Loose Larry: A Binding of Non-Blood Story

Tyler Scott Cieplowski

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Loose Larry: A Binding of Non-Blood Story

by

Tyler Scott Cieplowski

Under the Direction of Ruth Stanford, MFA

ABSTRACT

Binding of Non-Blood combines found and fabricated objects interwoven with recorded spoken word stories by a narrator I identified only as “Man 1.” The stories include themes about coming-of-age, familial dynamics, gang-related activity, and an obscenity of war all originating from the initial directive, “tell me a story of friends who became closer than family.” This chapter focuses on a character who interacted with “Man 1” in a Motorcycle Gang in the 1970s by the name of Loose Larry. Throughout the installation, viewers are invited to eavesdrop on stories about Larry, which are presented anonymously from within the sculptures. Left without descriptors or characteristics of the narrator, the viewer is able to detach from any presumptions they may carry with them, and bring their own meaning to the stories. Binding of Non-Blood is intended to demonstrate how experiencing events together can unite individuals from a multitude of backgrounds and cultures.

INDEX WORDS: Sculpture, Spoken word, Found object, Casting, Metal casting
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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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2018
Loose Larry: A Binding of Non-Blood Story

by

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Family, Friends, and the Friends closer than Family.
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1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout my life, I have made connections with people from many walks of life and while some things are different, there are a lot of similarities between us all as humans. One of those similarities is that we, as humans, create bonds (an emotional connection between two or more people) that extend beyond blood relationship. While there are countless other similarities between everyone, currently, I am only interested in discussing the bonds people are mentally creating with others. Those bonds create situations where individuals or groups of people experience facets of life that can alter the way that they go about their everyday life. Mentally, they can be and in my experience often are reflecting on those bonds and the memories that they have created with these people.

These memories are carried with the individual, even after the bonds have been stretched or lost through death or choices to leave the lifestyle they were living at the time the connections were made. While these memories are carried with the people who are the subjects of this body of work, they have developed lives that have extended past the memories of previous lives. Memories affects the lives that they are currently living. Trauma can affect memory as well as true and false narratives in the conscious and unconscious mind. Memory affecting the self and how the self affects the memory. While some of the research that I have found has shown that there are ways for the subject to repress the memories of trauma, it is also possible for them to be false memories.

Within my work I plan to discuss how the stories led to the creation of the objects they are presented with. The viewer is welcomed to listen to the story and judge whether the story is a true or false narrative, through the narrator’s use of language and the language of the object in relation to the story. “Man 1” as I will call the narrator for the purpose of anonymity, is the focus
of this body of work, specifically in his previous gang life. He has since separated from and cut all ties from the motorcycle club with which he was affiliated.

In this thesis, I look at some of the things from my past that have led to this body of work. Growing up surrounded by stories and storytellers, not only influenced my work, but me as a person. I will also discuss how I came to know about some of the stories that “Man 1” has lived. In getting to know “Man 1”, through informal interactions, helped me feel comfortable enough to ask him for permission to record some of his stories. I will also talk about artists and works that have influenced me over the years. Artists that have continually come back into my attention include Ed Kienholz, Joseph Beuys, Erwin Wurm and Robert Ashely’s performance and recording for example *Now Eleanor’s Idea*. These have influenced my work in many ways, from the presentation of the physical objects, to collection and narrative style of the spoken word aspects of the pieces.

2 Background

I was born in a small southern town on the coast of South Carolina, where storytelling is a way of life. I was surrounded by family and friends who not only had a knack for storytelling, but had a life full of adventures to go along with it. Some of these stories were fabricated, but most were factual events from the narrators’ past. Each story I was told by my family was an event that had a direct influence on them. Some of the stories were about life lessons while others were reminiscent on time with family members and the adventures that they had together. Even the stories that were fabricated and told to me as a child as a bedtime story contained
elements from our culture and were started with an element of truth. No matter the origin they were always entertaining and helped bring me to where I am now as an artist and a person.

