

LITTLE WORLDS

A Thesis

by

ANDREW MALCZEWSKI

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This thesis meets the standards for scope and quality of  
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

Greg Reuter, MFA  
Chair

Louis Katz, MFA  
Committee Member

Joe Peña, MFA  
Committee Member

December 2017

## ABSTRACT

I have always been immersed in stories of fantasy, especially the works of J.R.R. Tolkien including *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* which were some of the first novels I read. I embraced them and they led me to become very familiar with that genre. In my search for personal expression I find myself once again being drawn to the works of Tolkien.

In a 1939 lecture entitled *On Fairy-Stories*, he discussed fantasy and fairy tales providing validations for the importance of the fantasy genre. He also identified three values required for Fantasy: *Recovery*, *Escape*, and *Consolation*. He defined these in a literary convention. I am translating them into a visual one.

This paper discusses how I came to the decision to synthesize the literary convention of Fantasy with the Visual arts. It posits how experience is an essential part of this synthesis. How the replacement of a monetary value with the value of a gift allows the experience to transcend from the exhibition space to the home. It discusses the importance I place on the atypical viewer of fine arts and why I made this body of work specifically for them.

This paper discusses how I used the formal elements of design to create an aesthetically pleasing sculpture that continually reinforces the conceptual basis of fantasy as a visual art and how it works together to create a new and engaging environment; a microcosm of a second world where the mind can wander. It is how I combine my two intense interests – fantasy art in concept and fine art in construction.

## DEDICATION

To my parents Greg and Gail, for always believing in me and encouraging me to be more than a starving artist. To Anna and Cary, my loving siblings who have always reserved a spot for me on their couch.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ONE

I am a sculptor. This means I work in the round, in three dimensions. My sculptures take up physical space and affect the space around them. When I first begin a new body of work I start with space and the audience. These are two separate aspects, though often related. Works of art, like *Wind and Wave*, (2017) (fig. 1) were made to be site specific and serve a specific function<sup>1</sup>. With my latest body of work, *Little Worlds* (2017) (fig. 2), I started with the understanding that the space they inhabit would be twofold. The first is that of the exhibit space<sup>2</sup>, and second is that of the home. The dynamics of these spaces, how and why they engage an audience, vary widely depending on that audience. The typical audience is one that visits galleries and either buys works of art or appreciate it on a deeper level. They are patrons with a dedication to the arts and have space reserved to exhibit it.

For *Little Worlds*, I focused on a different type of audience, that of my friends and family. They are not the type of people who actively seek out artwork, or have the ability to exhibit fine works of art in their homes. A lot of them are at a point in their life where they are focusing on building a family, buying diapers, strollers, and tricycles not sculptures and paintings. Many of my friends are not academically minded and they perceive a high level of intellectualism is required to engage in the fine arts, and they have become dismissive of works that they ‘do not get’<sup>3</sup>. Their tastes tends to lean towards the classical works of art in the styles of realism, surrealism, and impressionism due to the recognizable imagery. Because of this most of them will only visit a museum once a year on a free day and only go to a gallery if invited. This type of audience does not see itself as patrons of fine art, and is a larger demographic that is not part of the art world and don’t care to be. I am concentrating on this type of audience because my friends and family are deserving of fine art and what it can offer, even if they do not actively seek it out, so by focusing on them as my audience it allows my work to be more accessible on a broader scale.

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<sup>1</sup> Commissioned to be a shade structure and iconic location marker to beautify the space in front of Collier Park Pool in Corpus Christi, Texas.

<sup>2</sup> Galleries, store fronts, museums, Instagram, restaurants, bars, libraries, art centers and any other venue that can displays works of art.

<sup>3</sup> Often I hear them disparage works of pure abstraction and abstract expressionism as childish or garbage.

## TWO

It was with space and audience that I began to design *Little Worlds*. They are a group of hanging sculptures that are made from ceramics, moss, wood, acrylic paint, and copper wire. Because of my targeted audience, I focused on a nontraditional sculptural form of a hanging object, and limited the size to that of a softball. This allows the viewer to place them where they would be visible, but also addresses the issues of small children. For the same reason, I focused on materials that were durable and lasting. In doing this, it opened up new areas of the home to exhibit my work.

I have a personal connection with this audience, and I did not want them to have something where the value is tied to its monetary expense,<sup>4</sup> but rather in how they experience the work. That experience had to start in the exhibit space so that it could heighten the internal value<sup>5</sup> of the work. This allowed the work to continue to function as a signifier of that experience in the home space.

In order for this to happen I intended the individual sculptures to be given away. In doing so, I am able to extend a meaningful portion of myself and give of my inner gifts.<sup>6</sup> This is what allows the sculpture to function outside of the exhibition space as was eloquently stated by writer and cultural critic Lewis Hyde (b. 1945).

“As once an inner gift has been realized, it may be passed along, communicated to the audience. And sometimes this embodied gift—the work—can reproduce the gifted state in the audience that receives it. Let us say that the “suspension of disbelief” by which we become receptive to a work of the imagination is in fact belief, a momentary faith by virtue of which the spirit of the artist’s gift may enter and act upon our being.

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<sup>4</sup> Lewis Hyde states it as when an object that’s value is not inherent to its monetary value is “sold, they change their nature as much as water changes when it freezes, and no rationalist telling of the constant elemental structure can replace the feeling that is lost” - Lewis Hyde, *The Gift creativity and the artist in the modern world*. (United States: Vintage Books (NY), 2008.), 51.

<sup>5</sup> I am referring to the appreciation of art, appreciation has a meaning monetarily as well as what happens to art. Art appreciates in value because it is appreciated this is an applicable apparent truism.

