Skin and Bones: A Sculptural Exploration of Form and Structure

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Skin and Bones: A Sculptural Exploration of Form and Structure

A thesis Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Science in the
Department of Art and Art History from
The College of William and Mary

by

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Introduction:

My work is poetic. I create sculptures that are highly symbolic and deeply personal, addressing themes of self, personality, and fragility, embodying the symbolism and at times the esoteric nature of poetry. The poetic nature of my work deeply influences the way I approach creating sculptures. The reason for this influence is explained well by Bachelard when he states that to study poetry, “one must be receptive, receptive to the image at the moment it appears: if there is to be a philosophy of poetry, it must appear and reappear through a significant verse, in total adherence to...the very ecstasy of the newness of the image. The Poetic image is a sudden salience on the surface of the psyche”\(^1\). In summation, he says that one must acknowledge that poetry is a thing without a past, without causality, or at least without causality that can be understood. The poetic nature of my art causes me to find myself of a similar mindset to Bachelard. I discover the poetic intentionality of my art in the process of creation, shifting the ideas and messages that a piece conveys and addresses during the making of it. Juhani Pallasmaa puts it well in his essay *The Eyes of the Skin*, when he says “When working, both the craftsman and the artist are directly engaged with their bodies and their existential experiences rather than focused on an external and objectified problem”\(^2\). This is very similar to the way I work, I let my subconscious guide me, and while I might have an idea of what I want a piece to say I let myself work, and then step back and look at whether its meaning has changed as I’ve created it. This allows me to realize the newness of an image and the poetry within it in the process of making a work, without getting bogged down in an initial concept. I carry this mentality in all of my sculptures.

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2 Pallasmaa, Juhani. *The Eyes of the Skin*. (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd. 2005) 12
I am fascinated by the differences between the interior and exterior of a work. In earlier work it was important that I include an opening into the core of a piece, a literal hole inside of which the structure or lack thereof could be seen, and I leaned on this space for the development of meaning within my work. I was entranced by the possibilities present in the transition between interior and exterior, the liminal space between them and how that could be used in a piece to address two varied, conflicting concepts within the same piece. This led me to the idea of skin and bones. The skin on the outside acts like a shell, the part of a piece presented to the world, and the bones lie beneath, obscured structural things that hold up the outer form. As I worked, I found myself changing directions, shifting away from a literal exploration of this concept, and delving more and more into symbolic representations of what these two pillars of the self, the skin and the bones really meant.

The skin was no longer just the exterior form of a sculpture, it became a symbol for the public self, the self that others are allowed to see, protecting that which lies within. This led to self-reflection. My pieces were walking through the various ways that I interpret or have interpreted my outer, public self, and thus lead the work to become more and more self-reflective and personal. Likewise, the bones became less about the structural forms and more about the things that lie beneath the symbolic skin. The bones hold up the personal self, and the elements that help to create and support the facade of the skin. This shift toward the symbolic nature of skin and bones as presentations of the self, rather than merely the interior and exterior of a sculpture, led me to embrace self-reflection, and my pieces became self-portraiture or autobiographies veiled under heavy layers of symbolism, with the skin and bones of a work coming to represent and analyze issues regarding the self, personality, growth, and decay. In many cases, these are things that I am only vaguely aware of while working on a piece. Harkening back to Bachelard, I create a piece with only the vaguest notions of the true
reasons that lead to my interest in either a form or a concept that the work is based around, embracing the poetry that can be achieved only through allowing meaning to spring up again and again throughout the creation of a piece. My deer sculpture *Hallowed* for example, focuses on a sort of exaltation of the broken, of purity through pain that I was very aware of throughout planning the piece, but it was only through making it that I truly began to project my own views of this idea onto it. As I thought more about the work while creating it, I decided to show this exaltation in ways that I view as more societal, making the spear golden and valuable, elevating the deer on a pedestal, placing it in a position of prominence.