The stories that were told to me as a child led me to realize, that while some are better story tellers than other, everyone has an interesting past and memories that influenced them. I was introduced to “Man 1” through a mutual friend for the purpose of work on cars. While we would work on cars “Man 1” would tell us about some of the cars he worked on in the past and how they would break or how they would need to be worked on. His mood also seemed to influence the stories that he would tell varying to a variety of subjects. After knowing “Man 1” for a while and hearing what I felt like was a good portion of his stories I started to feel more and more comfortable with him and I felt him becoming more comfortable with me. Once I felt like we had a good rapport between us I asked him in passing if I could sit down with him and record some of the stories that he has told me. The first time I asked he seemed hesitant and unsure about being recorded but agreed to think about it. I ran into him a little while later and mentioned it in passing again this time he agreed to it on a couple of conditions. The first was that he was to remain anonymous and the second was that if he changed his mind on telling me a story I would have to delete it. We sat down on a day and he asked what I wanted to hear stories about I then presented him with “I want you to tell me a story about friends who became closer than family.” What followed was an hour and a half interview with me hardly saying anything and never asking a follow up. However, to know how I got here we need to take a step back and look at how some of my artwork over the years and the artist who had a direct influence on each work.

At the start of my artistic practice I was coming out of focusing my studies in Biology and with a concentration in Marine and Coastal Life. With such bodies of work as *Circle of Life* a piece that calls into question what is the most important species of an ecosystem, in this case the
salt marshes. Circle of Life was an installation consisting of three sculptures *Stalking Through The Grass* (Figure 1), *Beautiful Savory Swimmer* (Figure 2) and *BIRD* (Figure 3). The sculptures were placed on pedestals that were the same height so that one is not over another making their status as the same. All the sculptures were placed around the room in a semicircle so that they looked at each other, suggesting that they are all could be the victim of prey of each other. The individual sculptures in *Circle of Life* is based on animals in the ecosystem and built in Abstract Realism. In this regard, I am defining Abstract Realism as representing an object while only giving a few details on what the original object is, a merger between a direct realistic copy of the object and pure abstraction. Abstract Realism is the aesthetic for a large portion of my work, even in video and sound based pieces.

![Figure 1. Tyler Cieplowski, Stalking Through the Grass, Ceramic and metal 2014](image)
The next example is *Red Raggon* (Figure 4), a found object and video installation based on a 1964 Ford Galaxie 500 door. The car door was inverted into a position suggesting the car is no longer operational with a video projecting on the inside of the door and on the glass. It is also suggestive of Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* (Figure 5) in that it is a found object and inverted so that it is no longer functional. The video is shot from the perspective of a car driving down a two
lane road that transitions into a four lane. It is looped to suggest this is the car’s potential last ride and it is remembering a part of life before it was abandoned. The memory video is abstracted, and incomplete, not showing the car’s origin or destination; this is to suggest a disruption and imperfections in the memory. The abstraction continues into my work that is primarily sound.

Figure 4. Tyler Cieplowski, Red Ragoon, Found object video projection, 2015
Coyote Sound Box 1 (Figure 6) is the first example of the Abstract Realism being continued into sound in my work. The box dimensions are 48x33x16.5 inches, and is based on the relative size of a coyote standing with not much room to turn around or do anything inside of the box. The work is built with common building materials of metal and wood to symbolize a city and crates used to house animals for temporary purposes. Coming from within the box is a collection of sounds that are edited together to invoke a city evolving into a place where coyotes are living and thriving. The sounds were collected from around the city of Atlanta, Georgia, as well as in various places in the Southwest region of the United States. A Soundscape is a term first popularized by R. Merry Schafer as a collection of sounds presented in a new space.¹ My Soundscape is one making up a fictitious city where there are sounds that seem part animal and

part mechanical with obvious city sounds that evolve into clear animal sounds. In this example the sound is in primarily in Abstract Realism, while the sculpture is more of a pure abstraction. R. Merry Schafer has not only influenced me with his theories but with recordings like *Vancouver Soundscape 1973* a direct recording of Vancouver, Canada. Although Schafer did not edit his piece the way I edited mine, it nonetheless had an influence on creating this piece.