<sup>6</sup> My natural abilities as a sculptor and artist that I have trained and honed over the course of my life.

Sometimes, then, if we are awake, if the artist really was gifted, the work will induce a moment of grace, a communion, a period during which we too know the hidden coherence of our being and feel the fullness of our lives.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Hyde, 212.

### THREE

The original exhibition space that I was designing the work for was a large gallery. The space was immense, being approximately 106' x 18' x 20'. My initial design was site specific where, I intended to fill the space with hanging sculptures to create an experience that inspired awe and wonder. Then at the end of the exhibition I would gift each sculpture to a viewer. Unfortunately, as I was working with the gallery to design a setup that I could execute I became aware of several limitations that I would have had to overcome. I came to the realization that the gallery's limitations were becoming the primary focus of the work, and the work was beginning to no longer serve its intended function. After much deliberation, I decided to search for a different space. I looked for one that allowed me the freedom to exhibit the work in the manner I had envisioned, and found the Mary and Jeff Bell Library on the campus of Texas A&M University –Corpus Christi.

It was during this time that I created several test *Little Worlds* (fig. 3) to explore and develop the form (fig. 4). I used the knowledge of who my audience was as an idea of how I wanted the sculptures to function, but I needed to understand what the conceptual function of the work was before I would be able to continue to the next step in creating the sculptures. Aesthetic communication is part of function.<sup>8</sup> I began by questioning what this work would be, and how it could perform that function of aesthetic communication. I looked at my previous works, and found there was a commonality between them in that of a whimsical nature (fig. 5), humor (fig. 6), and a sense of “fantasy” (fig. 7). When I mentioned this to Joanna Bolsins, she did not understand what I meant by “fantasy.”

What did I mean when I used the term “fantasy” and why did I use it? I did not have a clear sense of it, other than I felt there was a connection to my work. I felt that connection because I have always been immersed in fantasy stories. Some of my fondest memories are of me and my siblings gathering around our mom as she read Patricia C. Wrede's incredible young adult book *Dealing with Dragons*<sup>9</sup> (1990). I grew up very familiar with the fantasy section at the

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<sup>8</sup> A more specific expression than the common classroom maxim of ‘Form follows function’

<sup>9</sup> This is a great book about a princess who runs away to live with a dragon. My mom would make all the voices different and add sound effects; we loved story time in my house.

local library and from there began a long-lasting relationship with excellent stories in that genre. Growing up I would find myself awake until three or four in the morning reading just one more chapter. I would lose myself in the story. It would fuel my imagination, and I would daydream and draw.

At first, the notion of mystical magic drew me to these stories. As I grew and continued to read the genre, I realized that my interest was in the worlds the author created. These worlds, like the ones created by authors John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892-1973)<sup>10</sup> and Patrick Rothfuss<sup>11</sup> (b. 1973), can be totally different yet amazing worlds. They can build two totally distinct places to lose oneself. It is why I have kept returning to fantasy literature. It was the function I wanted for *Little Worlds*, a platform for imagination.

Imagination is an integral part of fantasy. It is one of the many reasons I love reading. When I read epics like Brandon Sanderson's (b. 1975) *Stormlight Archive*<sup>12</sup>(2010-) the serious nature and tone makes me see the world in my mind; it has the same kind of dark atmosphere as *Bladerunner*<sup>13</sup>(1982). When I read Rainbow Rowell's (b. 1973) *Landline*<sup>14</sup>(2014), I imagined it set in the world of *Bojack Horseman*<sup>15</sup>(2014-), which made the book so silly and fun that I recommend it quite often, even though it is a romance<sup>16</sup>. This is part of what I wanted *Little Worlds* to do; to be a spark for the imagination; to cause the viewer to immerse a portion of themselves into the work. I wanted them to engage in the narrative, whatever it may be, to make *Little Worlds* into a fantasy construction.

*Little Worlds* is primarily focused on the imaginative aspects of fantasy which is the most prominent feature of the genre, but fantasy in itself is nuanced and diverse in its topics, styles, and execution. Many authors will enrich their worlds by addressing real world politics and issues in their stories. For myself I find this approach in writing draws me out of the narrative. While I

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<sup>10</sup> Middle Earth

<sup>11</sup> Temerant

<sup>12</sup> An Epic Fantasy series that is three books long. The series follows a couple of different protagonists both male and female. Book three will be released in November of 2017.

<sup>13</sup> A movie that was a loose adaptation of the 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick. Purposely shot so that the blacks are a true black giving it a very distinct visual style.

<sup>14</sup> A quirky romance about a woman who is falling out of love with her long-time husband because she found a phone that lets her talk to her husband in the past, before they started to date.

<sup>15</sup> Bojack Horseman is a cartoon on Netflix that follow an out of work actor who is making his comeback after 15 years. Bojack is a narcissist, who is deeply depressed. Anthropomorphic animals populate the world with humans. Bojack is literally a horse man.

<sup>16</sup> My least favorite genre or part of a book is the romance.

can appreciate this ability fantasy literary has to offer, it is difficult to accomplish in a circuitous way. When Tolkien deals with issues like race and class, it is through the races of elf and orc. Furthermore, it is not an overt issue of the plot but a subtext to it and is employed as a device to enrich the fantasy world. This aspect is something I find particularly enticing. For *Little Worlds* I am not interested in the post-colonial, postmodern, post-postmodern, political, gender, racial, and or other issues that are the common topics of my peer's work, or the critics who talk about art. Part of this is because I am a lower income, heterosexual, white male, and I usually do not have to deal directly with these issues unless I choose to. It is because of these reasons that I feel that *Little Worlds* would be hindered by my socio-political input and would ultimately be disingenuous. Although I do not want to make a direct commentary on the deeper social issues in this body of work, I recognize its need, and I find fantasy to be a safer place for that commentary. Perhaps my work will grow into dealing with these issues as a secondary topic, much as some works of this genre does.

