

ABSTRACT

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FEAR AND DOUBT

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My work is about the shared human experience. The intent of the work is to address broader issues by using a mixture of the observational with the personal. The underlying concept of the work is that individual identity is not separate from the larger human collective. Finding a commonality between our individual experiences is the only way to truly understand each other.

FEAR AND DOUBT

By

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Preface

This body of work can be traced back, as far as I can remember, to some of my most personal experiences. It has taken me a lot of time to get to this point in my life; it has been a journey full of heartbreak. This journey has created tremendous feelings of inadequacy. Even during this last year of my graduate studies, feelings of inadequacies kept creeping back into my daily life. These feelings manifested as a quiet mantra, "not good enough", which I quietly heard throughout this last semester.

The past year has resulted in my creating and explaining work I never really understood or believed in; yet I was forced to continue production. The best part of this experience, is that I am finally able to understand two important things: 1) I am the only one who should believe in me, and 2) I will never second guess what I feel. While I still don't recognize the full power this negativity has had on my life, I do recognize that "it" needs to be and believe that "it" will be conquered. While some may argue that this current body of work is too personal. I agree that it is personal. However, I believe that to truly reach an audience it is important to completely expose yourself; to become personal. It is within the realm of this personal experience that each one of us can transcend our own egos to become a part of that shared human experience I mentioned earlier. By allowing the audience to access me as a person and personally, will allow them to see and share "themselves" and their own experiences with me.

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Table of Contents

Preface.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
The Introduction.....	1
The Current Body.....	3
The Self.....	5
The Empty Throne.....	9
Fear and Void.....	11
Doubt and Creation.....	13
The Mural.....	15
The Outro.....	17
Images.....	18
Bibliography.....	20

Chapter 1: The Introduction

My knowledge of artists, books and theories has vastly increased over the past 4 years, as I have developed a hunger to know more and more about my craft. However, my hunger has plateaued since becoming more familiar with the art world. By going to more galleries, talking to more artist and evolving as an artist myself, I have become more disillusioned with the institutionalization of art. My artwork comes from a place that is disconnected from the terms, discourses and theories that have been made by countless art experts. After all of the knowledge acquired from 25 years of school, I now understand one thing: art is about expression of “Self”.

Throughout history, artists expressed their thoughts, emotions, and personality using the most effective tool at their disposal. This is not to say that an artist doesn't want to gain riches, but that gaining riches is secondary to the primary focus of “Self” expression. The themes of my work are “born” from issues that both intrigue and annoy me. Once I am struck by an idea or theme in my sleep, observations or conversations, I am able to see the “piece” in my mind. Beginning with the seed of an idea, I then begin to construct the intent and execution of the idea in the most direct and effective way. Focusing on the idea behind the work, allows me to manipulate any medium to achieve the most effective way to connect with an audience.

Lately, I have fallen in love with wood in every form. Wood is a mutable medium that gives me freedom to create anything.

The mutable nature of wood and its characteristic texture, movement and varied color, gives my work both life and warmth. The figurative nature of my work is intended to give the audience a direct and penetrating way to immerse themselves in the pieces.

My drawings and the other pieces of work that I produce, are often curvilinear and follow the grain of the wood. The interplay between my drawings and the grain, intrigues and challenges me to illuminate what is within the grain.

“Growth”, as an artist, has allowed me to rely on my intuition to realize when a work is done. My artwork is never 100% complete, but I know intuitively when I am done. This is when my eyes and spirit are at ease with the totality of the project. When my work is going well, I am filled with a sense of ease and happiness.

Chapter 2: The Current Body

"He who does not know can know from learning". This African Proverb resonates with me clearly as a process of self-examination to know oneself better. The work in the exhibition is comprised of my personal history and experiences for the past 25 years. Negative thoughts and events have created an internal conflict within my Self that has materialized into the physical. The purging of these thoughts and memories are necessary in order for me to grow and evolve. I have had to research myself thoroughly; retelling stories I had long ago forgotten. In the process, of this "soul searching", I began to know who I Am. As a secondary function, this work serves not only as aesthetically pleasing, but gives an in-depth insight into my life.

By installing a wall-size mural, the viewer is invited to enter and leave the space having had an indelible experience. The exposure of topics ranging from suicide to losing a spelling bee should resonate with most viewers who are aware of their own narrative. In this work, the artist and the viewers' experiences are interchangeable because of the familiarity of the subject matter. I chose to use a mural to represent the search to find a natural balance between the two elements, "self and other" and reveal how the reflection of one leads to examination by the other. Reviewing my previous work, throughout these three years, has revealed that I have come full circle. The true evolution of my work has come from my maturity as an artist, not from ideas.

