



Cort Savage

Interiorities: A Decade of Inevitable Form

This publication was produced in conjunction with Cort Savage, *Interiorities: A Decade of Inevitable Forms* in the Van Every Gallery, Davidson College, March 12–April 12, 2015.

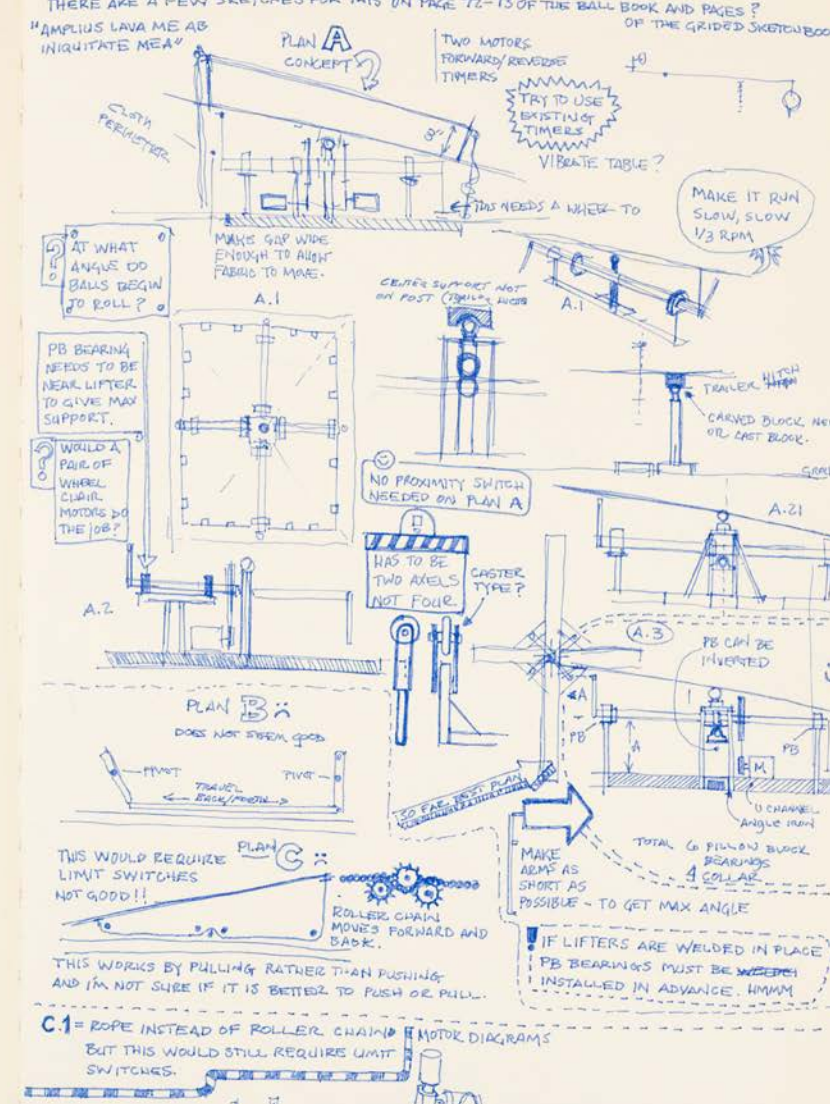
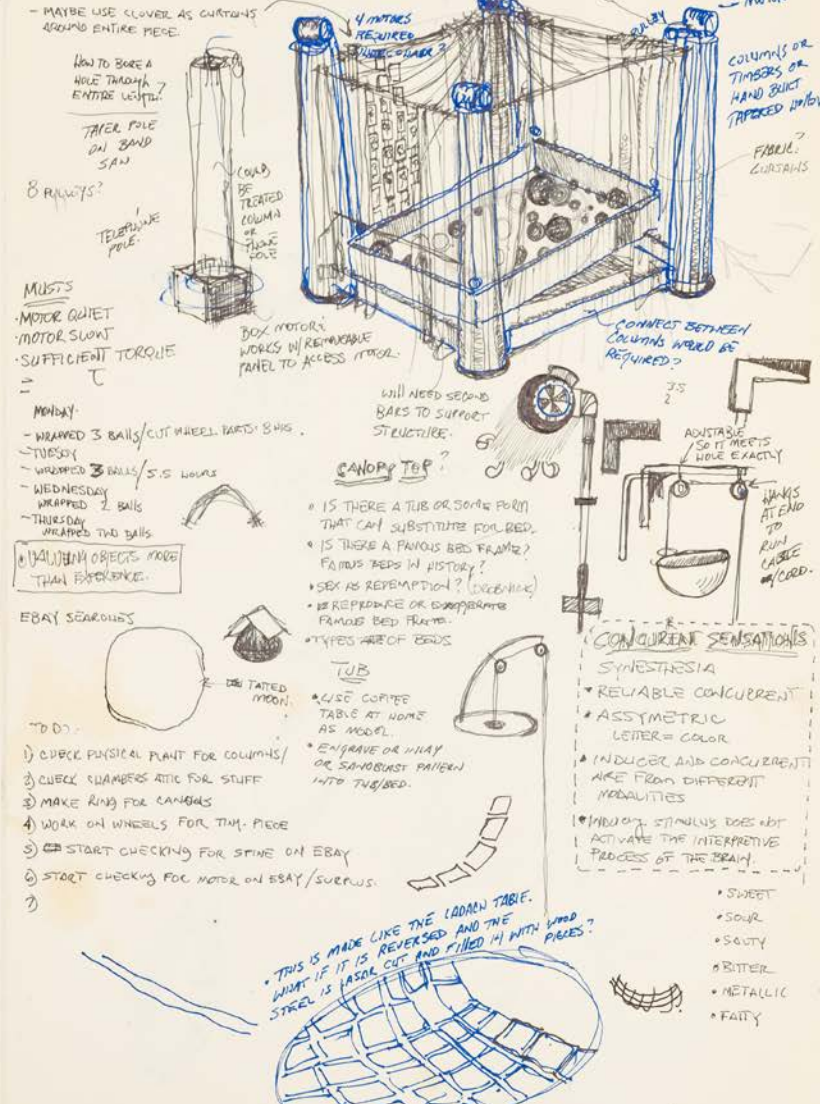
Publication © 2015
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ISBN: 978-189057316-4

