

**SOCIAL SACRIFICE:
CREATIVITY STIFLED BY CONTROL**

A Thesis presented to the faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri – Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

by
KIMBERLY A. WATSON

Deborah Huelsbergen, Chairperson of Supervisory Committee

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APPROVAL PAGE

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School,
have examined the thesis entitled

**SOCIAL SACRIFICE:
CREATIVITY STIFLED BY CONTROL**

presented by Kimberly A. Watson
a candidate for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
and hereby certify that, in their opinion, is worthy of acceptance.

Deborah Huelsbergen

Jean Brueggenjohann

Richard A. Wilson

Paul Bolts

DEDICATION

This body of work and thesis paper is dedicated to my mother, Sharon J. Nowak, who passed away only weeks before my MFA thesis exhibition. Mom, you taught me everything I needed to know to be creative, courageous and strong.

My previous dedication read as follows and still stands...

A very special thank you to my...
creative, hardworking Parents
supportive Husband and Children
and influential Friends and Professors

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INTRODUCTION

“Trying to look good limits me” -Stefan Sagmeister

CREATIVITY EXPOSED

Societal control results in stifled creativity within an individual. Self expression and original ideas are restrained due to everything we've been taught throughout life. Unknowingly, we control ourselves, and each other. It is the desire to be accepted that leads us to conform. The fear of being judged represses the imagination. In addition, expectations and cultural traditions also asphyxiate the ability to be creatively expressive. The body of work I am presenting initiates a dialog confronting this issue. My art instigates the discussion with carefully chosen words and ambiguous imagery that initiate feelings of concern. My mission is to affect the viewer, making them aware of the freedom that has been taken from them. The hope is that they will strive to regain their creative freedom once again. Throughout this paper I will elaborate on my methods in greater detail. As for now, let me say that while I playfully compose these images, I am tapping into my own creative subconscious and defying the status quo. Because I am utilizing concentrated levels of creativity during my process, I create images that also raise great curiosity in my viewer. The making and viewing of my images combat the social sacrifice we blindly make. The goal of my art is to awaken the human ability to question arbitrary social structures. Hopefully, these prints will alert individuals to become acquainted with their sense of "Being" so they may function as creative souls.

We all begin life playfully expressing inventive ideas. Children are uninhibited while only concerned with "having fun". It is during this time of "having fun" where

obscure yet ingenious ideas are born. Unfortunately, however, this candid and innocent way of life gradually becomes disrupted once ideas are criticized and guidelines are placed before us. Soon we start to question ourselves and alter behavior to reflect the more accepted ways of society. Negative emotions alter the enthusiasm to originate and share. Over time, influences condition us to a point that restrains our creative thought process. Eventually the playful spirit, full of spontaneous ideas, is elapsed. Creativity is diminished or nearly gone.

I am passionate about this problem because I found myself, an artist, inhibited and struggling with my own creative abilities. Following contemplation, the rationale for my lack of resourcefulness came to light. I began to realize why I had become immobilized. Looking back over a lifetime of conformity and rituals, the reason was obvious. The more I thought about my frustration, the more I could see this as a widespread, common issue that affects all of us. Often I've heard others speak the phrase, "I don't have a creative bone in my body". Such a belief, at the very least, leads to challenges in daily problem solving. The ability to be creative is a natural ability we are all born with as a means of pure survival, yet so many factors of our world today play into the deterioration of that natural gift and leave us with less fulfilled lives.

"The best thinking has been done in solitude.

The worst has been done in turmoil." –Thomas Edison

THE THEORIES AND STUDIES

In support of my argument I found that the theories of Existentialist philosopher's such as Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Michael Foucault (1926-1984), were closely associated with my position. These men were the first philosophers to be concerned with describing and diagnosing the human predicament or "human situation". (Titus, 1970, p. 300) German philosopher Martin Heidegger claimed, "much of 'what is' – Being itself – remains hidden, undisclosed and unthought-of, ever-new possibilities remain latent within the field of Being, and to be authentically human involves being questioning, being creative, and maintaining an open mind and a receptive attitude to possibilities unseen and previously unrealized." (Wicks, 2003, p. 224)

These philosophers realized that conditions of the changing world were interfering with the significance of personal existence and the creative self. They stated that man's feeling of estrangement had increased since the coming of the Industrial Revolution. "Great cities built by advancing technologies, collectivist trends and mass movements, the fragmentation and specialization of knowledge and life, all have tended toward the depersonalization of man." (Titus, 1970, p. 316) "Existentialism has called our attention to serious frustrations and disorders in modern life and to the fact that human existence itself is in a precarious condition." (Titus, 1970, p. 317) This equivocal situation of course being, the demise of original thought and lessened problem-solving abilities. These modern days would no longer foster or allow great creative ability as that seen throughout historic times.

The Existentialists primarily address the issue of “freedom” as it relates to being inquisitive. The Existentialists talk about society stripping a man of his sense of self, yet despite the struggles, Existentialists point out that man can prevail. Jaspers says philosophy is a guide to reasonable living; it is a perpetual quest in which living, feeling, deciding, acting and risking cannot be ignored. He talks about limiting situations such as the restraining conditions of the environment. However, he also states, “Man is always more than what he thinks he knows.” Jaspers says we find a historically conditioned empirical self. “It is conditioned by the physical and physiological background and cultural environment. This is the self as studied by sciences like psychology and the intimate human experience of love and hate, joy and tragedy, aspiration and anxiety. Yet there is also a transcendent or authentic self, which the sciences cannot discover. This authentic self gives life it’s meaning”. (Titus, 1970, p. 307-308) This intangible quality contains our creative ability, which makes us unique. We choose whether to discourage creativity or encourage.

A 2002 interpretation of Nietzsche’s work by Michael Steven Green proclaims that we are motivated by a desire to submit to an authority. Nietzsche sees a close connection between accounts of evaluation and submissiveness. It is this sort of control that I bring forward in my work. Green elaborates by saying, “if a person were aware of the role that the desire to submit plays in such evaluations, the feeling of evaluative objectivity would evaporate. Evaluations feel cognitively compelled because of the compulsion of obedience. Recognition that commands compel obedience only given the desire to submit would mean recognizing that one is responsible for one’s evaluative responses. One responds only because one thinks submission is of value”. (Green, 2002, p. 137)

Nietzsche was a tremendous influence on Foucault. Not only did they share common philosophies, they also shared the same birthday of October 15th. Foucault was

concerned about the “institutional and psychological cages” in which we live. His work undermined conceptions that have remained relatively unquestioned for centuries. Questioning the legitimacy of many entrenched social structures, he challenged the validity of judgmental societal labels of “normal” and “sane”. Furthermore, “Foucault investigated the ideas of self-control and self-discipline, noting that the distancing and control mechanism that operate socially to dominate and oppress people are of a piece with the kind of control one can exert over oneself, although the latter may be used in a more constructive, creative and self-liberating manner.” (Wicks, 2003, p. 221) In working with artists and writers Foucault regarded “that people who are often renegades, or outcasts have the talent and courage to break free of the most invisible, most difficult to dissolve cages in which we live, namely the cage of consciousness that is literally informed by the language we inherit.” (Wicks, 2003, p. 220) He believed that by understanding the construction of a social constraint, we could learn how to disassemble it. On the topic of growth and liberation, Foucault is determined of the possibility that we can experience a sense of being released from bondage, from a stifling set of social relationships, or from one’s former patterns of narrow-minded thinking.

Taking a closer look at studies in creativity will help to better appreciate the obstacles just described. To be creative means to take risks, be open minded, look at things from multiple angles and make irreverent associations. No one has yet to explain the actual function of creativity within the brain. However, many psychologists and theorists have studied creativity over the last century and have each formed models on what occurs during the creative thought process. These models vary between specific headings given for individual classifications, yet in spite of this, the overall discoveries can be summarized as being quite similar in nature across the board. A bit of a general consensus you might say.

