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Embedded In These Walls

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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To all the women with whom I share my life.
To the great women with whom I am connected by way of blood and spirit.
And to those who have been, or will be, here, too.
This is for you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	5
Abstract.....	6
Introduction.....	7
Chapter 1: March 2017.....	8
Chapter 2: Indication: Multiple Falls.....	11
Chapter 3: What Happened.....	14
Chapter 4: Those Who Have Been Here, too.....	20
Chapter 5: Memories We'd Sooner Forget.....	24
Conclusion.....	35
Bibliography.....	37

LIST OF FIGURES

1. trish j gibson. <i>Francie (behind)</i> , Archival image, 2017.....	10
2. trish j gibson, photo of <i>Indication: multiple falls</i> , installation piece, 2017.....	13
3. trish j gibson, <i>Patricia Ann</i> , Archival Image, 2017.....	16
4. trish j gibson, <i>Debby</i> , Archival Image, 2017.....	17
5. trish j gibson, <i>Anna</i> , Archival Image, 2017.....	18
6. trish j gibson, Installation Image from <i>What Happened</i> , 2017.....	19
7. Nan Goldin, <i>Nan one month after being battered</i> , Archival Image. 1984.....	20
8. Nan Goldin, <i>The Hug</i> , Archival Image. 1980.....	21
9. Donna Ferrato, <i>Given that sexual problems are related to violence between couple, it is not surprising that the most deadly room in the house is the bedroom, Denver, Colorado.</i> silver gelatin print. 1983.....	22
10. trish j gibson. <i>Patricia Ann 1 of 2</i> , Interview Text. 2018.....	23
11. trish j gibson, <i>door</i> , archival image, 2018.....	25
12. trish j gibson, <i>mirror</i> , archival image, 2018.....	26
13. trish j gibson, <i>stairs</i> , archival image, 2018.....	27
14. trish j gibson, <i>window</i> , archival image, 2018.....	28
15. trish j gibson, <i>memories we'd sooner forget than have to retell</i> , perspective text, 2018.....	29
16. trish j gibson, <i>evidence</i> , perspective text. 2018.....	31
17. trish j gibson, <i>Memories We'd Sooner Forget</i> Installation image 1, 2018.....	32
18. trish j gibson, <i>Memories We'd Sooner Forget</i> , Installation Image 2, 2018.....	33
19. trish j gibson, <i>Memories We'd Sooner Forget</i> , Installation Image 3, 2018.....	34
20. trish j gibson, <i>Embedded In These Walls</i> , Installation Image 1, 2018.....	35
21. trish j gibson, <i>Embedded In These Walls</i> , Installation Image 2, 2018.....	36
22. trish j gibson, Text written for the opening of <i>Embedded In These Walls</i> . 2018.....	36

Abstract

Embedded In These Walls
by trish j gibson

A thesis submitted in partial requirement for the degree of Master of Fine Art
at Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2018

Major Directors:

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Embedded In These Walls uses photographic imagery, archival ephemera, and written text to examine a specific history of generational trauma through the lens of a singular family of a southern tradition to point to a larger systemic breakdown of accountability and truthfulness regarding abuse

Introduction

Embedded In These Walls is my own reclamation of the histories of my family, the undeniable truths and events, told from my own voice, as I weave in and out of the perspectives of the women with whom I am connected. My focus for this work rests on the narrative of my mother, my two aunts, and my grandmother. Viewing myself as a guide or a conduit to organize accounts.

My interest has always lived within moments of familial connection, interpersonal relationships, and documentary-style making. But, during the research and exploration of my own family's cyclical history of trauma and abuse, I was quickly faced with the question of what to do with these histories and how do I confront my own experience with secondary trauma. With eleven women on the maternal side of my family, whose lives had all been heavily punctuated with abuse. And several men in my family who are abusers, warnings about such things were given to me from an extremely young age. Jessica Valenti wrote something in her book, *Sex Object* that seemed to describe exactly how I have seen and felt the history of sexual abuse within my own family: *"the frequency with which women in my family have been hurt or sexually assaulted starts to feel like a flashing message encoded in our DNA: Hurt. Me."*

-Jessica Valenti, Sex Object. 11.

When I was younger, I was often warned about the danger that can be found in amorous relationships. I was given anecdotes from my mother about her adolescence. My father warned me against male friendships and dating, "they only want one thing" he would say, a cliché that I now understand to be both starkly real and complete hyperbole. Despite my parents best efforts to shield me from the generational curses of my family, we all recently found ourselves confronted with just how deeply we are still held by them.

Chapter 1: March 2017

Last March, my mother called me late one evening, and when I answered I heard a woman wailing on the other end of the phone, collapsed with grief. I screamed too, not knowing what was happening, trying to understand what was going on and what I was hearing. Eventually, my sister-in-law came to the phone and told me my mother was trying to call me but had collapsed when I picked up the phone. She told me that my aunt Francie had been badly injured, but she was not sure what had exactly happened.

