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Robin Alexander

April 12, 2010

Time, Activity, Process, and Documentation:
An Exploration of Contemporary Sculpture and Installation

by

Robin L. Alexander

Advisers Linda Armstrong and Dr. Eddie Chambers

Department of Art History and Visual Arts

Linda Armstrong
Adviser

Dorothy Fletcher
Committee Member

Martine Brownley
Committee Member

April 5, 2010

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Abstract

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I define a “process” as a series of actions or steps taken in order to achieve a particular end, including a series of alterations and improvements that may occur naturally or synthetically. My understanding of the artistic process also has evolved during my four years in college. I have learned at Emory that one often needs to make large mistakes before he/she ultimately can create good work. This also applies to art historical writing. The process of deciphering who really has the largest influence on my work in sculpture is just as difficult as writing this thesis itself. I soon realized that it is artists who share their process in their work who inspire me. Discovering that I primarily value the process most has been a process and I plan to determine in this paper how and why the work of Richard Long, Christo and Jeanne-Claude and other contemporary sculptors reflect their progression and how their doing so inspires me. Wrapping trees and the distortion/regulation of nature comprises my process. In doing so, I try to emulate Christo and Jeanne-Claude by taking majestically large objects, things larger than my body, and covering, or transforming, them. Christo and Jeanne-Claude proved to the world that nothing exists that is so expansive that it cannot be “conquered” by art alone. Richard Long has also strongly influenced my work. Like him, I use natural forms and place them in inorganic settings. Long was able to illustrate for his viewers that the journey – in his case that long walks, taken to create the artwork, is just as, if not more, important than the finished product. I think that Long’s emphasis on the process of creating artwork heavily influences my sculpture projects. These two radically different artists, however, act as inspirations for dissimilar reasons. In this paper I explore whether Richard Long, Christo and Jeanne-Claude are more similar than previously thought, despite diverse subject matter, material and scale, and explain how their processes of creating art have influenced mine.

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I

Introduction

Clearly, an awareness of how the work was made, which is apparent just from looking closely at it, plays an important role in amplifying and focusing the viewer's perceptual engagement with it.

-Alex Potts¹

I define a "process" as a series of actions or steps taken in order to achieve a particular end, including a series of alterations and improvements that may occur naturally or synthetically. In exploring process, the art historian Kristine Stiles explains, "[a]rtists used process simultaneously as a natural phenomenon, the focus of their working method, and a style."² According to Stiles, in contemporary art the notion of process has evolved into a tool that artists can use in a multitude of different ways.

My understanding of the artistic process also has evolved during my four years in college. I have learned at Emory that one often needs to make large mistakes before he/she ultimately can create good work. This also applies to art historical writing. The process of finding a topic that reflects the work I create and the work that inspires me has been a long one involving complex research and self-reflection. My focus changed multiple times. Sometimes I was able to rely on personal discovery and other times I required guidance from others. At first, under the influence of a serial-modular piece I enjoyed creating last year, I believed that I only could write a paper focused on the

¹Alex Potts. *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) 346.

² Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists Writing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) 577.

history of the grid in art making. I wanted to write about Sol LeWitt, and could not see beyond him. After that intensity passed, I decided to broaden my search and to include artists who continued to operate under strict geometric and grid-like conventions, but also inserted personal narratives into their work. I checked out every library book on artists like Eva Hesse and Carl Andre only to discover they did not resonate with work that I created. The process of deciphering who really has the largest influence on my work in sculpture is just as difficult as writing this thesis itself.

I soon realized that it is artists who share their process in their work who inspire me. The creation of a piece, the time it requires, the materials used, the techniques and the planning are just as important as the end result. Discovering that I primarily value the process most has been a process and I plan to determine in this paper how and why the work of Richard Long, Christo and Jeanne-Claude and other contemporary sculptors reflect their progression and how their doing so inspires me. I want to explore ways that artists use the development process to create an overall experience that ultimately enhances their final works.

