

MAKING PEOPLE:

desperate endeavours to create life from primordial sludge



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Honours Exegesis*

*Adelaide Central School of Art
2020*

ABSTRACT.

This honours project is an exploration of the field of sculptural installation, focusing on large scale figurative sculpture and how it can create experiences for an audience. The project extends from the topic question: 'how can I bring a sculpture to life?' By using an Affect Theory methodology, these works are attempts at creating an artificial sense of life from inanimate material, through figurative representation and material exploration. It examines creation stories as a narrative framework to apply to the making process. The project is developed through a secondary Practice Led Research methodology where the repetitive processes of research, making and reflection inform the outcomes.

This exegesis examines artists within the field of figurative sculpture such as Auguste Rodin and Huma Bhabha. It discusses ways that these artists have used certain concepts to evoke life-like responses in their artworks, and these connections to my research project. Rodin and Bhabha both explore the figure by focusing on material and form, but also embrace the imperfections and material deformations. In this project, I have made use of similar processes in the making of my sculptural figures.

My method combines clay modelling, plaster casting forms, and plaster building to create large figurative sculptures. These sculptural people are attempts at making living beings from basic material, referencing creation stories such as the Jewish folktale of the Golem, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The process of layering plaster and combining cast forms creates a material story of the sculpture's making, evident in the forms themselves. This project aims to tell a narrative through these works, which describes the somewhat desperate human endeavour to create artificial life.

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Introduction.

This honours research project has been an exploration of the field of sculptural installation, with a specific focus on figurative sculpture and the relationships between artwork and audience. My topic question is; 'How can I bring a sculpture to life through figurative representation and material experimentation?' The research is focused on the creation of figurative anthropomorphic beings from inanimate material, and the narratives of their creation. It is underpinned by creation narratives such as the Jewish folktale of the *Golem*¹, cautionary tales of human creation throughout mythology, and more contemporary stories such as Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*². This project extends from a mixed methodology grounded in Affect Theory, where I look at ways in which my artworks interact and create experiences for the viewer, combined with a Practice Led Research methodology, where the circular process of making, research, and reflection informs the outcomes³. This exegesis describes my endeavours to bring my sculptures to life, failures in this process, and the narratives which inform the making. It defines concepts such as the inherent life of materials, artificial life, figurative misrepresentation and narrative, while comparing my own research with literature and examples in the visual arts. It will examine my figurative sculptures with past and contemporary artists such as Auguste Rodin and Huma Bhabha. I will first examine methodologies concerning Affect Theory and Practice Led Research, then look at creation narratives, then the materiality of figurative sculpture and my studio practice's creative processes. This exegesis will also examine concepts such as the sacred, artificial life, and the historical grandeur of the field of figurative sculpture.

Rationale & Methodologies.

This project has endeavoured to create a sense of life from inanimate materials. I have been building large scale figurative sculptures by emulating the processes from the creation narratives that I am researching. Elements in my works are built from clay, like Prometheus moulding man in Greek

¹ Golem (גולם) meaning 'raw' in Hebrew, describes the Jewish folklore story of animated clay human forms being brought to life by a righteous rabbi.

² M, Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*, (London. Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor & Jones. 1818)

³ These methodologies are discussed more extensively below.

mythology⁴, then combined in composite cast forms, like the cadaver amalgamation of Frankenstein's monster, to create sculptural people. I am interested in imbuing these forms with a sense of life, through material exploration and figurative representation, and focusing on how these elements generate responses within the audience.

