

THESIS

SUBLIMINAL RECOGNITION

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

SUBLIMINAL RECOGNITION

In the making of *Subliminal Recognition* I strove to create a work of art that will engage an attentive viewer and facilitate a contemplative experience. The writing in the following pages provides background information regarding the path of exploration that led me to the ideas and processes of its creation. It is designed as a resource to facilitate both an appreciation of this work and an understanding of my intentions as an artist.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Subliminal Recognition.....	1

Subliminal Recognition is a body of work in which I strive to facilitate a contemplative experience within each viewer. As a series of singular impressions captured and highlighted as textures in copper, moments of contemplation are constructed and encouraged. Simultaneously, by positioning each panel within a larger continuum, viewing becomes less about a specific determination and identification, but rather becomes a conditioning practice for cognizant recognition of the subtleties of our surroundings. The discourse surrounding a work can serve to both inform and construe a viewer's interpretation, but my intention is merely to illuminate. As an art piece, *Subliminal Recognition* is intended to operate on an experiential level. In this writing I offer my intentions, and a bit regarding the path and process by which *Subliminal Recognition* came into being. These processes include those that are both conceptual and technical in nature.

While my artistic background is rooted strongly in the techniques of a classical metalsmith, I am also particularly intrigued by the intersection of traditional craft methodologies and technological innovations. Metalsmithing as an art form sits at an interesting juncture; before industrialization, the manufacturing of metal items for both for artistic and functional purposes was much the same. In the era of post-industrialization, mass production became prevalent and began to reduce the demand for and appreciation of hand made objects. In contemporary times, a cost versus utility comparison of handmade items has pushed the making of many functional items to an extreme niche market. Many art jewelers and metalsmiths often relinquish actual hand production in their practice, and merely reference the history of the craft rather than practice it. These factors have led me personally to investigate ways in which industrial progress can be mined for technological processes that can be modified and adapted for my studio practice. In this lies the opportunity to find new sources of ideas and techniques to help keep the work I create fresh and relevant in today's art world.

As an artist I have long been concerned with process, and the possibilities it offers for bringing physicality to artistic communication. The route which led me to electroforming (the process by which the copper panels that form the heart of *Subliminal Recognition* were created) helped shape the work's development. This journey began as experimentation seeking to enhance the surface characteristics of a series of previous works I had created. These earlier works were hollow-form copper vessels created through a time-intensive metalsmithing process called angle raising. (Fig. 1)



Fig. 1: Raised Vessels, 2012.

As a maker of these objects, I enjoyed a personal appreciation of the process I was enacting, both for its foundation in tradition as well as the experimentation I was able to achieve with form. At the same time, I began to struggle with an internal conflict, perhaps ego-driven, but also pivotal in guiding my development as an artist. At what point was creating art primarily for my own enjoyment of exploration, and hoping others would understand it as I did, no longer a viable practice? Knowing that as a maker using traditional craft processes I was not alone in this dilemma offered little consolation. I made the inevitable realization that much of what I create would seldom be appreciated by others as it was by me.

Much of the detail work put into *Subliminal Recognition* stems from my personal relationship with material and process, and reflects characteristics that I value regardless of if they are noticed by others. A personal sense of integrity regarding both aesthetic concerns and craftsmanship, as well as the simple enjoyment of process, led me to custom fabricate four articulated joints to attach each of the frames holding the panels to the rail system. Other specially crafted details, including the suspension cable attachment elements and end-caps for the rails also serve both functional and aesthetic purposes, and serve to create a work of art in which an appreciation of details is both shown and encouraged. (Figs. 2 and 3)



Fig. 2: Articulated Joints.

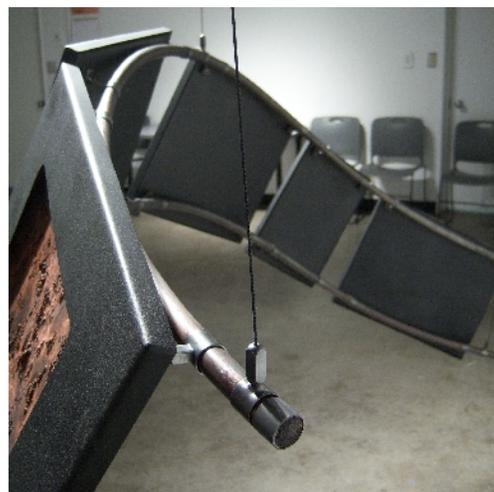


Fig. 3: Endcaps and Cable Hanging Elements.

