Seattle Metals Guild Symposium Lex Archibald 5-20-18

Seattle is one of the leading cities of Metalsmithing in the United States. Due to the large number of metalsmiths who live there, the city has a very thriving and active Metals Guild. Every year the Guild sponsors an annual Metalsmithing Symposium. It is a day full of lectures from nationally recognized metalsmiths. For years I have wanted to attend this event. After viewing the 2017 schedule of speakers, which included my favorite kinetic sculptor, Arthur Ganson, I knew this was the year.

The opportunity to hear other artists speak about their work is so beneficial. Viewing their work and hearing them authentically reflect about their content, materials, and process inspires me to rethink my personal studio practice and classroom.

Attending a symposium is one way to ensure that your classroom remains contemporary within its discourse. For example, Tiff Massy, one of the speaking artists, shared a body of work that spoke to me. Her work is an observation of class, race and contemporary culture, viewed through the lens of African adornment and life in Detroit. This inspired me to rethink one of my class projects. Each year I have students create an object that is reflective of their own culture. It is often difficult for some students to define their culture. This year I shared Tiff’s work. As a class, we engaged in a deeper conversation about stereotypes. It ended up being one of the most engaging conversations of the year. The students are creating a musical instrument. The design and content is a response to how they define themselves through culture past and present.

My favorite type of creating is mechanical sculpture. Arthur Ganson is an absolute genius when it comes to fabricating an object to function like a machine, yet have the essence of a living thing. The objects are emotive and often have an omniscient presence. He has been a big influence to me for many years. It’s lecture undoubtedly provoked me to rethink my current body of work and the content. Currently, I am working on wearable pieces that have a mechanical component.

Symposiums are unique in the way that they are small enough to meet with a lot of people in your field including the guest speakers. I enjoy sharing art discourse with other artists. It’s something many of us miss once we are out of school. It is necessary to engage in discussion about your work and the work of others. It keeps you nimble in critique and humble, so that you can edit your own work and continue to grow. As a teacher, working with the material you teach and talking about it, naturally brings great enthusiasm and new knowledge to the classroom.

Hopping back onto the plane to San Diego, I sketched and wrote the entire time. Before I knew it, I was almost home. I left feeling inspired and refreshed, and full of gratitude that I had the opportunity to attend The Seattle Metals Guild Symposium.

I want to thank CAEA for this generous gift and opportunity.

I would like to recognize The Seattle Metals Guild for organizing the event.

I would like to thank Barb Knuth, a fellow colleague and friend, who invited me to stay at her house in Seattle.