In this sense, my research project is primarily extending from an Affect Theory methodology, the creation of experience. Affect Theory examines the production and transmission of experiences between artworks and their viewer, and the agency (and therefore life) of an object. In his essay *Aesthetics of Affect*⁵, Simon O'Sullivan describes art as a portal or access point to another world, a world in which we experience reality differently. He writes that art is a bundle of affects (or a bloc of sensations) waiting to be reactivated by an audience. Rather than art as deconstructions of knowledge or meaning, art's life is in its function as a producer of experience. Artworks aren't simply retellings of meaning through material, but rather have a living symbiotic relationship with their audience. Caroline van Eck also explores this concept in her text *Living Statues*⁶ where she describes the concept of an artwork creating a living presence response with its viewer⁷. Art becomes a living agent through its transference of feeling which influences its viewer to act as if they are engaging with a living being rather than lifeless matter. The artworks can create all sorts of different reactions, from humour, to horror, to desperation, to pity. My research project uses these ideas as a conceptual method to imbue my beings with a sense of life.

This project has examined ways in which I can create living experiences when my audience engages with my sculptures. I am using creative processes which produce unpredictable outcomes, using materials such as clay and plaster. By using a process of repetitive drafting, modelling and remaking with different materials, I create broken, failed misrepresentations of human figures. These figurative malfunctions are

⁴ Apollodorus, *The Library*, (Translated by Sir James George Frazer. Loeb Classical Library Volumes 121 & 122. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1921) Retrieves 19/06/2020, from <https://www.theoi.com/Text/Apollodorus1.html#7>

⁵ S, O'Sullivan, *Aesthetics of Affect*, (London. Department of Historical and Critical Studies Goldsmiths College. 2001)

⁶ C, Van Eck, *Living Statues: Alfred Gell's Art and Agency, Living Presence Response and the Sublime*. (Cambridge, Art History 33(4). 2010) P: 642-659.

⁷ Van Eck's text is a response to Alfred Gell's text *Art and Agency*, where he describes artworks as living agents which transfer experience. Gell, A. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press. 1998)

informed through repetitive drawing in the studio, primarily through their haphazard construction. This work is an experimentation of the human form. My drawings abstract, invent, and extrapolate the anatomy. From these drawings I then model forms from clay, and cast them in plaster, which combine into larger than life sculptures. These material choices and methods allow room for chance and failure to take control. Other works are started with a mesh of chicken wire and a steel armature, which I then cover in plaster bandage and layer upon layer of thick plaster. Loose chicken wire and the unwieldy nature of building with handfuls of rapidly setting plaster allows room for material deformation and chance forms to direct the choices in my making.

By playing with different materials, manipulating scale, and making failed representations of the figures, I have focused on specific absurdities of the human form. This malfunctioning of the figure speaks to the development of my project through a secondary methodology of Practice Led Research⁸. Practice Led Research describes the continual cycle of research, action, and reflection I used in the development of my studio practice. I am making my figures through a series of processes which evolve and change through each step, combining the processes of drawing, clay modelling, casting in plaster, repetitive reproduction and painting. Tim Ingold in his lecture *Bringing Things to Life: Creative entanglements in a world of materials*⁹, quotes painter Paul Klee, 'Form is death. Form giving is movement, action. Form giving is life.'¹⁰ The processes of the making and generation of ideas are as important as the end forms and are an integral part of the forms themselves. My sculptures are as much about the story of their creation as their finished outcomes, developed through a Practice Led Research reflective process of making, thinking, and narrating.

Creation narratives.

⁸ E, Barret, B, Bolt, *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*. (London, Bloomsbury Academic. 2007)

⁹ T, Ingold, *Bringing Things Back to Life: Creative Entanglements in a World of Materials*. (Manchester. NCRM Working Paper. Realities / Morgan Centre, University of Manchester. 2010)

¹⁰ P, Klee, *Notebooks Volume 2: The nature of nature*. (Basel. Schwabe & Co. 1973) P: 269

