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Visiting (H)ours

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VISITING (H)OURS

By

JANE GILLIAN MORROW

Under the Direction of Craig Dongoski

ABSTRACT

This manuscript serves as a path through memory, through time and through experiences that have brought me to a personal understanding of death and dying and the immaculate resonance of the spirit. Tracing my way through my first experiences with death and loss, I dissect my emotional and physical journey towards complete solace and serenity facing tragedy and heartbreak. My work embodies my philosophy of maintaining a connection to loved ones through memory and through recording.

INDEX WORDS Death, Life, Dualism, Soul, Body, Medical, Weaving, Drip,

VISITING HOURS

By

JANE GILLIAN MORROW

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

In the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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2012

VISITING HOURS

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my family, my friends and everyone who supported me through this journey. Thank you Mom and Dad for encouraging me and for never letting me down. Thank you Erin and Merrie for being the sisters that everyone wishes they could have. Jan Ru Wan, you will never understand the power you gave me, as well as the strength you have shown me. I also dedicate this to everyone who donated their love, their time and their money to me during the fire. I could not have finished this without the love and support of my friends and family. My heart truly beats for y'all and I could not express my gratitude enough. All of my Best Friends on the 5th floor, you rock my world. Most importantly, thank you Remi Jane Morrow-Hamm for giving me the reason to pursue my dreams and thank you Mike Hamm for being my ride or die and living this life with me, you are truly my other half and I am so lucky. Also, I dedicate this to my soul sister, WGK. 165ALS forever.

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Thank you Doc. Decks, Mark Burlison, Craig and Pam. The road was tough but you saw me through to the end. Thank you forever.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
1. THESIS EXHIBITION.....	1
2. HISTORICAL.....	17

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig 1. Installation	4
Fig 2. Day 1, First I/V bag started	4
Fig 3. Day 1, Drip detail 5	5
Fig 4. Day 1 Painting.....	5
Fig 5. Day 2 Performance: Painting Removal.....	6
Fig 6. Final Paintings Day 1 and Day 2	7
Fig 7. Day 3 Performance: Begin Drip	8
Fig 8. Image of my hands after changing I/V bag tubes	8
Fig 9. Day 3 drips in progress.....	9
Fig 10. Day 3 drip detail.....	9
Fig 11. Day 3 Final Painting.....	10
Fig 12. Empty I/V bags after day 3.....	10
Fig 13. Day 4, end of day.....	11
Fig 14. Day 5, cutting the final painting.....	11
Fig 15. Bed on day 5.....	12
Fig 16. Shot of completed 5 day performance and installation.....	13
Fig. 17. Rebecca Horn, <i>Blue Monday Strip</i> , 1993.....	19
Fig 18. Todd Cook, "Home" series, 2011.....	20
Fig 19. Todd Cook, "Home" series 2011.....	20

1 THESIS EXHIBITION

My work is a cloth, woven from threads of loss, of death, of life, and of strength. My thesis exhibition, Visiting (H)ours is a visual narrative of my lifelong grieving process. I subscribe to Rene Descartes's philosophy of the mind and body duality. I believe that the mind and the body exist as one, but function mutually exclusively of each other. When the physical body is no longer present, I believe the spirit of the soul is preserved in memory and in artifacts. My first two years of graduate school I was in the Textiles department, and switched to the Drawing and Painting department in my third year. My work has strengthened as a result of the marriage of textile processes and painting processes. Visiting (H)Ours ran from February 13, 2012 through February 17, 2012, and included twice daily performances symbolizing care taking and devotion. Each day, an I/V bag dripped ink onto a blank roll of paper, ultimately creating five different paintings, which serve as evidence of existence. Even when the life substance drains from our veins, the record of our life serves as comfort for our loved ones.

