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Subliminal

Mary McDonald

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SUBLIMINAL

by

Mary McDonald

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in the Art, Studio

Andrew Casto
Thesis Mentor

Spring 2017

All requirements for graduation with Honors in the
Art, Studio have been completed.

Kee-Ho Yuen
Art, Studio Honors Advisor

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Mary McDonald
Spring 2017
Andrew Casto
School of Art and Art History

Being a double major at the University of Iowa, I thought it would be interesting to incorporate both of my fields of study into my honors project. These two fields include Art and Communication Studies. More specifically, I wanted to choose an axiom I've learned in my communication courses and translate it into a work of art. The communication principle I focused on is that "you are never not communicating." Therefore, what isn't communication, and in relation to this project, what isn't art? In our daily lives, we take in an immeasurable amount of communicative practices and pieces of art without noticing them or truly taking them into account. In this project, I wanted to take a simple object that is involved in communication, and make it into art that is more noticeable.

Inspired by Marcel Duchamp, I chose an everyday object just as he chose his "readymades." Readymades are ordinary objects that are elevated to the dignity of a work of art by the mere choice of the artist. Duchamp was also interested in ideas, similar to this project. After several weeks of research and observation regarding different communicative objects and practices, the object I finally chose was a wire, or a cord. This object could be seen as telephone wires that allow us to communicate over long distances, or a cell phone charger that enables limitless communication with others. I chose this ordinary object, but decided that in order to better convey my idea, I would alter it. Rather than simply taking the manufactured object and displaying it, as Duchamp did, I recreated my own version of a cord in ceramics. I attempted several different techniques of making these cylinder shaped cords. I first planned on throwing various sized cylinders on the wheel, cutting them into rings, and attaching those different sized rings together. After running into issues with that method, I decided to use the pneumatic extruder. This method included me working with my mentor in the woodshop to make four different sized dies that would extrude out cylinders. Unfortunately, the extruder was too strong and without cross braces, the board would break when extruding the large cylinders. My third approach was to use the rectangular shaped attachment on the pug machine and pug out these long rectangle forms, using them to hand build cylinders. This method did somewhat work, with me carving into the cylinders to create the assorted sizes within the cylinder. However, to get the desired effect, the clay was too thick to be able to realistically fire. After corresponding with various instructors in the ceramics field to find the most efficient way to build these structures, I finally figured out my final method. This time-consuming process involved me making over 90 clay rings on the pottery wheel by using a mallet to flatten the clay and slipping and scoring them together into various sized cylinders.

The most significant thing I learned throughout this project is the importance of the artistic process. The failures made throughout the course of making this honors project turned out to be just as important as the successes. My final method was the most successful because it was the most appropriate thickness of clay, the most efficient, and resulted in the most desired visual aesthetic. By learning what techniques or methods didn't work, I got closer to finding what does work and moved toward my final goal. This revelation is an important truth that will impact my processes in not only future artistic endeavors, but in every other aspect of life as well. According to Oxford dictionary, the definition of my title, Subliminal, is "perceived by or affecting someone's mind without their being aware of it." It is my hope that my rendition of the simple cylinder shape will catch people's attention and will be noticed, unlike many communication practices and artworks that we overlook each day of our lives.