COCK-EYED OPTIMIST

By Martha Rose A. Echols
The following research consists of a plan for a multi-part project whose elements are bound by a central theme--optimism. These elements are to be represented by a central figure(s)–a bird. The visuals are tied together by the use of music and light.

The research is divided into 3 parts--the last 2 are more connected then they seem, the 1st is only loosely connected, ‘piffle’
BACKGROUND

• While adding music to an old player I began adding showtunes, which lead to the soundtrack of, 'SOUTH PACIFIC'. Following an attempt at ceramic clay-egg construction for a Spring 2017 project, I had birds on the brain from that and previous earlier projects.

• The whippoorwill mentioned in the song, 'Cock-eyed Optimist’ and the songs overall message tied in well to the ideas I was already thinking of and with the collection of emptied salt containers and slip-covered canvas from previous a previous project, I even began making a tree.
BACKGROUND

• Fluke 'Absurd’ added in September 2, 2016, would have given me plenty of casual listening time as it was one of my 1st added songs, & a favorite sound, with a really lackluster music video attached.

• my mind-set around the Big Bird Skeleton growing increasingly political as my GOOGLE-searches of Big Bird began producing images of Mitt Romney and Trump in 2017, due to politicians threatening to cut taxpayer funds to PBS or something. Increasingly negative input from various hearings (the most recent also in Fall of 2016) and at home establishing my bleak future(especially with the new gov. admin.), coupled with my struggle to get back on top of my class assignments, made the idea seem appropriate.

• the general election having just taken place and images of protest showing up, picking up on any mention of 'birds' and 'optimism' and 'yellow' was hard to miss.
PART 1:

HAND BIRDS
BACKGROUND

• In a sort of continuation of what was originally a fall piece inspired by the government shutdown (the 1st one in Fall 2013)), the hand turkeys of the season and Thing from the Addams Family, this 2nd Hand bird was the first in the series I was intend to make from earthen clay and acrylic nails. The reasoning is purely aesthetic and I simply thought I’d make something that I could see sitting in my home for a long time, due to the permanent nature of the intended medium, fired clay.
THE PLAN

The different birds I plan on making are a turkey, partridge, dove, and cardinal, in a sort of ‘US winter holiday season theme’. For the hand gestures I looked at bird hands shadows, bird holding and measuring techniques, and sign language.
TURKEY
THE PLAN

• For a previously constructed Hand Turkey, I faced some construction issues like cracking & even breakage. I hope to correct those issues for the new pieces, with the continued but adjusted usage of wire armatures.
THE PLAN

For the turkey I decided to go with the pattern of a traditional, ‘hand turkey,’ with the turkey’s head as the thumb and the fingers as tail feathers, but I added my other hand with my pinky hooked around the thumb for a snood and wattle and my index, middle, and ring fingers folded for a wing, with my other thumb as part of the tail.
PARTRIDGE
THE PLAN

For the Partridge, I wanted to show the bird held in cupped hands, which would match the patterns on its wings.
DOVE
THE PLAN

I wanted to integrate the Dove with the sign of Benediction, which matches nicely the one-handed form of holding small birds along with the left hand fingers forming a splayed tail.
CARDINAL
THE PLAN

Lastly, for the Cardinal, I wanted to use the ASL symbol for, ‘faith,’ or, ‘importance,’ with the forefinger and thumb of one hand wrapped around what would be the cardinal’s head and the other fingers forming a sort of outstretched, lifting wing, along with the other hand in the same position with the fingers forming tail feathers.
THE PLAN

• After firing, I would add different Raku colors for the shine and iridescence of the birds feathers (particularly Rainbow glaze for the turkey) along with other paints or glazes. I also want to experiment with some nail art designs. I’m also considering putting a hole in the back of the Partridge and the Dove for maybe a tealight or small candle.
THE PLAN

• The entire piece is meant to sit static on a table or stand, just below eyelevel. The piece would serve as something to have setting out for people to move around or touch— a kind of conversation-starter. I would craft a nest separately for all four birds to nest inside. I would place feathers on the bottom of the nest, which would have a solid base, for some decorative patterning. I plan to use bailing wire and an extruder to make coils of clay of varying size that would break and bend just like a real nest and would have a solid base to hold all four birds at once. The nest would be an optional part of the display an the birds could be removed to be displayed individually. It would essentially be a piece made of sloppily placed but solidly joined coils.
CITATIONS
PART 2:

WHIPPOORWILL WITH A BILL
The title of my project as well as Part 2 is inspired largely by the movie *South Pacific*. Upon re-watching the film many times after not watching it since I was very young—perhaps 5 or 6—I had a greater appreciation for the movie's grand spectacle and restraint.

