

Title: "The Sleep in My Eyes"

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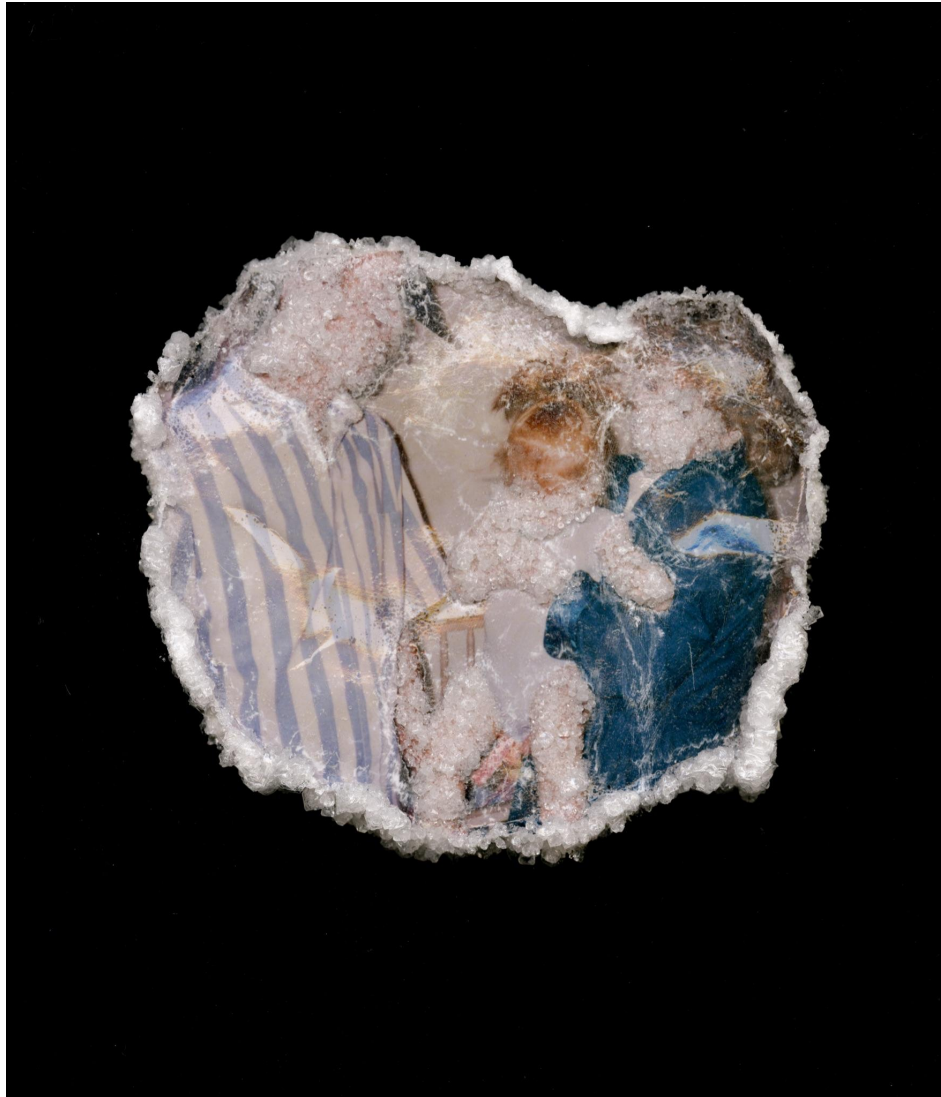
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## Abstract

My work is a vehicle for personal examination and investigation into my identity. When I started dealing with the reality and trauma of my childhood as an adult, it made sense to start by making art around it. I found that most of my vulnerability stemmed from the female relationships I had in my family, so most of my recent work has been created through collaboration with them. My art has become a valuable tool for navigating tough conversations with my family and has created a bridge for us to work towards healing. It is also a way for me to connect my trauma to broader issues that affect the world around me. I know that even if my experiences are unique, there are others out there that can relate on some level. I find power in sharing my story and learning about others because we are all connected through a vast web of personal experiences.

“The Sleep In My Eyes” primarily deals with themes related to memory, trauma, and identity as it is formed by the nurturing of our families. I create art that focuses on my personal experiences while examining issues within them that relate to more extensive problems affecting broader populations. This specific body of work is centered around the sudden discovery of my mother's addiction to methamphetamine and how this knowledge has affected my memories, my family, and my relationship to my mother. Since she kept her struggle hidden from me up until my adulthood this knowledge created a sudden sense of clarity about her mental and physical deterioration over the years. However, it also changed how I perceived my own upbringing and brought about an entanglement of feelings I am still trying to unravel. With this project I have created a

platform that allows me to share my perspective on the situation with my mother and to spread awareness on the effects substance abuse has on an addict's entire family, especially their children.



