

Trent Thigpen

Complex systems fascinate me and inspire my artwork. The complex psychology of creativity and the potential experiences of viewers motivate me to do artwork. At the beginning of a project, I work intuitively with great effort not to overthink or to overanalyze my choices. I choose images and materials that invoke, in me, a cognitive dissonance, a state of unrest, or a strong emotion.

During the planning and sketching phase, I continue to work with as little thinking as possible, focusing on the visual impression. In the making phase of a project is when I allow myself to slowly contemplate and analyze multiple levels of meaning available in the imagery. I think about why I chose the objects, I imagine metaphors, symbolism, and the concepts clashing in the subjects and the materials. I do my best to understand how it all relates to everything else that I think I understand, always open to the possibility that I might have to adjust my beliefs to accommodate an observation or epiphany. I wonder how others will experience my creations.

Using fire ants as a medium gives such a multilayered experience. One of my earliest memories, from five years old, was the pain of a fire ant attack that shocked my young body and mind into a kind of acute awareness. Fire ants represent emergent social intelligence, where individual behaviors add up to something greater. The fire ant's identity as an invasive species is a complex relationship between other species and human activities. They are evolutionary survivors. During the many, many hours of placing individual dead fire ants in my artwork, I have found a reverence for the lives I harvested. It has evoked an awareness and experience of the flowing systems which we all share and try to thrive within.