## FOUR

When I looked for visual art about fantasy worlds, the professional work was often illustrated on book covers and in game books. It was in the art by artists such as Frank Frazetta's (1928-2010), *Conan the Barbarian* (fig. 8), or Larry Elmore's (b. 1948) classic *Dungeons and Dragons* (fig. 9) work. However, these works did not function in the way the literature did. Their work was illustrative. They are designed to function in a specific way that will entice readers. The prime example are book jackets. They are created to attract a certain type of customer to a novel to sell books<sup>17</sup>. I am not an illustrator nor am I trying to sell books. I see myself and my work in closer connection to the authors who create the world in which the reader themselves experience. My work is not the illustration of a secondary world<sup>18</sup>, but rather the secondary world itself.

As I have stated, I would like to be a world builder and make this body of work function like a fantasy novel. At first I did not know how to do this in sculpture. I understood the connection between fantasy and my work, but I did not have a way to articulate why. The breakthrough came when I read *On Fairy-Stories* (2014)<sup>19</sup> by Tolkien.

Born in South Africa in 1892. He was educated in England and became professor of Anglo-Saxon and English language and literature at Oxford. He had an amazing grasp of language and was regarded as one of the best philologists in the world. He is considered by many to be the father of the Epic fantasy genre beginning with the *Lord of the Rings*<sup>20</sup> (1968). In 1939,

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<sup>17</sup> Most cover illustrations are chosen by the publisher's marketing team, and designed to tell the reader at a glance the type of book they are buying.

<sup>18</sup> A term Tolkien uses to describe the worlds created by fantasy authors

<sup>19</sup> *On Fairy-stories* is an essay adapted from a lecture Tolkien gave in 1939 where he discussed what a fairy tale is and gave an exemplary personal statement of his own views on the role of imagination in literature. He beautifully talked about the importance of stories and fantasy.

<sup>20</sup> Published as a trilogy in 1954-55 it was not published as a single volume until 1968 and has sold over 150 million copies since, placing it as one of the most published books ever.



Tolkien gave the Andrew Lang<sup>21</sup> lecture at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland in which he discussed the concept of what Fantasy is and how to validate it as a natural human activity.<sup>22</sup>

He made the claim that Fantasy is better left to words, rather than to be art and that “it rarely succeeds in drama”<sup>23</sup>. A lot has changed since 1939, and I found the genre as a drama in the popular cinematic works such as *Krull* (1983), *the Harry Potter series* (2001-11), and *A Game of Thrones* (2011-) to name a few, has proven that fantasy can be successful in different formats. If it could be so successful in drama, then it could be as successful in fine art.

I needed some way to compare literary fantasy with the visual arts. In *On Fairy-Stories*<sup>24</sup> Tolkien talks in depth about the nature of fantasy and defines it through a conceptualization of three values: *Recovery*, *Escape*, and *Consolation*. By looking for a similarity of these values in the Fine Arts, I found immersive works of art like Bruce Nauman’s (b.1941) *Green Light Corridor* (1970), *The Way of Color* (2009) by James Turrell (b. 1943) and *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross)* (1991), by Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-1996) as select examples.

I found that the largest similarity between fine art and fantasy was experiences. It was Tolkien’s words and my experience of engaging with works of art that allowed me to answer the question, “How do I make a body of work that is fantasy art in concept and fine art in construction?”

To begin with, I needed a clear definition of the term “fantasy,” and Tolkien’s interpretation was significant:

Fantasy<sup>25</sup> is a connection between Imagination (mental power of image making) and Art (the achievement of the expression of the Imagination)—expression is derived from the image. Its goal is the making of a Secondary World that commands Secondary Belief;

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<sup>21</sup> This series of lectures was named in Mr. Lang’s honor and was begun in 1929. The 22<sup>nd</sup> and the most recent in the series was given in 2012. All the lectures are focused on the topic of fairy-stories. Andrew Lang (1844 –1912) was an important member of the Folklore Society (1878) and president in 1888–1889 his most popular books are his twelve collections of fairy tales known as *Andrew Lang's "Coloured" Fairy Books*. - Sharin Schroeder, "The Andrew Lang Site." The Andrew Lang Site. Accessed November 03, 2017. <http://www.andrewlang.org/>.

<sup>22</sup> John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, Verlyn Flieger, and Douglas Allen Anderson. *Tolkien on fairy-stories*. (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2014.), 65.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>24</sup> *On fairy-stories* is the title of the Tolkien’s lecture and the essay that was drafted from it. *Tolkien on fairy-stories* is a book published in 2004 that reprinted the essay and where I was first introduced to the lecture. For this paper and the ease of reading I am referring to the lecture unless otherwise stated.

<sup>25</sup> I use this definition for the word “fantasy” in the context of this paper.

this requires labor, thought, and a special skill, a kind of elvish craft.<sup>26</sup>

Tolkien's definition, "Fantasy is a connection between Imagination and Art,"<sup>27</sup> made an impression on me. For the first time, someone was articulating something I had always felt.<sup>28</sup>

In the first portion of the lecture, Tolkien spoke about fairy stories.<sup>29</sup> He discussed their origins, the role of children in the stories and as their audience. It is near the end of *On Fairy-Stories* that Tolkien identified the three values required for Fantasy: *Recovery*, *Escape*, and *Consolation*. I used these concepts as a guide when looking for examples of Fantasy in Fine Art and through this was able to understand the conceptual basis for my own works.

