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The Secret Life of Things

A thesis

presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Art and Design

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Fine Arts in Studio Art

by

Maja Savić

May 2013

Professor M. Wayne Dyer, Advisor and Committee Chair

Professor David Dixon

Professor Scott Contreras-Koterbay

Keywords: graphic design, animation, movement, animism, household objects, typography

ABSTRACT

The Secret Life of Things

by

Maja Savić

The artist discusses the work presented in *The Secret Life of Things*, her Master of Fine Arts exhibition held at Slocumb Galleries, East Tennessee State University, from March 18th through 22nd, 2013. The exhibition consists of sixteen illustrations (four of these are digitally enhanced photographs) and one animation that show the artist's interest in bringing household objects to life. Pieces in the exhibition can be characterized as humorous with a strong narrative and attention to details. Savić's ideas are based on traditional education with contemporary influences. All printed work is twenty inches wide, sixteen inches tall, framed, and hung in one side of the gallery. The other side was reserved for an animated artist statement projected onto the gallery walls.

This thesis discusses the most important influences and doctrines about art that support and further explain the presented work.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Faster than I wanted, I had to learn to live, work, and survive in the country that was everything but art friendly. After Yugoslavia fell apart in the late eighties/early nineties, many people decided to leave it in a search for a better future. I was still a kid when that happened and I was dreaming about “the perfect world” where my passion for art would bring me some kind of life I wanted to live. Unfortunately, the borders were closed for a long period of ten years so that almost no one could leave the country. This naturally decreased the chances that anyone would visit Serbia as well. The Nineties were the years of isolation, time when exhibitions were a luxury, as well as the other kinds of artistic practice. During that period, freedom of speech did not exist in Serbia, and the same could be said for almost every other kind of freedom. In that kind of environment, becoming an artist was reserved for either irremediable optimists or complete lunatics. I truly felt like I was a little bit of both.

I studied art in a country that constantly had some sort of political or economic problems and therefore was isolated from the rest of Europe. Serbia felt like an abandoned land at the time and leaving it became a dream for many. When I was still in college, I saw Wim Wender's movie *Paris, Texas* about a man who was wandering out in a desert, not knowing who he was. Needless to say, I also felt like a lost lamb and recognized myself in the main character. In need of change, I started applying for different scholarships and art residencies. I was hoping that one of those opportunities might be a way out of the forgotten land where I felt stuck. Traveling became a hope for a better future; a symbol of progress, a goal, and, as such, a major inspiration of my art. Henry Miller said in *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*: “One’s destination is never

a place, but rather a new way of looking at things” (Miller 25). In a similar way, my art changed, and my area of interest expanded from the finished product to the joy of exploration, learning, and experimentation. When I started graduate program at East Tennessee State University, I acquired a variety of interests—from graphic design, motion graphics, and typography, to animation and web design. I had an enormous need to constantly learn and develop what graphic designer Massimo Vigneli calls *intellectual elegance*: “I would define intellectual elegance as a mind that is continually refining itself with education and knowledge” (Millman 216-217). In my case, traveling had a major role in that refinement. I truly believe that one has to keep his mind alert and to expose it to different impulses in order to make good art. I was lucky enough that I had a chance to travel and, therefore, experienced ignorance and closed-mindedness in people but also widened my horizons so that I could express myself more clearly than ever.

In an interview with Debbie Millman, graphic designer Paula Scher gives advice on how to improve work: “Try to find another way to walk” (49). I find many similarities in our ways of thinking and often remind myself of her walking metaphor of which I can closely relate. In the same interview, Scher answers a question about what makes her design good and elaborates on what that means:

For me, that’s why the breadth, the core, matters. Because when I change what I’m doing from editorial packaging to environmental design to identity to motion graphics to some form of Web work—as long as I can do that—it’s going to take my work in another direction. Particularly because I’ve been practicing for 25 years, I have to keep walking forward. I can’t look at the past and worry about whether it’s good or bad. It’s critical for me to move on to the next project, to discover the next thing. (49)

This thesis discusses the influences, concepts, ideas, experiences, and processes developed on a journey that brought me to Johnson City, Tennessee and ended with my graduation from East Tennessee State University.

CHAPTER 2
TSUKUMOGAMI

I grew up in Serbia where traditional art education required students to work on large scale studies of a human figure. I had been painting from observation and constantly drawing, eager to improve my artistic skills. Unfortunately, I failed to notice that I was not becoming a better artist but rather an uninteresting copyist. With no personal stamp or message that I wanted to communicate, my art was missing a huge piece of a puzzle. “The artist must have something to say, for his task is not the mastery of form, but the suitability of that form to its content” (Kandinsky 213).