One of the first to study creativity was a professor of Social Psychology from the University of London, Graham Wallas. In his 1926 book, *The Art of Thought*, Professor Wallas mentions observations made by our conscious brain, but more importantly our sub-conscious brain. He refers to the relationship between random thoughts as a “train of associations”. The emphasis of his discussion is how creative we can be when our thinking takes place in the subconscious or preconscious level. The train of associations is free to link ideas in boundless combinations. Yet once we bring thoughts to consciousness, they become interrupted or hindered. In support of this theory, Wallas quotes German philosopher Freidrich von Schiller (1759-1805) in his book as saying that when Schiller was fully conscious of creation his imagination did not function “with the same freedom as it had done when nobody was looking over his shoulder”. (Wallas, 1926, p. 105)

With this in mind, I intentionally created my prints to subsume a dream like quality for the purpose of replicating subconscious thought. This illusion also assists my audience with accessing their own creative subconscious. Consequently, viewers begin to premeate what creative energies they may harbor.

Wallas based his model of creativity around this premise. He labeled his four classifications as Preparation, Incubation, Illumination and Verification. He believed that by knowing these stages and the thought processes behind them, we could learn to control and increase our creative energy. As I mentioned earlier, I discovered several models of creativity by other psychologists throughout my research. Based on my studies I eventually developed my own model of creativity, which consisted of five areas. My headings were entitled, Problem, Incubation, Intimation, Ah Ha and Verification. Some areas of my model overlap with first established model of Wallas. Yet in all actuality, most of the models I had studied did consist of comparable aspects. Some of

these models either used different terms for the headings or contained additional categories. My model is a cumulation of the best of what all of the models had to offer.

In terms of representation, I found it surprising that all of the models I studied were shown as lists of words, in books. Not one of the models was in the form of an illustration. Illustrations often present more immediate understanding of complex ideas. Our iconic-based world proves that shapes and colors that lead, flow and inform enable people to learn facts quickly. For this reason, I found it imperative to “illustrate” my model. In my model or “Map of Creative Thought”, I utilized color as a tool to indicate the flow of creativity. (See figure 1) In having my own model of creativity I could now move forward with a better understanding in creativity, enhancing my own creative abilities, and helping others to recognize their own creative potential for themselves.

This area of study is what lead to creating the body of work you see presented here. Upon examination of my model you’ll notice that the Incubation stage is the largest area in the functioning of creative thought. Incubation is the most critical stage of imagination where all associations are made and new ideas arrive. Associations are made based on our individual experiences and frame of reference. Incubation is also a delicate stage where the mind must be in a particular state of relaxation in order to be most efficient. The Incubation stage is the point in which my gum prints intersect the creative thought process. Because of the curious dreamlike appearance, the images open up the mind up to wonder and exploration. The ambiguity invites viewers to relax and be free from the labor of identifying content within the compositions. Reaction and interpretation is now open to new associations that may not have otherwise arrived. The result is creative thought.

Map of Creative Thought

By Kim Watson



Figure 1

Problem (yellow) - Clearly define the problem you are trying to solve and remember your objective through the process.

Incubation (orange to red) - The bulk of the creative process occurs here with the flow of associations coming together to form your solution. A relaxed, child-like state of mind nourishes the process and accrues more ideas.

Intimation (red to purple) - A sense of excitement builds knowing you almost have a solution to your problem.

Ah Ha (blue) - You finally arrive at what may seem as the perfect, original, creative solution.

Verification (green) - How valid is your solution? Will the solution be accepted? Will the solution solve your original problem?

In the Wallas model, the first stage, Preparation, consists of an assessment of the desired topic of study. During the Incubation period, Wallas encouraged a detachment from the creative objective as a means of stimulating thought. In the case of more difficult forms of creative thought, it is desirable not only that there should be an interval free from conscious thought, but also that interval should be so spent that nothing should interfere with the free working of the unconscious or partially conscious process of the mind. "The stage of Incubation should include large amounts of actual mental relaxation." (Wallas, 1926, p. 87) The Illumination period is the emotional rush characterized by an epiphany-like affirmation as a prelude to a solution. It is here that even the most creative individual can be influenced by emotions. Finally, the Verification stage is intended to appraise the success of the solution and consider its accuracy as well as its social acceptance.

In 1961, Mel Rhodes conducted a study to determine a "universal definition" for creativity and published an article entitled, *An Analysis of Creativity*. He did not find a definition, but he did establish a classification system he called "The four P's". The four

elements of Mr. Rhodes's system were: the creative Person, the creative Process, the creative Product and the creative Press.

His classification of the creative Person lists characteristics that can be affected during development and result in varying degrees of creativeness amongst individuals. In other words, he points out character traits that enable or disable the creative ability within us. These traits include: personality, intelligence, temperament, physical characteristics, personal traits, habits, attitudes, self-concepts, value systems, defense mechanisms, cognitive styles and behavior. Many of these characteristics fall vulnerable to outside influences, which in turn affect how creative or uncreative someone may be.

How one approaches being creative is what Rhodes refers to as the Process. Motivation, perception, thinking, communicating and learning style are all essential to how people go about being creative. The Process classification is also influenced by our environment, which may cause to inhibit the creative practice.

According to Rhodes, the Product is merely how an idea had been communicated between people. The Product could consist of words, or would include something that had been produced, either a tangible substance composed of a material source like fabric or wood, or something intangible such as a concept or theory. The Rhodes Product classification helps to explain my choice of Tri-Color Gum Bichromate as a way to further communicate my theory of stifled creativity. The processes of creating the print, as well as the dreamlike appearance are aspects that contribute to the message. In addition, Gum printing raises curiosity because it is an art form that is rarely seen and unique because the process dates back to the early 1800's. So the Product by which I open my dialog with my viewer is completely and appropriately represented with the medium of Tri-Color Gum Bichromate.

The final stage to the Rhodes model is the Press. The Press is the most important classification, for it applies to the relationship between the person and his/her

environment. Basically, the Press is everything that affects you, in your physical world on a daily basis. Rhodes emphasizes concern for elements within your environment because they “Press” you, or rather they can help you or hinder you. Rhodes goes on to discuss in greater detail, the controlling pressures within the environment that “Press”. This list questions what type of support system may be in place for an individual’s creativeness. It looks at whether your environment is a nurturing one for creative freedom. And Rhodes also finds that your physical condition and psychological state are factors as well. He points out that your emotional safety and comfort level are self-conscious concerns that can also determine how creative you are able to be.

The gum prints create certain uneasiness due to their unfamiliar appearance. Understand that every viewer has a different frame of reference. This is what Rhodes refers to as the Press. Varying experiences between our separate lives alter opinions and observations. With my prints I intentionally create ambiguous compositions to get the attention of the audience. The patterns and colors are unfamiliar. What is typically strange and new is unnerving and is cause for investigation. Non-typical images have a tendency to draw from each individual viewer’s frame of reference in unexpected ways. The prints push viewers to access their creative aptitude and each viewer will have differing interpretations of what they see. This stretch of the imagination would enhance one’s creativity. Or the opposite may occur. A viewer who is severely creatively repressed may not have an opinion of the imagery at all and walk on by. This scenario calls for intervention beyond the faculty of an art show.

As presented by Rhodes, our creativity is susceptible to so many variables that surround us daily and can devastate our self-confidence and our willingness to contribute new thoughts or ideas. Our daily lives are filled with rigorous routine, social pressures, policies and procedures. There isn’t any room left for creative expression. New thoughts are suppressed so frequently that they simply stop flowing. Our world is

such a literal one where we take everything at face value. Viewers try hard to make sense out of the non-descriptive imagery. There is a strong need to assign labels to things, or identify everything as to what they are. If everything has a name or only has one meaning there is no opportunity for creativity to exist. With my prints, I am trying to allow everyone an escape from such responsibility and let them enjoy the textures, values, colors and shapes for what they are. No one is to stress over what my photo is “supposed to be”. I’d rather everyone take a break and just experience the work. They need to let their mind relax and travel to a place where it usually does not have a chance to wander.