Design: Graham McKinney
Printing: ImageMark

cover: *Piled Man*, 2005. Artist buried under Scattered Man. Photo Credit: Via Savage

opposite: *Pages from artist sketchbook*, 2014.





It is with great pleasure that the Davidson College Art Galleries present *Interiorities: A Decade of Inevitable Forms*. This exhibition presents, and perhaps more importantly, demarcates the conclusion of, a ten-year exploration by sculptor Cort Savage.

At Davidson College, Savage is recognized as a dedicated educator, deeply engaged in nurturing student development for more than two decades. While the Galleries – and faculty exhibitions in general – provide an intimate, comfortable space for sharing ideas and processes with other members of our community, with particular importance placed on the growth of our students, we cannot forget that Savage is also

a well-respected, accomplished artist. Thus, *Interiorities: A Decade of Inevitable Forms*, is an opportunity to honor one of our own – Cort Savage, as both an active creator and educator, immersed in the broader art world, but with a special place in our community.

The Galleries extend heartfelt gratitude to Cort Savage for his dedication to this project; Brad Thomas, for his thoughtful investigation into Savage's work; and last but not least, to Davidson College, for providing a space for enquiry, discussion, and presentation around creative endeavors.

– Lia Newman, Director/Curator,
Van Every/Smith Galleries

Installation view, *Interiorities: A Decade of Inevitable Forms*, Van Every Gallery, Davidson College, March 12–April 12, 2015. Photo: David Ramsey Photography



Artist Statement

I notice and appreciate the simple beauty of mass and gravity and time. As each sculpture in this series grew at an excruciatingly slow and absurdist pace, the profound nature of mass and gravity and time settled in me bit by bit. Bands accumulated like dust particles silently coalescing into planets. A bone's identity, its individuality and its ego all surrendered under layers of accumulated stretching and snapping. Every time a singular form emerged: an *Inevitable Form*.

The selections in this exhibition embody two primary gestures. One is the gesture of grasping or controlling. The other is the gesture of letting go or yielding. The Greeks originated the term *pneuma*: breathing in the life of the universe. As I wrap, I breathe and I wonder: When is the time to grip tightly or insist or control? When is the time to let go or yield or surrender?

While time passed and each inevitable form evolved, I contemplated my own *Interiorities*, recalling my individual experiences, observations and intuitions both literally and metaphorically. Such inwardly directed thought has been essential to making sense of life, the world, its institutions and others.