As I have matured in knowledge and experience, my artwork and its execution have grown as well. I have also come to understand and somewhat agree with the theory that art is not about its originality or even its execution, but is about the idea itself. How many times have people said, “I could do that”? The counter-statement, “but you didn’t” gives credit to the “artist” and not the person who can draw best. In my experience, anyone can make a pretty picture, some of my work in the show may seem simplistic in nature, the complexity lies in the idea behind the art. In my artwork, the meat of the bone lies in the personal emotion that I place into the artwork. No one can make a picture like I can, because we each come from unique places in life. However, that is not to say that because my work has my DNA in it, that one cannot access its content.

My current body of work is a form of group therapy; it exists to help individuals grow emotionally and solve personal problems. All utilize the power of the group, as well as the therapist who leads it, in this process.¹ This is a personal dialogue that transcends the Personal to become Impersonal. The hope is that because each viewer is inevitably at a different point on the life continuum and grows at a different rate, watching others overcome similar problems instills hope and inspiration. It may be the first time they feel understood and similar to others. Enormous relief often accompanies the recognition that they are not alone.

⁵ Again, we are all part of the shared experience.

Chapter 3: The Self

Identity exploration is the central theme of this exhibition. Every action and every observation of the world accumulates over time and shapes our identity, or “Self”. Events that happen to us, our choices, and our interactions with people all contribute to our knowledge and beliefs about the world. This cycle of “act and observe” and our experiences ascribed to these factors, adds to our human nature, personality and ever changing Self. My experiences, throughout childhood, have subconsciously affected me in my choices and actions throughout my life. My self-concept and mantra began to include beliefs, such as: “I’m not good at _____, good at _____, not great at _____ and I suck at _____”.

The best part of this introspection, is that it has allowed me to recall these various memories; that I have suppressed for one reason or another. This “thesis work” became a healthy release of potential negativity which transformed into this strange form of Self enlightenment or realization of self.

Many teenagers suffer from the insensitivity of their peers, who do not know the impact they have on this concept of self-image. These critical experiences continue to shape a young person’s life who may feel stressed enough to create a “fictional self” that is opposed to their “authentic self”. Those experiences become beliefs which are constantly reinforced, interpreted, evaluated, and inevitably distorted by a young person’s inner dialogue. One person may grow up to believe the world is a warm and wonderful place, or it may be harsh and cruel.

Certain people have strongly influenced me, and my Self-concept; my parents, siblings, peers, teachers, coaches, heroes, tormentors and competitors. My Self-perception is my own nemesis. For better or worse, they have all contributed to who I am today. Understanding myself was needed for a comprehensive retrospective of my life. I had to examine myself, purge my interjected personality and integrate my various core values, beliefs and actions to become a more authentic person.

To achieve this, I had to detach myself and become aware of my own thoughts and contemplate my thought pattern as a whole. Self awareness and introspection has opened me to emotions that I have either suppressed or overly dramatized. I also had to understand that my inner dialogue is different from what others are saying about me. Concentration on excessive inner dialogue, positive or negative, is often responsible for many distortions of self-perception. Also, because we are humans, we often worry about our potential future while being stuck on the past. This causes us to worry about what others have done, thought or might do. Anxiety becomes a problem and results directly from our self-talk.

While in most cases, this is true, it has also been my experience that most people lie to your face in order to be polite or nice; when in reality they have two contrasting opinions of you. However, being too aware of those conflicting opinions of you, can cause you to become more anxious, lower your self esteem and cause you to develop into a overly self-consciousness being. "Self-consciousness can cause us to choke under pressure when we are called on to

perform.” Threats to my thoughts and ideas often result in my withdrawal of activities or events because of my own inner dialogue. However, the benefit of creating this show, has allowed me to realize that I can stare back at my thoughts and jump into a space between my ego and core beliefs. The Self is an essential, but tricky component to our identity. However, we are in control of who we are to become and if we believe in something strongly, we can act on it and thus be creators in action.

...and I came, it may be, to look for myself and recognize myself. What have I found?"- Rembrandt

A self-portrait is a representation of an artist, drawn, painted, photographed, or sculpted by the artist. Self-portraits have been made by artists since staring into water began early in man’s history. Whether it is an in-depth exploration of the artist’s own psyche or because the artist is clearly the cheapest and most available, self-portraiture has a powerful impact on the viewer. A self-portrait is a projection of self to others as they wish to be seen. Other portrait artists who also used the self-portrait as a projection of self did so to demonstrate wealth, social status, talent or religious beliefs.

Rembrandt is given credit for being the first artist to intensely study the self through art. They explore his psyche, complex personality, emotions, and chronicle various points in life. Sean Kelly once noted that for Rembrandt, "self-portraits became an outlet for feelings and ideas concerning the nature of human

existence which found no satisfactory channel elsewhere. Self portraiture provides a wide range of opportunity for growth and discovery.