If one cannot see the work, the thought, the process that went into creating a piece of art, he/she cannot completely connect with the artist. In many mediums, the artist's work traditionally is hidden, for instance obscured in paintings, as layers of paint hide prior decisions. In sculpture, we see the final works, not the drawings, maquettes, and processes that are used. In my work, I attempt to show the creative process as much as possible. For instance, the work that I created last year in Sculpture 309 for an

environmental assignment included wrapping all the braches of a 40ft tall fallen tree with grey electrical tape. Anyone seeing the sculpture could experience the process I underwent to create the work, which was the ultimate significance I wanted to convey as the process required to wrap the branches of an entire tree in grey electrical tape is intricate and an important part of the final product. The tedious wrapping technique to replace natural bark with a highly synthetic looking and feeling material is vital to understanding the final work, because it highlights how important the rhythmic meditative and repetitious actions were in making this piece of nature appear inorganic.

To create sculpture requires me to boundlessly repeat the same movement. Doing so creates cohesiveness in the work by making it appear as though this occurred naturally. It creates juxtaposition: although the materials used obviously do not occur organically in nature, the use of uniform patterns created by an uniform process allows the artist to mislead a viewer into believing that the fake bark is authentic.

Wrapping trees and the distortion/regulation of nature comprises my process. In doing so, I try to emulate Christo and Jeanne-Claude by taking majestically large objects, things larger than my body, and covering, or transforming, them. Christo and Jeanne-Claude proved to the world that nothing exists that is so expansive that it cannot be “conquered” by art alone. This concept is what moves me and what I consider before I start a project.

Richard Long is another artist who has strongly influenced my work. Like him, I use natural forms and place them in inorganic settings. Long was able to illustrate for his

viewers that the journey – in his case that long walks, taken to create the artwork – is just as, if not more, important than the finished product. I think that Long's emphasis on the process of creating artwork heavily influences my sculpture projects.

Specific pieces that these artists created in their respective extensive careers particularly inspire me. Like Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Wrapped Reichstag: Berlin, 1971-95* and *Wrapped Trees: Fondation Beyeler and Berower Park Riehen, Switzerland, 1997-98*, I have to consider funding, planning and permission from others before installing my work. Like Long's *A Line Made by Walking* and *Gobi Desert Circle Mongolia, 1996*, I can work alone, emphasize a singular gesture and quietly complete a piece.³ These two radically different artists, however, act as inspirations for dissimilar reasons. By studying selected pieces from each of them, I hope to refine my understanding of the relationship between the creative process and the final artwork, how documenting the process is integrated into the project and, finally, how this process becomes part of the final piece. In this paper I explore whether Richard Long, Christo and Jeanne-Claude are more similar than previously thought, despite diverse subject matter, material and scale, and explain how their processes of creating art have influenced mine.

³ William Malpas, *Richard Long: In Close-Up* (Kent: Crescent Moon Publishing, 2003) 13.

II

Walking with Richard Long

Nature has always been recorded by artists, from pre-historic cave paintings to 20th century landscape photography. I too wanted to make nature the subject of my work, but in new way. I started working outside using natural materials like grass and water, and this evolved into the idea of making a sculpture by walking.

-Richard Long, Bristol 2000⁴

Land Art and Earthworks, as environmental art often is referred, include a range of projects, artists, and ideas that expand across a vast category. The British artist, Richard Long, established a career in the art world by producing pieces that focus on the physical experience of creating the work and reacting with and in the natural world. Although a surface reading of one of his pieces may produce a purely aesthetic experience, making the viewer contemplate the natural subject matter and materials, when considered in conjunction with his writings, one sees that in composing his art, Long thinks about a variety of topics including place, geography, mapping, water, the different properties of rocks, paths as a social network and various forms of measurement.⁵

Despite his tendency to use natural materials and work in nature, Long does not see himself as a political activist for the environmental movement. Despite his love of nature and of uninhabited locations, Long does not that believe art and the political world

⁴ Richard Long, "Introduction." *Richard Long*, 2000, 26 Feb. 2010, <http://www.richardlong.org>.

⁵ Richard Long and Ben Tufnell ed. *Selected Statements & Interviews* (London: Haunch of Venison, 2007) 9.

are simpatico.⁶ In that sense, what easily can be misconstrued as a general environmental message about the planet and maintaining its majestic natural beauty, is in fact more like a gesture hoping to express one individual's perspective.

