

Response to Bill O'Donnell

Bill O'Donnell is a professor at ISU, and a photographer. For this presentation, he talked about the progression of his work over 34 years. The earliest series he talked about was titled *Childhood Memories*, and it was based on daily life or detailed events from his childhood. These photos were all black and white images. One photo of a woman in a kitchen stands out in my mind because it was taken low to the ground, possibly from the perspective of a child.

He is interested in the idea of “unconscious play” and the instinct to create or as he called it, “re-present”. He explored this interest in a series titled *Diddles*, in which he cut figures out of magazines and took photos of them in spaces with unbelievable proportions. He talked about his process of preparing for a photo, saying he would do a “casting call” to find the right characters for the photo. I appreciated the imaginative way he thought about the selection process and how he can have fun with his work. I also related to this playful method of creating because I made paper dolls when I was a kid and made different clothes for them.

When he started talking about the series titled *Human Remains*, he mentioned that at this stage in his career he was returning to ideas he had in past work. He explained his interest in people leaving their marks on the world. He described it as “I am. I was”. For example, one photo showed a handprint on a rock similar to the ones made in caves by blowing pigment. He said his interest specifically lied within the second right after the print was made. He appreciated how it could last so many years, still looking exactly the same as that moment. He is also interested in the fragility of human life, which I think goes along with the idea of wanting to leave a mark on the world while we are here. His interest in the afterlife is something that has stayed with him throughout his career.

With his current work, he is still in the playing phase and exploring his ideas. The photos he showed of the new work had a very different feel to them than the older photos. He went from detailed photos of “re-created” scenes in dollhouses to close up photos of objects. The zoomed in composition creates is disorienting. It was difficult for my eye to figure out what was what in the image. This visual confusion kept me looking.

I related to his work because it was autobiographical, which is something I recently decided to try in my own work. I have always been afraid to explore personally difficult content. I am not sure how it will feel to be vulnerable in my artwork. I do not believe that all art needs to be personal or autobiographical to be successful, but I think it is definitely worth trying. I appreciated the balance he was able to achieve between giving the audience too much or too little information. His photos were relatable because they often depicted familiar objects, but there was an element of mystery, which allowed for open-ended interpretations. Right now, I feel like I am possibly offering too much information, but I hope I can find a balance that works for me.