Many years ago a fellow artist gave me a piece of advice: Think in decades. I allowed this series a decade to unfold. It was sound advice. I found my own growth greatly facilitated by contemplating my interiorities, each sculpture giving rise to a few specific questions, shared in the Exhibition Checklist in this document.

– Cort Savage

opposite: *The Particle*, 2005, EPDM rubber bands, human skull, copper-covered copy of Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, X-ray.
Photo: David Ramsey Photography



Q&A between Cort Savage and Brad Thomas

BT: How did *The Inevitable Form* series develop?

CS: *The Inevitable Form* series was born out of an installation I created for the Cameron Museum in Wilmington, NC, in 2003 related to the hundredth anniversary of flight. I read somewhere that Orville and Wilbur had a rubber band powered airplane. I don't know if that is true, but I was interested in the idea of something as insignificant as a rubber band inspiring something with global impact of powered flight. I was also interested in strange objects that did not have a comfortable place in either the Art realm or the Craft realm. For example, I made a few earlier pieces by whittling chains and balls in cages out of wood because the form of expression did not have an easy place in either camp. Rubber band balls felt like a similar 'freak'.

BT: Many sculptors will admit that gravity presents the greatest challenge. Planetary bodies are the result of

gravity's gradual attraction and accumulation of matter. With *The Inevitable Form* series, you gradually wrap "charged" objects until they inevitably take on a spherical shape. How does this dance with gravity work?

CS: I enjoy it when something has every reason to make no sense or be unimportant but then ends up being very important. I also enjoy it when something builds very slowly until it becomes something monumental, like wind forming sand dunes, or a stalactite formed by tiny drops of water or dust swirling in the cosmos to ultimately form planets. In the first ball I created, I was surprised that it formed a sphere shape at all. I expected it to take on the shape of the form I was wrapping, which it did, for a while. But as time and layers progressed and pressure accumulated, the process we see in nature took over and then it became really interesting. There was a power that presented itself the more I took myself out of the process — a sort of intention

opposite: *Selbstberaubung*, 2007, EPDM rubber bands, human skulls, cow femur, X-rays. Photo: David Ramsey Photography

ality that was about something much bigger than me. For me, the strength is because they exist only and exactly as they are.

BT: If you tell me that there is a human skull encased in a rubber band ball, then my conscious mind will process that suggestion. Why, then, is it important to display accompanying X-rays of the objects with most of the sculptures?

CS: We have long since let go of the notion that a photograph provides us with a form of truth. I think a lot of people hold on to the notion that an X-ray still holds a kind of evidentiary truth. The X-ray is a photo that has the authority of science backing it up. The X-rays become metaphors for the authority of science in the artworks. There is a tension I'm trying to set up between what would appear to be one piece of evidence as suggested by the X-ray and another piece of evidence that is suggested by the object resulting from the process. The X-ray suggests the integrity of the intellect while the rubber band sphere suggests the integ-

uity of processes linked to physical process. Sometimes they support each other and sometimes they are pushing against each other.

BT: Perhaps one of your most ambitious projects was *Scattered Man* (2005). An entire human skeleton was deconstructed into 214 individual parts and each bone was wrapped until it resulted in a sphere. The spheres were then scattered about the gallery floor. Does the piece suggest an unease with mortality?

CS: When I was in undergraduate school, students had to choose between a sculpture program in the 'figure sculpture' which was modeling the human figure or 'constructive sculpture' which was primarily non-representational work through woodworking, welding and foundry. I completed both, and as a result, even when my work has been entirely non-representational, I always wanted it to have a consciousness of the human form. *Scattered Man* was for me the first time I attempted making a figurative sculpture with

the kind of integrity I was looking for. On the one hand it is quite literally a figure — an actual human skeleton. On the other hand, it presents as an entirely non-representational, almost minimalist, form. I enjoy how the final work does not focus on the figure in terms of gender or race or age. Its gesture is one of yielding. I see it as letting go of identity and ego and silently accepting its return to some source far bigger than itself. One of my favorite figurative works has always been the Greek Hellenistic sculpture, *The Dying Gaul* that depicts a gladiator's last moment prior to dying and addresses the question of how one maintains personal dignity in the face of one's mortal defeat. *Scattered Man* is my response to the same question. So while the question brings up perhaps the most challenging human experience, the work, I hope, actually embodies a kind of meditative calm and peace. When I think of all the time and care put into the wrapping and the quiet of the gallery space, I think this skeleton has been afforded an incredible amount of dignity. Not unlike a mummy. This particular skeleton was a

'retired' medical skeleton. I think in this form it continues to play the role of giving those who experience it the opportunity to contemplate, grow and learn about themselves and to see simultaneously how big and how small we all are.

