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Hearts and Trees

Documentation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University.

By

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Artist's Statement

The process of creating art is a visceral experience for me. Each piece is born from an inherent need to visually express and understand my experiences and emotions. I use a variety of materials to create mixed media sculptures, books, and two-dimensional images. Maps and trees are the common motifs and metaphors found in my work. I paint on the surface of maps to reference significant locations in my journey of personal growth. I incorporate found sticks and branches in my sculptures and paint images of trees to communicate my reverence for nature. I often use the tree as a symbol for myself.

I create images and detail with careful control of my media. I use pliers to manipulate wire into precisely formed curls around stones and wood. I apply short, repeated strokes with pen or paint on paper, or with a ceramic tool on a clay surface. I use this repetition of marks to create visual rhythm and a sense of movement which gives energy to otherwise simple images. I use a limited color palette to help maintain visual clarity of the image.

Trees and Hearts

Introduction

Art has always been my most effective mode of communication. I started drawing when I was just a baby, with a crayon in my hand and a sheet of paper taped to my high chair. The healing role of art in my life inspired me to earn a bachelor's degree in art education. Although my degree certified me to teach children from kindergarten through grade twelve, I felt as though I had only learned the basics. I was a jack-of-all-trades, master of none. I knew in my first year of teaching that I needed to continue my education in studio art. I wanted to develop more techniques with familiar media and explore new media. It was also necessary for my own development, as an artist, to continue to work in the studio.

It was difficult to find the time and energy to create my own art work during my first year of teaching. After my second year of teaching, I applied and was accepted into Virginia Commonwealth University's Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art (MIS-IAR) Program. This program allowed me to teach full-time and earn my master's degree, one class at a time in the evenings and over the summer. Taking classes provided a structured schedule in which I could work on my art. I embarked on a long journey with fellow art educators and locally renowned artists who have inspired my work.

Aesthetics and Influences

Creating art has always been my way of making sense of my life. I often approach my work intuitively and full of emotion. I am better able to understand myself after my thoughts, feelings, and memories have been visually expressed. When I began the MIS-IAR Program, I

was teaching, travelling, and trying to find myself. These experiences are symbolically expressed in my work through the imagery of trees and hearts.

I have an affinity for trees and a great appreciation for their aesthetic qualities. Every species has physical characteristics that differentiate it from other varieties. Their most visually significant features, in my opinion, are the organization of the branches and the appearance of their bark and leaves. Even within one species, each individual tree is unique in its configuration. This sense of individuality, existing within a large group of similar beings, is one aspect that I attempt to capture in my tree portraits.

This individuality is one of many analogies that I make between trees and humans. About ten years ago, I became aware of similarities between myself and trees. Trees change physically with the seasons while I change emotionally. Trees are rooted to the ground, I am grounded in reality. Trees are able to endure stormy weather as I have endured stormy relationships. I choose to use the image of the tree as a metaphor for myself because of these similarities.

Trees are also incredibly resilient. When a person carves their initials into the bark of a tree or saws off a limb, a visible scar is created that exists for the remainder of the tree's life. Because I have Type I Diabetes, I have twenty-three years' worth of needle scars on my flesh. Emotional wounds that result from personal relationships can leave more painful, but invisible, scars. The lines I paint and the marks I carve on the trees in my work make visible my emotional wounds.

Travel and personal relationships have also influenced my art. I have taken several trips to other states where I have met people with whom I felt a strong emotional connection. Some of

these relationships were strained by the physical distance, whereas others grew stronger. In my work, I address these themes of travel and relationships by painting and sculpting hearts. I carved heart-shaped leaves on a sculpture of a tree to represent the emergence of love into my life. I painted hearts on top of state lines on road maps to indicate the physical separation between people. I have also cast clay models of the human heart and used them in an outdoor installation to map the emotional journey through a long distance relationship. I was sensitive to these experiences and I used the art making process to heal myself by working through my thoughts and emotions.