I also learned more about the movie itself, and how the circumstances under which it was made and its lasting impact were not so lighthearted.
What—What piffle. I—

- Nellie FORBUSH

SOUTH PACIFIC (1958)
- Nellie FORBUSH

SOUTH PACIFIC (1958)
• Based on a book by James A. Michener, ‘Tales of the South Pacific’, the movie itself was made with a very large budget (for the time) of $5mil and innovative in many ways, shot largely on location instead of a studio and in a new widescreen format with a record-breaking soundtrack recorded

• Thought controversial at the time, the film captures “Captures Post-WW2 sentiment in America”, with the military featuring heavily in a romantic drama that tries to tackle ‘interracial relationships’.
• Problematic elements like character of ‘Bloody Mary’, the submissive and childlike islanders who are only portrayed as objects of desire, often by Americans of varying colors & not true Vietnamese (then Tonkinese), & the overall failure by

• The childlike portrayal may have been in small part, due to the low average age of the islanders hovering around 30 and the fact the filmmakers presumed they could underpay the local actors needed to work on the film to cut costs & they would be none the wiser.

• The island of Kauai, used by the filmmakers to stand-in for Espir-tu Santo the island featured in MICHENER’s book, was known for union uprisings well before they arrived.
• Poor communication and resentment between local government lead to a very unpleasant experience for the filmmakers.
THE PLAN

- Sometimes the filters are used well in a classic way, recalling old silent films, or facilitating the transition of day to night, or simply illustrate a heightened atmosphere & reflect the source material of the musical theatre, where filters & lighting changes are expected.

- Receiving mixed responses in its initial roadshow tour, some viewers reacted with concern and others thought the effect was heavy-handed...
THE PLAN

• My plan is to create two slightly-larger-than-lifesize Whippoorwills, ones whose range extends from Arkansas to Hawaii, perching low in & below a tree. The ‘tree’ would sit just at eye level (if the viewer is around 5 feet tall) or slightly below, constructed of about eight salt containers & covered in burlap soaked in casting slip & coated with salted clay with extruded roots. Other visual elements like moths made of cut turkey feathers or cardstock & painted with acrylic scattered on ground & tree along with a nest & moss at the base of tree.

• I initially planned to photograph the final result with a yellow filter, a la cinematographer Leon SHAMEROY, because only then could a person truly be ‘incurably green’. People don’t turn green permanently, but they can turn blue permanently from ingesting silver, so I decided to be just as literal and hint at that in the receipt (suggesting someone could get argyria from optimism from an alternative form of colloidal silver, this time ‘silver-lining’ of clouds).
THE PLAN

• Adding some Pandora & Army Green Sphinx moths, that have pink and green wings, would add some color to the otherwise mottled browns and greys of the piece - the only other pink would be the gapping maws of angry the European Nightjar and the Eastern Whippoorwill, representing Hawaii & Arkansas respectively.

• Whippoorwill/Nightjar/Nighthawk appear to be interchangeable terms. The Eastern would be on the 'ground/base' and the European on an extended branch below eyelevel with an itemized receipt on the branch its standing on....
THE PLAN

• First I drafted the receipt, which informed the way I planned to finish and photograph Part 2. I began looked at the actual structure of the receipt, then the wording. I went for the plumage of a 'cynical adult' bird and tried to discern the feather types laid out. I went for individual primary & secondary feathers because I figured they could be put on wire individually and posed/splayed like an actual wing. Then the bodies would just be paper Mache and the feathers out of cardstock.
THE PLAN

- I would like to set up the relatively low-profile display with hanging crystals strung thru-out to cast prisms of the walls, a la Pollyanna the embodiment of optimism. The piece would be lit thru a filter or filters like an old-fashioned aluminum Christmas tree.

