

Legion

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Abstract

How can the artist's embodiment of repressed emotions and inner dialogue regarding influential life moments form multi-faceted beings that create the idea for the viewer that each individual has a more complex inner self than what can be seen from first impressions of their exterior self? With the use of large ceramic sculpture, the viewer is enticed to take their time moving around the piece to capture the full detail. This process breaks the initial perception to show that there is more than meets the eye. From afar, the piece has a perception of being one figure, but as one moves around the work, the viewer can notice the many sculpted, carved and hand painted elements that make up the whole. This technique is used as a metaphor to convey the many moments and memories that influence the creation of an individual's inner self. Each work in the series is a portrait of the artist's inner self that focuses on different moments from his life that he was looking to further explore. The works portray a menagerie of different symbols, figures and objects that are consciously selected for the viewer to demonstrate the complexity of the inner self and how individuals and moments can impact a person's life.

1. Introduction

In my work I experiment with addressing my past in an attempt to demonstrate how these events affected the outcome of my Ego. If the Id is the "primitive and instinctive part of the personality" the Ego is "the part of the Id that has been modified by direct influence of the outside world."¹ Confronting these moments in my life can be cathartic, because I am able to see what memories still influence me and work towards overcoming them with my art. After sitting with these moments which make me who I am, and following the links they make within my mind I can begin to create connections about who I am as a person and how these events create my perspective of myself.

I began to repress my emotions at an early age - specifically when my sister was at her peak struggle with an eating disorder. Each week, my family and I would drive to the Duke Medical Center to take her to group therapy sessions. This routine continued for years as the therapy sessions transitioned to AA meetings for her substance abuse. During this time, to avoid adding further stress to my parents, I quickly learned to put up a facade of happiness. This repression of emotions and false sense of contentment followed me throughout my childhood and early adulthood. It was not until my first year of college and my childhood best friend committing suicide that I realized this method of coping was not sustainable.

The jar filled with years of suppressed emotion and memories was full and beginning to overflow. My inability to understand and explain my internal thoughts put me into a constant state of panic. No longer having my unhealthy coping mechanism to use as a crutch, I became depressed and suicidal. After hitting my breaking point and worrying I would harm myself, I began weekly sessions with an art therapist.

Going into therapy, I lacked the ability to verbalize my feelings. To overcome this barrier, my therapist provided me with colored pencils and paper to allow me to communicate with visuals. Working intuitively using tools in a stream of consciousness process allowed my brain to create connections on the page which helped me unearth things I had not allowed myself to process. This non-representational art allowed me to see what was inside of me. By observing the colors and shapes I saw on the page with my therapist, I began to feel comfortable exploring my

emotions in a place that felt safe. This method, also known as free association, gave my unconscious mind the ability to confront repressed past and current traumas. In rediscovering moments from my life which have influenced me, I began to create works of art outside of my therapist's office which explore the many moments and thoughts that make up my inner self. My therapist explained that creating work which helps me process and channel my emotions into art is called sublimation.² Sublimation is the act of taking unhealthy emotions and feelings and turning them into healthy and socially acceptable alternatives. I channel my unhealthy emotions by creating monster-like figures constructed of objects and characters from specific moments in my life. These beasts stand as representations of the inner selves we have within all of us. In the art therapy world this would be explained using the term Internal Family System. IFS is an approach to therapy that addresses multiple sub-personalities within a person's mental system.³ These sub-personalities stem from trauma and painful emotions as well as parts of the mental system trying to protect the individual from this trauma and pain. Creating art helps bring harmony between these sub-personalities as opposed to the previous discord between them which was the cause of my urge to harm myself. Now my sub-personalities work with each other, however I portray my inner self as a monster because when I first explored my emotions in a therapeutic setting, conquering and understanding the dissonant sub-personalities felt daunting and scary to me as if I had real monsters within me.