Most of us put our creativity off into a corner around age eight and some abandon it. Generally this occurs with schools emphasizing facts over imagination. Children hearing words like, “act your age” or “be serious”, by authority figures. Greater importance is placed on being “scholarly” over “artistic”. In raising our hands and taking our turn we learn to conform. There are right answers and wrong answers. Soon we stop taking risks. And tests prove to us that we had either learned something, or we had “failed to learn”. (Fox, 2000, p. 28) I myself had experienced these social pressures and after some reflection I began to realize periods throughout life when these inhibitions chiseled away at the creative and free Being that I started out to be.

Around 1960, a group of inventors and psychologists from Cambridge became curious wondering why on some days they invented well and on others not so well. These three men, Arthur D. Little, George Prince and William J. J. Gordon, formed the Cambridge Synectics group. Synectics, from the Greek language, means the joining together of different and apparently irrelevant elements. For the Cambridge group, “Synectics theory applies to the integration of diverse individuals into a problem-stating problem-solving group. It is an operational theory for the conscious use of the preconscious psychological mechanisms present in man’s creative activity.” (Gordon,

1961, p. 3) William Gordon set forth three fundamental precepts or assumptions of Synectics theory:

1. Creative output increases when creative people become aware of the psychological processes that control their behavior.
2. The emotional component of creative behavior is more important than the intellectual component; the irrational is more important than the intellectual component.
3. The emotional and irrational components must be understood and used as precision tools in order to increase creative output. (Gordon, 1961, p. 6)

In Synectics theory, play with apparent irrelevancies is used extensively to generate energy for problem-solving and to evoke new viewpoints with respect to problems. Play generates energy because it is a pleasure in itself, an intrinsic end. Essentially the idea is borrowed from German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), "play without purpose". "In play and art, pleasure is not dependent upon the purpose of the activity. Expanding this axiom to include all creative activity implies that in play and in all creative activity the process itself is satisfying." (Gordon, 1961, p. 119) This hypothesis has indeed been verified following tests and interviews between scientists, and artists and the Synectics group. They conclude that "Synectics theory implies that not all play is creative but that all creativity contains play." (Gordon, 1961, p. 120) "Play" in the creative process means considering associations that may seem irrelevant to the problem. "Play in this sense involves the constructive use of illusion, conscious self-deceit, daydreams, and of associations in general which seem to imply no immediate benefit." (Gordon, 1961, p. 120)

I “Play” when I make my images. Though it is a difficult challenge to break out of my typical daily composure, I am persistent with the atypical selection of my props, type and locations and representing them photographically in new, unconventional and unidentifiable ways. As the Synectic theorists point out, “Play” is required to both stimulate and encourage creative thought. The longer I push my elements and “Play” with the possibilities for my compositions, the happier and more energetic I become. There is a clear realization of the point in which I cross over into that child-like state of mind. The weight of responsibility seems to float away and I’m able to have fun with my creations. My best work does not arrive until I have been submerged into “Play” for quite some time. Usually not until I’ve photographed at least 100 arrangements or angles. I believe this “Playfulness” is apparent in the prints and creativity becomes contagious.

Synectics go on to defend their system saying that play is not a worthless waste of time, it can be disciplined and directed at will. Play merely means a willingness to manipulate words, concepts everyday and technical assumptions, together with playing with apparently irrelevant objects and things. (Gordon, 1961, p. 123) “Play” to Synectics is a true constructive effort toward a serious, form-making endeavor. The group is certain to point out societal resistance to such a behavior declaring that the tendency toward problem-solving amongst the masses is to define the relevant in the narrowest, almost legalistic sense, because superficially at least, the narrow limits offer a more comprehensible working position. A single operational mechanism of Synectics is to “make the familiar strange” through play. (Gordon, 1961, p. 123)

Owing to the control of diverse elements through out our lives, our Being has lost significant meaning and our creativeness has diminished due to exposure to the elements. Through the research I have done over the last three years I have found that in order to be creative one must be childlike, relax the mind, be open to new ideas and

not be sensitive to judgment. Yet based on what our Existentialists have indicated and merely being an observant of our culture today, the opportunity to apply these methods on a regular basis seems unattainable. We are reminded however that individually we are capable of regaining our freedom and question arbitrary convention. Though a challenge, it is our responsibility to look to ourselves, value ourselves and brave the structures around us so that we may be free of control, allow the creativity to flow and lead full rich lives.

THE IMAGES

“Key metaphors help determine what and how we perceive and how we think about our perceptions”. –M.H. Abrams

THE METAPHOR AND CONTROL

Communicating with visual imagery means utilizing symbols with strong associations to the concept you wish to convey. Metaphors play a crucial role in the conceptualization of abstract concepts. So, in choosing a metaphor to visually represent my strong feelings against societal control, I selected one of the most powerful forces known to mankind, “water”. Because water is such a dominating variable that can continuously change situations, I feel it is a dynamic force that parallels societal conformity.

The amount of control that water dictates in our world is tremendous. Water limits and molds everything in life. It can give life, sustain life and take life away. Water can assist in journeys to new shores or cease them. Its strength can carve stone. Streams and lakes calm us, while waves and tsunamis excite us. Water flows under us, over us and through us. It can take on many forms, yet is always controlling. Besides being a most suitable metaphor and an interesting element to photograph, water is also evident in every aspect of the Tri-Color Gum Bichromate printing process that I have chosen to make my prints.

Another artist, beside myself, using water as a metaphor representing societal control is Rogelio Lopez Marín, also known as Gory. His work also employs intense color, hand tinted alternative photography to create a surreal feel to his work. In his

photomontage series *It's Only Water in the Teardrop of a Stranger*, Gory uses an image of a swimming pool and blends in photos of trees, cars and the open sea into a surreal exploration of the objective and the mystical. (See figure 2) Originally a painter, Gory now manipulates his photographs through multiple negative montage printing and color toning by hand. This process questions the nature of reality itself, with subtle shifts in image gradually separating the viewer from any sense of objective truth. This is similar to the dreamlike quality of my prints.

The major focus of this series, the pool, is located at an abandoned hotel in Cuba. After the government denied Marin the ability to leave the country, he constructed *It's Only Water in the Teardrop of a Stranger*, expressing his frustration and sense of suffocation with the restrictions. This is a prime example of an individual, an artist no less, being bound by societal control.



Figure 2

To offer an example of the use of water within one of my prints, we can look at the work entitled "Social Sacrifice" (See figure 20). During the early stages of my work I was on a walk one trash day and I passed by a mattress on the curb. Over the mattress was a door with a glass window. Both were being thrown out that day. There had been a

great deal of rain the night before and the mattress was soaked, yet this day, the sun was burning bright. On the underside of the glass window, just over the wet mattress condensation had formed. A collection of little water droplets everywhere that functioned like tiny magnifying glasses placed over a sparkling gold colored mattress. I found this combination of elements intriguing and couldn't wait to run home to get my camera.

Upon returning I took several close up photos of the domed shaped bits of water suspended over the gold background. To me, the droplets seemed to represent each of us with how we are all hanging in the balance of life. We are unsuspecting of when we will fall. We are vulnerable victims, prisoners of society who lack the creative freedom to truly understand what puts us into the places we find ourselves. The droplet is you and I. Our destiny is to eventually fall when the forces of nature have decided for us. Just like the Existentialists, this symbolizes whether we really know why we make the choices that we do. I believe we are so lead into what choices to make that we never have the opportunity to use creativity to think of other alternatives.

Lying below the droplets, ready to catch us, support us and embrace us is the governing forces of mankind, society. The soft, gold surface is a false pretense that everything around us is fine and beautiful. It leads us to believe that all is good and we need not concern ourselves or think for ourselves. The mattress is telling us to trust in society and there is no need to have a creative thought of your own.