Long's work has been described in simple terms. William Malpas writes: "Richard Long walks. This is the central fact of his art. His work is founded on the art of walking and on walking as art."⁷ In this argument, we see that to Long walking and art are interchangeable experiences and terms. His walks are his works.⁸ The walking pieces have a definitive creation process: a specific intention, image/geometry clarity, setting, process/formalism, direct contact with humanity and nature, sense of time, relationships with the natural world and a balance between conception and execution.⁹

We can see these ideas coalescing in a finished product like Long's 1967 *A Line Made by Walking*,¹⁰ which initially strikes one as a somewhat simple piece. A short line was made on grass and daisies by walking over the same area repeatedly and by then documenting it with a photograph. As one of Long's first walk-works, it is considered revolutionary. As in performance art, it is hard to discern exactly what aspect of *A Line Made by Walking* is the art. Is it the photograph eventually purchased by the Tate Gallery, the actual line in the field or the experience of creating the line? When Michelangelo carved *David*, no one considered the process of hammering the marble as

⁶ Long and Tufnell, 9.

⁷ William Malpas, *Land Art: In Close-Up* (Kent: Crescent Moon Publishing, 2003) 76.

⁸ Malpas, 76.

⁹ Malpas, 76.

¹⁰ Richard Long. (British, 1945 -), *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967. Photograph and Pencil on Board Image: 375 x 324 mm. The Tate Collection; Purchase 1976.

the final product. To Long's contemporary audience, the question remains why when he creates a piece for personal consumption, are we able to bend the definition of art? Or rather, who considers a walk as art?

One easily can argue that because of Long's meticulous planning process, which he documents in detail along with final product, the planning is consumed into the eventual art piece. Like the traditional master carvers and painters, Long creates work with limited spontaneity. While on a walk throughout the Scottish Highlands he may not know what exact rocks, shrubs or puddles he may approach to alter a landscape, in *Concentric Days*, a map covered in equally dispersed circles measuring his five days of walking, Long knows the limits of where he can go. Like a modern-day Michelangelo, Long has a vision of what he wants to create and how just how far he can go to accomplish his ends within the limitations of his materials and tools, mainly the camera and literature. Unlike Michelangelo, as an artist Long depends upon the expansion of the traditional ideas of objects as sculpture and the expanding definitions that allow art to include his documentation of his work's creation. To Long, his scale always is limitless; he does not need to be contained by the magnitude of an entity.

The reason I am inspired by Richard Long's process to create a piece is because of his ability to blur the distinction between the creation process and the final product. In a review of his 2009 exhibition at the Tate Britain in London, Martin Patrick wrote, "Long's work is engaged with finding, noticing and searching. Rather than monumentality, it depends on minor adjustments of his surroundings, which he

subsequently records.”¹¹ Patrick informs us that Long’s work is just as much about finding the perfect location as it is about creating a finished product. Unlike Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Long’s work benefits from subtle changes and personal construction. However, similar to the artistic couple’s work, integral to Richard Long’s work is his dependence on his detailed creation process and the relationship that he builds with the natural world.

¹¹ Martin Patrick. “The Wanderer,” *Afterimage*. Nov/Dec 2009: 38.

III

Wrapping with Christo and Jeanne-Claude

“Our work is about joy and beauty.”

-Christo and Jeanne-Claude, 1998¹²

Pigeonholing the work of the French artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude is not easy. They seem to operate outside the spectrum of artistic classification. Even their artistic name is not straightforward; for a time they produced work together under the name Christo to more easily establish their work, but then switched to the official title Christo and Jeanne-Claude in 1994 once they had gained enough recognition to be called whatever they pleased.¹³ Christo and Jeanne-Claude do not attempt to catalog their work within a known genre. On multiple occasions, Jeanne-Claude explained that “Christo and I believe that labels are very important, but for bottles of wine, not for artists, and we usually don’t like to put a label on our art.” She went on to say, however, “[i]f one is absolutely necessary, then it would be environmental artists because we work in both the rural and the urban environment.”¹⁴ Even after the passing of his wife earlier this year, Christo continues to produce art that cannot be defined by any typical artistic genre.

The pair does not carry out the same project more than once. After wrapping the Pont Neuf Bridge in Paris, they never attempted to wrap a bridge again. Part of their

¹² Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Wrapped Trees: Fondation Beyeler and Berower Park, Riehen, Basel, Switzerland, 1997-1998* (New York: Taschen, 1998) Front Cover.

¹³ James Pagliasotti, "An Interview with Christo and Jeanne-Claude." *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 2002, 1 March 2010, <http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/eyeLevel.shtml>.

