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Crafting Authenticity

A SERIES OF CREATIVE PROJECTS BY: *Allison N. Schumacher*

SUBMITTED TO

the faculty of the School of the Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, *Master of Fine Arts in Design: Visual Communications*.

Allison N. Schumacher
Bachelor of Fine Arts | Appalachian State University
Boone, North Carolina | December 2006

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia | May 2009

PRIMARY ADVISOR

Jamie B. Mahoney
Assistant Professor, School of the Arts • Department of Graphic Design

SECONDARY ADVISOR

Camden Whitehead
Associate Professor, School of the Arts • Department of Interior Design

READER

John Demao
Associate Professor, School of the Arts • Department of Graphic Design

Jack Risley,
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

Richard E. Toscan
Dean, School of the Arts

F. Douglas Boudinot
Dean, School of Graduate Studies

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ABSTRACT

Authenticity is what we want from the world around us, from others, and crucially from ourselves and what we make. As it relates to graphic design, I define authenticity as a perceived match between form and purpose. For the designer, its quality is found in the process of simultaneously developing a concept and crafting the design/object.

At the beginning of the Spring 2008 semester I was involved in a class titled Teaching Practicum at Virginia Commonwealth University. I rotated between classes, observing teaching styles and student interaction and participation. For an aspiring teacher, the experience was invaluable. I began to notice patterns in the student's design methods and habits. Many young design students' were relying heavily on computers and seemed uninterested or unaware of hand techniques. This was most apparent in their design solutions. Something was missing.

At first, my printmaking background lead me to believe that the imperfections of the hand-made had disappeared. Since technology is almost always accepted without hesitation in our society, I felt the need, in my thesis, to defend the hand and I initially placed too much emphasis on the importance of this kind of creative discovery. As my thesis developed, I realized that I was deceiving myself. Not only did I overlook the immense potential of balancing hand and digital techniques, but I also failed to see what was really missing. Authenticity. At first, I became wary of this word, trying to circumvent its intimidating presence, but it has an incessant ability to resurface and beg for a definition. Here, I am tempted to borrow from a Supreme Court Justice speaking on pornography, "I may not know what it is, but I know it when I don't see it." Authenticity seems much easier to identify when it is lacking, but how do we know what it really is and how to achieve it?

Authenticity is what we want from the world around us, from others, and crucially from ourselves and what we make. We search for it in the objects we own and the places we visit; this desire provides us with a drive to know who we are and motivates who we will become. We are aggrieved when we find it lacking in our relationships with others and aggravated when trusted institutions do not deliver it in the information, products and services they provide.¹

As it relates to graphic design, I define authenticity as a match between form and purpose. For the designer, its quality is found in the process of simultaneously developing a concept and crafting the design/object.

This project is an exploration of my personal design philosophy and how it may contribute to the dialog of how we design and communicate. In the words of D. F. McKenzie from his 1985 Panizzi Lectures on bibliography, "My purpose is to express a need and stimulate discussion."²

¹ Todd, Richard. *The Thing Itself*. New York, NY: The Penguin Group, 2008

² McKenzie, D.F. *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts: Panizzi Lectures*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The quest for authenticity touches and transforms a vast range of human experience—we speak of authentic food, authentic music, authentic dance, authentic art, authentic roots, authentic meanings, authentic nations, authentic products, etc. Authenticity gathers people together in communities that are vital, essential, and real, providing members with an unmatched sense of unity and belonging. Authenticity can describe tourist sites, the scent of spray starch, and your seventh grade math teacher. It can be found in moments of severe peril, such as the loss of a loved one, or in the taste of funnel cake at the state fair. Authenticity can be ratified by experts who certify genealogy and origin, or by the summoning of feelings that are paramount and undeniable.¹ The desire for an authentic experience draws us to charismatic leaders, expressive artists, and social movements; it makes us into trendy consumers and fanatical collectors. Given all these varied usages, how can authenticity be defined?

