ARTIST AS INVENTOR : INVENTOR AS ARTIST
ART AS INVENTION : INVENTION AS ART

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree Master of Fine Arts in the

Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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ABSTRACT

In acting as both an artist an inventor I have created many things; some are inventions, while others can be viewed as works of art. My work involves the creative process and results in objects or devices that may or may not be useful, yet may be conceptually or aesthetically pleasing.

Often my ideas start with inspiration from my life experiences. Those experiences spark my desire to create and reflect my ideas on culture or concepts. I begin an artistic piece or an invention by brainstorming, jotting various notes and drawings in my sketchbook. Eventually, my ideas begin to take shape. Elements of art such as the mediums to use and design basics are primary considerations, yet as I progress I think of modifications. When I think of a practical modification, my piece changes from art to invention and my role melds from artist to inventor. For me the roles of artist and inventor are not in conflict; rather I feed off of the merging of these professions to create my work.

Many of my works are created by the combination of two or more previously existing 'samples' to make a third "new" object. However, some of the things I've made not only combine several pre-existing 'samples' in the work, but are also the combination of both art and invention.

Dedicated to my dreams.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Influences in My Work:

Thoughts of suicide, MTV music videos which featured cars with big, chrome spinning rims, skateboarding, and pool tables.

Outside Influences in My Work:

Parents: Tom and Sue Westhoff

Siblings: Steve and Lisa Westhoff

Friends: Zac Childers, Charlie Roberts, Kami Meighan, and Jennie Thomas

Artists: Leonardo da Vinci, Tom Sachs, Tim Hawkinson, and Tom Friedman

Other: Starbucks, Skateboarding, and Rap music

Thanks to:

My family

My friends

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My teachers and mentors

The Ohio State University

Virginia Commonwealth University

Anyone else who has helped me along the way.

VITA

April 26, 1979	Born – Willmar, Minnesota
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FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Art

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INTRODUCTION

While growing up, I admired and was inspired by inventor and artist, Leonardo da Vinci, who created works of art such as the Last Supper and the Mona Lisa, as well as inventions like the calculator and the first design for a robot. As I reflect upon his work, I questioned, what is artist or an inventor? What differentiates art and invention? Am I producing art or inventions?

As defined by Wikipedia:

> An **artist** is a descriptive term applied to a person who engages in an activity deemed to be an art. An artist can also be unofficially defined as, a person who expresses him or herself through a medium. The word is also used in a qualitative sense of a person creative in, innovative in, or adept at, an artistic practice.
>
> **Art** is a result of human creativity, which has some perceived quality beyond its usefulness, usually on the basis of aesthetic value or emotional impact.
>
> An **inventor** is a person who creates or discovers new methods, means or devices, though the term is formally reserved for those who have been granted a patent.
>
> An **invention** is an object, process, or technique which displays an element of novelty. An invention may sometimes be based on earlier developments, collaborations or ideas, and the process of invention requires at least the awareness that an existing concept or method can be modified or transformed into a new invention. However, some inventions also represent a radical breakthrough in science or technology, which extends the boundaries of human knowledge.

Like Leonardo da Vinci I work as both artist and inventor while creating in my studio. I create pieces that arguably could be art or invention, and some works that are both art and invention.

CHAPTER 1
ONE-WAY TICKET (SUICIDE KIT)

A few years after graduating from high school I started to become severely depressed. I didn't know what was wrong, but it was not good, and I wanted to kill myself. I wanted to find a quick and easy way out so I began to research ways to commit suicide online. I learned of Dr. Jack Kevorkian, "Dr. Death" and his "suicide machines" (Figure A.1). I even came across an article about a bag used for suicide called an "Exit Bag". An "Exit Bag" is a bag that has an elasticized opening to provide an airtight seal around the neck that when placed over the head suffocates users who had previously taken a sleeping tablet. (Mercer)

While doing my research I also found out a lot about depression. I wanted to feel better and I knew that death wasn't the answer, so I decided to see a psychiatrist. He prescribed Remeron, an antidepressant, and I soon my suicidal thoughts faded and I was on track to being happy and healthy again.

A few years passed and I was listening to rap artist Eminem rap about his problems and feelings in life through the lyrics in his songs. I could relate to his lyrics, and I was inspired to create a piece that spoke about some of the similar issues and problems that had happened in my life. When I was suicidal, I really wished that there was a suicide kit that I could purchase. Then I could painlessly and peacefully leave this world behind. Since such a thing did not exist, I decided to design and create a suicide kit as an inventive artwork that would represent my earlier suicidal feelings.