¹⁴ Pagliasotti, 1 March 2010.

artistic process involves convincing their audience, and the community they work in, that the artwork will be successful and beneficial without any previous examples. Christo said “[t]herefore we have to go over the fact that all human beings are afraid by what is new. It is our work to convince them that they will enjoy it, and even if they don’t, to allow us just for 14 days to create that work of art.”¹⁵ A unique and inspiring aspect of this pair’s work is their ability to continually surprise their audience with new and innovative motifs and to convince their audience to enjoy their work.

When first introduced to Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s wrapped trees as a high school student, I recall my confusion. Christo had begun individually wrapping trees and putting them on display in 1964. Using leftover materials from other larger wrapping projects, such as 1969’s *Wrapped Floor and Covered Stairway* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, Christo covered trees and their roots in tarpaulin, brown paper, polyethylene and rope and made a smaller exhibition using the same wrapping design.¹⁶ To many untrained eyes, this work seemed simplistic and elementary in its conception, not sensing the meaning behind wrapping a tree in building materials.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude initially wanted to parlay the wrapped tree idea into a larger project for the Avenue des Champs-Élysées in Paris that never was realized. A few years later they were approached about installing their work at Fondation Beyeler, a new building surrounded by trees in Berower Park in Riehen, Switzerland.¹⁷ As detailed in the book they compiled about the project, Christo and Jeanne-Claude spent over a year trying

¹⁵ Pagliasotti, 1 March 2010.

¹⁶ Christo and Jeanne-Claude, 22.

¹⁷ Christo and Jeanne-Claude, 30.

to assess the area for the best trees and locations to install their wrapped sculptures. They meticulously planned the number of trees that they would use, the amount of fabric required and even miniscule details such as the shape of sewing patterns.

Upon seeing the finished piece, photographed from nearly every angle and detailing the entire installation process along with the final product, many people began for the first time to understand the essence of the pair's artwork. The final work only was displayed for two weeks, despite planning that took over two years, and including a project idea that was over twenty years old. As the founder of the Fondation Beyeler, Ernst Beyeler said, "[d]espite this short period...a wrapping turns into a unique event which makes a lasting impression on all who see it."¹⁸

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's work deals with many important ideas including the environment and creating unique aesthetics, but the most important aspect may be their ability to share their process of creation. Their systematic and prolonged planning process may juxtapose the ephemeral final work on display, but the creation of a piece like *Wrapped Trees: Fondation Beyeler and Berower Park, Riehen, Basel, Switzerland, 1997-1998*¹⁹ emphasizes the importance that developing an idea is to their art.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's work in public and, therefore, they often have to deal with the communities and politics of areas where their work is installed. As these constraints cause issues and conflicts and to free themselves and their project of any obligations to any forms of external authority, the couple pays all related expenses with

¹⁸ Christo and Jeanne-Claude, 7.

¹⁹ Christo and Jeanne-Claude. (Bulgarian 1935- and Moroccan 1935-2010, respectively), *Wrapped Trees: Fondation Beyeler and Berower Park, Riehen, Basel, Switzerland, 1997-1998*. Photo.

their own money and accepts no sponsorship.²⁰ Sales of the detailed books that they create illustrating their process to produce their sculptures, their preliminary drawings and earlier wrapped sculptures are used to fund their projects.²¹ Because of their need for the profits from these ancillary endeavors, Christo and Jeanne-Claude's creation and planning process represents one of their work's most important aspects. Without their fastidious attention to details surrounding their formation process, the pair's artwork even if possible to create, definitely would not be possible to fund.

²⁰ Stiles, 505.

²¹ Pagliasotti, 1 March 2010.

IV

Time, Activity, Process, and Documentation

Anything that is used as art must be defined as art. The new work continues the convention but refuses the heritage of still another art-based order of making things. The intentions are different, the results are different, so is the experience.

-Robert Morris, 1967²²

As noted, the entire creative process that these contemporary artists embark upon to create their work has evolved to push the boundaries of what constitutes artwork. Sculpture is not a medium easy to define. Disparity among size, material, placement, color, shape, abstraction, figuration, location, theory, philosophy and a score of other considerations leads to a multitude of different, yet totally acceptable, definitions of the subject. A further point of differentiation is how the process can be used. The work of Richard Long, Christo and Jeanne-Claude highlight two different approaches to using process to enhance sculpture. Each artist controls his/her process to achieve a desired outcome while also allowing it to determine their final product. This amalgamation in their progression is emblematic of the work that I am creating for my final project.

