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The Last Word

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THE LAST WORD

by

KRISTIN LAWHON KYZER

(Under the Direction of Patricia Wasson Carter)

ABSTRACT

The last word, as defined by Webster's dictionary, describes the final remark in a
verbal exchange, the power of a final decision, a definitive statement or treatment, and
the most advanced, up-to-date, or fashionable exemplar of its kind. I venture to explore
and utilize the meaning of this well-known idiom through the creation of visual artworks
that comprise my Master of Fine Art thesis research. Within this body of visual artworks,
titled *The Last Word,* I explore the evolution and realization of self-image through the
examination of disparate and reciprocal relationships. Utilizing personal symbolic
imagery, provocative text and mixed media processes, I present my last word about my
own self-image. This written support paper chronicles the evolution of *The Last Word*,
correlating the creative process with historical and theoretical scholarship.

INDEX WORDS: Self-image, Iconography, Inner Experience, Symbolism, Stream of
Consciousness, Text in Art

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my supportive family. I am blessed and thankful for such loving and steadfast people in my life. Through this process I have realized much about self and family. I know that without each of you, I would not be who I am today. Thank you for being unwavering in your support for me. I love you all.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THESIS BODY OF WORK

I create a scenario that intrigues viewers with an image, a piece of text, or a swipe of paint. This installation ultimately explores how self-image evolves and is realized through disparate and reciprocal relationships. The work is rooted in my own self-awareness and the cultivation of my psyche through examination of relationships and experiences. The creative process has fostered personal revelations while simultaneously validating the process of self-image development as universal. After immersing my creative output into this concept, much has changed in my own understanding of self and in comprehending how we all attain knowledge of self. The title of this thesis research is *The Last Word,* which indicates the choices we make regarding judgments about ourselves.

PURPOSE OF THESIS SUPPORT PAPER

The purpose of this thesis paper is to provide insight into the creative process and research conducted in creating the body of work entitled *The Last Word.* Within this supporting document, I will provide an overview of the scholarship that influenced my development of select pieces as well as influencing the culminating final body of work. Specifically, within each chapter, I will discuss the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of content, art historical references, and the materials and processes used

to create *The Last Word.* In addition to illustrations of artwork created during the initial

stages of my creative process and of the final exhibition itself, the reader will find

illustrations of direct, indirect, historical and theoretical influences that informed and

influenced the development of the body of work.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ORIGINS AS UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCES

This thesis work, *The Last Word*, has been an exploration of my own self-image,

foundations upon which it was built, and its evolutionary process. Through an

investigation of self, I cultivate introspect in viewers, prompt self-analysis, and possibly,

an unavoidable aesthetic response, stream of consciousness or some connection to their

own personal symbolism. When being prompted to consider self-image through the use

of printed text in the artwork, viewers will inevitably link images and text in the artwork

to themselves. At the very least, I will intrigue viewers and propel their thoughts.

Our self-image is created through our interactions and our analysis of those

interactions with others, society, and through self-reflection. Psychological scholars

assess the understanding of self-image as:

> "The process whereby individuals come to see themselves as
> others see them is generally referred as the reflected appraisal
> process or the "looking glasses self" (Cooley, 1902); Mead, 1934.
> According to this process, significant others communicate their
> appraisals of us, and change the way we view ourselves.   Be-
> cause we do not have monitors on our foreheads, we must rely
> on the verbal and nonverbal communications that we receive from
> others. "[1]

As I analyze my own process of identity development, I confirm that I am often very quick to form ideas of self-image and then find it very difficult to shed or change these notions once they have crossed the threshold of my mind.

The artworks in *The Last Word* represent varying revelations within the study of my personal self-image development. The images in the work are part of my own lexicon of symbolism, which reference certain people, places, ideas, experiences, memories and relationships that have molded my self. I have chosen images that I believe can be internalized on a universal level in order to communicate with viewers of the work. I predict that viewers will examine their own selves because according to Mary H. Guindon, professor and Doctor of Psychology, " it is possible that behaviors meant to maintain and enhance a positive sense of self are universal…" [2] As viewers interact with the imagery presented, and the text acts as psychological prompts, the images will be interpreted by means of the viewer's own iconography and related self-image. Viewers will internalize the images and relate them to their own behavior and self-image, a result of life's experiences. After all, everything we experience affects the way we view ourselves.

Stream of consciousness is "the continuous unedited chronological flow of conscious experience through the mind."[3] When particular actions or events are seen by multiple people, registered and processed, interpretations can be completely different. Doctor and professor of Psychology Russell T. Hurlburt further explain this account to our varied inner experiences,

> "By "inner experience" I mean thoughts, feelings,
> sensations, anything that "appears before the footlights of
> consciousness." Some would call it "experience," "lived

experience," or "phenomenal consciousness."…as long as we understand that by "inner experience" (or whatever) I mean what presents itself to you directly, in your conscious awareness as some particular given moment." [4]

I create artwork in the same way as an inner experience or a stream of consciousness moment. Just as the stream of consciousness or inner experience is set into mental motion by some catalyst, so are my artworks and the way they manifest themselves. This process begins with a memory of some person or event. I then make a list of things that I would like for the work to include. From that list I begin to think of images that relate those ideas. Usually these images are obvious choices, so I try to move a step away, and choose other images that still relay the meaning for me, but are obscure enough to keep the work interesting. I do not want to create artworks that are so easily understood that they become boring. After gathering imagery and applying ink or paint to paper, my intuition takes over and I begin to work almost subconsciously. I intuitively respond to marks and images in the work and create other elements in an effort to achieve some compositional balance. During this mechanical-like aesthetic responsive process, memories and experiences auto-play in my head adding to the artistic efforts that go into each piece. Of course, there are intervals where I have to shut down the intuitive art maker, and objectively, critically, look at my work. This dichotomous working relationship serves to create pieces that are filled with content, yet balanced with compositional elements that create successful artworks.

PSYCHOLOGY OF TEXT, IMAGE, ICON, ICONOGRAPHY

Iconography as defined by Webster's dictionary is: pictorial material relating to or illustrating a subject: the traditional or conventional images or symbols associated with a subject and especially a religious or legendary subject: the imagery or symbolism of a work of art, an artist, or a body of art.[5] In my artwork, I use personal symbols or iconography and metaphoric imagery to make up my own self-reflective lexicon. These images work together with words to form the content of the work that I create.

I do not contend that I am a writer but I find the question put forth by Scott McCloud, artist and theorist, thought provoking: "Writing and drawing are seen as separate disciplines, writers and artists as separate breeds. But just how different are they?"[6] In addition to imagery, I intentionally utilize text to convey meaning. I include handwritten text as snippets into my mind and to allude to the personal nature of the work. I also utilize printed text not only as an additional visual commodity within the work, but also to inform the viewer in a more contextual manner.