I wanted to take on this project as an artist as well as an inventor. As an artist, I wanted to create a piece that would comment on suicide, euthanasia and death, and would draw attention from the viewer. As an inventor, I wanted to make sure everything in the kit would or could actually work properly if it were a real product. While designing the suicide kit, I kept in mind that euthanasia was illegal. I knew the design of the kit had to allow the users to end their lives unassisted, much like a gun. I wanted the piece to appear to be a harmless shipping crate on the outside, but on the inside it would be quite the opposite. Upon closer inspection I wanted the viewer to see the inner workings of the shipping crate, and become aware it contained a kit that one could use to commit suicide.

Figure 1.2: *One Way Ticket (Suicide Kit) (Open)*

Figure 1.1: *One Way Ticket (Suicide Kit) (Closed)*

I constructed a 54 x 24 x 36 inch-shipping crate out of wood, which is just large enough to fit an average sized body. I added a hinged door on the front, so the individual could easily enter the crate. The door also includes external and internal latches that can securely close the door from inside, and later can be locked from the outside. Attached to the outside of the crate is an envelope that contains a pen, a fill-in-the-blank style last will and testament, and suicide note. "BETTER LIFE CO." and a social security number are stenciled with black spray paint on the outside of the crate. The entire interior of the crate is painted a sterile white. A battery powered push light is mounted on the ceiling and a cushioned upholstered chair equipped with a seatbelt is in the center of the crate. On the inside of the door is mounted a poster I designed in Adobe Illustrator using an "airplane instructions" graphic style of simple pictures and easy to read directions. (Figure A.2) On the door below the poster of directions is a shelf with a small, plastic box that contains two 'exit' pills, a bottle of Aquafina water, and a nitrous oxide tank that's attached to a plastic "oxygen" mask which hangs on a hook on the wall. On the opposite wall is a switch that would be used to turn on a global positioning system (GPS) transmitter that would wirelessly send the location of the crate and a signal letting the company know it's time to pick up the body in the crate for disposal.

While doing research for this thesis I discovered artworks created in 1992 by a young New York sculptor, William Scarbrough. Satirizing the insatiable appetite of the American public for violence and sensationalism in the media, Scarbrough constructed a series of sinister 'Suicide Machines', each one providing a different method for the user to bring about his own death. (Williamson) (Figure A.3) I found it interesting that another artist had also created works dealing with the topic of suicide.

In this piece I was dealing with some very serious subjects that are often taboo; death and suicide. Prior to creating "One-Way Ticket" I had not revealed my inner most dark thoughts. However, as an artist I found myself expressing those morbid ideas through the mediums of wood, nails and paper. From the inception of the concept, through the process of planning and executing the design, I found the experience of creating and

inventing the art piece to be a therapeutic endeavor. I found the creative experience gave purpose and direction in my life. It caused me to realize how ridiculous it is to kill one's self. I hoped that the sharing of this piece would communicate to those who viewed it, that suicide is an absurd solution to life's problems.

To balance out the morbidity I wanted the piece to have a slight dark humor to it. To do this I titled the directions "Twelve Simple Steps – To get you out of here in no time." With the first step asking the user to ponder if they really want to kill themselves. One of the other steps said to "make sure that you buckle the seatbelt so your body doesn't bump around during disposal." (Figure A.2)

Upon completion I entered the self-suicide kit titled "One Way Ticket" in the Virginia Commonwealth University Student Fine Art Show in 2003. To my surprise this piece was judged by Sarah Finlay, curator of Fusebox Gallery in Washington D.C. and received the top "Dean's Award" for the show, which entitled me to a $500 cash award. Receiving that award did wonders for my happiness and wellbeing.

CHAPTER 2
TWIRLING RIM PROTOTYPE

Rap music has long been a love of mine. I love hearing the beats with their pulsing rhythm and deep bass notes, but mostly I love the flow of the delivery and use of complex metaphors in the lyrics while telling stories. By listening to Rap music I learned a lot about the Hip-hop culture and how it evolved over the years.

Automobile rims have become a large part of hip-hop culture. The current trend has been large, shiny, chrome rims, which typically measure 20 to 26+ inches. Rims are seen as jewelry for your car. Some rims have jewels on them and even cost over $250,000 a set! (Figure A.4) They are regarded as a symbol of success, and have been in numerous videos and mentioned an innumerable amount of times in rap lyrics.