(Figure 1) "Roots", Archival Pigment Print with Alum Salt, 5"x4", 2019



## THE SLEEP IN MY EYES

For 18 years my mother was in a relationship with a man who got her addicted to methamphetamine. For most of this time I was exposed to the physical and mental violence that my mother endured at the hands of this man and felt powerless as I watched him ceaselessly diminish her as a person. Although I could see what the relationship had done to her I wasn't completely aware of my mother's addiction or what was really happening to her brain or her body until much later into my years as an adult when she confessed it to me. She had kept it pretty well hidden from me somehow, but there is also a possibility I had just been living in denial. My time being raised by her had always felt chaotic and unstable, but I never truly understood why things were that way until now.

With this new knowledge I began to experience an entanglement of conflicting feelings that I will probably spend the rest of my life unraveling. I am angry that a lot of the most traumatic things I have experienced have derived from my mother's actions. I am sad that I may never have a normal relationship with her because of those actions. There is also a strange sense of relief that stems from years of not understanding exactly what was happening to her mind and body and overcoming the misconception that it might be something genetic that would eventually happen to me. I am also extremely proud of her for finally overcoming her struggles both with her addiction and her ties to the man that caused her pain for so many years.

I started this project in an attempt to reconcile with these feelings and come to terms with the trauma both my mother and I have been through together. While I

originally set out to create work that viewed the situation from both of our perspectives I came to realize that I couldn't tell my mother's story and what I really wanted to do was to shed light on how it has affected me as a person and altered the memories I have of my own upbringing. By manipulating my childhood family photographs and objects reminiscent of those I had growing up I am creating work that symbolizes how I actually remember that time in my life while also creating beautiful objects that become catalysts for healing.

An integral part of this project was attempting to discuss my feelings about the situation with my mother. Through these conversations I have begun to piece together what actually happened to us and have started to understand why my mother made the choices she did. Unfortunately, it became evident to me that my mother doesn't even understand why she did the things she did and I am unable to seek total clarity from her. She often states that she used to be a woman who could never see herself as a victim of domestic violence. "I used to tell myself that would never happen to me." she says, but I know that we don't get to choose whether or not we become victims.

I try to keep in mind that we are all human and that we all carry pain. Sometimes it's really difficult for me to recognize all my mother has been through in her lifetime. She and my grandmother spent many years holding grudges against each other. I don't really remember them ever having a good relationship with one another. However, as I write this my grandmother is reaching the end of her life and I see them both desperately trying to rebuild some semblance of a normal relationship. That is one of the most frightening things about this situation for me. I don't want to spend the rest of my life blaming all of my problems on my upbringing and being angry about my

childhood like my mother has. It feels pointless. However, I can't deny that it affects me now as an adult and it takes work to learn how to cope with it.

As I have gotten older I have noticed certain aspects of myself that I know are derived from these unpleasant childhood experiences. My physical symptoms of stress or anxiety include usually unconscious self harming behaviors like skin picking, lip biting, and hair pulling. I often struggle with verbal communication whether it be with strangers, friends, or in intimate relationships. I find it extremely difficult to control my emotions when I am upset and I sometimes catch myself responding to uncomfortable situations with abusive language or shutting down completely. These are all behaviors that I believe I have developed in an attempt to gain a sense of control in my life, but I am working on developing healthier coping mechanisms and responses now.

I often remind myself that I am much luckier than others when it comes to my circumstances. I have always had a strong support system in my family that has helped me overcome a lot of obstacles in my life. My grandparents and my father have always been around to support me emotionally and financially when my mother could not. However, growing up I had a lot of friends who were also living in households where they were exposed to substance abuse and violence. It is only now that I have realized just how prevalent drug abuse is in the small Texas towns I grew up in and how it has really impacted most of the people around me. I see how others have struggled more than I have because they didn't have that support system. I understand how alienating it can feel to have a chaotic home life you don't really want anyone else to witness and I strive to make work that shows people in similar situations that they are not alone.



(Figure 2) "*Foster*", Archival Pigment Print with Alum Salt, 5"x7" 2021

## SALT:

I began using salt as a symbol for the destructive nature of my mother's addiction to methamphetamine. I was initially interested in the crystalline structure of the salt and the way in which it grows, or spreads, over the photographs and the found objects. When I look at the sparkling voids on the images where my family's bodies used to be, it evokes a sense of emptiness within those memories for me, as they are of happier times I can barely remember. The way the salt has taken over the found objects mimics the ways in which I now see my mother's substance abuse and how it affected certain parts of my childhood as well as my mother's dreams. I also found it fascinating that the obstruction of our identities provides an opportunity to allow viewers to place themselves and their own memories within those vacancies.

It wasn't long before I began realizing that I wasn't the only one in my family who had been affected by the situation. The salt spreads over the figures in a few images in a way that symbolizes how each one of us has been affected in one way or another. For example, my father had to take me in when I was 15 years old because I had become completely aware of how unhealthy the situation with my mother had gotten. He's a wonderful dad, but my parents have been divorced since I was two. I'm sure it wasn't easy for him to take me in as a teenager having little to no experience raising me full time. My grandparents also had to support me financially throughout the years due to my mother struggling to keep a job and her ex-boyfriend frequently stealing most of our money.