Even though my concentration is graphic design, many different areas of art quite often intrigue me. Serbian poet Duško Radović once wondered what pillows would say if only they could talk. At first, I thought that my interest in bringing inanimate objects to life came from Radović, but then I realized that the influence was a lot older. It was brought to me through a TV series that I used to watch every day when I was little. *The Shoe People* was created by James Driscoll and first broadcasted in 1987 in the United Kingdom. It is a story based on a belief that shoes tell about their owner’s personality. The Shoe Mender, who works in a Shoe Repair Shop, fixes the shoes he gets. The ones that cannot be repaired are not thrown away but stored in a back room. Whenever he leaves and slams the door, something strange happens and all the shoes come to life. The back wall disappears, and Shoe Town, where they all live, appears. They do not interfere with the Shoe Mender, but they live in their own Shoe World (Thorne). Shoe people are similar to the characters that I create. They are anthropomorphic creatures (they have human characteristics), whereas the majority of my objects are zoomorphic. Driscoll’s shoes have arms

and a face, and the animal properties in my art come from the “behavior” of the items I use. To be more specific, my main interest is *animism*: “attribution of conscious life to objects in and phenomena of nature or to inanimate objects” (animism), and anthropomorphism and zoomorphism appear as its consequence. I do not enjoy the style of animation in *The Shoe People* too much, but I really like the idea that there is something magical happening in the Shoe Mender’s backroom, a world that is parallel to actual real life. I have seen the same idea developed in other movies such as *Toy Story*, *Roof Sex* by PES, and *The Christmas Toy* by Jim Henson. However, *The Shoe People* represent my first contact with that idea, which has been ingrained into my memory ever since.

My thesis show is a collection of sixteen digital illustrations (four of those are digitally enhanced photographs) and one animation. It explores the other side of reality, where household objects have personality, motives, and emotions. By taking tools, cameras, and lamps out of their ordinary context, I change the way we see everyday life and emphasize what is extraordinary about it. Czech photographer Josef Sudek once said: “I like to tell stories about the life of inanimate objects, to relate something mysterious” (“Josef Sudek”). I am interested in exploring the secret life of things and in representing additional layers of what is obvious.

What makes me pick those specific objects? When I started working on this project, I was greatly attracted to old cameras. They are an inevitable part of every film made on tape, but today they are almost completely replaced by more advanced digital models. I feel sad and melancholy for those, in my opinion, beautifully designed and crafted objects. Because of the improvement in quality and noticeably lower costs, most filmmakers have switched to digital models. Even though their old filming tools were not out of order, they were put on a shelf to hope that someone would hold and use them again. I decided to give them a second chance to

live a life on their own. After a while, I started paying attention to different household objects that similarly sit like the forgotten cameras, with no real use. I assigned them new roles and created environments where humans were not allowed.

The idea that household objects might come to life, came back to me when I moved to the USA and started living with a Japanese roommate. I became interested in reading about her home country and in influences that *Japonism* had on western art. One of the most interesting stories I stumbled upon became a main core of my current work. There is a Japanese belief that objects have spirits, like humans. After household objects reach their hundredth birthday, they can become alive and aware. This type of spirit is called *tsukumogami* (Lillehoj 8). In their rage, these objects usually seek for revenge because humans discarded them just because they were old. Nevertheless, *tsukumogami* can also be friendly and harmless in case those objects were well treated and used. It is said that electricity kills the spirit, and that is the reason why electrical devices cannot become alive. The idea of inanimate objects transforming into animate ones has been common in Japan for a long time. *Tsukumogami* influenced both my life and my work. I became more aware of the value of what I possess, and I started thinking about our appreciation for what we do and do not have. That naturally brought up some questions about materialism, consumerism, our need to always buy more, satisfaction, and above all, revenge. I started thinking about differences between cultures, societies, religions, and people; tolerance, human vices, and about consequences of our own actions and words. The concept of *tsukumogami* is truly intriguing to me because it raises numerous questions about the problems of which I am interested, such as identity, human behavior, and needs.

In addition to *tsukumogami*, *kintsugi*, or “golden joinery” is another idea that comes from the Asian continent that fascinates me greatly. “It refers to the art of fixing broken ceramics with

a lacquer resin made to look like solid gold” (Gopnik). Pottery fixed by kintsugi is believed to look even better than before it was damaged. It represents the original object, now enhanced with a golden pattern and the effort, time, and skill of the master, who put all the pieces back together. When I first read about these two concepts, I felt like I finally found a piece of a puzzle that my art was missing for such a long time.

The ideas that things can come to life if not treated well, as well as that the broken objects can be fixed in a way that is going to increase their value and beauty, became truly important to me after I spent some time in the United States, the land of waste and consumerism. *The Secret Life of Things* deals with the same kind of objects that appear in Japanese folk tales; discarded, dysfunctional, or fully functional but dated and replaced. Whatever was one man’s trash became my treasure and, as such, the core inspiration for my MFA show.

CHAPTER 3

HUMOR

Humor in literature is dependent on writer's skills to use a language and change ordinary situations or phrases in a way that creates exciting mental pictures. Similarly, graphic designers use their own means of expression to create symbols that most effectively communicate their messages. Symbols in graphic design exist because they simplify complex concepts and make ideas appealing and easy to understand for consumers.

One of the earliest examples of humor in graphic design is a serial poster *Dubonnet* designed by A. M. Cassandre in 1932. It represents a man drinking wine in a cafe, depicted in three different stages in a form of a cinematic sequence. The word *dubonnet* is rendered in a similar way as the man himself, underneath each of the three images. In the first panel, the man is looking at a glass full of wine. The drawing seems unfinished because it is rendered almost completely out of outlines. In a similar style, the word appears as *Dubo*, which means “something liquid” in French. The next panel shows *Dubonnet Man* while drinking out of the glass. He is filled with color and the word underneath now appears as *Dubon-* which means “something good.” The final panel depicts a completely rendered image of a man who is emptying a bottle of wine above the finished word, *Dubonnet*, which is the name of the product. Casandre's sophisticated sense of humor and repetition, created rhythm in this piece. What intrigues me the most about *Dubo, Dubon, Dubonnet* poster is not only the sense of motion that is achieved through cinematic representation of the three panels, but also a fact that this concept came to the artist through the “play principle” (Heller).