Music artist Jay-Z raps in a record called "Beach Chair" off of his 2006 "Kingdom Come" album: *"Benz's round corners where the sun don't shine. I let the wheels give a glimpse of hope in ones grind."* I translate his lyrics to mean he drives in a Mercedes Benz automobile around the corner to an area of the city where the sun is blocked by the shadows of buildings, possibly referring to a low-income area similar to where he grew up. He lets the chrome rims on his automobile shine to give a "glimpse of hope", showing people the reward of his hard work, and giving the viewer hope that hard work pays off, regardless of where you started.

Rims are so often mentioned in lyrics that they have become commonly referred to by many different names: "Dubs", which are 20 inch rims, "Deuce-deuces", are 22 inch rims, and "Twenty-fos", respectively are 24 inch rims. Rims are also referred to as the

name of various sports players. For example, west coast rapper "The Game" on his record "Start from Scratch" rapped, *"Twenty-three inch Lexain's, bitches call 'em LeBrons."* "LeBrons" are 23 inch rims derived from the number "23" on LeBron James' Virginia Cavaliers professional basketball jersey.

There are also 'spinning rims' called "Sprewells" named after Latrell Sprewell; professional basketball player, car enthusiast, and the first person to buy 'spinning rims'. Crunchy Black from the Memphis, Tennessee rap group "Three 6 Mafia" referenced Sprewell by rapping *"Ain't nothin' like Sprewells cause they spinnin'"* in a song all about spinning rims, the song was called "Ridin' Spinners", off the album "Da Unbreakables". A "Spinner" is a rim that has an extra "spinner" piece attached to a roller bearing that allows it to spin independently of the wheel itself when there is a change of motion.

I found these spinning rims to be very entertaining to look at and interesting to think about. Inspired by the unique design and the exploding popularity of the spinning rim, I decided that I was going to make an art piece about the spinning rim and its symbolic importance in Hip-hop. While I was pondering what and how I was going to create this art piece about rims, I also saw how I could evolve the design of the "spinning rim". Excited, I instantly went over to my sketchbook and began to jot down the basic idea. After several restless nights of thinking, I came up with a design for my art piece and a new design for the evolution of the spinning rim. It was then that I decided that I was going to take on this project as both an artist and an inventor.

As an inventor I thought about how the "Twirling Rim" would actually work. My rim has twirlers instead of spinners. (Figure A.5) If you were facing the rim, the spinners have their axle at the center of the rim on the z-axis. My "Twirling Rim" has six twirlers whose axle axis radiates outward from the center of the rim. The twirlers would start twirling from the passing wind, picking up momentum as the car rim continues to rotate and travels along. As you slowdown or even stop, the twirlers' momentum would

continue to spin for a bit causing reflecting light all over from its moving, shiny, chrome surface. After I worked out the mechanics I needed to make a prototype.

As an artist I wanted to create the prototype using materials familiar to my studio art making practice. I also wanted the final twirling rim prototype to be able to be displayed and talked about in an art context. I wanted the rim to have a handcrafted quality much like Tom Sachs's work. (Figure A.6) I decided to make a life-size 20" rim using only paper chipboard, glue, and chrome sticker film, all of which are readily obtainable, cheap, and easy to work with. (Figure A.7) Tom Sachs also uses these materials for the same reason. His pieces have a very "do-it-yourself" quality, made from mundane materials: cardboard, foam core, Sharpie markers, duct tape and hot glue. He says his favorite term is "bricolage", a French word meaning the art of assembling objects with the materials at hand. An exhibition catalog essay about Tom Sachs's work stated that:

> While the similarities are clear (they are both, after all, bathroom fixtures), it is the differences which are illuminating, and which make Sachs a much different kind of artist. One of the most significant differences with respect to their recontextualizaton of the common toilet as art object is that Sachs' piece is not a 'readymade' (a found object displayed 'as is', as art), nor is it even, strictly speaking, an 'assisted readymade' (a found object altered or combined with other objects or materials). The "Prada Toilet" is a model. Like all models, it is an object which stands for and whose existence depends upon an 'original', or else exists as a prototype for the future production of a particular object. (Crane)

I began the creation of my twirling rim prototype working as an inventor by creating 3D models using Maxon's Cinema 4D software and making life-size, accurate drawings of my twirling rim design using Adobe Illustrator. (Figure A.8) I used these computer drawings to create individual templates that I printed to scale at Kinko's using their 36" wide format printer. Working as an artist in my studio I applied these templates to the sheets of paper chipboard using a light spray adhesive. I then began the laborious task of cutting out all of the individual pieces with an X-Acto knife and gluing them together to form the rim. To help aid the assembly of the chipboard parts I had to create various jigs out of wood to hold the parts stationary while the glue dried and hardened. When I was finished constructing the life-size paper chipboard prototype model, I completely covered

it using chrome sticker film. In order to have the twirling rim prototype spin freely while it was displayed on the wall, I made a mounting bracket using wood, bearings, and hardware.

