

Faith Parris

Final Draft

Object: Sleeping Mime by Charles Ray

The Sleeping Mime is a life sized aluminum sculpture of an oddly positioned man laying on a cot. One cannot ignore the life size frame glistening in the spacious room. *The Sleeping Mime* melts into his cot and his holographic aluminium glaze sends viewers to the distant future. The windows to his soul are blank and stagnant yet the stiffness in his chest implies soul and vitality. This robotic, unidentified man is both dead and alive in many ways. The story that Charles Ray tells with this gem is much deeper than meets the eye. After examining the explanations and commentary of Charles Ray, I distilled his process of making this masterpiece into three parts and will explain it chronologically. I explored the ways that his philosophy, hands on research, and sculpting technique play a role in the creation of Sleeping Mime.

Charles Ray's thought process was intriguing. In order to go about thinking of ways to approach this piece, he had to philosophically understand the idea behind it. He takes his inspiration for his sleeping mime from two sources. One being the Egyptian word for for life or immortal soul "ka" ¹and the second being one of my favorite novels, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* by Philip Dick.² Charles Ray encourages the dance between sleep and death, even studying Greek and Egyptian ideas about eternity. He speaks of forcing his viewer to reflect on whether the Mime is sleeping or miming sleep, similar to the question in *Do Androids*

¹ Foster, Hal. *Philosophical Objects*. Charles Ray Studio, 2019.

² Dick, Philip K., et al. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Boom! Studios, 2011.

Dream of Electric Sheep, that explores dreaming as a sign of self reflection and therefore consciousness. This juxtaposition between dream, sleep and death is essential and not only was there miming death in life, but Charles Ray flirted with the opposite idea as well. To think about miming life in death is hard to grapple with at first seeing that we are all alive, but his goal was to explore ways in which one could recreate a scenario where there is an underlying living energy within a dead or still object, as a ghost would during the act of haunting.³ The mind games and interactions with his viewers are endless. He even mentioned hoping to make readers believe the mime would get up and walk out of the exhibit in jest.⁴ Ray manipulates reality and thought with this thought provoking experiment. But to masterfully do so, he had to step out of his sculpting mindframe and step into another. Because he attempts to capture a still moment of life, he reasons that the best way to portray that is with someone who has mastered the art of believable imitation: a mime. Having decided that the best way to capture this false sense of life is to create a lifesize mime, he dedicated a significant portion of time studying mimes and their psychology.⁵ Enlightened by this experience, he was taught to pay attention to minor details while sculpting in order to truly give his viewers the interactive experience he intended them to have.

After digesting what he was taught by the mime, Ray honed in on each detail. He describes having shifts in thought and being forced to reimagine his goal when simple questions arose like whether or not the mime would have stripes. Things we take for granted such as

³ Ray Charles, Wagner M. Anne: *Carta(s) Thinking Is Three-Dimensional*

⁴ Foster, Hal. *Philosophical Objects*. Charles Ray Studio, 2019.

⁵ Ray, Charles, and Brooks Turner. *A Guide to Charles Ray: Sleeping Mime*. Paperleaf Press, 2017.

breath was something that could make or break the act of a mime which Ray made the choice to not neglect. Ray sculpted the mime with an erect chest as if he were inhaling and holding his breath for the sake of assuming a pose. Whether or not Ray had this in mind, I immediately think of the biblical hebrew word used in Genesis, "Rua".⁶ While this word means breath, it also means life, which God breathed into his first creations to give them soul and consciousness, which the Mime possess.

As budding curators, we know that the layout and deliberate placement is just as and at times even more important than the art itself. Ray knew that when the pieces compliment each other, the message is amplified. The placement of Bachus' mask melding together to be one with his flesh compliments the melting of the mime into the cot, giving that liquid metal effect. The placement of the and the dying Christ and the living Christ sculptures makes the Mime neutral to both life and death. He straddles the line and can be either one depending on the viewer. His choice to use bare aluminium was due to his love of the material. He acknowledges the many constraints when sculpting with aluminium. To him, it was impossible to leave it bare or unpainted because of its invisibility. The sculpting of that unidentified face was an interesting process. He sculpted the face from scratch and memory out of a block of foam. The apparent smoothness and lack of distinct features is because the lines were softened by the foam. Ray's goal was for it to be a realistic face.⁷ Which in my opinion was successfully done.

⁶ *Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments: King James Version*. American Bible Society, 2010.

⁷ Ray, Charles, and Brooks Turner. *A Guide to Charles Ray: Sleeping Mime*. Paperleaf Press, 2017.

In conclusion, the process of making art can be more captivating than the history itself. Ray's process is enlightening and gives more insight on the culture and experience of the *Sleeping Mime* than meets the eye. Personally, what the *Sleeping Mime* tells me is a story composed of juxtapositions. It represents hopelessness and hope, eternity and mortality, life and death. His miserable and awkward positioning on the cot results in him exuding a sense of entrapment in his mortal form yet this metallic figure will last forever.

Sources

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