I want to look at one work in particular. As mentioned in the introduction, my final project and paper largely were influenced by the sculpture that I created last year. When starting the piece *Study II: Tree Wrapped in Electrical Tape*,²³ I had an impression of what I wanted the finished piece to look like, but even more I had a concrete idea of

²² Stiles, 588.

²³ Robin Alexander (American, 1987 -) *Study II: Tree Wrapped in Electrical Tape*, 2009. Fallen tree and electrical tape.

what I was trying to express. As the product of an environmental art assignment, the project dealt with the idea of distorting nature through first bringing it indoors and altering its environment and, second, covering the entire structure with a synthetic material and essentially concealing its natural identity.

Before commencing the work, I deliberated my eventual process and decided that it would consist of wrapping the branches in the grey tape, using a uniform pattern to control my work and achieve my desired outcome. However, in creating the actual sculpture, it also evolved into “Process Art,” the creative outlook where the formation of a piece, and not necessarily the final product, is its central focus. When wrapping the branches I was obsessive about my pre-determined method of covering the tree. I chose a uniform pattern created by applying the tape in a specific manner and pattern. As I progressed, it became more important to repeat this design correctly than to create the sculpture that I initially thought I was going to make. With this change in focus during the eventual artwork’s production, the sculpture’s meaning also changed. No longer was it only about distorting the nature of the tree; the project now also dealt with the means it took to create the structure’s second skin. The process of covering the tree could not be quick, compromised or completed without careful consideration, nor could it be pre-determined and realized through preliminary sketches. The sculpture was a creative journey, rather than merely a deliverable end product.

Process Art requires two basic steps: the first, creation of the work and then the subsequent documentation of the work’s creation. For instance, Long makes a line in the

grass by walking over the same spot multiple times and then photographing it to make his work accessible to others. Christo and Jeanne-Claude spend years planning their giant sculptures and document every facet of their process along with the subsequent short-lived installation. All of this information is compiled into a book and shared with their audience. These artists are documenting four aspects of their projects: the time that it takes them to produce the work, the work's actual production and the process that they use to produce the work and, of course, the final product. The production and the ensuing documentation create the final sculpture.

I want to look more closely at particular works by these sculptors. All that exists to document Richard Long's 1967 piece, *A Line Made by Walking* is a black and white photograph that he made when still a student. This piece is considered the beginning of his considering walks as potential artworks. All we are given in this photo is an indication of Long's presence in this meadow. There is a field of grass and flowers, presumably daisies or weeds, and perfectly centered in the middle of the picture is a line, probably not more than half a foot thick, that appears much lighter. Upon closer observation we can see it is lighter because the grass has been crushed multiple times and the disparity in height allows the sun to illuminate this particular vertical strip most intensely. At its horizon, a group of dark trees juxtapose the flat foreground, and we get a small hint of the sky beyond this meadow. Our concentration is centralized and controlled to focus on the moderation that Long created.

It remains confusing why Long considers a walk an artistic equal to the traditional idea of sculpture, whether additive or subtractive. However, the artist has very simple ways of explaining how his work constitutes art:

A walk is just one more layer, a mark, laid upon the thousands of other layers of human and geographic history on the surface of the land.²⁴

Just as Rembrandt, Da Vinci, Monet and Dali applied layers of paint upon their canvases, Long coats the earth with the marking of his feet. His creative process is physical, while maintaining attention to detail in order to achieve a perfectly straight line. As Long stated, his mark is not dissimilar to the history of marks humankind has created; however, whereas other artists choose to create objects suitable for gallery viewing, Long chose to create work intended for a specific location and a specific time. A sculpture such as *A Line Made by Walking* is effective because of Long's attention to his procedure and to his surroundings.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude also create work that must be situated into a particular site and point. In *Wrapped Reichstag: Berlin, 1971-1995*,²⁵ which took over two decades to accomplish, the artists wrapped the German Reichstag building in Berlin, a symbol of German democracy, dictatorship and Communist legacy in over 100,000 square meters of thick woven polypropylene fabric for fourteen days. It took over six months to manufacture all of their various materials and a work force of 90 professional climbers

²⁴ Stiles, 565.