My portfolio of work consists of artist's books, mixed media and ceramic sculpture, and acrylic paintings. My non-objective paintings as well as my heart paintings are limited in color to black, white, red, and gold. This combination of colors allows me to maximize contrast and the visual weight of color for an emotional impact. The colors I use in my sculptures and tree paintings are similar to those found in nature. In both my sculptures and paintings, I use repeated linear marks to embed a sense of rhythm and movement in the works.

Mixed Media and Sculpture

My mixed media and sculptural materials include tree branches, wire, glass, ceramics, maps, thread, paint, pencil, and pen. I use these materials to create layers in each of my works. Working in layers allows me to purge my thoughts and emotions onto the canvas without completely revealing myself. Sometimes, I write my thoughts on paper and overlap the words with more words, obscuring my original text. The process of writing the words is healing for me but I don't want anyone to read the thoughts I have written. Abstracting text in this way makes

the words illegible but creates a visual texture of layered marks. By controlling the amount of recognizable text and imagery in my work, I am able to safely express myself without feeling vulnerable to the eyes of others.

In my mixed media book, *The Story of State Lines* (Appendix, 1), I used wood, wire, paper, and glass beads. In creating this sculptural book, I wrote a story on thin strips of handmade paper and then wrapped the strips of paper around a piece of wood and pieces of wire. I twisted the wire around the wood to create the illusion of roots and branches. The tree represents myself and the story becomes a part of me. The wire also connects several pieces of sea glass and glass beads to the tree. The beads are the only source of color, and represent glimmers of hope growing on the branches of the tree. Only a few words of this story are visible. It is a story I wrote that is never to be fully read by the viewer. It documents the beginning of a long distance relationship and ends with my romantic visions of a fairytale ending. Like making a wish, I felt it was in my best interest to keep these thoughts to myself.

I Live Here Now (Appendix, 2) is a book that I altered by drawing, painting, and transferring images to the surfaces of the pages of an old atlas. At the time that I made this book, I was looking forward to moving into a new home in the city. I made this book to foretell the next chapter of my life with my significant other. I painted the cover of the book to resemble the peeling paint of an old building. I attached a small picture frame to the front cover to represent the front door to my new home. Inside the frame, I tied two hearts together with red thread, representing the loving relationship that would flourish in my new home. Inside the book, in a detail view (Appendix, 2a), I drew pictures and wrote words on the maps of the United States. The images recall fond memories and the words foretell future moments of my life in the new

house.

Tree Lady (Appendix, 3) is a mixed media sculpture that resembles a woman flying. The body of the lady is represented by a forked tree branch which is set in plaster in a tin can. The top-heavy sculpture requires a large solid base of plaster, which a tin can supports. Her right leg extends gracefully behind her while her left arm reaches out for balance. Her face is suggested with leaves for lips and blue sea glass for a single eye. Painted branches of golden hair flow behind her as it would in the wind. The lady is adorned with unglazed ceramic pieces in the shape of dogfish. The dogfish are a nod to the local brewpub Dogfish Head Alehouse where I met a man with whom a relationship developed. Sadly, the relationship came to a sudden end. Although the fish remind me of a specific person and place, they also act as reference to the saying that *there are more fish in the sea*. This sculpture reminds me to carry on and remember one of those fish out there is for me.

Imperfections (Appendix, 4) is a carved plaster sculpture that was the result of a happy accident. My first attempt at making a base for the previous sculpture, *Tree Lady*, failed. When I set the tree branch in a milk carton full of plaster, the branch broke. I was left with a solid block of plaster and an imbedded stick. I took this plaster stick and sculpted a female form. I left the stick to represent the neck as I carved the torso of a woman. I encountered many air bubbles as I carved the plaster, the imperfections of the plaster match the imperfections of my body. My midsection is scarred from years of insulin injections.