The form my sculptures take is also inspired by the story of Legion in the Bible. Mark 5:1-13 states:

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!" For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!" Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

My interpretation of this tale is metaphorical. To me this seems like a story that can relate to any individual who has suffered internally. We all have inner "demons" or struggles and often not just one. My work is reminiscent of Legion in how I create these figures comprised of many other forms. Each figure represents a time in my life and the features within are the many parts that make up who I was and what I was experiencing during that period. The many parts making up the whole also represent how each individual's inner self is created by many different events that alter who they become as they pass through their life. This is like the story of Legion in how the demon is not just one being but is composed of the many others. If my experiences that make me up are equivalent to the many demons that create Legion, my own experience with therapy as well as my art is like Jesus. My work I did with a therapist and my own personal work has casted out the "demons" inside me and have helped me regain strength over my true self and who I am.



Legion, Harry Malesovas, 2020, Ceramic, Artist's own image

2. Miro and Free Association

Sigmund Freud theorized that the mind has three sections: the first being the conscious, the second the preconscious and the last being the unconscious.⁴ The conscious mind oversees all mental processes one might be aware of. The preconscious mind contains all the things one does not actively think about but can readily remember when prompted.⁵ Lastly the unconscious mind controls processes that influence judgments, feelings, and behavior.⁶ Freud was one of the first psychiatrists to popularize the idea that the unconscious is an active area of the mind, working within an individual even though they are partially unaware of it. The ability for the unconscious mind to determine some actions is out of self-preservation; for example the automatic bodily functions such as breathing and blinking which are necessary to keep oneself functioning. However, other influences the unconscious holds stem from a large web of thoughts which are all interconnected based on information from prior experiences that the mind collects.⁷ Artists have used this web of connected thoughts to create pieces which aim to explore intricacies of the unconscious. Many of them attempt to show the connections the unconscious can make through free association.

Joan Miro, a member of the painting movement known as the Surrealists, frequently incorporated the technique of free association into his paintings, notably in the piece *Birth of the World*. Miro began the work by mark making, letting unconscious decisions of the mind create connections on the page.⁸ In reference to his creative process of the piece, Miro said,

rather than setting out to paint something I began painting and as I paint the picture begins to assert itself, or suggest itself under my brush.... The first stage is free, unconscious [but] the second stage is carefully calculated.⁹



Figure 2. “Birth of the World”, Miro,Joan. 1935.

https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/joan-miro-the-birth-of-the-world/

Free association and other tactics used by surrealists are used by many artists still to this day to create work, but it has especially grown in popularity amongst art therapists. Art therapy is the therapeutic practice of creating and looking at art to help uncover the unconscious, allowing the patient to find breakthroughs in how and why they interact with the world around them. Art therapists will use an assortment of practices to help their patients uncover truths about themselves like drawing, painting, ceramics and other mediums. According to the American Art Therapy Association “art therapists are trained to understand the roles that color, texture, and various art media can play in the therapeutic process and how these tools can help reveal one’s thoughts, feelings, and psychological disposition.”¹⁰

Patients can create an assortment of work that can be nonobjective or figurative and, together with a therapist, the two will work together to unravel the messages that may be hidden within the work. Art therapists like Juliet King who has worked extensively with PTSD patients believes serious breakthroughs can be made using this therapy. Discussed in the article by PNAS, King is believed to have found specific art mediums that work well with different exercises in unlocking the mind. King believes that “less resistive media like watercolor or clay [are] going to tap into more emotional centers,” but, “more resistive media—pencils, rulers, building something 3D—[are] going to utilize more cognitive processes.”¹¹

Whereas today I view free association as a tool to be used sparingly in my work, in the beginning of my art making career I relied on it heavily. As mentioned before, it was one of the practices I used alongside my art therapist in an aim to tap into my unconscious mind and discover issues that were buried deep within me. As I began to make art outside of a guided setting I continued using the practice in my drawings. I would often work intuitively and create figures on a page without a real endgame in mind. These works would emerge spontaneously and I would not usually derive meaning from them until after I studied them and deciphered the imagery I included.