Text joined with imagery can be considered parallel to the use of symbols, icons and iconography. Words are symbols or icons that conjure ideas and images in our minds based upon life experiences. For example, the letters E-Y-E can stimulate a reader to think in terms of the organs that provides sight. Similarly, the image of an eye would most probably elicit the same thoughts an oval shaped organ with a retina, pupil and eyelids and lashes. However, this is where I believe the similarities end. At this point, unlimited semiosis will affect the interpretation of the image. "…the interpretant (mental concept), resulting in our mind from the first representamen (object) can then become a

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further sign and trigger an infinite chain of associations where the interpretant in one sequence becomes the representamen."[7] To further explain this idea I will continue with the eye illustration. For someone who has had an injury to the eye, the mention of the word could create a visceral reaction from the re-visitation of some psychologically scarring event. For someone whose favorite features are their eyes, it could be a symbol for beauty and attraction. I propose that two individuals could produce unlimited semiosis or a stream of consciousness something like this: Viewer 1- eye, nail, injury, pain, disfigurement, viewer 2- eye, lashes, beauty, attraction, attention. Even though everyone understands eye, when placed into the context of an artwork, it has the possibility of evoking varying responses and emotions from different viewers. For this reason, I contend that we will all approach a piece of artwork with our own set of preconceived notions and ideas that are based on personal experience. These will, no doubt, inform our interpretations. David Crow addresses and supports this idea in his book, Visible Signs, and wrote, "The meaning of the sign will be affected by the background of the reader (viewer)."[8] When text or image are brought into our minds and psychologically processed, they are digested in much the same way. Consequently, by placing text and image into a singular piece of artwork, or a body of artwork, the viewer automatically draws meanings and associations between the two. It is inevitable that viewers will create associations between the text and imagery through self-reflection. The text in my artwork, while intended to inform, also affects how the artwork is interpreted. Professor and author, W.J.T. Mitchell describes the merging of image and text or 'language' into a "psychological communication phenomena." Mitchell claims that pictures have and have always been involved in an "inextricable weaving together' and 'imbrications' with

language. When viewers look at art, they cannot remove themselves from the picture, images and pictures are the source and target of love and desire, but also fear and hatred."[9]

To further examine my artwork, I must address the idea of pictures as icons and iconography. Regardless of what is portrayed, individuality and our "suitcase of experiences" follow us wherever we go. Scott McCloud, for example, uses the word icon as "any image used to represent a person, place, thing or idea."[10] The words "represent" and "idea" are critical. When, viewing artwork and searching for meaning, we are, in fact, persuaded by our ideas and what they represent to us, who we are, and all of our individual understandings, morals, preferences, cultures and generations. From these differences I believe we create our own iconography. Images are interpreted according to our own knowledge and familiarity. Building on my own ideas discussed earlier as well as Crow's notion that "the meaning will be affected by the background of the viewer,"[11] my personal arsenal of iconography will be interpreted differently by each viewer. Because of this, I attempt to utilize imagery that I believe can be universally assimilated. When using the term universally, I simply mean: imagery that can be understood or interpreted by many: "1 including, covering, or affecting the whole without limit or exception: available or applying to everyone; 2 present or occurring everywhere; 3 used or for use among all; 4 adaptable for various purposes."[12] This universal imagery gives viewers a basis for internalization of the image or icon so that they can use it in conjunction with the text and marks provided to create some self-reflective aesthetic experience. Although it is difficult to anticipate viewer's interpretations or past experiences with the images, I cannot deny my own personal arsenal of representations as

cathartic and effective self-image resolution. Many opportunities for understanding and interpretation are provided for viewers who look at my work, whether it is a written word, a printed text, an image or an expressionistic mark. To fully experience the art, viewers will translate my musings into something personal from their own repertoire of experiences to make it valid and valuable for them. The dialogue within the text along with the imagery can generate some aesthetic exchange between viewer and artwork. I want my viewers to have that "hiccup" of a moment, some sort of connection when they look at my work, and are drawn in to linger and consider the marks, words, images and possible meanings.

MIXED MEDIA AS PROCESS, HISTORICAL, CONTEMPORARY ART FORM

20th century artists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque began to expand the ideas of painting by gluing pieces of fabric, paper and other materials to their canvases. These works of art combined different media and represent the beginning of a new art form called collage. Mixed media in its simplest terminology means using a combination of various media for creating a single artwork. As part of early 20th century modernism, artists such as Picasso and Braque were questioning the boundaries of singular art forms. Picasso attached newspaper to his works and Braque glued wallpaper to his in an attempt to create new and exciting outlets for traditional media. Artists wanted to re-define and expand ideas about conventional media in an age of mechanical reproduction.

In the 21st century, artists continue to re-define art with newer media to speak of their own digital age. My interest in mixed media stems from combining painting and printmaking processes to create new and dynamic dialogues with one another. The experience created by combining materials and processes gives artworks new life that chatters from the wall to the viewers. It offers an individual aesthetic experience if they will take the time to savor the moment. Contemporary artist Mark Bradford, for example, uses collage to create a seemingly chaotic work that invites the viewer to sort and weed out details. In *Ridin Dirty* (Figure 1.1), Bradford layers imagery and text to build meaning and purpose.   With each letter, each missing layer and each ghostly piece that has been left behind, the content is reinforced. Works such as this entice me to push layer upon layer, build meaning out of organized chaos and lure unsuspecting viewers.

The mixed media I utilize for *The Last Word* are paint, ink, printmaking, graphite, and collage on paper and Mylar. These materials create artworks that entice viewers to indulge themselves in an introspective contemplation of who they are and how they see themselves. With recurring screen-printing, I can repeat the same image multiple times, overlap images, interrupt them and change their color at will. From my dictionary of personal symbolism and iconography, I can choose a screen and print the image on Mylar. This allows viewers to see through certain parts to hidden images, painted marks or text on underlying layers. By creating imagery in this manner, I am collaging images together in a non-traditional manner. I can mix these images with paint to create a pulsating dialogue between paint and picture that interacts with text to create an interactive experience for viewers.   With self-image as the content for my artwork I find

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that the journey of the work informs it. It is because of this that I feel an overview of its

evolution to be enlightening.

Figure 1.1.

Mark Bradford,

Ridin Dirty,

2006.

CHAPTER 2

EVOLUTION OF *THE LAST WORD*: THE BEGINNING, FINDING MY WAY CONTENT

Self-image is the consistent content in my thesis artwork and this chapter will discuss how it originated as such. My initial intention for the work was to show how people use their circumstances as crutches or excuses for their situations or who they had become. I realized the underlying factor was actually choices people made in dealing with life situations. I wanted to show that everything in life is based on choices and how we deal with our own circumstances. However, upon creating artworks in this "beginning phase," I constantly based the works on my own life and my own choices. I was at war with people from my past whom did not perceive me as well bred or deserving, and at the very least, saw me as menial. I, after all, came from a poor family, and in their eyes, could never amount to anyone of importance. I found it necessary to include hand-written text on many of the pieces as an outlet to my hurt and anger. However, many times I would obscure the words to the point of illegibility. This process allowed my true feelings a creative outlet without actually making public specific and personal details. Even though the process revealed resentment and astringent feelings, it left me feeling empowered. I was able to vent my frustrations with my own secret indecipherable language. Making art like this was a way to yell at the very people who could actually look at one of my pieces not knowing it was about them.

USE OF TEXT, IMAGE, ICON, ICONOGRAPHY

The first work in this series that combined mixed media, personal iconography and the deluge of memories and repressed emotions, was mostly hand written text. It seemed like the most natural thing for me to do, simply write. I wrote about people who discounted me and things that had changed me permanently. I divulged my secret feelings and memoirs onto sheets of clear Mylar and then began the process of obscuring it all. I covered it with paint and scratched out areas of it with sandpaper. In the end, the writing was there, but often illegible and mostly indiscernible. This process was a bit of a cleansing for me, as well as an opportunity to be truthful to the work. I was not holding anything back, but at the same time, I was not telling the viewers any more than they needed to know to be able to appreciate the work.

During the initial stages of my work, I chose imagery that reflected my idea of choice and personal experience. I gathered a list of things that I thought would enhance the interpretation of the art and I searched for appealing images that would become the building blocks for my very own dictionary of personal iconography. As I included earlier, I chose images that relayed certain ideas for me personally, without being too overt and obvious. Using found imagery was my way of using objects or ideas that were personal to me while at the same time making it a bit more impersonal by using pictures that anyone could find. My repertoire of images included things like playing cards, scales, eyes and Bibles. The images were layered with swipes of paint, scratched into and often times partially covered.

