuminate my works’ purpose, but no decision is as important to me as a potter and a grown-up finger painter than my choice of materials.
After all, that is where the real chemistry takes place.
V. MATERIAL STUDIES

My beginning in clay was as a potter. Although a large part of a ceramic education is learning how the molecules interact, I responded to the possibilities of the materials through their manipulation and presentation. A potter learns what a material is made of and the course of events that put that material into his or her hands.

I approach my choice of materials as a connoisseur; all materials carry with them obvious visual characteristics and histories. The materials in this work become characters, along with more obvious, personified subjects, like scientists and traffic cones. In *It’s Elementary My Dear Watson* (figures 2 & 3), rough, dry and charred terra cotta hexagons serve to represent the idea of a handmade product. This handmade group is at battle with the mechanically mass-produced traffic cones. Orchestration of the relationships between separate materials in my work reinforces the alliances and differences between the characters and environments.

*United they Stand...*

At times, this work depends on similar materials to bring characters of a group together. In *Production* (figure 17), the conical shaped vase forms standing at attention in succession on top of a ware board display a surface quality unlike those holding up the ware board. Cones on top of the board are complete and uninjured and have a surface that is semi-gloss and rich in tone. Obversely, the cones supporting and allowing the “perfect” cones to stand are dull and worn.
This is an example of similar materials and appearances that suggest alliances and partnerships. Their worn and secondhand appearance proposes that this is a class within the body of work which exists to serve others. Similarities in surface treatment also highlight mutual grotesqueness and mutation, suggesting fraternal relationships between objects and characters forged by experience and interest.

_Cheese Bullets_ (figure 7), _Watchtower_ (figure 18), _Parts Sold Separately_ (figures 19 & 20) and others are covered in a patterned surface treatment. Upon further inspection, the surface is loose, imperfect and disagreeable in texture and dark, heavy and coarse in makeup. These surfaces were chosen because they attract and repel the viewer from their appearance. This similarity in exterior is shared between these forms, because they are all used to accept damage and show strength despite their manipulation and abuse. In _Cheese Bullets_, the surface of the moonlike sphere is given an organic and molten appearance as bullet forms pierce and protrude from its surface. In this instance, the clay in the center of this work is taking obvious abuse.

_Watchtower_ and _Parts Sold Separately_ are used in this narrative to support and shield. These objects form structures that protect and house both the personified characters and the viewer’s vantage points. This work is spawned from a dichotomous notion of unity and division, and although the surfaces appear uniformly patterned, these walls show painfully scored plow marks (figure 21) made by a governing being, such as the artist or consumer. This manipulation, accented by finger marks, is intended to aid in the fortress’
function and to function as a mark of brotherhood, providing unit cohesion that underlines their intent to serve. This is similar to the ranking patches worn by our service men and women.

**Divided they Fall...**

The conical vases in *Production* represent two groups with differing tasks. The difference here is small; only the close observer would see the subtle variations of color and sheen. Within other works, changes in shape, color and texture are more obvious - for example, the bullets and the sphere in *Cheese Bullets* or the bullets and wet books in *NFPA 704* (figure 22). These material variations suggest and begin to illustrate a hierarchal structure resembling a chain of command. In *NFPA 704*, four books lay on the floor. Three of these books (weapons manufacturing, chemistry and biology) are wet clay - vulnerable and literally impressionable. Interacting with these books, are germs, molecular models, tea bowls and bullets. The material choices for these different objects are as important as the decisions that determined what the objects were to begin with.

