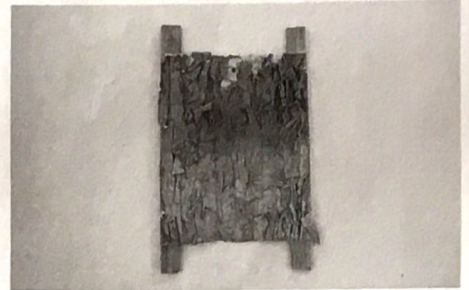


CHEMEKETA COMMUNITY COLLEGE COURIER BRIEF

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A collection of Matthew Boulay's mixed media pieces



Photos by David Diercks

Artist examines time, memory, and the wounds of war

BY MATTHEW SKOG

For artist Matthew Boulay, the Iraq war represents many things. It's a source of conflicting emotions – pride, anger, dismay – but it's also a source of creativity.

Boulay, a veteran, draws on his experiences in Iraq as a cornerstone of his art.

"I was in Iraq in 2003 as a Marine for the initial invasion all the way up to Baghdad, and then throughout the summer and early fall," he said. "I came home from Iraq pretty confused and trying to sort through some conflicting emotions.

"Part of me was proud – I certainly have a lot of respect and camaraderie with the other Marines – and part of me was angry. I was unsure if what we'd done as a country was effective and right."

As a way of coping with his experiences, Boulay found solace in reading the poetry of soldiers from the past.

"I really came to identify with them: in particular, the great war poets of World War I, like Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, and Robert Graves, poets who spoke in beautiful ways about their ghastly experiences from another time and in another part of the world," he said.

"I start by saying all of this because there's a lot of text in my show. The text is really important to me. Text is how I first started to make sense of my own experience. The art, in a sense, came after the text.

"I began doing this a few years ago as a way to express myself and these conflicted emotions through art. In many ways, I think the text and the art are in dialog with each other."

War, time, and memory are vital themes in Boulay's art.

"My subject is war," he said. "It's all about war, my experience with war, and how the country I think deals with war. My experience is really at the heart of what I've been doing.

"The war is a personal experience, but on a national level it's also a piece of our history. How do we create history? How do we remember history? Some things are remembered in our history, and some things are forgotten, and what does that process of collective memory look like? Why is it that we remember some things and forget others collectively? I think that's a large part of what I'm trying to explore through my work."

Boulay said he wanted gallery visitors to not only see his work but to experience it as well.

"There's a piece in the gallery with boots and shoes – the grass piece. I invite visitors to throw grass seed and to water the grass," he said. "I think that's fun for people.

"I've been to museums – you're not allowed to touch anything. I think it's fun to say it's OK to touch – not just touch, to sprinkle water on it, too.

"For me, this really is history. It's an effort to say to visitors that we all have a role in creating what ultimately is American

history. We are all part of that process of collective memory. The grass is a metaphor for the passage of time. With the passage of time, the grass grows. And through that passage of time, there's healing. The wounds of war can heal. But on the other hand, as we heal, we also forget.

"For me, there's ambivalence there. Should we forget? Is forgetting a necessary part of the healing? Or does forgetting literally mean not remembering what war is like – not remembering the sacrifices and the deaths – the wounds that so many people suffered?"

"But by asking people to sprinkle on the seeds and water the grass, I'm saying you can play a role here. You're part of the collective writing of history."

Boulay said that putting his work on display in Chemeketa's art gallery was a positive experience.

"I've been really happy and overwhelmed with the number of questions people ask, and when people tell me what they like and what they don't like," he said.

"There's an honesty that I've had with folks on campus that's been really wonderful and refreshing. It's been a lot of fun and a real privilege to be on campus. I've really appreciated the opportunity."

The Matthew Boulay exhibit is on display in the Gretchen Schuette Art Gallery in Bldg. 3-122 from now until Feb. 5.

2016
CHEMEKETA READS

January 19	1:30-2:30pm Bldg. 9/201
February 3	10:30-11:30am Bldg. 9/200
February 11	3:30-4:30p Bldg. 2/116
February 26	1:30-2:30pm Bldg. 9/200

Join one of the Chemeketa Reads discussion groups and share your experience reading *Spare Parts* by Joshua Davis

Chemeketa
CCAA/ADA Institution

Valentine's
Club Fair

Feb. 11, 2016
11am-2pm
Bldg. 2 Student Center

EQ/AA/ADA Institution