All of the work in this series with the exception of *Husk* are made of clay. However, my work is driven by the forms achieved through working with clay rather than the materiality of it. I paint the surfaces of the clay to deliberately obscure the connotations of ceramics as something either utilitarian, or ancient, while still being a thin enough barrier to allow the texture and surface to show through. The presence of ceramics does not interest me, instead, I am motivated by the forms that clay is capable of making. The way that it can be pushed around, cut apart and reassembled during the sculpting process lends it a sense of malleability and fleshiness that leads to forms and surfaces that fit well with the type of forms I make. The process of creating this work, of moving around heaps of clay with my hands, sculpting, then smoothing over and re-sculpting, ties back to the poetry of the moment. The plasticity of the clay allows for meaning to arise through the process of creation. In all my work, this process was essential.

**Summer Work: Pure Formality**

I started my thesis in the summer of 2019. At this point I had not yet realized that using skin and bones as a symbol for the revealed and secretive aspects of the self and personality,
was motivating my work. Nor had I realized how the differences and interactions between the exterior and interior self acted on a symbolic level. Yet these symbolic ideas were accompanied by the more literal elements of skin and bones, interior and exterior. In many ways, it was the exploration of the physical interior and exterior and the meaning that they had in these pieces that caused me to realize that my true fascination was with this more symbolic view of the interior and exterior as different aspects of self and personality, for example, how Veil, a wall-mounted deer head covered in glass, showed the exterior self being built up as a shield for the interior self.

In the early summer I began work on The Gorgon, a still in progress piece that will eventually take the form of a massive wolf, lunging at a rabbit running across its back. The rabbit’s footprints created holes with cracks emanating out of them causing the skin of the wolf to crumble and fall inward, as though the rabbit weighed a massive amount and the wolf was just a thin shell. This allowed me to reveal the dark, hollow interior of the form. It focuses on the fragility of the public self, and how something seemingly strong and indomitable can quickly be changed, eroded, or shattered, by something seemingly insignificant. While I was exploring the symbolism of skin and bones it was through the lens of the literal interior and exterior of the piece. I finished a maquette for The Gorgon, and began sculpting but was unable to resolve the piece, due solely to its size, and my inexperience at the time with creating armatures for such works, and it fell apart halfway through modeling. The ideas present in The Gorgon were carried on to a number of other pieces however, both the ideas of fragility, and of alteration by something seemingly insignificant.

I endeavor to make my pieces large, or to display them in such a way that they are on equal footing to the viewer, where they hold the same presence in space. This makes them more confrontational. They are not a specimen or artifact, nor a monument, all of which
separate the viewer from the piece. Instead they are equal to the viewer, making it harder to separate oneself from the work. As Martin Heidegger said, a sculptor is “an artist who confronts space in his own way”³, and I want to confront the space of the viewer, by having my sculptures reach outward, either physically or with their presence, into the viewer’s space, forcing them to come to terms with the images and messages they present. Making my sculptures the same size as the viewer, such as in *Hallowed*, my large deer sculpture or placing them at eye level such as in *Vigil*, my sculpture of an Ibex head held at the height of a human head, allows the pieces to confront both the viewer and the space that they occupy in a much more effective way. My work addresses very human traits, dancing around what I see to be themes within my own mind or the mind of society at large. Thus making the works have an equal presence to a human allows them to more effectively evoke some of these themes by allowing them to read as

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more similar to the humans observing them. All of my work to date has used animal forms straddling between the space that separates human from the nonhuman. They have human qualities, yet are not human, forcing the viewer to put aside the expectations and connotations a human form might present, one where the gesture and action of the figure is much more literal, and directly corresponding to the viewer, as opposed to being more symbolic. Using a non-human form that distances itself from the viewer helps this symbolism to come across, yet my work does focus on themes of human nature and personality, and some association of the sculpture with the viewer must be there to convey this. This space between the human and the nonhuman is what greatly interests me about animals, as Andrew Mitchell states, “to exist in the in between is to be not wholly within oneself but exposed at one’s limits and through this to be touched by what abandons its own enclosure to reach out to you”\(^4\). It is this uncomfortable sense of the in-between that I seek to achieve through my use of animal forms, with human qualities and inhuman ones wrapped up in the same form. Animal forms also carry strong connotations, predators, prey, trophy animals, all having varied concepts associated with them, which influence many of my pieces. The Gorgon, was where I settled on making these animal forms, as the ways in which the connotations of a rabbit and a wolf as prey and predator could be inverted, the rabbit becoming the force that is destroying and overpowering the wolf to help convey this idea of fragility. This reversal of roles was powerful, highlighting the fragile nature of the wolf as it was being broken by a rabbit, a creature which should be powerless against it. The way in which these perceived roles and connotations of animals could be used to present an idea in a sculpture led me to try experimenting with the ways in which different animals could present different ideas.