Play is typical of children and for their interest in exploration. Many designers work as adult children, and I am definitely one of them. I am a collector of junk who is storing random objects as long as there is the slightest chance to use them in future projects. Mervyn Kurlansky has a similar approach:

I collect seemingly random pieces of information but there is a point when I suddenly make order out of chaos, when I restrain and control diverse elements to create the design. My indiscriminate collection works like that too. I will pull out a found object randomly from a drawer and it will trigger the solution to a complex design problem. Sometimes it is precisely the object I am looking for, its image recorded indelibly in my mind by the long-forgotten act of adding it to my collection. Sometimes it is an object I simply stray across while searching for something else, yet it becomes the catalyst for a creative response. (Kurlansky)

I believe visual artists collect data that is stored in their minds both consciously and unconsciously. Paula Scher compares that process to gambling in the book *How to Think Like a Great Graphic Designer* by Debbie Millman:

I have a pile of stuff in my brain, a pile of stuff from all the books I've read and all the movies I've seen. Every piece of artwork I've ever looked at. Every conversation that's inspired me, every piece of street art I've seen along the way. Anything I've purchased, rejected, loved, hated. It's all in there. It's all on one side of the brain. And on the other side of the brain is a specific brief that comes from my understanding of the project and says, okay, this solution is made up of A, B, C, and D. And if you pull the handle on the slot machine, they sort of

run around in a circle, and what you hope is that those three cherries line up, and the cash comes out. (45)

No matter how hard I tried or how much I worked, those cherries did not line up for me before I came to ETSU.

The Secret Life of Things is a show that I previously characterized as humorous because of two reasons. The first one deals with the essence of the objects. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the essence as “properties or attributes by means of which something can be placed in its proper class or identified as being what it is” (essence). The humor in my show is coming from an unexpected context in which my objects are depicted. Their essence changes, and, therefore, they inherit behavior and identity that were reserved only for the living beings. Instead of showing how uninteresting a measuring tape, an old teapot, or a phone can be, I depict their other, secret side that was inspired by *tsukumogami*. My cameras are not capturing but projecting light in directions of their own choice. The teapot is using its handles to fly away and follow its dream. Another piece depicts a mother wrench feeding her little wrenches with bolts, while an old phone is chasing a newer microphone that stole a piece of his cord. Characters in my digital collages now behave as humans and animals and make the entire show funny and appealing to its audience. My MFA show is about everyday scenes and objects in which everyone can understand and relate.

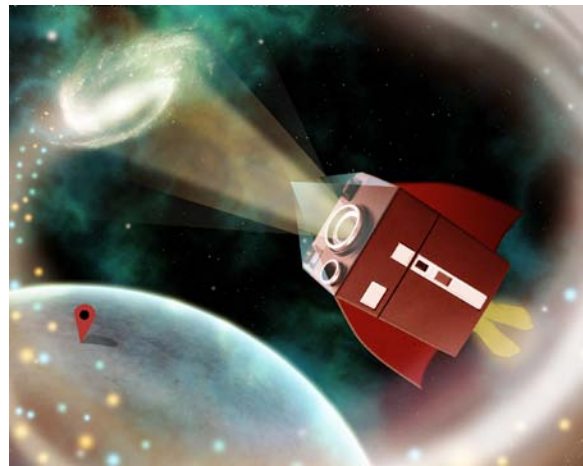


“Underwater Cameras” (detail)

The other reason that makes my show humorous is the existence of funny, hidden details in my pieces. One of them can be found in the *Underwater Cameras*. The camera I used for this piece had number eight embossed in a red rectangle that was visible in a reference photo. That meant that this specific model of camera had to be “fed” with 8mm tape. Because I changed the essence and, therefore, the identity of the camera, I felt like I should also change the embossing. I replaced the number eight

with a silhouette of a fish, rendered in a similar manner. This detail is almost invisible because of the perspective, debris, and transparency of water, but the fact that it is there makes me giggle.

The other example appears in a piece that takes place in outer space. Without knowing an anecdote that inspired this illustration, it is hard to understand the humor about it. The story comes from my brother who asked me a couple of years ago, why I could not find some “normal” friends, instead of hanging out with those “cosmonauts” of mine. He, who had a



“Cosmonaut”. Illustration, 16” x 20”. 2013

those “cosmonauts” of mine. He, who had a nine-to-five job and no interest in art, could not understand my way of life, and hence my friends and I looked like we were “lost in space” to him. Surprisingly, when I told this story to fellow artists, they loved it. Living as a cosmonaut became a mission for all of us. The camera that found its place in the Universe is exploring galaxies, while, somewhere on Earth, a symbol I used from Google Maps is pointing to a spot where my brother lives. Calder, too, found his

inspiration in the universe, or, as he would like to say, in part of it because his model was too large. He once told his mother how his inspiration was the sun, moon, and stars. “His mother said, ‘But you don’t know anything about the stars.’ And Sandy [Calder’s nickname] replied, ‘No, I don’t, but you can have an idea of what they are like without shaking hands with them’” (Lipman, 14).