Growing up, I experienced illness, death, loss, and I was taught the importance of memories as a coping mechanism for dealing with tragedy. The Visiting (H)ours installation is the visual representation of my experience as caretaker, as record keeper and as spectator. This installation grew over the period of five days, each day recording the existence of fluid symbolizing the draining of life and the evidence of existence. Each day I visited the gallery at 10 am and again at 5pm. Upon arrival every morning I rolled out a clean portion of paper onto the bed and began the drip of a single I/V bag. When I returned in the evening I cut the paper from the roll and placed it on the wall, documenting the paintings created by the emptying of the I/V bags. This regimented care taking resembles the actions I witnessed as my family members waited quietly at the bedside of loved ones. I created the environment within a space that allowed the audience to experience the work as a spectator, viewed through a glass

window, much like the impersonal hospital rooms and the sterile environment that serves as protection for the ill. My process and my materials have a direct relationship with my experience with death, life and the belief that the mind and body can exist exclusively as explained by René Descartes' philosophy of dualism.

In my installation, I used I/V bags to reference the way the body can exist with a foreign apparatus. I/V bags are used to replace the body's essential nutrients; sometimes they are filled with saline, with food, with blood and with endless other concoctions that sustain a living person. While these bags pump fluids into the veins of sick patients, they do not change the unseen properties of the soul. The bags, filled with ink and dyes empty out onto a blank sheet of paper that is draped across a bed. Everyday, I began the drip at 10 am and I returned at 5 pm to change the paper. This regiment allowed me to become the caretaker. Every day, for the length of the show, I returned every morning and every night to check conditions of the drips and to cut and replace the paper.

My process begins with concept. Often, I realize the initial thought as a "jumping-off" point for the rest of the work I make in the series. I typically make three or four pieces related to the initial concept, although each piece becomes stronger in terms of the materials, and the successful translations of metaphors. I relentlessly dig into my psyche to reach a complete understanding. I focus on the interpersonal relationships as well as the shared experience of grief and growth through loss. I seek out my own thoughts and then I create an experience that can relate to others. I write a lot. I sketch a lot; often the images I sketch are non-related to the surface level of the concept, rather, the sketches are "material sketches." In these "material sketches," I explore various processes, materials, size, scale and arrangement. I let the process inform the work. I trust my flow from piece to piece. I don't commit to a certain style, process, or material. I try to marry the concept instead of marrying the medium. Similarly, my work focuses on the conversation rather than the competition. Art making can become oppressive if

one gets framed into a certain style or a certain series. Often, the competition aspect of the art world will create burn out and the art will become a chore rather than a tool for conversation; the conversation becomes contrived and overworked. My art making process is similar to my grieving process in that every experience warrants a different approach.

In my installation, I used I/V bags to reference the way the body can exist with a foreign apparatus. I/V bags are used to replace the body's essential nutrients; sometimes they are filled with saline, with food, with blood and with endless other concoctions that sustain a living person. While these bags pump fluids into the veins of sick patients, they do not change the unseen properties of the soul. The bags, filled with ink and dyes empty out onto a blank sheet of paper that is draped across a bed. Everyday, I began the drip at 10 am and I returned at 5 pm to change the paper. This regiment allowed me to become the caretaker. Every day, for the length of the show, I returned every morning and every night to check conditions of the drips and to cut and replace the paper. The images below document the performances and the spontaneous paintings created by the drips of ink that flowed from the I/V bags as they emptied. The images are in chronological order, beginning with the untouched installation before the first I/V bag was released. The next four images are from Day 1 beginning with the installation prior to any performance.

