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Conversations With the Self; An Artist Visual and Written Wanderings

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

by

Elizabeth W. Perkins

Master of Fine Art, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2003
Bachelor of Fine Art, James Madison University, 2000

Major Director: Jack Wax, Associate Professor, Glass

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, VA
May 2004

My heartfelt appreciation to mentor Jack Wax; your ways of living, creating, and teaching will hum in my ear as a whispering shout when I am creating or even driving in my car dodging rabbits and other things of the world. I thank Bonnie Collura for her insight, honesty, and enthusiasm. Thanks to Jim Meyer for his encouragement and guidance. I thank Allan Rosenbaum for giving me just the right skipping albums to take into the studio; I have become the needle on the vinyl. I also thank Laura Browder for her patience in assisting me with my written thesis. My thanks to my family and my friends for their love and support.

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Abstract

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The thesis is made up of episodes in which I am in dialogue with myself, sometimes in dialogue with the work, and yet other times I am speaking directly to the reader/viewer. The tense also sways from past to present as frequently as the visual language does. The following episodes are a selection of writings from my final year at graduate school. The episodes express my influences, inspirations, theories, and philosophies as a person and a maker. I think of these things as what allows me to wander and then wander somewhere else completely different within the same landscape. I feel it is important for an audience to experience these wanderings. I feel it is more valid for you to read exactly what I am thinking rather than to tell you about what I am thinking and making, because it is an expression of my relationship with my work.

The images are supplemental to the writing. The images and writings fit together in that they inform one another. That is not to say that the ideas do not always transfer literally from image to writing but that they are what is thought about simultaneously through out my creative process. Most importantly I have developed through my graduate experience an intense relationship with the work. This is the most important relationship an artist has, the one with his or her work. It is deep and enriching, at times painful and frustrating, and at its best surprising, amazing, and even glorious. This is what I have to share through my thesis.

Introduction

The works, both verbal and visual, speak about familial existence; identity as child and adult. They represent, pay homage to and often cherish human emotion, experience, or personality and the prostheses of them. One writing brings validation to my own making through the discovery and study of art works created by my grandmother. Other writings and works express rural ritual and family tradition. Some works and writings discover the precious within the mundane or everyday life attaching experience and people to objects with specialness. These have human presence or absence in them. They are romanticized to create melodrama. They remember and magnify places, people, and experience. They allow characters and their mindsets to stay and to go, to live and to die.

It is simultaneously the telling of a tale and the searching for who I am. It is a way I can merge myself with others and find a commonality with humanity, while coping with the differences and uniqueness' of myself. This encompasses those things that alienate and isolate experience and my desire to communicate those experiences. They reflect the human condition; conjuring pain, isolation, and fear while celebrating love and hope.

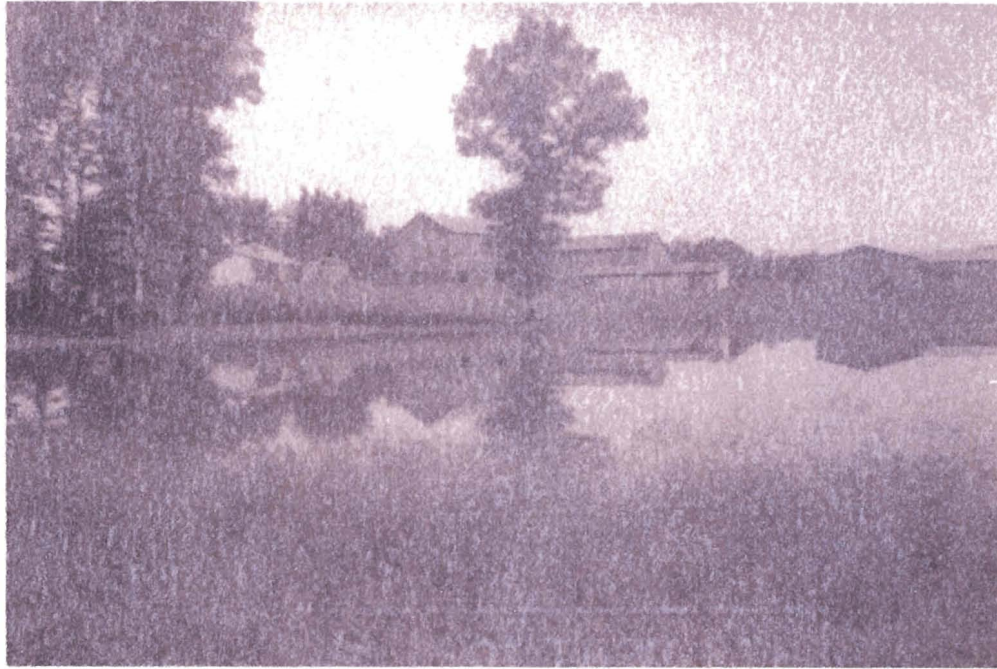
I wander with these things in my work and they are what remain in the work. I leave from this place, I take something with me, and then I give it to an audience. The work

infuses and grounds all of these things; they are the conduits between what I imagine, have experienced, think, see, and make tangible.

These things find a certain solace and resolve through what is happening now in the work. The visual and verbal work is the collision of memory, reality, and imagination. The work is a documentary with missing parts.

The written work is central to the process of coming to terms with the visual work. My intention and relationship often times changes throughout the working process; the wandering. Making radical changes to the work and ideas is necessary for the work to live. The writing allows clarity and speaks to me as much as the making does. I write and build, build and write. It is a call and response physically, mentally, and verbally. The writing directs my wandering in idea and image.

The works are complex characters, within a narrative, that have multiple roles. The protagonists pursue one another through the works. In many ways the stories are unfinished or even unknown; they are discoveries.

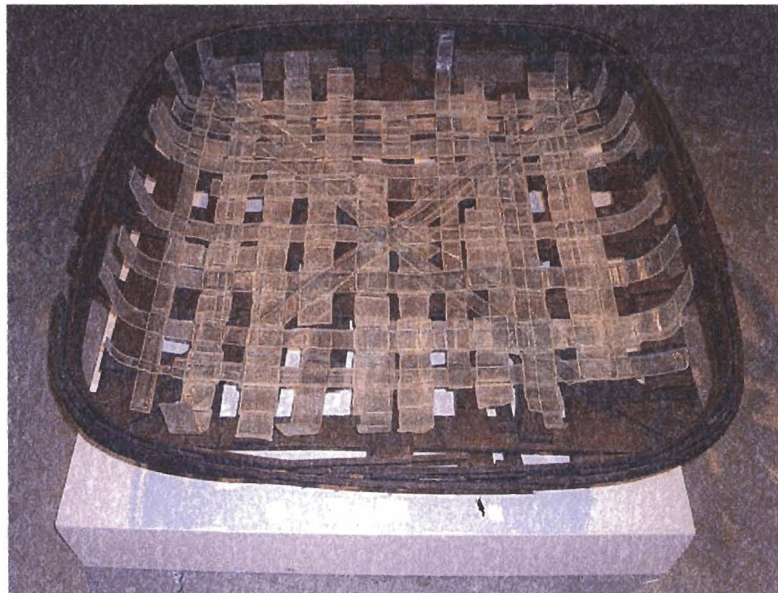


Red Bud Farm

The work has a nostalgic quality and makes present for me my appreciation and thanks for all that was given and sacrificed so lovingly. They speak about what it is like to grow up in the rural south in the small farming community of Louisa County, Virginia. The works are a reflection of who I am presently and what I have learned of past experiences. They sometimes express a hopefulness for the future.