In *Milton Glaser Legacy*, a film about Glaser’s work for SVA and Silas Rhodes, the artist talks about a poster he created for the School of Visual Arts. The purpose of the piece was to promote the school by offering twelve scholarships. Glaser used twelve plums as a symbol for twelve students, a concept based on a phrase, *plumb job* (meaning a very good job) that he grew up with. In addition, he added a visual joke to his piece. Glaser repeated highlights that appear on the plums to define their shape, above the fruits, in positive, so they look like they jumped off. In a similar way, my pieces often have subtle, hidden details that contribute to the humor and overall richness of my art. It is not rare that those visual jokes stay unnoticed, but I still believe they have an important role in my art. In the film I mentioned above, Milton Glaser honestly admits: “I have no idea if anyone ever got that joke, and truthfully I don’t care very much” (La Monica). Nor do I, in the case of my art.

Ever since A. M. Cassandre, humor has kept an important role in graphic design and advertising. I use it because I believe it expresses my nature well, and it helps me communicate my messages better. By incorporating inanimate objects, humor, story telling, and motion into my art, I found the best means of expression for what I wanted to say. Those elements helped the alignment of those three little cherries in my slot machine, and I hit a jackpot.

CHAPTER 4

MOTION

An exhibition that influenced my understanding of art was a retrospective of Alexander Calder's work in Paris. It consisted of wire sculptures, jewelry, screening of the artist's film *Circus* with accompanying animal sculptures, and most importantly, his moving pieces that are known as *mobiles*. "It was Duchamp who suggested the name mobile for the moving sculptures" (Eiseman 1).

Calder used to say that "a mobile is a piece of poetry that dances with a joy of life" (Lipman, 19). Mobiles made me wonder about what I wanted my art to communicate and what I wanted my audience to feel. Thanks to the great sculptor, I became conscious of what was important to me: to create pieces that were a reflection of life and how I would like it to be.

Alexander Calder has been one of my major influences ever since I saw his exhibit in Paris. Movement, playfulness, and genuine energy of his art are greatly present in my work, too. Assigned to outcasts between household things, those characteristics emphasize their vintage beauty and criticize the consumerist society that rejects them too quickly. I combine photographs with drawings to create digital collages of a world in which those objects live, where real and magical coexist together. My interest in motion has an important role in the environment like that because, when attributed to inanimate objects, motion symbolizes life that was reserved only for the chosen ones. My characters follow their dreams and, literally, think outside of the box.

Representing motion in art is not a new concept. The first examples date from around 30,000 years ago when hunters painted animals on cave walls. Artists from all around the world have been trying to solve the same problem using different approaches ever since. Marcel Duchamp and Giacomo Balla depicted different phases of a walking process. Both Duchamp's painting *Nude Descending A Staircase* from 1912, and Balla's *Dynamism Of A Dog On Leash* from the same year, showed almost onion-skinned bodies in action. These approaches resulted in complicated compositions where most of the details were lost. In pieces similar to *High Speed*



***"High Speed Camera"*, Illustration, 16" x 20". 2013**

Camera, I wanted to emphasize the impression of movement, and, therefore, I used a solution inspired by Duchamp and Balla. Numerous overlapped layers with increased blurriness and transparency, created an effect that household objects were moving like depicted animals.

Representing motion is equally important to me as is the idea of *tsukumogami*.

The way I usually represent motion can be compared to taking snap shots, such as in a piece *Mouse Trap*. This approach was present in Hokusai's woodcuts and Lichtenstein paintings, among others. The artist shows only a frozen moment instead of creating an illusion of motion. The Japanese printmaker and the American painter each tried to solve the problem by depicting motion in its crescendo. In *The Great Wave* from 1823, Hokusai created a strong feeling of tension by showing a moment when the wave reached its peak. Similarly, Lichtenstein painted a plane crash in *Blam* from 1962 where he showed an upside-down plane that was on fire. This approach was more suitable for art with a strong narrative, such as mine. It allowed me to create

tension, to keep details, and to emphasize the message. In *Mouse Trap*, I used this approach to show a moment in which a mouse is about to grab a slice of cheese, while a predator is watching him, waiting to attack. An old conflict between mice and cats was clearly my inspiration, but I took it out of the context to create a visually interesting, yet clear and



“Mouse Trap”, Illustration, 16” x 20”. 2013

understandable piece. Because of their similar shapes, I used a measuring tape as a symbol for a mouse and replaced a cat with a hammer to create a famous chasing scene. Motion helped me recreate a tension between two enemies, but in a new and exciting way.

The history of representing motion in art extends from the first drawings of animals in caves, across impressionism and futurism, as well as Muybridge’s photography towards the film and internet era, where everything is moving and flickering. Graphic design and illustration offered me some solutions on how to represent motion, but I still felt like my art was lacking something important. What I was trying to achieve in my thesis show is probably best described by Miro’s words: “What I am seeking in fact is motionless movement, something equivalent to what is called the eloquence of silence” (“Miro A Life in Retrospective”).

CHAPTER 5

ARTIST STATEMENT

Because of its important geographic and strategic position, Belgrade has always been interesting for invaders. At one point, it was the second largest Ottoman city in Europe after Constantinople, and a crossroad of many cultures. It is also famous for Vinča, the Neolithic archeological culture that existed and dominated in the Balkans area about 7,000 years ago. Vinča is important because of the anthropomorphic figurines that were found there, as well as the pottery. The signs engraved in clay represent one of the earliest known forms of alphabet. They convey certain messages, but the written language has never been decoded (Tasic, Srejovic, and Stojanovic).