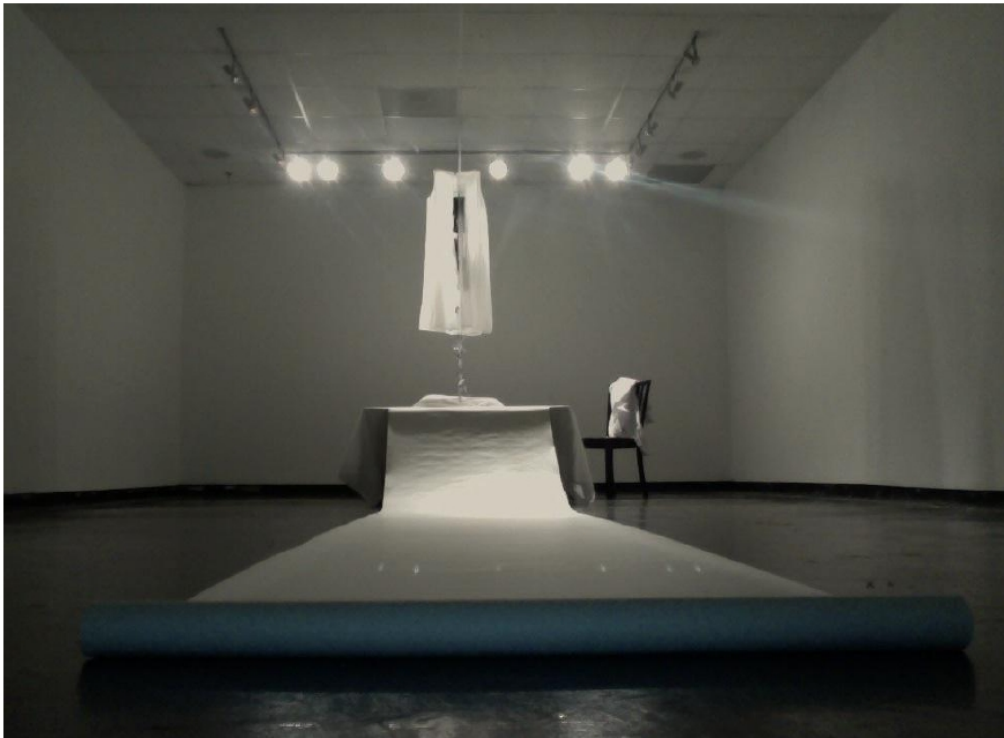


Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

The next series of images are documentation of Day 2. The image below shows me performing the afternoon duties of removing the paper from the bed and installing the painting on the wall.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Figure 6 shows the completed paintings from Day 1 and Day 2.

The next series of images chronicles day 3. The first image is during my morning duty of placing new paper from the roll, and beginning the drips from the third I/V bag, representing the 3rd day.



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

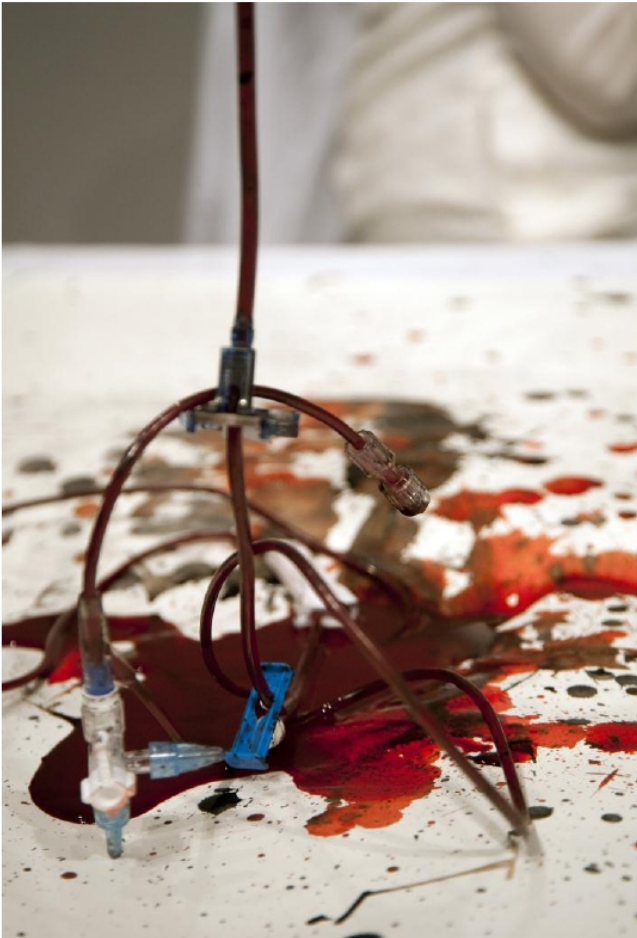


Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

The next series of images are from day 4.