In my observation, graphic design means involving typography as a design element. Type also allows for another form of communication. Unquestionably, I knew I wanted my prints to contain type. I began to search my immediate surroundings for some form of printed material. There, not even two feet away did I spy a newspaper lying next to me. It was soggy too, but I was still able to leaf through the pages. Suddenly, as fate would have it, I came across a headline that hit the nail on the head. It was perfect! The headline summarized my entire thesis in two words...“Social Sacrifice”.

After some thought I realized the headline offered a dual meaning that supported the same idea. Not only is society sacrificing the creativity of individuals with its control tactics, but also as a result of what society is doing to its individuals, society itself is being sacrificed rather than growing and flourishing. Next, I placed these words under the glass and amongst the condensation and photographed it from several angles until I thought I had captured the best composition with my new found elements. I was so excited. I had put together my first image and it communicated my idea precisely.

"Imagination is more important than knowledge" – Albert Einstein

THE PLAY AND FUN

I feel a sense of liberation when I am working through staging my photos and making my prints. My need to control the outcome is counterbalanced by a medium that cannot be fully controlled. My art dictates to me what it will be rather than me controlling what I want it to be. During the shooting of dozens of photos containing the same elements, the potential evolves. I find myself beginning to invent, explore and push the type, colors, lighting, water and textures beyond their intended uses. I plan for the curious composition to draw the viewer into the print. The presentation of elements within the work elicits an emotional response that communicates the tragedy I wish to address. The ambiguity of the imagery intrigues the viewer, leaving the prints open for contemplation, interpretation and ultimately understanding the creative individual that resides in all of us, despite the controlling forces that govern us.

It isn't so much the images themselves. It is the process of shooting that is most important. I struggle and want to control the finished print because it seems it should look beautiful, clear and bright, by social standards. Yet my approach pushes me to experiment and play. Letting go of that control is very difficult for me, yet proves to be very therapeutic and oh so very fun.

There are various ways I go about creating one of my compositions. I might begin by clipping a word from the newspaper that emphasizes the issue of creativity in jeopardy. Or, I might discover a textural or colorful area or location to photograph. This place would need to enhance the expression of a word that I position there. Or, I might first come across a form of water that is especially intriguing and then try to think of how to make a great composition using it. No matter where I begin though, it always leads to

a surprise ending that I had never intended upon in the first place. That is when I know I've achieved the goal of letting go of the control, being playful and accessing my creative process.

When shooting my images I build or stage the scenes with objects collected within my surroundings. Another way of letting go and being creative is by utilizing objects with reasons other than they were originally intended for. I use a 55mm micro lens, which moves me very close into the scenes. This micro approach adds to the abstraction of the composition as well. Maintaining a particular scale to the compositions is important to me. Any interruption in scale or presentation might confuse the viewer. The scale of the work must be consistent so that the same message is carried throughout the work.

Photographing the scenes is where I have the most fun and fun is critical to being creative. Here I have permission and opportunity to arrange elements for no apparent reason other than to create an interesting image. Though it is fun, it is still hard and tiring work. Not every arrangement is a successful one. It may take 100 photos before I'll know if the image works or not. It is then that I may need to change a scene's orientation, a camera angle, or props and setting. The fun comes in not knowing what that winning arrangement might be. The fun comes in playing in ways I'm not "supposed to". The fun comes in doing something other than what is expected of me or of the situation. Included with the fun is the stage of "Intimation", that sense of excitement when I almost have the solution to my problem (Map of Creative Thought).

Don't confuse legibility with communication. Just because it's legible doesn't mean it communicates, or communicates the right thing. Good typography sends the message before someone can read it. –David Carson

THE AMBIGUITY OF TYPE

Besides the interesting visual obscurities that my images portray there is also my use of type. Since we are taught that reading “given text” offers immediate instruction and/or understanding, the most obvious representation of my argument comes through the presentation of the physically manipulated type. The deteriorated condition and odd orientation of these words make the audience anxious. The words appear alone and not within the context of a sentence, so the meaning is open to interpretation. Imagination is now called upon for an explanation of the message. This stimulates creativity within the audience. Additional words which are blind embossed, subtly add meaning to the printed word, however observers of my work still feel isolated without more information. Humans naturally demand understanding, especially of the printed word. Yet as I've said before, I wish for my audience to simply experience my work, not necessarily take everything so literally. If they give themselves a chance to just feel what the images have to say (including the words), they shall feel the meaning. My use of type in the prints (distressed appearance, negative connotations) is designed to agitate the viewer, urging them to take action over their creative aptitude.

For myself, creating the images that I do, many things have to happen. First there is the art of selecting the right words to abstractly represent the idea and have enough impact to stimulate the audience's mind. Making things too obvious by spelling out the complete idea would not hold attention. I enjoy being somewhat vague to offer

the audience a chance to use their own creative minds. The strategy is to draw the viewer in and give them something to contemplate.

The next consideration is to think of colors, textures, surfaces, camera angles, lighting and so on that will make this composition even more fascinating. I investigate ways of distressing the word. Not only does distressing the type add to the interest of the composition and ambiguity, but it also symbolizes and reinforces the idea of the destruction of our creative ability. Tearing the type offers a violent, angry appearance that implies a negative connotation to that very word. One example would be the word "Fear" appearing more fearful once the word is torn in half lengthwise and pulled apart. A once nicely printed bit of type is now suddenly wrinkled or ripped or marked upon and it is a harrowing experience. Physically as well as legibly I've elicited an emotional response from the viewer.

Upon discovering the work of world-class surfer and infamous graphic designer, David Carson, I felt as though I was finally given permission to color outside the lines. This is a man who made his living as a high school Sociology teacher in San Diego California, took a three week class in Graphic Design and is now one of the most successful, well known designers of all time. He admits to having no formal training, designing based merely on how he "felt" about the subject matter and making lots of mistakes that others thought were purposeful revolutions in design. Humble as he sounds, he still has single handedly changed the public face of graphic design. The entire premise for his technique is to make an "emotional connection" between the work and your audience. His work is loose and free. Some accuse his work as being illegible, but he'll argue that his work communicates regardless of how well you can recognize letters.

I felt completely free, for the first time, to be more expressive as a designer. Prior to this event I carried the restraints of obeying "the grid" with the belief that layout could

only be handled a certain way. I thought to be a great graphic designer meant following the styles of the founding fathers like Herbert Bayer and Herbert Matter. It wasn't so much that I wanted to rebel or become a deconstructivist and create design with a more postmodern approach. To the contrary, my style is and always will be that of a minimalist. Yet there are times where I would also like the freedom to bring more feeling and depth to my commercial work. I was under the impression that putting emotion into your work was something that was reserved for fine artists only. Now, I understand that in some situations, there are no boundaries between graphic design and fine art. Both are expressive, both obviously involve creativity, and ultimately, both communicate an idea. Once I realized the acceptance and popularity of Carson's work, this allowed me the approval I needed to pursue more avenues of expression within my graphic design work. Obviously, my recent venture into the world of Tri-Color Gum Bichromate printing is evidence of the David Carson influence.

One example of my new found methods of working would be creating the work entitled, "Disaster". (See figure 8) I discovered a peeled, hard-boiled egg in a plastic bag, in the refrigerator. Condensation inside the walls of the plastic bag created beautiful little water droplets and I just knew I had to photograph those interesting little patterns. Of course the egg was white, not very interesting, so I knew I'd need to introduce color in some way. One of the great things about water droplets is the lighting. The egg in the bag was on the top shelf, just beneath the bulb lighting the fridge. It was perfect. Though I needed to find a way to introduce color and bring text into this orientation.

It's all about the exploration. Through toying and manipulation, my mind "lets go". My mind's process shifts from daily rules and responsibilities to pure playful experimentation. I feel free to create art, because I have been given permission to be an artist. I am now allowed to enter into a world of the unexpected and perhaps the

unacceptable. It is about having permission, this is how one “let’s go”. Stepping out of bounds like this is the only way one can step into a world of absolute creative thinking.

