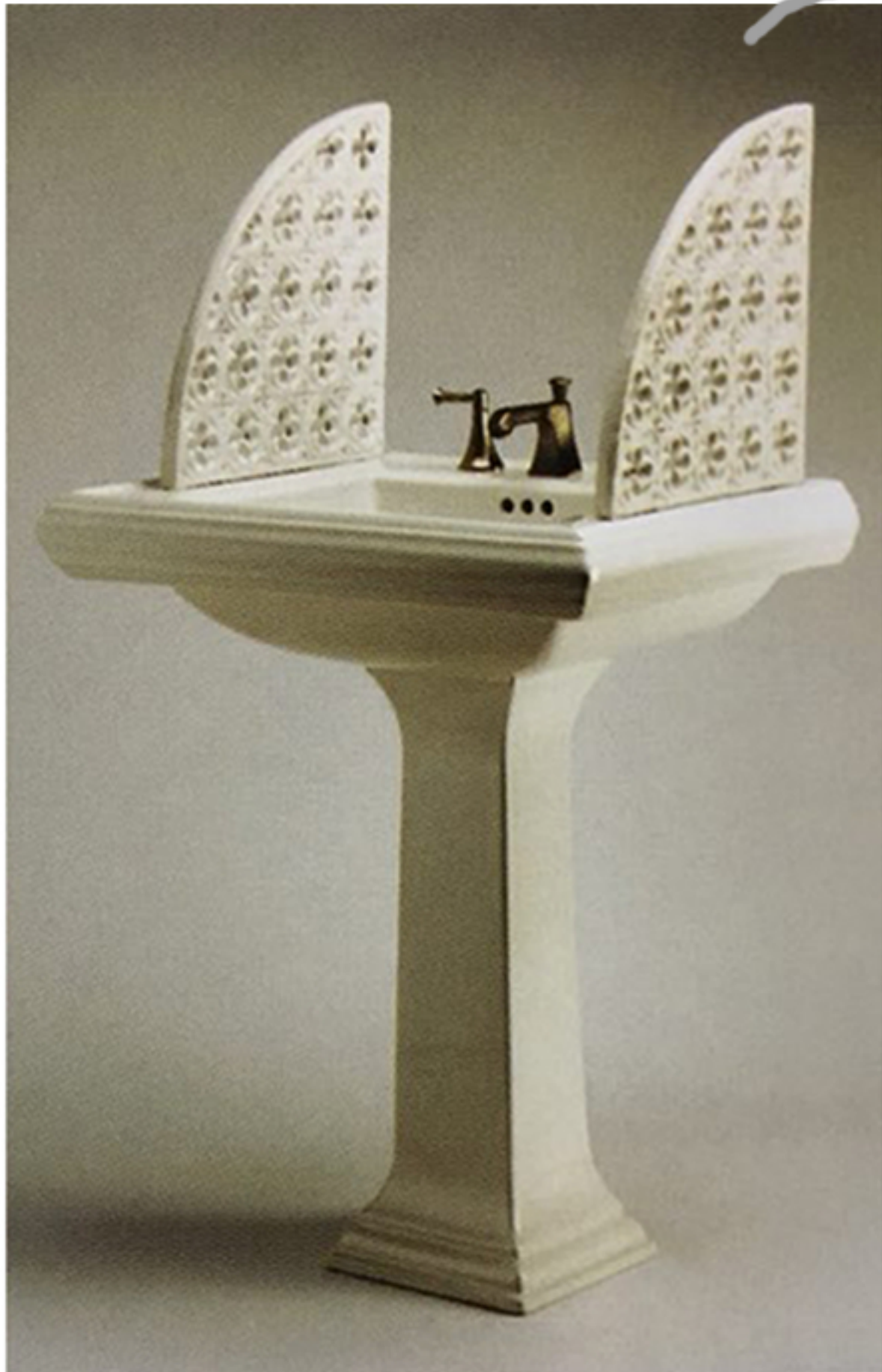


COMPARATIVE STUDY

Rejection of logic and expressions of nonsense are key concepts of Dadaism. Meret Oppenheim, Justin Novak, and Tony Marsh manipulated the Dadaist idea into their artworks shown below through considering the functionality of objects. Oppenheim and Marsh use loss of functionality and Novak uses an alteration of functionality. Oppenheim created this work more than 60 years before the other two artists. For the later two artists, there was also a significant investment in technique. This takes the work a step further than the work of artists who came before them. Also, all three artists turn familiar objects into unfamiliar form to arouse the curiosity of audience. They all have actual negative spaces in their artworks, however, Novak and Oppenheim's purpose is for subject recognition; Marsh's purpose is exactly the opposite.



Confessional Sink, Justin Novak, 2004, Slip-cast vitreous china; Kohler Factory through the Arts/Industry Program at John Michael Kohler Art Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin.



Object (Fur Breakfast), Meret Oppenheim, 1936, Fur-covered cup, saucer and spoon, overall height 2 7/8" (7.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Perforated Bowl with Elements, Tony Marsh, 1997, Earthenware, 16.5 x 49.5 x 39.7 cm, Gift of Garth Clark and Mark Del Vecchio

Identification and Analysis of Formal Qualities

Object (Fur Breakfast), Meret Oppenheim, 1936, Fur-covered cup, saucer and spoon, overall height 7.3 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Oppenheim uses **fur-covering technique and process** to create an **unity** between these three various objects — cup, saucer, and spoon — which forms a **unity with variety relationship**. Also, the combination of gazelle fur¹ with manufactured tea sets forms a **biomorphic verses geometric contrast**. Such contrasts arouse audience's interest and query.



Moreover, the **actual negative spaces**, concave part and the handle, make the tea sets easily recognizable. This helps audience to realize that this artwork is a combination of fur and tea sets. It is naturalistic if we view the fur and the cup individually, but by combining such **unexpected materials** together, the **level of abstraction will be ambiguous**. Also, the texture of these three objects should be smooth, but the fur brings them an **abstract fuzzy texture**. This creates an odd and disgusting sensation — imagine drinking from this furry cup!