Fig. 12

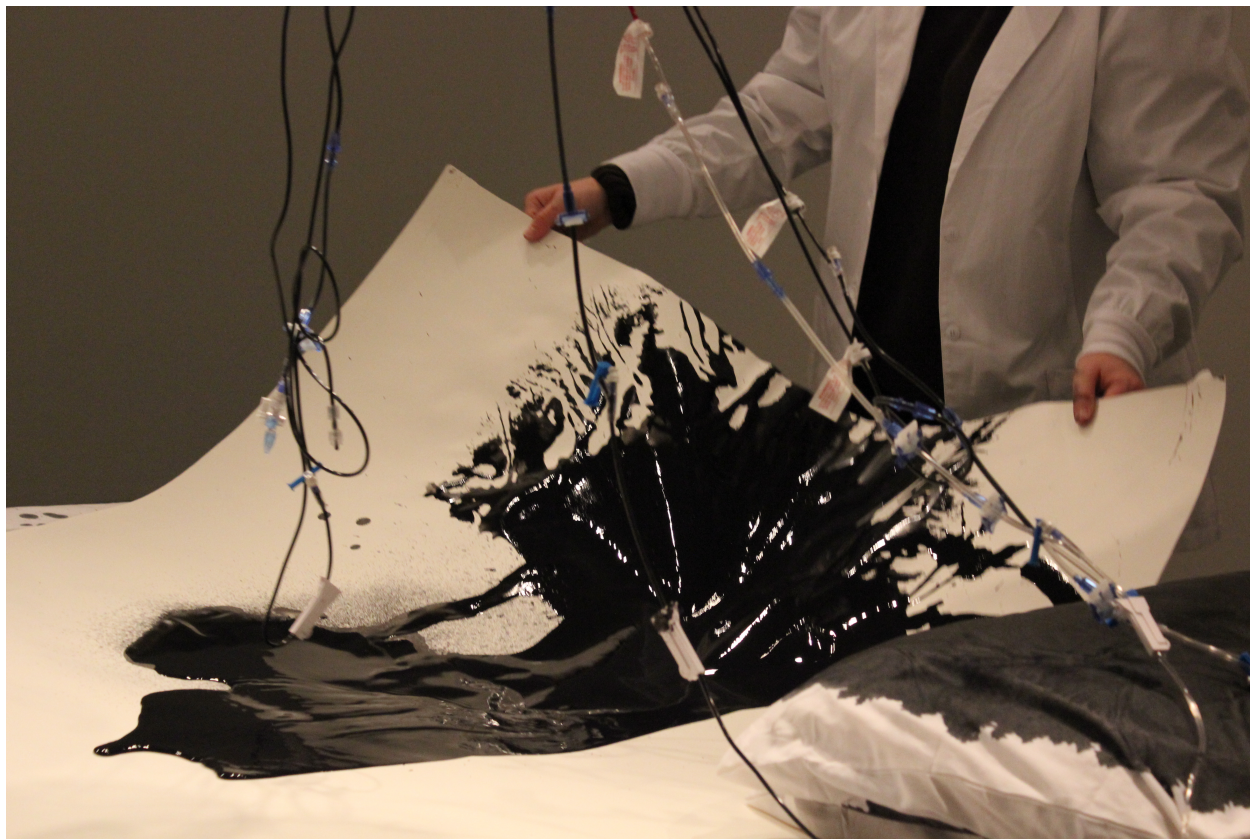




Fig. 13



Fig. 14

The final images represent the last day of the installation and performance.

Fig. 15





Fig. 16

2 HISTORICAL

Personal History

My work is centered on my growth through loss, grief and the ways I have learned to cope. For as long as I can remember, I have experienced death. When I count the deaths of friends and family, the number exceeds my age. Death serves as a constant reminder that physical existence is fleeting, and it is only with memory that the soul can exist without the body. For this installation, I focused on three specific deaths; the death of my Granny Betty, the death of my cousin Meghann and the death of my Grandma Jean. Each of these grieving processes enlightened me differently, and allowed me to further explore my belief in duality. My process begins with concept. I relentlessly dig into my psyche to reach a complete understanding. I focus on the interpersonal relationships as well as the shared experience of grief and growth through loss. I seek out my own thoughts and then I create an experience that can relate to others.

