

“Conflict, Commemoration, Fact, and Fiction”  
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I have been incredibly humbled and appreciative to have received an invitation to speak at the 41<sup>st</sup> Annual GAS Conference this year...especially in considering the fact that I am a fairly unrecognizable member of the international glass community. With this in mind, I used the opportunity to introduce myself, my work, my methods of making, and the ideas that motivate what I do and how I go about doing it within the presentation.

I've always taken special interest in the metaphorical properties of specific glass objects or processes of glass working in particular eras of glass history that were commonly associated with hosting graphic content – relishing not only in their unspoken poetic potential as objects commonly associated with pictorially ornamented glass, but of the conceptual relevance of translating their significance into a modern-day formal vehicle of self-expression from the perspective of a young man of American descent. In drawing from the goblet, the bottle, and glass painted portraiture, I spoke in the presentation of how I utilized these historical instances as platforms – or formal motifs – with which to speak from with personally applied narrative content.

The work involving the goblet motif was an effort to create a modern day rendition in glass of everything I was attracted to with the black-figure painted

pottery of ancient Greece. In acknowledging the Greek strict obedience to mathematically based structure of form and lustful aesthetic to craftsmanship, I drew a connection to a shared virtue in the making and prestige of European cup making of the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century. The goblet has primarily been personally considered as an object of metaphorical purpose - a luxurious form to commemorate particular individuals or events by means of imagery and/or text applied upon or into its surface. With that in mind, I pulled inspiration from the mythical narratives upon the ancient Greek pottery and created proportionally enhanced goblet forms to host fictitiously adapted narratives inspired by my own human shortcomings. In using the graphic stylings of the comic book format and look I felt that this particular mode of present day storytelling was a fitting extension of Greek lore – that super hero comics in particular serve us as a contemporary society as modern day mythology. The attraction to the Greek value in the tragic hero also serves as an impetus in what motivates the content of my narratives – stories featuring protagonists destined to “battle”, and ultimately lose to, unforeseen forces of conflict. I acknowledge this to be an odd fascination, but personally meaningful, nonetheless. The materials used to apply graphics are selected to be intentionally primitive and non-traditional. In using spray paint, Sharpies, and children’s Crayola markers, the motive is to find the extraordinary potential within ordinary means of self-expression...to make these materials “pass” in a visually glorious manner. This is a constant consideration within how I go about my work as an attempt to externally implement the process of radical transformation...of hoping to find my own capacity of substantiality as a common

individual by uncovering the unique and unforeseen potential of the most unsung of mark-making tools.

In speaking of things uncelebrated, another body of work was again inspired by a significant object of glass history commonly associated with glass that has hosted a variety of images and text upon its surface. However, for its humble simplicity as opposed to the goblet's opulent demeanor. The hand-made bottles of colonial America were quickly and crudely made...a no-nonsense approach to its production leading to a rough and tumble aesthetic. For all of its faults and faux pas – its thickness, its wonky stature, its loose posturing, the blemished glass it was blown with – they all had introduced the idea of integrating a bit of humanity into how I worked with glass. Ultimately it inspired me to begin “undoing” my obedience to symmetry.

A second consideration of the work involving the bottle motif was in regards to its para-function...its ability to undergo a great variety of identities and serve many different purposes beyond its initial function of holding fluid. Once its contents are gone, the bottle essentially serves its owner of no importance. Although coming across as a simple and lowbrow poster child in the archive of objects commonly associated with glass, I find the bottle to be a highly iconic visual motif – especially once emptied and considered “useless.” In fact, the bottle is at its poetic best once its initial purpose has been served. Under this light, the bottle serves as an ordinary thing capable of serving tremendously extraordinary and

unforeseen purposes due to functional reinvention under peculiar circumstances (as seen by the Molotov cocktail) or by metaphorical association (as represented by the hopelessness of an emptied and strewn brown-bagger). This body of work was pursued under a variety of intentions. The most important, however, was to establish a reciprocal dependency between form and imagery in accordance to the content of a piece, to pursue the application of the graphic material in a way that utilized the physical/visual properties unique to glass, and of doing all of this in service to ideas based on the callused grandeur of being human.

The third body of work that I discussed was a radical deviation from the previous two. Putting blown form to the side, my interests in using graphics led to questioning how I could use imagery and the written word more within a sculptural context; as abstracted visual components that contribute to a bigger idea as opposed to drawing upon the legacy of vessel surface ornamentation. In capitalizing on my value for doing a lot with a little even further, I wanted to compose a body of work that thrived on resurrecting discarded float glass and other abandoned materials. In using ink, pencil, cold paint, and enamels I am thinking about a variety of new considerations within this work: the role a flat image has in space, the relationship between materials, the quality of the marks being made, and the significance of even removing them and what that implies in some accounts. All of this “flat” work is, most importantly, inspired by the idea of reinterpreting the conventions of glass painting and framed portraiture. In considering the frame as a housing unit of portraiture in general I use it as a symbol for order and pursue this work with the

idea of playing against this structure in a variety of ways. Also, this body of work is pursued with a desire to add an ironic twist to the idea of a portrait as serving as the rendering of one's likeness and approaching this abstractedly – not interested in portraying how one looks, but how one is. Actually, I should clarify that the work is exclusively in regard to myself...perpetually learning even still who I am and how I operate and trying to assemble some sort of meaning out of it all.

The nature of my work has always been highly introspective. Although seemingly stable and confident, I am often fascinated by my own faults and failures that often lead to an overwhelming sense of personal uncertainty and insecurity. For me, making is an activity with which I can impose order upon my mental and emotional processes and find a sense of meaning amidst the occasional clutter of doubt and disappointment. I don't usually intend to make statements with my work, but I will admit that I do make testimonial confessions of a certain callused grandeur within being human. Whether or not this remains a significant aspect of my future work, I think it is a natural thing for one to take a curious interest in that which distinguishes him or herself as an individual. Ultimately, I will always be drawn to the human response to personal conflict...not necessarily because I romanticize about tragedy, but because there is an ironic beauty within the purpose of experiencing struggle, humility, and defeat. Whether we like it or not, these discomforting factors allow us to continually redefine ourselves and, therefore, serve as highly transformative opportunities. There are pluses to all of our minuses.

I am so incredibly happy to have had the opportunity to introduce myself to the international community within my presentation at the 41<sup>st</sup> annual GAS Conference. Please visit [davidschnuckel.com](http://davidschnuckel.com) for more images and links to sites that host more written material in regards to my work...including an uncut version of this essay. There's more to the story...