This moment is where the arch of my narrative in this work begins, with that night. That phone call started a trail of events that are still happening today. These events have shifted my life, and my family's lives and altered how we have managed to get from one day to the next since that time.

Below, is the timeline of events starting from Francie's attack to when she was discharged from the hospital. These are the facts stated to the best of my memory (and my notes) from that time, which are based on my family's recounting, my own first-hand experience, and the reports given to the detectives.

The last time anyone heard from Francie before Aaron assaulted her was on Sunday, March 5th when she spoke to her oldest daughter, Kari on the phone. On Monday, Aaron called into work for Francie. Aaron stated that he was taking Francie to the emergency room because she had fallen and was badly injured. The next day, Aaron dropped Francie off at Sentara Obici Hospital in Suffolk, VA around 5:00 pm and immediately fled the scene. Upon assessing her injuries, the trauma staff at the hospital immediately flew Francie, via helicopter, to Norfolk General Hospital, which is a level-1 trauma unit, approximately twenty-two miles away. Francie's family members were contacted by the hospital staff at Norfolk General and informed that she may not make it through that night. Police and detectives were contacted by Francie's daughter, Amy. That is when the investigation began.

After receiving a full assessment at Norfolk General Hospital, Francie's injuries were listed to include: bruises on her arms, legs, back, right armpit, shoulders, and face. Large masses of hair torn from the sides and back of her head. Abrasions on her face left hand and left shin. Four isolated brain bleeds from impact trauma to the head. Two broken bones in her face and a torn left eyelid.

When the detectives arrived at Francie's home they found blood stains on the carpet and the bed. The stains were faded by an apparent attempt at cleaning with bleach. There was human hair scattered in chunks and a sizeable piece of hair found inside of a pizza box that had been placed by the trash can outside of Francie's trailer.

Francie's sheets and bedding, stained with blood, are found in the washing machine. A large metal pipe is found under a pillow on Francie's bed. And a wooden hockey stick is found in the backyard.

Two days after her initial attack, I arrived at the hospital. My cousin, Amy, was already there. I waited in Francie's room for my other family members to arrive while Amy continued to talk with police and detectives. The family decided to press charges of attempted murder against Aaron.

During those days, Francie's cognitive skills were low and she slept through most of the days while I was with her, due to her injuries and the pain medication administered by the hospital. Her room was under a high-security enforcement at Amy's request, so that Aaron could not find out where she, Francie, was. We spent all day in the neurological surgery ward of Norfolk General. Francie's name is blacked out in records and no one was permitted in her room without prior clearance. It was extremely chaotic. When Francie would wake, she would be totally unaware of where she was or what had happened. She asked to see and talk to Aaron repeatedly. During the moments when she would stay awake, recordings of what she could recall about her attack and the events leading up to it were taken by myself, my mother, and my aunt Anna. We hoped that these recordings would be used to bolster our case against Aaron. The following day, they moved Francie to a lower security status and they took her out of the neuro ICU after her surgeries. They placed her in a trauma recovery room. Her injuries were stable and her cognitive skills were still consistently improving. She still claimed at that time, that she did not remember the events that led to her being brought to the hospital and she continuously requested to see her boyfriend, Aaron Ashley. I made additional recordings to turn over to the detectives assigned to Francie's case. I asked permission, and Francie allowed me to take photos of her healing injuries.

By Friday, all five of Francie's children, her three siblings, her mother, and I (her niece) rotate in and out of her room. Her doctor discussed the possibility of allowing her to be discharged on Tuesday and spoke with Francie about options if she decided she would need a place to go after she left the hospital. She was given pamphlets with titles like "What is Domestic Abuse:". I kept recording. The next morning, Francie refused to move forward on pressing charges against her boyfriend, stating that she could not remember anything thoroughly enough to testify.

One week after Francie was initially dropped off at the hospital, they discharged her from Norfolk General and she returned home with Misty and Corey, two of her children. The day after she returned home, Francie spoke with a detective to give her account of the events as she remembered them from the prior week. It is unclear what was said during her interview.

That is everything that I know of for sure leading up to, and during, Francie's stay in the hospital. Directly after she was discharged from the hospital, Francie was brought to her mother's home in Tennessee to heal and to gain some distance from Aaron. But after being there for two days, she disappeared. No one knew where Francie was for two or three days after she fled from her mother's home. She eventually called one of my family members to let them know that she was fine, she had gone back home and was with Aaron.