It became obvious to me early on that the crystalline structure of the salt also vaguely resembles the crystals of methamphetamine. I started using alum salt (Figure 5) rather than iodized salt because the crystals formed faster and the results were a little easier to control. I began including epsom salts (Figure 4) in my process after realizing that their needle-like structure more closely resembles the structure of methamphetamine (Figure 3).

I also see the saturated salt water solution I use to grow the crystals as symbolic of the tears my mother and I shed throughout those years and the tears we still shed today trying to heal from it. It evokes memories of afternoons with my mother, consoling her as she wept over her own trauma, and late night screaming battles whenever the boyfriend was around. Some nights were much worse than others and the fights often turned physical. I imagine all of the water from those tears evaporated into the air leaving the salt behind on my pillow, on my toys, or on the furniture in my room, and if that really was the case then my mother's own salt would have covered everything else in the house.



(Figure 3) Methamphetamine Crystal (Image from United States D.E.A Website)



(Figure 4) Epsom Salt Crystals



(Figure 5) Alum Salt Crystals





(Figure 6) "Fading" Archival Pigment Prints with Alum Salt, 13"x17", 2020



## Artistic Influences

There have been many artists whose work has helped guide me through this particular project in regard to both process and narrative. I'm particularly interested in those which use their work as a means of self exploration and utilize the medium of photography to connect with their viewers through a sense of intimacy.

In terms of process I became particularly intrigued by the work of Amy Friend and the way in which she uses multiple techniques to manipulate found photographs. Both her "*Dare alla Luce*" series and "*Multi-Verse*" series directly influenced my process when it came to saltering my own family photographs. Seeing the way in which she punctures and rips into the photographs allowed me to think of them less as precious objects and more as materials. The light that she shines through these openings in the images feel as if something intangible, like a memory or an emotion, has been imprinted onto the media. Even though the images she uses are not of her own creation or personal family archive, they feel as if they are. They even enable the viewer to impress their own personal memory and feeling into the experience of viewing the work.

The action of piercing the photograph in the way she does throughout her "*Multi-Verse*" series actually directly influenced the way in which I created some of my pieces. The emulsion of the photographs were smooth so it was initially difficult for me to know exactly where the crystals would form, so in order to gain some control of the process I used this puncturing technique to create a more tactile surface for the salt to grow on. In some pieces, such as with "*Foster*" (Figure 2) and "*Fading*" (Figure 6), I wanted the salt to grow in a way that simulated the appearance of it gradually spreading

over or connecting the bodies of the subjects in the images. This visually depicts the way in which my mother's addiction gradually damaged her body, mind, and the various ways in which it has forced strain on the relationships within my family.



(Figure 7) "Wayfinding in Cold Light" Amy Friend, From the "Multi-Verse" series



(Figure 8) “*Jack’s Cat*” Amy Friend, From the “*Multi-Verse*” series

I didn't employ the same kind of control over all of the photographs. For some I opted to allow the crystals to form more freely. Matthew Brandt's "Lakes and Reservoirs" project was one of the first that initially inspired me to begin using the salt solution as a medium in the first place. (Figure 9) His process included photographing various large bodies of water and then collecting liquid samples from each of them. He then developed these landscapes in the darkroom as chromogenic prints and allowed them to soak in the liquid samples from their corresponding subjects. Over time the bacteria and other pollutants in the water ate away at the emulsion on the paper to reveal a wide array of different effects that usually obliterated the representational forms in the image all together. He let the prints soak until he was satisfied with the appearance of each individual piece. This could sometimes take as little as a few days or as long as months. I was extremely intrigued by this concept of allowing such a process to naturally unfold by itself and so I chose to allow the same to happen for many of my own pieces.



(Figure 9) "*Lake Isabella CA TC 5*", Matthew Brandt,  
triptych c-print soaked in Lake Isabella water, 2014



Most of the artists who have influenced my work through narrative over the years are those who utilize personal documentary aesthetics to connect their experiences to broader issues. I am always drawn to work that allows me to connect intimately to the artist's own experiences, and even better if those experiences speak to issues I can relate to.



I asked my father to look in the mirror, while I took his photograph.

Now, the thing you have to realize about my dad is that he was a very handsome man when he was young.

When people talk about 'film star handsome', well, that was my dad. In fact, he WAS a film star (of sorts), in Hollywood, during the 1930's.

So when he looks in the mirror, he sees a man ravaged, a man no longer beautiful, and that upsets him deeply.

You see, he's still vain at 98. In fact, his vanity can be quite extraordinary.

I tried to take him to the doctor a few months ago, but on the way out, he caught a glimpse of himself in the hall mirror.

He was so horrified with his appearance, that he refused to leave the house until I found a 'black pencil' to dye his white hair with.

(Figure 10) Philip Toledano, "Days With My Father"

The first artist to inspire me to make work about my family and personal life was Philip Toledano and his series "Days With My Father". In this series Toledano created a photographic journal of the time spent with his father after his mother had passed away up until his father passed away himself. Each photograph is accompanied by a statement reminiscing over his father's life, their time together, and how he is handling

the gradual deterioration of his mental health. It is incredibly touching and personal, but it is an obvious memento mori. We must remember that we will all someday die and it is up to us to make the most out of the time we have with our loved ones. I believe this rings especially true for those of us who wish to mend our broken relationships and find ways to heal while we still have that time.