Representing a time in a specific city in my Soundscape, the coyote sounds come in at the end symbolizing a change where the wild animal is repopulating and taking over areas of the city. The coyote has implications that expand beyond the animal as Joseph Beuys explored in his Action *I Love America and America Loves Me* from 1974 (Figure 7). In my exploration, I am interested in the coyotes’ ability to adapt to any situation like their infiltration into Chicago city limits.² The coyote is not only moving into the city but thriving in every respect. The adaptation and evolution of the species is what I was attempting to convey in *Coyote Sound Box 1*.

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Figure 6. Tyler Cieplowski, Coyote Sound Box 1, Metal Wood recorded sound, 2016

3 THEORY OF LARRY

*Loose Larry* is based on a collected story from “Man 1” about some of the memories of past lives. While the whole collection spans almost all of Man 1’s life, the story we will be focusing on is from the 1970s and his affiliation with a gang member who went by the name Loose Larry. The story was recorded around November 2017 some 40 years after the event, although there isn’t an exact date for the incident that was given by “Man 1.” This amount of time can influence the memories that we have but there are ways to combat the memory loss through recounting the story. That amount of rehearsal is distinguished as a “maintenance and elaborative rehearsal,” by *Autobiographical Memory: Remembering What and Remembering When*. Claiming that simply recalling the information mentally over and over passively can lead to a weak memory while digging into the information and attempting to somehow connect it to previous knowledge will produce a better recall of the information when needed.¹ I do not know how much this story was rehearsed and dug into by “Man 1” but part of the lead I gave to him was to tell me stories as they came to him in free association and that he thought about frequently. The method of free association is also described as Involuntary and Voluntary Remembering, which so-and-so in *The Act of Remembering* defines. The one I am focusing on is event-cueing memory chain. This is where the subject is at first a response to a cue much like what I started the recording session with.² After I gave “Man 1” the prompt of “tell me about some friends that have become closer than family” what followed was over an hour and a half of stories that started with his life in the

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² Mace, John H. *The act of remembering: toward an understanding of how we recall the past*. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 47
Motorcycle Club, wandered into Vietnam and the Marine Corps, and Man 1’s family life before and after the Corps with me giving little to no input on where the stories might lead to next. The only leading of the stories that took place after the initial prompt was when “Man 1” became emotional to the point of not being able to speak anymore and saying, “That’s all I can talk about that” when talking about his time in Vietnam and gave another prompt to the Motorcycle Club life.

Emotion is another powerful indicator of memory retention and how the memory is coming from the subconscious to the conscious mind. The emotional mood of the subject can influence the ability to cue memories that have some type of emotional relevant aspect to it. Therefore, if the subject is in a happy mood they are more likely to recall an event that is more positive and a subject in a sad or depressed mood is more likely to recall a negative memory. The second prompt was more an attempt to change his mood verse changing the subject directly. As I already mentioned, when “Man 1’s” mood changed his stories would alter course, this time his stories changed his mood verses his mood on the stories. Once his mood changed back to a more positive one “Man 1” opened back up and finished his narrative with family. Through the whole recording you can hear the pitch of “Man 1’s” voice change over the course the interview but we are going to stay in the one recorded section of just over four minutes making up *Loose Larry*.