Since her discharge, Francie's case and all charges against Aaron have been dropped at her request. After the initial case was dismissed, Aaron has been taken to jail on two or three additional occasions of domestic assault. Francie has stated that he has tried to remove her eyes from her head, continued to hit her, twist her hair, and throw her on the ground. Sometimes she will call my mother or one of her children, frantic and crying. There is always a moment, briefly after a new attack, where Francie will give a true account of what has happened to her. A case of hers even went to trial earlier this year. But, during the pressure of the trial process, she claimed no abuse before the judge and even stated that everything was a misunderstanding and that it was all her fault. At this time, Francie and Aaron are still together, living in Newport News, Virginia.



1. trish j gibson. *Francie (behind)*, archival image, 2017.

Chapter 2: Indication: Multiple Falls

The process of entering into this work started with those days I spent in the hospital with Francie, right after Aaron assaulted her. I took photos of her injuries and recorded audio of her recollections so that we would have evidence to turn in to the detectives. I made *Indication: Multiple Falls* in response to that jarring feeling of being in the hospital with someone who has been broken by the hand of another person. That sense of helplessness, anger, and deep sadness that I felt from my family members and that repeated notion that “all we could do is pray,” pray that things would get better and that this situation would change. That false sense of hope without action always seemed to be lost on me. I feel very strongly that things, in fact, will never get better.

I feel this way, because from the time I was nine-years-old, I can remember my mother telling me stories about my aunts, about my grandmother and how she was raised, and about my mother's own recurrent assault. These oral histories informed how I viewed the world both then and now. Both of my aunts have had abusive relationships in their lives, but my aunt Francie seems to have an association with love that always incites a certain type of violence.

When she was fifteen, Francie met the man who would later become her husband and the father of her five children. I remember their home vividly, filled with smoke, bottles of beer, and the tense energy of stale arguments that, in time, were never settled. I remember the ominous feeling of the neighborhood where she lived. My mother and I would drive from Tennessee to Virginia to visit Francie and my cousins. After those trips, my mother would come home unnerved. She would weep on the all-day drive back to our Tennessee home and the lingering mood of those visits would affect her for several days after we were back. Even then, when I was too young to understand, I could feel the unrest of that space. The way an abuse, not inflicted on my mother's own person, could still cripple her.

The truth is, because of how deeply her decisions impacted my mother, I always resented my aunt Francie in a way. Throughout my life, my mother has often mistakenly called me by her sister's name, she would call “Francie” from across our house, but I would know that it was intended for me. My mother views her baby sister as her first child, as they are ten years apart. My mother often recalls a story from when Francie was three years old, in which Francie was run over by a truck. Though her legs were badly bruised, they were not broken. But still, Francie could not walk for several weeks so my mother carried her every day until she healed. My mother considers herself to be Francie's “other” mother.

I think she always wanted to protect Francie in some way, in the same way that she has protected me, and tried to keep the generational cycles of abuse from punctuating my life in the same way it has affected the eleven other women in my family. Dorothy Allison, who I often turn to for connection or inspiration, once equated her mother to a force of nature, with the ability to save her, Dorothy's, life. I feel this statement to be undeniably true of my mother as well: *"I thought of my mama like a mountain or a cave, a force of nature, a woman who had saved her own life and mine, and would surely save us both over and over again."* *Trash*. Pg. 35.