This project is underpinned by literature and narratives that focus on the creation of life, specifically focusing on narratives within the Judeo/Christian tradition. Initial exploration began with the Jewish folklore story of the Golem, which tells the tale of a rabbi making a man from clay and bringing him to life. I was at the Jüdisches Museum Berlin in 2016 when I saw their major exhibition *Golem*¹¹, a historical survey of the Golem throughout folklore, which considered its subsequent evolution and reinterpretation throughout popular culture and literature. More recent interpretations tackle significant concerns for the future of our society, including cloning, artificial intelligence, and robotics. The exhibition catalogue essay begins with a discussion of the Christian creation narrative found in the Bible¹², where God formed his embryonic man from dust, then breathed life into his nostrils, however it is not explained exactly how this life was given. The omissions of this particular element of the narrative spawned the many interpretations, such as the Golem legends, that followed. In the Babylonian Talmud, a righteous rabbi was said to have tried to make his own man, only he could not get it to talk because he couldn't breathe true life into its nostrils as God did¹³. Other rabbis are said to have tried but only ended up with a calf instead, so they ate it for dinner¹⁴. There is an absurd desperation in these attempts, which captures a very human desire to make life and to understand creation, and a beautiful nonsense in the outcomes.

My project focuses on the failed results of these attempts, with my own works also starting as lumps of clay, and through my own desperate human endeavor, creating absurd life forms. I am more interested in the mute mud monster, the out of control magical broomstick, or the accidental calf malfunction than any attempt at creating a perfect human being. These failed results revel in the narratives of their making and their maker. The rabbi failed because he wasn't pure, he wasn't God. I am using my processes to encourage new decisions and evolutions, by setting myself up for failure. For instance with my work, *Spaghetti legs*¹⁵, I started building a human from the feet up, in a kneeling position, staying true to the

¹¹ Jüdisches Museum Berlin/Jewish Museum Berlin, *Golem. Selected Texts From Our Catalog*. (Berlin. Jüdisches Museum Berlin. 2016), Retrieved 25/02/2020, from URL: www.jmberlin.de/en/node/4680.

¹² B. Blayney, *Holy Bible: Standard Text*, (Oxford. Oxford University Press. Printed by T. Wright and W. Gill, printers to the University. 1769) Retrieved 20/04/2020, from [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Bible_\(King_James\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Bible_(King_James)) (Genesis 2:7) (Genesis 2:22)

¹³ P. Schäfer, *The Golem in Berlin. Introduction to the Catalogue to the Exhibition "Golem"*. (Berlin. Jüdisches Museum Berlin. 2016). Retrieved 25/02/2020, from www.jmberlin.de/en/node/4681.

¹⁴ Schäfer, *The Golem in Berlin*.

¹⁵ See Fig. 1.

form. These legs kept growing and extending, to eventually become a twisted, folded heap of limbs. I try to allow myself an open road ahead of my initial intentions. After my original idea, through the processes of continuous drawing, sculpting, distortion, and play, the idea finds its form and takes on a life of its own, acting out the concepts defined in Practice Led Research methodology.



(fig. 1) Nicholas Hanisch, *Spaghetti Legs*.

Life of materials (Artists and methods).

The cast elements of my figures were initially made from my own clay modelling of human body parts, before being reproduced in plaster. The use of clay as a material is important because of its narrative connection to the creation stories that I am referencing. As stated, God sculpted man from clay in the Bible, Prometheus did the same in Greek mythology¹⁶, and the Golem is made from clay by the rabbi. Clay has an important connection as one of the oldest art materials, with ancient ceramics being some of the earliest evidence of human creation. The never-ending cycle of human creation started from a pool of muck. Primordial sludge as the building block of life interests me as a mythological starting point for

¹⁶ Apollodorus. *The Library*.

creation. The entire planet's evolution started as a gigantic puddle of sludge which has been refining itself into more complex forms for millions of years. In this way the act of reforming clay into more complex forms is an, albeit poor, emulation of the core essence of life's evolution and creation on this planet.