Kahlo used herself as the main subject, creating a therapy of sorts, struggling with personal challenges and beliefs. Like me, all of these artists gazed into their “mirrors” and attempted to grasp their identities. Some of the self-portraits in the show are what I want you to see, some chronicle my history, others reveal personal secrets and a sense of isolation. Each portrait is a an exploration of the Self. “For all artists, the self-portrait is an exploration, an opportunity to see beyond the image in the mirror and begin to search into the soul.”

Chapter 4: The Empty Throne

The idea of an 'empty throne' is meant to serve as a replacement for the individual to serve as "everyman", yet no 'Self' is present. The throne also serves as a way to approach the universe even through its' emptiness. The 'empty throne', torn from its logical context has great potential to cause us to think.... Made to act as a modern day "Thinkers' Chair", the throne has a functional and aesthetic value. While thoughts and questions are on display as a representation of ones' inner dialogue we should be more concerned with what is actually there – 'emptiness'. The 'empty throne' concept exists in other religions and cultures, as well – for example the prohibition of certain images in Islam, the lack of any depiction of God in Jewish art, and the empty tomb in Christianity stands as a symbol of the invisible presence of God. In haikyo, chairs are manifestations of human memories.

The rejection of a picture, as a means of representing the holy, is also a symbolical way of positively asserting the presence of God. The 'empty throne' stands as symbol of the divine and could do much to bring people together as it represents the spiritual and the universal Self.

I think by character of their function, chairs are imbued with a certain amount of personality- and in this sense, as a pure object, the chair's inner character is made more evident when stripped of context. The chair's function is to let a human being sit. So, in a way, it acts as a impersonater; it sits in for a person when a person isn't present.

It simultaneously creates a presence and an absence; a duality. The 'empty throne' as a centerpiece gives a direction for the reflection and exploration without a strict definition. Anybody could/can sit there.

Symbolism of an empty chair/throne is also used throughout psychology. When you go see a Gestalt therapist, the office will usually have an empty chair facing the patient. This chair serves an important function. When the client expresses a conflict with another person, the patient is directed to talk to that person who is imagined to be sitting in an empty chair. This helps the client to experience and realize their feelings. It stimulates their thinking, by emphasizing their emotions and attitudes. There are numerous people, objects, parts of your personality, your emotions, any aspect of a dream, or a stereotype that you can imagine will be in the empty chair. 6

The hope, when viewing this work in its entirety, is that the viewer will achieve a long, detailed, emotional interaction--a conversation. This "conversation" could help to clarify the viewers feelings and reactions to the other and may increase their understanding or empathy.

Chapter 5: Fear and Void

“[W]e now know that the human animal is characterized by two great fears that other animals are protected from: the fear of life and the fear of death... Heidegger brought these fears to the center of his existential philosophy. He argued that the basic anxiety of [humanity] is anxiety about being-in-the-world, as well as anxiety of being-in-the-world. That is, both fear of death and fear of life, of experience and individuation.” - Ernest Becker

This body of work represents my fears and doubts that have manifested themselves in one way or another. Whether it is about just reaching short of a childhood dream, desires to be someone/something else; fear and doubt have reared its ugly head on more than one occasion to prevent me from accepting who I am and my potential. Fear is an emotional response to threats and danger.

As an individual emotional state, fear can affect the unconscious mind, where it can become manifested in the form of nightmares. People develop specific fears as a result of learning and having various encounters in their life's journey. Although fear is learned, the capacity to fear is part of human nature. While the name of my show is about fear, a more accurate label for the images within the show is about anxiety. Anxiety is about the emotional state in a long lasting manner and repeats as an internal stimulus. Anxiety is a psychological and physiological state characterized by various behavioral components. These components combine to create an unpleasant feeling that is typically associated with uneasiness and fear. Fear also serves to create a platform to overcome your fear and become stronger in the process.

My greatest fear is the Void. Whenever I sit to think about the Void and its contents of nothing, it brings tears to my eyes because of its power of absence.

The questions that abound when thinking about death or vast emptiness assume that consciousness would also exist; the scariest thing to try to conceptualize is being conscious of the emptiness. That is a truer and scarier idea of what “Hell” could be for me.

Chapter 6: Doubt and Creation

“Our doubts are traitors and make us lose the good we often might win, by fearing to attempt.”-Jane Addams

Doubt is probably the most important negative energy present in my work. After priding myself on questioning society and its politics using my own Socratic method, doubt began to fill my own life from internal and external sources. By doubting myself, how could others believe in me and thus created this viscous cycle of negativity around me. The purging of my doubts will be the best thing to happen to me at this point in my journey.