Another artist whose extremely personal work touches on broader social and political issues is the photographer Latoya Ruby Frazier. Her book “The Notion Of Family” is a series of images and writings that explore the socio-economic injustices that her community in Braddock, Pennsylvania has had to endure for generations. The work brings to light the intense legacy of financial inequality and racism that dominates small industrial towns all over America.

Frazier’s family has lived in Braddock for generations. Her images capture the effects that pollution from the local steel mill has had on her family’s physical and mental health. She photographs the spaces she grew up in, the buildings crumbling around her, and the people in her community whose livelihoods have been pushed aside for the sake of economic progress. The local hospital, which was the main source of income for most of the town’s residents, is condemned, and torn down due to lack of funding. It is replaced by a newer, more expensive, hospital farther away which limits many in their marginalized community from obtaining affordable healthcare.

Frazier’s work brings me back to the small blue collar towns I myself grew up in and the oppressive endemic issues that the people within them face daily. Through her work she brings our focus to the ways in which pollution of local industry and institutionalized racism affects not only her community but many other marginalized

communities around the world. In my own work I am attempting to reveal how the prevalence of substance abuse in most communities affects us all in some way or another.



(Figure 11) Latoya Ruby Frazier, “Aunt Midge and Grandma Ruby”, 2007,  
from “The Notion of Family”

## Explorations in Personal Documentary

Looking back, I was never attracted to art or media that was personal or grounded in reality. I was usually more interested in the act of consuming things that were based in fantasy and helped me escape the chaotic world I was living in. When things became rough at home I would lock myself in my room to play music or draw fictional characters in order to take my thoughts away from the situation. Now, I have come to realize that most artists make work that comes from a place that is part of their identity. Some just make it more apparent than others.

In 2017 I exhibited my first personal project, "*The Ground I Walk On*", which was titled after the expression I had heard so often from my grandmother growing up, "I/they worship the ground you walk on". Her relationship with my mother had been tumultuous for most of my life. I felt increasingly frustrated that I had been so affected by their lack of affection for one another. I was a vessel for their criticism towards each other. Every conversation with one would devolve into a tirade of blame against the other.

The project began as a way for me to communicate that frustration with both of them, but it eventually became a conduit for healing their relationship even if only out of concern for my well being. Through photography I was able to show them how similar they really are despite their differences. I was later told that my work had helped someone think about their own relationship with their matriarchal figures in a new light, and that was when I truly understood the power of telling my story to others.

It was through "*The Ground I Walk On*" that my mother was also able to admit to me that she had been heavily addicted to methamphetamine which was the spark that



led me to create "*The Sleep In My Eyes*". I'm still not sure if it was the project that laid the foundation for her confession or if it was just something that was weighing heavy on her soul, but it affected me and my work a great deal nonetheless.

Mary Karr's "*The Liars Club*" was the first memoir I read that felt I could really relate to. It might have been the fact that we both grew up in southeast Texas and I could hear the accent of every one of my relatives in her dialogue, but I think I was most drawn to her sense of humor when writing about her own traumatic experiences as a child, and especially those which involved growing up with a mother who was an alcoholic. It had always seemed so natural for me to think about my own trauma as a foundation for building strength and resilience, but for some reason learning about my mother's addiction just hit me differently. I'm still trying to understand why that is. Karr's writing brought me back to a time when I could still laugh about my situation and helped me somewhat alleviate the pressure I was feeling about confronting my trauma.

The book also taught me that I could be honest with myself and others about my life through my work. I found reading about Karr's family dynamics and childhood memories to be extremely relatable. The way she owns it all and accepts her trauma as a part of herself is inspiring. I also really enjoyed the edition I read which opens up with an introduction that focuses on her experiences after releasing the book and what happens when she meets the many people that her story has touched. She speaks about those who come to her with their own stories or childhood trauma and tell her about how the memoir has changed their perspectives on those experiences. She states how hearing these stories has made her feel less alone and I can't think of

anything more oddly comforting than when she says, “A dysfunctional family is any family with more than one person in it.”



(Figure 12) “*Pony Dreams*” Archival Pigment Print of Toy Horse with Alum Salt, 24”x18”,

2020

## The Attraction of The Family Archive:

“A photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)”

- Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

I spend a lot of time thinking about Roland Barthes and “*The Punctum*” in my process of choosing the family photographs I want to use. I wonder why certain images or items strike me in a way that others do not. Some photographs contain details which just evoke a stronger emotional response from us as individuals. Barthes suggests more often than not, this emotional response is brought on by details within the photograph that the photographer, or “*operator*”, didn’t outwardly intend to capture.

Most of the photographs I choose are of memories I don’t actually have. I recognize myself within them, but I don’t remember actually experiencing them. I have found that these particular images tend to evoke a separate feeling inside me. I see the way my mother holds me and the way her mother holds her. These are happy people who were living seemingly normal lives and I find myself not being able to relate to that. I want that world to be real again. Photographs of celebrations, my mother as a young woman, and my family posing in an Olin Mill photo studio all fill me a sense of longing. However, I’m not longing from the perspective of nostalgia, because I’m unsure of what it actually felt like to experience these moments. The longing comes from the perspective of wanting to remember what these experiences felt like.