primary resource (the fur from a coat & a cup)

Interpretation of Function and Purpose

Critical Hypothesis: Oppenheim uses unexpected combination of materials and turns familiar objects into an ambiguous abstracted form in order to comment on traditional view of women. Furthermore, *Fur Breakfast* is influenced from both Dadaism and Surrealism which challenges the concept and aesthetic of art.

Object (Fur Breakfast), Meret Oppenheim, 1936, Fur-covered cup, saucer and spoon, overall height 7.3 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Polite tea sets represents the traditional view of women that consider women's job as just preparing tea at home and serving people. However, Oppenheim is a strong feminist who claims that men and women should be treated equally. She once said that: "the creation of art had nothing to do with one's gender, but was a product of both the male and female sides of the artist's psyche²." Oppenheim indirectly suggests erotic elements in this artwork — the concave furry part of the cup implies of women's private part, the spoon and the handle implies of sexual intercourse.

Oppenheim uses gazelle fur, an unusual object, to cancel out the daily object of the tea sets. This fur-covering process and combination of unexpected material confuses audience. They might consider it as nonsense and ask "is this Art?". This is exactly what Dadaism all about (more detail about Dadaism will be presented in next page). Oppenheim applies one of the concepts of Dadaism — turn functional piece into useless form — to form nonsense and illogical. By doing so, Oppenheim suggests that the traditional view of women should be canceled.

On the right side is Man Ray's artwork, who is the photographer of *Fur Breakfast*³. It is a similar artwork which is both dada and surrealistic. Iron is useful, but with nails, it becomes useless. Both of the artworks turn the functional piece into useless, which are humorous and sarcastic.

Gift, Man Ray, replica of lost original of 1921. Flatiron with nails, height 16.5*9.2*9.5 cm. Collection Morton G. Neumann Family, Chicago.



