

Elizabeth Spear
11.2.2013
ARTS140-004
Anderson Gallery Exhibit Paper

Steampunk itself is relatively new although it borrows from past historical eras and stems from older works of speculative science fiction. According to the website urbandictionary.com, steampunk is a form of speculative fiction that generally takes place in an alternate history setting and which explores what would have occurred if futuristic advances had taken place earlier in history. It tends to blend fiction with fantasy, horror, or science fiction themes. There are also different types of steampunk, such as Victorian Steampunk, Medieval Steampunk, Western Steampunk, and Industrial/Modern Steampunk. Examples include *The Time Machine* (a novel by H.G. Wells), *Final Fantasy VII* (a video game), and *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* (a film).

In the video on steampunk, Eva Galperin confirms this definition, and she adds that the term “steampunk” became known in the 1990s but that the genre itself was mainly influenced by Jules Verne, an author who was one of the first speculative science fiction writers. Eva Galperin also notes that as a fashion statement and as an aesthetic look steampunk only became popular fairly recently. She goes on to say that the rise in popularity of steampunk fashion is (in part) a response to mass production. She also notes that only recently has it become relatively easy for people to build their own intricate machinery that truly captures the essence of the steampunk literary genre. Others interviewed in the video concur. Nathaniel from Abney Park adds that steampunk is about putting ones hands on what one is doing and being able to turn objects inside out so that the viewer can see the insides of complex machinery.

Recently steampunk has regained popularity, and steampunk elements can be seen in contemporary art. Furthermore, within contemporary art, these steampunk elements tend to connect to current events covered by the media and also to science fiction. Process plays an important role in how these steampunk elements are incorporated into contemporary art, and then how they are ultimately connected to science fiction as well as to current events covered by the media. The artwork

Elizabeth Spear
11.2.2013
ARTS140-004
Anderson Gallery Exhibit Paper

that is on display in the Anderson Gallery Exhibit (and will be until November 7, 2013) is a prime example of contemporary art that includes elements of steampunk. The exhibit itself is put together incredibly well. Even though there is work done by three different artists on display, all of it flows together in a way that makes sense visually and nothing looks out of place. The exhibit is also visually intriguing because some of the work (in particular the work done by J. Shea) is suspended so it gives more character to the space it is occupying. Overall, the exhibit is a success.

The work of each artist is not arranged so that it is always together. Instead, the work of each artist is spread out so that sometimes it is together and sometimes it is apart. For instance, there is work by Tom Haney (*Defender of the Aquifer*) placed right next to work by Nemo Gould (*Huey*). However, there is also an area where two pieces by Tom Haney are right next to each other (*Home* and *Out of the Darkness*). The walls are painted white and the floor is a light colored hardwood. Some pieces are displayed on the walls, one piece by Nemo Gould (*Ankle Biter*) is displayed on the floor, and some pieces by J. Shea are suspended from the ceiling (such as *Hope*).

The exhibit also contains a booklet that talks about the work of each artist that is on display. The first section of the booklet is about the artist Tom Haney. It describes Tom Haney's background in detail. It also describes his creative process, which involves sketching, computing, and copious amounts of planning to ensure that the electric components work properly. It notes how Tom Haney's style changed over time, as well. At first he mainly carved wood to create his sculptures, but then he found that polymer clay was easier to work with and so shifted to primarily using that. Lastly, it talks about how he became popular and what he hopes to accomplish with his art. For instance, he says that he never wants to place trend over tradition.

The second section of the booklet contains an interview with J. Shea. It talks about how narratives within J. Shea's mind are what led him to create his *A Feeling of Transience* sculpture set, a

Elizabeth Spear
11.2.2013
ARTS140-004
Anderson Gallery Exhibit Paper

part of which is included in the display. It also discusses the underlying themes of his work, the main theme being the exploration of spatial relationships, and how he goes about collecting his materials. It goes on to mention how his work ties into steampunk, along with other concepts such as classic science fiction.