- I would include clear prismatic crystals, alluding to the actual fix for 'hypertropia', or being ‘cock-eyed’, which causes people to cock their head to the side when one eye drifts upward- also, it is an excuse to 'beautify' the camo-colored scene with glitzy shiny objects, not just to provide relief from what appears to be dull subject matter (like adding glitter to a science fair project).
THE PLAN

- I would surround the piece with blue-tinted mannequins to recall the static, stage-y nature of the movie on which Part 2 is based as well as suggest to the viewer that there are other like-minded aggressively optimistic people around them- that there are other incurably green knuckleheads out there.

- In addition to giving the piece a larger sense of context it would also serve to provide a sense of scale if photographed.
THE PLAN

• Standing in defensive poses, one of the Whippoorwills would stand above a mock ‘itemized receipt’ with a message that states, ‘It just ain’t so!’ among other things, negating the pessimism of naysayers who seek to quell the viewers optimism.

• I believe the overall uplifting message of the piece I intend to create- essentially to hang on to hope and stay optimistic- could heighten the work and make it more engaging.
THE PLAN

• I think the piece should be bathed in golden light and possibly accompanied by projections of GIF’s or scenes from the movie.
- Luther BILLIS

SOUTH PACIFIC (1958)
CONCLUSION

The conclusion of ‘South Pacific’ is left on a fairly ambiguous note— we, the audience is left to believe the main char.’s NELLIE & deBEQUE are meant to live together & raise their mixed children together aft. The end of WW2, what NELLIE describes simply as, ‘a big change’. Listening to the 60Minutes documentary when MICHENER returns to the island where he was stationed for two years during WW2, we learn many of the French were ousted form the island or were reduced to great poverty, if one of the interviewees story is to be taken as general truth. Having not actually read MICHENER’s novel, if NELLIE & deBEQUE’s life together plays out as they think & hope in the movie, NELLIE will be left w/ the children when deBEQUE dies of old age eventually taking the children to America, and maybe before that they will spend summers in Australia.
THE PLAN
- ‘Bloody Mary’

*SOUTH PACIFIC* (1958)
- Nellie FORBUSH, 1957
PART 3:

BIG BIRD ABSURD
BACKGROUND

• The idea to make a big bird skeleton was born out of my failure to draw one in 2 dimensions for Drawing 2 back in March of 2014. after going through several characters- any whose innards I could make-up with 'non-bone parts' like garbage or car parts

• The ideas of Lt. CABLE from SOUTH PACIFIC (1958) really connect to the premise of Part 3, in which the ideas that began to counter those of the post-WW2 era are being expunged by the new youth culture, in favor of deprogramming from society and the man-machines, a la the Matrix or a Clockwork Orange.
Live on an island.

- Joseph CABLE

*SOUTH PACIFIC* (1958)
RESEARCH
RESEARCH
RESEARCH
RESEARCH
RESEARCH

• The dimensions of the bones I am creating are after the character’s first puppeteer, and aging Caroll Spinney, who at 84 years old continues to perform with the character as long as he is able. The bone dimensions for my project will be specifically for Spinney’s connection to the character and making him what he is.

• Most of the bones will be human, but some will be based off of ostrich and emu bones. I think it ties in more to an overall theme of optimism and goodwill. The character is six years old, mentally, and exhibits a good-natured attitude towards anyone. I think the idea that a nostalgic fictional character for multiple generations grew up expositing kindness & shown to be continuing to do so after death is a powerful one.
RESEARCH

Because th
THE PLAN

• I decided I wanted to add different elements to my image to suggest a Big Bird that has become a kind of urban survivalist or maybe even homeless, without being able to rely on the goodness of neighbors, friends, or strangers. I wanted the skeleton to be the remains of an old big bird, with grey turkey feathers strewn around with a few clinging to the crest of his head.

• I plan to pose the character in an animated way, rather than like a classroom skeleton, with the left arm in a sling, still with eyes in the sockets, and open mouth as if still proselytizing posthumously.

• Big Bird will spread his message with a makeshift homeless sign drawn with crayon & hung from a red ribbon that used to be around his teddy bear Radar’s neck, used to allude to the character’s Teddy Bear, named after a MASH character that matured because of overcoming war and hardship and left his own Teddy Bear on the battlefield, with the idea that perhaps the toy Big Bird held decayed long before he began to- or even, that he simply gave it away as an act of charity.