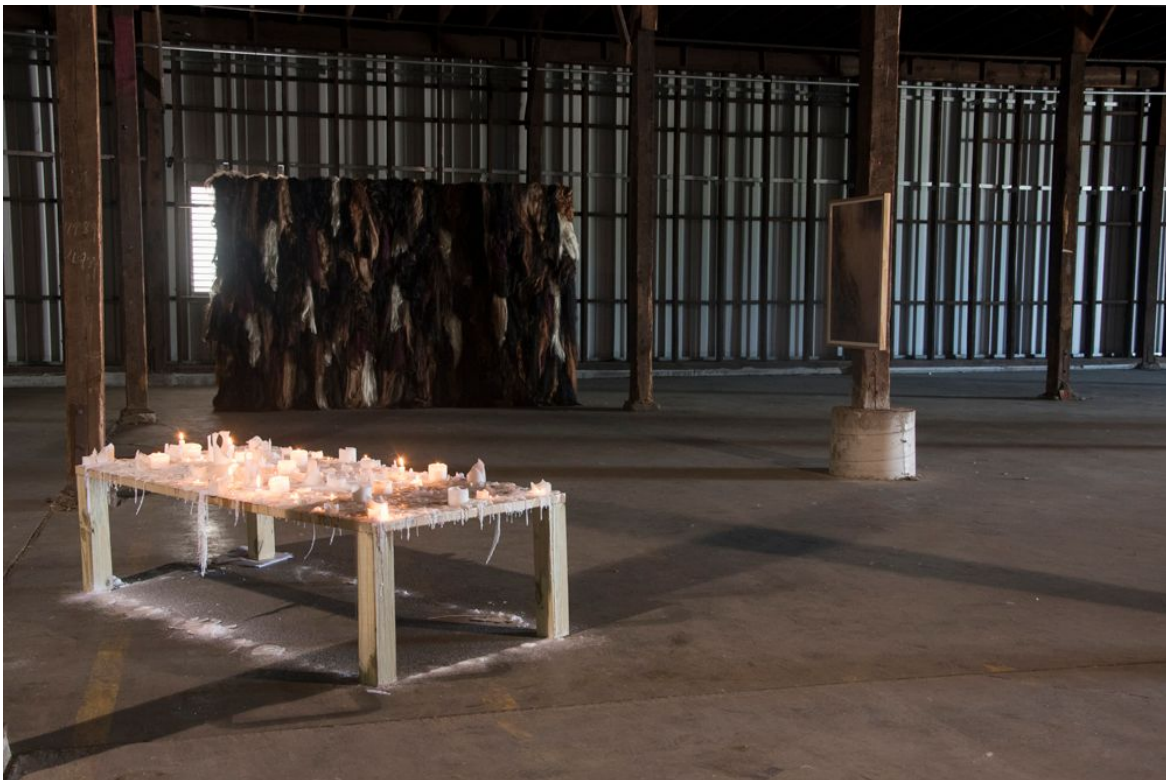
I can remember my mother praying over my childhood bed as I slept, she would pray that I would not be touched by the same curse that inflicted the generations before me, and still, the generation around and even after me. I remember this vividly, but I know that it began long before I was aware. I think in some ways those prayers must have worked, but then again, no person is immune from the abuse of a family, or the certain type of trauma that comes from living in a society that deems you as less than, just because of your gender. As Jessica Valenti points out, *"- despite the preponderance of evidence showing the mental and emotional distress people demonstrate in violent and harassing environments - we still have no name for what happens to women living in a culture that hates them."* *Sex Object*. Pg. 13

Sometimes I think my mother's love for me and her perception of me must also intertwine with her love and perception of Francie. Somewhere in time, the two of us had to have converged in her mind and since then we have been parallel in her consciousness.

My initial work after Francie's attack came from a place of desperation, a need to understand and process without being overt and allowing myself some emotional distance. The chaos I felt from the days that followed Francie's recovery led to an installation piece which I titled after the phrasing on Francie's discharge paperwork from the hospital: *Indication: Multiple Falls*. This one term cycled through my brain over and over again, this confirmation that the account Francie had given to the medical staff was that she had fallen over and over again and that is how she sustained all of her injuries. But, no one believed that these injuries could have come from multiple short-distance falls in her own home. The staff in the trauma ward stated that it was clear what was going on from the moment they saw her. But unfortunately, in the majority of domestic abuse cases, the symptoms often look the same, and there is not much anyone can do to keep it from happening again.

For the *Indication* installation, I created three separate pieces, which existed as one work. I intentionally kept the work indistinct in order to give myself critical distance from the emotional nature of the subject. I constructed a bed, which also acted as an altar where I lit candles and prayed every day for the duration of the installment of the show. I printed an extremely close-up view of a photograph of the side of Francie's head, which acted as a sort of abstract expressionist articulation of a bruise. And I constructed a 15x10 foot wall covered in hair extensions to represent the hair torn from Francie's head, as well as, the hair that my aunt Anna bought for Francie to cover-up the large patches of hair that were missing after she came home from the hospital.

Under one leg of the table, you could find a copy of the actual discharge paperwork that Francie was sent home with from the hospital, including documents titled "What is Domestic Abuse?." These documents were coated in wax from the table and inaccessible to the viewer. By constructing the piece in this way, it gave me time and space to process, and it allowed the viewer to see only what I was able to show them at that time.



2. trish j gibson, photo of *Indication: Multiple Falls*, installation piece, 2017.

Chapter 3: What Happened.

After I made *Indication: multiple falls* I began to interview my family, and question them on what they could remember from Francie's time in the hospital earlier that year. I became obsessed with the change in the story from person to person, fascinated by the denial and the blame placed to cope with our inability to actually help the situation. I began recording what I could and asking the same questions over and over again. While having conversations with the women in my family, I would have them sit for large-format, 4x5 portraits. I brought up past instances of trauma, I asked my grandmother about the boy who assaulted my mother in their home; knowing that this was something my mother had confronted her about many times during the aftermath of the event. But, hearing my Grandmother deny ever knowing what had happened to my mother made me realized just how long these issues had been locked behind doors in her mind. And how she could still today, claim that maybe the events leading up to Francie's hospitalization really were just a big misunderstanding.