The punctum always depends on the individual and their personal memories or experiences. Sometimes it is not always so obvious at first glance and might take some studying of the image to find. Barthes describes an image taken by James Van Der Zee in 1926 titled "*Family Portrait*" which portrays a black family dressed in their Sunday best. He states that for a long time he thought he had been attracted to the strapped boots of one of the women in the photo but eventually discovered that the real punctum for him had been the necklace the woman had on. He recognizes this necklace as the same he had seen one of his own family members wearing. (Barthes, 53)

In a photograph of one of my birthday parties there is a lot of information. At first glance I thought I was attracted to the overall composition in the photograph like the big pink balloon which takes up so much of the frame or the young guests in the background. At a certain point in my childhood I remember I didn't have birthday parties anymore because we couldn't really afford them. I thought maybe that the rarity of the memory is what drew me to the image and of course that was initially probably the truth. However, the more I looked at it the more I became fixated on my mother, the way she is moving over the table, and her attentiveness to everything and everyone around her. What strikes me the most is her manner of thoughtfulness and the elated expression on her face. I remember my mother this way and to a certain extent she is still the same person I see in the photograph even though she may not have the same appearance.

Although these details end up being covered by the salt in the process and will most likely never be seen or understood by the viewer, I select images to use based on details of this kind because they become a part of my personal healing process. Small

gestures like these help me build my own understanding of our history, and more specifically the history of my mother as an individual and my relationship to her.

In a way I feel like I'm doing the same thing Barthes does in the second part of his book, *Camera Lucida*, as he talks about a particular image of his own mother as a young girl. He never shows us this photograph unlike most of the other images he discusses throughout the book. He keeps it from us because he knows the reader will never understand the image and the reasons behind why he is so attracted to it. Showing it would only break the magic in the way he describes it. The reader is able to relate to the way he feels about the photo more if they don't see it. Maybe they can imagine another image that makes them feel a similar way.

I understand that viewers will never see what I see in my own family photographs and part of omitting our identities from the images is to also provide an opportunity for the viewer to imagine themselves within them so they can find their own punctum.

“As photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure.”

- Susan Sontag, *On Photography*

In her book “*On Photography*” Sontag explains the importance of the photograph and its presence in various modes of capturing different aspects of human life. She speaks about its ability to document family members as a way of memorializing relationships and special events. (Sontag, 8-9) . She goes further to explain how the

sentiment of wanting to capture these family memories is basically the same way in which people treat photography as tourists. We want to immortalize our memories on paper because although the print never truly survives forever, it survives longer than our own memories. The photograph immortalizes a moment forever. It can keep a person alive indefinitely through their frozen image. The same can be said for our relationships and connections to one another. It reminds us of a time that was.

It's for this reason that family members usually don't think to photograph bad memories, so when looking back on the archive what one usually is reminded of is the happy or fun times. However, the gaps in between our personal documentary has been what interests me the most currently. There are significant gaps in my own family's archive of images all across my own childhood. These gaps were caused by rifts in my relatives relationships with one another and years of unhappy memories. Even between the images of all of us smiling together I wonder what conversations were happening outside of the frame away from the prying eye of the camera lens.

Sontag also describes what happens when we are exposed to media depicting the ugly side of our reality. Through the ceaseless accumulation of photographic evidence we tend to become desensitized to images of violence and evil. She states "The vast photographic catalogue of misery and injustice throughout the world has given everyone a certain familiarity with atrocity, making the horrible seem more ordinary -- making it appear familiar, remote ('it's only a photograph'), inevitable." (Sontag, 20-21) She explores this idea more extensively in her book "*Regarding the Pain of Others*" which focuses primarily on the documentation of war and death. We are subjected to images of pain almost every single day through news coverage, Hollywood films, and

social media. Sontag brings up the attack on September 11, 2001, and how many people responded to the disaster unfolding as “surreal” or “like a movie”. After years of being shown images of the pain and suffering of others they could not relate to and characters they knew were fiction, it felt unreal or improbable that they should be experiencing that pain and fear themselves. (Sontag, *Regarding the Pain...* , 21-22)

I believe that this sense of separation is something that I have been subconsciously aware of when creating “*The Sleep In My Eyes*”. I think that showing the viewer something raw or unpleasant doesn’t always have the desired effect. It’s been seen before and most people are numb to imagery of this kind. It is for this reason that I believe using my family photographs is more effective. There is no pain displayed in the images from my family archive. However, they are happy memories which have been tainted by violence and corrupted by suffering. I destroy those happy smiling faces because they feel foreign to me. People should be able to easily relate to the aesthetic of the family photo as most people have an archive of their own. Seeing someone else’s face might destroy the illusion of being able to place oneself in that person’s shoes so to speak. Even though these images are incredibly personal to me, I want the viewer to be able to think about themselves as well.