Figure 2.1: *Twirling Rim Prototype (Stationary)*

As an artist, I want to see the actual polished twirling rim sparkling on a luxury automobile in a music video on MTV. However, before that can happen, as an inventor I need to see my "twirling rim" design come to fruition and be sold. There are improvements to be made and a lot of kinks that still need to be worked out before the

twirling rim prototype could be manufactured. I plan to start to achieve those goals by contacting the man who re-invented the wheel, David Fowlkes, president of the Dävin Wheels Company and inventor of the original spinning rim. At age seventeen, Fowlkes attended Minneapolis College of Art and Design. It was then, while attending college, that he found his niche in the field of product design. He came up with the idea for spinning rims when he was assigned to come up with a marketable product for a class he was taking. Needless to say he got an A. I also came up with my rim design as a project while attending art school, so hopefully he will relate to my dreams of creating this rim design.

Figure 2.2: *Twirling Rim Prototype (Spinning)*

CHAPTER 3
SK8 POOL TABLE

I was on a trip in 2002 to Virginia Beach with my brother Steve, friend Shane, and my girlfriend at the time, Jennie. We just finished playing what at first looked like an entertaining and challenging course of mini-golf, but ended up being a fast and easy eighteen holes. When we were done, we went into the arcade to play some games. The arcade was okay; it had a few classic video games, a skill crane, and several pool tables, nothing fancy. However, there was one pool table in particular that caught my eye. (Figure A.9) It was a full sized pool table, but it was shaped like a right angle "L". I instantly went over and put a dollar into it and we began to play a game of pool. Then it hit me; I could combine the game of mini-golf with a pool table.

From that day forward as an inventor I did several sketches and thought of many ways that I could design the table. At first I wanted to create several different tables, like holes of mini-golf, where each hole could have a different theme and obstacles. I also thought about including lights and electric bumpers like in a pinball machine. As my thoughts evolved, the influence of my love of skateboarding became apparent. I realized that the table could have quarter pipes and ramps much like a skateboard park. As an artist, I created many of my works by merging two or more preexisting things to create something new and unique, yet still revealed evidence of the original sources. My table was to become a combination of a skateboarding park and a pool table.

When designing my table, I found Gabriel Orozco's *Ping-Pond Table* and *Oval Billiards Table* to be very inspiring. Orozco presents you with something so familiar, yet so odd at the same time. Another enjoyable aspect of Orozco's work is the hands-on quality,

where you are allowed to play the 'game' he has created. This interactive quality is something I want to embrace and work with in my art.
See (Figure A.10) for an image Gabriel Orozco's Oval Billiards Table
See (Figure A.11) for an image Gabriel Orozco's Ping-Pond Table

I did a lot of research on billiards before beginning construction, and learned about the different billiard games, parts, and types of billiard tables. There are oversized tables and tables that have no pockets. There are also tables of many different shapes; zigzag, round, oval, and right-angle tables, like the one that inspired me. There is a hexagonal table that is made for a special game that was invented called "Zoneball", but of all the tables I came across, I did not find a table similar to my idea. (Zoneball) (Figure A.12)

I spent months designing and re-designing the table using the computer programs: Maxon's Cinema 4D and Adobe Illustrator, before I finally settled on a final design for construction. (Figure A.13) Originally as an inventor I had planned on making a table that would have pockets or holes for a mini-golf feel. As an artist I wanted the game table to be more open, with no rules or any obvious goal of play. An open-ended game without rigid rules becomes a form of art as it enables the players to use their own imagination and expertise to experience enjoyment.

In skateboarding, which can be a form of art; there is no right or wrong way to perform. A skateboard park has a variety of manufactured obstacles with many different configurations and the skateboarder has free reign on what he wants to do depending on the individual's skill and imagination. Skateboarding is an art that appeals to many young people, because it provides them with the opportunity to express themselves in a physical way without restrictions. There is no score and no winners or losers. Some professional skateboarders, such as Rodney Mullen and Tony Hawk, have invented moves and tricks that are truly unique and innovative, and have become nationally known for their mastery of skateboarding skills.