I continued the process of recording over the course of several weeks. I would press my family members and ask them more each time. I began to be able to anticipate their answers and gain a deeper understanding of each woman's unique perspective on what had really happened to Francie, what they thought might come in the future, and what damage had been done to them much further in the past. I recorded the interviews and listened to them on a loop. I recorded myself, and my own recollection of that time and my experience with trauma. I let myself dwell in that space and reflect on those stories. I ached for my family and the women who were currently being torn apart by Francie's abuser. I grieved for the trauma we had all experienced and I grieved for the wounds that had been inflicted long before me.

I considered why I so often dwelled in this space, why we all revisit trauma again and again, especially in art. I'm reminded of Maggie Nelson's thoughts on this in *The Art of Cruelty* where she discusses the psychology of trying to master trauma through the lens of art-making. "*Freud argued that our enjoyment stems from art's ability to offer – perhaps to viewer and creator alike – a retroactive mastery of traumatic experiences that one's defenses failed to deflect adequately from the organism at the time of the original impact or injury. The "compulsion to repeat" the trauma – be it in art, nightmare, or walking life – is the organism's attempt to master the surplus anxiety that the original incursion produced. Of course, these attempts typically fail, often to catastrophic effect – in which case art can be seen as a relatively innocuous arena in which to showcase the failure – to enjoy, as Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek has put it, our symptoms.*"

pg. 11

During the collection and research process of this work, I often reflected on the current politics and media; with so many past acts of sexual trauma coming to light, from the #MeToo movement and the election of Donald Trump, despite several claims of assault and sexual violence against him, I couldn't help but make connections to my work.

It seemed that the discussion of violent acts against women was everywhere and the same questions continued to cycle through my mind:

“What happens when we have to take in so many of these accounts of trauma?”

“What do we do with all of this information?”

“Who's voice do we listen to?”

“Who has the right to speak about this?”

“How do I keep from becoming overwhelmed and tuning out?”

These questions swirled around my head for weeks as I continued making portraits and recording interviews with the women in my family. Often, when I would speak to other people about current events, or even about my work, there was always an initial sense of relevance or a real urgency to their tone and comments regarding what was happening. But, as time went on, you could detect an exhaustion, and eventually, a total tune-out or a sense of apathy towards the accounts and events.

I used this same cyclical experience I found in the discussion around abuse and trauma to inform my own work about these same themes. I decided to try and tackle a way to cause a viewer to go through these cycles of empathy, exhaustion, and disconnection all while viewing a piece about my family's latest trauma. To manage this, I edited all of the interviews of my family together on single multi-track audio piece and played them in the space that contained the images I had made of my grandmother, my mother, my aunt Anna, my cousin Misty, and myself. All of which were confronting a large image depicting Francie in the hospital.

The audio would rise and fall, creating a cacophony of voices all retelling their individual versions of what had happened to Francie. I titled the piece, *What Happened.*, as this was one of the questions that my aunt asked us over and over again in the hospital after she was assaulted. The title, as a declaration instead of a question, is an acknowledgment of the confusion of the situation, and also a statement that each person's individual account of this story, though extremely erratic, was genuinely what believed had happened.

Susan Sontag, wrote of the collective memory, stating that all memories, regardless of how shared they are, are inherently individualized and unreproducible. I employed this mode of considering memory when dealing with the large gaps and shifts in the story from person to person during these recollections. *“All memory is individual, unreproducible - it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that this is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds.”* *Regarding the Pain of Others*. pg. 85



3. trish j gibson, *Patricia Ann*, Archival Image. 2017.



4. trish j gibson, *Debby*, Archival Image. 2017.



5. trish j gibson, *Anna*, Archival Image. 2017.



6. trish j gibson, Installation image from *What Happend*. 2017.

Chapter 4: Those Who Have Been Here, Too

Through the research of this work, I also found connections to other photographers who have inhabited the same space I sought to find with this work. Nan Goldin is an American photographer who famously depicted brilliant scenes of violence and cruelty. She was one of the first women who clearly represented these truths with her lens, and I still turn back to her work as a method for describing brutality, though I often omit the figure in the frame when confronting trauma in my own work. Goldin was most known for photographing intimate moments in her life and the life of her family and friends. Her work was well-known for being shown in slide-show form while projected over music. Her snapshot-like images would revolve before the viewer showing images of love, loss, drug use, domestic violence, and the ravages of the AIDS epidemic in the late 1970s and 1980s.