Growing up so close to Vinča made me think about humans' need to exchange messages. Typography, as we know it today, has appeared in art ever since the ancient ages. Its purpose was to identify the artist, date, or biblical protagonists; but its purpose changed dramatically in the beginning of the twentieth century with Picasso and Braque. Through Malevich, Duchamp, Magritte, Kosuth, Nauman, etc., words have found their way into art, and I recycled the same idea one more time.

When I came to the USA, it was really hard for me to communicate because I was not fluent enough in English. I had an extremely turbulent inner life, but I could not find a way to express myself. That is how the power of the visual image became really important to me and why none of my illustrations in the show include written language (except for the titles). Nevertheless, all the printed pieces represent "the eloquence of silence" as Miro defined it. That approach turned out to make a lot of sense when applied to the characters I created.

On the other hand, I do indeed have a strong interest in typography, and, therefore, I decided to make one more piece as a compliment to my printed work. *The Artist Statement* was influenced by two concepts in graphic design that struck me as an artist: found typography and metaphoric lettering. Found typography is an idea presented by Mervyn Kurlansky in 1977, in which he used household objects to create letters. He presented the entire alphabet in *Alphabet with Tools*. Almost thirty years later, Stefan Sagmeister finished *Things I Have Learned In My Life So Far* project, in which he created words directly in nature from natural and industrial materials. These two principles were very appealing to me because of my interest in old, abandoned, and found. I decided to use these two ideas in my MFA show to create one more piece in which I joined my interest in motion, typography, visually appealing imagery, and bringing inanimate things to life.

The Artist Statement is a piece that explains my main influences, doctrines, and concepts about art. The University of Arts in Serbia did not require students to write artist statements; therefore, this requirement in the USA seemed really odd to me. I realized that I usually found them uninteresting, too long, and usually degrading when being compared to the art itself. The ones that I actually enjoyed were because they explained the art better. The artist statement, as it was required from the school, seemed sufficient to me because as Walter de Maria said: “Conceptual art need not be dependent on words of language” and “any artist who explains his work is a fool” (McFadden 69).

I decided to transform the artist statement into a piece of art. I made an equally explanatory but personal and visually appealing piece that is much more related to my subject matter. After hearing an interview with another design hero, Saul Bass, I came to a conclusion

that his slightly arrogant attitude is very applicable to how I felt towards this school's requirement:

Aesthetics are your problem and mine. Nobody else's. The fact of matter is, I want everything we do – that I do personally, that our office does – to be beautiful. I don't give a damn whether the client understands that that's worth anything, or that the client thinks that it's worth anything. It's worth it to me. It's the way I want to live my life. I want to make beautiful things, even if nobody cares (Marshall).

Development of television, music videos, animation, title sequences, and the internet increased a need for motion graphics, and Saul Bass is considered to be one of its pioneers. He designed title sequences for *The Man with the Golden Arm*, *Psycho*, *North by Northwest*, and *Vertigo*, and made them integrated parts of the film, elevating them to a higher level. Motion graphics is still not widely recognized as a form of graphic design (I believe it is even further from being recognized as a part of art), but I think its future is moving in this direction. A motion graphic artist has to understand the basic principles of typography, imagery, color, and other visual elements in order to communicate a message, and I therefore decided to challenge myself one more time and to make this piece a part of my MFA show.

CHAPTER 6

TECHNIQUE

Graphic designer David Carson says: “It's not about knowing all the gimmicks and photo tricks. If you haven't got the eye, no program will give it to you” (Carson). I was a painting major and because of that I always felt a need to achieve a more human, organic, and artistic look with my work. Now, I use the computer as a tool to research, find reference photos, and combine them together, but the final result is highly dependent on my personal feeling of what looks good and what does not. One of my professors from Serbia gave me a piece of wisdom that I dearly remembered: “The computer is your shovel, but what you are going to dig out, depends on you and somewhat on your luck”.

All the work presented in *The Secret Life of Things* showed my interest in the same ideas and principles previously discussed in this paper. The owner of Goldman Properties, Tony Goldman, makes a comment about Stefan Sagmeister’s approach: “Concept is Stefan’s driving mantra and everything else follows from that- texture, color, typeface, copy, etc” (Hall 49). Similarly, my ideas are my starting point, and my technique is there to support them. During my graduate studies at ETSU, I took a wide range of classes ranging from illustration, web design, studio photography, 3D modeling, and motion graphics, to history of animation and graphic design. All of these courses in some way influenced the technique presented in the show. I developed skills I was not familiar with, succeeded and failed numerous times, and most importantly, no matter what I was working on, I tried to push the limits of my art as much as I could.