\(^4\) ibid. 52
My next two pieces were *Vigil* and *Veil*, which helped me to establish new directions I wanted to develop in my work. *Vigil* was both sculpted and finished first. The massive Ibex head, with its enormous gilded horns, stoic expression, gives it a sense of monumentality. The inside however, is hollow and black, an empty cavernous void, that was meant to highlight the disparity between the monumental head and its flimsy, empty interior, and thus, similar to *Gorgon*, highlight the fragility of the public self. In the process of creating *Vigil* however, I realized that this idea of flimsiness through a change in physical structure was no longer the focus of the piece. The transition between interior and exterior is not enough to draw the eye inward, and the piece reads more as a mask than a monument with a flimsy core. This is largely because the bottom edge, where this transition occurs, is thick rather than being thin enough to suggest that the form is in fact flimsy, while the ritualistic connotations present in this giant goat head also add to the mask-like quality. The mounting of the head adds to this, as while the stand elevates it just above eye level, placing it on equal footing with the viewer, while also being monumental, the heavy steel bars convey a sense of weight being supported, rather than something flimsy and hollow. However, I still felt that the piece was successful in portraying the symbolic narrative it was meant to: a strong outer shell with a weaker core,
specifically because of its mask-like nature. Here the flimsy core becomes the person who would wear this large imposing mask, helping the piece to connect to the viewer even more.

The failure of Vigil to fully depict the difference in the physical interior and exterior, while still being able to convey the message of fragility masked by stoicism that I had wanted led me away from this idea of transition between interior and exterior. Now I realized I could use more forms to address symbolic and internal concepts that interested me. While this idea of a literal interior and exterior remained in many of my works, it was no longer the sole focus of the sculptures.

I sculpted Veil at the same time, a deer head that was meant to focus on how the inner self being concealed could eat away at a person, how hiding the jagged pieces of yourself would cause a person harm. It was initially intended to have tiny glass shards erupting out of grooves in the head, these pieces emerging from within the head to show the interior self coming out and overtaking the exterior which would hang solemnly on a wall, as a trophy, a monument to the negatives of self-containment. I realized shortly after starting work on the surface that this was not the message the piece should convey, and shifted how I approached
the surface. I finished the surface in the fall, and will discuss the final message of the work later. Shifting from this initial concept to the final one was an important step for me in solidifying my views on embracing changing concepts, and developing the message within a work through the process of creation rather than trying to stick to a rigid idea of what a piece should say before even starting it. I let myself be influenced by the presence of the materials of a piece during the creation process, in addition to the forms that I made.