Evaluation

Material Significance: Oppenheim uses unusual object of gazelle fur to cancel the function of the daily object of the tea sets. This creates a sense of familiarity and unfamiliarity to the viewers; and creates both intimate and distant connection with viewers. The domesticity of the tea sets symbolizes the traditional view of women (doing housework, preparing tea for the guest, etc). The fur-covering process cancels out the function of tea sets. This process is suggestive of canceling this traditional view of women.

Cultural Context: - At the early 20th century, women had less right and freedom than men, which was due to the discrimination towards women⁴. Because people had stereotypes of women as: men earn the money, women do the chores; men talk about the business, women get ready for the tea sets. Oppenheim seeks for equality between men and women and claims that women are not inferior than men. She used her own artistic voice to react against the time and the place where women got treated.

- In the cultural background of Dadaism, there were many rebellious and bold artists as Meret Oppenheim and Man Ray appeared. "Although Oppenheim is normally aligned with Surrealism, her daring use of found objects is straight-up Dada. She is a key transitional figure, linking the two movements"⁵. Dadaism (1916-1923) is an anti-art movement, which is formed by artists who are dissatisfied with European civilization after WWI⁶. Before war, citizens in Europe thought they were the best. Their technology level were fully developed, and the amount of colonies they have were countless. They were organized, taking control of the world. They found the way to create the best society, and deeply believed that they are number one. The WWI started for no good reasons. The kings and queens in each country had commitments when they got married that they would help each other. The war turned out to be people kept fighting and helping each other. It was filled with chaos and nonsense. Everything they thought they believe is not true and not wonderful anymore⁷. Due to the dissatisfaction of such state of European society, some people started to stop following the tradition since the tradition is no longer wonderful and great anymore⁸.

Conceptual Framework: Although Oppenheim is a Surrealist, however, *Fur Breakfast* is strongly connected with the rejection of logic and expressions of nonsense from Dadaism. Oppenheim destroys the function of a functional piece in order to create an illogical and nonsense work. Also, the concave part and the tea handle are suggestive of orifice. The concept of sexuality is also involved in this work of art.

Identification and Analysis of Formal Qualities

Perforated Bowl with Elements, Tony Marsh, 1997, Earthenware, 16.5 x 49.5 x 39.7 cm, Gift of Garth Clark and Mark Del Vecchio



Contrast of Texture



BOWL

primary resource (bowl)

The perforated elements allow **light** to pass through, bringing a sense of **void** and **lightness**, which is quite unexpected for a clay pot. Marsh coats the perforated structures with up to six layers of **vitreous engobe**, a mixture of slip and glaze, which, when fired, forms a crust that **refracts light**⁹. Overall, this piece does not only allow light to go through, but also, it could reflect the light. Thus, the whole piece seems illuminating.

Marsh creates **geometric elements** in the vessel — such as spheres, tubes, gourds, pods — with the **pattern of actual negative spaces** (little holes), which brings an **abstract bumpy texture** (which contrasts with ceramic's smooth texture). These holes forms **decorative qualities** with **rhythm** on the surface. Marsh also creates an **proximity (unity)** of all being enclosed within the continuation of the outer bowl, repetition of the holes, monochromatic color, bumpy texture, and basic curves of the forms. The bowl suggests a function but the forms within the bowls are unfamiliar and either do not suggest obvious function or suggest handles for people to grasp but for no clear reasons.



Interpretation of Function and Purpose

Critical Hypothesis: Marsh employs with medicating and self-reflective process to show several contrasts (as solid vs. weightless, functional vs. nonfunctional), in order to suggest that everything in the world got two sides but it is depending on how you look at it.



Perforated Bowl with Elements, Tony Marsh, 1997, Earthenware, 16.5 x 49.5 x 39.7 cm, Gift of Garth Clark and Mark Del Vecchio



primary
resource
(bowl)

A universal archetypal geometric form vocabulary is always at play in the work. These are the fundamental building blocks of all things physical¹⁰. There is something ironic about taking a material like clay which is dense, opaque and ruled by gravity, creating eggshell thin forms and then removing as much material as possible one hole at a time and replacing material with light¹¹. The more material Marsh removes, the more visually intense the work becomes. **It is addition by subtraction**¹².