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METHODOLOGY OF PROCESS AND MATERIALS

In terms of materials and process, I experienced struggle. I waivered between two-dimensional and three-dimensional artworks. I began using unfamiliar media and experimenting with transparent Mylar, printmaking, paint and handwritten text.

Clear Mylar was my final choice because I wanted to create art that had an element of transparency. At the same time I wanted to control what elements could be seen on the other side of the Mylar, so I strategically used paint and printmaking to hide or highlight them. For me it was very much a metaphor for how we see people. Often times you can see right through them but at other times, they are skillful at hiding things about themselves.

I came to a point where I was left standing in the middle of my studio, surrounded by a large circular structure. It had been fashioned into a three-dimensional cylindrical piece out of two-dimensional materials. I had cut multiple pieces of the transparent Mylar and connected them together with book rings in such a manner that I could hang them in a large circular formation much like a tube. The structure was approximately 6' in diameter and 8'-10' in height. On these Mylar pieces I had created layer upon layer of hand written text, painted marks and silkscreened images. There was so much to see within the images that viewer's eyes were constantly visually assaulted from the chaos. I was stuck in the middle of this piece and did not know which way to go.

During the building block stages of the work, my color palette was greatly influenced by things that I saw as black and white, much like many of the choices people face. I utilized values of gray to relay the idea of "gray areas" where sometimes people are not certain what is the right or wrong choice. During this time, I also used blue and

red inspired by the playing card imagery that I was including in the work. I also felt that the two colors had very different feelings associated with them, which added to the viewer's response of the work. Warm colors like red are more active visually, compared to cool colors such as blue, that are more passive and relaxing.   In one piece where both red and blue were present, there could be an idea of strong anger or passion, which was offset by a calming serene ease. I continued to research my place as an artist in the world of art. Influences from past and present artists led me to create a stronger body of work. Artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Cy Twombly helped to direct my experimentation with materials, media and text.

HISTORICAL REFERENCES

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

The American artist, Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008), was instrumental in helping me find my way to the art that I produce now. His early work especially interested me because he incorporated non-traditional elements similar to ones that my work includes. One specific example is his work, *Soundings*, c. 1968 (Figure 2.1). "Soundings is an 8 foot high 36 foot long mirror. Behind a partially mirrorized front panel hangs two rows of 4x8 panels of transparent Plexiglas about two feet apart on which are silkscreened images of a wooden chair."[13] The piece also included lighting effects that were activated by the sound of people's voices. Different pitches of people's voices created different lighting effects. This piece in particular peaked my interest on multiple levels. Not only did Rauschenberg use transparent material, Plexiglas, which

aided him in focusing on a reflection of the viewer so that they became part of the work, he also screen-printed his imagery. This allowed him to reproduce the same image multiple times in different sizes without risking unwanted alterations of the image. In his overlapping of the screen-printed images, often parts of the chairs would become covered with other chairs so that they were obscured. Rauschenberg's obscurity in his images is not as severe as what I often create, but it was a solid basis for reflection.

Figure 2.1.
Robert
Rauschenberg,
Soundings, 1968.

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Figure 2.2. Robert Rauschenberg, *Revolver*, 1967.

Rauschenberg's piece, *Revolver* c.1967 (Figure 2.2), was also provocative to me. The piece consists of five layers of Plexiglas circles saturated with screen-printed found imagery. The images are so dense that when viewing one through another five layers deep, the images and text often times become completely illegible. The Plexiglas pieces themselves sit on a motor that rotates the circles individually so that they become interactive. I feel that my work reflects this interactive notion although my pieces do not move. I also feel that this piece speaks to my work because he has included printed text, found imagery, transparent supports and silkscreen.

CY TWOMBLY

Another influential artist is Cy Twombly (1928-2011). I am drawn to the expressiveness of his marks and the presence of hand-written text. Twombly provides a direct link to his thoughts in every hand-written word that he finds necessary to include in works like *Quattro stagioni Part, III: Autunno* c. 1993-94 (Figure 2.3). I do not care

Figure 2.3. Cy Twombly, *Quattro Stagioni Part, III: Autunno*, 1993-94.

what the words are, I just like that they are there. I like the autobiographical link they provide to the artist, as well as their juxtaposition to the painted areas that are textured and dripping. If I can read them then I have a means of discerning some context of the work, but if not, it does not make it any less valuable of an aesthetic experience for me.

I am so captured by Twombly's works that I get lost in each mark of the brush *Proteus*, c.1984 (Figure 2.4), every texture, *Nimphidia*, c.1981 (Figure 2.5), every collaged piece, *Bassano in Teverino*, c.1976 (Figure 2.6), every line made by an oil stick, *Petals of Fire*, c.1989 (Figure 2.7), and each drip of paint, *Hero and Leandro*, c. 1985 (Figure 2.8). In *Bassano in Teverino*, I like that there are pieces of other papers with different lines, visual textures, patterns and marks that are used to amplify the composition to a higher level of visual interest. The components are often indiscernible but at the same time, they heighten my desire to try and figure them out or make them fit into the context of the piece.

Figure 2.4. Cy Twombly, *Proteus,* 1984.

Figure 2.5. Cy Twombly, *Nimphidia*, 1981.

Figure 2.6. Cy Twombly, *Bassano in Teverino,* 1976.

Figure 2.7. Cy Twombly, *Petals of Fire*, 1989.

Figure 2.8. Cy Twombly, *Hero and Leandro*, 1985.

Twombly's work has also been a reassurance to me that a controlled color palette is well within my bounds as an artist. Twombly uses a limited palette in many of his works. What intrigues me even more is that he handles some of his palettes much like I have managed mine. *Petals of Fire*, c.1989 (Figure 2.7), *Petals of Fire*, c.1989 (Figure 2.9) have color choices directly comparable to my work.

Figure 2.9. Cy

Twombly,

Petals of Fire, 1989.

RELFECTION OF RESEARCH STAGE

In review of this particular stage of my artwork, I was excited with the new materials and media. Working with unfamiliar components provided opportunity for growth and exploration. I was creating artworks of which I would have never dreamt. I was excited about the contemporary feel pulsating from the artwork that was materializing in my studio. In reflection of the whole beginning, I had created a framework, which gave me freedom from certain conceptual and technical elements. I did not try to micromanage each panel that made up the large piece that hung from the center of my studio. I was not concerned with every little minor detail. This particular stage of my work allowed me to produce some very thought provoking pieces, which is ironic, since it was when I was thinking the least about how I was creating the art. As I was constantly asked to discuss my work, I began to identify a reoccurring theme that seemed to weave in and out of each discussion: Self. This realization lead me to the next stage of the journey of my work.

EVOLUTION OF *THE LAST WORD*: MIDWAY, MAKING PROGRESS CONTENT

Once I realized that self was as ingrained in my artwork, as much as the elements of art, I knew that it was not about choices. More acutely, it was about my own choices. Enlightened by this discovery, I was liberated to create artwork about what I knew, my experiences and me. However, victory was short lived because even though I was creating artworks with some degree of success, I knew there was more to it than simply self. I forcefully struggled to uncover the direction that I felt was intuitively there, but

which I could not see. My artwork began to revolve around experiences and interactions that I had had with relatives and people that were close to me. The artwork began to be expressionistic while continuing to be introspective. I continued to try and excavate meaning from the work, searching for the unidentified motivation that I knew was there.