At a very young age, I was confronted with the death of my Granny Betty. Granny Betty was my maternal grandmother. I have the strongest memory of the way her house smelled of eucalyptus and potpourri. My younger sister and I used to stay with her after school and we would pick mint and violets from the side of her house. On sunny days, Granny Betty would take us to the cemetery where we would do gravestone rubbings and sit in a circle and tell ghost stories. My Granny was very spiritual; she believed she existed in a former life as a Native American princess. Granny Betty always told us stories of her parents and recounted her youth. She wrote endless stories about her experiences and documented family stories. Granny Betty had Rheumatoid arthritis, which left her hands crippled, and her immune system weak. I remember going to regular doctor visits with her, and when she had an operation to receive a pacemaker. Granny Betty nearly met death on more than one occasion. One time, in particular, she was in her bed at her home where my mother grew up. She was very close to death and my mom and

her two sisters and my Grandpa Ray stood by her side, prepared to watch her take her last breath. My mom, her youngest daughter bargained with God, and begged her in between sobs, to stay, begging her not to go. After a few minutes of slipping away, Granny Betty came back to consciousness. She explained that she had experienced a state of bliss, being welcomed by an angel to cross a white river; the only thing keeping her from crossing the river was hearing my mom call for her. At this moment, Granny's soul was separated from her body and she faced a dilemma that defied her physical health. Granny revealed to her daughters that at the moment of the angel's beckoning, she felt serenity and peace, yet she refused to cross the river because she heard my mom begging her to stay. Near-death experiences are the result of the body and the mind or "soul" separating and existing mutually exclusive of one another. Not long after this, Granny Betty passed away in a hospital. Per her wishes, she was cremated and we scattered her ashes from a cliff in the North Carolina Mountains while reading one of her poems. As a young child, my parents instilled the importance of family. I was taught to cherish the love of family members and to value my relationships above everything else. I am on a constant journey to trace my ancestry and to identify myself with those who came before me. I truly believe that we can only come to know ourselves from the history we document. Neo-Cartesian dualism is a philosophy that is based on René Descartes' original concept of mind and body separation. Neo-Cartesian dualism introduces today's medical and technological advances to further highlight the ability of the mind and the body to exist independently of each other. Many Neo-Cartesian dualists view organ transplants as evidence of this existence. Current medical technology allows a sick person to replace her damaged organs with donated organs in better condition. Experiencing my cousin Meghann's journey from healthy adolescent to disabled adult, I witnessed the strength and resilience of the mind during times of great physical decline. When Meghann was 13, she contracted a staph infection called Bronchiectasis.

For half of her life, my cousin racked up hundreds of hospital visits, oxygen tanks, set backs and eventually the opportunity to have a pair of working lungs. Throughout this entire journey, she remained the same resilient person she was when she initially found out she would need the transplant, which was shortly after being diagnosed with Bronchiectasis. Our family is very close, and as we watched this life threatening illness take hold, we searched for ways to support and comfort her and help her maintain a sense of "normalcy," however we could. The transplant process is strange; you have to meet a certain degree of illness to be moved to the top of the "list," as the organs are donated to the patient with the most immediate need. Meghann's place on the list traveled up and down as her health fluxuated. At times she was at the top of the list, and if her health improved in any way, she was moved down the list.