What Grows on My Tree (Appendix, 5), a relief ceramic sculpture, was inspired by a photograph of a strange looking tree with sausage-like fruit or seed pods hanging from its branches. As I pondered this strange tree I thought about what, if I could choose, I would grow

on a tree. I imagined the potential of a tree to produce fruit similar to a person's power of intention that will manifest as their future. The trunk is the torso of a woman, the branches are broad and lush with green leaves, and the hearts hang from the branches like ripe fruit ready to be picked. At the time that I made this sculpture, I yearned for true love in my life. The creation of this sculpture was a way for me to express my desire to fill that void.

When I assembled *Round Trip* (Appendix, 6 and 6a), a ceramic installation, my wish was coming true. I met a man in California with whom I had developed a relationship. After several cross-country visits and much time apart, he moved back to Virginia where he grew up and where I live. We were finally together. The installation was outside a ceramic studio in the sand surrounding garbage cans used for raku firings. I imagined the space in the installation to be the United States. In the sand, I arranged more than a dozen wheel-thrown cylinders and several human heart forms made from slip cast molds. Bright red string, representing blood, emerged from the ceramic hearts, flowed through the sand, and physically connected each heart to one of the cylinders. Every cylinder is connected by red thread to a heart or to another cylinder. There is no apparent beginning or end. Every piece in the installation is connected to another, as each moment in time is connected to the next. Some of the cylinders are broken while plants sprout from within others. The cylinders mark moments in the long emotional journey from the time that we met one another in California and the three years since then, leading up to his return trip home.

Painting

I developed many of my paintings on top of actual maps. Initially, I was intimidated by

blank canvases and began by making very small paintings. I selected sections of maps I had used on a trip to California and adhered them to 4"x4" pieces of matte board. I painted directly on top of the maps instead of a blank, white surface. The maps also were symbolic of places I had been, and I found them to be visually interesting.

When I looked at the maps of California, images from a recent trip flooded my mind and emotion swelled within me. In this first non-objective work, *State Lines* (Appendix, 7), I painted circles and spirals around specific sites, towns, and cities where memories were made. I merged lines of paint with the existing lines of highways. The creations of these paintings allowed to me relive memories. The process of layering and marking on maps is similar to my use of text in mixed media. The first marks I made were my immediate thoughts and feelings about a specific place on the map. Building layers upon the first marks allowed me to add depth to the paintings and conceal some of my private memories as well as the specific location of the maps.

I painted about twenty of these 4"x4" paintings and struggled with how to continue working with maps. In *A Long Journey* (Appendix, 8 and 8a), I experimented with various imagery and eventually replaced the circles and spirals with symbols of hearts. I painted hearts within different state's boundaries and on the boundaries between states. I realized after painting these hearts that I was processing my past relationships with people who lived in these areas that I had targeted with hearts. The paintings in *A Long Journey* were painted on many small sections of maps and then glued to canvas. I stitched red lines with thread that connected the red highway lines from one map to another. These lines extend outward from each map to unite the sections of maps. The canvas and maps are seen through an old window, which is supported by an easel. I chose to display the paintings in the window because of the nostalgic feeling of old

windows. Looking at the maps and paintings through the window suggest looking back on the travels and experiences that inspired the paintings. The canvas and paintings hang down past the window, almost to the floor. I intentionally left the stitching incomplete with the thread and needle dangling to suggest that the journey was not yet complete.

Next, I began painting trees on top of maps. I found remarkable trees and painted their portraits. I discovered colors and patterns in the bark of the sycamores and cedars so naturally beautiful that I felt they needed to be captured on my canvas. I painted subtle color variations and peeling layers of bark. *Map Blossoms* (Appendix, 9) is a painting inspired by the beautiful cherry blossom trees of the region. On the surface of a map, I painted the branches of the tree and the sky, leaving the untouched surface of the map to imply the light delicate colors and textures of the cherry blossoms. The light and cool colors of the map and the sky reflect the brisk temperatures of a cold spring day when the trees are in blossom. *Fallen Log* (Appendix, 10) is a portrait of a dead tree, with severed branches, painted on the surface of a map. Although the tree was dead, I found it striking. The base of the trunk was splintered which created rich shadows on the brown bark. Raindrops fell in the water around the tree as though mourning the death of this once grand structure. The clouds' white reflection on the surface of the water allowed me to transform the white map into an illusion of the white surface of the water. The blue lake on the map can be viewed as blue sky but it also disappears in the implied white water of the painting.