BT: This exhibition concludes a decade of work. What's on the horizon?

CS: I'm interested to bring the kinetic back into my work if I can do it with some grace. I've been collecting four-leaf clovers and want to create something about wonder, joy and the seemingly impossible. I'm looking at the work of Jean Tinguely and Bernini and wondering how these two artists intersect with my own aesthetic and conceptual concerns. Moments of human vulnerability and acceptance are at the front of my mind these days.

— Brad Thomas,
Director of Residencies & Exhibitions,
McColl Center for Art + Innovation

Exhibition Checklist

Canons, 2011

EPDM rubber bands, X-rays, cast bronze human skulls — one holding the Quran, one holding the Tanakh, and one holding the Bible.

At what point does religious commitment shift into violence? How do we act when we cannot discern?

Maquette #1 for Two Hands Touching at One Point, 2009

Cast bronze.

Maquette #5 for Two Hands Touching at One Point, 2009

Cast bronze, steel.

Phenomenological Fissure, 2010

Bronze, EPDM rubber bands, disarticulated human hand bones.

To what extent can we truly comprehend another thing? To what extent can we truly comprehend ourselves?

Scattered Man, 2005

EPDM rubber bands, disarticulated human skeleton, each bone wrapped individually.

What do we become when we yield? How can we understand death as something beautiful? How can a sculpture be both literally figurative and entirely non-representational at the same time?

Selbstberaubung, 2007

EPDM rubber bands, human skulls, cow femur, X-rays.

At what point does Kant's Moral Imperative apply? When is an act against another an act against oneself?

Spitting Teeth, 2007

EPDM rubber bands, cast bronze, X-ray, human skull with teeth removed and wrapped individually.

What is the significance of final words? Does a dignified death mean refusing it or accepting it? What happens when the ego of the internal object reasserts itself by bursting out?

The Inevitable Form, 2003

EPDM rubber bands, fabricated steel, X-ray, print.

How much must an idea grow in us before we choose action over contemplation? What does it mean when every object wrapped becomes the same form? Is an x-ray the last photographic form accepted as 'real' or 'truthful'?

The Particle, 2005

EPDM rubber bands, human skull, copper-covered copy of Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, X-ray.

When is attempting to control or manipulate another human being a reasonable choice?

The Particle in Process, 2005

Video with sound, 1 min, 32 sec.

Two Hands Touching, 2014-15

EPDM rubber bands, steel, two disarticulated human hands from different individuals, each bone wrapped individually.