USE OF TEXT, IMAGE, ICON, ICONOGRAPHY

I continued including hand-written text in the pieces as well as obscuring words and phrases while I often highlighted others. I rejected the idea of printed text because the words were personal thoughts and feelings and when legible, I wanted them read as such. The ability for me to cover certain parts was a comfort because it helped to keep the viewers away from the true underlying meanings in some of the pieces. It was my way of keeping up my guard, and not divulging certain personal events or thoughts.

I continued to use found imagery. I began to think that using found imagery would also be a way to make the pieces more universal and viewer friendly while at the same time helping to make the artwork a barrier between the viewer and myself. I also slightly adjusted the types of images I used. I threw out the idea of choice, so there were no more cards. Because I was focusing a bit more on the composition of each individual piece, and not one big curtain, I began to search for imagery with a more specific list of items. Each item was representational of a memory or experience so that it played directly into my lexicon of personal iconography.

METHODOLOGY OF PROCESS AND MATERIALS

After standing in the middle of the room of what had come to be known as the "shower curtain," I invited professor critiques. During one of these said critiques, two professors were giving me feedback on this transparent work that was a bit too chaotic. Because so much could be seen through the Mylar, I lost control of what I wanted to be seen. In a moment of clarity, one professor took one of the transparent Mylar pieces from the structure hanging in the middle of the room, and tacked it to the wall. Unexpectedly, I could see the elements in the artwork that had been lost in the chaos of the cylindrical hanging structure. This catalyst caused me to move all of the pieces from the hanging cylindrical structure in the middle of the room to the wall (Figures 11-11). There was more clarity and discernability. Viewer's eyes could rest in areas, and find visual intrigue in others. I could also see where there were areas that were lacking in composition and interest. It was this step that propelled me into a new direction.

Figure 2.10. Kristin Kyzer, *Untitled "Shower Curtain"*, 2011.

Figure 2.11. Kristin Kyzer, *Untitled,* 2011.

Figure 2.12. Kristin Kyzer, *Untitled*, 2011.

Instead of using one layer of Mylar, I began to create works on multiple pieces of Mylar. This worked well for layering and stacking the found imagery, hand-written text and paint (Figures 2.11, 2.12). Overall I was pleased with the progress. I took these layered pieces and mounted them together with clear screws and hung them on the wall. The results were artworks saturated with words, images, marks and text. The compositions were stronger because they had been addressed individually and intentionally, however the content became a bit too overworked. The layers of Mylar sat nicely atop one another while controlled with a top layer of Plexiglas. The sizes of the pieces were not tiny but they were small enough to be intimate and administering to the work.

The layers of Plexiglas and Mylar that offered saturated printed imagery also provided something else for my viewers, a way in. When someone would stand in front of these pieces and look at them, they would notice their reflection in the Plexiglas staring back at them. This reflection worked to my advantage to help draw the viewers into the intrigue of my experiences and how they could personally relate. When they saw themselves in the work, they actually would begin to link the images to their own experiences and it would become relevant to them. This internalization of imagery was based on their own lives. Once in the work I hoped it would guide them through an aesthetic experience that was informative and unforgettable.

Not only did the new process of creating the works change the way in which they were viewed physically, it also changed the way I viewed them metaphorically. In creating the layers, it was as if I saw myself peeling back my own layers, piece by piece. I was uncovering parts of my inner psyche that I did not really like to acknowledge.

However, as I continued making pieces and dissecting the artworks, and myself I felt at peace with things that I had never realized bothered me. The layers in the artwork became metaphoric for the layers I had built up because of others and their actions or words. I began to really think about how important those things were to me and I analyzed experiences—as though I was a doctor examining myself. It was a very cathartic process.

I believe the layers on some subconscious level were also a way to help remove myself from the piece. I was taking a handmade thing and creating it much like a graphic designer would create something with a computer. I was physically creating layers with Mylar and images that I had taken from the computer. Oddly enough, when I found images on the Internet, I would have to flatten the layers of the imagery before transforming it to a grayscale and printing it for use as a screen print. I was basically undoing what the computers had done so that I could turn around and do it by hand.

My color palette was not changing very much. I was continuing to paint with black, white and many values in between. I added pops of red and blue but steered away from other colors even though I found myself being drawn to them. Aesthetically, I wanted more color, but was unsure of how to incorporate it so I stuck with what I was comfortable using, even though I was becoming bored by it. The dissatisfaction with color, combined with the autobiographical reflections in my work, led me to the works of Frida Kahlo and Louise Bourgeois.

HISTORICAL REFERENCES

FRIDA KAHLO

Frida Kahlo's work is known by some to be influenced by politics, gender, sexuality, culture and many other things. However, one prominent and continually occurring impetus in all of her works are her personal experiences "to observe her manner of transforming lived personal experiences into works of art…"[14] Kahlo actually launched a "systematic search for self"[15] much like the path I found myself while searching for the meaning in my artwork. Granted, Kahlo knew what she was searching for "*My Birth* was the beginning of a larger quest, a project entailed a visual reconstruction of her childhood years."[16], but that does not prevent similarities in inspirations. In *What the Water Gave Me* (Figure 2.13), "the work visually theorizes Self as a set of diverse simultaneous entities: a fragmented physical being as well as a Cartesian Self who possesses thoughts, imagination and memories."[16] "Kahlo's paintings coalesce into a visual discourse on identity, teaching us that identity is neither a static nor a monolithic 'given', but rather a complex construction and a shifting configuration."[17] This identity discussed is reminiscent of self-image and our own perceived identities, which are a direct result of our self-image.

In my work I have been very selective about the colors I have used. Each color has meaning relevant to the artwork. In addition to the meanings associated with color, I have been drawn to an aesthetic appeal of the very controlled color punches in my work. I like the calculated feel that begins to transpire in a piece and then, abruptly color disturbs the expected composition, demanding attention from the viewer.

Figure 2.13. Frida Kahlo, *What the Water Gave Me*, 1938.

I was indirectly influenced by Frida Kahlo who accounts for a specific system of color

symbolism that she created and executed in her work.

> "Green symbolized 'good warm light'; solferino 'Aztec Tlapali [the
> Aztec or Nahuatl word for colour] old prickly-pear blood, the brightest
> And oldest'; brown 'color of mole [a Mexican chile sauce], of leaves
> Becoming earth'; yellow 'madness, sickness, fear. Part of the sun and
> of happiness'; cobalt blue 'electricity and purity/ love'; black 'nothing
> is black- really nothing'; leaf green 'leaves, sadness, science, the
> whole of Germany is this colour'; greenish yellow 'more madness
> and mystery, all the ghosts wear clothes of this color, or at least
> underwear'; dark green 'colour of bad news and good business';
> navy blue 'distance. Tenderness can also be this blue'; magenta
> 'blood? Well who knows"[18]

Like Kahlo, for me, each color is significant. I chose colors that I responded to in certain

manners without trying to inflict my viewer with my exact perceptions. We are each

drawn to certain colors and repelled by others. My viewer's acceptance of each color

will affect the way they see the work. Kahlo helped to reinforce the idea that

autobiographical subject matter was valid. Research of other artists such as Louise

Bourgeois solidified it even further.