Marsh uses actual negative space to make the objects useless, to let it be not utilitarian. However, the perforating process allows more light to get through. Also, the glazed surface allows light retracts back out. Thus, it is functionless compared to its original purpose (as the perforated bowl cannot contain water anymore as the normal bowl), and it is functional compared to the new purpose (light). Also, where the light is, there is shadow. Everything got two sides and it is depending on how people view it.

Throwing a pot is a medicating process. Making the objects perforated and nonfunctional is being suggestive of let it be utilitarian is not the main purpose, in fact, the process is the purpose.



Evaluation

Perforated Bowl with Elements, Tony Marsh, 1997, Earthenware, 16.5 x 49.5 x 39.7 cm, Gift of Garth Clark and Mark Del Vecchio



Material Significance: Throwing a pot is like a medicating process, providing people a sense of satisfaction. Also, the perforated process is also taking time and patience. The process of making such pieces seems like a healing and medicating process. And, although the creation of ceramics has typically served utilitarian purposes -- were used as burial object, decorative items, status symbols, and given as tributary gifts¹³. But, Marsh cancels the utilitarian purpose by perforating them. Moreover, Marsh does not use a more efficient and time saving material as autoCAD (as 3D printing). But he chooses clay as his material. This emphasizes the importance of the process.

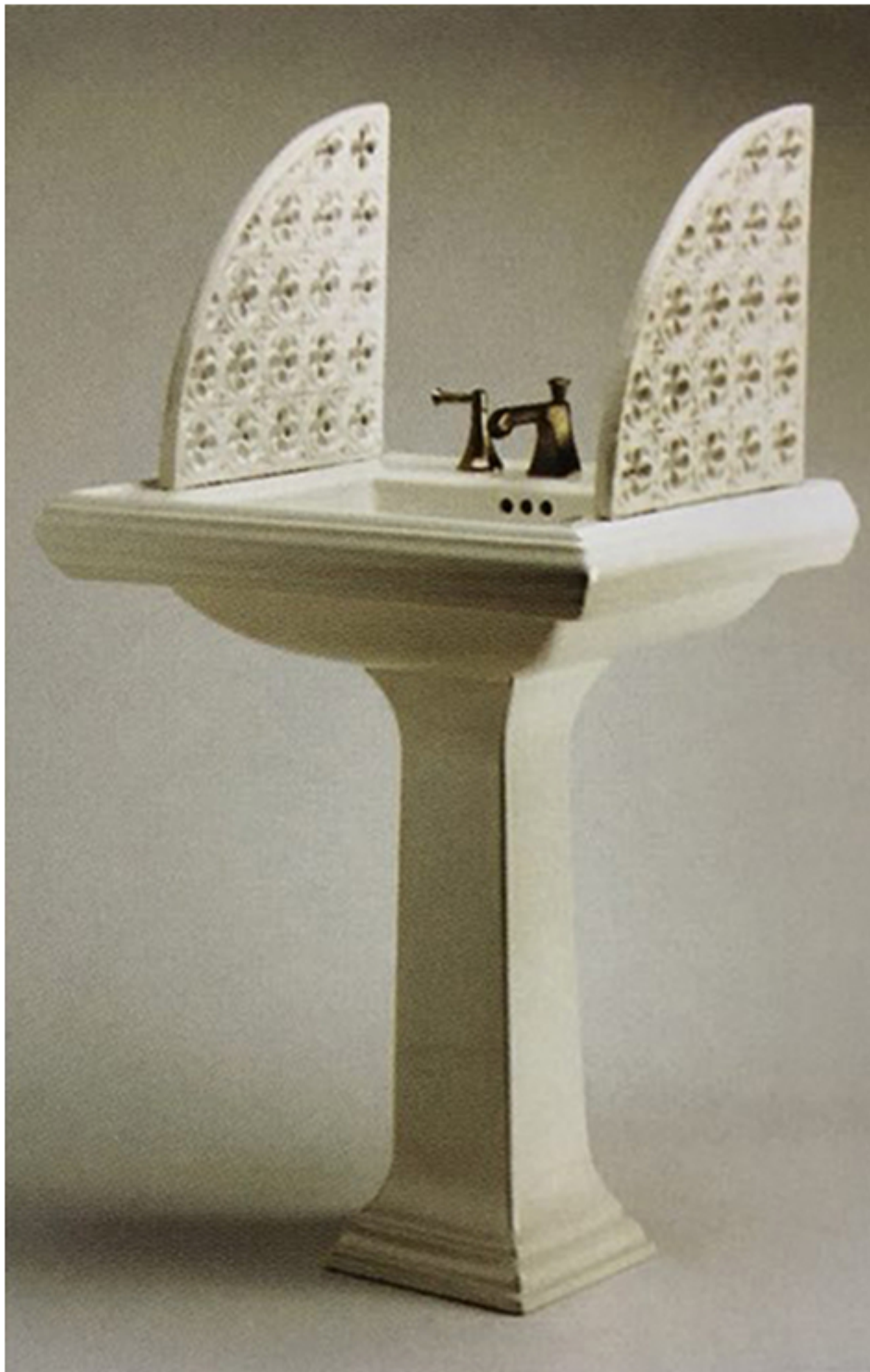
Cultural Context: Tony Marsh was born in New York City in 1954. From 1978 to 1981, Marsh studied as an apprentice under Japanese potter Tatsuzo Shimaoka¹⁴. Marsh learned Japanese and its culture, which allows him to begin to see the world through the lens of another culture¹⁵. As Marsh describes Shimaoka's concept was not the same as the art school stuff in America nor about radical expression¹⁶. Shimaoka teaches him to appreciate the value of solitude and patience¹⁷.