After these pieces, I tore down the armature for *The Gorgon* and began work on *Hallowed*. *Hallowed* was the first time I realized my work was self-reflective and autobiographical. I came to this revelation while working through ways to convey the theme of exaltation of damage, the idea that hardship and injury change a person, and it is the changes that result from this damage that give something its value. The deer is impaled, a violent act, yet in this act, there is surprisingly little violence; the spear tip is clean, and springing forth from the wound are white feathers. The deer seems unafflicted. Beyond that the deer is elevated, literally placed on a pedestal. The entire piece was meant to speak to purification through hardship, pain, and damage. The spear is the catalyst for that, and the feathers spreading out represent purity, an allusion to angels as well as the fabled white hind, a mythical, uncatchable deer said to be a sort of guide showing purpose to those who see it. The pedestal shows the elevation of this whole process. The deer itself is inspired by classical sculpture, the idealized musculatures of renaissance figures being presented here on the deer as a way of further elevating the process as something to strive for. It is positioned at eye level so as to confront the viewer, to make them realize that the deer is addressing ideas within their own lives and confronting them in a very human way. Its legs extend off of the pedestal and into the space around them to help in this confrontation, the creature is not confined to the artificial world of a pedestal it intrudes into our own space, becoming something within our world that we have to
content with on its terms? Again here, we can turn to Heidegger, who reminds us that “the sculptor’s confrontation is capable of interrupting the smooth functioning of the plan, of setting apart a place which will disturb… The sculptor brings about this confrontation by setting in the work something that is neither present nor absent”\(^5\). Here, *Hallowed* is both absent from the world of the viewer, isolated on a pedestal, but also very present, extending into our space with its gaze locking with that of the viewer. All of this serves to bring this idea of exaltation through pain into the lives of the viewers, to make it more real, and to help set apart this place which will disturb, to force the viewer to confront these ideas.

**Fall Work: Finishing, Planning, and Falling Apart**

I spent the fall finishing all of the pieces I made over the summer beginning with *Veil*. During the finishing process, I affixed shards of glass onto the head. I shifted the issues that the sculpture should address as I realized that it was more about creating a shell of glass than about the emergence of these glass shards from within. The gesture of the piece was still important, the head hanging down still evoked sadness and exhaustion. However, I shifted focus away from the shards exposing the inner concealed self and moved instead to the idea of concealment. While the glass made it beautiful it also discouraged people from touching it. While still maintaining an element of concealment the work became less about exposing the inner self and the associated negatives of that; isolation, exhaustion, and repression. The somber gesture then became a testament to these negatives, and the head is literally weighed down by the concealment of its core, the only openings being the eyes.

This time is also when I finished assembling *Hallowed*, and the process involved with that piece was instrumental in determining how I approached new pieces from that point on.

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Due to its size, *Hallowed* had to be fired in pieces, and the pieces warped during firing, meaning that in order to reassemble them, they had to be ground down, broken, reorganized, and gaps had to be filled in. This taught me the value of compressing the clay, a process where you apply pressure to the clay walls to align the crystal structure of the clay, preventing it from trying to return to its original shape during drying and firing. This influenced how I constructed works such as *Painter* and *Rouse*, which were hollowed out while they were smooth, featureless forms to allow for easier compression, and then had details added on afterward. It also made me look into gas firing for those larger pieces, which meant I would be able to use a larger kiln, and would not have to cut them into pieces. This gave me the confidence to try making the more dynamic pose of *Painter* on a larger scale.

While the fall was mostly a time for finishing work, I did work on a new sculpture as well, but much like *The Gorgon*, it didn’t pan out. It was going to be a human torso emerging from the wall, different from the animal forms I had made until then. I wanted to see the ways in which I might be able to achieve the separation between the human in the nonhuman while making a human figure. I ended up building this out of large slabs of clay, forming hollow tubes that attached together rather than hollowing out solid forms, as I did with much of my other work. I tried to achieve the inhuman, separated nature present in my other work by letting parts of the form fall away into abstraction; the stomach was elongated and smooth, the head was featureless, the only real definition was in the back. While the piece did collapse, it influenced my work going forward in two ways. First, this element of abstraction of certain elements of a form, letting certain parts be featureless while other parts had more detail, led to the viewer’s eye being directed around the work in interesting ways, holding longer on the elements with features and glossing over those without. I experimented with this in later pieces, as well as with the idea of abstraction as a whole, and the ways that letting certain parts of forms be
realistic while others were just abstract gestures, influenced the messages conveyed in a piece. I started to experiment with this immediately in my winter work, with pieces like *Whole* and *Djinn* being excellent examples of this. The other aspect of my work that was influenced by the process of creating this failed torso was understanding the influence that texture had in directing the viewer’s eye. Just as leaving out features on a part of the figure led the eye to focus on other areas, letting a section of a sculpture have a much denser texture, while leaving other parts smoother gives the eye designated focal points, as areas with a rougher texture have more planes and shadows for the eye to focus on. My work before this piece all had fairly homogenous textures and levels of detail, at least in the treatment of the clay, but through the process of building this torso, some elements naturally became smoother and less detailed than others. Looking at the ways in which these interactions between smooth and rough, detailed and featureless, worked on this torso caused me to want to experiment with these elements in other work.