Visitant and Shadow

I remember summery sweat sticking the backs of my legs together as I squatted with knees up higher than my butt that kissed the red mud field. I lifted the leaves with my stick searching for the horned worms. With a tin bucket in my hand the green worms, whose color resembled that of my Aunt Hazels Watergate Salad, were collected with my stick. I did this with a carefulness so as not to harm the hairy leaves of the tobacco. The sticky leaves could not be touched, as the leaves ooze could linger on the skin becoming hells fire for the eyes when wiping the sweat from my face. The worms were pounded to death and their guts emanated the heat of the tobacco that filled my lungs in those country fields.



Visitant and Shadow. slumped and woven glass, tobacco basket. 4'x4'x3". 2003

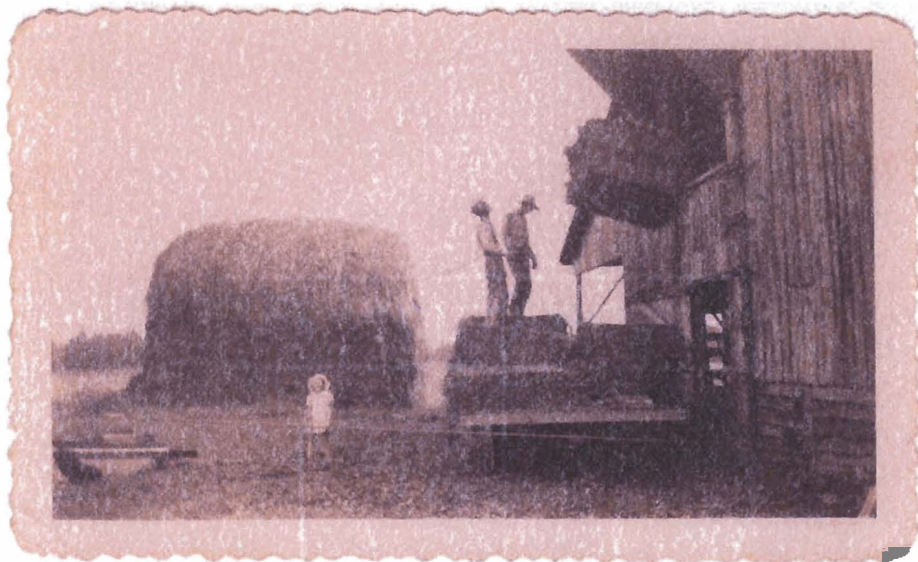
Just before the sun went down we would return from Noon's to Mammie and Pappies farmhouse. Mammie would turn on the spigot so I could have my feet washed by the garden hose that was still filled with warm water from the day's heat. We sat in the side yard watching the sun set over the wheat field blowing its soft cadence upon us. I remember the smell of cow manure and the sounds of the peepers in the pond. There were katydids, locusts, and crickets chirping furiously and I lay in the pitch black imagining their every move, as my eyelids became heavy. My legs itched from fresh cut grass. The glow of lightening bugs lit the large boxwoods that circled the screen porch on the front of their house next to the room I slept in.



Alma, my mammie and Julia, my ma on the front porch before it was screened in.

Mammie's wind chimes tinkled in the movement on the screened in porch. The morning greeting of the cow's comin on echoed: cah-mawn, cah-mawn, cah-mawn; cahm awn, cah-mawn, cah-mawn. I scrambled out of bed into the humid morning to traipse across the morning dew with bare feet to watch the milking. He sat on a one legged stool rhythmically pulling teats. Keashet, keashet, keashet, keeshet went the milk across the tin pail. The rhythm every now and then broken by the shooting of milk on the feline thieves. They rumbled in the magic dust created by the light between the cracks of the pine boarding. Their tongues and claws fought over the coats of those hit with fresh wet milk by Pappies good aim. I watched the cows while I waited for the cream to separate and skimmed it with a miniature hand made oar.

I would get to pull the chain from the cast iron bell for the men to come in from the fields for dinner, the five-course meal that was served between 2 and 3 in the afternoon.



Claude my paw and greatgrandfather, Farrar my pappie, and Julia my mother putting up hay.

Farrar was the most intelligent person I have ever known. Wise from, well I do not really know what made him wise, but he was. I suppose it was from life, hard work, being self sufficient, being a faithful southern Baptist, having experienced a lasting true love, and the subscriptions to Readers Digest, Popular Science and other multiple science, agricultural and the way things work kinds of magazines and books he read.

Pappie knew farmer things about the moon that amazed me. Putting the plow to the field during the full moon was like digging a hole during the full moon. The dirt would not fit in the hole at certain lunar times while the dirt from a hole would more than fill the hole at other lunar times.



Pappie with his mules

He had an eighth grade education. He read the paper cover to cover every day. He was a farmer, an electrician, a plumber, a welder, a husband, a father, a grandfather. He could certainly do anything. To afford sending my mother to college Pappie worked the fields all day and then worked the swing shift at the rock quarry.

The day he retired, there was a huge surprise party. Parties at my grandparent's farm were huge: Bluegrass rang out from a stage (also known as a hay wagon). Lawn chairs on the side yard and hill were for those folks that did not get around to well. The others danced on. New Years and Fourth of July parties were the best because of the additional sounds and sites of fireworks over the field. There was grilled chicken cooked over a hand made pit. The grill was made from chain link fence that sandwiched the chicken to be easily flipped and basted with a broom. There were spirits, and food for the masses.

Married First Prettiest House;
A Fortress of Memory and Bones

The white bones are now existing actively in space. They are no longer decorative or on display and are floating, suspended and levitating. The tool and wedding veil fabric becomes its blood and the tablecloth its flesh. The cloth from the table is the stretching of the flesh that is the protector. The door is the child surrounded by the child's first construction. The child as architect builds with furniture and fabric the reconstructed home. The protector, the table cloth becomes a web of domesticity. There are the stretch marks. The vulnerability in the doorway becomes a duality. It is now not behind or in front, not past or future but present. The figure, child, woman and artist stands above below, behind, and in front and is centered strong and defensive. What is it that hangs on the skin, pulling the bones on the outside, turning the inside out, into an amulet, one that is worn by the children who break wish bones on the leg of a table? Worn on the many legs of the child bones are wishing bones breaking. It is keeping you from walking the myth of home and husband. The door is violent, an intrusion, an extrusion, the cloth gives the door force and resistance. There is a duality in that the door is being pushed down and the door is rising up. It is all of the change, questioning, and becoming of one's self. The old bones have found their reference in this work through amulet; they are wind chimes individually soft bagged in muteness. Other bones lay motionless in paralysis.



Married first. prettiest house. glass, fabric, wood. 9'x4'x4'.
2003.

Hog Slaughter and Lemon Pie

This piece started as an image inside the meat house on the farm; it was dark, greasy, musty, salty, charred, and smoked. The hams were realized in glass and then hung in clean cotton ham bags. The surface texture of the material, the emptiness or fullness of the containers and how the hams would hang became extremely important considerations for the work. What was I to use, blown color, sandblasted, etched, lard filled, greased surface, intestine filled, enameled? Should I hang to build a complete structure unlike the hams? Would they be hams that become something else? Struggling through this I decided to go against all my original thoughts about the piece.

I based my new direction on a memory I had of Lucy baking lemon pies all day while boiling the shit out of the chitterlings. I decided to go to the proverbial artistic cliff and jump. I added bright color to the work. Before all the work was black, brown, gray. The hams became lemon drops that cascaded from the ceiling celebrating the food and the kill that a year of work had provided.

For the first time I felt it was OK to make the work bizarre, to realize my experience as bizarre. It celebrates the uniqueness rather than the universal quality of experience. In this way I might produce a work that is more unrecognizable. This work seemed lighter

and different from my other works in many ways, but still was rooted in the concept of rural and farm living, because of its collision of memory and present.

The work was alive. It returned the past to the present.

Now that I have moved to the farm Lucy calls once a week. “How’s everything and how’s Alma... You come and see me now... Yes, can’t complain, Baby Anne is doin fine, she’s got her self a real good job, livin in Orange county, married to a real nice fella...oh, yea and Bubby is takin care of me better ‘an anybody could., we’ll see you soon.”