The final section of the booklet discusses Nemo Gould. It is all about how Nemo Gould “take[s] silly very seriously” and how, like Arthur Ganson, he tends to create mainly kinetic sculptures. It goes on to discuss his background (his parents were artists) and what inspires him (mostly science fiction and comic books). It also details how he loves to reanimate objects, for instance he can make an old garlic press into a part of an epic space ship. The booklet shows pictures of work by all three of the artists in each section, too.

Two pieces by Tom Haney from the exhibit that best capture the essence of steampunk are *Defender of the Aquifer* (2013) and *Out of the Darkness* (2013). *Defender of the Aquifer* (2013) is made up of wood, polymer clay, fabric, and an electric motor. The piece consists of a male figure on a platform. The figure holds a gun that moves from side to side, aimed at the viewer. It captures the essence of steampunk because the figure is wearing futuristic clothing and the gun he holds looks old-fashioned and futuristic at the same time. *Out of the Darkness* (2013) also captures the essence of steampunk, although in a less obvious manner. The woman in the piece is not dressed in steampunk fashion, and the scene depicted is not blatantly steampunk either. The piece itself consists of a female figure in a dress that stands off to the side, holding a piece of string. This string connects to lit-up lanterns that move when she pulls the string. The box around the female figure contains a background scene within it, which is made up of wooden pieces and a branch. The piece has combines modern mechanical techniques with traditional ones, which captures the spirit of steampunk even though the piece itself is not obviously steampunk. In addition, from his portfolio, the piece *Undaunted* (2010) also

Elizabeth Spear
11.2.2013
ARTS140-004
Anderson Gallery Exhibit Paper

captures the essence of steampunk. This is because the figure in the piece is dressed in steampunk fashion. The figure has a mechanical flying device strapped to his back and his clothes have a Victorian era feel to them.

Tom Haney follows a specific creative process that he uses to design his pieces. His process involves drawing out sketches of his pieces and then creating and assembling the actual figures or sets involved. He also has to plan out the figures so that he can fit an electric motor in them so that they will move. According to his biography, a few of his earliest memories include creating toys and games. He has always been intrigued by mechanical objects, as well. He often enjoyed taking apart household items as a child, which greatly irked his parents. He enjoyed art classes in high school and went on to study Industrial Design in college. He became a full-time artist in 2000, but before that he made a living by creating props, models, and miniatures for television, movies, and still photographers. He was well-known for his ability to create items that had never been created before by others, such as a five-foot ping pong paddle for a Japanese television show. As of now he is a full-time artist who focuses on tradition over trend.

J. Shea's work also captures the essence of steampunk, and two pieces that do that well are *Hope* (2013) and *King* (2013). *Hope* is reminiscent of steampunk because of its overall design. The sculpture itself is of a ship that appears to be ancient and futuristic at the same time. The entire ship is suspended in the air. The piece is a mixed media piece that looks like it includes metal, chain, other discarded parts, and wire. The piece *King* is comprised of mixed media, as well, and it includes similar materials to the ones used in *Hope*. *King* looks like it embodies parts of steampunk because of its overall structure, as well. The wings look like they were built inside out, which is a part of what steampunk is about. So too does the rest of the body that makes up the sculpture. Other pieces by J. Shea include *tension* (2012) which is a mixed media sculpture of a man that is meant to be suspended in the air and a

Elizabeth Spear
11.2.2013
ARTS140-004
Anderson Gallery Exhibit Paper

memory (2007) which is another mixed media sculpture that is of a skeleton man who is dressed like an astronaut. Both pieces look intricately mechanical but at the same time look as if they could be antiques and that gives both pieces a steampunk vibe. J. Shea uses a unique process to create his sculptures, and a part of that creative process involves creating sketches. Sketches of his designs are included in the exhibit.

