

WANT LESS / GIVE MORE

2019 – 2025 | 102 x 108 x 25in

Plastic letters, paper, lacquered cabinet, platform, plaster panels, bar stools, polished stainless steel with lighted acrylic panel

INSTALLATION ESSAY

The summer before the outbreak of Covid, I was in Guatemala visiting a non-profit that I had helped start in 2017. As is the case with many start up groups, money was scarce even after almost three years of operation. It was during that trip, after visiting a health clinic and school high up in the jungle mountains surrounding the capital city, that I realized that I wanted to do more. I thought about it and decided to sell my house when I returned and live more simply in order to fund more fully the work in Guatemala.

I can't say that conceiving of WANT LESS/GIVE MORE happened at the same moment as the decision to sell my house but certainly became a manifestation of a process—a transition—that I was undergoing. I feel that this piece does reflect a movement in my life which grew consistently in the years since I left my life as a monk in a Catholic monastery.

As we experience growth, first as children—through adolescence—to adulthood, we begin to recognize that true growth does not always feel good or make you happy. Child: burning their finger on a stove, Adolescent: first breakup, Adult: being in the first round of job layoffs—none of these experiences bring joy and encourage you want to sign up for “more growth”, but after taking time to process the moment, you can make changes that promote greater understand or perspective.

WANT LESS/GIVE MORE combines visual clues and plain messages to link the human condition with the diametric views of empathy and indifference, generosity and selfishness. This conversation has a moral aspect to it as well which is represented in religious traditions and values. But being truly present to all these thoughts opens up the distinct possibility of one's descending into the mania of post-logical, thought circles and mental self flagellations that can eventually lead to a ‘dark night of the soul’ moment, where by you feel that there is only darkness with no end to the suffering of the world. And we are faced with our individual inability to change that fact.

Sometimes you are left with one final question in the face of human inequity: WHY ME? At first glance, the question seems to mean: why don't I have more—but in reality, for those of us with more, the question is: WHY ME?—why do I have to be the one to see this inequity and now feel called to address it. WHY ME when you know that nothing you can do completely resolves the intrinsic injustice of life. WHY ME?

INSTALLATION DESCRIPTION

WANT LESS/GIVE MORE is an installation incorporating a number of different elements:

Back Wall Panels: These panels of discarded cardboard boxes that are reclaimed to be used as surface for the non-linear thinking and ‘mulling’ of the phrase, want less/give more. A multilayer process of hand writing (the finely printed lettering is the work of the owner of a Thai restaurant whose hand written menu boards are works of art themselves) and spray painting the words: want, less, give, more—together with successive plaster washes, gives the impression of language floating/disorganized which I the way I ‘see’ it happening in my minds eye.

WL/GM Diptych: This framed piece of word or language art is reminiscent of the work of Jenny Holzer or Barbara Kruger as well as the introduction into historical painting of messages on banners and plaques. The direct communication of words is not only easy to read and understand the words themselves, but also hold a certain ‘poetic’ position as imagination sparks—igniting the mind to think beyond the words themselves.

Gothic Inspired Cabinet: A religious overtone is inevitable with the introduction of a Gothic arch. This architectural form inspires wonder when confronted in reality and is used here to connect the words themselves with a moral tradition as expressed in the doctrines of most of the world’s great religions: that of being generous with others. There is no religious tradition that I know of that promotes selfishness or narcissism.

Pair of Bar Stools: By chance I spotted these bar stools at the local Habitat second hand store. Not that these in any way look like the bar school found in most bars and joints, the idea that people sit on these stools to converse with others happens everywhere: notice the bar stool at the kitchen island today—endless talking is encouraged even while cooking dinner.

Kneeler: This unassembled kneeler bought from Amazon is expressive of the posture of repentance. Participating in the installation in the kneeling posture focuses one’s attention on supplication: asking for something. In this instance is it forgiveness for not being committed enough to the idea of generosity in daily life or by nature of your personality or it is in supplication, pleading to be let go of the responsibility of the idea of giving more and wanting less. If art can do anything it can stir up in the unconscious the contradictions of existence.

Plastic Basket: I found this on one of my many walks with my dog Peggy. In retrieving it, I brought a new purpose to its existence: holding the opportunity for the viewer to express themselves by leaving their mark (words) on the installation.