In my practice today I implement some of the same methods that I used in the past but I have shifted how and when I incorporate them. In my current body of work I am very conscious about what I look to explore in each piece. When I first begin a work I already have a plan of an event or time frame that I want to explore further. For example in the work, *In the Snake Pit*, I knew I wanted to explore a period in my life in which a roommate of mine abruptly vacated our apartment while trying to get my girlfriend to break up with me and friends to leave me. She began lying about me, saying that I was physically abusive and was going to kill my girlfriend. I channeled my feelings about this time into a work that focused on the time we spent together becoming close as friends and how the loss and betrayal from her affected me. Along with discussing the hard times from this period, it also highlighted the good times, portraying moments in which my friends and girlfriend provided me with support. With that in mind I began with a sketch to get the initial shape and imagery I want to incorporate. Sometimes if I have a clear enough mental image of what I would like to sculpt I will jump right into a work. Clay allows for you to use it as a sketchable medium because it is so forgiving. As I consciously explore the topic and find imagery that I want to use I start sculpting it onto the form that I build. This is where I currently use some free association. As I am sculpting imagery I enter into a state where stream of consciousness becomes easier. Mental images assert themselves that are linked to the one I am sculpting. For example, as I was sculpting the face of my old roommate Zane, I thought about how she demonized me in my

relationship with my girlfriend. This led me to depict myself and my girlfriend as demons which can be seen in the middle of the work above the crotch of the monster. My process does not always work this way and often I look back at pictures to bring up symbols to be used in my work. Sometimes I reflect internally and meditate on the periods I am focusing on to recall memories which are important. Usually, if I can unearth a memory from the deep reaches of my brain, I can go back into that state of flow mentioned before and the one memory will bring up a slew of others that can be used as resources in my work.



In the Snakes Pit, Harry Malesovas, 2020, Artist's Own Image

3. Contemporary Influences

Within the contemporary ceramic world a major influence for me is SunKoo Yuh. His works are comprised of large clusters of creatures which create a story for the viewer. As one rotates around the work the story unravels itself. These pieces have only continued to grow in size throughout Yuh's career, with many of his sculptures being far beyond human proportions.¹² Yuh describes his scenes as being glimpses into his mind and life, showing his inner emotions and feelings as well as a look into the mundane parts of his world. He pulls his ideas for these large works by first doing paintings with ink and a brush. Then he draws intuitively, pulling imagery from his head and then moves the works into clay.¹³

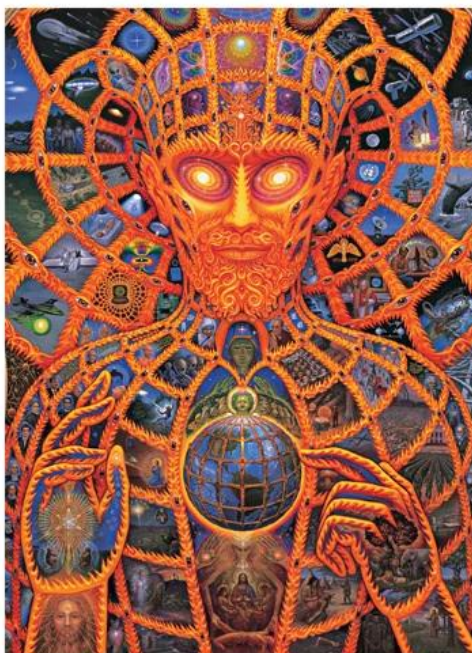
I gravitate towards Yuh's work because of our similarities in how we address the first steps in creating a work as well as how we go about composing our work. Like Yuh, I too begin my work with an initial sketch in which I work intuitively using stream of consciousness. Our work is also similar in how we pile many forms together to create our composition as seen in Yuh's work *Can You Hear Me?*.