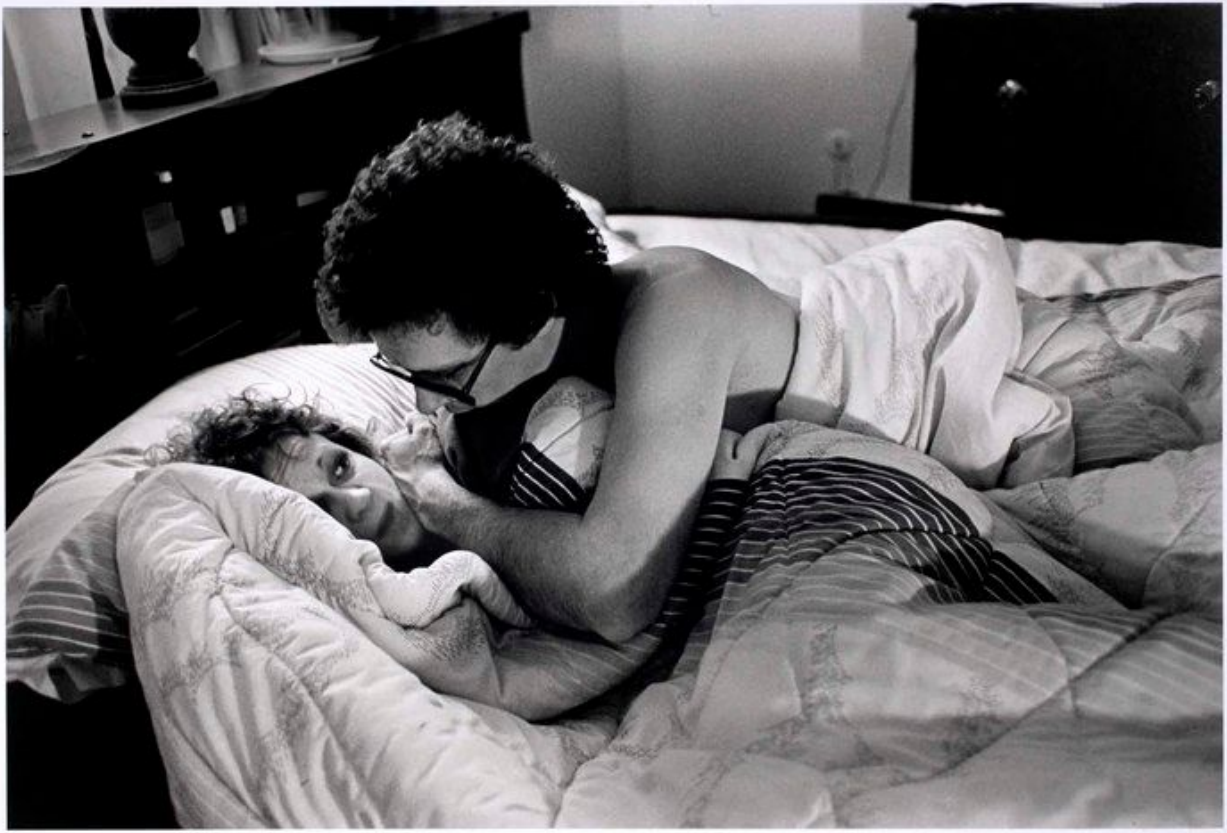


7. Nan Goldin, *Nan one month after being battered*, Archival Image. 1984.



8. Nan Goldin, *The Hug*, Archival Image. 1980.

In addition to Nan Goldin, I also pulled description from Donna Ferrato, who worked for years photographing scenes of domestic violence. Ferrato would spend time in hospital waiting rooms, waiting for women who had been attacked to arrive. She would document them and eventually, find her way into their home lives, their court cases, their flee to women's shelters, and in a few instances, their deaths by the hands of their partner.



9. Donna Ferrato, *Given that sexual problems are related to violence between couple it is not surprising that the most deadly room in the house is the bedroom...* Denver, Colorado, silver gelatin print. 1983.

While informed by these works, my desire was to push past them, to create something new and to pull the gaze away from direct images that depicted the aftermath or present sense of violence. My aim is to create a whole story, a shift of perspective and an attempt to see all angles of my own history to better articulate the root and the dishonesty or one-sidedness that so often surrounds the discussion about abuse.

I think Dorothy Allison stated it beautifully in her book, *Skin*: “If we are forced to talk about our lives, our sexuality, and our work only in the language and categories of a society that despises us, eventually we will be unable to speak past our own griefs. We will disappear into those categories. What I have tried to do in my own life is refuse the language and categories that would reduce me to less than my whole complicated experience.” pg. 13

My aim in this work is to define for myself the language and categories for which to discuss my own history, and through this act to carve a path for others to reclaim ownership over their own stories as well. My desire in this work is to find my own voice within the matters of class, culture, trauma, abuse, and womanhood, and by doing this, create more platforms for others who are already in, or will one day find themselves in my same position. The same position of so many who have remained silent or been silenced up to now.

Through this work, I hope to excavate histories, stir up difficult conversations, and create a more honest plane when it comes to the complicated and multilayered truths behind intimate acts of violence by revealing the inner workings of the individuals that reside within a family involved in a cycle of trauma.

I couldn't say where all of this started... Maybe with my mother? But it could have been long before that, I just wouldn't know.