¹ Trilling, Lionel. *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972

PROBLEM STATEMENT

CONTINUED

At its origin, authenticity is the leading member of a set of values that includes the sincere, the essential, the natural, the valid, the original, and the real. Most of these terms can also serve as intensifying adverbs: ‘I’m really telling the whole story,’ ‘essentially, my argument is.’ But it is impossible to put ‘authenticity’ into any of these constructions. Unlike its cousins, authenticity stands alone; it has higher claims to make. In legal jargon authenticity means that signatures, documents and paintings were actually authored by the person whose name is on them.² In computer language authenticity indicates that a message received is the same as the message sent, and that the sender is indeed the person who signed the message.³ When considering cultural artifacts, authenticity implies that an object is not false or copied, and that it has originated from collectives whose biological heritage can be traced. Collectors see authenticity in an object’s verifiable history and specific markings.

If explicit languages can define authenticity in all these distinct examples, how can we in turn analyze visual language? How do designers understand authenticity?

Essentially, graphic designers are communicators. We encode and decode information in order to shape the visual world. Information can take on many forms such as billboards, posters, maps, periodicals, books and diagrams to name a few. The organization and appearance of that information are left to designers informed by their research. With this responsibility, let us consider how authenticity may affect communication and its final outcomes, or better yet, consider the decisions that lead us to that outcome. In the past, the term ‘authentic’ has been used primarily to describe antiques or what is viewed as craft when considering visual language or objects. Antiques are valuable due to their age. The

creator is most likely deceased, making the object rare and difficult to replicate or replace. Crafts, on the other hand, are a commodity because of the relationship with their maker and that person’s culture. Consistent with etymology, the general understanding of craft refers to weaving, carving, pottery, or folk art activities that involve doing something with your hands. The introduction of digital technology makes this perception of craft limited or incomplete, and has sparked a change in the conversation about craft. Senior Systems Architect and MIT alumnus, David Crow, provides inclusive meaning and defines craft as “work bearing the mark of its maker as a part of the maker’s journey of discovery.”⁴ Richard Sennet, co-founder of The New York Institute for the Humanities at New York University and author of *The Craftsman*, defines craft as more of an action. He characterizes it as “the basic human impulse to do a job well for its own sake.” This applies to any trade: a surgeon, luthier, architect, parent, landscaper, graphic designer, etc.⁵ I define craft as a combination of these ideas. Craft is the undeniable meticulous human presence in any work. It bears the “mark of its maker” through the dedication apparent in its execution and is not limited to any one medium. Designers find their craft in the decision making process as they develop a concept and make the design/object. When the goal of authenticity is at the forefront of the decision-making process, designers should be able to create more meaningful, resonant communication. But how?

To understand what makes any one thing authentic, it is essential to consider its purpose. The reason something exists, is done, made, or used, outlines its essence and allows us to evaluate its form. Form is affected by many factors that include, but are not limited to: where it originated in time, the methods and processes used to produce it, the author/artist/creator, how it functions, aesthetics, and craft.

Marshall McLuhan provides a valuable point, “the medium is the message,” meaning that the substance of a medium embeds itself in the message creating a symbolic relationship by which the medium influences how the message is perceived.⁶ For example, the use of photography in a work conveys a perception of reality, while illustration denotes fantasy. Over-use of a method or process, with little understanding, can limit our visual vocabulary and result in design that is more about style rather than content or purpose. In his book *Technopoly*, Neil Postman writes, “Embedded in every tool is an ideological bias, a predisposition to construct the world as one thing or another.”⁷ In other words, by choosing one medium, you negate others. With more understanding of media, designers can evaluate which processes are essential to the purpose, and avoid miscommunication between designer and audience.

Another factor in this arduous search for authenticity is perspective. Everything we see and do now and have done in the past, can affect how we will interpret what we see and do in the future. This leaves any one definition of authenticity provisional and incomplete. A teddy bear may be a treasured keepsake for one person, but to another may be nothing more than a dirty stuffed animal with one eye missing, just as grandparents may misunderstand a poster design aimed at college students. Ultimately, authenticity can be broken down and categorized according to who is making and who is evaluating. Ambiguity like this only opens discussion for a deeper understanding of this nebulous subject. As Nietzsche encourages: “The more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity’ be.”⁸

The following projects reveal my path to authenticity, how it may be created, and perhaps provide clarity to the design process.