A sense of personal enrichment and enjoyment from the investigation and practice of technique has always been an important factor drawing me to metalsmithing, offering both meditative properties and avenues for experimentation. I began to realize, however, that the work I was producing offered these benefits at a far higher level to myself as a maker than it conveyed to most viewers. As a result, my self-described ego-driven seeking for others' appreciation was tempered by wanting to produce works which might provide for others an experience akin to what the process gave me.

Contradicting the skilled metalsmith's natural tendency to appreciate and preserve the surface created by the hammer in the raising process, I began experimenting with electroforming as a secondary process to apply new and varied surface textures on the objects I created. In this manner, I transformed two copper vessels that I had previously made. (Fig. 4) As I finished this initial experimentation, I began to realize the potential for exploration I might find in this process that, although it has been in industrial use for many decades, was new to me.



Fig. 4: Raised Vessels with Electroformed Surfaces, 2013.

Sensing that its applications reached beyond my original intentions, I began a second series of experimentation, which would increase the rate at which I could produce iterations. This second series used a similar application of the electroforming process, but primarily applied to smaller vessels, formed in a manner that was both much faster and would serve to highlight the tendency of the electroforming process to accent wrinkles and edges rather than the smooth surfaces I generally produced with raising. This group of objects allowed for experimentation and variation of the surface texture that the electroforming process could create. (Fig. 5)



Fig. 5: Experimental Textured Electroformed Objects, 2013.

While I enjoyed the results of these first two rounds of experimentation, the technical research I performed in conjunction with these artistic explorations led to a dramatic shift in the process by which I created the original form I would secondarily electroform upon. This new direction helped determine the system by which I would create the copper panels in *Subliminal Recognition*.

In my earlier explorations of electroforming, I was exploiting the highly textured qualities produced by the copper particles as they built up on the surface of my copper vessels. This electroformed copper texture could be altered by manipulation of various factors which controlled the rate of deposition. As I learned more about the process, I began to not only appreciate the texture it could create, but also became interested in the textures it could replicate. As the electroforming process builds up copper one particle at a time, it has the ability to form highly accurate copies of preexisting surfaces. In *Subliminal Recognition* this was done using a variation of the process, referred to as electrotyping, wherein textures are impressed into wax, and then once the surface of the wax has been made conductive it is electroformed upon. The wax can then be melted away revealing an exquisitely detailed reproduction of the original object.

Over a period of several months, I utilized this electrotyping process to form the fifteen copper panels shown in *Subliminal Recognition*. In choosing the subject matter which I would imprint into the wax and then transfer to copper, I considered ways in which the character of the detailed reproduction effected by the process could help to visually enact my conceptual intentions. My personal appreciation of finely crafted objects created through traditional metalsmithing techniques has a lot to do with the way in which my senses are attuned to the process by which they are made. I find these characteristics are not the easiest to share with the casual viewer. However, the way my attention can be caught by a carefully planished surface,

and the momentary pause of contemplation that can accompany the viewing of an object that I appreciate on an aesthetic level, is the experiential opportunity that I try to create for the viewer of *Subliminal Recognition*.

To achieve this goal I decided to focus on the concept of illuminating the overlooked in my everyday environment. In this way I could take impressions of intricate textures of everyday objects I pass by on a regular basis. The specific subject matter of the panels differ; each is unique, but related. Each of the electroforms is chosen for its visual nature, one which can resonate with the attentive viewer, inviting investigation which can turn to introspection. (Fig. 6)



Fig. 6: Electroformed Panel Closeup, 2013.

The level of detail captured by the process serves to highlight these textures and present them out of their original context. The structure in which these textured panels are presented is designed so that each individual panel is both highlighted, and positioned as a moment within a continuum. (Figs. 7-10)



Illustration 7: Subliminal Recognition, 2014.