I was raised understanding that I wasn't exactly wanted, you see my mother did not raise me. She had me when she was very young so, I thought that she was my sister. Growing up I always hated her. It wasn't until I overheard her talking to my parents...well, who I thought were my parents that I found out that she was in fact, my mother.

We never did really bond, you know, in the way that a mother does with her child.

10. trish j gibson. *Patricia Ann 1 of 2*, Interview Text. 2018.

Chapter 5: Memories We'd Sooner Forget

From this point, I felt I needed to create something that would be able to hold the weight of all of my research, the scope of my family's history, and of the current narrative we were all still living through. Because of this instinct to bring all of these pieces together, I decided to begin constructing a book. An object comprised of archival images from my family, new images of my own making, and two variations of writing. This form seemed to be what the work was initially missing. Within this book, I could tie together all of the pieces that had come before and allow the viewer to see a more full scope of these histories that I was so desperately trying to articulate through my previous attempts.

The images from this final work, come from a conceptual notion that a physical space can hold trauma in the same way that a body can. Embedded in the walls, underneath the carpet, and forever permeating the air in and around it. I concentrated my gaze on what I felt to be the center of the events and histories as I could recall them. My grandmother's house where my mother and my aunts grew up, my aunt Francie's trailer, where she lived with her husband for 26 years, raised her children, and later, where she was attacked by Aaron.

I moved through these spaces and meditated on what I could recall, the oral histories of my family, told to me over and over again. I focused in and tried to create a portal to these places or a feeling directly tied to these events. These images create deeper paths to my family's shared consciousness. They are conductors of memory, made to be entered. My intention to tie memory, document, and narrative together made me even more aware and considerate of each individual piece of the work. The narrative I composed works to build my story and take the viewer along with me through a history. But the photographs, I believe are capable of tapping into something more psychological. As Susan Sontag stated: "*Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us.*" *Regarding the Pain of Others*. pg. 70



11. trish j gibson, *door*, archival image, 2018.



12. trish j gibson, *mirror*, archival image, 2018.



13. trish j gibson, *stairs*, archival image, 2018.



14. trish j gibson, *window*, archival image, 2018.

The text written specifically as an accompaniment to these images comes from the perspective of my grandmother. I weave between things she has said to me and things I wish she would say, the unspoken truths of our shared history. As with all my writings, I pull from Dorothy Allison to create a sense of place and to guide my intention when speaking about my family. I also return to Maggie Nelson's book, *Jane*, which initially guided me to tap into a history that has so heavily defined my life, though it exists without my physical participation in the story itself. I find that I was able to articulate the overwhelming sense of what my family has experienced for the past few decades by tapping into that collective history and excavating the stories and perspectives that already existed within my mind.

*there are places that hold on to the truths of our lives
the lust – the pain
memories that we'd sooner forget than have to re-tell
but I can't escape them, even in my very home
the scars of my mind are embedded in these walls
like the scars inflicted on my daughters bodies*

*I shoulda taught them how to run...maybe we all shoulda ran a long time ago
- I shoulda packed up and fled, but where could we have gone?*

*I taught franny how to stay
while anna learned to fight back – grew a rage inside of her as wild as the mountains that
surround us
debby holds a pain deep inside her that we all helped to grow – I wish I could've heard her
back then...back when she still reached out to me
there are truths to our lives that can only be seen behind closed doors
memories that we can't share
but we gave them to you, anyway
I can't say...*

*maybe somebody needs to know about the lives that we've lead
and the unbearable honesty that lies within the naked truth of those lives
desire and passion – hope and longing
the upheaval of our minds and bodies
the marks on her body
the feeling of seeing your daughter lie broken in a bed
oh, he nearly killed her
I really think she's fine now – she seems to be doing well
she says she loves him and I have to believe her
she said she fell*

15. trish j gibson, *memories we'd sooner forget than have to retell*, perspective text, 2018.

My hope is to take these stories which have long been quieted and break them open. In some spiritual way, my recurring thought is that I must continue the work which Dorothy Allison started, and show where we are now, generations later, still struggling to be heard. Regarding these thoughts, Allison wrote: Behind the story I tell is the one I don't. Behind the story you hear is the one I wish I could make you hear. Behind my carefully buttoned collar is my nakedness, the struggle to find clean clothes, food, meaning, and money. Behind sex is rage, behind anger is love, behind this moment is silence, years of silence. Dorothy Allison, *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*. pg. 39

Once I gave myself permission to tell these stories, the work began to flow out of me. The permission to write these things down seemed to be what I had needed all along. Claiming these stories as my own, as a part of my unique history allowed me to immerse myself in the pool of narratives that had always existed within me. The words and images poured freely from my mind and I began to understand what was needed to make this work not only deeply personal, but also a universal example of what cycles of trauma can look like amongst a family or group of people. I believe by allowing myself the authority of authorship to these histories, I tapped into a space of undeniable honesty about the complicated and multilayered nature of abuse. I allowed myself to see it's full effects in my life, and the lives of those around me.