Modernist sculptor Auguste Rodin has become a major influence on my own sculptural practice, particularly in his use of emotive clay sculpting and his frankensteining of cast forms. In the introductory essay to the Art Gallery of South Australia's 2017 major exhibition, *Versus Rodin: bodies across space and time*¹⁷, art historian Richard Beresford states, 'Rodin's interest was in making his statues come alive.'¹⁸ He achieved this by drawing upon his knowledge of anatomy and the mechanism of the human body. His anatomical method drives his sculptures intense emotional forms and their revelry in imperfection, as opposed to the idealised forms of past classical sculpture. His works have a freshness to the surfaces, where you can see traces of Rodin's hands and fingers carving into the clay. These traces show his making process, and also implant Rodin himself into the sculptures, giving them some of his own life. Showing the maker in the artwork creates a visual connection to its creation, and this is the reason I have been modelling my body parts from clay, as opposed to casting them directly from someone. My clay hands are modelled on my own, made by juggling observation and making, which resulted in exaggerated forms with elongated palms and twisted fingers. The subsequent casting reproduction process also distorted the hands into erroneous mangled forms.

¹⁷ L, Robb, *Versus Rodin: Bodies Across Space and Time*, (Adelaide. Art Gallery of South Australia. 2017)

¹⁸ R, Beresford, *Rodin - a very traditional revolutionary*, (Adelaide. Versus Rodin catalogue essay, Art Gallery of South Australia. 2017) P. 16



(fig. 2) Auguste Rodin, *The Inner Voice*, (c. 1894).¹⁹

Rodin's sculpture *The Inner Voice* is created from a composite of casts from different body parts. Like my own project, this process creates a completely disproportionate body which emphasises its own disfigurement. Rodin's amalgam figure has the legs of Adam, the belly of his assistant Camille Claudel, and the face of an unattributed model.²⁰ With this sculpture Rodin allows the failure of idealised form to become more important than the figure. In his essay *Embodying the ideal in form and image*²¹, Tony Magnusson states that, 'imperfection was a far more realistic marker of human experience than its classicising opposite.' Failure and imperfection are an important part of my studio practice. The sludge material of clay allows happenstance errors in representation, emphasising their character. The challenges from building with clay and also modelling with plaster inform the types of figures I create.

¹⁹ A, Rodin, *The Inner Voice*, c. 1894, bronze, 146.0 x 76.0 x 45.0 cm, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.

²⁰ L, Robb, *Assembling the inner and outer self*, (Adelaide. Versus Rodin catalogue essay, Art Gallery of South Australia. 2017) P. 194.

²¹ T, Magnusson, *Embodying the ideal in form and image*, (Adelaide. Versus Rodin catalogue essay, Art Gallery of South Australia. 2017) P.40.

I have chosen to primarily use plaster as the finished material for my sculptures. Plaster allows me to reproduce and reuse cast forms across all my sculptures, and it is also an ideal material to force chance decisions. My process involves preparing a bucket of plaster, while having multiple sculptures ready to work on around the studio. I then chaotically pour and build with the plaster in the small window before it sets. I will lump up piles of plaster to make a nose and face or pour layer upon layer of plaster bandage to build up a clothed body. The small timeframe of the setting plaster forces me to make spontaneous decisions in my struggle with the material. Necks and faces emerge from splattered piles of the fast setting plaster, which are then erased, carved into, or covered over in the next batch. Highly expressionistic marks and forms become a direct translation of my making.

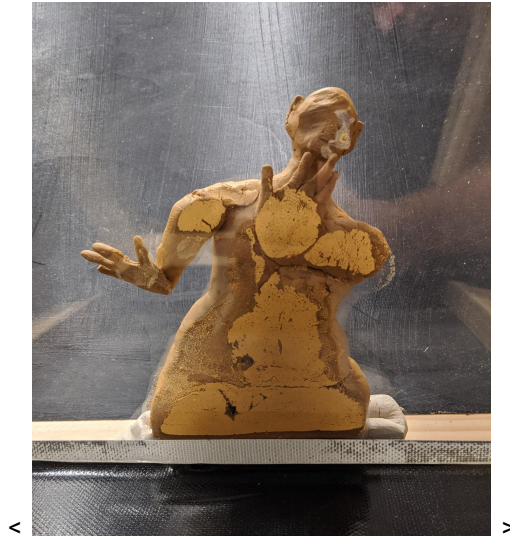


(fig. 3) Nicholas Hanisch, *Slow Cooked Golem* (self-replicating shaving cream).