Doubt brings into question some notion of a perceived “reality” and may involve delaying or rejecting relevant action out of concerns for mistakes or faults or appropriateness. The term “to doubt” can also mean “to question one's circumstances and life-experiences”. Most psychologists trace the concept of doubt back to childhood experiences. These traditions maintained, can plant and repeat doubt about one's abilities and even about one's very identity indefinitely. The influence of parents and other influential figures often carries heavy connotations subconsciously into the self concept of the child. Doubts are often included in such self-portrayals.

Doubt can serve to create individual illusions to shield the experience of an unpleasant outcome; depending upon the energy put into the doubt. When used in this way, doubt itself may have little impact on events, merely blocking the individual from seeing different outcomes.

Doubt has some positive aspects which depends on the character trait of a person. Some people will use that uncertainty to become more determined to achieve their goal.

While skeptical thinking is often assumed to be at odds with spirituality it can also be turned inward on itself and preserve the possibility of spiritual belief. My greatest doubt is the idea of creation. Not only in the biblical sense, but in the idea of creating an original idea. I have my doubts as to whether any idea is original; only original in its execution. It is my belief that we all get the same idea, but because of our cultural background and experiences we make different pieces. No two works look the same.

The interesting aspect of my greatest fear and doubt is that they are both about “ex-nihilo”; out of nothing. The biggest lure about creation is the ability to create something out of nothing completely from being inspired by an idea or material. Interestingly enough, this is also where my doubt comes from: Is man capable of creating by himself, or is it that an artist is one who taps into the stream of unconsciousness, the stream that is constantly creating. In the biblical sense, creation is controversial at best in its manner of having multiples “we create” and the problematic text of the Bible itself. External creation exists one way or another, whether we have created a God for fear of death or for doubt about our future, or that there is some invisible stream of ideas/creation.

Chapter 7: The Mural

When I work with my wood drawings and place them in installations, I am reminded of the murals of Mexican artists Juan Orozco and Diego Rivera. When I work with wood, I am reminded that I am following an old tradition of wood as an art form and utilitarian object. Murals have dated all the way back to prehistoric times and many have survived in Egyptian tombs, as well as other locations. However, the term became more famous with the Mexican "muralista" art movement. Their murals were engaging, detailed and complexly layered with historical and cultural references. Their gutsy ability—especially by Diego Rivera—to portray political and socially important people in unflattering ways, was very inspiring to not only Mexicans but to those here in America. It served as an inspiration, particularly the Black Power Movement.

Woodcuts and murals are important in that they bring art into the public sphere. Murals and woodcut prints can be a relatively effective tool of social emancipation or achieving a political goal. Often, the visual effects are an enticement to attract public attention to social issues. Public works such as printmaking and murals have functioned as an important means of communication for members of socially, ethnically and racially divided communities in times of conflict. They also serve as an effective tool in establishing a dialogue between various cultural, religious and societal gaps. The arrangement of the work on the back wall serves as a sculptural mural.

It tells a narrative of my personal narrative by using the mediums of woodcuts, photographs, as well as sculptural objects and found media. This contemporary version of a wall mural, still retains the principal purpose of conveying a message to the public. The wood “etchings” represent my perception of the “other” in my life, while the photos are the most direct representation of myself. The sculptural components are the part of my self portrait that best convey ideas, events in my life that could only be explained in three dimensions. As the murals of the “muralista” art movement, my work can be entered at any point and will tell a story. Also, like the older murals, there will be a lot of information that may not be totally understood at first glance, one will have to stand still, observe and experience all that the piece has to offer. My mural serves to offer a comprehensive story telling meant to leave an indelible experience on the viewer.

Chapter 8: The Outro

Through this fusion of diverse pieces, the body of work presented strives to captivate and stir conversations of inner dialogue with the viewer. The visceral nature of some of the work within the piece will be gripping and moody to some, while some of the cleaner work will connect to others. This is a personal dialogue that transcends the Personal to become Impersonal. We all have fears and doubts and we all ask the same questions that you ask. This is the transcendence we spiritually speak of --it's what Jesus did and Ghandi did--give of self to represent others. My art is being used as an instrument that creates the dialogue. We can all look at my pieces and be able to see ourselves. That is the point: we all have fears and doubts....everyone will personally determine what these pieces mean to them. It is my inherent belief that my personal fears and doubts are the same as many of our own. The question that I ask is, "How many of these "personal statements" can You identify with?" The goal is to identify with everyone else....We all have a common experience. I am not like everyone else, I am everyone else.

Images



Pull, 2009
Digital Photograph
24" X 36"



23 Shots, 2009
Wood, Rubber and Metal
24" X 36"



Struggle, 2009
Wood etching
11" x 15"

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