Needing a typed word to use in my arrangement, I unmethodically chose “Disaster” from my collection of newspaper clippings. I grabbed a tube of blue food coloring. Tearing up the word several times, I wet it and stuck it to the underside of the glass shelf. Now all I had to do was position the plastic bag with the blue egg and water droplets over the text and try for an interesting composition. I stood on a chair (since it was the top shelf) and shot down through the bag, across the water drops and to the distressed word. I took about twenty-five different shots at this location, then I noticed what a beautiful sunny day it was outside. Even though the lighting in the fridge was working well, I thought I’d see what I could do out in the sun.

I noticed I was getting too much glare on the plastic bag from my light source, so I thought I’d try taking the water and the egg out of the bag. Now I needed a surface, something interesting to place everything on. I thought of a hand mirror. Another clever idea came to mind that I had yet to attempt. I stuck the wet, torn newspaper word, “disaster” onto the egg itself. It offered a unique curvature that I had not tried before. Playing with the type and the objects is an evolutionary process. One thing cannot occur without the other. Trying odd combinations leads to more odd combinations. Always asking, “what if”, will always stimulate creativity. I suppose while I’m working with the type I imagine the works of David Carson and I push myself to distort the type even more than I would have on my own.

When I select these things and make these choices, I never know what the result will be or if the idea is even going to work well. That is where the liberating part comes in. To do something that makes no logical sense at all. It seems everything we do in life must be explained, justified or have a reason. Being held responsible for our every move prevents us from exploring possibilities. When I work alone, I know I am free of

judgment. I can experiment, play and manipulate my elements in unexpected ways. Just like Schiller admits, working in isolation offers prime opportunity at being creative.

Type must be allowed to play too. It should be free to move, to tear, to twist, to be upside down if it wants to. With my egg example the type had plenty of opportunity to do all kinds of things since it was clinging to a moist, curved surface. This dynamic added a wonderful new dimension to the image. I was trying to be free, I wanted the type to be free and I wanted the camera to express this freedom.

Also, within the images I photograph, and most significantly, I think about what new ways can I visually incorporate “water” into this image. Uniquely shot ice or a splash or pouring, adds to the curiosity of the image as well as the interest. Water is not an expected element in most of these staged situations.

This course of acquiring my images is where the true art lies with true expression of the artist. My thesis has come full circle by this point. I’m being creative and expressive while photographing these words and compositions. This work then communicates the idea for the need for more creativity. With the creation of my images, I’m taking various items and arranging them in creative ways that offer them functions that were never initially intended for them. I am stretching my imagination when searching my house, my yard, my city for items and locations. I look at newspapers, packaging and trash for the right words. I watch the way water moves in streams. I freeze water into oddly shaped ice and I pay attention to condensation on windows. Again, I’m looking to represent water in new and interesting ways as to stimulate the imagination of the observer. The photo I set out to shoot never winds up being the photo I print. The entire process develops over a 30-60 minute “play-time” of rearranging elements, adding more water, melting ice, moving the camera closer and working with the light. With so many variables, I wind up shooting 100 photos of the same idea, yet in the end there will only be 1 or 2 strong possibilities.

The right image has to have a strong composition of course. However, the right image must also be evident of a creative process. In other words, the photo must appear obscure enough to show the creative undertaking that occurred in it's making while also being interesting enough to engage the observer's imagination. If not, I start all over with a fresh word and new elements.

The blind embossed type is the finishing touch. The type used to make an impression into the paper is a vague yet apparent statement that accentuates the attitude of the work. Words are carefully selected as companions to the word printed in the image to help further convey the idea of creativity being suppressed. These words are pressed or forced into the image as rules and traditions are forced upon us. The indentation of the pressed word is subtle, barely noticed at first. Once the light catches the differing levels in the surface of the paper, the viewer begins to investigate the presence of the embossed word, a bit further. This is another aspect of the print that will raise curiosity and draw the viewer into the work. Like the Rhodes model illustrates, we tend to not take notice of what "Presses" us, until we are notified. My prints are notifying.

Helvetica wood type is the font of choice due to its anonymous presence. "Helvetica is like air, it is just there". (quote from the movie *Helvetica*) It has no implications of anything specific. Words can be communicated broadly by using Helvetica without alluding to any particular feeling or message. Wood type is another way of expressing a warm, earthy, handmade implication. As like any media, the result of the blind emboss speaks of the material used to create it. Any characteristics or imperfections in the wood type would be revealed in the print and welcomed.

THE PROCESS

“Great technical command is not easy, nor absolutely necessary to make good images.

Just have fun doing it!” –Sam Wang

THE HISTORY AND COINCIDING

I'd like to offer a foundation now of the Tri-Color Gum Bichromate process so the points I make in this paper will be comprehensible. I will begin with the history of gum printing and then talk briefly about the technical part of this art form.

The Tri-Color Gum Bichromate (also known as dichromate) came to existence by a series of inventions and findings. Not one person can be awarded with the discovery. The gum process began its development in 1839 when a Scottish inventor named Mungo Ponton first found sodium dichromate to be light sensitive. Some like to refer to Mungo Ponton as the “father of dichromate printing”, though other scientists contributed to the process as you'll see. A few years later, a British inventor, William Henry Fox Talbot found that colloids such as gelatin and gum arabic became insoluble in water after exposure to light. Then along came Alphonse Poitevin, a French chemist, who added carbon pigment to the colloids in 1855. Poitevin is credited for creating the first carbon print. Finally, in 1858, John Pouncy of England patented the use of colored pigment with gum arabic to create the first color images. His coating consisted of vegetable carbon, gum Arabic and potassium bichromate. For this reason, John Pouncy is considered by some to be the practical founder of the gum bichromate printing process.

This alternative photographic process is made from “contact printing”. This means that the negatives are laid directly on the chemically treated paper and sandwiched in a contact frame of glass. The prints are exposed to ultra-violet light for a period of time (depending on multiple variables). And the finished print is 100% the same size as the negative used to make the print. Making a good negative will result in a good print and that is a science within itself. I used Mark Nelson’s *Precision Digital Negative* procedure to assist me in establishing a proper negative with the correct contrast. The PDN system essentially calibrates every aspect of your workflow in order to produce the perfect negative for you. PDN takes into consideration what chemical mixtures you are using, your choice of watercolor pigments, type of light source, type of paper, type of negative, the distance of the lights to your paper, humidity level, exposure time, ph balance of developing water and then determines what color ink you should print your negatives and how to plot an adjustment curve in Photoshop for each channel.

A tri-color gum print contains several layers and a negative is required for each layer. Much like the CYMK (cyan, yellow, magenta and black) separations of our modern day printing processes, gum printing involves similar layers of color. The multi-layered process uses three negatives, each intended for a different pigment. Once the RGB (red, green, blue, primary colors for light) channels of a photograph are separated in the computer, a negative can be printed for each of those colors. Since the print will be made up of pigment now, instead of light, there is a conversion for color that takes place and each pigment is assigned to a certain negative. The negative made from the red channel will now be the negative used to print with cyan pigment (or cyanotype). I have adapted the practice of my good friend and expert gummist Sam Wang to print the cyan layer of my gum print with cyanotype chemicals (Ferric Ammonium Citrate and Potassium Ferricyanide) rather than cyan pigmented gum. The negative output from the green channel will be the negative used to print the red pigmented gum layer. The

negative made from the blue channel is the negative that will be used to print the yellow pigmented gum layer. Finally, after all three layers have been printed, Sam Wang taught me to apply a final coat of cyanotype for added contrast. In-between each application of color and exposure, the prints are developed in water and hung to dry.