¹ Trilling, Lionel. *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972
² Garner, Bryan. *Dictionary of Modern Legal Usage*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995
³ *Oxford Dictionary of Computing*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008
⁴ Crow, David. “*Magic Box: Craft and the Computer*” Eye Magazine. Winter 2008, 70

⁵ Sennet, Richard. *The Craftsman*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008
⁶ McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Critical ed. W. Terrence Gordon. Berkeley, CA: Gingko Press, 2003.
⁷ Postman, Neil. *Technopoly*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1993.
⁸ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. New York, NY 1969

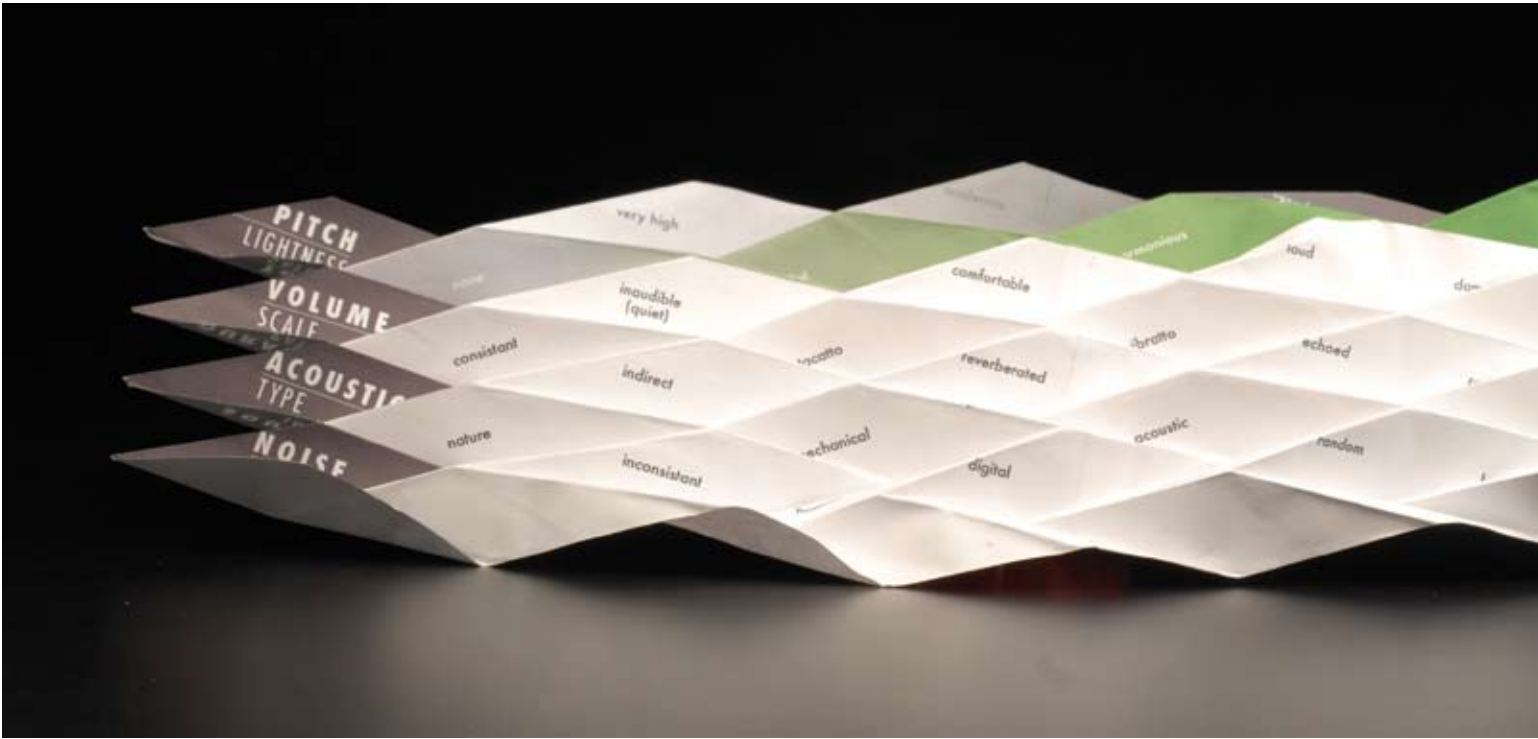
ANOTHER DIMENSION

Authenticity can be found in a relationship with a personal object, but can also be discovered in a personal exploration. When I was introduced to the topic and experience of creating a morphology, I started slowly, frustrated by the simplicity of the problem with no way to relate to it personally. According to the book *Typographic Form and Communication*, a morphology, in terms of graphic design, is a menu of visual possibilities. It consists of a list of syntactic and/or semiotic variables that can be systematically or randomly explored. Two-dimensional printed pieces did not satisfy my creative urges nor did they provide working solutions to the experimental problem at hand. I found myself fantasizing about another dimension. I have had an interest in origami since I was eleven and I finally found an alternative application for it. Tessellations, hyperbolic parabolas, and other 3D multi-unit forms are discoveries made when researching my 3D paper options.