The Secret Life of Things is a show that represents things I have learned in my life so far, a concept I took from Stefan Sagmeister. It is a story about my life, told through the lives of inanimate objects. I created the style of illustration I presented based on the idea of *gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art. This idea came to me through Art Nouveau that I became familiar with during my trips to Europe. Art Nouveau architecture resembles this spirit the best. Houses and buildings that were built at that time represent a collaboration of architects, painters, craftsmen, and sculptors. This idea of unification of the arts, in as many ways as possible, has always been a part of my artistic utopia. Similarly, I tried to combine different skills I developed, such as drawing, photography, and illustration into the digital pieces I presented. I have not been influenced by any artist in particular, but the idea of combining different images into one came to me through Picasso's and Braque's collages. The design process for all of the pieces in my show was similar. I sat still, paralyzed because of the amount of work I had to accomplish, and stared at the things I had collected over time, with no inspiration or idea about where to start. Suddenly, I recognized a potential in a certain object, installed a homemade studio and took numerous reference photos that I opened in an image editing software. After I made a rough sketch of what I wanted to accomplish and printed it out, I backlit the paper and drew the elements that I needed on the other side. I scanned them and brought them into a program where the coloring process started. At the end, I added layers filled with textures and overlays that tied the entire piece together.

I used a similar process in *The Artist Statement*. I combined different techniques into one piece while trying to achieve seamless transitions and a unified look. Compositing is a term widely used in the film industry that describes combining two or more images into one piece. Inspired by traditional collages and the pre-digital editing of the "first artist of the cinema"

(Hutchinson), Georges Méliès, I created a piece that represents a combination of skills. I tried to achieve a balance between different techniques and elements by combining what they have in common. Because I have always been interested in photography and motion, stop-motion was perfect for unifying the two. There are several reasons why I chose this approach. First of all, it is easy. The process itself is fairly simple, and there are not many artists that make stop motion movies. Second, stop-motion animations are made of still photographs. Analog and digital cameras are so widespread nowadays that it is easy to recognize someone else's photos as stills from our own lives. I believe we all build some kind of a collective memory with all the information we store so that we can watch and understand movies, among other things, better than ever. In my opinion, stop-motion also brings a personal touch to understanding movies because many people already have their own cameras. This technique does not make any sense if it captures an action that could be caught with a video camera. The arrangement of photos, repetition, exposure, and other visual elements can easily make us believe that inanimate objects are alive. Seeing something unexpected like this breaks the boundaries of reality, and as soon as inanimate objects start to move, jump, walk, go through the walls, appear, and disappear, something magical happens that instantly catches the viewer's attention.

Most of my influences in the field of animation come from movies that either deal with anthropomorphism and personification, such as *Bottle* by Kirsten Lepore, *Roof Sex* by PES, *The Brave Little Toaster*, *The Shoe People*, *Kogepan*, or from animations that express a strong sense of design, such as those designed by Saul Bass. "For Alfred Hitchcock, Bass designed effective and memorable title sequences, inventing a new type of kinetic typography, for *North by Northwest*, *Vertigo* (working with John Whitney), and *Psycho*" ("Saul Bass").

The Artist Statement is a piece in which I used kinetic typography to express the main ideas that support my art. Once again, with a help of household objects, I told a story about things I had learned in my life so far, in a different form of art- animation.

CHAPTER 7

EMBRACE THE FAILURE

The Secret Life of Things is a show I put together during the last semester of my graduate career at ETSU. Even though I had an extensive body of work to show, I decided to start from scratch and build a completely new portfolio. I spent most of my time at ETSU experimenting, exploring, and learning new techniques that I wanted to present in my final exhibition. The learning curve was equally painful and exciting, and, therefore, a majority of my work ended up in a trash can. The other half turned out rather nice, but even so, I thought that creating a new portfolio would be beneficial for me.

Lack of time, sense of panic, and feeling too weak to accomplish all the requirements did not stop me. My driving force was freedom to work on a topic of my choice, and to use every single second of my time at ETSU to learn and to make good art. I am grateful that my committee members were supportive and that they did not try to change the course of my exploration.

Finally, I would like to mention two speeches that inspired me greatly as an artist. The first one was given by Neil Gaiman to students graduating from the University of the Arts, Class of 2012:

Sometimes life is hard. Things go wrong — and in life, and in love, and in business, and in friendship, and in health, and in all the other ways in which life can go wrong. And when things get tough, this is what you should do: Make good art. I'm serious. Husband runs off with a politician? Make good art. Leg crushed and then eaten by a mutated boa constrictor? Make good art. IRS on your trail?

Make good art. Cat exploded? Make good art. Someone on the Internet thinks what you're doing is stupid, or evil, or it's all been done before? Make good art (Gaiman).

The other one was a speech by Milton Glaser. When comparing professionalism and professional development, Glaser finds professionalism to be limiting and professional development liberating. He states that the only thing that stops us on our way to success is fear, and, therefore, he gives universal advice on how to overcome fear: embrace the failure (Glaser).

The Secret Life of Things, represents the final stop on a journey that brought me to ETSU. With no doubt, I can proudly say that I *learned a new way to walk* on a rocky road that leads to graduation.

