Altruism, Activism, and the Moral Imperative in Craft

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Defense Date
2009

Document Type
Thesis

Degree Name
Master of Fine Arts

Department
Crafts

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Abstract
I consider myself a metalsmith although my interest in materials and ideas extend beyond the boundaries of traditional practice. I approach my work thematically, meaning that I treat my discipline as a framework for a broad investigation rather than as a skill set or process. The outcomes of this approach are therefore varied and include jewelry, installation, performance, video, interactive community based projects, print and web based writing, and historical research.

It is through humor or direct viewer interaction that I promote accessibility in my work. My ideas are layered and communicated in a way that allows viewers to engage on multiple levels, from superficial aesthetic appreciation of my jewelry to complex theoretical contemplation of my multi-media installations. I frequently use text, photographs, and video for their transparency and accessibility as communicative devices. In general my process favors ideation over formal aesthetics, sometimes neglecting objecthood in the pursuit of audience engagement. In my writing I employ a wry and biting style, using humor and metaphor generously. My interest in historical craft production frequently seeps into my writing. My studio practice, writing and research have a complementary relationship. My thesis work has two main components, the physical exhibition, Philanthropy Failed: The Altruist Series and the written thesis, Altruism, Activism, and the Moral Imperative in Craft. These two components are different manifestations of the same investigation into ethical production and market imperatives embedded in craft objects and interactive craft-based projects rooted in the desire for social change. Philanthropy Failed: The Altruist Series embeds the logos of prominent non-profit organizations into jewelry creating an object that, through commerce, can raise money and awareness for a charitable cause. The rejection of the project by the organizations that I sought to support highlights the cultural impotence of the individual to engage in meaningful social change activities. The exhibition documents the jewelry artifacts and their rejection by non-profit organizations, as well as three related videos; two documenting educational jewelry making performances (The Pro Bono Jeweler Series), and one chronicling the current state of ethical production within the established craft marketplace (The Moral Imperative in the Craft Marketplace). Altruism, Activism, and the Moral Imperative in Craft begins by placing the moral imperative in craft production in a historical context, and then proceeds to locate moral consumerism within the current craft marketplace. It goes on to explore activist and interactive projects rooted in craft. Additionally, it includes information about creation of the work for the physical exhibition and a brief history of my artistic development.

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Do value orientations of egoism and altruism affect pro-environmental behaviour? The answer is "yes", according to the results obtained. Corresponding to the self-benefit goal hypothesis, egoistic individuals (rated “high” on egoism) were shown to perceive having less control; that is, they believed that it was too difficult as well as pointless to do much about environmental issues. They were also less willing to pay higher taxes and prices as well as cut their standard of living for environmental protection. This suggests that environment-related moral imperatives may initiate a lesser or greater willingness toward pro-environmental actions (see Steg & Vlek, 2009 for a review). In spite of this, can we conclude that climate change is a moral issue (Markowitz, 2012)?