As my mentors, Sam Wang and Christina Z. Anderson say, "gum printing is the easiest to do, but the most difficult to master". This is said because the steps are simple...brush on the chemical the paper, lay the negative over the chemical, and expose it to light. However, the difficulty lies in all of the many variables that effect the final outcome of the print. No matter how you try, two prints from the same set of negatives will turn out entirely different every time. No two prints are the same, similar to that of human personality or behavior.

"Its kind of fun to do the impossible" –Walt Disney

THE TECHNICAL AND FREEDOM

There is a constant tension, for me, between wanting to control this printing process and letting go and allowing the process to go where it will. I feel a tendency to refine the finished print to resemble the colorful brightness of an inkjet print. Printing the images with the Tri-Color Gum Bichromate process further expresses my thesis because of the unpredictable nature of the process. There are so many variables involved with gum that the outcome cannot be completely controlled. The nature of this medium does allow the opportunity for tremendous creative freedom, and the "dreamlike" quality of the prints resembles the functioning of our creative sub-conscious. The painterly print is slightly out of focus, somewhat murky in coloring and the organic edges add to this surreal affect. The printed image emerges from the primary colored pigmented perimeter like thoughts can emerge from the depths of our imagination.

I've chosen this very involved process to print my images for many reasons. Tri-Color Gum has a very tangible form, which upon viewing puts us in touch with our human need to reach out and feel what we see. The soft textural quality of the watercolor paper, its lacy deckled edge, the exposed brush strokes of the applied color exceeding beyond the perimeter of the image, all contribute to the tactful impression. The combination of the three primary colors layering over one another, coupled with the texture of the watercolor paper welcomes us and allows our Being to connect to the work in an organic way. Naturally the blind debossed text physically indents the paper below it's original surface. So we have tangible texture and implied texture running throughout the entire viewing experience.

Due to the nature of the gum process, each print is “one of a kind”. Symbolically this takes my photos back to their origin when this mechanical image making process was trying to gain acceptance as an art form. Each image is handmade just like a painting or drawing, relating once again to humans as individuals. No two prints are the same just as no two humans are the same.

The gum printing and letterpress processes both date back to the pre-industrial age before mass production of factories. My images display messages of revolt and are presented with vintage means. They take us back to a simpler time when hand crafted one of a kind items were valued significantly. Individualism was appreciated and celebrated. In modern day we are an over populated, disposable society where very little is truly appreciated. As the Existentialists summarized, the age of the machine implied that man function as a machine as well.

Water is involved in every step of the Tri-Color Gum Bichromate process. Being that water stands as my metaphor for “control” throughout my thesis work, it seems very appropriate that it’s presence be evident in all aspects of creating the photo. Water is used initially to preshrink the paper. Next water is mixed with gelatin to make the sizing for the paper. Sizing can be brushed onto the paper or the paper can be soaked in the sizing. The sizing provides a smooth printable surface for the color to adhere to while keeping the paper from shrinking during multiple development stages. Water is also added to each of the color mixtures. A recipe of gum arabic, watercolor pigment, potassium bichromate and water is mixed and applied for both the red and yellow layers of photosensitive color. The blue layer is actually cyanotype which consists of two chemicals mixed in varying proportions (1:1 or 2:1), with water being optional, depending on the shade of blue desired. Lastly, after each exposure, water baths are used to develop the exposed image. The first soaking leeches the bichromate out of the unexposed areas. A second and final soaking pulls excess color out from the unexposed

areas thus revealing the image to us. Then the print is hung to dry before the next layer of color is applied, exposed and developed again. The process is repeated three times, one for each color, unless the artist wishes to apply further layers of color for added effects.

Another reason for choosing this process to print my images is because it is so rarely seen. These prints do not look like typical photographic prints that you might get printed at a photo store. The importance of utilizing such a unique style of printing is to tempt the audience to “question”, make them wonder and kick-start their imaginations. The aforementioned German philosopher Martin Heidegger stated that questioning means having a receptive attitude to possibilities, which in turn immerses the human mind into creative thought. In order to capture people’s attention you need to present them with something they do not normally see. I remember when I saw Sam Wang’s gum print of a bird on the website “Alternative Photography.com” for the first time. I was completely perplexed. I asked myself, “what in the world is that?” I wondered, “how did that person get a photo to look that way?” I thought it was the most unique, beautiful and rare art form I’d ever seen. I actually put it out of my mind for a year or so, but then when I started to evolve the content of my photos, develop my thesis and think of a metaphor to tie things together, I came back to the magical process I had witnessed online that one day. After researching the tri-color gum bichromate process, it’s unpredictable nature and dreamlike appearance seemed to be the most perfectly suitable technique for communicating my idea of societal control stifling creativity.

My thesis project has helped me chisel away at my own tendency to control situations and details. Initially a certain freedom is required where I must force myself to let go in order to create the new images I do. Then, there is the unpredictable nature of the gum process. Here, I can’t have it my way. The images cannot look like a regular photographic print no matter how much I try. The multitude of variables involved in the

gum process does not allow for any kind of control other than getting some kind of an image to the paper. Every step of the process affects the end result of the image from chemistry to exposure, from digital curves to humidity. Matter of fact, the multitude of variables contained in the gum printing process mimics the many variables mentioned in the four P's of Rhodes model of creativity.

The individual identity that original thought allows someone mirrors the one and only technique of the gum printing process. It is truly one medium that absolutely has an identity of it's own. The final result of a gum print will be what it is meant to be. There is no controlling the outcome. People, if creative, original and unique, will be what they are meant to be and will not fall victim to being controlled. The beauty of the gum print falls into the same freedom of its own Being, just as people should.

CONCLUSION

*“The mind is like an iceberg,
it floats with one-seventh of its bulk above water” –Sigmund Freud*

THE REALIZATION

In this paper I have outlined what creativity is, how we believe creativity functions, what actions diminish creativity and what it takes to increase creative abilities. I've pointed out philosophers who declare that humans have a tendency to submit to authority, which results in our loss of freedom, the ability to question and our sense of Being. I presented a model of the creative thought process formed by Social psychologist Graham Wallas. And Mel Rhodes told us of all the many variables that either foster or hinder our creative abilities. Based on the parallels I have drawn between these theories and my illustrative prints, I hope my statement of suffering creativity amongst our culture, is a clear one.

My hope is that these prints will alert others of society's constraints against their creative potential. Ultimately, this awareness should make all of us less critical and more open to creativity and inventive problem solving. Consequences often drive our actions, however we all need to question why we do and choose the things we do. We limit ourselves and we limit each other. If we can question, we can understand, if we can understand then we can create change. The world we live in has suppressed our creativity, yet there is the opportunity to revitalize it. The survival of our civilization depends on a population of creative spirits in order to bid possibilities to our challenges.

There isn't enough attention paid to the thoughts of the sub conscious. We base all of our facts and information on what conscious thought proposes. We tend to disregard the meaning behind dreams or thoughts of feelings that are not easily rationalized. I believe these underlying thoughts actually have more value than conscious thought, mainly because conscious thought is so influenced. As Wallas determined, sub conscious thought is pure, uncontrolled, insightful and uninhibited. Humanity needs to address these thoughts, (when we are able access them) and try to analyze their meaning and significance.

The bottom line is that this is the key to becoming more creative and free. Confidence in our deeper thoughts will offer more honest forms of expression. Expressing ourselves without inhibition will generate more helpful solutions. Credence in our thoughts and ideas will set us free and ultimately allow that needed sense of Being. Having a strong sense of Being empowers us and makes us happy individuals. Furthermore, enabling ourselves to be tenacious creative problem-solvers builds us up to being indomitable spirits. Life is richer, fuller and we are able to offer more to our society as a whole. The opposite effect of this, plain and simple, is that without creative thought our species will simply die.

I'll conclude with a quote from a famous graphic designer of our time, Neville Brody. "If I manage to create a situation where someone had to think twice about something they're doing, I would call that a success. I think the objects I leave behind are not the legacy I'm interested in. It's whether I can leave behind a thought process." (Unknown, Research Studios, 2009) I too share the dream of Neville Brody. My intention is that I will leave behind a thought process for all who witnessed the body of work presented in this thesis.