For many years, we waited on her to receive a pair of lungs that could save her life. Her lungs looked like Swiss cheese, due to the oxygen deterioration at the early stages of her illness. Her sassy personality and vivacious presence remained throughout this torturous journey of uncertainty. She waited with hope and she never accepted failure. In an essay titled, "Neo-Cartesian Bodies in Parts," Ian Hacking defends the Neo-Cartesian philosophy by addressing organ donation, blood transfusions, bone marrow transplants, and other ways our bodies have become separate from our mind and our soul. Hacking concludes his article by saying,

"In the West we go the other way. The body on the ventilator is, we solemnly assert (or decree), not the person! Just a lot of tubes and wires (to use Cartesian images), vessels and nerves and remaining organs being kept pumping by being plugged into a wall socket. This is just an instance of our return to Cartesian instincts. We are Cartesians when engineering cannot save organs but only preserve them. We are equally Cartesian when we engage in feats of surgical engineering for large

body parts. Here is an unpopular inference: with the ongoing advances of technology, neo- Cartesianism is bound to win in the end."

This statement references the preservation of organs while also arguing that the "person" is not reduced to the medical machinery that keeps said person "alive." The organs are preserved, existing separate from the body and then transplanted into a completely different body. The preservation of essential organs demonstrates the existence of the body parts individually rather than the body parts relying on the mental counterpart. The design of my installation was inspired by the furniture arrangement in the room my Grandma Jean occupied during the last days of her life. The placement of the bed and the chair directly referenced the room that my Grandma Jean occupied during her last month of her life. My Grandma Jean was the matriarch of our family. We lived on the other side of the neighborhood from Grandma and Grandpa; I remember walking to their house as a child and immediately going to the fridge for a coke and making a bag of popcorn to go with it. Grandma Jean's house symbolized safety and security and smelled like clean linens and home made biscuits. When she was diagnosed with Ovarian Cancer, my world immediately came to a halt. For 2 years she fought, she lost her hair, she slowed down from her busy itinerary. She was retired from her job as a secretary at a funeral home but she always wanted to be a waitress, so that is what she did after she retired. I learned so much from Grandma Jean, and to this day, I have not fully dealt with her passing. Everything reminds me of her and I am constantly re-evaluating my life in terms of how she lived her life. In the last few weeks of her life, she was at home, receiving Hospice care. I remember, she laid in a white, for post bed, with white covers, white pillows and white walls. My Grandfather sat by her side, every minute of every day. He whispered to visitors and eventually lost his voice from the constant whispering. There was one chair that set beside the bed, for her constant flow of visitors. I remember sitting in that chair and just watching her as she slept, praying for anything that would help her.

Art

The process of contextualizing my work within art history has proven to be essential to my growth as an artist. I couldn't define my work as it wasn't traditional fiber art, sometimes the work didn't include textiles at all. I was more focused on creating concept-based work that served as a metaphor for a deeper meaning. In order to place myself within the context of art history, it was completely necessary for me to refine my knowledge of movements, of processes, of various methods. Aside from looking within the purely formalistic aspects of art, it was necessary for me to create a collection of artists that I could draw inspiration from. I focused on artists that made work based on concept and artists whose work I admired formally. My work is concept based, it is essential that I choose materials and processes that can support my concept and effectively communicate my message. Within the art historical context, my work directly relates to Allan Kaprow's process and philosophy. Kaprow started the Hans Hofman School of Fine Arts in 1947; it was during this time that he started a style of painting known as "action painting." Kaprow's essay, *Blurring of Art and Life* stated that "concrete art" should not focus on permanence and craftsmanship, but rather, the work should focus on the "experience" and the use of everyday materials. This philosophy was coined "happenings." These "happenings" referred to the unique experience of the work. A "happening" could not be replicated, as it was an experience only lasted in the moment. The work could not be shown again, in the same capacity. The emphasis was placed on the experience of the audience rather than the ability to reproduce the physical work. The exhibition Visiting (H)Ours follows this same philosophy. The drips of ink can not be predicted, they can not be trained. The installation can change environments endlessly, however the paintings will each be one-of-a-kind. Kaprow's work focused on the "happenings," which simply referred to the way things naturally "happen." The Visiting (H)Ours exhibition directly relates to Kaprow's "Happenings," as the intended use of I/V bags are to drip fluids.