I believe that the design of my *SK8 Pool Table* will provide the viewers and players the opportunity to use their own creative ability to determine how the individual wants to play the game. The players can make up their own rules, or play without any rules if desired. My newest design has removed all pockets and holes, thus allowing the viewers and players to create their own games and ways to use the table. The players could use their hands, pool cues, or other possible ways of moving the balls around the table. Players could also provide additional, perhaps movable obstacles, such as rubber bands or whatever they might think of, to make the game more interesting. The *SK8 Pool Table* is a playing field that will encourage creativity and innovation. I want those that experience my creation to have fun and be entertained, as well as to stimulate creativity and social interaction.

Figure 3.1: *SK8 Pool Table*

As a work of art my *SK8 Pool Table* may be viewed as a metaphor for life. In life, individuals determine their own goals, just as they can when interacting with the *SK8 Pool Table*. Setting one's own guidelines or rules can help avoid obstacles in both life and on the table. Individual participants can relate their lives to that of using the ball on the table. Some may wonder where to start or where the path should lead. Others may wonder which path to take to avoid the obstacles that will inevitably be encountered. Most have to change course as they travel on the path, often having to try again when ground is lost. Learning takes place as the participants master the skills to perform tricks, which lead to success. The interactions of the participants with each other and the *SK8 Pool Table*, is similar to life in the fact that people enjoy time with others and yet there are times they prefer to act alone. The *SK8 Pool Table* can be viewed as art, a game to be played, or a challenge to be conquered, just as life can be.

As an artist and inventor I plan to further investigate my *SK8 Pool Table* ideas and designs by using my computer to create 3D models and business proposals for construction. As an inventor I want to see my idea become an actual manufactured game or activity with several themed tables created for people to play, much like a game of mini-golf. As an artist I would like to create a table that could be displayed and interacted with in art galleries or at various creative events. I envision a much larger skateboard park style table with a variety of ramps and obstacles that could be enjoyed by many people at the same time. Either way as artist or inventor, I want my work to stimulate the viewer or player to have fun and be happy.

CONCLUSION

Are the pieces I presented art, invention, or both? Am I an artist or an inventor? I think the work I create often fits both categories. They involve the process of creativity and result in objects or devices that may or may not be useful, yet may be conceptually or aesthetically pleasing. I am an inventor, as well as an artist. These roles are not in conflict rather I merge the traits of these professions to create my work. My ideas often start with the desire to create an artistic piece that in some respect is commentary on culture or concepts. I frequently begin with a drawing of an object that I want to make. Elements of art such as medium and scale are primary considerations. As I progress I think of aesthetic modifications that could be useful. When I think of inventive modifications, my piece, as well as my role, changes from artist to inventor.

Often I use my artistic ability to record the chronology of a creation or invention. My art becomes a means of documenting my creation. Art and invention become joint processes, which result in the completion of my creations. Thus, I think, that like my inspiration; Leonardo da Vinci, the talents of an artist and inventor perfectly complement one another.

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APPENDIX A
REFERENCED IMAGES

