

Hiding My Candy, 2013

Donald Lipski

Public Art Installation, Auditorium, New Central Library, San Diego

Donald Lipski's large-scale public art installation on the east interior wall of the auditorium at the New Central Library in downtown San Diego is titled *Hiding My Candy*. Completed in 2013, the sculptural installation is a "painting with books" measuring 60 feet long by 10 feet high. A plywood surface was attached to the concrete wall of the auditorium and approximately 2,000 new books were opened and attached with pages facing out onto the plywood backing with stainless steel screws and washers. A layer of stainless steel mesh was then wrapped over the face of the installation. Finally, the entire artwork was sprayed with a coat of fire retardant.

Lipski likens the process of composing the artwork, book by book, to painting with a palette knife where a dab of color here and a dab of color there combine to make the final picture. Lipski's creation of the swoops and swirls of pattern with the placement of books was akin to a performance. Where he typically has art components fabricated off-site then shipped to and assembled in place, Lipski arrived in San Diego to create *Hiding My Candy* with no precise drawing or plan for how to place each book. It was through experimentation and improvisation on site, as well as through feedback cycles with three assistant technicians, that Lipski arrived at the final result. Lipski identifies *The Starry Night*, a 1994 temporary installation of 20,000 double-edged, steel razor blades on the gallery walls at Capp Street Project in San Francisco, as the only other piece in his body of work that was created with a method similar to that of *Hiding My Candy*. "I walked around the gallery poking holes in the wall with a mat knife. Then twenty people followed me around and inserted razor blades into the holes. At the end, it was my drawing made of twenty thousand razor blades."*

The artwork is intentionally minimalist and monochromatic. Lipski credits the cultural exploration of minimalism in art and design in the 1970s as an early influence in his visual art practice. Artists such as Robert Ryman, known for creating white-on-white paintings, made an impression. Lipski describes *Hiding My Candy* as beautiful and restful but also rhythmic and active. With the goal of achieving a uniform appearance, he selected the books purely for physical attributes such as size, thickness, typeface, paper quality and binding color. Lipski considered using a random assortment of used books, but ultimately decided that that would result in an undesirable splotchy appearance as each book yellowed or faded differently over time. Theme and content played no

part in Lipski’s book selections, though he did ultimately acquire multiple boxes of about 10 titles ranging from memoirs to self-help to fiction. Lipski is frank: “By and large, these books aren’t great literature. I was able to obtain so many new books at a reasonable price from a liquidator in New York because these were books that hadn’t sold well in other outlets. I saved them from the landfill.”

One feature of *Hiding My Candy* that particularly delights Lipski is its sound dampening capability. “A surface that’s both textured and soft will absorb sound. It strikes me as poetic that the books on the wall will offer fresh, white pages with black words that go into people’s eyes, and, presumably, the auditorium will host authors speaking about their work and their words will go into the books.” Lipski acknowledges that metaphors may be created by his work that he hasn’t anticipated. “Quite often in my work there are elements that seem to have nothing to do with each other, but ultimately a poetic relationship is revealed.” He points to the use of the stainless steel mesh as a way to “protect or sequester” the books and he anticipates that the metal washers may create a “field of dots”, but he’s not sure how he or others will ultimately interpret those features.

Hiding My Candy is Lipski’s first public art commission in San Diego. The Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego owns one of Lipski’s artworks from his *Water Lilies* series created in the early 1990s and handful of private, San Diego-area collectors also own artworks by Lipski. When asked about other connections he has with San Diego, Lipski enthusiastically mentions that he tries to visit the Stuart Collection at the University of California, San Diego every time he’s in town, calling such visits “a real treat,” and he also reminisces about some great friends who live in San Diego. One such friend is Anna O’Cain, an artist and professor at Mira Costa College who was a student of Lipski’s at the University of Oklahoma. “I have maybe four or five great, brilliant, memorable students with whom I’ve kept in touch and Anna is one of them. I’ll never forget one time I came to visit Anna and she had a motorcycle that we were riding through the Carlsbad flower fields when all the sprinklers came on.”

**All quotes from a May 23, 2013 phone interview with Dana Springs, Public Art Program Manager, City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture.*

###