²⁵ Christo and Jeanne-Claude. (Bulgarian 1935- and Moroccan 1935-2010, respectively), *Wrapped Reichstag: Berlin, 1971-1995*. Photos.

and 120 installation workers.²⁶ As with all of their projects, Christo and Jeanne-Claude funded this work through the sale of their preparatory studies, drawings, scale models, books, early works and lithographs. In her history of art, Laurie Adams explained this project when she said, “This, like all of the Christos’ environmental projects, was temporary, and had no utilitarian purpose in the way that animal structures have. But, because people have a longer-term memory than animals, and a sense of history, Jeanne-Claude and Christo’s work is recorded-in preparatory drawings, models, books, and on film.”²⁷ All of this time, fundraising, planning and construction was undertaken for a project that was installed for, and only existed, for two weeks.

When this project was initially proposed, the Reichstag was located in West Berlin, but within only a few meters of the East Berlin border.²⁸ The political implications of this location in West Berlin, a breeding ground of Cold War tension, are colossal and also could be understood by viewers around the world. In a 1982 interview about the potential project, Christo remarked: “[w]hat I was mainly interested in, was to work in a place where the separation between both Berlins was obvious. I am fascinated by the physicality of this separation. Its demonstrative character. It is not a frontier border in the countryside, but a city, one of the biggest and the most remarkable in the world from an urban point of view, which is divided like that.”²⁹ Christo and Jeanne-Claude knew that this work would be successful, not only because of the city in which it

²⁶ Pagliasotti, 1 March 2010.

²⁷ Laurie Adams, *The Methodologies of Art: An Introduction* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1996) 9.

²⁸ Stiles, 550.

²⁹ Stiles, 550.

was situated, but mostly because of the location on the border. Wrapping a symbol of the former united Germany's political strength only made sense if positioned on the divided capital city's frontier.

In this example, the process was affected by the artists' desired location. Without securing the regulatory consents required to wrap the Reichstag, this sculpture never would have been realized and, unlike the trees in the park at Fondation Beyeler, the location of this work was not interchangeable with any other place in the world. As this project had to be sited at the Reichstag, the process necessary to accomplish this piece was entirely about place. In that sense, this project is unlike the other sculptures discussed herein. Instead of having an intended process that could be used to produce a controlled outcome, the wrapped Reichstag required a process that could be adjusted in response to any setbacks that arose. When Richard Long created the sculpture *Gobi Desert Circle Mongolia, 1996*,³⁰ he required a very specific aesthetic, but the actual, specific location in the Gobi Desert was arbitrary. Long's intended process and the manifestation of this final work were not going to be determined by its position. The wrapped Reichstag, however, was just the opposite; the process was determined largely because of this specific location, the building thereupon and the site of that singular building. Although the installation reflected the artists' intended final look, it only eventually was realized because they finally received all appropriate authorizations and consent necessary to use that specific site.

³⁰ Richard Long. (British, 1945 -) *Gobi Desert Circle Mongolia, 1996*. Photo.

Upon finally receiving permission to cover the German Parliament building, Christo and Jeanne-Claude chose a fabric with a silvery hint and shaped it with blue ropes. This resulted in a spectacular surge of vertical folds, which simultaneously highlighted the building's features and proportions while also covering the aesthetics which makes it recognizable.³¹ They wrapped the Reichstag in a manner that allowed them to maintain its two major courtyards. When seen from a distance, their chosen fabric caused the building to appear as minimalist architecture, transforming the multifaceted colors, materials, shapes and finishes into a solitary and continuous ornamentation. The artists documented this work with numerous photographs and with a publication focusing on their entire process to make their idea a reality. Their accomplishment certainly merits documenting; Christo and Jeanne-Claude transformed, abbreviated and complemented one of the world's most iconoclastic, complicated, visually and historically significant structures.

There are many divergent ways that contemporary sculptors allow their process to shape and to inform their work. The methods that Richard Long, Christo and Jeanne-Claude use are emblematic of the art world's cutting edge because their processes are concurrently highly structured, while also remaining adjustable enough to allow spontaneity when the artwork demands it. They then share their process and how it forms their sculptures through intricate documentation. Process utilization is similar among these sculptors who create contradictory work. Their similarities in progression and difference in aesthetics represent one of the greatest aspects of contemporary sculpture.