The final artist in the exhibit, Nemo Gould, has work that captures the essence of steampunk, too. Two pieces of his that do so best are *The Race* (2010) and *The Pollinator* (2012). Both of these pieces are made entirely of found objects. These pieces both embody steampunk because of both of them involve the repurposing of other objects, which is a part of steampunk. However, these pieces also embody elements of science fiction, since both look as if they could have come straight out of science fiction films or novels. The piece *The Race* is a kinetic sculpture that is on loan from the Appleton Museum of Art, Florida. It consists of a figure on a motorcycle within an old piece of equipment. A futuristic, elaborate background surrounds the figure and, when a button is pushed on the old piece of equipment that contains the figure, the figure and the motorcycle move back and forth. The other piece, titled *The Pollinator*, is of a bumble bee that has a mechanical apparatus attached to it. The bee buzzes and moves around when a button is pressed. The bee itself is inside of a rounded piece of old equipment with a pink flower in the background and a blue sky. Nemo Gould also has an extensive portfolio, which includes other kinetic sculptures such as *Armed and Dangerous* and *Tightly Wound*. These pieces also embody elements of science fiction and steampunk because they are futuristic and intricately mechanical, with an “inside out” appearance.

Nemo Gould was born in 1975 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He was named after the protagonist in one of Winsor McCay’s comic strips. His work has evolved over time to reflect the mythology and the images from science fiction and comic books. He enjoys dismantling and then rebuilding objects with

Elizabeth Spear
11.2.2013
ARTS140-004
Anderson Gallery Exhibit Paper

moving parts. He received his BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute in 1998 and his MFA from U.C. Berkeley in 2000. In 2007 he became an Artist in Residence at the San Francisco Recycling and Disposal, Inc.'s Solid Waste Transfer and Recycling Center. A major aspect of his art involves getting adults to reconnect with their inner child. His work has appeared in many galleries and exhibits. According to the "News" section of his website, he is currently working on new projects, and he is planning another exhibit for November 7, 2013.

Nemo Gould's process involves collecting found and salvaged materials and then keeping those materials organized in a way that works for him. He notes that he spends equal amounts of time searching for materials and then organizing those materials. He then has to fix up the materials so that they are useable. After finding what he needs, organizing what he needs, and fixing what he needs, he is then able to create beautiful kinetic sculptures. He also has had to master many different skills, some of which are not standard artist skills, such as TIG (tungsten inert gas) welding. Each of his kinetic sculptures takes a long time to produce and involves a lot of hard work.

There has been a large resurgence in the popularity of steampunk. This is because it touches upon many current events that are portrayed in the media and because it has a touch of science fiction to it. It also allows for individuals to really express themselves in a myriad of creative ways (such as through fashion, art, and mechanical work). For instance (within art), *Defender of the Aquifer* by Tom Haney embodies steampunk and also touches upon current events covered in the media because the piece is of a soldier, which makes one think of the recent wars that America has been in, such as the Iraq war. Tom Haney's work in general also ties into current events and science fiction because it covers the ideas of a throwaway society and some of his other pieces also have futuristic aspects to them (such as *Home*). Other artists such as Suzanne Forbes also use steampunk elements to explore science fiction and current events covered by the media (such as data mining). Furthermore, J. Shea's work touches

Elizabeth Spear
11.2.2013
ARTS140-004
Anderson Gallery Exhibit Paper

upon current events through its titles, such as *Corporate* (from his portfolio) which is a sculpture of a shark. It appears to be a comment on the ruthlessness of corporations and their predatory natures, since sharks are indeed predators and rather ruthless creatures. Lastly, Nemo Gould's work also has aspects of science fiction to it and delves into current events in its own way. For instance *The Pollinator* has a science fiction twist to it since the bee has some mechanical aspects to it, but it also seems to be a commentary on the fragility of the environment, since everything within the piece is so fragile.

Steampunk is ever-growing in its popularity and many aspects of it are seen in contemporary art. Contemporary art uses steampunk aspects for aesthetic purposes. However, contemporary art also uses elements of steampunk to comment on current events that are covered by the media. Additionally, contemporary art uses features of steampunk to explore science fiction themes. Combining all of these pieces together involves much thought and the use of a creative process. Through all of this, the artist is able to speak volumes about society with no words, only images.