LOUISE BOURGEOIS

> "My childhood has never lost its magic, it has
> never lost its mystery, and it ha never lost its drama. All
> my work in the past fifty years, all my subjects, have
> found their inspiration in my childhood."[19]
>
> Louise Bourgeois, 1997

When talking about artwork in terms of it being based on personal experience, I would be

doing myself a disservice to exclude Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010). Acquaintance with

Bourgeois' artworks reinforce that an aesthetic experience can result, without the

necessity of knowing the history. In works like *Red Room (Parents)*c. 1994, (Figure

2.14), it is not necessary to understand the troubled relationship between her parents to interpret meaning from the work. The red that invades our vision and captures viewers with disregard to conclusions can overtake a viewer. *Red Room*, a painfully articulate enactment of some real or imagined place, draws attention to the approximately

Figure 2.14. *Louise Bourgeois, Red Room (Parents)*, 1994.

symmetric set up which is very neat and tidy. In the midst of a red bed, a glaring white pillow veers out with the words "je t'aime", which translates 'I love you. Are they sincere or is it a cynical stab at mere facades that couples try to pass as truths? It is not necessary for us to know her history because she is adept at referencing her past as subject for her work without making it a required credential for appreciation. She pulls

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from memories that only she fully and personally knows, to create artworks that can be appreciated publically.

Not only does Bourgeois inform her work with the emancipation of personal memories like those with her father and mistress nanny (Robinson, 134), she also pulls from psychoanalysis.

> "I carry my psychoanalysis within the work. Every day I work out all that bothers me. All my complaints." She asserts, " The only remedy against disorder is work. Work puts an order in disorder and control over chaos. I do, I undo. I am whit I am doing. Art exhausts me."[20]

For me this enhances my connection with Bourgeois as an artist because I too feel that my subconscious takes over when I 'get in the zone' and begin to work almost automatically. My mother used to say "The house could fall down around you when you are drawing, and you would never know it." To some degree I have to agree with her. The premise of psychoanalytic theory is this "artists express what is buried within their subconscious mind and that works of art provide us with knowledge of artists as making-subjects and of viewers as viewing-subjects."[21] Regardless of the importance of this hashing out of our own psychoanalysis for viewers, I find it a valid motivation for artists. Albeit, this is more than likely not a primary cause to create artwork for professionally trained artist, I do not think it minimalizes its magnitude. The works of Kahlo and Bourgeois helped me to validate self as content for my artwork. Reflecting on these artworks and influences allowed for the next step in growth and realization, self-image.

REFLECTION OF RESEARCH STAGE

During this "middle-ground" stage of the work, I was focusing more on each individual piece of work, therefore becoming more aware of each element and questioning each mark, image and word that was included. The individual compositions became super saturated and almost too instructional for the viewer. It was as if I was trying to tell them what they should see without giving them enough information to see it. Even though there was a definite progression of the work, the compositions were a bit overworked and too thought out.

EVOLUTION OF *THE LAST WORD*: THE END, REALIZATION

CONTENT

Because artists are asked to discuss their work quite frequently, I kept hearing myself say the same things over and over again about my art being guided by personal experience. Soon, it was not enough. Every artist creates artwork that is personal to him or her in some way. So what was the real issue I was dealing with?

After being pummeled with question after question about why my artwork was significant, I finally realized it was not simply that the artwork was about personal experiences.   It was about an ever-changing definition of self-image that is created through our experiences and relationships.   Not only relationships with others, but with self as well. All of the experiences and relationships that I had been exploring were not about the actual experience or relationship at all; it was about how they made me feel about myself and how they influenced the way I saw myself.

My artwork is about self-image. It is about how others influence us in the molding and shaping of our very own feelings about who we are, how we are perceived by others and whether or not we are liked by others and self. We question how others perceive our attitudes, appearance, intelligence, morals, viewpoints, mannerisms, background, culture, upbringing, beliefs, and our very essence of being. This is not something that only happens when we are children. It is a constant growing and evolving reflection. In fact, I think we actually become more aware of it the older we get. My artwork was informed by self-image and how we nurture it through relationships, experiences, surroundings and internalization of self.

USE OF TEXT, IMAGE, ICON, ICONOGRAPHY

During this period of realization, I went through two stages of imagery. Initially I began with images that ware very unsettling and menacing. After creating several pieces that all had the same tone of malevolence, I recognized the unintentional continuity and intentionally began efforts to choose other imagery. This, in turn, caused me to begin reflecting on positive experiences in addition to the negative ones. In a new phase of imagery, I began purposefully to choose images that were not ominous. Some of the images appeared very ambiguous to anyone other than myself. I liked the mystery that this provided. Even though, in some cases, there was no obstruction of the image due to paint or text, they were often unrecognizable to the extent of being indiscernible.

I also began to incorporate patterns into the work in an effort to make it more universally viable. The initial pattern that was incorporated was a series of benday dots. They were actually a specific reference to a pair of black and white polka dotted earrings

that I owned when I was a teenager. Because of the visual texture, the additional element for composition and the opportunity for a universal inlet for viewers, I felt that additional patterns could work on multiple levels for my pieces.

METHODOLOGY OF PROCESS AND MATERIALS

Because of an inherent need to push the boundaries of my work, I attempted to return to a paper support. In addition to the paper, I challenged myself with a larger picture plane. After failed attempts at completely reconverting to all paper, and a total disconnect with the larger size, I decided that my best recourse was to cease and desist. The next step was to return to the materials that worked together and the familiar scale that was successful for creating a more intimate experience for the viewer and me.

I began to back all of my layered Mylar pieces with paper so that I could control the background on which the pieces were viewed. Realizing that what I was doing was basically collaging images together, I embraced the idea and started thinking less about each individual composition, and more about the overall acceptance of the work. I began working in the studio to print many images on groups of Mylar and then collaging them together in compositions that I felt worked aesthetically.

I began including printed text in addition to my handwritten text as a way to inform and lure viewers into the work and gently guide them in a direction of thought. I felt that it added more visual textural elements as well as informing the viewer. Because I realized that the works were about self-image, I felt that the pieces, even more than before, invited the viewers in.

My color palette also began to introduce other colors. In an effort to control the colors, I created artworks that consisted of black, white, values of gray and concentrated

punches of color. I chose colors that were inspired by certain memories, images or feelings. For instance, the yellow in *Eye on the Queen* panel (Figure 3.2) is a link specifically to the yolk of an egg. This reference to an egg can allude to a couple of other things. It reflects rotten eggs, which immediately wrinkle my nose at the thought of having to smell such a fowl odor. The egg can also refer to an idea of fruitfulness.   I know different colors evoke different types of emotions and responses from people according to their likes and experiences. Because of this I created my work from an autobiographical palette that is certain to be interpreted differently by viewers.

HISTORICAL REFERENCES

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT

Jean-Michel Basquiat is one of the direct influences on my artwork in terms of origin of content and iconography and symbolism. I do not mean to say that I include the same images in my work that Basquiat included in his, or that our art is about the same things. More specifically, Basquiat was well known for using his own dictionary of personal symbols that were rooted in his own experience. I too am using a lexicon of imagery that is specific to my experiences. Although the imagery is specific to me, I do believe it to be imagery that can be understood and interpreted by any viewer, as was Basquiat's. In works such as *Charles the First* c.1982 (Figure 2.15) by Basquiat, you can see his personal iconic imagery clearly. He uses the letter "S" in conjunction with his graffiti tag name "Samo" which has multiple levels of meaning. He is referencing Sambo, a racially slurred character from literature, as well as "same old same old." He

also uses a crown quite frequently to reference people he considered to be royalty or worthy of honoring. Most of this list of people were African Americans who were a success in his eyes, therefore deserving of being crowned. Basquiat's lexicon of imagery is one of his most well known attributes because he employed it so well.[22]

Figure 2.15. Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Charles the First*, 1982.

I also am drawn to many of Jean-Michel Basquiat's works that are dominated by a

black and white color palette that have punches of color. Being able to create such strong

imagery with such a controlled color palette attracts me to the contrast in Basquiat's

work. In images such as *Self-Portrait* c.1982 (Figure 2.16) and *Rape of Roman Torso*

c.1982, I appreciate that in such a restrained palette, he allowed himself a surprise of color amidst a picture plane of basically black and white imagery.

