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SMITHSONIAN ARTISTS RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP / 2012**

A LANGUAGE OF AGGRESSION: A STUDY OF THE AESTHETICS OF MILITARY AIRCRAFT

My interest in industrial imagery is almost completely aesthetic, as I have no practical experience in any of the technical fields from which my work is derived. It has been through my understanding of the ceramic medium and its inherent limitlessness that I have been able to invent my own fictitious technology to suit my sculptural needs.

Over the course of my career I have been able to derive great inspiration from such sites as the New York City subway with its waterfalls of rust and soot, vast networks of electrical cables and conduit, and great columnar monuments to the golden age of rivets. The decline of my native Detroit and its once mighty automotive manufacturing base would seem an obvious influence on my work as would other rust-belt realities and flourishing urban detritus. Institutions such as the Henry Ford Museum afforded me my first glimpse of the lineage of V-8 engines that helped define an automotive era. My perception of the proportions of the V-8's engine block led directly to the production of a series of "motor" related sculptures that I have developed over the last 15 years.

At this time I need my art to evolve from a fictitious and frequently amorphous approach to an emphasis on a hyper-real, historical and a possibly political approach. A shift such as this would allow a new degree of accessibility to my work that could not be achieved in any other way. While vast amounts of information on engines, military aircraft, armaments or any technology can be easily accessed via the Internet, there is no substitute, particularly for a sculptor, for the visceral experience that can only be gleaned from an in depth exploration and study of objects that can be seen, and, if possible, touched at close range. An informed understanding of those objects is only available from curators, historians, and restoration experts.

Serial numbers, national markings, striping, camouflage and enumerable emblems are just some of the graphic markings on military and commercial aircraft that are used for communicating information. Nose cones, air intakes, propellers or the shape of a fuselage or wing may have specific aerodynamic and ergonomic functions but are frequently enhanced with color, graphics and other icons that are also intended to communicate. While the mere scale and beauty of any military aircraft in a museums collection is enough to inspire and excite, it is, of course, impossible to ignore their aggressive, violent intent and historical implications. The

Curtiss P-40 “Flying Tiger,” an iconic American aircraft from WW2 is decorated with a cartoonlike depiction of a snarling, animal mouth, along the side of its engine air-intake, that defines it’s national identity and boasts of its capability. Aside from an almost comedic appeal, it is also poignantly aggressive and could be construed as grossly condescending, much like the way one could interpret the phrase “Shock and Awe.” It would be my intention to observe, document, photograph and measure details such as the “tiger” mouth on the Curtiss P-40. My observation/investigation would also include components as large as a two-ton turbofan or as small as a cockpit hinge.

It is well within my skill set to construct a full-scale ceramic facsimile of, for example, the Enola Gay. My goal is, however, to acquire technical and visual data, not to replicate whole aircraft. Aside from its catastrophic historical significance, the Enola Gay’s serial number alone provides it with its own unique identity and separates it from other B-29 long-range bombers of it’s era. A small section of its riveted fuselage or portions of its propeller constitute the possibility of a painted sculpture wonderland with significant three, and two-dimensional dynamism. The geometric patterning of the painted camouflage on the Albatross D. Va, for instance, is almost decorative in its relationship to fabric design but in no way belies the malignant intent of the aircraft itself. This duality of beauty, color, form and ultimate function are the basis of my interest in working with NASM, NMAH or any other Smithsonian Institution that could provide relevant resources.

My research would be conducted primarily through photography and, when possible, interviews with museum curators, restoration and other museum staff. I would desire close access, within inches, of any given aircraft, engine or artifact for inspection and photography. Photo documentation and interviews would be conducted via the use of an I Pad 3, recorded only for archival purposes and would not be used for commercial reproduction in any manner. In the event that objects are unavailable for close observation due to physical, restoration or archival limitations, alternatives such as mechanical drawings, schematics, elevations or other documentation would be acceptable.

I have contacted curators at both the National Air and Space Museum and the National Museum of American History, many of who have agreed to support my potential participation in the SARF program:

Jane Milosch: Director, Provenance Research Initiative

Margaret Weitekamp: Ph.D, Curator, Division of Space History, NASM

Jeremy R. Kinney, Curator, Aero Propulsion, NASM

Peter L. Jacob: Associate Director for Collections and Curatorial Affairs and Curator of Early Flight, World War 1 and Vietnam War Aviation, NASM

Dik Dasso: Curator, Modern Military Aircraft, NASM

Tom D. Crouch: Senior Curator, Lighter-Than-Air, Early Flight and Art, NASM

Jennifer L. Jones: Curator of Military History, NMAH

Bonnie Lilienfeld: Deputy Chair, Division of Home and Community Life, NMAH

There are, understandably, innumerable objects from the collection of NASM and other Smithsonian branches that fit my criteria or have implications that have piqued my interest. They include:

Albatros D.Va

Inventory number: A19500092000

Douglas SBD-6 Dauntless

Inventory number: A19610109000

Mikoyan-Gurevich MIG 21F-13 FISHBED-C

Inventory number: A19930354000

Mitsubishi A6M5 Reisen (Zero Fighter) Model 52 ZEKE

Inventory number: A19600335000

North American P-51D-30-NA

Inventory number: A19600300000

Propeller / Spinner Nose Cone, Spirit of St. Louis, C.A. Lindbergh, NY-Paris

Inventory number: A19890217000

V-2 Missile

Inventory number: A19600342000

Bell UH-1H Iroquois "Huey" Smokey III

Inventory number: A19960005000

Katydid Drone

Inventory number: A19660162000

Space Shuttle Enterprise

Inventory number: A19860004000

Sidewinder Missile

Inventory number: A20030007000

Boeing B-29 Superfortress "Enola Gay"

Inventory number: A19500100000

Curtiss P-40E Warhawk (Kittyhawk IA)

Inventory number: A19650242000

It would be my intention to translate those aspects of my research that I find essential, into art. It is conceivable that the smallest aspect of what I discover could result in an unlimited output that could supersede the breadth of my research. The cumulative creative result of my participation in the SARF program would determine the course of my career. It would enable me to make the transition to an art that is based on fact and history. The prospect of this makes my request for support not only tantalizing, but a career imperative.