*Loose Larry*, the first chapter of *A Binding of Non-Blood Story*, is a collection of stories where the prompt, “tell me about friends that have become closer than family” that even expand

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past “Man 1” into other individuals. An artist who influenced this decision is Robert Ashely’s performance of *Now Elenore’s Idea* (Figure 8) in how the parts of the story overlap and combine with each other. Series of books, music and television shows like, but not limited to, Suzanne Collins’ *Hunger Games*, J Cole’s album *4 Your Eyez Only*, and *Gangland* are another influence of this work. All of them treat the viewer as a silent part of the group, clueing into details that only the members of the family, selected few, or witnesses/participants know of. *A Binding of Non-Blood Story* is a more of a discrete process of recording in which the viewer is almost feeling as though they are eavesdropping on the conversations that would only happen in front of or with people closer than family. There were previous renditions I want to discuss along with the artists that lead to the final setting.


The vessel for the sound is selected from an aspect of the story, in the case of *Loose Larry* a 1970s Motorcycle gas tank. The gas tank was placed onto a fabricated frame that is positioned on a stool in a way to imply that the motorcycle is in the process of crashing as well as becoming a
stand in for the human figure (Figure 9). A second stool accompanies the vessel and is intended for the viewer to sit and listen to the audio. Erwin Wurm’s One Minute sculptures played a role leading to this interaction between the viewer and object. For example in *Deep Snow* (Figure 10) the viewer is asked to stand in two holes cut in the table and the table is brought up around the thighs. Wurm also changes the intended position of objects and potential viewers in *Just About Virtues and Vices In General* (Figure 11). I place the objects in a semi-distorted way, in order to break the original intent and to draw the attention of the viewer. In my work the human element is consistently present, either through viewer participation, or in actions and placement of objects in the sculptures themselves.

*Figure 9. Tyler Cieplowski, Loose Larry (Rendition 2), Found object Spoken word audio Metal, 2016*
Figure 9. Erwin Wurm, Deep snow, 2017, https://www.erwinwurm.at/artworks/one-minute-sculptures.html

Figure 10. Erwin Wurm, Installation shot of Just About Virtues and Vices In General, 2017, http://www.erwinwurm.at/artworks/sculptures.html
The actions and placement of the objects being presented as signs of the human element in sculpture continues in Joseph Beuys’ work with his interest in universal social concerns. His work is a look at larger global concerns, while mine are more focused on connections of smaller factions of the population. At this point, I am more interested in his handling of the objects versus the scale of our respective social interactions. *The Pack* (Figure 12) is a sculpture that I frequently recall of Beuys’s showing the human element without the figure being directly present. The sleds seem to be coming out of the back of the Volkswagen van based simply on the direction of the lights and the sleds themselves. The sleds seem to be laid out in a way that a group of people are about to depart on their way back from where they came, or head off where they were going in the van. All of this has led me to the final rendition of *Loose Larry: A Binding of Non-Blood Story.*

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4 THESIS SHOW

The final display of *Loose Larry: A Binding of Non-Blood Story* (Figure 13) was a full room installation that included cast paper, cast paper, cast resin, found objects and video all had a portion of the spoken word story. Every object was selected to correlate with a portion of the narrative. The total hour and a half interview was paired down to a four minute segment where “Man 1” directly refers to a fellow gang member who went by the name of Loose Larry. There are two stories and several other details that are shared about him. They are then separated into the individual stories and were then broken down further into in 13-45 second segments for each object. Each portion of the story to has been edit to either include or exclude portions of the
narrative to give the suggestion that the viewer is eavesdropping and not picking up every detail of the story.

![Image of an installation art piece with various objects and lighting.]  