"Can You Hear Me?," 2007, SunKoo Yuh. Glazed porcelain, cone 10; 27 x 22 x 17 inches.
https://archiebray.org/workshops_classes/workshops_2018/workshop_Yuh_2018.html

Yuh and I differ in that where he aims to create a scene for the viewer of what seems to be one moment, whereas I aim to create one central figure composed of many moments. Another difference is the smaller details I create in my work as opposed to the larger details Yuh has in his work. In my own pieces I add small carvings and characters that the viewer needs to step in closer to see. Yuh's work differs in that his pieces are monumental. This allows him to have fewer intricate details because each piece, which is still large, is dwarfed in comparison to the size of the overall work. This also alters the glazing options he has. Oftentimes, because I do incorporate small details in my work, using traditional glazes can cloud my lines, so I utilize underglazes which are not glass forming. Yuh on the other hand uses traditional glass forming glazes which accent his work nicely, due to the fact that he does not have small details which can get covered by his runny glazes.

Another artist who influences my art, especially my 2D work, is Alex Grey. His art, specifically the oil on wood painting titled *Cosmic Christ*, inspires me in the amount of detail he is able to pack into a composition. The painting from afar has the appearance of a centralized figure which takes on a pose associated with Christ seen in traditional depictions. However, upon closer inspection, the work has small portals into scenes throughout history of important religious and sociological figures. Like Grey, I also use this technique of portraying a centralized figure with smaller details hidden within. This tool is important in both of our works in its ability to draw in the viewer and portray the idea that the artwork is more than what initially meets the eye.



Cosmic Christ, 1999-2000, Alex Grey, 50-102 In.
Oil on wood with carved wood painted and gilded frame
<https://shop.cosm.org/products/cosmic-christ-notecard>

4. Process

When beginning a sculpture I start with exploring a memory or period from my past which I want to address and process more. Always these are memories that I have seen drastically alter my path in forming who I am. Occasionally I use my work to journal what is happening in my life currently but more often than not I am exploring the past. After deciding the time frame I want to focus on, I begin to use paper to formulate my ideas. This beginning step in my process can be seen in *Fears*. Initially, I begin with deciding the shape and main face I want the monster-like figure to take. Once I understand the form I begin to fill it in with imagery. During this process I search inwardly to find symbols relating to the period in which I am exploring. These symbols are sometimes figures which can be life-like or exaggerated depending on the memory. Sometimes the symbols are also animals and objects that can represent a memory or stand as a metaphor for a person or period. When searching for images, I use some stream of consciousness as one memory leads me to another.



Fears, Harry Malesovas, 2020,
Acrylic and Printer Ink, Artist's own image



Fears, Harry Malesovas, 2020,
Ceramic and Glaze, Artist's own image

After formulating a drawing on paper, I take successful elements from the composition to build with clay. I often do not incorporate all figures seen in my drawings because some do not look the same when they are translated from 2D to 3D. There is also an inability to add as many elements as desired into a sculpture as opposed to a drawing because weight restrictions affect the ability of the sculpture to support itself. This transformation from 2D to 3D can be seen in my work, *My Fears in Clay*. However, using a process called mishima in which one carves into a clay form and fill it with glaze, I am able to replicate parts of the 2D work on my sculptures. This can be seen below in the mask titled, *Mask of the Serpent*.



Mask of the Serpent, Harry Malesovas, 2020, Ceramic, Artist's own image

In this piece I am able to pack in all the figures that are seen in my 2D works because I am not restricted by weight or issues with constructing every figure on the piece in 3D. This technique has continued and evolved in my work as a decorating technique. I now use it to carve designs into my large ceramic pieces to add extra imagery and symbolism to the figures I sculpt.

5. Expressing My Internal Self in My Work

The work titled, *If You Smile They'll Think You're Happy*, is a piece I created as a means of unpacking the years in which my family was driving weekly to Duke Medical Center for my sister's counseling appointments. The work from afar has the appearance of a slug-like reptile creature with a large grin on the predominant face. This grin is symbolic of the outward emotions I was portraying to my family and friends during the early part of my life. This grin appears on many of my sculptures' faces, because a false appearance of happiness is most often the emotion I would use to hide my true inner feelings. The imagery the monster is made of is built off moments which affected me during this period, both positive and negative.