I am much more comfortable as a painter now than when I entered the MIS-IAR Program. My color palette has developed and my brush strokes flow with ease. I learned how to incorporate my personal experiences into my work. I took my reverence for trees and hearts and

developed my own style of painting on maps.

Conclusion

The MIS-IAR Program facilitated my growth as an artist while I worked full time as an art teacher. The night classes and summer courses provided a structured time in my busy schedule to work in the studio. The professors were knowledgeable and skilled artists with fresh ideas and real world experience. They introduced me to new materials and innovative applications of familiar media. They challenged and inspired me with their assignments, their own personal artwork, and their perspectives on art.

As a result of the MIS-IAR Program, I feel more confident as an artist and an art teacher. I have acquired new skills in mixed media, sculpture, and painting techniques that are applicable to my work and my students' artwork. Many of the art works I made in the program have been on display in public art exhibits. I now have a network of resources and support in the art students and professors in the MIS-IAR Program. I feel confident in the concepts and quality of my work to continue working on my own and pursue future opportunities to exhibit my work.

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Figure 1. *The Story of State Lines*, mixed media, 10.5" x 9" x 5.5", 2008.



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Figure 3. *Tree Lady*, mixed media, 32" x 40" x 18", 2009.



Figure 4. *Imperfections*, plaster with imbedded stick, 10" x 4"x 3.5", 2009.



Figure 5. *What Grows on My Tree*, clay (6 pieces), 56" x 22" x 1", 2008.



Figure 6. *Round Trip*, clay, string, installation size variable, 2010.



Figure 6a. *Round Trip* (detail), clay, string, installation size variable, 2010.