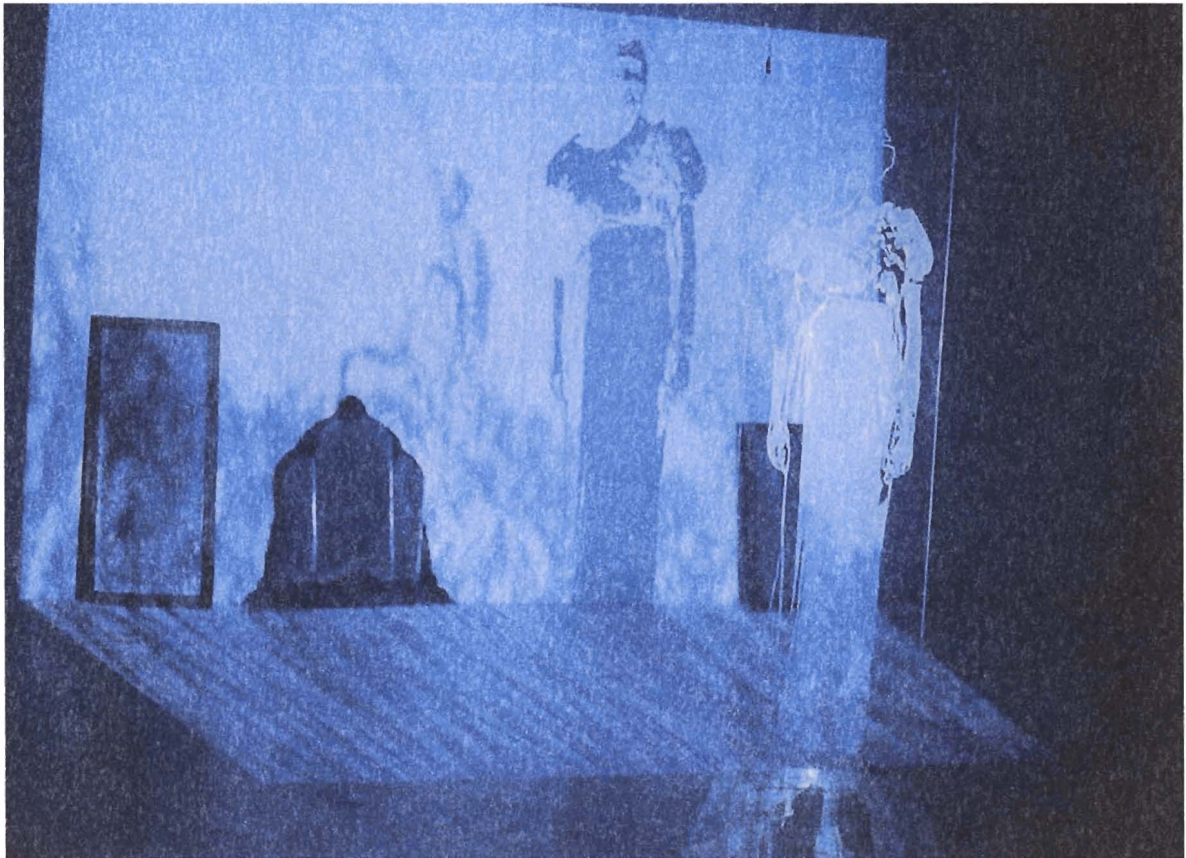
She’s 92 now.



study; Hog Slaughter and Lemon Pie. glass, fabric.
installation. 2003.

Ode to Alma

I want to become the mirror in the work. I am reflecting in this piece. I am also reflecting on her life, her loves, and the power of the land. The land is generated by a projection of rhythm. The wind and weather waving and scratching the autumn cornhusks imply sound but the piece remains silent. I want to be the mirror so that I might reflect her loves and life into the world.



Ode to Alma. etched glass, antique mirrors, video projection. installation. 2003

“What is it about myself that is her?”, I ask myself. What do I love and embrace about her? “Child”, she says, “this is how you snap beans and this is how you make biscuits and pies and this is how fry fish for breakfast and call the men into eat with the bell. This is how you can and freeze and make preserves”. Everything is about the kitchen. She taught me how to make my bed. She was the first person to paint my nails or let me wear make-up. She shared with me a canon of southern womanhood. She let me wear her perfume even before I wore a bra. I tromped around barefooted across rocks and mud all summer smelling of cheap Charlie perfume. Mammie loves Charlie perfume.

What I love about my mammie is the oral traditions she shared with me, about where everything in the house came from and what was willed to who and how she'd gotten it. We never talked much about death, though we spent many a day cutting the family cemeteries and taking flowers into the center of the cornfield, where they, (my ancestors), rested in peace at home.

I love the fact that one of the things that my Mammie was most proud of was her tenth grade biology notebook. This is how she saw herself as an artist. Every summer we would revisit it, the notebook and her past through metamorphic animal drawings. She told me of metamorphosis (the changing of forms and structures through transformation-change of character, appearance, condition...during development)...and the stages and transformations of life.

She started painting when she was in her sixties. She made paintings in the same genre that I work. She made work about what she knew and then she would make up the rest. This is in part the melodrama of the South. It is always better when you tell it, than when you lived it. I think this is why I lay claim to this type of work. I always want the work to be better than its original idea. All her paintings are landscapes, mostly of the farm that have been chopped and pushed around from one side of the farmhouse to the other as if to say, "Today, in my painting, the front porch will face the cornfield rather than the wheatfield". In this world the deer devour the ears and the imagined dew silver in the foreground on corn silk becomes a new reality from her wicker rocker. She has a serious imagination! Some paintings depict her bedroom window facing another side of the farm-another world (familiar yet reimagined). Her life was certainly changed by her painting and by her piece work quilting.



This photo was used for *Ode to Alma*. It is her high school graduation picture.

The summer I fell in love: The here and now and the world beyond.

In The summer I fell in love: The here and now and the world beyond, as the viewer we learn about a relationship between two people. We learn that they were in love but are separated by two different worlds, they are separated by the here and now and the world beyond. Many of my works attempt to connect these two worlds.

The objects in this piece are from another era, that of the characters. Transferred love letters stain their once white bed sheets with communication. These letters represent an excitement and anticipation involved in their young but timeless love.



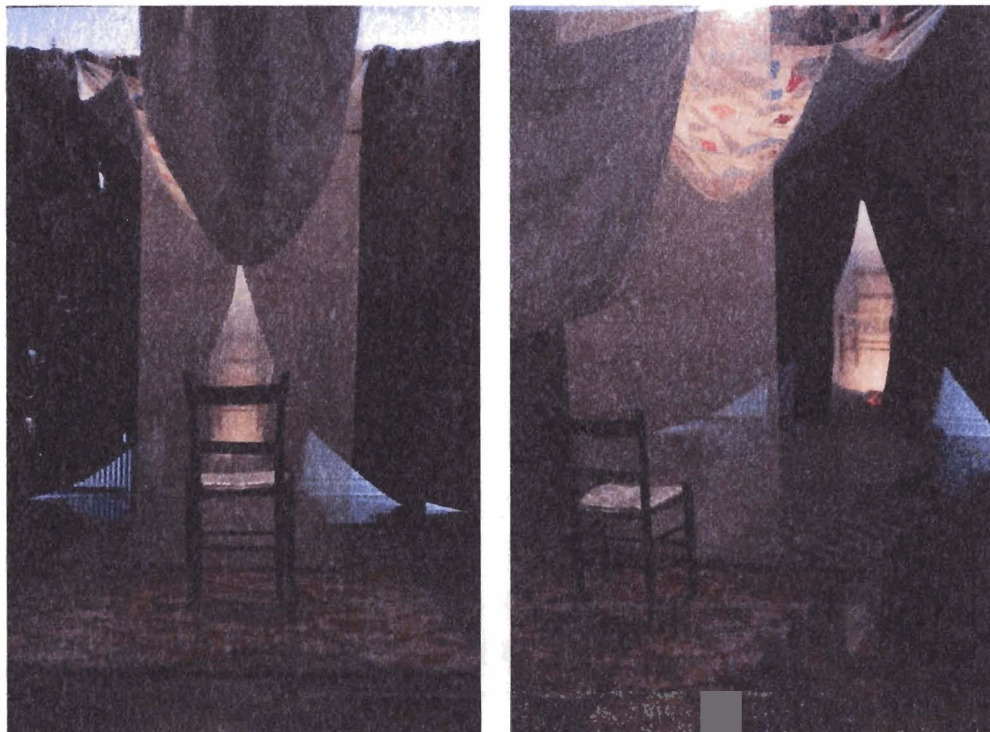
Mammie and Pappie around 1938 and a picture from Easter of 1960.