With my sculpture, *Slow Cooked Golem (self-replicating shaving cream)*²² I started with a steel frame of its hips and legs attached to a makeshift wooden plinth on a dolly. From this base I began layering plaster bandage and loose plaster. Above the hips I then attached a plaster cast of an upper torso clay model I had previously made (modelled on my own goofy skinny body). Once these were attached, I gradually built the arms and head. This body has gone through many iterations, with each layer I would sand and chisel parts before building on top with more plaster again. Throughout this process the originally clean plinth and dolly have become littered with plaster drips and detritus, which have now set and combined into the form. I see this as a reflection of the history of the chaotic making process, and therefore an important element of the sculpture. The fact these large and heavy sculptures also exist on mobile dollies also has an interesting connection to their life. The wheels on the dolly suggest its ability of movement, which let us imagine them driving away and living in different places. These artwork's material processes capture in time the energy from which the works are made, and highlights the material challenges, but also the absurd desperation of the attempt to build life.

Earlier in this project I created a squashing press which I fed small clay people into. This clay man torture device was originally intended to create video works which would show a sludgy blob building itself into a human form by reversing the footage of the squash. These videos would show the direct forming of life, symbolised as a human figure, from dead matter, in this case clay. The outcomes from the device were quite intriguing, but they did not convey my conceptual goal of bringing the artwork to life. The outcomes ended up being better suited as an abstract human form generator. The squashed figures had a connection to my crafted clay models and the unpredictable pulped blobs ended up being more relevant to my conceptual generation. This was a useful step in opening up my thoughts about how my larger figures should be produced.

²² See Fig. 3.



(fig. 4) Nicholas Hanisch, *Squashing Press*.

Narrative & artificial life.

Erroneous decisions are also a part of the spontaneous *creator* persona I am cultivating, which informs the narrative framework from which I am making. This creator is inspired by Mary Shelley's story *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*²³ which focuses on the ramifications of creation. The novel presents us with the tale of a scientist, who builds a man from cadaver parts, and brings his creature to life with artificial science. Dr Frankenstein becomes a figure of excess, with his work consuming his logic and reason to leave him as a ranting lunatic, intent on destroying his life's work. This plot of the manic and mistaken creator interests me as a narrative lens to apply to my studio practice. The lens of storytelling provides a framework for examining human phenomena without being too broad. Earlier in the project I was documenting my studio practice through a self-reflective narrative journal, emulating the first person perspective of *Frankenstein* and using anatomical journals as references.²⁴ Although this method was abandoned, it provided useful development in the narrative voice I am using in my making process. I had

²³ Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*.

²⁴ 'Entry 1. 27.04.2020

As I am starting this journal, my research has begun unravelling deeper mysteries than I initially intended. What started as a somewhat straightforward exercise in investigating the terrestrial bipod known as a homosapien - or "Human", has devolved into a seemingly infinite web of absurd possibilities. My arrogance of assuming I could easily recreate such a chaotic machine has left my fumbling over its core, basic components. To even begin to comprehend the Human's impenetrable make-up, I must deconstruct and analyse piece by piece. This study henceforth shall be a rigorous personal examination which will hopefully finally shed some light on how these beings are made, for the good of intelligent beings everywhere.'

been working from an imagined perspective that is somewhat detached from humanity, as if I wasn't a human myself and instead, examining the human as a foreign subject. I have previously explored this concept in my 2018 exhibition *People Machine*²⁵ where I embodied the character of an extraterrestrial²⁶ trying to rebuild a human with found materials. That project allowed me to assume an outsider position to observe humanity and consider our absurdities from a detached viewpoint. Examining and attempting to reproduce humanity as a whole is a project fraught with failure, and it was this intentional representation of such failure which interested me.