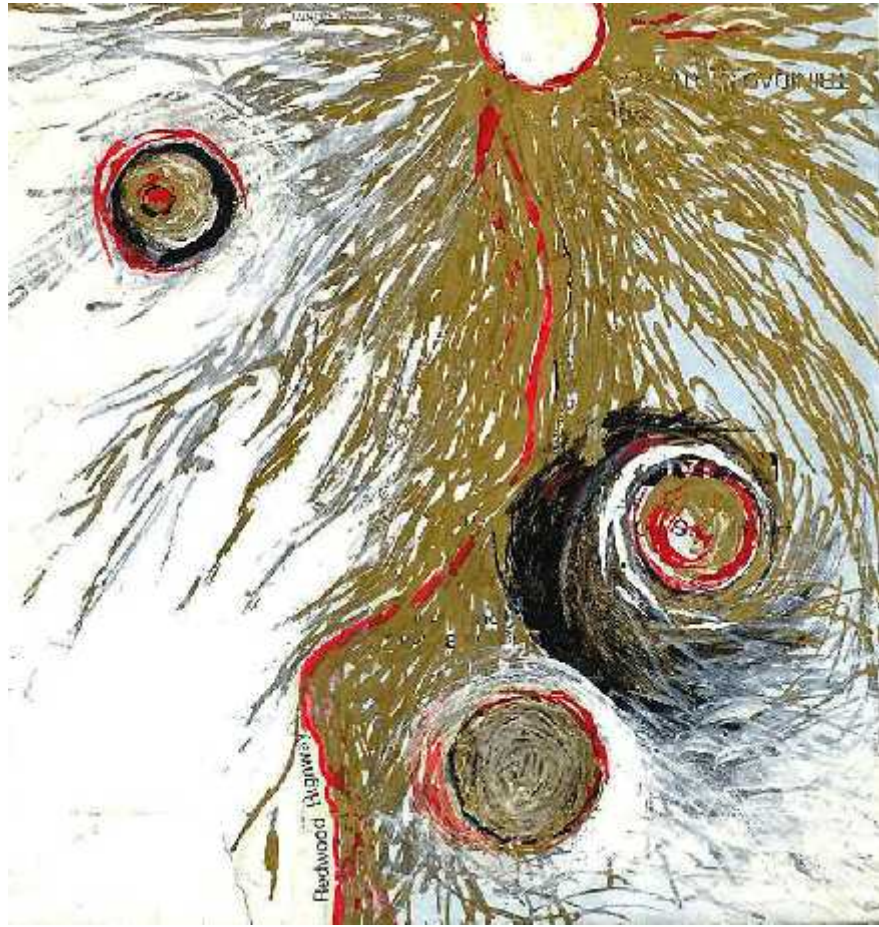


Figure 7. *State Lines*, acrylic paint, map, 4"x4", 2007.



Figure 8. *A Long Journey*, acrylic paint, maps, thread, canvas, needle, window, easel, 64" x 36" x 40", 2008-2009.