*Figure 12. Tyler Cieplowski, Loose Larry: A Binding of Non-Blood Story (installation), 2018*

The *Trip to Florida* pieces (Figure 14) include three wall hanging objects that do not contain a sound and three pedestal based objects that do. These objects are based on a trip that “Man 1” and Larry took to Florida where they ran into another individual, at a bar, that owed Larry money. Starting from left to right, in 22 (Figure 15) instead of trying to collect the money Larry decided to kill the man, pulls a 22 from his pocket and shoots the man who owes him money in the back of the head. As described in the audio the round was ineffective in killing him and went around under the skin. This led me into cast the empty 22 brass casings inside of the clear resin (Figure 16) that is on top of the pedestal. After the shots were fired the man who owed Larry money was pissed and started to a fight between the two. The paper casting above the pedestal in figure 15 is meant to be Larry realizing who the person is and before the start of the fight and is intact and whole (Figure 17). This selection of *Loose Larry* has the most details presented and the longest audio of all the stories in part because “Man 1” gave the most details in this story. In
my opinion this could be in part because it was a traumatic event so more details ingrained in to his memories of the day.

Figure 13. Tyler Cieplowski, Trip to Florida, Cast Paper Cast Resin with Brass Found Object Recorded Spoken word, 2018

Figure 14. Tyler Cieplowski, 22, Cast Paper Cast Resin with Brass Recorded Spoken word, 2018
Figure 15. Tyler Cieplowski, 22 (Detail), Cast Resin with Brass Recorded Spoken word, 2018

Figure 16. Tyler Cieplowski, 22 (Detail), Cast Paper, 2018
Moving to the middle selection of the three, *Outside* (Figure 18), is an empty pedestal with another paper casting above. The empty pedestal’s audio, “Man 1”, goes on to say that a cop just happened to pass by the bar just as the shots were being fired with a portion of the audio left off. The pedestal is intentionally left empty because the events he is discussing are happening outside of the bar, and “Man 1” doesn’t give any further details. The paper casting that is above the pedestal is starting to crack, symbolizing that the fight is continuing (Figure 19). The last pedestal, *Cops* (Figure 20), is filled with aviator style sunglasses implying that the police filled the bar after the shots were fired. This portion of the audio is intentionally edited out, but what is audible is “Man 1”, stating that “this guy was kicking Larry’s ass and he wasn’t going to help” using the excuse of “stupid fucker he shot em, I’ll let him loose real bad then I’ll jump in” this statement is directed at the cast paper that is above the pedestal (Figure 21). The paper is becoming misshapen, cracking and tearing as a result of Larry losing the fight with the man who he shot. A portion of this story was displayed in the bathroom for the reception only. It was only displayed during that time for two reasons. The first is clueing back to eavesdropping and being in the right place at the right time to hear something. The second is based on the story, “Man 1”, and continues to discuss the cops who filled the bar, interviewing everyone who was present then. At the time of the shooting he then stops and yells to everyone “look all you fuckers couldn’t have been in the bathroom! ..... ah hell no.” so if you weren’t present for the event, like the cops weren’t, you would be left out of the loop. The word “fucker” was also replaced with the click from a zippo due to it being placed in a public area of a school property. *Everyone in the Bathroom* (Figure 22) was cast Hydrocal filler necks from a motorcycle gas tank with the opening closed off implying that the witness are not going to discuss what they saw. In total
there was 102 Hydrocal castings, split with 51 in the men’s and women’s restroom suggesting that there is a large number of people of each sex.

*Figure 17. Tyler Cieplowski, Outside, Cast Paper Recorded Spoken word, 2018*
Figure 18. Tyler Cieplowski, Outside (Detail), Cast Paper, 2018

Figure 19. Tyler Cieplowski, Cops, Cast Paper Found Object Recorded Spoken word, 2018
The next story is also in a bar, where Loose Larry, “Man 1” and other members of the motorcycle gang go to a bar and play a game called Designated Drunk. The first object is a video that is being played on a loop lying flat inside of one of the pedestals mimicking the top of a
table (Figure 23). In the video, a quarter is being flipped onto a table where there is only one flip that results in a tails as the result is to signify the loser being selected to be the Designated Drunk and stay sober while everyone else gets to drink. *Outcome of Designated Drunk* is accompanied by a silver stool (Figure 24) with the audio discussing how the game is played and how the loser is to act when leaving the bar. “Man 1” goes to say that once everyone is ready to leave, the Designated Drunk walks from the bar stumbling, struggles to start the bike and drives off bobbing and weaving so the cops follow the loser and everyone else goes out the other way. In this case Larry played the role too well and ended up crashing his bike into a telephone pole. This is being acted out by the tank being inverted into such a position to where it would be almost impossible to recover from. The stool is meant for the viewer to sit with the object in a way becoming a participant in the game itself.