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<sup>26</sup> Tolkien, *Tolkien on fairy-stories*, 61.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> I also noted a parallel in the way that Tolkien described fantasy and how Hyde referred to the gift of the artist.

<sup>29</sup> Stories that contain actual fairies, like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595) by William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

## FIVE

Tolkien defines *Recovery* as the “regaining of a clear view, a cleaning of our mental and imaginative windows so that we can see clearly without the masks of every-dayness.”<sup>30</sup> It prepares the viewer for the fantasy, it opens the “hoard and lets all the locked things fly away.”<sup>31</sup>

I see the gallery, museum, cultural institution, screen, device or venue that is showing the work as the place of *Recovery*. In a formal institution, it is walking through the doors, in a non-traditional space, it is often the area from which the work is viewed. This type of space can be an intangible area that primes the audience to view art. I refer to this as ‘art space;’ because it changes the way I see and think about the objects in that space. In the institution, there is a solemnity of those spaces that is quiet and still, a place where the “mask of every-dayness”<sup>32</sup> can fall away. It prepares me for the “art” in “Fantasy and Fine Art” and readies me for the experience.

I noticed this when I visited the Austin museum of Contemporary Art in 2015 and was able to experience Bruce Nauman’s *Green Light Corridor* (fig. 10). The piece is composed of two walls ten feet high and eighty feet long placed one foot apart, lit by green fluorescent light. That experience was fun in a claustrophobic, sweaty kind of way. The irreverence of touching the work, and laughing as I squeezed through the narrow opening, made me feel like a kid. It was as if I swapped my Bible for Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman’s *Death Gate Cycle* <sup>33</sup>(1990-1994) to read during church services. It was the art space that prepared me for the engagement. The experience of works of art like Nauman’s is best summed up by the artist Barnett Newman (1905-1970), “It’s no different than meeting another person. One has a reaction to a person physically. Also there is a metaphysical thing, and if a meeting of people is meaningful, it affects both their lives.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Tolkien, *Tolkien on fairy-stories*, 67.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> A 7-book epic that follows, a powerful dope, a cut-throat survivor, and his small dog as they travel through elemental worlds to discover the secret history of their people.

<sup>34</sup> Barnett Newman, John Philip O’Neill, and Mollie McNickle. *Barnett Newman: selected writings and interviews*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 259.

Often the concept of *Escape* is seen as a negative, as a running away from problems or not having the courage to confront tough choices. For Tolkien, *Escape* is a good thing; it is, “evidently as a rule very practical, and may even be heroic.”<sup>35</sup> He sees it as a break from modernity, “We are too surrounded by the manmade and the mechanical; it’s good to get outside these sometimes; modern life can be raw, ugly, and soulless.”<sup>36</sup> *Escape* in this context is not a running away from a thing; it is distancing to gain perspective. Through the suspension of disbelief, a reader can become enveloped in the narrative and may be able to empathize with the characters. As I mentioned earlier, fantasy can discuss politically charged issues in an indirect way. Abstract concepts and situations can be posited and examined because the very bounds of nature can be manipulated but more so as it gives the reader distance and time.

During the summer of 2016, while I was visiting the Crystal Bridges Museum in Bentonville, Arkansas, I was able to experience Terrell’s *The Way of Color* (fig. 11). It is an amphitheater large enough to fit thirty people with a large oculus that opens to the sky. At sunset and sunrise, light is projected along the walls that complement and matches the natural color of the sky as it goes from light to dark, or dark to light. Terrell stated that he created “a different kind of landscape, a new landscape of in determinant space.”<sup>37</sup> This space, by the nature of its experience, allows for a deeper reflection, an escape<sup>38</sup>.

I was underwhelmed when I entered that space during the daytime. There was nothing happening, it was a large empty room lit by natural light through the oculus. When I re-entered at sunset my expectations were low. As the sun set, the oculus slowly faded and the walls lit up (fig. 12). It was during this time, in this space, I was able to transcend the mundane. It was a break from the “every-dayness” of modern life. It became a space to carry the participants away from the ordinary.

Tolkien’s final value for stories of fantasy was *Consolation*. It is the turn in the story, it is when the hero rises, or the ‘happily ever after’ of a fairy story. “It can give to child or man that hears it, when the ‘turn’ comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting

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<sup>35</sup> Tolkien, *Tolkien on fairy-stories*, 69.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Govan, and Christine Y. Kim. *James Turrell: a retrospective*. (Munich: Delmonico Books, 2015), 103.

<sup>38</sup> I feel that all “good” art has a component of escape in it, but not all art does. This is because I believe the definition of “good” art is a personal one that needs to be defined by the individual.

of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art, and having a peculiar quality.”<sup>39</sup> It is the consolation of the happy conclusion. Tolkien says, “If tragedy is the end of drama, then the opposite is true of Fantasy.”<sup>40</sup> This experience is called eucatastrophe which is defined as, “a fleeting glimpse of Joy, beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.”<sup>41</sup>

Satisfaction, excitement, and a slight sense of loss are what I see as the eucatastrophic moment and it is how I feel about Felix Gonzalez-Torres' work. His work encapsulates the value of *Consolation* because of its accessibility and depth. I remember the first time I saw "*Untitled*" (*Portrait of Ross*.) (fig. 13) in the Milwaukee Museum of Fine Art. I was 15, it was the year 2000 and I was walking around looking at abstracted modern art when I stopped in front of a pile of shiny wrapped candy. A docent politely informed me I could take a candy, so I promptly took two. I put one in my mouth and one in my pocket. The docent smiled at me and I walked on. I did not understand the conceptual value of "*Untitled*" (*Portrait of Ross*.), but I knew what it was, a pile of candy. Since then I have come across several of Torres' works, and it was not until I was in college that I first came to understand the deeper meaning behind his work.