• To connect with Part 2, I would have a sort of painted/printed background to set the scene where Big Bird once lived, poor & destitute, but forever psychologically six and optimistic.
Body Proportions

- MANDIBLES OFFSET, LOWER JAW ≈ 16 IN.
- HEAD LENGTH = HUMAN HAND LENGTH (WRIST > FINGERTIP)
  - CSs/BBs HAND LENGTH = 6.1216 IN.
  - CSs HAND LENGTH = 6.75 IN. × 0.9
  - HUMAN HAND LENGTH = 2 HAND WIDTHS
  - CSs/BBs HAND WIDTH = 3.3333333333333335 IN. × 3 = 10 IN.
  - CSs HAND WIDTH = 8.75 IN. × 0.375 = 3.3125 IN.
  - CSs HEAD HEIGHT = 24 IN.
  - CSs HEAD LENGTH = CSs HEAD WIDTH ≈ 8 IN.
  - HUMAN HAND WIDTH = HUMAN FOOT WIDTH
  - GUESS-IMATES:
    - CSs/BBs ARMSPAN = 6 FT. + 72 IN.
  - HEAD LENGTH = PELVIS LENGTH = FOOT LENGTH
    - HUMAN HEAD WIDTH (@ EYE LEVEL) = ¼ HEAD LENGTH × DISTANCE FROM HAIRLINE TO MOUTH APERTURE

- BIG BIRD BODY PROPORTIONS
  - HEIGHT = 7-8 HEAD LENGTHS (8=IDEAL, 9=‘HEROIC’)
    - HUMAN MALE = 7-8 HEADS
    - HUMAN FEMALE = 6-7 HEADS
    - HUMAN CHILD (6 Yrs Old) = 5-6 HEADS
  - CAROLL SPINNEY’S (CSs) OFFICIAL HEIGHT (HT) = 6 FT. or 72 IN.
  - BIG BIRD’S (BBs) OFFICIAL HEIGHT (HT) = 8 FT. 2 IN. or 98 IN.
  - BIG BIRD’S OFFICIAL CURRENT AGE = 6 Yrs Old
  - GUESS-IMATES:
    - BIG BIRD’S HEAD LENGTH (HL) = 17.1216 IN.
      - CSs/BBs ARMSPAN = 6 FT. or 72 IN.
    - HEAD LENGTH = PELVIS LENGTH = FOOT LENGTH
      - HUMAN HEAD WIDTH (@ EYE LEVEL) = ¼ HEAD LENGTH × DISTANCE FROM HAIRLINE TO MOUTH APERTURE
  - GUESS-IMATES:
    - BIG BIRD’S HEAD WIDTH (w/ PLUMMAGE) = 16 IN.
  - BBs EYES (MEAS. from the TOP) T.5 FT. or 90 IN. from HEELS -> BASED on Jim HENSON’S Pre-lim SKETCH...
    - BBs EYE to the TOP of FEATHER CROWN = 8 IN.
    - BBs HAIRLINE = 6 IN. ABOVE EYES (TOP of WHT HIGHLIGHTS)
      - 90 IN. + 6 = 96 IN. from CSs/BBs HEELS -> BBs ‘HAIRLINE’