The pictures my grandmother shared with me each summer I spent with her to describe the summer she fell in love.

The communication line at the end of the piece, the end of a boat, receives and recedes the rest of the piece. It is suspended in air. The cheesecloth extended from the ghost figure of Mammie sieves the open end of the boat connecting and filtering her with the rest of the piece. The piece represents an eternal love in which the other end of the boat opens up into heaven behind the curtain of quilts made by three generations of women in my family. The glass works to become the ghost. The cheesecloth solidifies the ghost. The sleeping glass seat beyond the final curtain call of quilts glows. It represents the loves that have passed on.

Heaven becomes something beyond the gallery space while the viewer swims in the water, open air, beneath the boat. The viewer becomes submerged in the work physically.

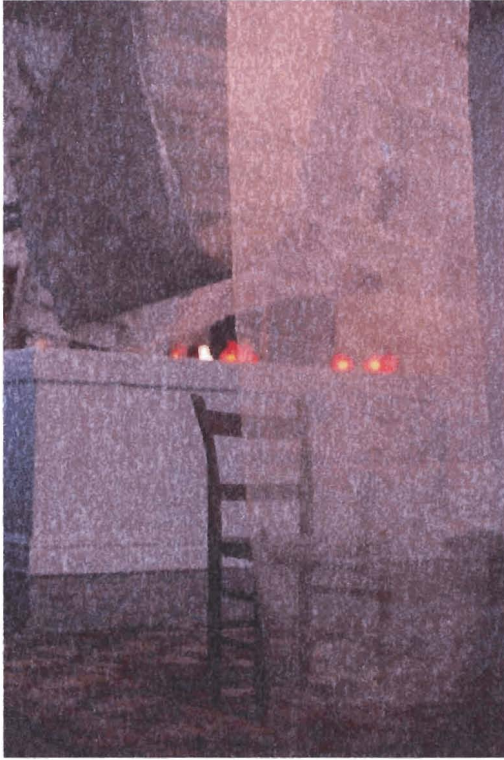


The Summer I Fell in Love, The Here and Now and the World Beyond.
blown glass, and heirlooms
installation
2004

The quilts lay claim to their kind of life through the remnants of cloth that includes seed bags and Sunday dresses. Like my upbringing the humbling parts of our heritage, the secrets and often complex and convoluted heart of my family and its traditions are seen on the under side, the seed bag linings of the quilt. These are the things that are not so much talked about; these are the givens and the hardships of farm life, the skeletons and their acceptances.

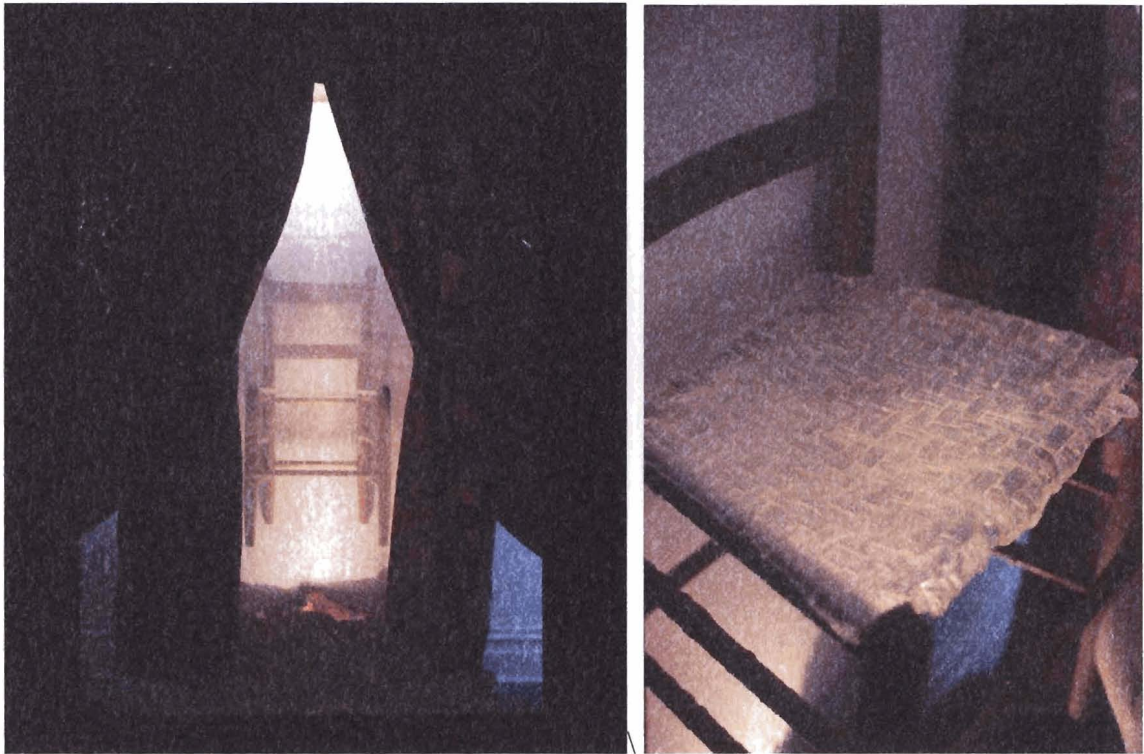
On the flip side, the surfaces of these quilts are the best of the best. They are the celebratory, fancy, bright, and proud Sunday garments outgrown, yet salvaged worthy of beautifying and warming the souls of loved ones as they lay asleep in dream at night. All these surfaces are to be everything we want, wish, and hope.

The force of the dreams beneath them moves them from inhalation and exhalation, from the tossing and turning. As an anxious artist, this is me now safe in my beliefs and faith. When I wake up each morning on their farm I know I am blessed and I am grateful. It is a glorious life I have chosen as an artist; to die trying to make these pieces work-stumbling along and failing all the way. I have dedicated my life to this making. It has become me.



The Summer I Fell in Love, The Here and Now and the World Beyond.
blown glass, and heirlooms
installation
2004

I am the living ghost that carries everything they were. The glass is what I bring to the experience. It is essential to the work.



The Summer I Fell in Love, The Here and Now and the World Beyond.
blown glass, and heirlooms
installation
2004

Could I make a piece of art that was more powerful than the actual love that my grandparents had for one another? Maybe not, but I can bring a closeness to this even if it is a prosthetic. The truth to me is an idealization of what love might really be. Living life with the expectation that this idea could be real, and then I could spend my entire life never having it happen the way I thought. Like the work, something even better could happen!

It is a fantasy.



The Summer I Fell in Love, The Here and Now and the World Beyond.
blown glass, and heirlooms
installation
2004

Like these quilts, the works are hand me downs made new; restorations and repairs of ephemera.