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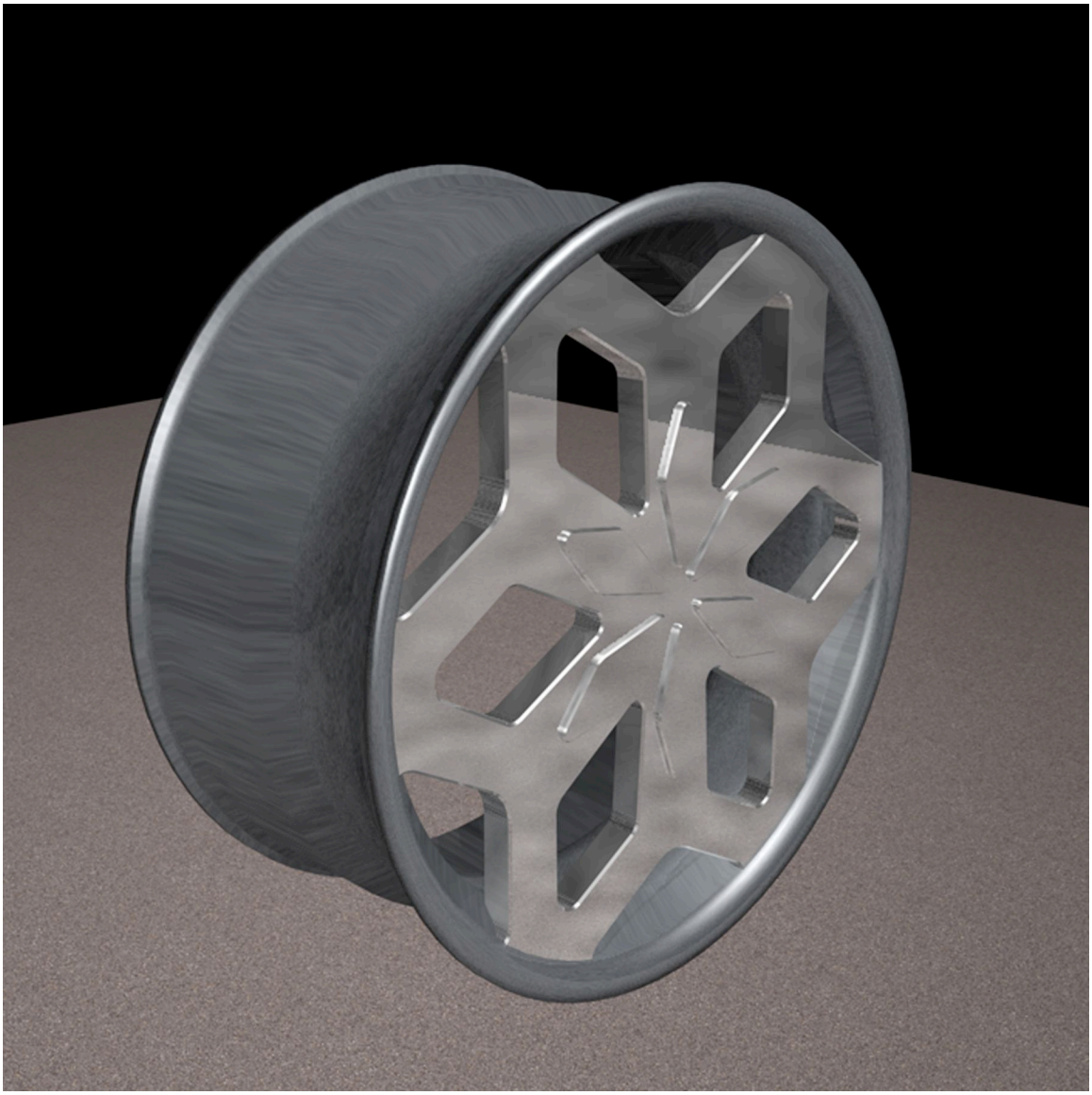

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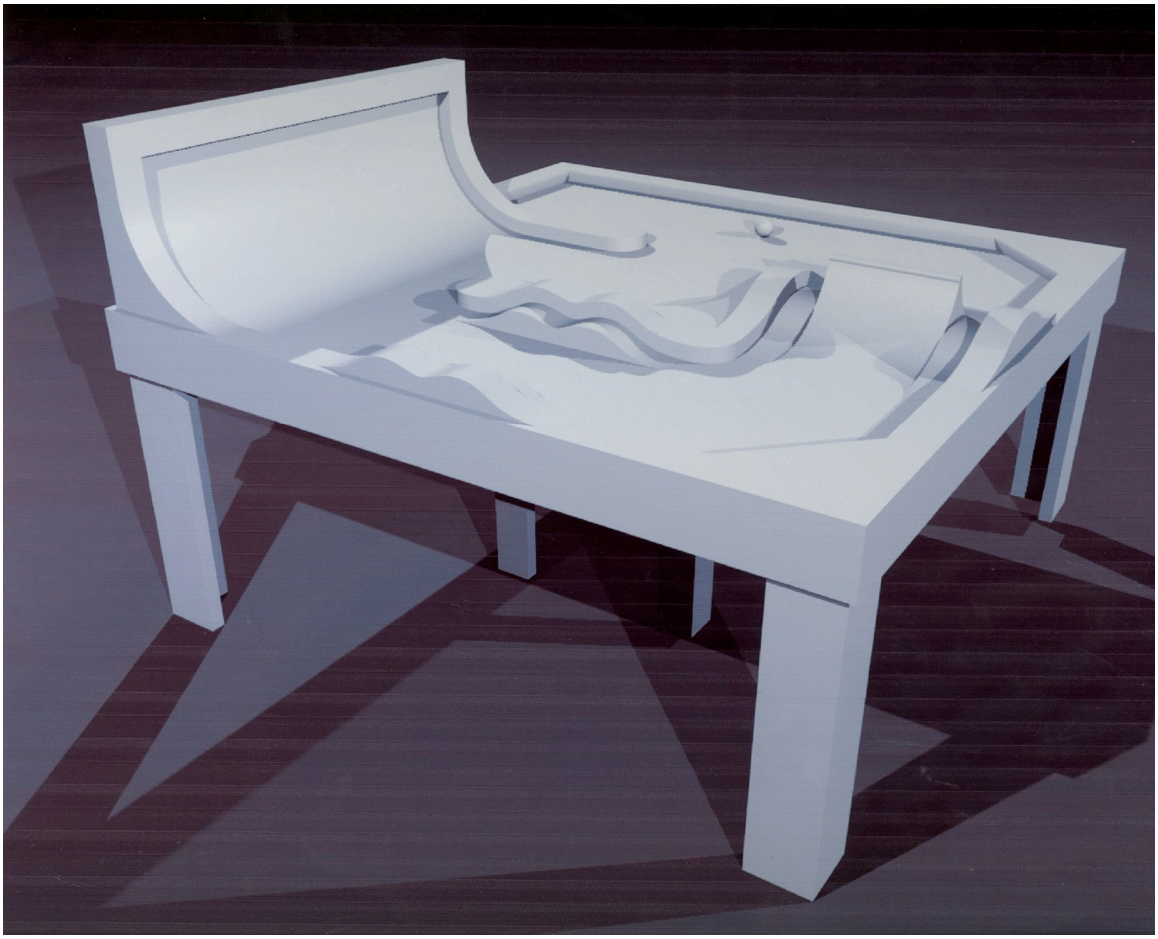