    - CAROLL SPINNEY’S HT (6 FT or 72 IN.) × FOOTLENGTH (ELBOW -> WRIST) 9 IN. = 81 IN. (= BIG BIRD’S FEET TO CHIN)
      - BIG BIRD’S HEIGHT 8 FT. 2 IN. (98 IN.) - 81 IN. = 17 IN. for BBs HEAD LENGTH
      - 17 IN. – CSs WRIST RADIUS (approx. LENGTH of BBs ‘LOWER LIP’) – 1.43 IN. = 15.57 IN. BBs MOUTH APERTURE
  - CSs/BBs FOOT LENGTH = 6 IN. × 1.5 = 9.0 IN. from CSs/BBs HEELS = BBs HEAD LENGTH
    - CSs FOOT WIDTH = 3 IN. × 0.625 = 1.875 IN. BBs TOE WIDTH
    - CSs SOLE = CSs/BBs PALM/MIDDLE FINGERS (1ST > 3RD phalanges) LENGTH = 6.1216 IN.
  - WRIST > FINGERTIP (HAND LENGTH) = ¼ FOOTLENGTH = FACE (CHIN > HAIRLINE) HEIGHT
    - HUMAN HEAD Width (w/ FEATHER) = 6 IN. × 0.75 = 4.5 IN.
  - FIST Circumference = HAND LENGTH
    - CSs FIST CIRC. = C = πr
    - WRIST > ELBOW (FOREARM) = THUMB > PINKY (OUTSTRETCHED) = FOOT LENGTH
      - CSs WRIST > ELBOW (FOREARM) = THUMB > PINKY (OUTSTRETCHED) = FOOT LENGTH
  - EYE > TOP OF HEAD = ¼ HEAD LENGTH
    - ½ BBs HEAD LENGTH ≈ 8.5-9 IN. (BBs EYELIDS > TOP OF EYES)
    - 1st BBs HEAD LENGTH ≈ 8.5-9 IN. (BBs EYELIDS > TOP OF EYES)
  - BOTTOM LIP > EYES (TOP) = 4 EYES
    - BBs ‘BOTTOM LIP’ > EYES = 3.5 EYES
    - THUMB > MIDDLE FINGER = ONCE ARND WRIST
    - ONCE ARND WRIST = 1 FOOTLENGTH
    - ONCE ARND FIST = 1 FOOTLENGTH
    - THUMB LENGTH (1ST > 2ND phalanges) = WRIST WIDTH = 1/3 HAND LENGTH
  - HUMAN HEAD = 4-5 EYE WIDE
    - BBs EYES (MEAS. from the TOP) T.5 FT. or 90 IN. from HEELS -> BASED on Jim HENSON’S Pre-lim SKETCH...
  - BIG BIRD’S EYES = 2 11.16 IN. dia. ea.***
  - BIG BIRD’S HEAD 6 EYE WIDE (w/ FEATHERS)
    - BBs HW (16 IN.) = 6 = 2.67 IN.
  - *** BIG BIRD’S EYES ABOUT ¾ LARGER THAN BIGGEST BIRD EYE for an OSTRICH @ 2 IN.!!!
  - BIG BIRD’S BEAK = 18 IN. (¼ IN. UNDER LONGEST BEAK (PELICAN) @ 18.5 IN.)
Body Proportions