In my installation, the I/V bags maintain their integrity as objects that hold fluids and drip them steadily. Using ink as the fluid allows the I/V bags to maintain their integrity while creating a painting machine" out of everyday materials. My work his heavily influenced by Rebecca Horn's "painting machines." Horn's installations include common objects such as feathers, typewriters, ink, pumps and mechanical devices. Specifically, her work, *Blue Monday Strip* uses suspended typewriters, dripping ink, to create one-of-a-kind paintings that occur naturally within the ink's drip pattern. With the use of common materials, creating unique experiences, Horn's work aligns with Kaprow's philosophy of "happenings." An effect of letting the work "happen naturally" adds authenticity to the work. The paintings created by the spontaneous drips of ink create individual artifacts. Each painting is considered an artifact, as it serves as evidence of existence; the proof of a "happening," that will never be reproduced. I am attracted to Rebecca Horn's work because of the stark contrasts of black and white, as well as her process of removing her hand from the work and using everyday objects to create paintings spontaneously. The concepts are communicated in the way the installation is continuous, as if it were living.



Fig. 17

Conceptually, I am drawn to Todd Cook's work. Cook is a photographer, whose latest series captures his best friend's journey through cancer. Cook uses traditional photography methods to capture black and white images that narrate the everyday struggles of his best friend, Justin, as he battles lymphoma. The images range from Justin in hospital beds, to images of Justin engaging in everyday activities that show the young man's yearning for a sense of normalcy. In the series, Home, Cook captures the raw, uninhibited ugliness that is cancer. Alternatively, some of the photos show Justin seizing life; shooting guns with his father, jumping off a cliff into a river, or reading books. The photos also show the role of "care taker," as Justin's mother tends to him in the hospital. The images in this series are tragically beautiful and they engage the viewer in the journey of a family struggling to maintain normalcy amongst fear and disease.



Fig. 18



Fig. 19

Career

My artistic career has been a journey of twists and turns, acting as artist, curator, teacher and student. I consider my artistic career as beginning from the time I was a child. My parents have always encouraged my impulsive, natural artistic expression. Tucked away in the basement is the lamp shade I drew on when I was three years old. Given the opportunity to define myself as an artist from a young age, I adopted art as my primary outlet for communication. I consider this early age to be the beginning of my artistic journey. My confidence as an artist began with the freedom of expression, as my parents respected my individuality. As I grew older, I sought artistic nourishment wherever possible. I am from a small town that doesn't have much opportunity for artists. When I graduated High School, I attended East Carolina University where I was immersed in a very formalist education. My education was heavily influenced by the emphasis on philosophy of art. I began seriously making work in my sophomore year in undergraduate as a Textile student.

My professor changed the way I viewed art and helped me find a balance between the formal elements and the conceptual elements of my work. I was trained in traditional processes of weaving, sewing, printing, dyeing and construction. We were challenged to push the limits of traditional "Textile" art while using traditional methods. It was during this time that I developed a process, marrying concept and formalist philosophy. By the time I left East Carolina, I had sampled techniques including leather working, welding, textile processes, encaustic, and created work that involved mixed media. My goal was always to find the materials that worked seamlessly with the concept to communicate effectively. By the time I got to graduate school I had shown in several group exhibitions and formulated my own philosophy of art. I believed that for art to be successful it had to include conceptual value as well as ultimate craftsmanship.

When I started Graduate School at Georgia State University, I was in the Textile Program. By this time, I was working less with fabrics and more with found objects and incorporating ceramics and installation elements. During this time, I also moved into video art and considered the video as documentation of performance as well focusing on the aesthetic of the installation and the formal elements of the work being documented. I had not developed a "style" yet and I no longer felt that I could classify myself as a "Textile" artist. My first solo exhibition took place in my first semester of graduate school and the work primarily showcased large scale sculptures made from fabric and hand woven fabric. During the next two years I curated two exhibitions and I enjoyed the opportunity to create exhibitions that showcased work of all types. In my third year of Graduate school I moved into the Drawing and Painting department where I took full advantage of working with other graduates in the program. I was enlightened in ways beyond my expectations. I attended seminars that yielded conversation about works and artists that I had never been exposed to.