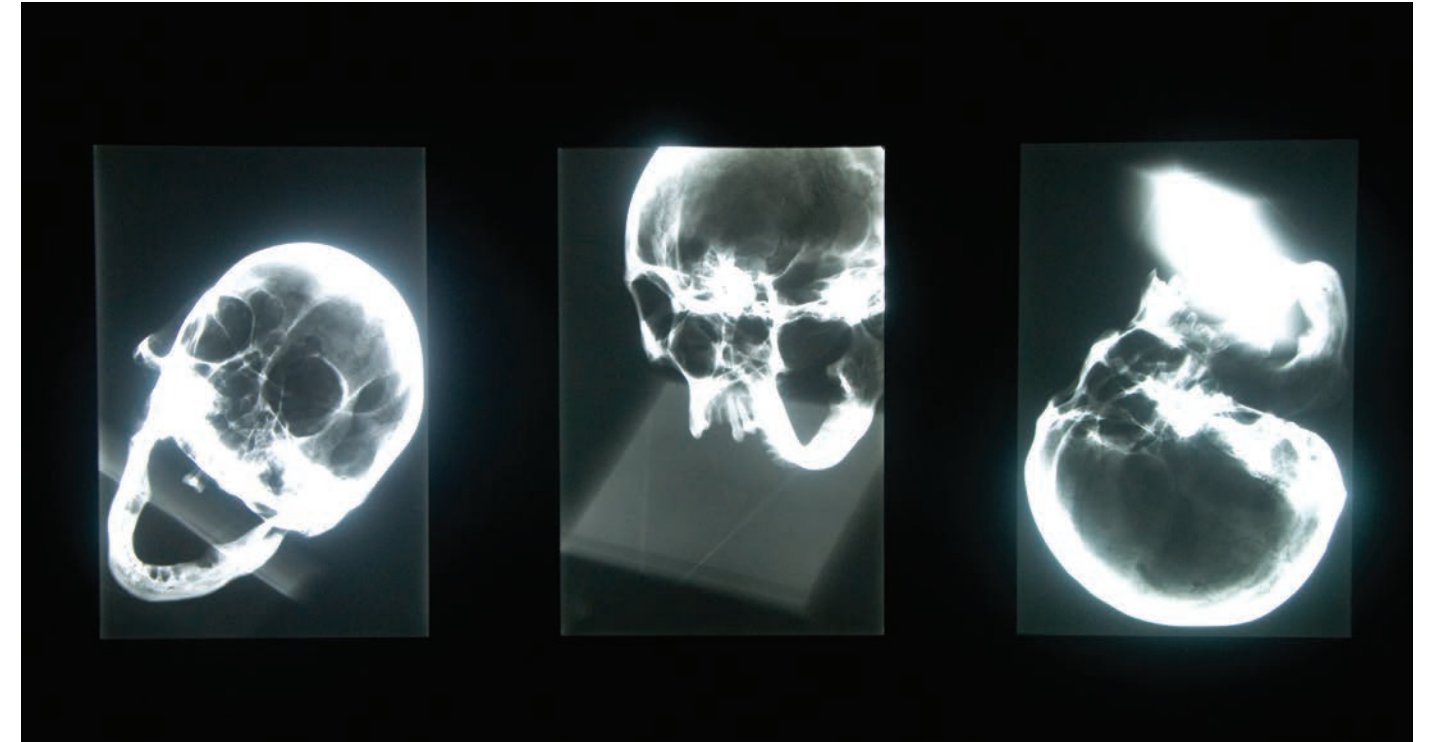
How close can two people get to completely knowing one another? What separates us? How well can a person know themselves? What separates us from ourselves?



Maquette #5 for Two Hands Touching at One Point, 2009, Cast bronze, steel. Photo: David Ramsey Photography.



above: *Maquette #1 for Two Hands Touching at One Point*, 2009, Cast bronze.
opposite: *Scattered Man*, 2005, EPDM rubber bands, disarticulated human skeleton,
 each bone wrapped individually. Photo: David Ramsey Photography



above: *Canons, detail*, 2011, EPDM rubber bands, X-rays, cast bronze human skulls — one holding the Quran, one holding the Tanakh, and one holding the Bible.

opposite: *Canons*, 2011, EPDM rubber bands, X-rays, cast bronze human skulls — one holding the Quran, one holding the Tanakh, and one holding the Bible. Photo: David Ramsey Photography



from left, all three images: *Spitting Teeth*, 2007, EPDM rubber bands, cast bronze, X-ray, human skull with teeth removed and wrapped individually.
Photo this page: David Ramsey Photography



above: *Phenomenological Fissure*, 2010, Bronze, EPDM rubber bands, disarticulated human hand bones.
 opposite: *The Inevitable Form*, 2003, EPDM rubber bands, fabricated steel, X-ray, print





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Cort Savage and Brad Thomas, Director of Residencies & Exhibitions, McColl Center for Art + Innovation



Artist Biography

Cort Savage completed his formal training with a BA in Fine Arts from Indiana University, Bloomington (Phi Beta Kappa) and MFA in sculpture from Syracuse University. He is currently Professor and Chair of Art at Davidson College in Davidson, North Carolina where he has taught Sculpture and Drawing for more than twenty years.

Savages' mixed media kinetic installations are inspired by an extended recovery period following a fall while rock-climbing. His works have been exhibited throughout the United States including at the Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, North Carolina; The Cameron Museum of Art, Wilmington, North Carolina; and the New Orleans Center for Contemporary Art, Louisiana. He has received grants and fellowships of support from organizations including the North Carolina Arts Council, the Southern Arts Federation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. He received the Arlin Meyer Prize presented by the Lilly Fellows Program for the creation of his installation *Scattered Man and the Particle*.

Two Hands Touching, 2014–15, EPDM rubber bands, steel, two disarticulated human hands from different individuals, each bone wrapped individually.

opposite: Pages from artist sketchbook, 2014.