(Figure 13) *"Birthday Party"*, Archival Pigment Print with Alum Salt, 4"x4", 2021



## Collaboration and Understanding Stigma

The most significant part of this project has been the collaboration between my mother and I and the healing it has brought us. The work focuses on how my newfound knowledge of her addiction has affected my perspective on my upbringing, and that perspective has changed throughout the creation of the work. I was initially very surprised that my mother was so supportive of the project. Her permission significantly changed how I approached the work and allowed me to realize that it could potentially be a form of therapy for the both of us.

During the summer of 2020 I drove my mother from Texas to Colorado. I figured it would be nice to spend time with her outside of the place where we had both suffered so much. Unfortunately, she still lives in the same town where we experienced the most trauma because her financial circumstances have trapped her there. Everytime I visit her in that space my mind is clouded by all of the bad memories and I tend to shut down emotionally. During our road trip I recorded our lengthy conversations and listened to my mother express her regrets while explaining everything to me. It became clear that I would never completely understand her decisions as she doesnt understand them herself. She repeatedly stated that she had no idea how bad it was despite the many instances of friends and family, including myself, begging her to recognize reality throughout the years.

I brought my mom to my studio a few times in order to take photographs of her. We worked through several poses and props. Things got really emotional after I took a photo of her behind some transparent fabric, which cast moire patterns across her body and made her skin appear as if it was melting. I have kept all of these images to myself

not really knowing how to use them in my work, but she has repeatedly insisted that she wants at least one of these images to be seen. (Figure 14) She wants people to see what drug addiction can do to a person and how much it can change their appearance. She wants to be a warning for others.



(Figure 14) Photo of mom holding and old photo of herself, (2020)

While taking this photo I was reminded of the “*Faces of Meth*” (Figure 16) and “*METH, NOT EVEN ONCE*” (Figure 15) advertisements that I had frequently seen on billboards and public television while growing up in central Texas. These advertisements portray addicts as ugly, violent, and selfish which is sometimes true, but it paints them in the worst light possible. I understand the aim to make the drug seem unattractive to young people and these projects surely accomplish that to some extent, but I'm positive

that they also produce discriminatory stereotypes around what an addict should look like. Since learning about my mother’s addiction I have become much more aware of the taboos behind certain substances and the levels of stigma different addicts face. Unfortunately, there is a lot of misconception around methamphetamine and those who use it. The behavior and appearance of those who are addicted to the drug vary drastically. Avoiding addiction is usually much more complex than “just saying no”.



(Figure 15) Image from the Montana Meth Project. Used in their “Meth Not Even Once” campaign



(Figure 16) Image from the “Faces of Meth” campaign by the Sheriff’s Office of Multnomah County, Oregon

People are always searching for ways to escape their own realities. The drugs of choice often depend on the financial stability of the community in which they are sold. This is why methamphetamine, a relatively cheap drug, affects poor and rural communities the most. It's also a stimulant which is attractive to those who work blue collar jobs which require more physical activity. Severe addiction to any substance is harmful to the user and will always yield unattractive results, but it's become blatantly obvious to me that some substances are more romanticized than others in society and popular culture.

Erving Goffman, in his book on stigma, explains that the word "Stigma" itself originated as an ancient greek term for a physical marking someone on the fringes of society would be forced to adorn based on their unsavory actions. Everyone would know such a person was a "slave, criminal, or traitor" based on the mark they possessed. (Goffman, 1) Initially, the primary purpose of stigmatization was based on how we as humans perceive morality, so being stigmatized often meant a person was characterized as immoral or bad. Today the term is more flexible, as it can refer to something internal that cannot be seen. "*The Sleep In My Eyes*" heavily relates to Goffman's ideas on "In-Group Alignments" or how the stigmatized identify themselves within a group of people who experience the same stigma and what it means to question the discrimination that they face. (Goffman, 112-114) Speaking out about my mother's addiction and my identity as a child raised by an addict feels like I am outing both her and myself as people who are "not normal", but through my work I am aiming to help others feel more comfortable speaking out about their similar experiences in order to fight that idea.

Methamphetamine addicts are extremely stigmatized in America. Harmful stereotypes create barriers which prevent them from seeking the help that they need. I continuously hear people using terms like “meth head” as an insult toward people who look disheveled or act violently. There is a specific appearance that those addicted to meth take on the longer they use the drug. This is because the drug causes a multitude of health issues which usually include a decrease in skin elasticity, hair loss, and tooth decay. Dental issues are so common in users that dentists have developed the term “meth mouth” for related cases. My mother had to start wearing dentures at the age of 50 because all of her teeth had fractured and fallen out. The more addicted a person is, the more likely they will avoid personal hygiene which only makes matters worse. Another common side effect is skin picking, which can lead to serious scarring all over the body. My mother, up until recently, had a large scar on her face from picking at it while high and had to undergo surgery on it because it developed into skin cancer.