By creating this work, I consciously wanted to explore this time of my life. I also knew it would be about my level of happiness during this time, however, I did not know what imagery would emerge to me while moving through the process of construction. Some of the first images that came to me were the breakfast foods on the left side. In recalling my time with my family in which we would be driving to Duke. I always remembered that we would leave my sister's meetings around eight at night and drive to either Elmo's Diner or IHop before driving the two hours back home. Although this time was hard for me, those moments of relaxation with my family where we would enjoy a meal together always made me happy.



If You Smile They'll Think You're Happy, Harry Malesovas, 2020, Ceramic, Artist's own image



“Can't Live With Em, Can't Live Without Em”, Harry Malesovas, 2021, Ceramic, Artist's own image

Other works I have created address present struggles, one of which is unpacking the issues I face in regards to my roommate in a piece, *Can't Live With Em, Can't Live Without Em*. This work focuses on the love I feel towards my best friend, the underlying frustration and anger which emerges due to our differences and my aspirations for the future. The work includes three central faces, the most predominant being anger, the left side being happiness and the right being sadness. These faces along with the idea for the mask were my starting points, and from there I let the imagery associated with these emotions and my roommate pour out. Some images that emerged were a 40 oz malt liquor bottle, an image of me cleaning up fried chicken left on the floor as well as a bed with my girlfriend and myself sleeping. The images are all associated with memories of the three different emotions brought up regarding my friend. For example, the 40oz bottle represents our time living together during our freshman year of college in which we would drink beer and play video games. This memory makes me happy and reminds me of the reasons we became friends in the first place. The cleaning imagery represents a moment in which I had to clean up old fried chicken from under his bed that he had left there for over a month. This is associated with the sadness and anger I feel towards him in his inability or care to clean up after himself. Lastly, the image of my girlfriend and myself sleeping is associated with my hopes for a better future in which I can live with my partner and find happiness in our coexistence, as well as find peace in not resenting my long-time friend.

6. Conclusion

In my early life there were struggles I faced in which to cope with them I bottled up my emotions and told the world I was fine. After finally letting these emotions out I had no way to function due to my lack of awareness regarding my own feelings. Finally I discovered art therapy could aid in the understanding of my own mind. In my sessions we would tap into my unconscious using free association and dissect what I saw in the colors and shapes seen on the page. Through using these techniques to uncover my own repressed issues I have been able to uncover and process truths about myself and the events that have altered who I am internally. In saddling my emotions and coming to terms with them I am able to fully process them consciously in my current body of work. In my coming show *Legion* I present this body with an aim to show the viewer the many selves an individual can have within them and how their past influences who they are today. In presenting my personal moments which make up who I am, I hope that the viewer will explore within themselves and discover the moments from their past that influence who they are.

7. Bibliography

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8. Images

"Legion", Harry Malesovas, 2020, Ceramic, Artist's own image

"Automatic Drawing", André Masson, 1924. Ink on paper, 9 1/4 x 8 1/8"

"Birth of the World", Miro, Joan. . 1935.

"Can You Hear Me?," 2007, SunKoo Yuh. Glazed porcelain, cone 10; 27 x 22 x 17 inches.

"Cosmic Christ", 1999-2000, Alex Grey, 50 x 102 in. oil on wood with carved wood painted and gilded frame.

"A Study of My Fears", Harry Malesovas, 2020, Ceramic, Artist's own image

"My Fears in Clay", Harry Malesovas, 2020, Ceramic, Artist's own image

"Mask of the Serpent", Harry Malesovas , 2020, Ceramic, Artist's own image

"If You Smile They'll Think You're Happy", Harry Malesovas, 2020, Ceramic, Artist's own image

"Can't Live With Em, Can't Live Without Em", Harry Malesovas, 2021, Ceramic, Artist's own image