Smoke Rings and Apple Cores

I unclasp the cherry secretary and lay the desk top down. Inside, each letter slot is so full that the water could break at any moment giving birth to the language and meaning of each enclosed document. On either side there are small drawers and I choose the lower left brass pull. It slides, wood against wood. I marvel at an old hand made once white cloth bag hidden in the back. I discover single and fruit cluster collections of buttons, an old tatting needle, thread, an old bent bolt and various and asundry other things. The contents riddle me; "What could these things be, who used them and why on God's green earth would they keep them"? Among the shiny rhinestones was an ancient cigarette butt. I day dreamed about whose lips once caressed and mouthed the cigarette butt, perhaps my mothers, my grandmothers, or my great-grandmothers? I couldn't throw it away. I knew it was part of my history. That butt now somehow, seemed worth keeping after my imagined memory.

Another small package, a soft square within all the wrapping, a four minute continuation of sewing machine thread, green and belted around brown butcher's paper. Inside this a white paper package lined with plastic. The contents written out outside in lead; Plaster of Paris. I stuck my finger in the plaster of paris to feel it, even though I have felt it

hundreds of times before. This time “Plaster of Paris” was something new. To me, it was as if I had never touched plaster of paris before in my life. I even wanted to smell it.



The old bag I found in the cherry secretary.

I kept the butt and the bag, and I kept the package and plaster. They are like the work. When I am lucky the ideas that took the form of rhinestones, which seemed the best of ideas, turn a sixty year old cigarette butt into something else and somehow the work is better. Othertimes, no matter how much you wrap a little package with green thread the anticipation of the contents can be better than the treasure inside. The journey of unwinding that thread can be the best part of the work. Why I keep the things I do, that I am not sure, except that they bring a “realness” to my work. I know it. I know it like the better parts of a work that lie in the bizarre facts outside of the formal ruffraff.

These details allow me to experience and to see myself outside of myself. I am interested in how the viewer experiences my work. Do they rip and tear away at the package reading the card last? Do they read the card first by cutting a slit in the end of the envelope? Do they then methodically cut the invisible tape away from the fancy paper, with the proverbial pocket knife that once cut worms for bait, and witted sticks and continuous curls of apple peels which were then thrown out the window of the old blue ford pick up?

Through the work some things I discover and some things discover me. As artist I often act as both the cherry secretary and as the willing person that is curious to enter its life and contents. At my happiest I am still the naive child tip toeing in search of meaning that desperately wishes to share with someone the mysterious hidden drawers of life, and even the plaster of paris found in an old cherry secretary.

Electric Sky

I recently attended the Virginia State Fair; it was a menagerie of carnie curiosities, cattle and candy apples. The smallest woman in the world meets the FFA and the 4-H. Father's coach sons and daughters outside the rails of the corrals, moving calves around and placing them in stance to be judged. Folks from all over Virginia bringing in their canned goods, preserves and wild honey for competition. It is a reconjuring of the agricultural life that I grew up on, a reclaiming of memory.

The memory speaks finding the child. The child clinches her hands together behind her back. Her head raises back, and bangs danglewater into her eyes with the dark and nastiness of ever little child who has bobbed for an apple before her. It is like life and making art. There is this mucky tub that was historically used for washing. It transforms into a ces pool of slobber. The prize is an apple. She peers into the open blue sky. She is small while life is big. The apple a prize. She hangs the apples all around her studio. She makes the things that surround her, so she moves things around constantly. The hand wraps have become fence markers that blow in the wind instead of binding her hands together. The fence separates her open world and closed in field. This fence line does not delineate which territory is which.



Electric Sky
 solid and blown glass, projections, heirlooms
 installation
 2004

The electric sky becomes a projection of history and present; the family farm I have moved to, rediscovered images of my parents when they were young, images of my deceased father I have never seen, collections of seeds, rocks, butterflies, cows, and canning rings. Constantly centered on the wall of projections is the electric charge box. The viewer becomes the conduit for continuing the electric circuit. Only these projections and an open doorway light the piece. Linens made by my ancestors drape the doorway. This doorway curtain acts as a filter for light. It works dually in that it separates and joins an outside and inside world, or perhaps even another heaven. It is reminiscent of the cloths my grandmother used in her doorways to separate the parlor from the rest of the house.



Electric Sky. solid and blown glass, projections, heirlooms. Installation. 2004.

The glass fence tags are not like the ones that have inspired the piece. Instead of being light and touched by the breeze in country fields they are heavy and weighted down on rust electric fence wire.

In the Hen House

It was abandoned beneath the chicken coop, like the shit of chickens beneath the hay roosts and eggs warmed by the breasts that hatch their young. The feeder is rediscovered. Like a naive child she can hug this in her mind and transform it into an untouchable treasure. These things bring us back to the imaginary, like love. It is the kind of imaginary that is somehow based on a very exact object that embodies a feeling. The feeling allows us to remember the past and magnifies the present.

A short wave radio was a stored item that covered the feeder. Its glass tubes still light up red. The electric cord with frayed fabric was green with a spiral of gold, but has now turned to brown. The only thing that comes from it now is static. Only when it blares its static does it seem to be communicating anything at all. It blares no language and the sound speaks saying, "no words can be found inside this machine". There are no radio towers, there are no signals, just static. It is the cut off, the death. Our memories dearly haunt us with the things we long to feel.

The young girl finds a box and places the old chicken feeder into it. She writes on a slip of paper in lead; "promise". She then places the slip of paper into the feeder.

She walks to the local post office. The treasure travels to another place. It arrives in the exotic, while she returns to the familiar. She turns down the dial of the short wave radio from a buzz to a murmur and the hum becomes a click. The red light fades into a dusty tube with the smell of something hot and old, like a remembered lover.

3/5/04; Is life better than fiction?

Some days devour us and change us into the things we see ourselves as not. Today all the things I have to do seem to be and deal with the fact that I am sick to death of telling the truth through the work. Today I want to tell the filthiest lie I have ever told and see if I even know the difference anymore. I am sick of coming clean with the work. I need something rawer than the truth.

Can art be better than the truth? What I like most about lying is its ability to bring about another reality. If I think of this lying as truth, then maybe real life is better than fiction. Art can be just as horrific as life. It can satiate the soul with love or loneliness, evoking from within ourselves our own experiences or better yet create a new one. Through the work we are reawakened to the present. It is as if you remember what you have dreamed. It has become real: it has happened, has been triggered, or it is dejavu. Life makes us lie to ourselves about the way we should love and treat one another because of how we love and wound, and because of how we are loved and wounded. Life always takes you to the place you are at whether you are aware of this place or not because the self can never be fully realized. It meets you in a place where you are living moment to moment second to second-that very instance in where even in remembering we know we are not in the past.

In my making I am a time machine made from a John Deere combine with the wings of a luna moth; the pilot faceless. She wears a wrap around apron, made by her grandmother in a high school home economics class, white gloves, and an ancient handkerchief gladly given to her by “the queen”. You couldn’t believe a better story. The past, future, and present are all possible in one being if you can make people believe your story or if you can make characters that live truly in the world, in you, or the viewer. Life can only do this through living and changing you. One might argue this with the idea that we live our lives only in metaphor and only directly through our relations and experiences.

I am certain that what I try to do in my work is not this but it is to try to reach a place that is unfamiliar, and sometimes uncomfortable. Maybe this is not really possible through my searching for newness in memory. Maybe it is not possible to bring about an ever-changing reflection through the present in the work as a mere wander. I am so familiar with the familiar that I pray I will have the sense to recognize the difference when it arises. The oddest things about my work are better than what is pain stakingly familiar. Sometimes it is so ordinary, and could be compared to the feeling of loneliness. I believe there is more to life than these comparisons.

I think art has the capability to change us in ways that life does not because we can choose our relationship to it. We do not choose to be born but become active and reactive within life. The work does not change; it is the viewer that is changed. It may be a physical or a psychological change. We do not have to give anything back to a work of

art, but we can through making as artists or experiencing work as viewers. We can give back to the work, as this would allow it to have life beyond that of its creator. Work changes us by its stillness in the way's life can effect us through time. We can lose ourselves to art and art making in ways we are not able to in our daily lives. We can fly the combine on luna moths wings.