Conceptual Significance: Marsh also employs the concept of functionality. Although it does not involve the nonsensical or illogical Dadaism idea here, Marsh does approach the concept of logic from a very different point of view.. He goes beyond than turning something functional into non-functional. He suggests that although those vessel lost of its original function, it brings other meanings into it.

Confessional Sink,
Justin Novak,
2004, Slip-cast
vitreous china

Identification and Analysis of Formal Qualities

In this work, the hand sink has a **smooth and minimal texture** (as it is glazed by **monochromatic neutral color**, it seems even more minimal), which **contrasts with** the confessional pattern that has **complex and decorative pattern and texture**. The **level of abstraction is ambiguous** since Novak combines unexpected materials together — confessional and hand sink. The confessional pattern is a **direct symbolism** of confessional process. The sink is somewhat ornate and **more decorative** than a basic sink and decorative in a conservative and classical way, the sink and added pattern areas are all clean and spotless, the pattern area is more decorative than the one from Holy Cross Church shown below, and it creates an even greater contrast with the plain surfaces of the sink.



A detailed view of confessional
booth screen of *Confessional Sink*



A confessional screen
(from Holy Cross Church in Uclulet)

By creating **symmetrical balance** and **organization of space** into this work, it forms an “enclosed” space which has “inside” and “outside”. With the washing area being inside, it suggests of confessional space. Novak includes both **visual association** (created by hand sink, cleaning) and **ideological association** (created by confessional pattern, cleansing) into this work.

Interpretation of Function and Purpose

Critical Hypothesis: Novak uses unexpected and interesting combination of material to form a visual and ideological pun in order to question the role of tradition (as Catholic confessional) and the role of self.



Confessional Sink, Justin Novak, 2004, Slip-cast vitreous china

The action of washing takes place in *Confessional Sink* is both visually and ideologically associated with the process of people confessing about their sins in order to cleanse themselves. “Cleansing” means to make something or someone clean (in a more spiritual way). “Clean” also has a meaning of making something or someone clean, but it is more of suggesting in a physical way. Also, Novak presents this object in a clean and spotless way that is not dirty. Moreover, the decorative pattern with actual negative spaces creates an implied enclosed space, which directly symbolizes the confessional block. The areas of confessional block and hand sink are both also suggesting of cleansing/cleaning process. Symbolism of confessional is highly recognizable, which means that Novak’s objective can be very accessible to the viewers.