³¹ Pagliasotti, 1 March 2010.

The progression of what our senses recognize as art is reflected most significantly in what we accomplish as artists, with our ability to create imaginative and seemingly unique art while drawing upon and sharing our contemporaries' and predecessors' ideas and practices.

V

Installation

I'm at war with conventions...I'm against what's expected, what's safe.
-Judy Pfaff³²

As mentioned in the introduction, Richard Long, Christo and Jeanne-Claude are not the only contemporary sculptors whose work demonstrates their artistic process and conception. Many artists understand the Alex Potts quotation from my introduction and strive to connect with their audience through sharing their artistic processes. As a sculpture student, it is imperative to create work that reflects the work of other admired artists. Constantly looking to my inspirations allows me to advance my artwork to a constantly evolving desirable quality.

In this thesis project, I explore the realm of installation art. Many people consider Kurt Schwitters as one of the founders of the installation art movement. Although beginning his career as a painter in post World War One Germany's Hanover Academy, Schwitters soon found himself moving toward Modernism and more contemporary notions of art. He began creating collages with objects and writings that he found and called these works "Merz," which according to Schwitters was an imaginary word created by chance and as a word-fragment and assemblage derivation.³³ These drawings

³² Irving Sandler. *Judy Pfaff* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 2003) 2.

³³ Richard Humphreys. *Kurt Schwitters* (London, The Tate Gallery, 1985) 13.

and prints led to the “Merzbau,” essentially an, “autobiographical sculptural growth in his house.”³⁴

This structure began in Schwitters’ ground floor studio at the back of his house in Hanover, but grew to include grottos that encompassed every room. *Hanover Merzbau*³⁵ was a complete environment not to be lived in. He created a wall to ceiling complex held together by a labyrinth of struts³⁶; however, one of this structure’s most innovative aspects and what separates it from its predecessors in stage design and architecture, is the artist’s placement of objects inside the house that are important aspects of the piece. For instance, in one of the grottos Schwitters left flowers floating in a bottle of his own urine. He included his sexual and sadistic impulses through his careful placements of certain objects.³⁷ He created a 360 degree controlled atmosphere in which to convey his ideas.

My final thesis artwork is my effort to emulate Schwitters’s control and process. He was able to share his process and direct his audience with the careful placement of objects and of display. My final installation hopefully will create a controlled environment that convinces the audience of my artistic intentions. Although lacking Schwitters’s space and unable to turn an entire house into my distorted natural object forest, I can nonetheless can meticulously place my sculptures both to organize and to emphasize the message that I am trying to convey. In emulating Richard Long’s and Christo’s and Jeanne-Claude’s creative process to produce my individual sculptures, I

³⁴ Humphreys, 18.

³⁵ Kurt Schwitters (German, 1887 -1948) *Hanover Merzbau*, c. 1930.

³⁶ Humphreys, 19.

³⁷ Humphreys, 19.

also plan on following Schwitters's installation process to produce a regulated environment.

I also try to reflect Judy Pfaff's work. Pfaff is an unconventional artist to feature in a gallery as she is comfortable breaking down walls with a sledgehammer and allowing the subtle shadows of glass to create a composition on a wall. As she said in her personal mantra that introduced this chapter, Pfaff strives to push the standards of installation art and sculpture and create a hybrid form.

An obvious reason that Pfaff's art is attractive to me is her use of natural forms. In her piece, *Ear-to-Ear, 1995*³⁸ the artist fluently combines eucalyptus trees and branches with man-made materials varying from steel tubing to encaustic. The final sculpture, which is over eighty feet long, delicately hangs from the ceiling, floating over the gallery. At this height, it becomes harder to determine where the natural forms end and the synthetic materials take over. What is most impressive is Pfaff's ability to take materials associated with building and considered durable and assemble them into a form that allows them to appear graceful. She is like the artist Andrea Cohen who also combines different materials, but typically natural forms and craft materials.