I learned a new appreciation for temporal art, performance and I developed a new vocabulary to discuss works of art. I began to identify with art history in a way that was previously unknown to me. I became more comfortable with assigning works to movements, and defining my own concepts, processes and beliefs in terms of the larger art world. I have certainly grown from a naive student into an informed, focused artist. My career has included a lot of uncertainty and personal struggle with confidence and identity but ultimately I have learned to associate myself with the larger global art community and look beyond my strict philosophy of art to include more experimental works.

The grief process is never the same. I have experienced the loss of family and friends throughout my life, and regardless of the circumstance, I have been vigilant in keeping memories and photographs to keep the spirit alive. I have grieved the death of friends and family due to cancer, to car accidents, to overdoses, to drive-by shootings, to old age and to complete accident. It is my belief that no matter the cause of death, we should preserve the memories we have; in this way, we are able to revisit the spirit of loved ones. In revisiting the spirit of the deceased, we can realize the duality of body and soul. The end of life does not determine the end of the memory. The body is buried, is cremated, and is considered removed from physical existence. Sometimes we anticipate death in cases of terminal illnesses and disease. Conversely, we cannot anticipate death related to car crashes, overdoses, drive-by shootings, murder, old age or sudden death. Mourning cannot be predicted; it cannot be forced. I have learned that experiencing great loss is a part of life. We begin dying from the moment we take our first breath. If we could save our loved ones, and preserve them eternally, we certainly would. Although I have processed death in many different ways, I will always revisit memories.

I will always carry the spirit with me. As my grieving process evolves with each loss, I learn to cope differently. Regardless of the process or circumstance, I honor life by maintaining the evidence of existence. The healing power of memory is tremendous. Every physical object we touch receives our energy and is affected by our touch. Evidence of our existence can be found in our possessions. How we use physical objects, how we value these objects, and how we care for these objects ultimately gives material possessions new life. On Easter Sunday, 2012, a week before this manuscript was to be completed, our house burned up in a fire. My fiancé, my daughter, my friend and her son and I walked up the street to enjoy a cook-out at a neighbor's house. Fifteen minutes later, we were told there was a house on fire. We could see the rising smoke and it was in the direction of our house, so my fiancé and I ran to see if our house was on fire. The closer we got, the faster we ran, and we realized that our home was engulfed in furious flames. We lived in this house for three years, and we made it our home. We made memories there; we began to acquire our own TV, our own couches, and our own treasures. For as long as I have lived on my own, I have furnished my homes with the same hand-me-down furniture and appliances. We felt a great sense of pride in our growing collection of new possessions that we picked out and purchased on our own. We finally had a flat screen TV and we were phasing out our old items by donating them or giving them to people in need. We are a young family completely self sustained, handling all of our living expenses on our own and saving money so that we could be able to provide our daughter with toys that she wanted, and necessary items. Our daughter's security blanket was burned in the fire and we had to explain this to her in a way that a four year old can process grief. Her "Biggie" as she called it, had travelled everywhere with her. She often told us that Biggie was her best friend. The corners of the blanket were reduced to holes from where she rubbed them at night.

I tried my best to find a way to help her mourn the loss of her most cherished possession. The blanket was the most important thing we lost. I explained to her, that while she would never see Biggie again, that it would always live in her heart. I am not sure how successful this translated to her, as her world was just consumed in flames. I went in the house a few days after the fire and frantically dug through the remains to find a scrap of Biggie. There was nothing. We didn't let her see the house and we explained that it was broken and we wouldn't be living there anymore. After explaining the circumstances to Remi, she began her own mourning process. She told me that Biggie had princess wings and a gold crown and that she was flying in the clouds. Even at four years old, she channeled the spirit of her most cherished possession and she created a new existence for Biggie. Although she cannot physically touch the blanket, she is using her emotional tools to maintain its existence. As I continue to witness her mourning process, I am further convinced that even when we can no longer touch our loved ones, we naturally use memory and spiritual connection to make peace with loss and tragedy.

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