Figure 2.16. Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Self-Portrait,*1982.

In addition to personal symbols and color, Basquiat has also influenced me with

the hand-written text that he included in the largest percentage of his works. He entices

viewers to want to know more when he repeated words, crossed them out and often

circled words or phrases as seen in *Charles the First* (Figure 2.15) "I cross out words so

you will see them more; the fact that they are obscured makes you want to read them."[23]

I also like to provoke viewer interest in this way by making things legible at times while

often times partially hiding things. This element of hand-written text also helps to

remind viewers that this is something personal and connected to a specific individual.

Some one had to think of those words and then take the time to actually write them on the picture plane. Many of the pieces are made up mostly of words so that they become not only words, but part of the imagery. They become visual chatter that at first glance may not even appear to be text, but simply an implied texture.   Basquiat engages viewers with an effective use of text as content and as subject matter.
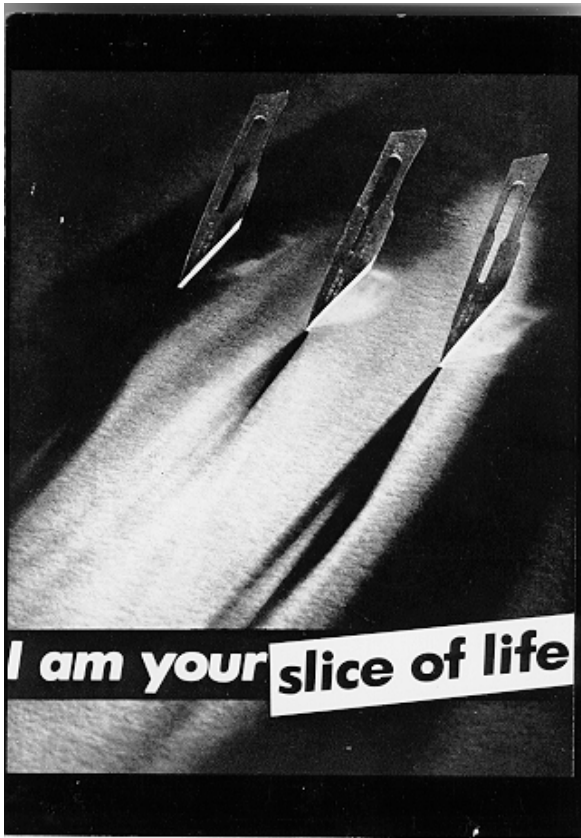
BARBARA KRUGER

Figure 2.17. Barbara Kruger, *Untitled*, 1981.

I also follow in the footsteps of artists like Barbara Kruger with license to use found imagery and text. Kruger uses many found images as well as

text in her works. As a matter of fact, "Kruger's art practice emerged 'directly' from her training in selecting and cropping images…Kruger states simply that she works with 'pictures and words.'"[24] Kruger juxtaposes images and text that leads a viewer to make assumptions or build relations between the words and the images. In *Untitled*, 1981 (Figure 2.17) viewers are forced to question the relativity of the connections between image and text.

GLEN LIGON

Another artist who uses text to create artworks is Glen Ligon. He creates text paintings as well as other pieces that utilize text. Ligon has created many things that make commentary on a plethora of subjects, one of which is the history of slavery. He often uses non-traditional materials such as neon lights shaped into text. In paintings, He saturates the text to the degree that it becomes mostly illegible. When choosing the text, Ligon uses other's words to create these paintings. In works such as *Figure #20* c. 2009 (Figure 2.18), Ligon uses silkscreen to create the image. He has used black ink with such

saturated text in such proximity that it is illegible. He creates a negative space with the text to be interpreted by each viewer.

Figure 2.18. Glen Ligon, *Figure #20*, 2009.

Because my work is about self-image, which is created through our experience with others, I truly appreciate Ligon's words about his own work when he said, "What does it mean to take another person's words as a way of talking about the self? One of the things I've always been interested in was the connection or collision of identities…"[25] Even though my work is very different from Ligon's, I find this quote relevant because I may not be using other's words to create my work, but other's words and actions certainly influence the way I see self.

TRACY EMIN

Tracy Emin reinforces the idea that text relates specifically to the artist who created the work. Emin's work originates in personal experience and includes hand-written text that informs the content of each piece. She often pairs text with image or includes it into sculpture and at times, allows the text to stand alone as the image. Emin's origins of her work often "refer to traumas, such as having an abortion or splitting up with her boyfriend."[26] The hand-written text personifies the extremely personal nature of

her work and helps viewers to realize they are seeing a window into the artist by reading

her words.

ELLEN GALLAGHER

Compositionally, the grid influence in Ellen Gallaher's works such as *DeLuxe*

(Figure 2.19) is unavoidable. I too respond to organization based on a grid. I believe that

for works such as mine, it provides a framework for an otherwise seemingly unorganized

barrage of images. Gallagher, like myself was influenced by pieces within the work. In

her work *DeLuxe,* she found the images of the wigs and layouts of the pages from the

magazine to be based on a grid system. This influenced her to display the artwork itself

in a grid formation.

Figure 2.19 Ellen Gallagher, *DeLuxe*

REFLECTION OF RESEARCH STAGE

Reflecting upon the work created for this thesis, I am surprised by my own evolution in the artistic process. Upon arrival at each interval in this progression, I did not expect to continue to change and morph the work further. Oddly enough, at times it seemed like the most natural thing while other times were excruciatingly difficult and I fought it at every turn. I am pleased with the resulting work, which is being presented as *The Last Word*. In further examination of this thesis work, I will discuss details of the work itself.

CHAPTER 3

***THE LAST WORD*, COMPLETE BODY OF WORK**

In discussing this body of work, *The Last Word*, I would like to begin with the presentation of the work. The piece is a large installation of 71 various panels that range in size. The panels are compiled of multiple collaged screen-printed images mixed with paint, ink, and hand-written and printed text on multiple layers of Mylar. They are backed by paper, held together with Chicago Screws[27] across the top and then mounted

on a French Cleat.[28] There are no frames, the panels create a wall of rectilinear shapes of varying sizes formatted both vertically and horizontally, and are arranged in a grid-like formation. They represent imagery ranging from brains and text, to swipes of ink and paint while off setting others that are screen-printed a continuous black that waivers from a matte to shiny finish. The odd juxtaposition of imagery offers visual interest to what may otherwise appear as a predictable ordered arrangement of squares and rectangles. The absence of frames removes physical boundaries from between the viewers and the artwork. Instead of being a static object, the art becomes a temptress offering an inviting interaction so that a viewer may feel compelled to experience the work and take part in some aesthetic exchange.

The pieces are hung in a grid like manner so that when looking at the work, viewers are enticed and visually pulled by an image, line or texture that may lead the viewer's eyes from one piece to the next. The grid provides some order to what could otherwise seem a bit chaotic. It does not denote a hierarchy within the piece, it simply provides a framework for the smaller components. When viewers look at this work, the structure provided by the grid helps to visually move them. It is not that they cannot stop and look at just one panel, but they are beckoned by others to reposition their line of sight so they may see what new and inviting images the next panel holds. Each panel entices the viewer to soak in the imagery, appraise the juxtaposition of whatever elements are present, and be aesthetically informed.

Figure 3.1. Masaccio, *Tribute Money*, 1420s.

The installation is a continuous narrative. There are multiple events, people and spans of time represented in the work, as is in early Renaissance artist, Masaccio's, *The Tribute Money* c. (Figure 3.1). Masaccio spreads three events from the narrative of the gospel story of Peter and the tax collector across a single landscape.[29] This same depiction of a non-linear story is presented in my work. No one image supersedes another. Viewers may start at any panel when viewing the work without needing information from other panels to internalize some meaning.