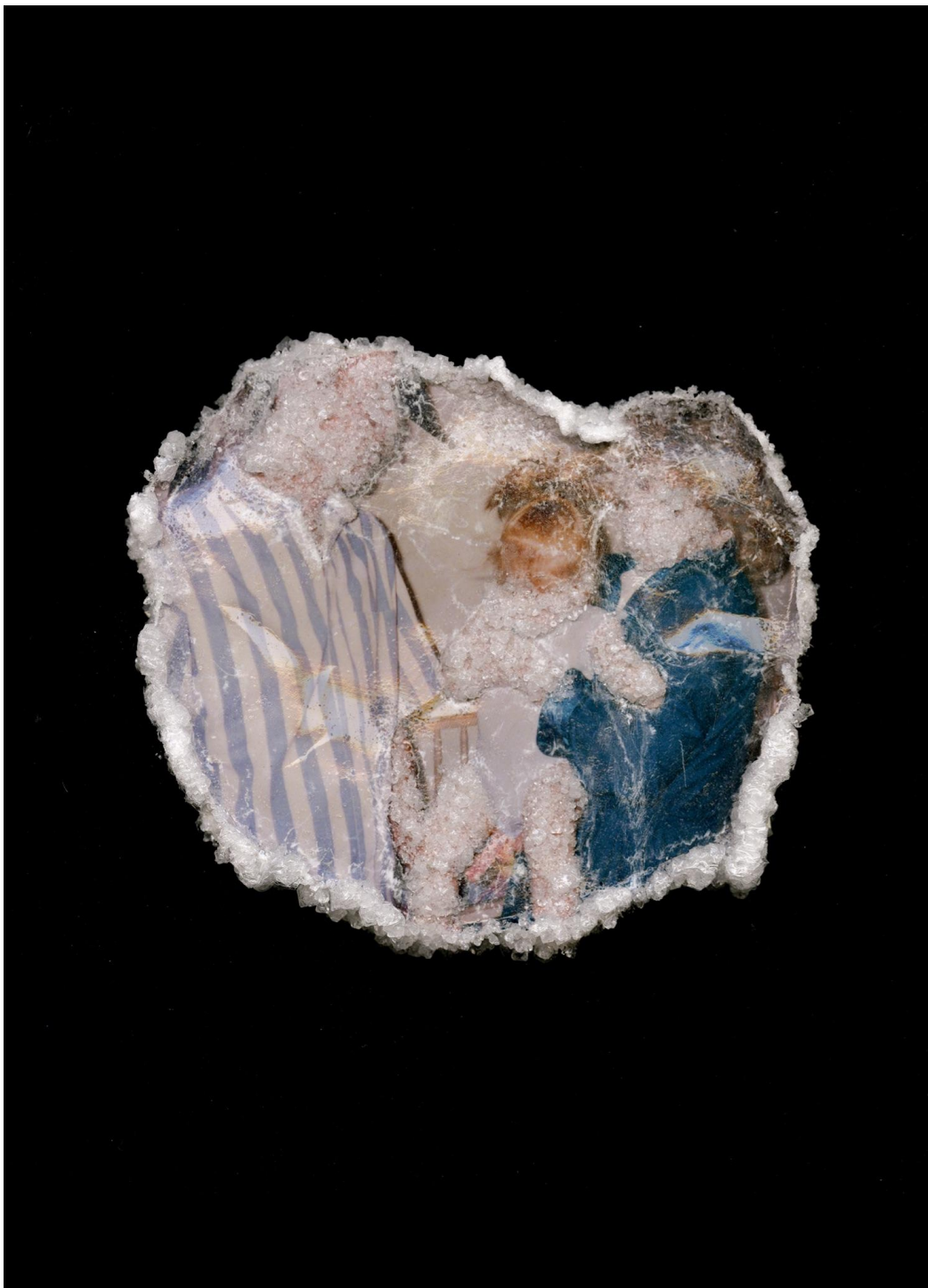
I think a large reason my mother has such a hard time finding stability in life is because of her appearance and her attitude which result from her trauma. She was repeatedly harassed at her last place of work, called a “crack head” by another employee, and lost her job after filing complaints against them. Their reasoning was that she was causing distractions in the workplace, and rather than also firing the employee who was harassing her they moved him to another plant.

It is because I see how these types of interactions have affected my mother that I believe we need to change how society views drug addiction. The war on drugs in America has stigmatized addicts as criminals rather than being mentally unwell. Everyone is addicted to something and we all turn to activities that help us cope with an

unsatisfying reality. Some activities are healthier than others, but we often cast aside those who fall into activities that are unhealthy. It's a vicious cycle that never seems to end and many children of addicts often become addicts themselves. I've seen it happen time and time again within my own communities. Those without the proper support systems are almost destined to fail. My mother was finally able to free herself from that cycle with the help of friends and family by her side, but not until she was able to see a better future for herself.

I want people to know that even though I am still working through my own feelings and perceptions over this whole situation, I am immensely proud of my mother and her strength in regards to her journey to recovery. I am grateful that she is still around for me to have these conversations with her and that we can work through this trauma together. There are so many that don't have this opportunity. I have read parts of this thesis to her and felt so supported by her along the way. It has helped me convey my feelings to her in a way that felt impossible before. Although the road to healing our relationship is rough and we still have a long way to go, I can surely see a future between us that is happier and healthier than before.