This composition is constructed with four quadrants, similar to the National Fire Protection Agency's 704 label (figure 23) that clearly states the imminent threat within an object, container or place. Within each of these quadrants rests one book, and each has a networking collection of fired and finished objects in and around it. In the chemistry section, for example, there is an array of steel rods and multicolored ceramic balls that resemble a fictitious molecule, constructed with a similarly fictitious molecule-modeling kit. As a
chemist’s son, I understand that humans do the best we can to understand the unexplainable; this is what research is for. However, what we think we understand in comparison with what we still do not is scary. This paradox of understanding and the desire to comprehend deserve explanation through a complex network of hierarchies within the materials themselves. The only portion of this piece that houses a book of fired clay is the “How to be an Artist” quadrant. A network of organic “blobs” is intersecting this book, and tea bowls that reference ceramic history bear the commonly defined chemical formula for clay. Art and pottery seem benign when placed next to biology, chemistry and weapons. I think that striving for centuries after advancements in the production of utilitarian and decorative arts is a much safer endeavor.

The bullet shapes in *Cheese Bullets* penetrate, with clear force, a spherical object that references the early twentieth-century film, *Le Voyage Dans La Lune*, 1902 (figure 24), by Georges Méliès. This work features fired parts, yet the bullets’ treatment suggests a solid, hard state reinforced by rifling marks on the bullet sides. These bullets are entering this sphere, imposing governance and domination over it, as bullets do in the real world. It is also obvious that a bullet is an object that imposes power over another; therefore, these bullets are used to show two parties in this work in conflict through harmful interaction.

Differences can be subtle, as in *Production* (figure 17), and, at times, grandiose and obvious, as in *NFPA 704* (figure 22). These environments present both playful and hostile spaces for the characters. When you remove the characters, icons, shapes, materials, and working methods, you are still left with
the presentation. I want to discuss this by identifying the way that the work is seen by the viewer and by the characters in this work.
VI. VIEWPOINT

Perspectives

I began the discussion about material decisions by relating to pottery influences. The way I interact with my work remains rooted in this discipline. A potter designs work by keeping their user in mind. This artisan knows that part of the interaction with a utilitarian object hinges on a pleasurable experience. A good experience with a vessel will yield success, and a bad one will yield little more than disappointment. My interest in the user’s experience followed my work into this sculpture by involving the viewer in the activity taking place.

This work is centered on study. This study is facilitated by the aerial perspective provided by my arrangement of floor compositions. By simply looking down, the viewer becomes a researcher and detective tasked at figuring out the relationships between characters and objects. Works like Slab Construction (figure 15) and NFPA 704 (figure 22) feature different scenarios. The former displays a battlefield planned out with deadly precision and rendered in board game pieces. This playtime activity is seen and understood best from above (figure 25), as it would if this were a real battlefield with real casualties. The networking steel and clay parts of NFPA 704 are too complex to decipher up close. These pieces offer the viewer an opportunity. Only after seeing this work from above is the viewer able to see the subtle relationships between the book titles and where they appear in relation to one another.
Optics

Within two of these works, the scientists use optical instruments to aid their studies. These include an optometrist’s phoropter and a telescope. These are very different machines. While one is used to view objects up close, the other is used at a large distance. The telescope is an instrument used to study something too far away to see clearly. In Astronomer (figure 26), the scientist uses a telescope to view the bullet sphere. This introduces the concept of wonderment, which is possibly the earliest step or cause of scientific endeavor. This brings a timeless element to a body of work concerning modern sciences and weaponry.

A phoropter is used by an optometrist to gauge minute differences in vision correction. In an eyesight examination, this tool allows the patient to subjectively choose between two different views of an object. Decisions made in scientific classifications of living things and matter are also subjective. This activity is often personal and based on an individual’s viewpoint. Thus, Research (figure 4) shows the scientists separated from an ominous form by a phoropter, which suggests that the study these figures are conducting will require comparisons driven by an agenda.

Playgrounds

A discussion of playgrounds will bring us full circle to where this writing started - the world of a child. A playground is a microcosm of the real world. It has things to play with, places to explore and obstacles to overcome. When you add a handful of kids, they begin exploring and interacting with the objects as
though they are adults in control of their new world. This place is of course under complete control by adults, but the relationships and interactions happen in the developing and fertile minds of the playground’s citizens - children. This play world represents all the conveniences of the adult world and all the dangers. This will become the testing ground for a child's temperament and where children learn to behave civilly.