Images in the work are seen multiply. They do not exist only in one spot; rather they seem to migrate around the entire piece helping one piece to talk to another. In gaining insight from one panel that includes the image of an ant, it can guide and provide information for other panels. The imagery creates dialogue that not only exists within singular panels; it speaks to multiple panels and to the overall sense of the work.

The piece contains marks from paint, ink, and pencil. Images are silkscreened, marks are drawn, text is incorporated both hand-written and printed, and all of these elements work together to entice viewers to gather visual information and make

inferences about the work. The layered images become collaged pictures that create new and often odd or strange juxtapositions with one another tempting viewers to question groupings and one panel's effect or relationship to another panel. Although each panel may not include all of the elements that make up the total installation, they all create an interesting interplay between the pieces and often reference one another with words or images. The pieces create interesting dialogues within themselves when a handmade mark is placed beside a screen-printed image that seems more mechanical than personal. As the artist, this is a metaphoric phenomenon of the actual issue at hand. Although the artwork comes from a deeply personal place, it deals with a universal issue, a common struggle. One might think that its' commonality makes it less personal, however, it does not make it any less personal for each person who is constantly assessing who they are. I believe the handmade marks create a balance when sitting next to images or words that appear more mechanical.

Figure 3.2. Kristin Kyzer, *Eye on the Queen*, 2012.

In the panel, which I will refer to as *Eye on the Queen* (Figure 3.2), the piece has a

large open eye that is screen printed in black and sits in the lower left hand corner, and

takes up the large portion of the left hand side of the panel.   It gazes upward toward the

right hand top corner. Before its implied line of sight can reach the far right hand top

corner, it is interrupted by an obscured curved mound that has been hazily screen-printed

in a gray value and an egg yolk yellow chicken stands atop it as if it were the winner in

some King of the Hill game. Underneath the hazy mound are barely legible, hand-written

words that read, "Self-Appointed Queens create anarchy." In *Eye on the Queen* the

chicken has a dual meaning. It is symbolic for a particular person and a way of thought.

The person that it stands for is someone who sees themselves as a bit smarter and a bit

better than others. Because of this I found it particularly fitting that a chicken, which is

linked to pecking order, represent them. Defined by Webster, pecking order is a social

hierarchy. I printed it in yellow because for me, yellow is one of the least appealing

colors and it also references an egg yolk. The large eye in the corner is symbolic of a

new awareness because sometimes people's true nature can be an unexpected realization.

The text refers to the fact that some hierarchy's within a group are not harmonious or

agreed upon. This hierarchy affects the way people within the group see themselves, how

they believe others see them and how they feel about their worth as an individual.

Figure 3.3.
Kristin Kyzer,
Windmills, 2012.

The panel, which I will refer to as *Windmills* (Figure 3.3), is a bit more difficult to describe than the previous panel. In *Windmills* the bottom half to three quarters of the picture plane is filled with a matte black that transforms to a clear transparent matte finish that sits atop the Mylar and controls the reflective surface. Sandwiched in between two of these sheets of matte black printed ink, three or four screen-printed windmills emerge on the right side and stand towering amidst the sea of black engulfing ink. The piece has a sublime feeling as if a particular moment has been captured. A moment that cannot really be explained because one is not entirely sure what it is. It is the embodiment of a quiet realization and understanding that does not have to be discussed to be understood. There is a sense of strength and uprightness in the presence of the windmills. A sense

that no matter how the wind blows they may turn in the gusts but they know their place

and will not move. The windmills are symbolic of the power to know self and stand firm.

Know your strengths while at the same time know when to grow, when to give and have

the understanding that sometimes it is good to not be too fixed.

      I will refer to the next panel as *Punch Bug.* The image consists of the back

bumper of a Volkswagen Beetle screen-printed in black in the upper left hand corner.

There is a calf located just below the center on the right hand side screen-printed in a

light gray value.   There is also an image screen-printed in a dark value that is situated

horizontally across the bottom of the piece that is obscured but begins to mimic a

landscape. The image across the bottom is actually lips that are placed horizontally to

make it more difficult to determine. In this piece there is also screen-printed text, in

white, that includes the term *self-image,* and discusses things surrounding self-image.

Figure 3.4. Kristin Kyzer, *Punch Bug*, 2011-12.

In *Punch Bug* the images are symbolic of a certain time period in my life. When I was a teenager, many things happened that molded my self-esteem. I think that almost every person remembers the first person that they actually loved romantically, and how it affected them. This piece references that youth and uncertainty, of which, at the time we thought we were quite certain. The piece is not only a reflection of that specific time, but also of the difference in how I see things now as opposed to how I saw them then. It references an evolution and growth of understanding of self and situations.

In the panel which I will call *Ants Go Marching* (Figure 3.5), the first thing that is seen in the image is a large ant screen-printed in black and positioned approximately in the horizontal center and just to the left of vertical center. The gaster portion of the ant is covered in paint. The paint is applied so that it appears as if the ant has exploded into paint swipes of black, white and values in between. Following this lead ant, there appears to be an army of varied valued ants that march behind him and flank both sides as they enter the picture plane. The ants appear to be invading a space in the plane that has printed text about self-image.
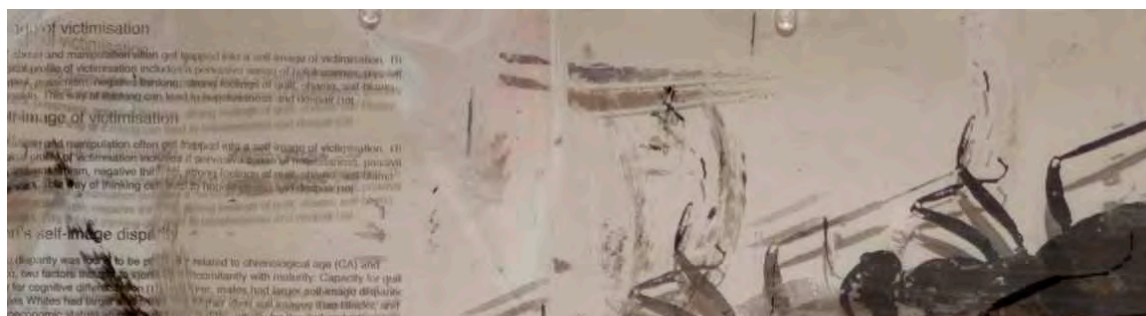
Figure 3.5. Kristin Kyzer, *Ants Go Marching,* 2012.

The ants are symbolic of several things. They are pests, they invade a space without consent or regard, they come in armies and they infest. They work much like our psyche works at times in weighing our thoughts about self. Sometimes negative thoughts come in droves and infest our minds, invade our thoughts and make it difficult to see

things clearly. I addressed the first ant with an attack of paint as though he had been shot and parts of him only existing in fragmented pieces.

I will refer to the next work as *Growth Rings,* there is an image of a quarter of a crosscut tree section that covers the bottom left hand corner of the image. Around this section of tree there is a saturation of black paint highlighted by green. On the right hand side of the image just above the half way mark, there is a dark swipe of paint and on it sits a moth. The entire image is littered with stray marks of black and green. Beneath the surface on a different layer there is hand written text that is partially legible and some words that can be read are; so, that, others, create, my.