I am more secure in my relationship with my work than any other relationship. This is not because I trust myself, or have confidence, but because I can truly be myself and allow the work to be what it needs to be. I can listen to the work and I can hear it and respond acceptingly with an unconditional love. The work allows a complete surrender in ways that life never allows us, because we are human.

We know what love is and we know what pain is. These experiences define our inadequacies and adequacies, our power and powerlessness. We can only hint at what the viewer will experience. There is a way that some works live that is better than life.

Working may not be more interesting than life, but I am more hopeful in my making than my living. My life is exciting because I am making and I am lost, being disoriented all the while.

Fiction may be better than life because there is a finality in life. There is more hope in fiction. When we except life as better than fiction we can regard our feelings, the drama

and all ignorance as better than something imagined. I am not sure what this imagined is, but I am willing to be lost in it for the rest of my life.

There are no real outside limitations to what I must do in my making. There is always a way to work out in my making. A closeness can be approximated. Work can be more bizarre, scarier, more beautiful, and filthier than our daily lives. In making we are truly free in ways that life does not allow. Ultimately the working is more hopeful. Art is not the truth-it's just the way that I interpret ideas about the world I live in, internally and externally. For me artwork is hopeful in that the fiction has a life of its own; it is free from all constraints.

The work is effective when I make love to it and it is not a one-night stand. It is something I return to that changes who I am. It is remembering the love of your life. It is keeping memories alive through the best things you remember about a loved one who has passed away. It is thinking about the most beautiful color of a field driving 60 miles an hour changing your mind by the second...no, it's that yellow, or, that orange or, that gold or, that brown, and never really being able to describe that color to anyone. It is driving down rural route 522 at 4:00 a.m. or earlier almost every day and praying for the lives of rabbits that enter the highway. It is gasping and exhaling slowly after you have passed them safely knowing damn well if they had not moved you would have barreled right over them.

It is all these things while not even being in a moving car.

It is a moving experience.

It is just a field, and a safe rabbit.

3/11/04

Yesterday and today my experience with another person has reaffirmed that life is better than any work of art. I am so grateful for such mysteries!

Imagining Catharsis Through the Work

During graduate school, honest investigations of my family and self-history led me on a personal quest to reconnect, rediscover, exaggerate, and recreate through the work. I have entertained the thought that the work might be cathartic. I can imagine catharsis through the work as a way to understand my experiences and as a way to heal me. Still I ask myself, "What would it mean to become a healer?". If my work is permeated by melancholy, then maybe the work is addressing the struggles in life and the pain and triumph that is relevant to all people.

So I ask myself in the making, "What is triumph and pain?, Does the work become the triumph, what lives or survives?, Does the work heal?". The work does not destroy the past but brings to the forefront what is essential to who I am. It is an acceptance and sharing. The work never feels to me as if it healed me. There is often a guest that does not leave. This type of accepting and sharing is what allows change. I hope to lift the weight of my own world, among other things, with the realization that difference is the beginning of isolation.

What makes me feel good is that sometimes I can communicate and make tangible an acceptance of my traditions and creative wanderings. There are modes of thinking that

reveal their beauty and disgust simultaneously, because that is the way life is. We accept and enjoy beauty and can laugh at ourselves and cry too. My life and the confusion of conventions we are brought up with can, I believe, be related to by all people. This is the regaining and the reliving of existence.

When I am unable to make things tangible through visual poetry it is a living hell. There is hope though because language is never exhausted even with its limitations. I am constantly filled with doubt and faith!

I work to make the catalyst disappear; this means I am not the only protagonist in the work. It is never just about what I need in the work, but what the work or characters need to be present in the work. I split it up, piece it together, deconstruct and heal with tenderness and aggression, as Mammie did with her landscape paintings and quilts. There is also an internal and physical battle between ideas and materials. I work to repair a new creation; the past is wrenched from its normal continuity into the abnormal future.

What I am telling through these stories are things that I feel live on after the passing of time or life. Such works can yield opposites, being dead and alive at the same time. They are things we never quite forget, good or bad. It is not really a matter of moving on. They are transcendences through time that remain in our minds like our memories. The works create a place that combines refuge and fantasy, a place that calls memory into the

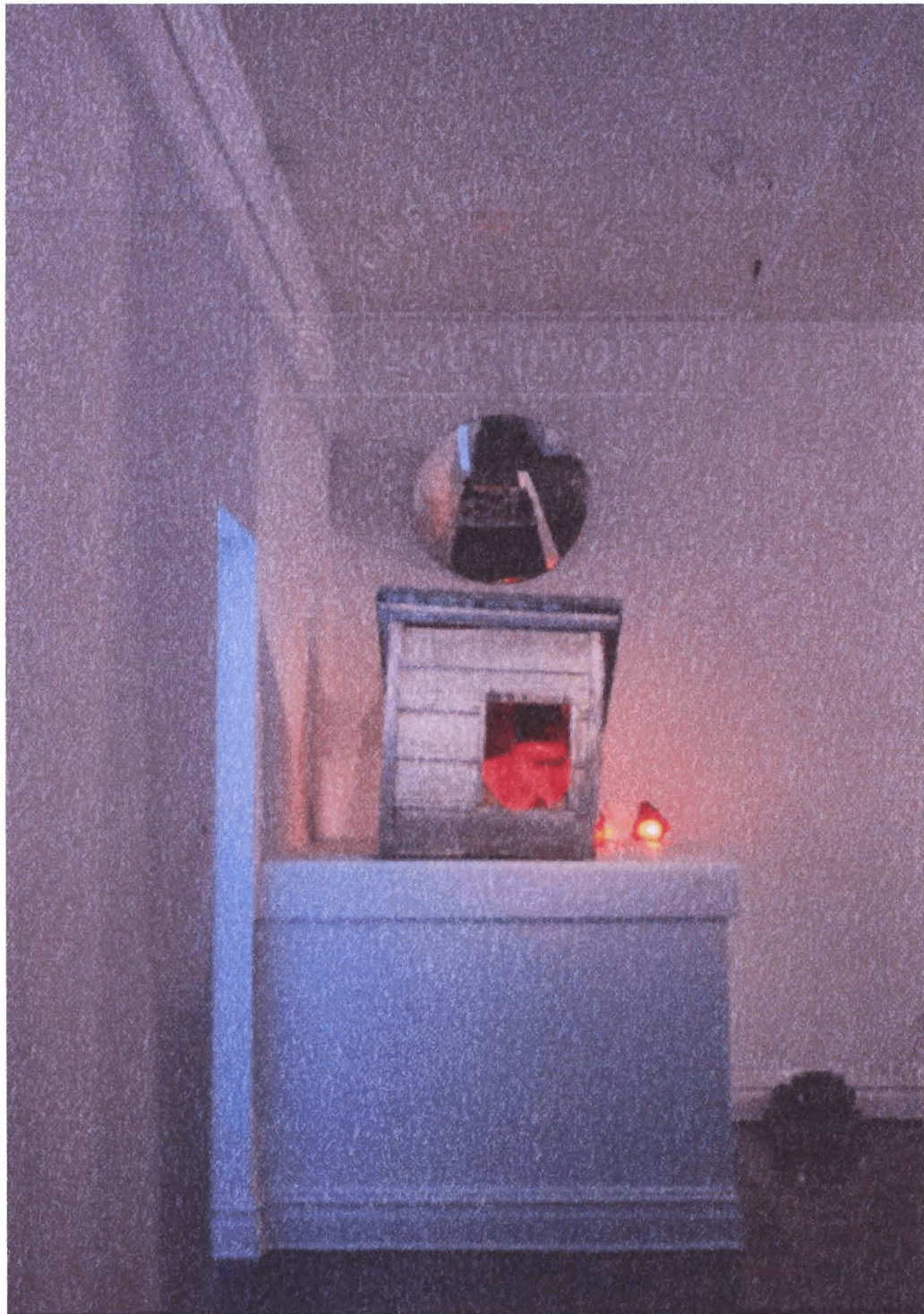
openness of the present. These are the experiences that form the souvenirs of my remembered experiences.