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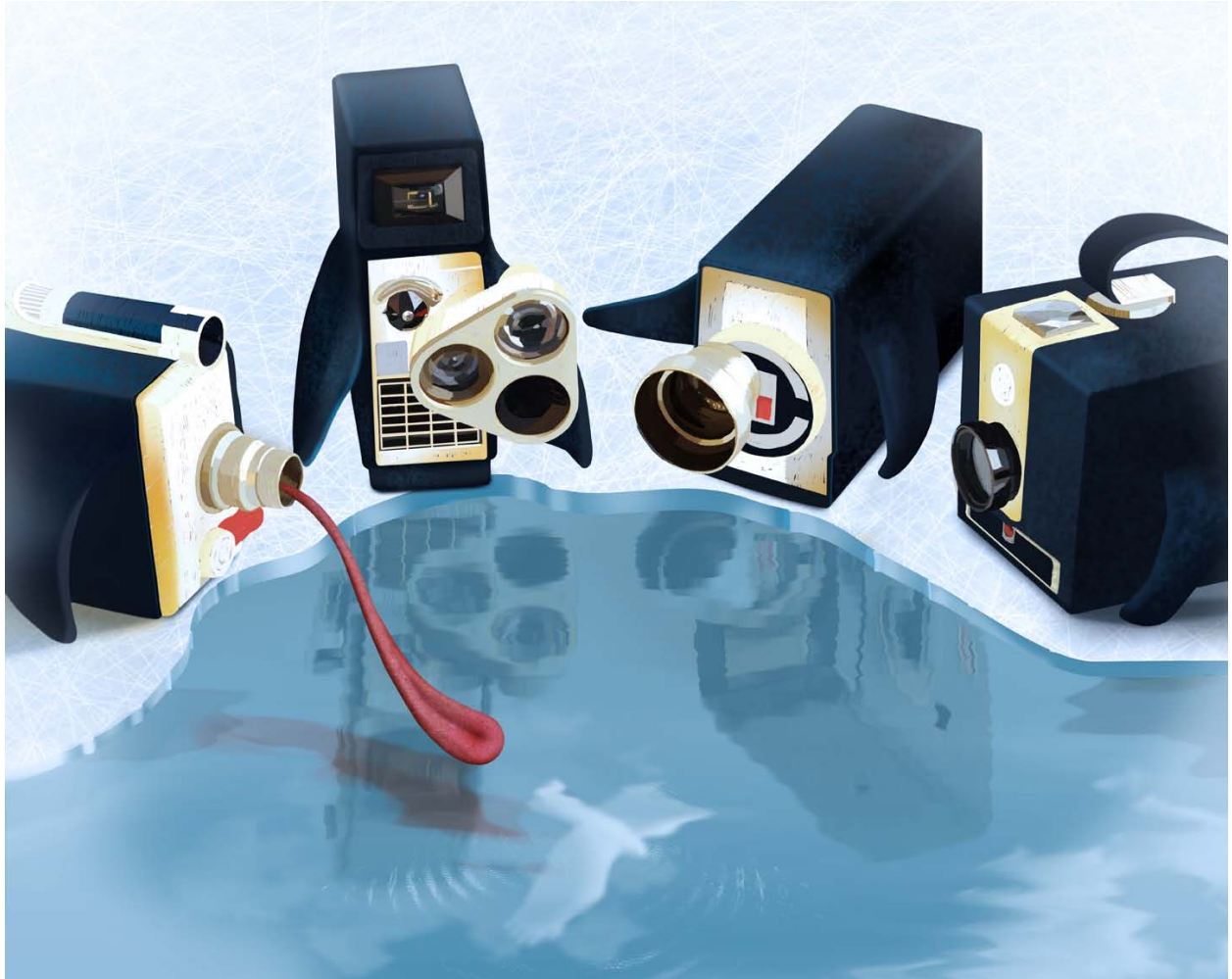
APPENDIX: CATALOGUE OF EXHIBITION