“The integration of this ritual of atonement into a domestic object suggests a private reckoning with one’s past deeds rather than a reliance on religious institutions”¹⁸. The cleansing process in the Church requires a priest/father to assist people to confess their own sins. Novak alters the function of confessional block and juxtaposes it on a hand sink. He is re-thinking the confessional, which is an act between a person and God, into something else, and an act between a person and him/herself. Novak questions some of the tradition as confessional. People feel relieved after they confess their sins, but is it by the power of the confessional or by yourself?



Evaluation

Material Significance:

Porcelain is a common material used to manufacture hand sinks. In order to let the hand sink and the confessional pattern look more coherent and united with each other, Novak chooses porcelain to make the confessional pattern.

Cultural Context: Confession is culturally important to many people who are Catholic. They believe God is omniscient and omnipotent. Here's one line from Bible, "if we confess our sins, He [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9)¹⁹. However, through this work, Novak challenges and questions the role of tradition in his work.

Confessional
at the Parma
Cathedral



Conceptual Significance: Concept of forgiveness is important in this artwork. Also, what the source of forgiveness (is it comes from the God? Priest? Self?) Who does the forgiving? What's the necessity to get the forgiveness? Moreover, concept of function. Novak's work contains both literal function and metaphorical function. This relationship with function shares a link with Dadaism.

Comparisons and Connections

All three artists employ the **concept of functionality**. Both Oppenheim and Marsh use **loss of functionality** but Novak uses an **alteration of functionality**. Oppenheim aims for achieving the concept of nonsense and illogical from **Dadaism**. However, later two artists does not involve that as strongly.



Fur Breakfast by Meret Oppenheim

These three artists **transform familiar objects into unfamiliar form** in order to bring audience's curiosity.

The color of these artworks are all **monochromatic**. They all focus on the **combination of materials**, and the **form of objects**.

Marsh and Novak are adding something new (which in this case is **technique-based**) to the ideas of artists who came before them (Oppenheim). Also, they **both dedicate in ceramic major/career** and their most of the work is **made of ceramics**.

Oppenheim's cup handle and Novak's confessional pattern have **actual negative spaces which have the same purpose** -- help the subject recognition. Also, their works are **related to action**: Oppenheim's work creates a sense of disgust by imagining drinking from this furry cup. Novak's work is relate to the action of cleaning (cleaning hands and cleaning soul). Both artists also **comment on social issues** through their work of art: Oppenheim comments on the female status and involves in Dada movement; Novak comments on Catholic Church.



Perforated Bowl with Elements by Tony Marsh



Confessional Sink by Justin Novak

Comparisons and Connections

Novak's work is **relatively more accessible** than the other two artworks, which means it is easier for the viewer to understand the artist's objective. This is due to the confessional screen patterns are highly recognizable.



Fur Breakfast by Meret Oppenheim

All these three artworks involve **domestic objects** (tea sets, hand sink, and bowl). However, Oppenheim and Novak combine domestic objects **with unusual objects** (gazelle fur, confessional block), and Marsh combines **with ambiguous objects** (geometric elements).

All three artists **change their form and texture** for their subjects (Oppenheim turns the smooth texture into a fuzzy texture; Marsh turns it into a bumpy texture; Novak change the wood/metal texture of confessional block into ceramic). The change of form and surface cancels out the variety in their own works, and creates unity instead.

All three artists use **geometric elements** in their artworks (tea sets, many kinds of geometric elements in the vessel, hand sink, and confessional). However, only Oppenheim employs a biomorphic element (gazelle fur) in her work in order to form a **biomorphic vs. geometric contrast**.



Perforated Bowl with Elements by Tony Marsh



Confessional Sink by Justin Novak