

THE BONES OF

SCULPTURE BY
DUSTIN FARNSWORTH



FEBRUARY 6 - JUNE 5, 2016

Seeking what is true is not seeking what is desirable.

Albert Camus

Somewhere between the realms of life and death, in the spaces of memory and reflection, we encounter the work of Dustin Farnsworth. Like the dusty shards of bone contained in a reliquary or the skull in a medieval Vanitas painting, his work engages the viewer in an inner dialogue on the drama of life and death, suffering and redemption. Leaving his narratives intentionally vague, Farnsworth encourages his audience to turn inward and reflect upon the psychic drama presented before them.

The Order of Lords (2015) greets the viewer with eyes closed and head tilted back by the weight of his satanic



The Order of Lords, 2015
Basswood, poplar, charcoal, various polychrome

collapse. A native of Lansing, Michigan, Farnsworth's works are informed by the collapse of industry and depict the rusted mementos of a bygone era in American culture

horns, like a medieval demon welcoming the damned into hell; though in this case not a hell of fire and brimstone, but of inner emotional struggle and outer societal

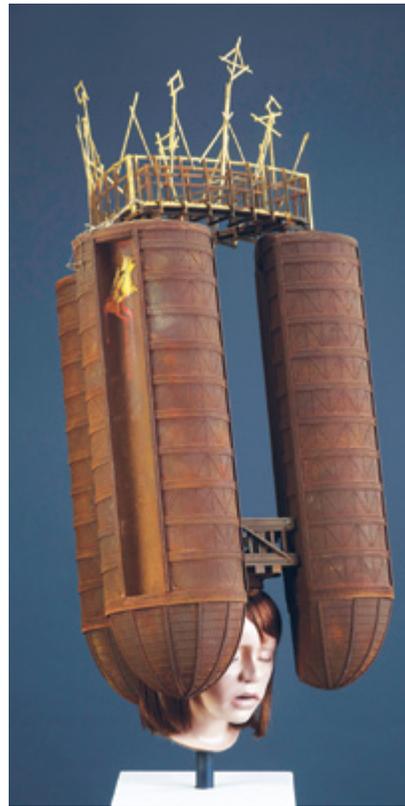
and their effect on a future generation who will inherit these shattered vestiges of a broken dream – the American Dream. In Farnsworth's world, the sins of the fathers are indeed being visited upon their children. His work is a social commentary on the anxiety of a region thrown into chaos. Formally, it embodies the harshness of Edward Kienholz, the nostalgia of Joseph Cornell, and the ecstatic drama of medieval devotional art. His commentary is affective and raw, moving the viewer on a visceral level well beyond mere shock-value, yet at the same time it expresses a melancholy longing, a wistful remembrance of times past. His figures are modern-day visionaries who articulate through emotionally wounded visages the angst of their dystopian revelations and the uncertainty of their futures.

The anguish associated with the industrial collapse is suggested through the use of the headdress, which expresses the ways in which emotional or psychological weight is carried. A physical manifestation of the weight of a fallen past, the headdress in *The Haunt* (2014) is a massive complex of industrial silos that all



The Haunt, 2014
Basswood, poplar, rope, steel, veneer, plywood, resin, various polychrome

but engulfs the tortured head beneath it. The head is tilted back imbued with pain and ecstasy; eyes rolled upward gazing somewhere beyond, rust pours like martyr's blood into one eye and down the face of this tortured soul tethered to a damaged and abandoned past like Saint Sebastian to his martyr's post. Likewise, in *Succession* (2014) and *Promontory* (2013) we read pathos and capitulation in the mournful faces bearing the weight of their neglected inheritance. Dramatic suffering such as this, one would hope, holds the promise of salvation.



Succession, 2015
Basswood, poplar, steel, bending plywood, human hair, various polychrome

Saint Ann's Theatre, 2012
Basswood, plywood, poplar, various fabrics, various polycoating



Shifting seamlessly between the visionary and the visual, at times Farnsworth's human dramas are acted out upon the framework of a theatrical stage, as in *Saint Ann's Theater* and *The Bones Of* (both 2012). In these

works, small figures toil in the darkness of dilapidated empty stages. In *Saint Ann's Theater* an elderly crone seated at the back of the stage appears to be busily tying tiny nooses that pile up on the floor around her. In front of her a large square hole in the floor resembles the trapdoor of a hangman's gallows; the broken beams of the theater's ceiling now all the more disturbing with this revelation. Is this the stage on which death is enacted in this theater of the macabre? Or are we merely witnesses to a repetitive manufacturing that cannot possibly sustain itself – an aimless future? Similarly,



St. Ann's Theatre [Detail]

in *The Bones Of* a despondent-looking black man dressed in collared shirt and tie sits in a burned-out ramshackle theater holding a single red rose. All the other roses strewn about the stage floor have been dipped into the can of black paint placed at his feet. What is the purpose



The Bones Of, 2012
Poplar, bendable plywood, plywood, veneer, basswood, various fabrics, various polychrome. Cameron Art Museum; Claude Howell Endowment for the Purchase of North Carolina Art, 2014.6.



The Bones Of [Detail]

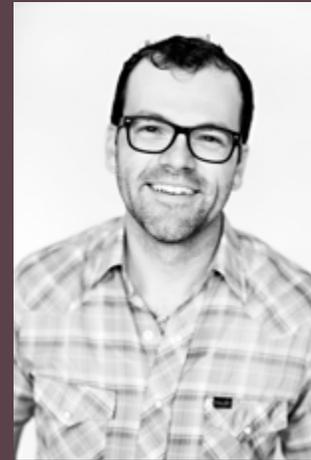
of this ritual and what is the meaning of this one remaining red rose? Is this an existential commentary on the absurd, or is it an acknowledgement of inescapable destiny? Or is it something else entirely? Ultimately it is the task of the viewer to “fall into and explore” the “emotionally charged rabbit holes” provided by Farnsworth; a journey of suffering and redemption that just might tell us as much about ourselves as it does about the work and world of Dustin Farnsworth.

Dr. Vibeke Olson
February 2016

Dr. Vibeke Olson is an Associate Professor of Medieval and Renaissance art in UNCW's Department of Art and Art History. Her current research considers sensory medieval devotional practices and visionary experiences, specifically the ways in which these practices and experiences inform viewer response to devotional imagery and relics.

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Dustin Farnsworth (American, b. 1983) received his BA in woodworking with a minor in printmaking from Kendall College of Art and Design, Grand Rapids, Michigan in 2010.

From 2012-2015 Farnsworth was a resident artist at Penland School of Crafts in Penland, NC. Currently he is a Windgate resident and Honorary Fellow at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

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February 6 - June 5, 2016

FRONT IMAGE:

Dustin Farnsworth (American, b. 1983)

The King is Dead, 2015

Basswood, poplar, various polychrome

Image courtesy of the artist

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This project is supported by the NC Arts Council,
a division of the Department of Cultural Resources



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