The hypothetical narrative character I am embodying operates in governance of the act of making. Instead of simply casting actual body parts and recasting them, my haphazard anatomically incorrect clay models are fraught with misrepresentation and paint a picture of their creator. This character is as much a part of the artworks as I am. If we take on the life of our things, and become the sum of our things, paradoxically our things are what we make them also. Art has the power to imbue objects and things with an importance beyond their original utility. A painting of a spatula has a vastly different meaning than the actual utensil. This concept is explored in a phenomenological sense by Peter Schwenger in his text *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and the Physical Object*²⁷, where he describes equipment or tools as things that possess a being which manifests itself, where it fulfills itself by doing its action. A hammer's purpose is to hammer and in doing some hammering it succeeds as a hammer. More importantly Schwenger also describes that the failure of breakage, or when things go missing, is when the object's being is most evident. Does the failure of creating artificial life speak more about life than succeeding?

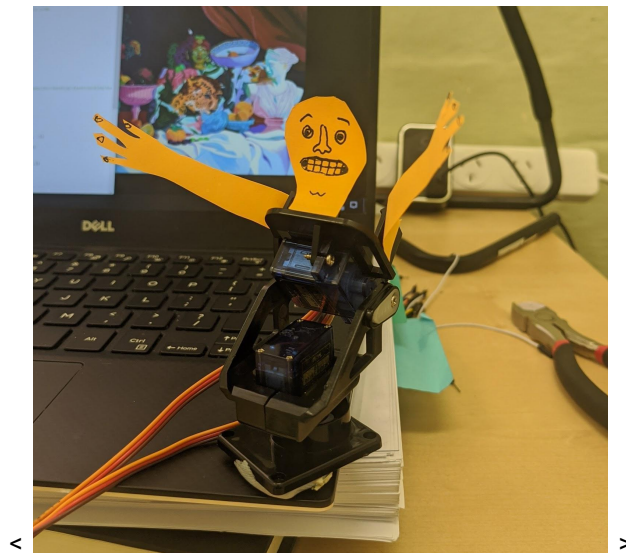
With making my sculptures I am playing with methods to imbue them with artificial life through manipulation of scale, material, form, and presence. The audience interacting with the artwork's physical presence in the same space should create an emotive conversation. This response links to the Affect Theory methodology I am interested in. I am looking at ways to extrapolate these living presence

²⁵ A, Clarke, *People Machine Essay*, (Adelaide. Floating Goose Studios. 2018)

²⁶ Not necessarily alien, but non-human.

²⁷ P, Schwenger, *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects*, (Minneapolis. University of Minnesota Press. 2006).

responses and elevate their interactions beyond looking at dead matter, in the same way van Eck and O'Sullivan described. In my project's earlier development, I created a prototype sculpture, *Hugging robot*, named such because of the humorous way in which it incorporated motion tracking robotics to desperately follow the viewer. One early comment on this work was that it looked as if the robot was bowing down and praying to the viewer, as if they were some deity.



(fig. 5) Nicholas Hanisch, *Hugging Robot*.

Artists Sun Yuan and Peng Yu's installation *Can't Help Myself*²⁸ was another important inspiration early in the project and is an example of the Golem trapped. A huge industrial robot arm is trapped inside a room-sized clear acrylic cage, which is continuously scooping liquid with its squeegee hand back towards its base. The artists programmed this arm with specific movements intended to emulate human actions, giving the robot a personality. There is an interesting dichotomy created between the dead matter of the metal robot and the desperate life of the frantic movement, that I considered as a potential source of artificial life. I moved away from using robotics in my work, mostly because I felt the novelty of the

²⁸ S, Yuan, P, Yu, *Can't Help Myself*, 2016, Kuka industrial robot, stainless steel and rubber, cellulose ether in colored water, lighting grid with Cognex visual-recognition sensors, and polycarbonate wall with aluminum frame, Dimensions variable overall, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

movement overpowered the material thing, but the feedback on these works prompted me to consider how certain absurd human actions could be captured and immortalised through my practice.

Flipping the grandeur & the sacred.