After I began to write, I started making connections between my photos and my writings. I began thinking of them no longer as separate pieces but as one cohesive and entirely intertwined story. I believe that both the texts and the images have the ability to function in the same way, as portals. I see them now collectively as a direct connection to a moment, a place, and a history that, through my authorship, a viewer can now also access.

The influences of my research come about most clearly through my writing. The book *Jane* by Maggie Nelson appears to me now as a direct roadmap for many of the writings I use in my own work. When going back, I find a correlation between one of her poems and one of my perspective pieces. In *Jane*, Nelson writes about the abduction and murder of her aunt, which happened before she was born. Nelson writes about the clues found after the murder of her aunt, where I write about the evidence found at my aunt's house after Aaron assaulted her.

“At Denton Cemetery –

*Fresh tire tracks
and the heel print
of a man’s shoe,
the only clues.”*

Maggie Nelson, *Jane*.

*a hockey stick, a metal pipe, a pizza box – filled with hair
blanched stains sunk deep into the fibers of the bedsheets and the carpet.
the whole place reeked of bleach*

16. trish j gibson, *evidence*, perspective text. 2018.

In my book, which I have titled *Memories We'd Sooner Forget*, there are six interview texts. These interview texts are restructured written accounts of oral interview recordings, which I made while putting together my piece, *What Happened*. By inserting these texts, which contain first-hand accounts from my Grandmother, my aunt Anna, and my mother, I am able to make more apparent the generational associations with trauma within my family.

The book, as a whole, weaves through perspectives and accounts, pulling together archival images, the new images containing sites of trauma, images of Francie from the hospital, current images of my family, the interview texts, and a series of poem-like writings that follow along the narrative of Francie's current relationship and the events of the past two years. These individual pieces all come together to create a more full view of the overwhelming breadth of the background to this work.



17. trish j gibson, *Memories We'd Sooner Forget* Installation image, 2018.



18. trish j gibson, *Memories We'd Sooner Forget*, Installation Image. 2018



19. trish j gibson, *Memories We'd Sooner Forget*, Installation Image, 2018.

Conclusion

In my thesis exhibition, titled *Embedded In These Walls*, a pull directly from the text I wrote. I pair the book with an installation of images attached to the wall of the gallery. I re-use the images of spaces that hold trauma for this installation and they again, act as portals, placed at the height you would see them in real space and at varying scales from 26x30 to 30x40 inches. The images have no frame or border, they hang snug against the wall. This specific hanging technique along with the scale of the images allows the viewer a more immersive experience within the scenes themselves, which draws you from one image to the next.

The installation is set up as a cycle. It's operation is to mimic the feeling of entrapment which caused the work itself to be made. As a viewer, you enter in through the photo of a hockey stick beside my aunt Francie's home. You move from exterior space to interior space as one photo leads to the next. You must keep going. Doorways lead to rooms and to windows you can't quite escape through, slivers of the next scene move you on but there is no way out. You exit the interior and are back outside. But, you're still trapped. You then find an exit in the same way you entered, again at Francie's home. The final exterior photo leads you to the books, hung on shelves, opposite the images. After you spend some time with the books, you learn more about the photos on the wall. After viewing the book, you move back to view the images and quickly, you find yourself caught in a sequence.



20. trish j gibson, *Embedded In These Walls*, Installation Image, 2018.



21. trish j gibson, *Embedded In These Walls*, Installation Image, 2018.

During the opening of the show, I read a new piece written specifically for this space, within the installation itself. By placing myself in the space, and speaking aloud this piece, along with some of the written works from the book, I continue to sew ties from the book, to the images on the wall, and to myself. Through this act of breathing these words in the installation, I further activate the space itself, the conversation, and the cycling that already exists between the works. For this final text, I draw on the memories I have of my mother. I write both from my own perspective but also from the perspective of Francie. In this piece, I see myself and Francie as one intertwined being, the way I believe my mother sees us.

I make one last reference to Dorothy Allison, equating the presence of my mother to a mountain or cave. In that one moment of speaking my final text, I hold all of the threads I have used to weave this story within my hand for one last time. And as I read, it all comes to a close. There is a finality to these words, but also a forbearing, because though this story may be contained neatly within the pages of a book of my own making, I know that for me and for my family, there is much more to come.

*So here we are. Despite all of your best efforts. Despite the countless nights you spent
praying over my bed as slept. Your hands outstretched - your face to the floor.
Despite you, yourself. A force, Like a mountain or a cave.
Despite all these things, you could not keep me from this.*

22. trish j gibson. Text written for the opening of *Embedded In These Walls*. 2018.

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