**Winter Work: Small Pieces, Big Presence**

My work over the winter was limited by the fact that I had a very limited amount of clay and only access to a small kiln. This led to a massive shift in the scale of my work as I went from making a few large complex pieces to a series of many smaller ones. Still addressing the same issues as before I was forced to figure out a way that I could create the feeling of having the pieces be stand-ins for a human form while having the pieces be much smaller than the viewer.

My first piece in this period was *Whole*, a small sculpture of a fox. This piece has a much more dense texture than the other pieces; the fur of the fox had much more detail than the smooth surfaces of *Hallowed*, or even the relatively sparsely detailed fur of *Vigil*. This detail
creates not just a literal texture, but gives it more visual information holding the viewers gaze longer in duration. A larger piece with a greater physical area could have a smoother surface which the eye moves over faster and still have plenty for the eye to focus on. With these smaller pieces, I used more detailed fur textures to create visual information so as to slow the viewer’s eye and create a greater visual presence. These pieces hold the viewer’s attention longer and as a result they are on more equal footing with the viewer, which is important because they could not be placed on equal footing through scale, as my earlier pieces could. Whole illustrates the idea of exaltation of the damaged or incomplete addressed previously in Hallowed, and later in Coronation, pursuing this idea that having endured damage gives something an elevated position. The gold around the hole here establishes this void or damaged section as something valuable, while the smoother texture of the interior of the whole compared to the rest of the piece helps to create a sense of something missing, becoming a void for the eye as well, with little visual information for the eye to focus on.

Ink was the next of the pieces made during this time. Here the dense texture was used to create something for the eye to latch on to but the texture was not necessarily that of fur, but rather that of brushstrokes. Streaks of clay cover the surface, applied and then brushed over with a coarse brush to texture them. This piece evokes a sense of self creation, the idea that it is active choices that lead a person to develop into who they are. The head is emerging from
the two dimensional plane of the wall, being created in physical space from nothing. The brushstrokes of the surface tie into the brush in the mouth, as well as the paint streak on the wall where the piece is hung connecting the action of the head to its form. This idea of self-creation is one that I was a bit taken by, and variations on this theme appeared in later pieces such as *Simulacrum*, and *Painter*.

*Djinn* followed *Ink*, and through it I explored the idea of letting something small, seemingly insignificant, weigh you down. The powerful swirling gesture as the form rises from the ground helps to emphasize this, providing a contrast between the active motion of the body and the small nail that holds it all in place. The relatively smooth texture of the fur compliments this form, allowing the eye to move along it quickly, granting it a greater sense of motion, yet it is not perfectly smooth, and still has enough visual information to hold the eye. The coloration of the piece is evocative of a storm or the sea, turning deep blue and then black as the form grows and twists. This change in color, from dark to light, as well as the shifting in the form from realistic and large to smooth, small and wispy where it is nailed down, helps evoke this idea of a powerful form being held by something small.
Flotsam was the next piece that I made over the winter. This piece was a continuation of the ideas of Djinn, but was meant to illustrate the negativity of allowing something to weigh you down. The initial idea is the same, with a piece being held to the ground, in this case seemingly weighed down, yet the rope that holds it is connected to nothing, elaborating on this idea of being held down by something insignificant. The form is swollen and bloated, held down as if held underwater, and coated in a shell of greasy slick tar, showing a sort of corruption occurring as a result of this weighing down. This gives the piece a very uncomfortable appearance, especially in person, where the piece is about the size of a head, and where the noxious smell of the tar makes it off-putting to approach. This uncomfortable feeling helps to convey the sense of being weighed down by nothing as a negative thing, and granting this negativity and nothingness a palpable presence.