Although differing from Pfaff because my sculpture focuses on separate materials for every piece, I appreciate her mixture of organic and inorganic objects. She distorts nature by camouflaging it with other materials, whereas I take a different route and try to cover most of the evidence that the underlying tree or branch exists. While our final

³⁸ Judy Pfaff (British, 1946 -) *Ear-to-Ear, 1995*. Steel tubing, cable, plastic tubing, eucalyptus trees, plaster lead weights, silver leaf, oil stick, encaustic, pencil, 20 x 80 x 40 feet.

intention may be similar, our processes of creating sculpture are not. In one of her larger installation pieces, Pfaff transformed the entire lobby of the Pennsylvania Convention Center and the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University using birch trees, fiberglass resin, steel, woven copper wire, duct tubing, plant materials and water to transform the entrance into a tactile, dark, and mysterious jungle of her creation.³⁹ She called this piece *Elephant*⁴⁰ because “[i]t was like the seven blind men walking around an elephant and each one touching a different part and describing it. They all had real information. But the thing was too big for anyone to get a handle on.”⁴¹ In this piece Pfaff knew that she wanted to create an installation spanning two stories of gallery space. This was not something that she could implement until she found a birch tree slated to be removed on her campus and promptly had her crew remove it with its roots and hang it on its side, so that the branches and roots reached into the upper galleries. She trusted the process of finding pieces to include in her installation to inform and enhance her final work. However, she combined the found aspects with the meticulously planned installation of other aspects and therefore combined methods of using process.

The installation artists Kurt Schwitters and Judy Pfaff help inform my art because their work does not end when their sculptures’ productions do. Although Richard Long, Christo and Jeanne-Claude all can be considered installation artists, they typically create their work outside of the gallery and exhibit only photographs of their final products after

³⁹ Sandler, 33.

⁴⁰ Judy Pfaff (British, 1946 -) *Elephant*. 1995. Birch trees, fiberglass resin, steel, woven copper wire, duct tubing, plant materials and water. Approx. 50 x 50 x 50 feet.

⁴¹ Sandler, 33.

the work has been taken down or in Long's case, left behind. Schwitters and Pfaff reflect the final project that I will install at the Emory Visual Arts Gallery; like Schwitters I want to be in total control of every aspect of what I bring into the space and like Pfaff I want to bring natural forms indoors and combine them with man-made materials. Through the process of installation, I am able to enhance my sculpture.

VI

Conclusion

I would like the work to be non-work. This means that it would find its way beyond my preconceptions.

What I want of my art I can eventually find. The work must go beyond this.

It is my main concern to go beyond what I know and what I can know.

The formal principles are understandable and understood.

It is the unknown quantity from which and where I want to go.

-Eva Hesse, 1968⁴²

There are multiple ways that artists can distort and transform nature. There also are multiple procedures and processes that artists can use to enliven their artistic intentions. Because of the variety that exists in a sculptor's toolbox, an artist's capacity for creation essentially is limitless.

The world of art always will be subjective. That is what makes it both exciting and complicated at the same time. An artist never can please all of his or her viewers and critics. More important, artists only can suggest the meanings behind their work and emphasize the message that they meant to convey to a certain extent. Once an artist places his or her work on public display in any sense, there is no guarantee that anyone viewing it will understand, or possibly even care, why the artist did anything that he or she did.

My project distorts organic objects by changing their natural appearance and environment. Covering an entire fallen tree branch with tar and a plastic, bubbling glue

⁴² Stiles, 594.

possibly raises questions about the current state of our environment, the dichotomy between the natural and synthetic world and/or the history of environmental art, but my focus in producing this piece still lies elsewhere. My primary interest rests in the layering process necessary to create this sculpture. *Study VIII: Tree Covered in Tar and Gorilla Glue*⁴³ required a patient and extensive process of coating the branch with different sheets of material. Every day I add another layer and every day the work changes.

That sculpture is meant as a piece of Process Art, but it was developed using a controlled process. While I determined the materials that I wanted to use and how to apply them in advance, the project still morphed after each application of new supplies because this process continually altered the final outcome. A work like this addresses the hybridity and duality existing between the natural and synthetic worlds and also the duality existing between controlling the process of creating art to determine a certain result and using Process Art concepts to ultimately affect the final outcome. This amalgamation of ideas and of materials and the capacity to combine those that reflect the artist's intent makes sculpture an exciting medium to pursue.

⁴³ Robin Alexander (American, 1987 -) *Study VIII: Tree Covered in Tar and Gorilla Glue*, 2010. Fallen tree, tar, and gorilla glue.

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