This body of work features sculptures with playful toy objects containing serious subject matter concerning destruction and scientific endeavor. *Parts Sold Separately* (figures 19 & 20) contains serious scenarios inside of a playful structure. The difference here is that participants will no longer only observe from the outside but enter into a world of threat and play. Surrounding the viewer with these themes will make them more aware of the interconnection of science, weapons and ceramics with the continuing language and imagery of childhood.
VII. RESULTS

*Reruns and new episodes...*

My objectives in this work have been complicated and numerous but began as a springboard from vessel-making. Following that departure, my intent was to transplant a nervous mood to my audience, similar to my feelings concerning my father’s health and brother’s deployment. To do this I began hybridizing themes like chemistry, biology, ammunition and ceramics. This amalgamation of imagery and language started to speak about more important ideas than any one of them alone. By proximity, science and weapons beg to comment on politics, and the connection between ceramics and science sparks a notion of timelessness and history. Constant in this work was my intention to display the interconnection of art, conflict and scientific advancement’s, told by toys and references to childhood.

The discussion in these works is a series of calibrations that re-evaluate the presence and inevitable creation of conflict in our world. This much is seen by the viewer in the way the characters’ relationships shift from helping to opposing roles and back again. In my mind, this work is a family portrait, and I am the artist. This portrait shows a chemist father, a biologist mother, a brother in the military and me - a potter making sculpture. As the artist in a family of conventional and political scientists, one could say that my work takes their influences and becomes the voice of reason or a sounding board for morality. That certainly is possible; however, I see my stance on what is right and wrong as
that of the researcher and soldier - neutral. On one hand, science and the military are like Swiss army knives with numerous gadgets and gizmos used to draw an understanding of our world and help it through the worst of situations. On the other hand, these forces are like baseball bats that can just as easily be used violently and dangerously.

I have appeared numerous times throughout this work. Although personified by tea ceremony objects as seen in *Unstoppable Rebel Force* (figure 27) and *Oh The Places You’ll Go* (figure 28), my presence has also been in the trenches with the chemistry flask, the germ and the 50 millimeter armor piercing round. This work is and has been a journey for my family. We have seen through it a child’s playroom and a researcher’s laboratory. We witnessed assembly lines churning out round after round of military ordinance and the inner workings of a potter’s sensibilities and perception.

From here the work moves into the realm of re-creation. Installations in the coming work will surround the viewer in these environments and characters. This narrative portraiture will always be illustrated with toys and childhood memories, because this is where our understanding of relationships begins.

*A child of five would understand this. Send someone to fetch a child of five.*

-Groucho Marx
EPILOGUE

INT. Fiery and smoky Cave -- DUSK
EXT. DEATHLY MOUNTAINS

The walls of the cave crawl with hostile life and sweat from the heat behind them. Below, a molten crucible of geologic matter churns, spews and sprays sulfurous steam into the air. Across this pit of fire extends a crumbling bridge slowly falling into the fire below. IAN, now 25, sits with DR. SHELLY, now 54, against an impassible wall. IAN begins to question DR. SHELLY while both stare into a pit of inevitable death.

IAN
How are you?

DR. SHELLY remains silent and after a few seconds, responds...

DR. SHELLY
Not good...I am scared.

IAN
I know, but the only way through this is for you to take that medicine. You are taking the medicine, right?

DR. SHELLY
No, I don’t think it helps. It makes me feel strange.

IAN winces and stares off into the walls of the cave. By now the cave is so hot that sweat is soaking through their clothes. IAN expected this answer and starts asking a different question.

IAN
Do you remember when we were at that bar in Lubbock...two or three years ago, and I asked you to explain a nuclear reaction?

DR. SHELLY
No

IAN
I asked, and you explained the difference between fusion and fission. You don’t remember that?