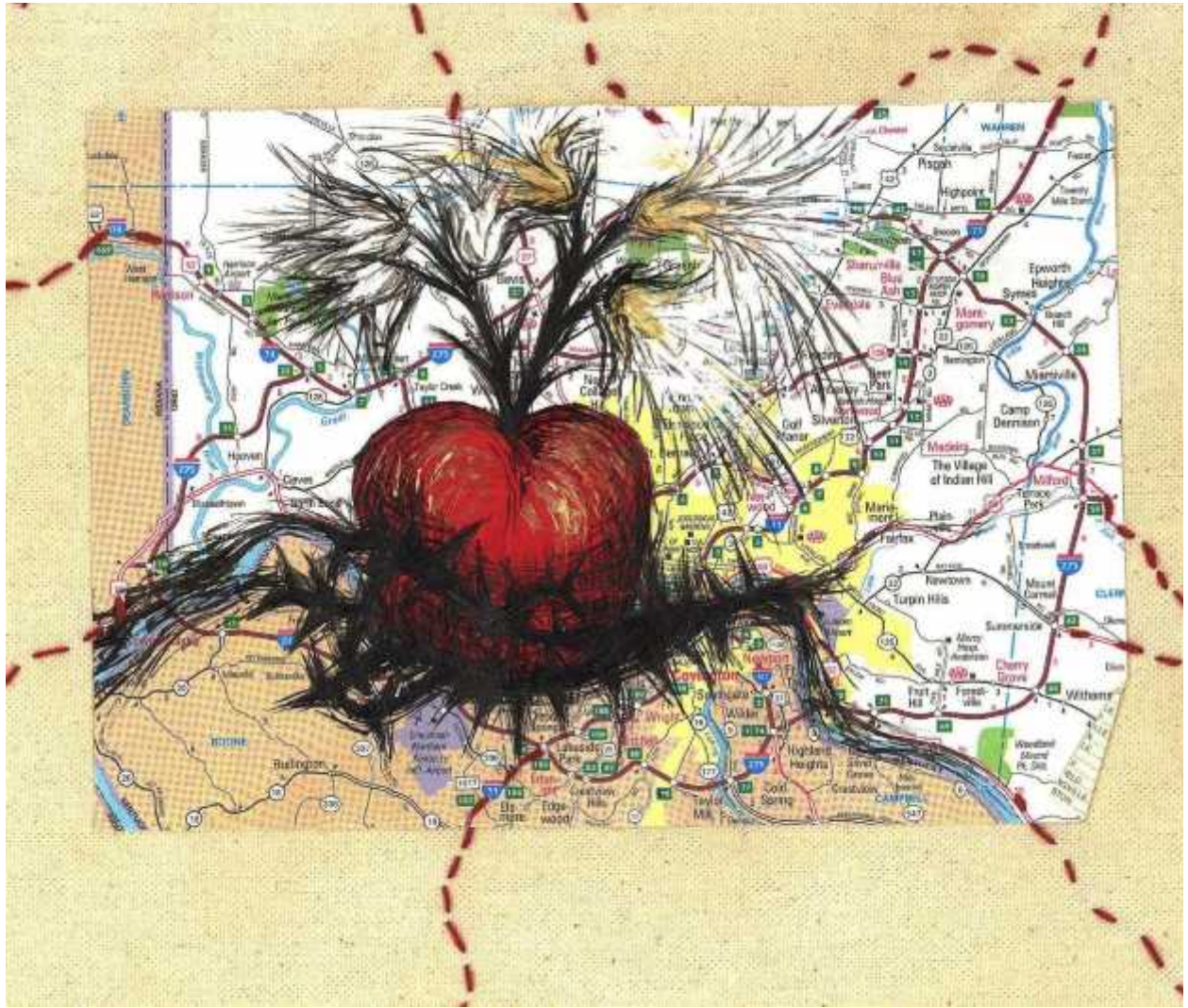


Figure 8a. *A Long Journey* (detail), acrylic paint, maps, thread, canvas, needle, window, easel, 5.5" x 8", 2008-2009.



Figure 9. *Map Blossoms*, acrylic paint, map, 12" x 12", 2011.



Figure 10. *Fallen Log*, acrylic paint, map, 24" x 18", 2011.

HILARY WOZNICA

EDUCATION:

- 2012 Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
- 2003 Bachelor of Science in Art Education, Nazareth College of Rochester, Rochester, NY

TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

- 2009-present Art Teacher, Glasgow Middle School, Fairfax County Public Schools, Alexandria, VA
- 2006-2007 Art Teacher, Institute for the Arts, Fairfax County Public Schools, Fairfax, VA
- 2005-2009 Art Teacher, Rolling Valley Elementary School, Fairfax County Public Schools, Springfield, VA

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

- 2009-2011 PBIS (Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions) Team, Glasgow Middle School, Alexandria, VA
- 2006-2009 PBIS Team, Rolling Valley Elementary School, Springfield, VA

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

- 2003 **First Place, Amateur Black and White Photography Award**, New York State Fair, Syracuse, NY
- 2000 **Third Place, Amateur Fine Arts Award**, New York State Fair, Syracuse, NY
- 2000 **Juror's Award**, *Nazareth College Annual Student Art Exhibit*, Rochester, NY. Juror: Nancy Bucket

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

- 2012 *Hearts and Trees*, Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art Thesis Exhibition, Ernst Cultural Center, Annandale Campus of NVCC (Northern Virginia Community College), Annandale, VA
- 2007 *Artspace Gallery Series Featuring Hilary Woznica*, Artspace Gallery, Washington, DC
- 2003 *Life (in progress)*, Little Gallery, Nazareth College of Rochester, Rochester, NY

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 2011 *FCPS (Fairfax County Public Schools) Artist Teacher Exhibition*, Ernst Cultural Center, Annandale Campus of NVCC, Annandale, VA. Juror: Joanne Bauer.
- 2010 *FCPS (Fairfax County Public Schools) Artist Teacher Exhibition*, Ernst Cultural Center, Annandale Campus of NVCC, Annandale, VA. Juror: Kurt Godwin.
- 2009 *bookart@artspace*, artspace gallery, Richmond, VA. Jurors: Michael Pierce and Ginna Cullen.
- 2009 *Metamorphosis*, Willow Restaurant, Arlington, VA. Juror: Alison Christ.
- 2009 *Artomatic*, Washington, DC
- 2008 *Artomatic*, Washington, DC
- 2008 *FCPS Artist Teacher Exhibition*, Ernst Cultural Center, Annandale Campus of NVCC, Annandale, VA. Juror: JJ McCracken.
- 2006 *Urban Artists Spaces and Creations*, Senate Realty, Washington, DC
- 2000-2003 *Nazareth College Annual Student Art Exhibit*, Nazareth College of Rochester, Rochester, NY
- 2002 *University of Georgia Studies Abroad Selected Student Works*, Lamar Dodd School of Art Gallery 307, Athens, GA
- 2001 *University of Georgia Studies Abroad Selected Student Works*, Piazza Signorelli, Cortona, Italy