Figurative sculpture has a long history of immortalization and memorialisation, traditionally used as everlasting monuments to gods, queens, kings, and heroes. In 2019 I spent some weeks in Rome touring all the classical sculpture I could find. During this time I was constantly sketching and drawing the sculptures I saw, particularly the broken, ruined forms. The breakages and ruin in the ancient forms filled the inanimate pieces of material with history and stories. My drawings started focusing more on these elements than the immaculate craftsmanship they originally displayed. Some of these drawings became early prototypes to the sorts of figures I would develop in my current research project²⁹. During this trip I also visited St Peter's Basilica and was blown away by the absolute grandeur of the building. In researching Affect Theory, I have been continuously reminded of the affect of the basilica. The space inside immediately demands you look upwards towards (towards the heavens). The number of dramatic sculptural figures occupying every crevice makes the room feel like it's brimming with life. Visitors are talking in hushed tones and kissing the feet of chunks of marble. The whole space created such a vivid affectual experience it forces you to consider the sacred (and how much money the Catholic church has). In an interview in Thomas McEvelley's book *Huma Bhabha*³⁰, the artist describes a connection between the spiritual narrative in ancient figurative sculpture; '...there is a part that makes you feel like there is something larger... When people in the past worked on monuments, tombs and sculpture, everything revolved around the human body. This was part of the ritual and how you connected to the deity - how you moved over to the other side.'

²⁹ See (Fig. 6).

³⁰ T, McEvelley, *Huma Bhabha*, (New York, Peter Blum Edition, New York/Salon 94. 2011)



(Fig. 6) Nicholas Hanisch, *Rome sketchbook example*.

There is a strong historical link between figurative sculpture and the sacred. Totems, golems, figures of Christ, they share a similar utility as attempts to connect two of our worlds, the sacred (or imagination) and our reality. In his text *The Sacred and the Profane*³¹, Mircea Eliade defines the affect of religious experience, when the sacred manifests itself; 'we are confronted by the same mysterious act - the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural "profane" world.' While I do not create my sculptures from a religious or spiritual starting point, it is worth noting the spiritual connection in striving to create life. The responses the audience has had to my large sculptural forms can be linked to this spiritual or sacred definition³². This endeavour to create a portal between the imaginary life of my sculptures and the reality of their plastery material composition is at the heart of my work.

³¹ M, Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, (New York. Harcourt, Bruce and World, Inc. 1957)

³² The faculty at school are constantly spooked by my figures looming around after dark on the security cameras.

Aforementioned artist Huma Bhabha³³ is a contemporary figurative sculptor whose works have an immediate relationship to my own practice. Her towering amalgamation figures combine sculptural traditions, cultural associations, and art historical references. Importantly, her practice has a profound sense of material play. Using found objects and industrial materials such as styrofoam, rubber, burnt wood and other detritus, she builds large abstracted figures. They combine references to ancient Egyptian monuments, African sculpture, modern sculptors like Alberto Giacometti and Louise Bourgeois, and science fiction popular culture. Her hybrid forms invoke an imaginary narrative where we are seeing new forms of life emerging out of apocalyptic rubble. Bhabha also works with concepts of the monster and material experimentation to examine the failure of the figure. In an interview with Negar Azimi in the *Gagosian Quarterly*, Bhabha describes, 'It's the monster I connect with, not Dr. Frankenstein. Dr. Frankenstein is arrogant, he's not ready to accept his failure, which is why he can't accept the monster's otherness. The monster, and other forms of the monstrous and grotesque, inspire me.'³⁴ Bhabha's sculptures come to life through their human-like forms emerging from the reconstructed materials, and in the same way my own sculptures evolve from plaster sludge into potential people.



(Fig. 7) Huma Bhabha, *The Company*.³⁵

³³ McEvilley, *Huma Bhabha*.