Midnight Snack, Illustration, 16" x 20", 2013



High Speed Camera, Illustration, 16" x 20", 2013



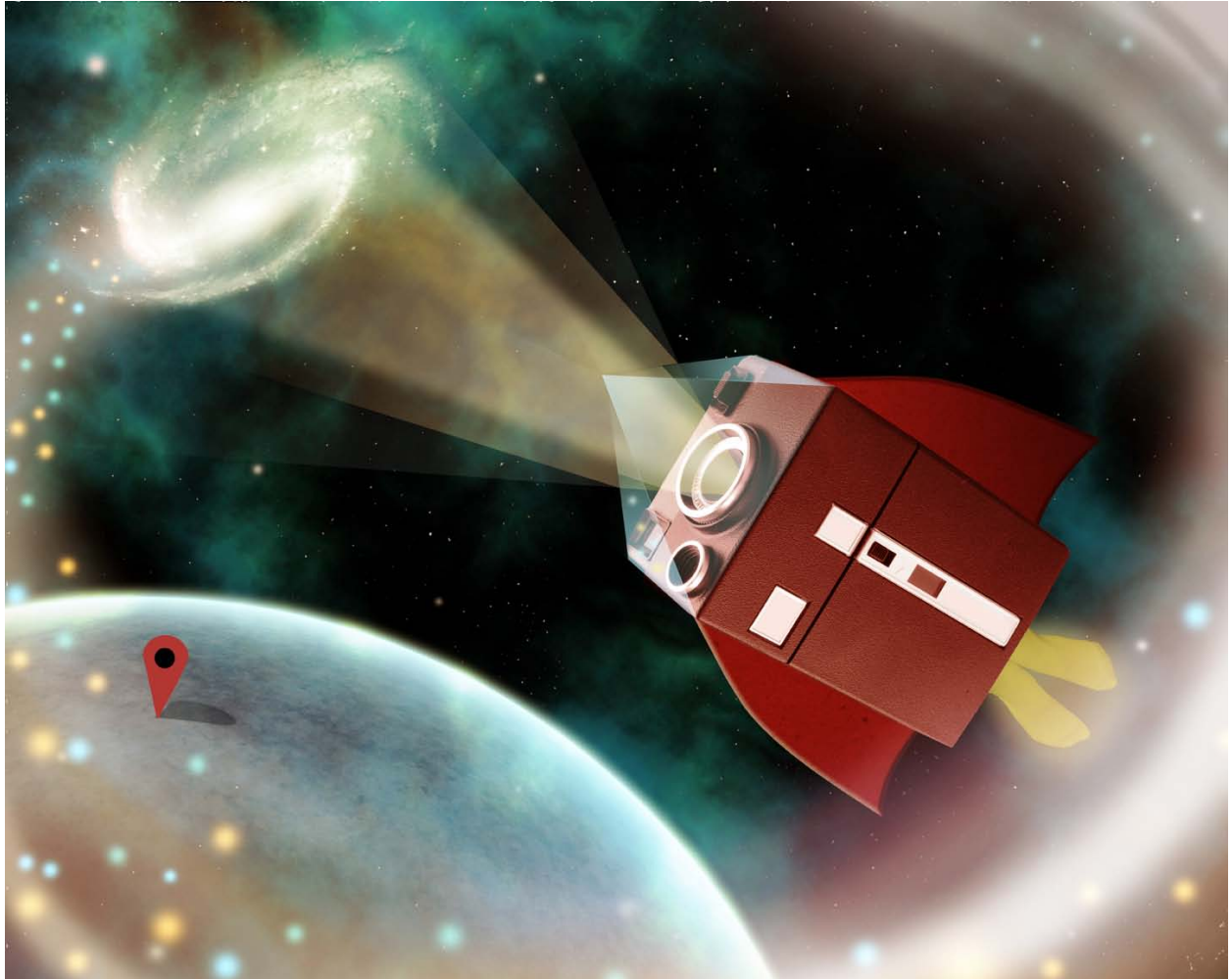
Reflections, Illustration, 16" x 20", 2013



Underwater Cameras, Illustration, 16" x 20", 2013



Surveillance, Illustration, 16" x 20", 2013



Cosmonaut, Illustration, 16" x 20", 2013



Outcast, Illustration, 16" x 20", 2013



Pigs In A Blanket, Photograph, 16" x 20", 2013



Broken Heart, Photograph, 16" x 20", 2013



Merry Christmas, Photograph, 16" x 20", 2013



Enlightened, Photograph, 16" x 20", 2013



Hatching, Illustration, 16" x 20", 2013



Mouse Trap, Illustration, 16" x 20", 2013



Wireless, Illustration, 16" x 20", 2013



Nuts for Dinner, Illustration, 16" x 20", 2013



Follow Your Dreams & Fly Away, Illustration, 16" x 20", 2013



Artist Statement, Animation, <https://vimeo.com/64151327>

VITA

MAJA SAVIĆ

Education

Master of Fine Arts, Graphic Design
East Tennessee State University
Johnson City, Tennessee, 2013

Master of Fine Arts, Painting
University of Fine Arts
Belgrade, Serbia, 2009

Exchange student
East Tennessee State University
Johnson City, Tennessee, 2008-2009

Teaching Experience:

Teaching Assistant (Instructor of Record)
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN
Course: ARTA 2401: Commercial Art/Graphic Design
2011-2013

Guest Lecturer/Instructor
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN
Courses: ARTA 3401: Typography, 2011
ARTA 2401: Commercial Art/Graphic
Design, 2010

Selected Exhibitions:
*indicates solo exhibition

ASCENSION: Graduate Fine Art Association Annual Exhibit,
Tipton Gallery, Johnson City, TN

“The Secret Life of Things” MFA show*
Slocumb Galleries, Johnson City, TN, 2013

“New APP: Contemporary Art in Appalachia”
Gallery of International Pavilion
Ulsan University, South Korea, 2012

“Humor; analog humor”
Tipton Gallery, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2012

Cultural Center Indjija*
Serbia, 2010

University of Fine Arts Gallery*
Belgrade, Serbia, 2009

Graduate show “Listen”
Tipton Gallery, Johnson City, TN, 2012

8th, 9th, 10th and 11th International Biennial of small formats
Gornji Milanovac, Serbia, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2011

Graduate show “Composed”
Reece Museum, Johnson City, TN, 2010

Group exhibition
Cvijeta Zuzoric Art Pavilion, Belgrade, Serbia, 2010

Awards and Recognitions: ADDY Silver Award for personal website (District 7 of the
American Advertising Federation- the second trier of the
National Advertising Awards competition), 2013

2012- ADDY Gold Award for personal website,
www.majasavic.net

ADDY Silver Award for photography “Canon”, 2012

ADDY Gold Award for poster design
Campaign for F1 Student Film Festival, 2011

ADDY Silver Award for poster design
F1 Student Film Festival, 2011

ADDY Silver Award for poster design
Southern Appalachian International Film Festival, TN, 2010

ADDY silver award for poster design
"Mamma's spaghetti", 2009

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2004-2009 from University of Fine Arts in Belgrade, Serbia
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Tuition scholarship, East Tennessee State University
Department of Art and Design, 2010-2011

FORECAST scholarship for the best Serbian and Montenegrin
students, 2009