![Figure 22. Tyler Cieplowski, Quarter, Video, 2018](image-url)
Huff (Figure 25) is another object that the viewer was intended to interact with and become a part of the piece. The viewer was to kneel and place head close to the cast Aluminum quarter tank (Figure 26) and then listen to the audio, much like some of the One minute sculptures by Erwin Wurm mentioned earlier. Within the original audio “Man 1” tells us that Loose Larry loved to huff anything he could get his hands on and even glued his face to the floor with a glue for leather and that he was still a good dude even though he lost his mind from it. After the edits the only audible portion was “Fucker was nuts, he lost his mind. But he was still a good dude… yeah he was a good dude.”
The next detail that “Man 1” gives us continues to speak about Larry being a good person to those who he liked. *Like You* (Figure 27) is a found object, a white T-shirt to go along with the audio that is being repeated of “if he liked you there wasn’t anything that he wouldn’t do for you.” Before the edit the audio continued to say that “he would be standing in the soaking rain and would give you the shirt off his back just so you won’t get wet.” While the shirt on the pedestal is not wet it is dingy, worn and loosely draped across the top as if placed there by Larry after taking it off.
The sculptural object, *Dead Larry* is a cast aluminum tank that is half the size of the original green tank (Figure 28). The polished portion across the top of the tank is potentially like that of “Man 1’s” memory of Loose Larry since there seems to be have a glimmering outlook of him based off the memories that were shared during this interview. My assumption on his positive outlook is based on “Man 1’s” laughing during the interview specify talking about Loose Larry. This piece has the shorted segment of audio at 13 seconds. It is a loop of Man 1 saying “Loose Larry, I can say his name cuz he’s dead, Loose Larry he’s dead.” The pedestal of the *Dead Larry*
piece is designed in such a way to invoke a head stone because of how thin and wide it is (Figure 29). The Aluminum casting is shrunken in comparison to the original, to fit the headstone shaped pedestal and his potentially shortened life, due to his choices in life. A life, which was, filled with events that are questionable in nature and from the details that were given primary in a bar.

Figure 27. Tyler Cieplowski, Dead Larry, Cast Aluminum Recorded Spoken word, 2018
In an attempt to recreate the bar vibe, I took a few steps to suggest the gallery was becoming one. With creating the bar vibe, I am not only trying to recall the places where some of these events took place, but also where you could overhear stories like these. The show title sign (Figure 30) made out of green neon to recall the green that was on the original tank. In having a sign that produces a light, I intentionally used small amount of lighting on the individual pieces. This also adds to the feeling of being in a dimly lit bar. The artist statement for the show was also printed on a certificate and framed (Figure 31). The certificate was intended to be like a liquor license and give a degree of credibility to the show along with giving it a stamp of approval.

Figure 28. Tyler Cieplowski, Dead Larry (Detail), Cast Aluminum Recorded Spoken word, 2018
*Loose Larry: A Binding of Non-Blood Story* is the first installment of full room installation that is based on a portion of a recorded narrative. Every object was made to correlate to the portion of the narrative contained inside it. Much like the chapters of a book, I plan to continue into the total hour and a half interview to show different parts of “Man 1’s” life. In this installation there the two stories, not only telling us about Loose Larry, but about “Man 1” himself. The viewer is in this limbo between eavesdropping and being included into the divulgation of information based on the amount of time that is spent listening to each sculpture and chapter.
REFERENCES