In the Catholic faith, there is a concept of memorializing loss through consumption and the pile of candy related to the weight of his lover Ross, who through his battle with AIDS became increasingly emaciated and eventually dying from the disease. As the viewer consumes the candy the weight of the pile is reduced to nothing but memories, like Torres' lover.<sup>42</sup> The other meaning of this work is the subversion of the 'no touching' convention of the museum space. By doing this, he breaks the stiff nature of the space and makes it intimate. As a 15-year old, I did not understand any of that; I thought it was just about taking art with me. It was exciting and I could understand his work on that level, unlike much of the other art I viewed that day.

Each successive time I see his work I am able to comprehend different meaning as to what the work is speaking about. He successfully layers his work with critiques about homosexuality, AIDS, the conventions of space, life and death. Much of his work has an

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<sup>39</sup> Tolkien, *Tolkien on fairy-stories*, 76.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>42</sup> Julie Ault. *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*. (2nd ed. Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 2016), 336-341.

underlying sense of loss that has contributed to the lasting impression it has made on me. This layering has made his work accessible and exciting over time. In this he has made something that has not had any diminishment in the feeling of eucatastrophy with each successive experience.

It was the apparent simplicity (fig. 14) (fig. 15) (fig. 16) of Torres' work that helped me to decide how much formal consideration was to be expressed in my own body of work. Though I continually use the formal elements of design, they could not be overtly present in the completed form. If complicated formal issues, such as the use of color, composition, space, scale, line, form, and shape distract the viewer, they cannot fully comprehend the piece as a whole; if they are weighed down by those concerns then the sculptures will have a much harder time functioning as their intended purpose. The work would not be understood immediately and would impede the viewer from gaining a sense of *Consolation*. It is because of the simplification that the viewer is able to immerse themselves in the sculpture's intent without distraction.

I was able to find Tolkien's literary concepts of *Recovery*, *Escape*, and *Consolation* in visual concepts contained in these three mentioned artists, Torres, Turrell and Nauman. Their work each embodies a different aspect of how fantasy works and with this as a base, I was able to articulate how the sculptures were to function. I now had a solid visual and conceptual basis to create *Little Worlds*. They would be intimate sculptures that would create a visual experience, one founded on the concept of fantasy but created in the realm of fine art. This experience would then transition into the selected viewer's home by way of being gifted<sup>43</sup>, where it would continue to act as a fantasy microcosm, one that is connected to the macrocosm of work through the memories of the initial experience.

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<sup>43</sup> In the exhibition there is a monetary value placed on the work, however when a viewer inquire about a particular piece it is given away freely.

## SIX

After coming to a conceptual understanding of what I was looking for in my work, I was ready to start production of the work. By first identifying the function of the sculptures, I was able to make all my aesthetic decisions in its support. I had already determined the size, that of a softball to be more accessible in the viewers' home, and it became a natural starting point.

I chose to represent a city as each *Little World* because a single city is a self-contained world. As a former resident of Chicago<sup>44</sup> it was easy for me to understand how a city can be a microcosm<sup>45</sup> that is also part of a macrocosm.<sup>46</sup> I also chose a city because it is a center of population, a personification of manmade civilization. The *Little Worlds* were to be a reflection of our world. As westerners, we cannot get away from the effect of men on the natural environment, whether it is in the conserved spaces that are affected by the borders we put on them or in cities where everything appears to be constructed to suit our purpose. For me that is what it is to be a modern human, to have a sense that we have control of nature and have strived to make safe. This makes the *Little World's* accessible on a human level.

With my understanding that the sculptures were to be a platform for imagination, their own fantasy world, the scale was incredibly important. By scaling the work to be of a miniature size it would help to create a more intimate interaction with the viewer. As the sculptor Robert Morris (b. 1931) stated, "The awareness of scale is a function of the comparison made between that constant, one's body size, and the object. [...] the quality of intimacy is attached to an object in a fairly direct proportion as its size diminishes in relation to oneself"<sup>47</sup>. By creating the sculpture on a micro scale, the viewer would stop relating to the real world and start relating themselves on a size where they must imagine

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<sup>44</sup> This is a personal bias, one that I supported with Michael Jordan (b. 1963), chocolate smells on the bridges, and Willis Tower.

<sup>45</sup> I have friends who have not needed to travel outside the city limits in over 5 years.

<sup>46</sup> It is connected through roads, and rail. Trade is the life blood of a city, and Chicago is one of the most important hubs for overland shipping and transportation.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Morris, "Robert Morris (b. 1931) 'Notes on Sculpture 1-3'." *Art in Theory 1900-2000: an Anthology of Changing Ideas*, new ed. (Blackwell Publishing 2003), 831.

the relationship to the object. The simplification of form at this scale is intentional, as it allows the viewers to fill in the details and put themselves into that imaginary space. What is represented is just enough to give the impression of each world, similar but unique.

There were two approaches I could have taken in building the cities on this scale. One was to try hyper-detail, much like a model train set. Everything is scaled to a proportionate size and has many details included to encourage the viewer to imagine themselves riding the rails.

The other is one of visual simplicity that prevents the descriptive nature of detail. The viewers, because of the work's lack of such detail, are allowed the freedom to roam inside their own imagination. This is much like the illustrative-like works of Henri Rousseau (1844-1910) (fig. 17) who leaves most of the specific content blank.