Figure A.13: *SK8 Pool 3D Computer Image created in Maxton Cinema 4D*

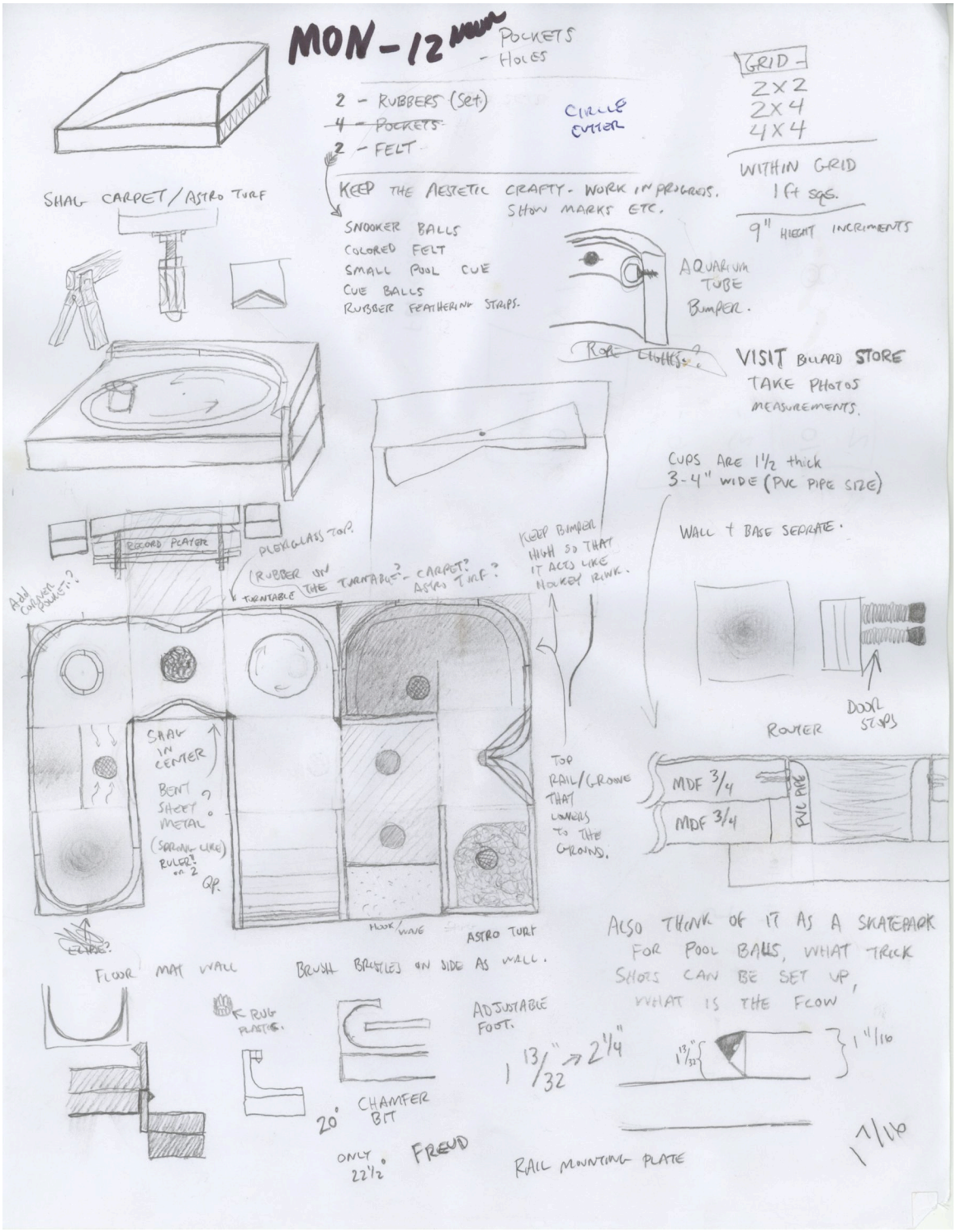