Coronation was made roughly at the same time as Flotsam, yet the ideas it addresses relate more to Whole and Hallowed. The idea of exaltation of damage is something that I was particularly inspired by and kept finding different ways to address, and in this
piece, I decided to treat the color of the piece differently. Many of my pieces are either black or white, and while that dualism helps to establish a symbolic, mythical quality I wanted to see how using more realistic coloring could impact the presence of the piece. It works well in particular with this piece, because I wanted to play up the idea of a trophy head, while also continuing with this idea of something damaging being something special because of its damage. In *Coronation*, the fact that the head is colored more realistically suggests that the only thing making it something special is the unique or unusual element of it, the golden opening in the center of the head. This differentiates it from *Hallowed* and *Whole*, as both of those pieces were distinctly unnatural and symbolic in nature.

The final piece I made during this period was *Simulacrum*. This piece addresses some of the elements of self-creation from *Ink*, but plays more into the idea of creating an idealized image or shell of oneself. Using the same language as *Hallowed*, where this concept of purification is represented by white, the reflected form of the weasel here is a purified one, yet also an incomplete one. Openings into the hollow, black interior, and the fact that only the front face of the weasel is whole help to establish this idea of a false mirrored image, an idealized version of the “real” figure in the piece, that is still incomplete and lets the true elements show through.
Returning from winter break meant that I had access to a large kiln again, and after not being able to fire large pieces I was eager to start working again. I applied what I had been experimenting with in terms of texture and color, and the ways in which varying them could be used to achieve different effects within my work. I also decided to continue developing some of the symbolic themes that I found particularly inspiring and wanted to explore further.

The first piece I made during this time was actually a direct continuation or reworking of *Ink*, called *Painter*. It is an elaboration on the idea of self-creation that I had addressed earlier in *Ink*. The similarities are readily apparent, but *Painter* is much larger, a product of the larger kilns that I had access to and a desire to try gas firing. I found *Ink* to be a bit too static, and the message a bit too blunt, not allowing for much ambiguity in interpretation. I decided to throw out the idea of having the rabbit hold a literal paintbrush and instead conveyed this idea of intentional creation...
through the surface. *Painter* has these curling sections of clay that flow across its surface, and while they do help to define the movement of the piece, their main purpose is to show a sense of intentionality in treatment. Where pieces like *Ink* and *Djinn* had textures that were just products of construction, *Painter* had a very defined surface to it. This surface being a product of active choice helps to tie in to the idea of deliberate creation of a form, the patterning did not accidentally arise, but was consciously chosen as this rabbit is brought into being from the two dimensional plane of the wall. Through showing this intentionality, I speak to the constructed, artificial nature of the self, without resorting to something as blunt as the paintbrush of *Ink*.

The other piece I made in this period was *Rouse*. Made concurrently with *Painter*, this piece was also inspired by my winter work. Notably, I was struck with the way that the change in color and twisting motion of *Djinn* could come together to create a feeling of power in a form. Similarly, my experimenting with different surface treatments that had more visual information, such as the fur of *Coronation*, and the way they held the eye was interesting to me. I decided to experiment with these ideas to create a snapshot of a moment of transition between tranquility and hostility, between passiveness and assertiveness. In *Rouse*, I knew I
wanted a predatory animal, to help emphasize this transition to something more hostile, but I knew that I also wanted a heavily abstracted aspect of this form. The smooth, white body is pillow-like, its lack of features and rounded form leads it to seem delicate and lends a sense of uniformity. As I wanted to capture the moment of transition and merely hint at this element of assertiveness or personality within this form, the head is not snarling but as the eye moves up the body, more details begin to emerge. This, combined with the transition in color from white to pink, gives the eye more to latch on to, and gives this head, twisting around toward the viewer, a greater sense of presence. The piece is the size of a person, and when looking at it hung on a wall, the head is at eye level, as though you are confronting another person, turning toward the viewer and away from the sheltered, cornered pose that the body might suggest.