The reason I opted for this approach was because of its similarity to a literary technique used in the Science Fiction genre when the author will describe the real-world science behind how something pertaining to the story works, like a laser, or a photon. They will use just enough terminology and information for the reader to suspend belief when they describe the fictional science of a made-up object such as a matter transporter<sup>48</sup>, or a faster than light speed<sup>49</sup> space ship. Visually this is what Rousseau does and how I approached world building.

I used a simplified representation, wooden blocks cut with peaks to look like roofs, to make the form of the cities. Relying on the simple elegance of 'a house shape equals home' and 'many house shapes equals city.' I wanted them to have a lived-in appearance and pushed the idea of a crowded city by overlapping the buildings and connecting them to build upwards, giving them an un-planned appearance.

The practical consideration of the materials led me to use items that were easily sourced and affordable. This allowed me to expedite the creation of multiple sculptures in a large quantity. The cities were made by cutting down a pine plank into 1"x1"x6' strips that were then miter<sup>50</sup> cut to create peaks and slopes. Each cut produced a length that was

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<sup>48</sup> The classic example is of the Star Trek transporter.

<sup>49</sup> By definition light speed is a fundamental physical constant where nothing can be faster.

<sup>50</sup> A cut at an angle other than 90 degrees.



between 1” to 5”. They were given a base coat in one type of acrylic color and a second coat of a different color. I used primary and secondary colors in pastel hues because of pictures I have seen of favelas.<sup>51</sup> (fig. 18) This color scheme contrasted better with the base and moss of the sculpture than other<sup>52</sup> crowded city color schemes. I continued to reinforce the idea of a crowded city by overlapping several different acrylic colors and then sanding through the layers to give the wood a distressed and used appearance. (fig. 19) With a worn and weathered look on some of the blocks, I added a bright orange and a slap dash<sup>53</sup> of lime green. The bright colors were used to create variety and break up the repetition of the forms. Since so much is repeated in the form, from the base shape to the building blocks, the bright orange draws the eye to the cities and contrast with the dulcet earth tones of the ceramic and the moss.

I used the moss to transition between the painted cities and the ceramic base. Unlike the ceramics which are clearly man made, the moss is completely natural, it is grown and is put into a state of dormancy. It retains that potential to continue to grow and becomes representative of trees, grass, and other natural features of a landscape. Its texture variation acts as a balance; the moss is the purely natural while the painted wood is man-made and the smooth ceramics is a combination of the two - natural and manmade.

The bases are made of a ceramic soda-fired<sup>54</sup> stoneware which I incorporated to indicate that the *Little Worlds* are built upon a representation of both natural and man-made but not synthetic like plastic. Using a clay body like stoneware was ideal because of the way that clay is formed. Clay in its natural state  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3\cdot 2\text{SiO}_3\cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$ <sup>55</sup> is composed primarily of decomposed feldspar and basalt, a component of granite. These rocks make

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<sup>51</sup> Portuguese for slum, it is a low-income housing area in Brazil.

<sup>52</sup> Like those found in illustrations of eastern cities like Tokyo, Beijing, or Delhi or of western cities like Chicago, Los Angeles or New York. The color palette of these cities is often influenced by sports teams, vexillological representation and other iconic location markers that can be used to define them.

<sup>53</sup> A random splashing, spraying, and dripping of paint.

<sup>54</sup> Soda firing is a process that uses soda ash in a water solution that is sprayed into the kiln at maturing temperature, and sodium vapor combines with silica in clay to form a glaze.

<sup>55</sup> The chemical formulation of  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3\cdot 2\text{SiO}_3\cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$  describes a molecule composed of one part Aluminum oxide-two silica-and two water molecules, commonly called Kaolin. This is the basis for differing clay bodies. A clay body will have other chemicals added to them so that they react in a desired manner. For instance the addition of iron oxide will turn the clay red and can affect the temperature the clay can be fired to.

up a majority of the earth.<sup>56</sup> This natural clay is then manipulated by man to create a stable, reliable clay body<sup>57</sup> that can be shaped into a desired form. This connection to the natural world and that of the man-made creates a foundation that is a synthesis of the two. This synthesis is the same foundation of modernity<sup>58</sup>. This process of soda firing gave me minimal control over the surface coloring of the ceramics which complemented the chaotic nature of the painted wooden forms.

Using copper wire to hang the sculptures was a subtle yet important choice as there is no way to remove the hanging device from view due to its support of the sculpture. If I had chosen something like monofilament line to attempt to hide the hanging support it becomes more obvious and it becomes a detraction from the sculpture as a whole. The added benefit of the copper is that it does not hold straight, it retains a character in the bumps and wiggles of the line. This celebrates the hanging apparatus; it acknowledges it and allows it to disappear. Copper itself also has the inherent value of holding energy. By choosing copper as opposed to any kind of cordage or other type of wire the sculptures gain an association with electricity. Electricity more than anything else allows us to stay connected with others over vast distances. We can stay connected with friends and family even if we are on completely different continents<sup>59</sup>. With *Little Worlds* exhibiting in the same space, the hanging apparatus becomes a form of connection of each world to each other. When the worlds are taken out of the exhibition that connection remains, like a phone call, it stays immediate and is understandable to the audience.

My use of the three parts of the sculpture, ceramic base, moss, and wooden city were also designed to keep the sculpture in a “Fine Art” type of creation. The size of the work, and its non-traditional appearance would have made it easy to become a type of “kitschy”<sup>60</sup> fine art. (fig. 20) If the sculptures were perceived as ‘kitsch’ it would have

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<sup>56</sup> Charlotte F Speight and John Toki. *Hands in clay*. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004.), 10.