GRESHISTIMATES:
EX. - OSTRICH FEATHERS = 7.5% TOTAL MASS -> 14lb. 7.5% BIG BIRD'S TOTAL MASS

OTHER MEASUREMENTS

AVRG MALE SPINAL CORD LENGTH= 71 CM.
CERVICAL 12.5 CM
THORACIC 28 CM
SACRUM & COCCYX 12.5 CM

*****7TH (LAST) cervical vertebrae in humans @ the base of the neck in line w/ the shoulders - BBs last cervical vertebrae is where the top of SPINNEY'S HEAD SHOULD BE (72IN. UP FROM BIG BIRD'S ANKLES)

AVRG. CERVICAL SPINAL CANAL DIAMETER = 17-18mm

AVRG. ANTEROPOSTERIOR (FRONT -> BACK) & TRANSVERSE
(ACROSS) DIA. 8.8mm X 12.4mm @ C2 -> 8.7mm X 14mm @ C4 -> 7.4mm X 11.4mm @ C7

AVRG. THORACIC (LUMBAR) SINICAL CANAL DIAMETER = 12-17mm

FIBONACCI SEQUENCE

WHEN THE LENGTH OF EA. FINGER IS MULTIPLIED BY 1.618, THE LENGTH OF THE NEXT LARGER SECTION IS INDICATED

CSs/BBs MIDDLE FINGER LENGTH = 3.375IN.
CSs HAND LENGTH (6.75IN.) ÷ 2 = LENGTH of MIDDLE FINGER

- THUMB LENGTH (1st -> 3rd phalanges) = INDEX FINGERS 3rd -> 4th phalanges
- ONCE ARND WRIST = TWICE ARND THUMB
- TWICE ARND WRIST = ONCE ARND NECK
- TWICE ARND NECK = ONCE ARND WAIST
- 2 FINGER LENGTHS (THUMB -> MIDDLEFINGER) = ONCE AROUND NECK
- 3 FINGER LENGTHS (THUMB -> MIDDLEFINGER) = ONCE AROUND HEAD
- ARMSSPAN = 7 FOOTLENGTHS = 7 HEADS or HEIGHT
- ARM = 3.5 HEADS
- UNDER THE NOSE -> TOP OF HEAD = 1 HEAD WIDTH
- BBs HW = 16IN.
- SHOULDER WIDTH = 3 HEAD WIDTHS = 2 HEAD LENGTHS
- RIB CAGE = 1 ½ HEAD LENGTHS LONG
- BIG BIRD'S RIB CAGE =
  9IN. (CSs HEAD LENGTH) x 1.5 = 13.5IN.
  Halfway down is where 6th RIB SHOULD BE!
  13.5IN. ÷ 2 = 6.75IN. or 6 1/16 IN.
- SYMPHYSIS PUBIS (WHERE PELVIS SPLITS @ BOTTOM) MIDWAY POINT (4 HEADS) DOWN LENGTH OF FIGURE -> WHERE BBs TAIL BEGINS
- CBs TAIL BONE/BBs TAIL & CENTER of BODY (VERTCAL& HORIZONTAL) = 9IN.
- CSs HL (9IN.) x 4 = 36IN. from BBs ANKLES
- HIP HEIGHT (FOOT TO PELVIS) = 4 HEAD LENGTHS
- CSs HIP HEIGHT = 36IN.
- CSs HL (9IN.) x 4 = 36IN. from BBs ANKLES
- PELVIS LENGTH = 1 HEAD LENGTH
- CSs/BBs PELVIS LENGTH = 9IN.
- HEIGHT÷ 4 = FEMUR LENGTH
- CSs/BBs FEMUR LENGTH = 18IN.
- CSs HT (72IN.) ÷ 4 = 18IN.
- ELBOW -> FINGERTIP = KNEE -> HEEL = 2 HEAD LENGTHS
- CSs/BBs KNEE-> HEEL = 18IN.

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BIG BIRD BONE WEIGHTS

BIG BIRD'S HEAD (BEAK & PLUMMAGE) = 4lbs
BIG BIRD'S BODY PLUMMAGE = 10lbs.
GRESSTIMATES:
EX.- OSTRICH FEATHERS = 7.5% TOTAL MASS -> 14lb. 7.5% BIG BIRD’S TOTAL MASS

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THE PLAN

• Reed, S. Alexander, Assimilate: a critical history of industrial music.
• Edited by Cohan, Steven. The Sound of Musicals
CONCLUSION

--Final Thoughts
but, uh, I could use a little more, um, freedom...

- Luther BILLIS

SOUTH PACIFIC (1958)
FURTHER RESEARCH & FUTURE PLANS

• With the help of my Faculty Advisor Amy Hicks, Fall 2018 I will work to create physical renderings of the proposal I’ve researched over the course of my studies. I will complete the sculptures using the department’s ceramic facilities with the goal of exhibiting this work publicly on campus. The resulting figures are intended to be displayed in a solo exhibition in Spring 2019.

• I think, later on, I will add to the display will more bird-centric projects & perhaps add more movement and visual media to what is now a static display

• I think it would be helpful to add ASL performance and maybe remixed versions of the showtunes of the play in an industrial style sound. Along with the lights in the displays could be made into something ore engaging and interactive- perhaps with a 360° livestream-style video and music that people could tune-into on their mobile devices or a car from a short distance away.
- Nellie FORBUSH

*SOUTH PACIFIC* (1958)
- Nellie FORBUSH, 1957

I—It isn’t as if I could give you a good reason.

I—There is no reason.
• Going into the project, I felt very much like Nellie FORBUSH, standing up to the opposition on my truly, little flat feet, in order to preach my optimism, but not having taken any steps myself to confront any preconceptions or notions I may have about reality in general.

Continuing through, spurred on by the readings on young N. England artists going, ‘against the system’ often aggressively and even destructively, I feel and continue to feel emboldened to try to succeed and try.
- ‘Bloody Mary’

SOUTH PACIFIC (1958)