Figure 3
Blame Convention
Kim Watson



Figure 4
Blame Tradition
Kim Watson



Figure 5
Control Freedom
Kim Watson

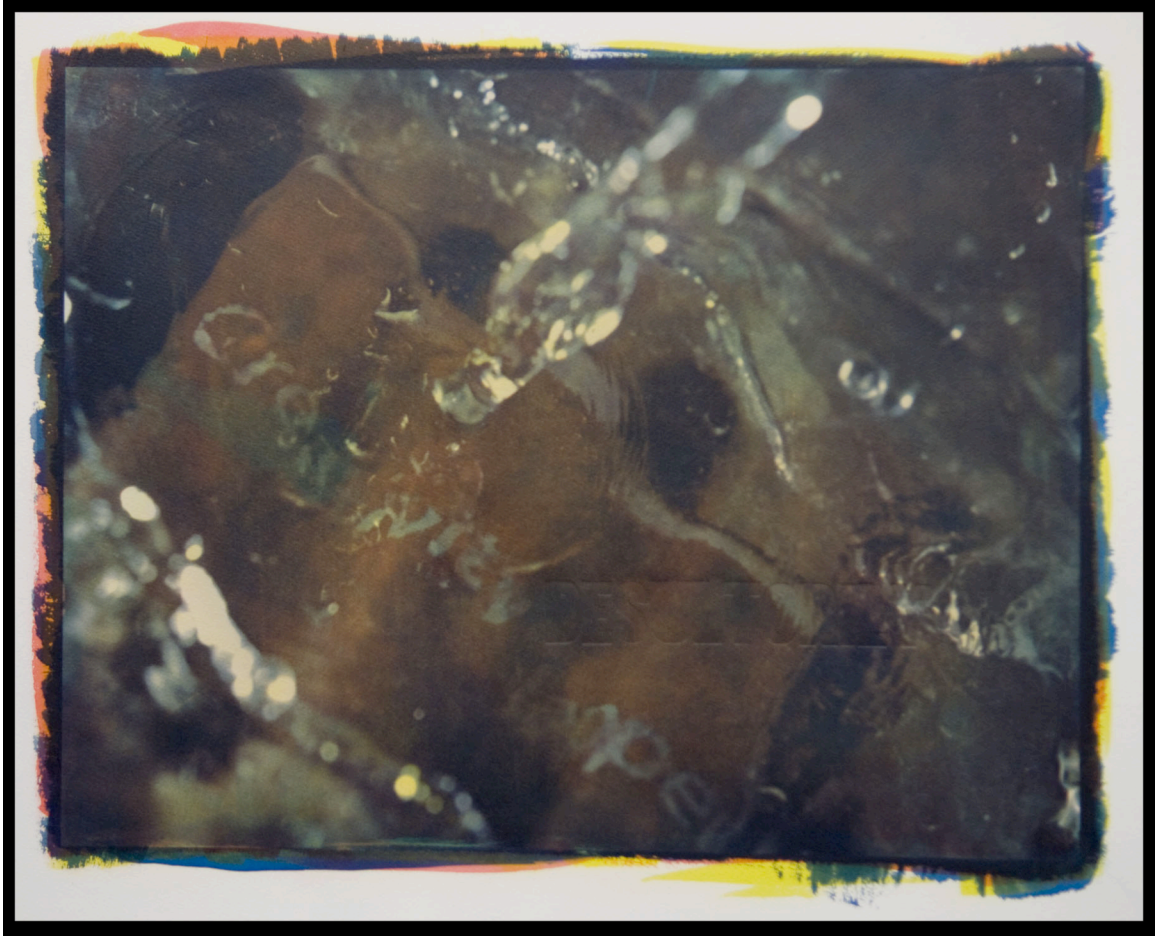


Figure 6
Creativity Happens Desultorily
Kim Watson



Figure 7
Persistent Crisis
Kim Watson



Figure 8
Obstinate Disaster
Kim Watson



Figure 9
Imperative Diversion
Kim Watson

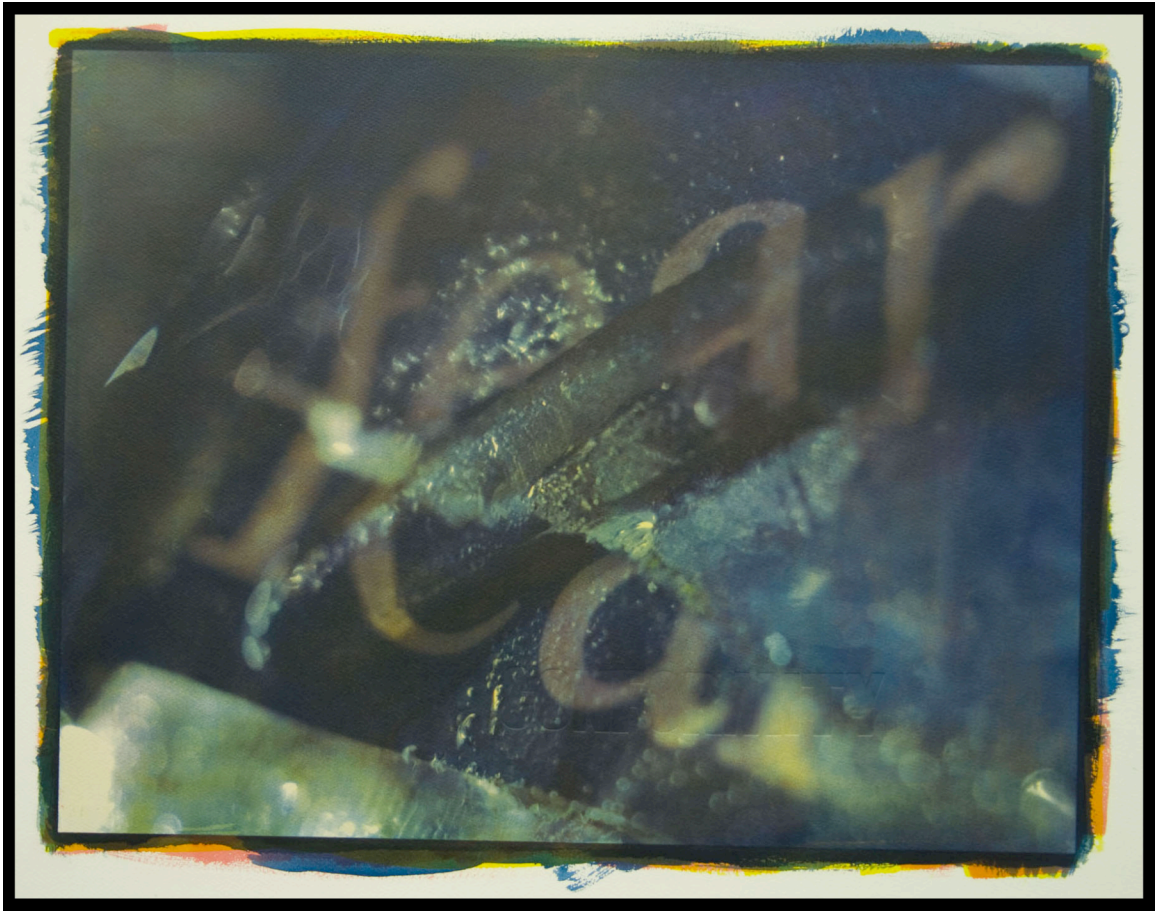


Figure 10
Fear Conformity
Kim Watson



Figure 11
Ideas Suppressed
Kim Watson



Figure 12
Poignant Influence
Kim Watson



Figure 13
Judgment Kills
Kim Watson



Figure 14
Obedient Minds
Kim Watson



Figure 15
Positively Absolutely Constrained
Kim Watson



Figure 16
Possibilities Inhibited
Kim Watson

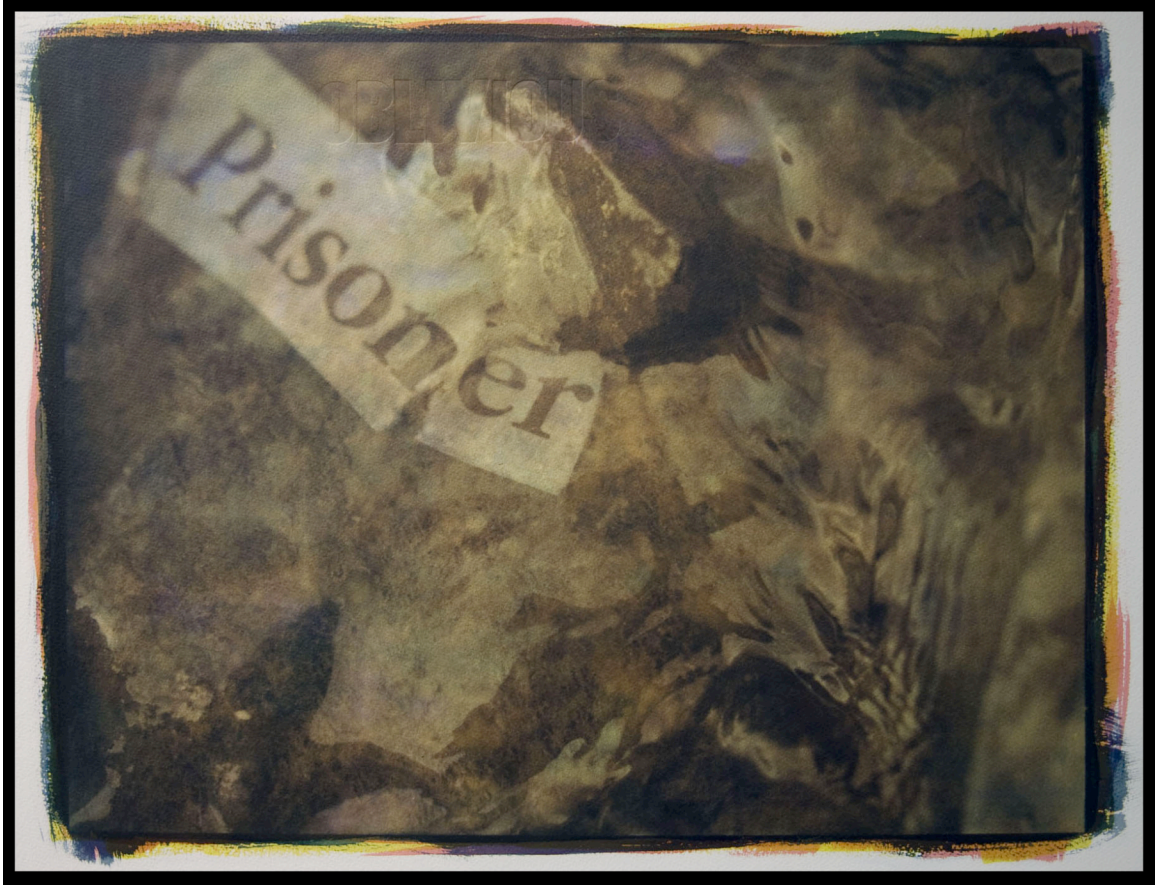


Figure 17
Oblivious Prisoner
Kim Watson



Figure 18
Obviate Routine
Kim Watson



Figure 19
Search Quintessence
Kim Watson



Figure 20
Recognize Social Sacrifice
Kim Watson

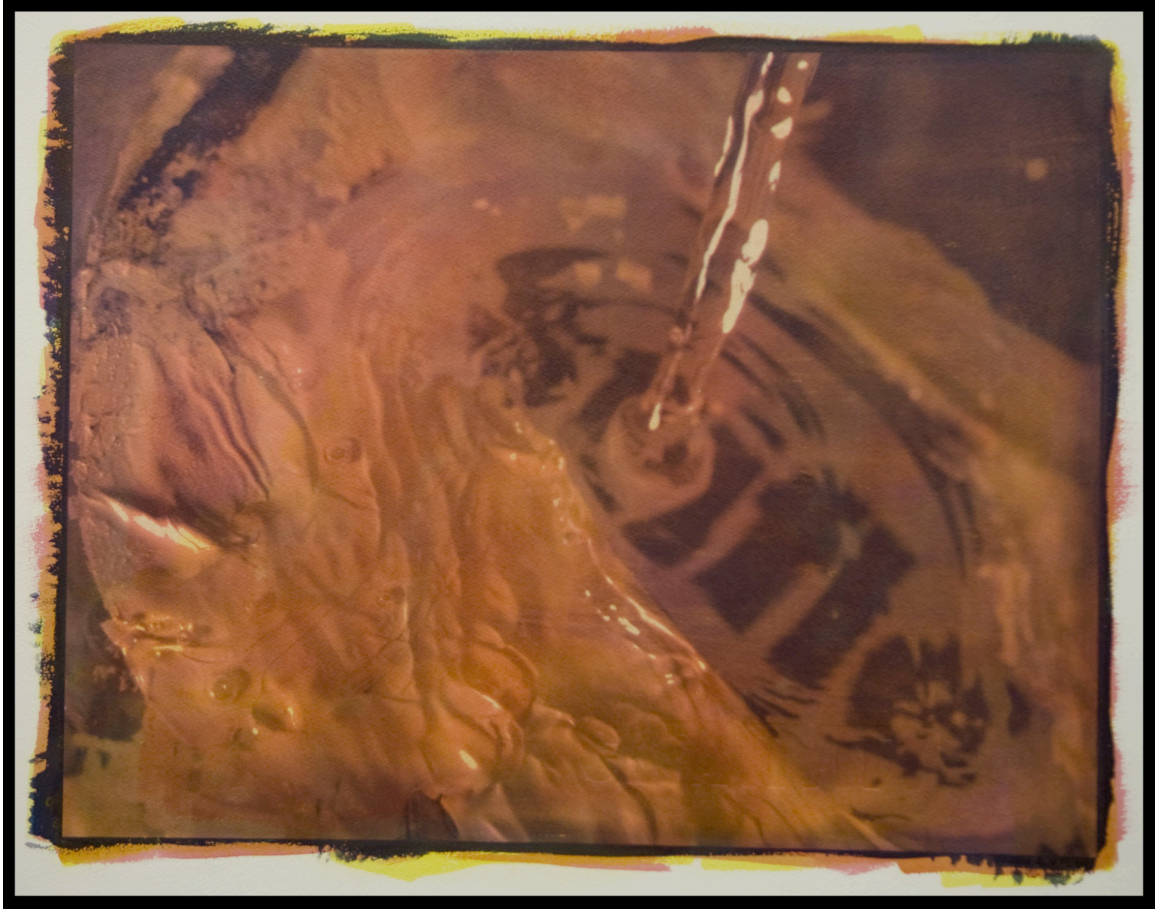


Figure 21
Stifle Creativity
Kim Watson



Figure 22
Struggling Commonwealth
Kim Watson



Figure 23
Perpetual Victims
Kim Watson



Figure 24
Ignorant Victims
Kim Watson

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VITA

Kim Watson was born and raised in Burbank, Illinois where she was encouraged by family and friends to develop her artistic skills in drawing, calligraphy and photography. At an early age she utilized those talents with commercial applications, which lead her toward a career in the commercial arts. Acquiring two undergraduate degrees from Columbia College in Columbia Missouri, Kim began a life of teaching art, and owning and operating a freelance graphic design business called Pinnacle Graphics. Through years of designing for clients and teaching to students, Kim witnessed varying incapacities with individuals to be original or creative. This concern raised the interest to further research and reveal this phenomenon. The result being the thesis work presented here.