Figure A.14: *SK8 Pool Table Idea Sketches*

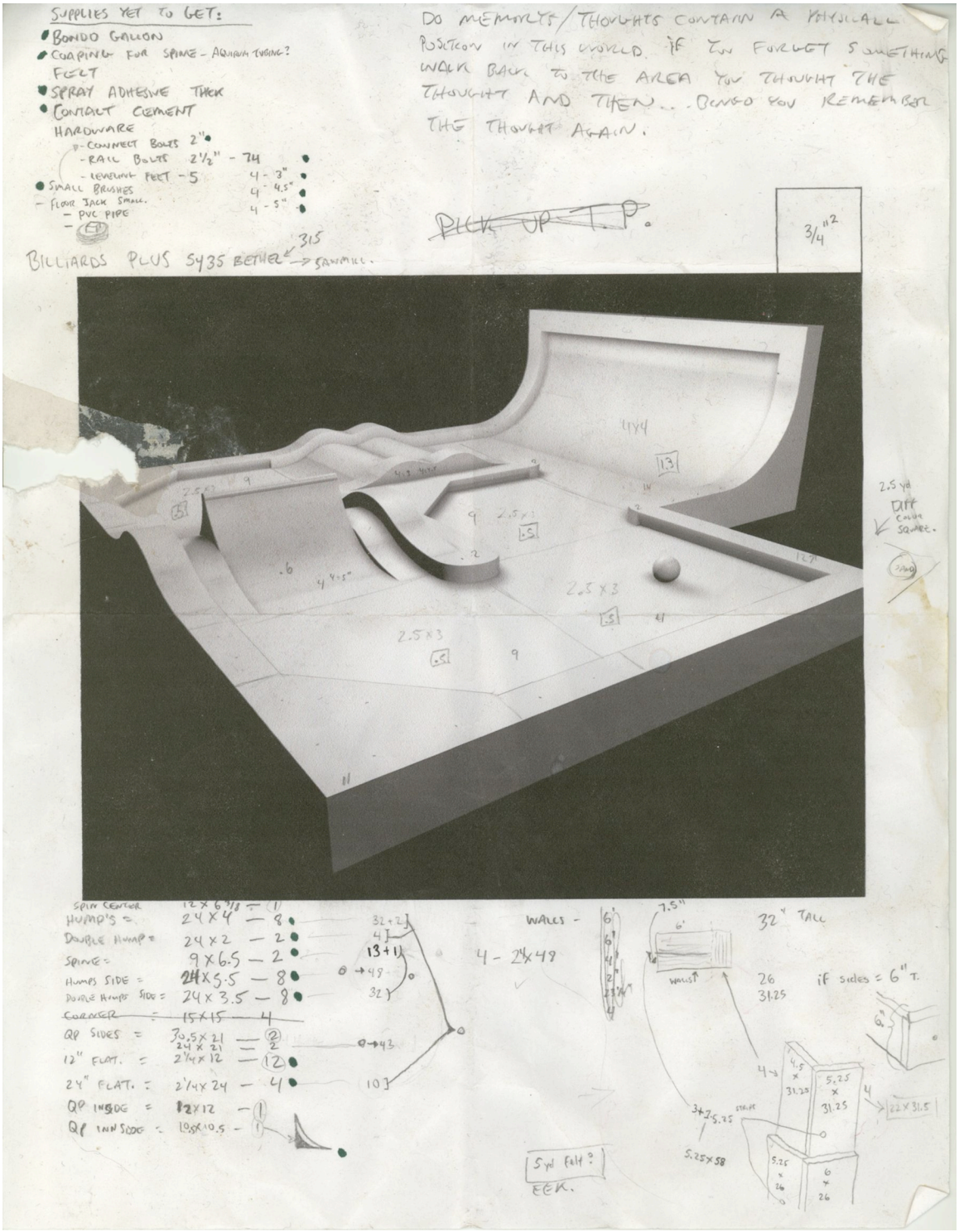

Figure A.15: *SK8 Pool 3D Computer Image with Working Notes*