³⁴ N, Azimi, *Work in Progress: Huma Bhabha*, *Gagosian Quarterly* Winter 2019 Issue. Retrieved 12/10/2020, from <https://gagosian.com/quarterly/2019/11/12/interview-huma-bhabha/>

³⁵ H, Bhabha, *The Company*, 2019, Exhibition view at the Gagosian, Rome. Photography by Matteo D'Eletto and M3 Studios.

These developments prompted me to explore the idea of flipping the grandeur of sculpture. My works borrow elements from classical sculpture and figurative representation but reject their importance as ultimate depictions of idealised figures. In a similar way Rodin combined different people to create new amalgams, I have wanted to immortalize the absurd. I am giving the same importance a King gets, to a skinny, plump bellied torso. Maybe we need to replace the idealised chiselled heroes of the past with our messy problematic selves. Especially in our current climate of post-colonial iconoclasm we must consider the importance of the figure in arts immortalization. Recently we have had colonial monuments throughout the world being pulled down, defaced, and destroyed in the waves of Black Lives Matter movements³⁶. While this is a complex field and quite tangential from my own research, I don't see the rejection of these historical figures as a protest against figurative sculpture, but as a prompt to reform the picture of humanity we want to preserve. In this regard my project is presenting disturbances in the traditions of monumental sculpture, which celebrate the absurdness and sheer endeavour of human creation. I'm going to bring my sculptures to life or kill them trying!

Conclusion

In conclusion this research project describes how I have been bringing my sculptures to life. Through material experimentation and figurative representation, I am exploring the inherent life and narrative connections of clay and plaster to the figure. My material play and construction of erroneous figurative forms creates a visual narrative of my own character and my desperate absurd undertakings. This research project explores how my use of misrepresentation of the figure can give an immortalising importance to nonsensical human actions. My studio practice is developed through a continual cycle of action and reflection, to explore how the outcomes can influence emotive responses from their audience. This exegesis has defined how I am relating my own practice to creation narratives such as the Golem and Frankenstein. It has examined my place within the field of figurative sculpture by exploring connections with old and contemporary artists such as Rodin, and Bhabha. This exegesis has examined

³⁶ G, Cohen, *The Historical Significance of Black Lives Matter Iconoclasm*, 2020, McGill Journal of Political Studies, <https://mjps.ssmu.ca/2020/06/26/the-historical-significance-of-black-lives-matter-iconoclasm/> accessed on 22/10/2020.

how I have used chance processes in my studio to relate to a Practice Led Research methodology, and how through using form and materiality I can create experiences of life for my audience, as defined by Affect Theory. It has also examined concepts such as the sacred, artificial life, and the historical grandeur of the field of figurative sculpture. This research project and exegesis explore how I can bring a sculpture to life through figurative representation and material experimentation.

..and thus he sneezed into the sludgy schnoz, thrusting the mucky being into the chaotic vortex of existence.

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Image List

- (Fig. 1) Nicholas Hanisch, 2020, *Spaghetti Legs*, plaster, wood, wire
- (Fig. 2) Auguste Rodin, (1840 - 1917), *The Inner Voice*, c. 1894, enlarged 1895-96 (Coubertin Foundry, cast 1982), Paris, bronze, 146.0 x 76.0 x 45.0 cm; William Bowmore AO OBE Collection. Gift of the South Australian Government, assisted by the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 1996, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.
- (Fig. 3) Nicholas Hanisch, 2020, *Slow Cooked Golem (self-replicating shaving cream)*, plaster, steel, wire, wood, bandage, dolly, 2400 x 830 x 500mm
- (Fig. 4) Nicholas Hanisch, 2020, *Squashing Press*, clay, wood, acrylic,
- (Fig. 5) Nicholas Hanisch, 2020, *Hugging Robot*, motion tracking robotics, paper, ink
- (Fig. 6) Nicholas Hanisch, 2019, *Rome sketchbook example*, Ink on paper
- (Fig. 7) Huma Bhabha, 2019, *The Company*, Exhibition view at the Gagosian, Rome. Photography by Matteo D'Eletto and M3 Studios.