The hand-written text in *Growth Rings* (Figure 3.6) is sporadically understood rather than being legible in an entire sentence, but when put together the words begin to make sense regardless of their placement. The imagery in this particular piece showcases the actual growth rings in a tree and a moth. The tree serves as the very literal metaphor for growth. The added color green was also chosen symbolically as a reference to the same idea. The moth is symbolic of seeking light or truth and then focusing on those them. I believe that when we realize truths about ourselves, we truly grow. The words "others create" and "my beloved traitor" play in perfectly to this idea because it is often

Figure 3.6. Kristin Kyzer, *Growth Rings*, 2012.

others that cause us to react and show our true nature. They help us to see the good and

the bad in ourselves. When that happens, we strive to hold on to the good things and

change the undesirable ones. These are the steps to true realization and personal growth,

which is integral in the way we see ourselves and the way we believe others, see us.

  I will refer to the next work as *True Feelings* (Figure 3.7). The work is covered

on the left-hand side with a gray valued screen print of some indiscernible object. I

knowthat this object, in reality, is a pair of lips that are zoomed in and cropped.

Balancing the large printed values that make up the lips, there is text, hand-written that

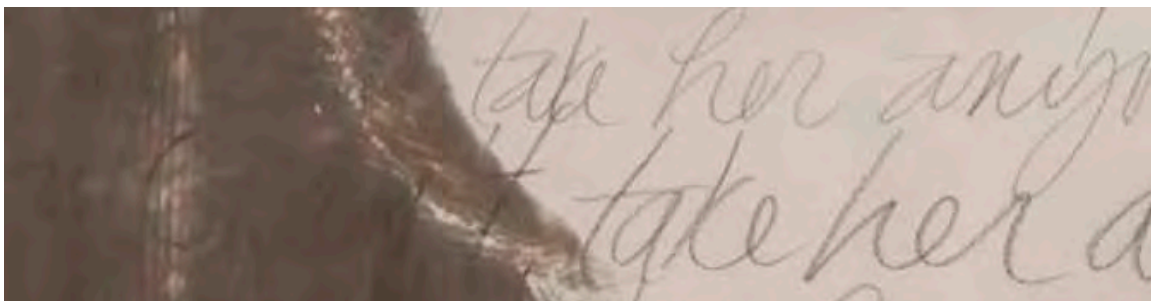increases in size

Figure 3.7. Kristin Kyzer, *True Feelings*, 2012.

as it progressively moves down the panel. The words on this panel read, "can't take her

anyw, take her anyw, take her an, take her an, can't take her, can't take her, can't take

her". Although the text is most apparent on the right-hand side, it is actually legible through the screen-printed lips as well.

True Feelings was created in response to something someone once said about me in a joking manner. In a group of people, a crowded room, and to family and strangers alike, they said, "We can't take her anywhere, she is from Wrightsville." What came out in a joking manner was something that I believed was truly felt. Just because I was not from a metropolis of some sort, I could never be trusted to behave outside of the country fence that I was used to seeing, regardless of the fact that I had been educated beyond any other person with whom I was keeping company. It truly infuriated me and played over and over in my head, "Can't take her anywhere. Can't take her anywhere. Can't take her anywhere." The more it played in my head the louder it became and the more unavoidable it was. This was one of those moments where I felt like I was truly being enlightened as to how I was perceived by others.

In *Balloon* (Figure 3.8), the piece begins at the bottom with three rows of concertina wire coiled and lined up across the bottom in values that become darker as the coils move up the picture plane. In this procession of jagged edges, there is a break in and above the wire. In this break there is a ribbon curling and hanging down. At the top of this ribbon is a white balloon floating effortlessly above the razor sharp edges. It escapes danger with ease and quietness. It floats to an unknown destination in the distance that beckons with yellow rays that permeate the panel from the right-hand top corner. Just outside the yellow rays, the picture plane is overtaken by black harsh edges that reach out from right to left.

In *Balloon*, the balloon is symbolic of multiple things such as childhood, goals, dreams and me. The concertina wire is easily iconographic of trials, growth, and bumps in the road. I created this piece thinking in terms of the well-known "light at the end of the tunnel." This light can be so many things that I did not feel as though I could narrow the piece down to being representative of just one instance or one thought. I wanted it to be representative of many struggles and hurdles that we face. It is how we handle these things that shape us into who we are. We are a sum of all of our experiences, good and bad. We can either rise to the challenge or sink under the pressure.

Figure 3.8. Kristin Kyzer, *Balloon*, 2011.

In the panel, *Transcendent* (Figure 3.9), the panel is covered on the right-hand side with a band of gray that seems to fade into the Mylar from velvety gray to transparent matte into glossy clarity. Layered underneath this layer of ink and gel

medium are screen-printed eyes. The eyes are not rigid and well defined; rather they are

fuzzy and not clearly focused.

Figure 3.9. Kristin Kyzer, *Transcendent*, 2012.

Transcendent (Figure 3.9) is symbolic of an understanding that cannot be

adequately described in words. It is the uncovering of truth to one's self as the eyes are

lifted out of the fog and the mist. Things are not always clear. In fact, they are often

hard to interpret and difficult to weigh. We often focus on the wrong things and forget to

take note of things that really count. Through experiences with others, we understand how many people see the world and are enlightened to find that other's focus on things that we do not think about twice. We all see the world very differently, in turn, people see people very differently. Understanding what is important to us individually is integral in knowing how we should see ourselves. The more we can understand self and our own expectations, the more we can become what we want to be.

Figure 3.10. Kristin Kyzer, *The Last Word*, 2011-12.

In many of the panels in *The Last Word*, they are covered in black ink. These *Black Holes* have a covering of Mylar that varies from flat black to shiny with a transition from one to the other. These pieces serve multiple functions, both in content and formal approach. Formally, the pieces are resting places and moving devices. They are

beckoning rectangles that invite viewers to rest and meditate on the work as the dark value leads them visually around the arrangement of images.

In referring to content, the *Black Holes* serve to reference holes in our memory, some intentional and some not. Often times we forget things out of poor memory recall, but other times we psychologically repress things. These black spaces are symbolic of these missing pieces.

All in all, even though each panel can be examined individually for content and information, the pieces are more powerful when looked at as a whole. They provide connecting points for viewers as well as multiple opportunities for interpretation. They reference one another and build a strong visual aesthetic that feeds the content.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In an overall reflection of my work, I looked across my studio and realized the different pieces that my methodology of process and materials produced. When comparing this to the personal undertaking of peeling back my own layers to get to the heart of the work I found the two similar.

In the beginning, I was not certain of what I was trying to manipulate in media or content. Through a progression of exploration and experimentation, I managed to peel away intangible viable layers in my psyche to produce tangible visual layers in my work. Not resting in satisfaction made me hard-pressed to stop there. Further excavation and production left me at the root of the artwork with reason for self-reflection. The result was multiple layered artwork that embraced many pieces and parts to form a whole.

Working through the layers in the work and in self helped me to discard them and get to the source of self and the work. The pieces produced in the later stages of work were made with a paper backing and completed with layered images that contained text and marks. The pieces also contained partially covered, images, some repeated and partially obscured, which produced an overall effective composition.

By surveying other artists and taking queues from them, I created a strong body of work that pushes materials and media to work together in a cohesive aesthetic. By using non-traditional materials and choosing not to use expected means of presentation such as frames, I have created a contemporary work that speaks to viewers and the art world.

When I consider self-image, I see a concept comparable to the artwork I created. People are individuals and they are made up of the sum of their experiences. Some

things linger and help to create positive results, while others are discarded because they

do not add to the whole. This thesis body of work explores the idea of self-image and

invites viewers to explore their own in response to the work.

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      &sear
[27] A type of fastener (nut) which has a barrel-shaped flange and protruding boss that is
internally threaded.

[28] A hanging system comprised of two beveled pieces. One is fastened to the wall and the
other to the object to be hung.

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