I did start on another piece during my time on campus in the spring. It was to be a massive hybrid animal form, combining elements from different creatures in a twisting pose that would have been low to the ground, yet twisting to look up, similar to Rouse, but with more overt aggression in this turning, as opposed to the mere sense of presence held by that piece. When finished it would have been over 9 feet in length, and 5 feet tall, and I had finished most of the basic sculpting, and had started to think about materials to cover it with, landing on leaves to give it a connection to nature while still being flat enough the retain some of the forms and vessel like qualities ascribed by the clay. When the Coronavirus shut down campus, I had to give up on the piece, as I could not bring it home and didn’t have time to finish it, but I found myself moved by the sheer size of it. Up until that point, most of my works were around human sized, but the presence held by something that was much larger than a person was a very powerful thing and I decided to experiment with that.

This led me to Husk. Back at home, with limited materials, and only a small kiln that I learned was incredibly expensive for me to fire I had to shift away from clay. Still inspired by the
monumental nature of large pieces that I found in my uncompleted sculpture, I decided to re-examine the themes of *Vigil*, of something grand and stoic, but revealed to be very flimsy at the same time. *Husk* is the largest work I’ve made so far, as I wanted something truly monumental. While it has a very grand scale, and a very stoic, imposing form in the elephant it represents, it is also very flimsy, just a shell of fabric draped over a core “skeleton” of woven branches, which also have a very flimsy appearance. I was drawn to branches not only because of their flimsiness, but also thanks to their ability to make such a large form that is relatively light. A key component for my vision of *Husk* was this ability to raise it up, above eye level. The hanging fabric, translucence of the skin, and lack of attachment to the ground, all give the work an ethereal quality that plays off of the monumental size, creating an interesting dichotomy within the piece. Raising the work up also allows the viewer to see underneath it, to look at its skeleton, and to see how thing the skin of it is, all helping to compound this idea of flimsiness within something so large, that *Vigil* was originally supposed to have as well, before I realized that the way in which the edges were treated on that piece obscured that message.
**Conclusion:**

Though my exploration of skin and bones might initially seem cohesive and relatively unaltered from the start, that couldn’t be further from the truth. I was able to create a cohesive body of work, creating a series of animal sculptures that touch on themes of fragility, of admiration of the broken, and of the difference between what is shown on the outside, and what lies within. However, through the course of creating these works, my approach and focus shifted from the literal skin and bones of a sculpture, the exterior form and the structure that supports it, to the symbolic skin and bones, the ways that the persona that is presented to a world can differ, influence, and be weighed down by inner, true personality. My work was no longer focusing on the ways in which I could use the difference between the interior and exterior of a piece, and became more about how I could address the idea of an interior and exterior self that I see within myself and society, the ways in which these selves are altered or restrained, and the ways in which I could use sculptural forms to convey them. In a way, I found my process inverted, starting with the symbolic and working toward the sculptural instead of starting with the formal elements and ascribing symbolism to them.

I also changed the ways in which I looked at detail and texture in my work, using these elements to create areas of visual density that could help create focal points and draw the viewer’s eye around a piece, in some cases becoming key to the way that the message of a piece is presented. I became more adept not only at using these elements of sculpture, but at working with clay as whole, having relatively limited experience in the medium before undertaking this project. I became better at compressing clay, and making complex forms that would not warp and crack; I learned different methods for mounting works; and I experimented with working with clay slabs, and even branches. The one thing that remained unchanged
though was my philosophy toward the act of creation. Through all my sculptures, I was changing, altering, and reworking ideas as I created work, learning from acts of creation that changed the feel, presence, or message of the work, and remaining fluid enough to change with them.

My work holds a place of confrontation in the world. It intrudes upon the space the viewer occupies, either physically or with its presence, forcing them to come to terms with elements of the self, of skin and bones, of fragility and creation present within the work. The animal forms of my work sculptures are non-human yet speak to traits of humanity, reclusiveness, doubt, and emotion. I present these forms, through my use of scale and visual information, as equal to those who view them, and force the viewer to confront the message presented by these equals, a look into the reality of the concealed, subconscious, and repressed within us all.