Pubic Hares



Pubic Hares. blown glass, heirlooms. Installation. 2004.

Pubic Hares explores a character and ideas not related to my personal or family history. Though many of the historical objects are from my family, this work tries to create an unfamiliar character.



Pubic Hares. blown glass, heirlooms. Installation. 2004.

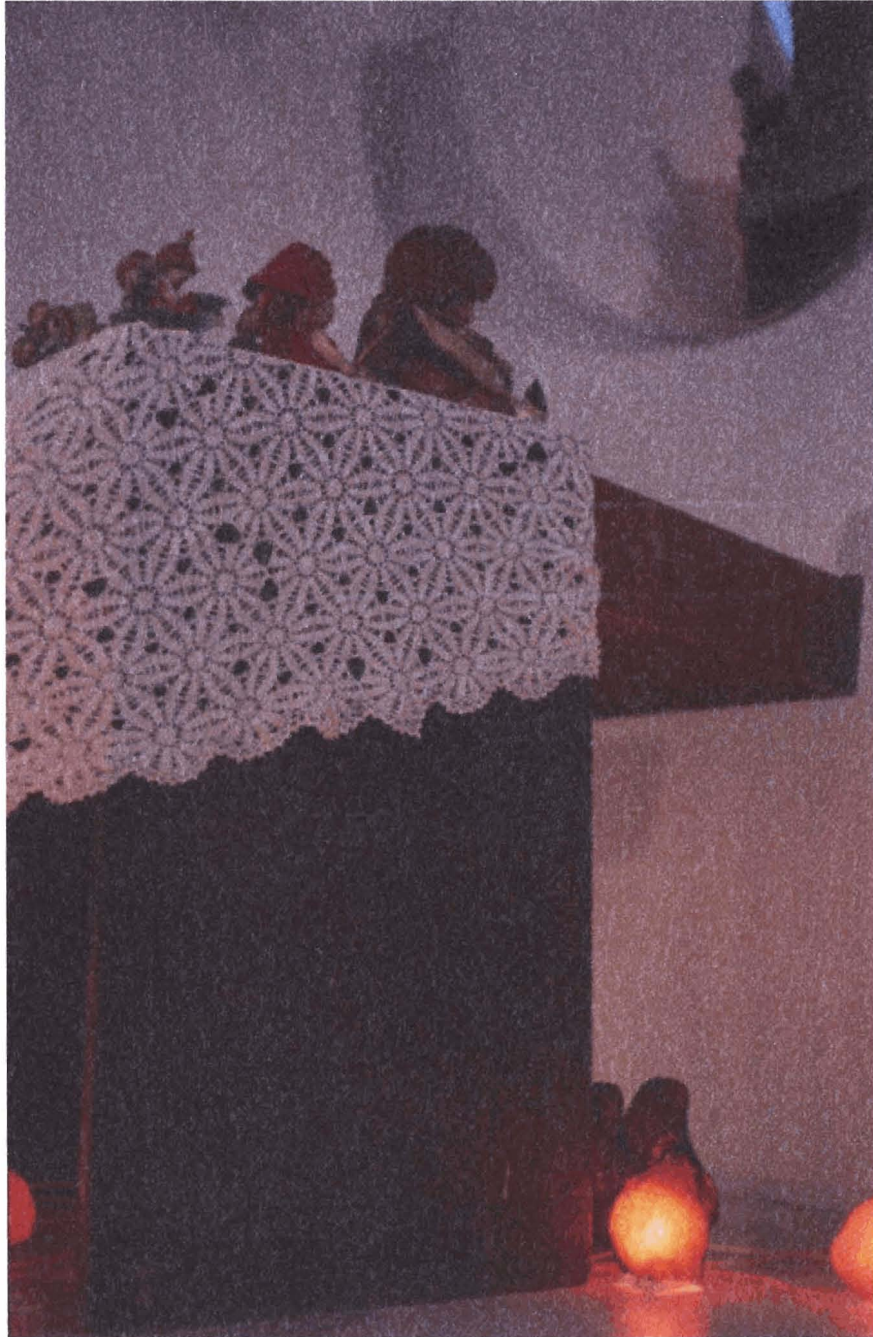
It is a coming of age story experienced through an elevated adult sexual landscape.

Old Playboy magazines within a wooden doghouse surround a church offertory envelope with pubic hairs from a twelve-year-old boy enclosed. A centerfold depicts the female erotically stretching a crocheted bedspread between her legs. It is like the bedspread used to connect the wooden doghouse and desk. Another Playboy cover depicts the subject erotically licking an envelope. Red light illuminates these characters enclosed in the doghouse.



Pubic Hares. blown glass, heirlooms. Installation. 2004.

The Hummel's on top of the desk are grouped so as to create glances between the miniature statuesque children's eyes. One doll even lifts the skirt of another doll.



Pubic Hares. blown glass, heirlooms. Installation. 2004.

Underneath the desk and the crocheted canopy, which stretches between the forms, are blinking glass rabbits. Stockings stretch over these blinking forms of red, black and white.



Pubic Hares. blown glass, heirlooms. Installation. 2004.

The finale of the piece allows the viewer to experience the exterior aerial view of the piece through a convex, rear view security mirror.

Conclusion

In conclusion I have found a literary genre that I feel describes what it is that I am trying to achieve in my work. This literary genre is postmodern melodrama:

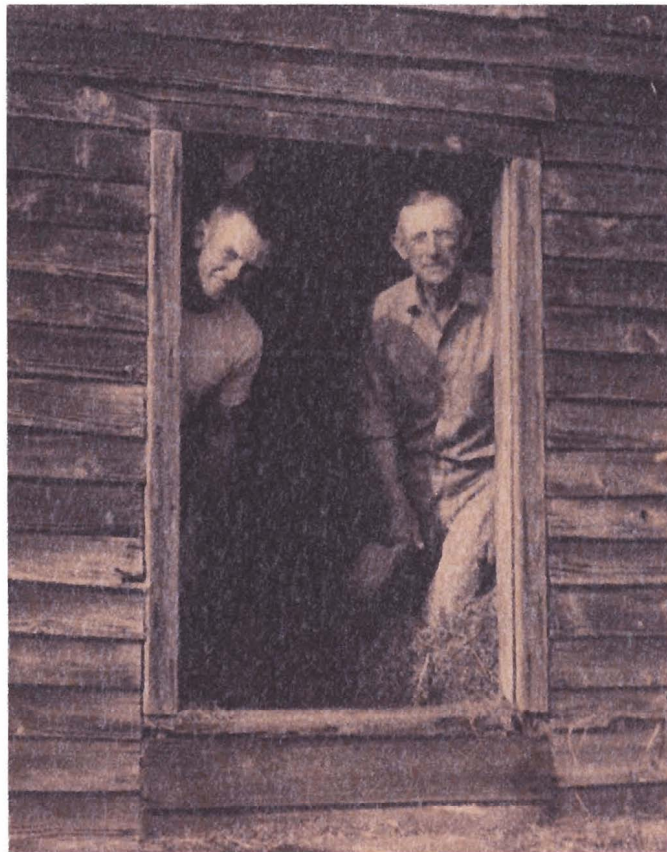
“As a “particular historically and socially conditioned mode of experience” as well as genre, melodrama is distinguished by an aesthetics of extremity and exaggeration that sublimates action or dramatic conflict to style and spectacle. In the highly symbolized, emotionally charged landscape of melodrama, everyday actions intensify or appear in strange, uncanny configurations and pacing is rapid, intense, restless, episodic. Violence, sensationalism, and visual excess predominates through a focus on such plot staples as lurid events, masked relationships or disguised identities, abductions, coincidences, highly polarized moral and emotional states, sudden reversals, or dramatic shifts in mood.