<sup>57</sup> Like stoneware or terra cotta

<sup>58</sup> As I stated earlier ‘to be a modern human, to have a sense that we have control of nature and have made it safe. ‘ I see this in city beautification, by bringing in more trees, gardens, and other natural “green” element we assert out control over nature. It is something I experienced firsthand during my time as fabricator for the McFarland Douglass Landscape Company in Chicago.

<sup>59</sup> The first transatlantic cable was made of copper and used by telegraph operators to communicate between the US and the UK, today all transatlantic cables are made of fiber optics.

<sup>60</sup> Thought of as being in poor taste because of its garishness or sentimentality, but appreciated in an ironic way.

altered the gift value and impeded the function. It is part of the reason why I wanted the work to have texture, and to use handmade ceramics for the base. When I think of kitsch, the smooth, slip cast look of a manufactured good comes to mind. This body of work lacks both those qualities and helps the viewer receive it as a work of fine art.

Multiplicity is also a major consideration of this body of work. When I originally planned to show the work in a gallery, the idea was to have hundreds of pieces to fill the space. Each space has different requirements for an installation. In the library there was not a need for hundreds of sculpture to fill the space. Instead a much smaller number was used to create a space that is balanced; the sculptures become an environment of the space while not taking it over. There is no hard delineation between the show space and the rest of the library. The repetition of the forms also adds to the viewer's ability to lose themselves in the work. As the viewer comes to each new sculpture, they are met with the familiarity of form allowing them to continue their imagination from sculpture to sculpture.

## SEVEN

I discovered how to use the space through three test exhibitions. Once the initial gallery was no longer a viable location I experimented by exhibiting the work in three test sites to learn how to maximise the function of the work in a non-traditional space. Each of these installations was also a different opportunity for me to create a new environment, or a new fantasy landscape if you will. In these test exhibitions, the work's function was limited because of the spaces where they were shown. Two of the spaces were commercial stores (fig. 21) (fig. 22), and the other was in a digital gallery (fig. 23). I learned that because of the limitations of the space and the way the work must be hung, it created a static experience. In the commercial spaces, the work was against a wall or a window making it impossible to truly enjoy it in the round, as well as to interact within the installation.

For the digital gallery, the obvious problem is that there is no actual space to show sculpture. The experience was separated by a screen and through this lens, sculpture is truly limited<sup>61</sup>. This gallery was also acting as its own conceptual work of art, and this changed the function of the work shown so that it became a tool of the gallery's concept. It was like the work went from being the 'novel' to being a 'book jacket'.

This led me to understand that I needed a space that was institutional and offered some of the same qualities as a gallery. The Mary and Jeff Bell Library (fig. 24) was ideal for several reasons. The library space is very similar to a gallery space; there is a hushed solemnity to both. The viewer may not be at a library to look at art but is still primed for the experience that acts to promote *Recovery*, something that was almost completely lost in the experimental shows. While I did not originally intend the work to be in a library, the exhibit added an important association between the work and literary fantasy. By exhibiting in a space not directly associated with the visual arts, it brings the work to a population, like my intended audience, that may not normally patronize museums. However, it is a population that is more likely to be familiar with the content.

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<sup>61</sup> A limitation that is being overcome with the virtual gallery and improvements in the way that digital media is interacted with. However I still feel that unless the work is intended for the digital space the experience is still unsatisfying.

The installation was laid out in a simple grid. While part of the reason for this is the physical limitation involved in the space it was installed in, the simple installation magnified the interchangeability of the individual sculptures. The *Little Worlds* are placed far enough away from the walls, floors, and ceiling that it makes them less difficult to enter physically and with your imagination. They were also hung at slightly different heights approximately four feet from the ground. This was to break up the repetition of the grid and add variety to the installation. The height of the hanging sculptures was to put them at eye level so the viewer is confronted with the sculptures without having to look for them. The spacing was important because they need to be placed in a way that the viewer could enter the space but not get tangled up in the work. By placing them approximately three feet apart it gave the viewers enough space to interact with the work and still freely move amongst them. Against the walls are two stacks of selected works by Tolkien to pay homage to the man who has had such a great influence on me and to reinforce the large inspiration fantasy literature has had on this body of work.

The only text visible was the quote of Tolkien's, used earlier in this text<sup>62</sup>, where he defines fantasy. This gives the viewer an idea of how the works are to function. He speaks to the audience about how fantasy is a combination of imagination and art. The viewer can see the art, being surrounded by it, and question where is the imagination? It is in this moment that I invite the viewer to participate. The quote acts as an important guide into the work's function as well as reinforcing how influential fantasy was on this body of work.

The process of making and installing work allows for unintended qualities to be noted and incorporated into my lexicon, into my toolbox of knowledge. One of these, in this exhibition, was the vibration of the work that seems to be created by library patrons walking across the floor. The vibration enlivens the work and removes its static nature. I found this subtle movement to be engaging and will become an intended part of future exhibitions.

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<sup>62</sup> "Fantasy is a connection between Imagination (mental power of image making) and Art (the achievement of the expression of the Imagination)—expression is derived from the image. Its goal is the making of a Secondary World that commands Secondary Belief; this requires labor, thought, and a special skill, a kind of elvish craft." - Tolkien, *Tolkien on fairy-stories*, 61.

## CONCLUSION

This paper discusses how I came to the decision to synthesize the literary convention of Fantasy with the Visual arts. It describes how Tolkien's concept for fantasy as I used it to describe a certain type of fantastic art, like *the Way of Color* or "*Untitled*" (*Portrait of Ross*) is the conceptual foundation for *Little Worlds*. Through this body of work, I have shown how I am able to visually express *Recovery*, *Escape*, and *Consolation*. Each is part of an experience.