DR. SHELLY
Maybe....I don’t remember things as well since starting the lithium.

IAN
I can imagine that.

DR. SHELLY
Why do you ask, Son?

IAN
Well, I’ve been thinking about science more and more now with my work here.

DR. SHELLY
That’s interesting, part of me is still very interested in this.

IAN
Good, because we still have lots to discuss. This is going to be my topic, and I’ll be needing an expert in the field....We’re going to get that medicine working and take this one day at a time.

DR. SHELLY
I will do my best

IAN
I know you will. I need you here; and I want to help.

The bridge in front of them continues to crumble, and both men stare at their encroaching decision. IAN looks at DR. SHELLY and begins to speak, but the crash from a section of the cave’s ceiling colliding with the last five feet of the bridge covers up the words he says to the tired and weak professor. DR. SHELLY looks at the young man’s outstretched hand.

IAN
We have to go...this is no place to be right now....we can get out of here.

The film goes black after zooming in on Dr. Shelly’s lips saying

DR. SHELLY
I love you very much, Son.

The End
REFERENCES


Figure 1. Erlenmeyer flask
Figure 2. *It's Elementary My Dear Watson*, 2008, Photo - Eric Zamuco
Figure 3. *It’s Elementary My Dear Watson*, Detail, 2008
Figure 4. Research 2010, Photo - Joe Johnson
Figure 5. *Propaganda Crew*, Detail 2010
Figure 6. Tom Otterness, *Microscope*, 2007, Photo - Jean Vong
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Figure 7. *Cheese Bullets*, 2009, Photo - Joe Johnson
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Figure 11. Lidded Jar Diagram
Figure 12. Traffic Cone
Figure 13. *Rocket Parts, 2010*, Photo - Joe Johnson

Figure 14. *Rocket Parts, Detail, 2010*, Photo - Joe Johnson
Figure 15. Slab-Construction, 2009, Photo - Dan Gemkow
Figure 16. *Supply*, 2009, Photo - Eric Zamuco
Figure 17. *Production*, 2008, Photo - Eric Zamuco
Figure 18. Watchtower, Detail, 2009
Figure 19. *Parts Sold Separately*, 2010, Photo - Joe Johnson

Figure 20. *Parts Sold Separately*, 2010, Photo - Dan Gemkow
Figure 21. Plow Texture Detail
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Figure 23. National Fire Protection Agency 704 Label

Figure 24. Georges Méliès *Le Voyage Dans La Lune*, 1902
Figure 25. Slab Construction, Detail, 2009, Photo - Eric Zamuco
Figure 26. *Astronomer*, 2009, Photo - Dan Gemkow
Figure 27. *Unstoppable Rebel Force*, 2008

Figure 28. *Oh The Places You'll Go, Detail*, 2008
VITA

Ian Shelly grew up on the rolling plains of west Texas in the laboratories and offices of the chemistry building at Texas Tech University. As the son of a chemistry educator father and biologist mother, the languages and materials of the science world have influenced his life heavily. The lives of his parents took him to Texas after spending years in Indiana and New Jersey. An upbringing in Lubbock, Texas around his scientist parents and his military minded brother have molded his interests in the fields of weapons manufacturing, scientific research and ceramic art-making. This atmosphere of influences is the core to all Ian’s imagery and thought.

Ian began his formal art education as a functional potter and only within the last three years has he incorporated the more stylistic narrative themes of his drawings into his world with clay. The immensity of the ceramic world and industry has made ceramic sculpture the ultimate testing ground for work that both exalts and deplores man’s inquisitive nature. Ian holds degrees from Western Texas College and Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas.

Although making artwork is all that really interests him as an activity, he also enjoys teaching ceramics and foundation art classes. If the universe will allow it, he would like to teach ceramics on the junior college level where he can be as influential to young artists as his art teachers were when he showed up fresh out of high school, pathetically arrogant yet ready to make art. Ian lives and works in Columbia, Missouri.