Although aesthetic history suggests the interdependent development of realism and melodrama, and while melodrama shares features with the realist text, their epistemological projects differ in several crucial ways. If realism posits a world capable of full representation and explanation through the organization of experience into coherent structures, melodrama lack’s faith in the world’s unproblematic decipherability or representibility. Instead, it attests to forces, desires, fears, which, though no longer granted metaphysical reality, nevertheless appear to operate in human life independent of rational explanation. Finding no such explanation available within socially legitimized discourses and possessing no other, melodrama turns to highly stylized relations and events as a means of signifying large inexpressible realms of experience. The formal characteristics of melodrama thus bespeak a crisis in representation in which language is either inappropriate or inadequate to the emotional burden of the subject matter at hand...as hysterical text, this suggests the workings of the unconscious that must speak obliquely through physical symptoms in order to give expression to material that evades conscious articulation...in its modern incarnations, the melodramatic mode most often explores themes of identity...it also threatens to expose the real conditions of psychic and sexual identity within the family structure.” 156-157.

Melodrama,...”has been most prevalent in times of social crisis.” ...postmodern revisioning of melodrama rehearses these crises thematically and structurally by

positioning a nonsubject both present and absent-one perhaps doubly absent”...from the artist...”as a double simulation, but one doubly capable of wandering away...this crisis also creates sites of possibility for the structure of new subject positions...a space of pure potential...As one of the distinctive features of post modern aesthetic, the practice of appropriation begins like simulation, by “bracketing the real altogether, fashioning its artifacts through the technologies of reproduction and acknowledging the reiterative already coded status of its own utterance. Such a practice is to be distinguished from modernist uses of allusion or quotation in which discursive heterogeneity is most often stylized in relation to a unifying perspective and in which particular discourses are privileged as modes of representation to the exclusion of others. Postmodern hybridization emerges from and reflects a view of culture as an arena of competing discourses and styles, no one which is sufficient or definitive as a cultural explanation, no one of which is intrinsically more valuable than another, and thus all of which might become the basis for art.” 174-176

There is hope and freedom in creating. It is bringing a new halcyon to the future through endless possibility and discovery by seeing, imagining, and creating.



Paw and Pappie
looking out and the
viewer looking in.

Literature Cited

Literature Cited

Ellen E. Berry. Curved thought and textual wandering: Gertrude Stein's Postmodernism. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, c1992.

Vita

Elizabeth W. Perkins

Selected Exhibitions

- 2004** *Woanderings: Master of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition.*
Anderson Gallery, Richmond, VA.
- 2003** *Elizabeth Perkins: Recollections.*
Charles Taylor Arts Center, Hampton, VA.
Wo(a)nder: Megan Biddle, Elizabeth Perkins, Sayaka Suzuki, Tim Wagner.
Bradford Gallery, Richmond, VA.
Graduate Candidacy Exhibition.
Polka Dot Gallery, Richmond, VA.
- 2002** *16th Peninsula Glass Guild Juried Exhibition.*
Charles Taylor Arts Center, Hampton, VA.
Juried by Ruth Summers, Executive Director of the Southern Highland Craft Guild, Member of the Board of Directors of the American Craft Council, and past trustee of the board of the Glass Arts Society and The Creative Glass Center of America.
First Year Graduate Exhibition.
Bradford Gallery, Richmond, VA.
- 2001** *Small Works By Virginia Artists.*
Peninsula Fine Arts Center, Newport News, VA.
15th Peninsula Glass Guild Juried Exhibition.
Charles Taylor Arts Center, Hampton, VA.
Juried by Lucartha Kohler, Glass Artist and Educator, Philadelphia, PA.
Glass Oddesey.
Rawls Museum Arts, Courtland, VA.
Juried by Kat Allison, Glass Artist, Newport News, VA.
- 2000** *Peninsula Glass Guild Exhibition.*
Towne Bank, VA Beach, VA.
Glass Invitational.
Crystallo, Williamsburg, VA.
14th Peninsula Glass Guild Juried Exhibition.
Charles Taylor Arts Center, Hampton, VA.
Juried by Gale Marie Levine, of Kane Marie Gallery, VA Beach, VA.
- 1998** *Isle of Wight Arts League Exhibition.*
The Collage Gallery and Artists Studios, Smithfield, VA.
- 1997** *Degrees of Excellence.*
Colony Square, Atlanta, GA.
Erotikos.
The Old Highland Bakery, Alternative Space, Atlanta, GA.

Emergence: Danielle Paz and Elizabeth Perkins

Gallery 100, Atlanta, GA.

1996 *200x200.*

New Visions Gallery, Atlanta, GA.

Raw.

Gallery 100, Atlanta, GA.

Atlanta College of Art Student Juried Exhibition.

Juried by Teresa Bramlette, of Nexus Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, GA.

Honors, Awards, Grants, and Publications

New Glass Review 25. Corning Museum, Corning, NY, 2004.

Style Weekly, "16th Peninsula Glass Guild Exhibition", Linda McGreevy, January, 2004.

Diversions, "16th Peninsula Glass Guild Exhibition and Elizabeth Perkins: Recollections," Nicole Benson, January/February 2004.

Partial Tuition Scholarship, Virginia Commonwealth University. Richmond, VA. 2003, 2004.

Partial Tuition Scholarship, Penland School. Penland, NC. Summer, 2003, 2004.

Travel Grant, Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts, Richmond, VA, 2003.

Lecture, Charles H. Taylor Arts Center, Hampton, VA, 2003.

Lecture, Glass Department, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu, HI., 2003.

Best In Show, *Peninsula Glass Guild Juried Exhibition*, Charles Taylor Arts Center, Hampton, VA, 2001.

Daily Press, "Cinderella's Among Us", Mark St. John Ericson, December, 2001.

Honorable Mention, *ACA Student Juried Exhibition*. Atlanta College of Art Gallery, Atlanta, GA 1996.

Artistic Merit Scholarship, Atlanta College of Art. Atlanta, GA 1993-1996.

Experience

2004 Emerging Artist In Residence. Pilchuck Glass School, Stanwood, WA.

2003 Visiting Artist. University of Hawaii at Manoa, Glass Department. Honolulu, HI.

Adjunct Professor. Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA.

Art Educator. Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Richmond, VA.

2002 Interim Director. Rawls Museum Arts, Courtland, VA.

Visitor Services Coordinator, Peninsula Fine Arts Center, Newport News, VA.

2001 Studio Art School Art Educator, Peninsula Fine Arts Center, Newport News, VA.

Glass Assistant, Pantera Glass, Norfolk, VA.

2000 Visitor Services Assistant, Peninsula Fine Arts Center, Newport News, VA.

1999 Glass Assistant, Cedar Creek Gallery, Creedmore, NC.

1997-98 Glass Apprentice, Jamestown Glasshouse, Jamestown, VA.

1996-94 Gallery Assistant, Atlanta College of Art Gallery, Atlanta, GA.

1995 Gallery Assistant, New Visions Gallery, Atlanta, GA.

Volunteer Artist, Atlanta Arts Festival, Piedmont Park, Atlanta, GA.

1994 Volunteer Art Educator, Art in Atlanta Project, Atlanta, GA.

Education

Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA.

Master of Fine Arts Candidate, Material Studies, 2004.

Atlanta College of Art, Atlanta, GA.

Bachelor of Fine Arts, Sculpture, 1997.

California College of Arts. Oakland, CA.

Mobility Program in Crafts, 1996. Glass Intercussion, 1997.

Penland School, Penland, NC.

Summer Session, 2004, 2003. Fall Concentration, 1997.