Images of Work and Installation



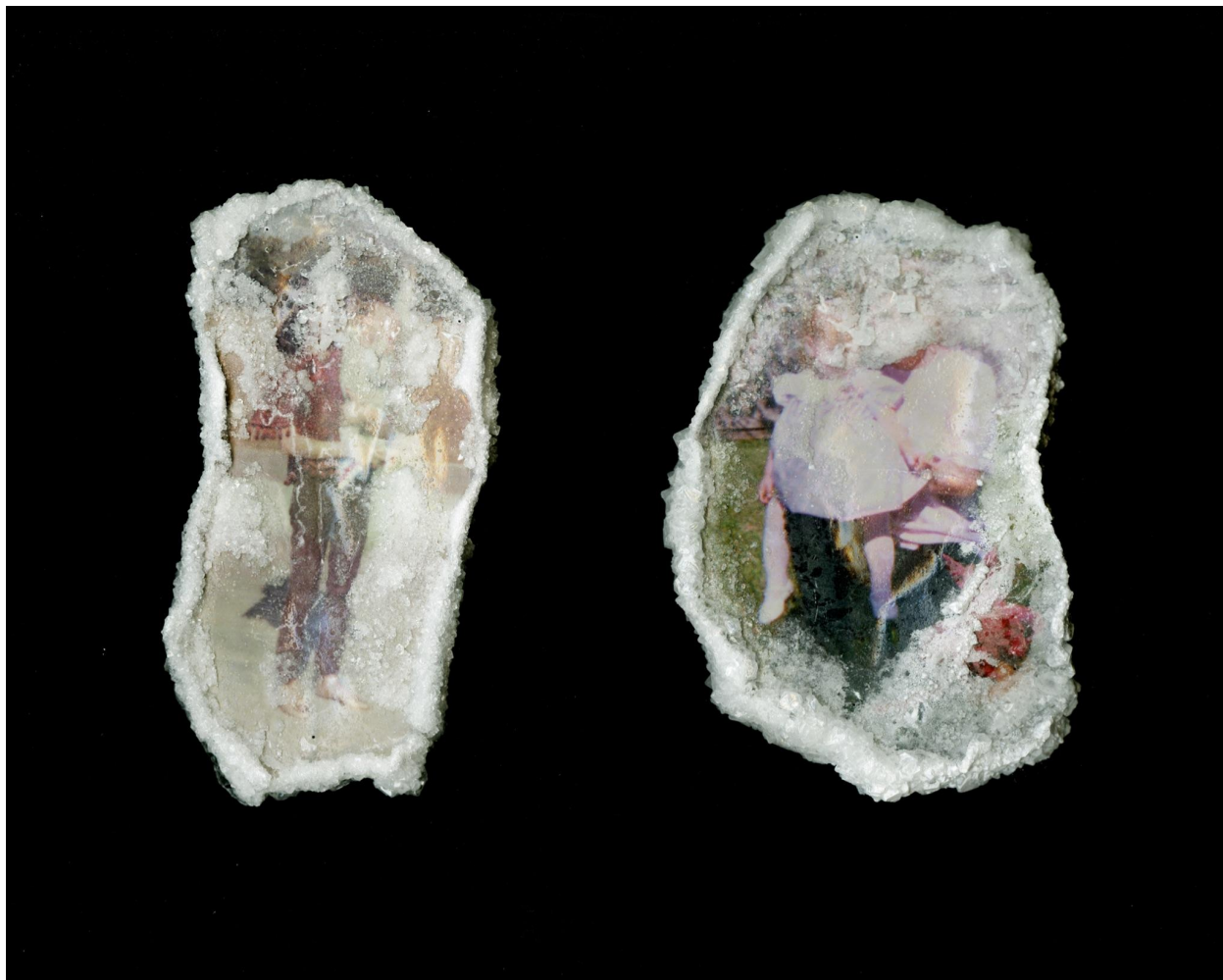
*"Roots"*, Archival Pigment Print with Alum Salt, 5"x4", 2019





*"Destroyed In The Move"*, Dollhouse Dresser with Alum Salt, 18'x24", 2020





*“Mothers”*, Archival Pigment Print with Alum Salt, 11”x9”, 2019



*"The Dream"*, Silk Flower with Epsom Salt, 18"x24", 2020



*"Fading"*, Archival Pigment Prints with Alum Salt, 13"x17", 2020



*"Pony Dreams"*, Toy Horse with Alum Salt, 24"x18", 2020





*"The Birthday Party"*, Archival Pigment Print with Alum Salt, 4"x4", 2020



“The Investment”, Porcelain Doll with Epsom Salt, 18”x24”, 2021



*"Foster"*, Archival Pigment Print with Alum Salt, 6.5"x3.5", 2021



*"Imaginary Friend"*, Ceramic Angel with Alum Salt, 18"x24", 2021





*"In Between"* Archival Pigment Print with Alum Salt, 6.5"x9", 2020



Installation of the Work at CU Art Museum, May 2021

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