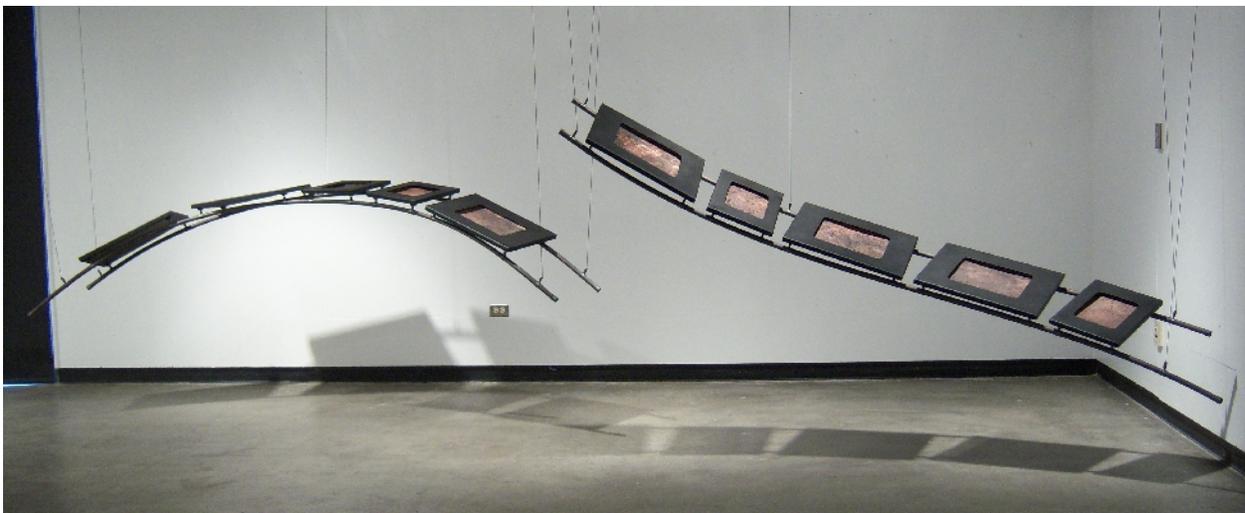


Illustration 8: Subliminal Recognition, 2014.



Fig. 9: Subliminal Recognition, 2014.



Fig 10: Subliminal Recognition, 2014.

Though as an object the sculpture is finite, it represents an appreciation for a contemplative nature in which the viewer looks within as readily as without. The use of textural imagery that is familiar yet often non-specific allows for an appreciation and investigation of the detail of the copper forms without stimulating an excess of analytical interpretation. Thus, the presentation of the works can be linear without creating narrative, reading instead as highlighted moments within an enveloping infinity.

I see this work serving as a filter that provides a focus rather than merely a lens. The inundation of information we are often exposed to in our modern society leads to a transitioning of importance away from the dissemination of information to the distillation. Availability and over-saturation of information on a constant basis causes desensitization. When people are desensitized to information rather than actively engaged in seeking it, the capacity of something, be it visual or auditory, to capture one's attention and focus it on any particular content becomes paramount, rather than the information conveyed itself.

This leads to the determination that peoples' attention is a commodity, to be valued and bargained for. As each viewer is a participant in a world in which they are constantly oversaturated and overstimulated, the intent to convey specific information can inadvertently add to this visual cacophony. In this system, influential power comes not from the possession of unique knowledge, but rather from the ability to effectively filter the immense quantities of data available. This filtering of information is necessary to reduce such inundation to perceivable levels.

When considering a viewer's attentive contemplation of my artwork as an exchange of value, the work's ability to provide a filter through which to view the world is primary to its purpose. With *Subliminal Recognition*, my hope is to convey to others some of the sense of resonant connection that I often feel when viewing finely crafted objects, and the opportunity to

engage in introspective reflection. By presenting panels that highlight items in my near environment, the familiar nature of this imagery helps form a subconscious appreciation for details often overlooked. This serves the dual purposes of allowing viewers to have a deeper appreciation for my own work, as well as finding a moment of focus in the midst of a world of information. If this work can serve to facilitate a contemplative experience accompanied by a sense of wonder, I will feel my intentions have succeeded.