*Recovery* is the space that prepares the viewer for the rest of the experience. *Escape* happens in the viewing of the work. The viewers are able to lose themselves in the viewing. By surrounding them in the sculptures, it is easier for the outside world to fall away. *Consolation* happens in the understanding of the work. *Little Worlds* being instantly recognizable as cities without any explanation or deeper understanding of the work does this. The viewer sees the sculpture, instantly knows what it is, and they experience *Consolation*. This experience only deepens when there are multiple layers of understanding for the viewer, if it was visually abstracted in its form there would be no chance for *Consolation* to happen<sup>63</sup>.

Through this fusion of fantasy and fine art I have created a body of work that is unique in its execution and conception. *Little Worlds* was created for a specific audience that is less interested in highly conceptual forms of fine art, and provides a unique way for that audience to interact and appreciate fine art. It postulates how experience is an essential part of this synthesis. Furthermore, this paper offers an alternative way to perceive value in the works of art, one that is not dependent on a monetary system of value, but one that is based on experience and the inherent value of a gift. It also allows the experience to transcend from the exhibition space to the home and how the audience was the impetus for the work.

In this way, I am actively adding a valued contribution to the greater lexicon of Sculpture and the larger body of knowledge that is Fine Art. It is the culmination of an exploration of my two intense interests – fantasy art in concept and fine art in construction but it is also the beginning of a unique approach in creating Fine Art and how to look at the visual arts. I am

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<sup>63</sup> Recognisability is the begging to *recovery*. My premise is that eucatastrophe in the visual arts comes with understanding. If the view has doubt or is uncertain of what a work of art is, either visually or conceptually, there will be doubt. That doubt will impede the viewer's ability to lose themselves in the work, and prevent the eucatastrophic moment.

incredibly satisfied with the exhibition *Little Worlds* however I see that there are still many avenues of research to explore within the concepts laid out in this paper and as many varied forms sculpture that can take to express those ideas. In this way I am excited to see what new worlds I will build, what new adventures await and what new experiences will come.

## FIGURES



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

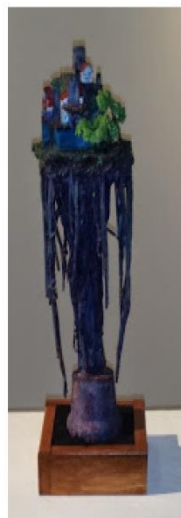


Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



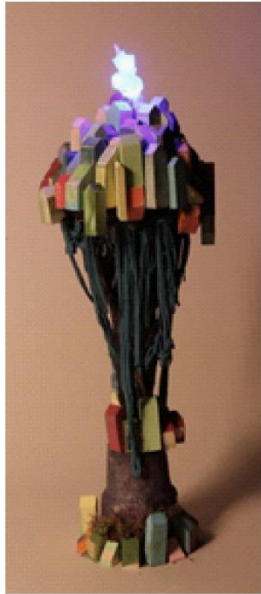


Figure 7

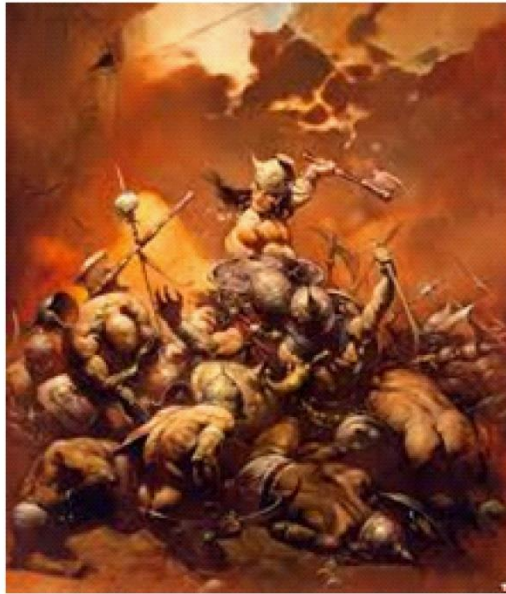


Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11

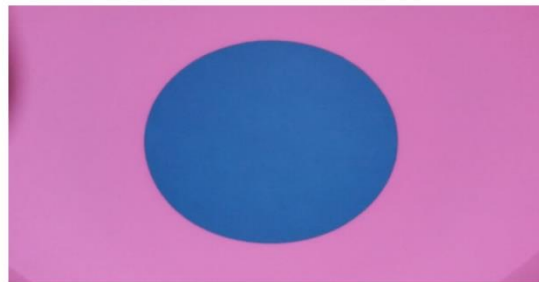


Figure 12

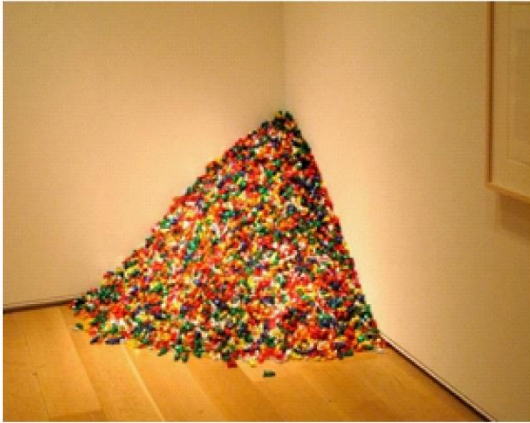


Figure13



Figure14



Figure15



Figure16



Figure17



Figure18





Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23



Figure 24

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