« While researching hyperbolic parabolas, pentagon-hexagon zigzag units, and various methods of origami folding, I sculpted a 3D morphology of texture. The object resembles a complex die and may be rolled for random outcomes.

« I felt the need to execute my creative explorations through the same 3D means as my morphology. Searching stores for origami books, I ran across an instructional manual for making pop-up books and made some experiments.

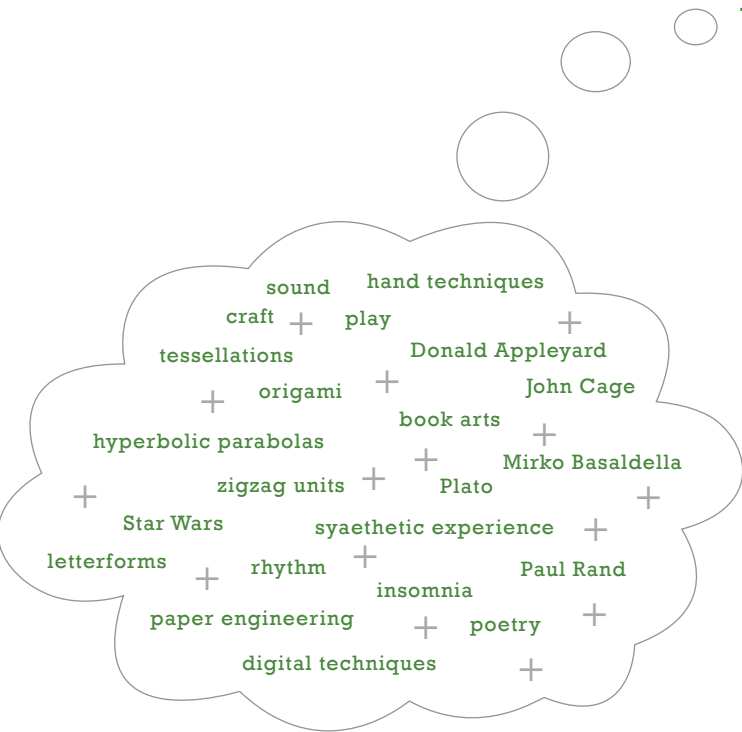


« Dimensional variations were applied to the morphology with a series of mountain and valley folds. Brainstorming led to a series subjects that I was already interested in. Visual > sight > the senses > hearing > sound. How does sound relate to design? I began with organized sound: music, then to noise, and other non-musical sounds. What is loud design? Discordant design?

1 Carter, Rob, Ben Day, and Philip Meggs. *Typographic Design: Form and Communication*. 4th ed. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2007. Morphology

CREATIVE PROJECT

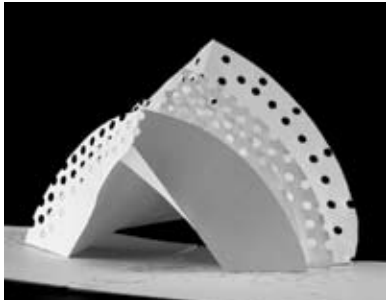
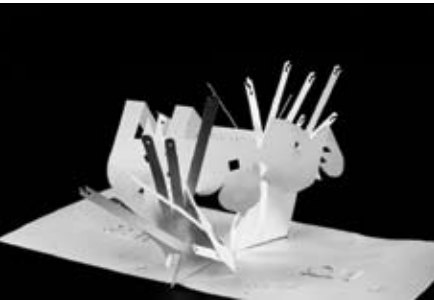
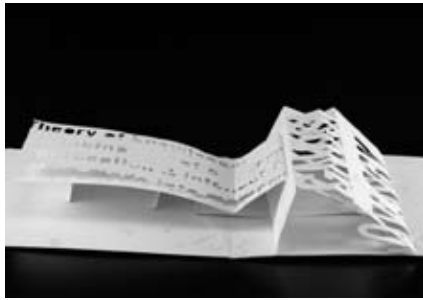
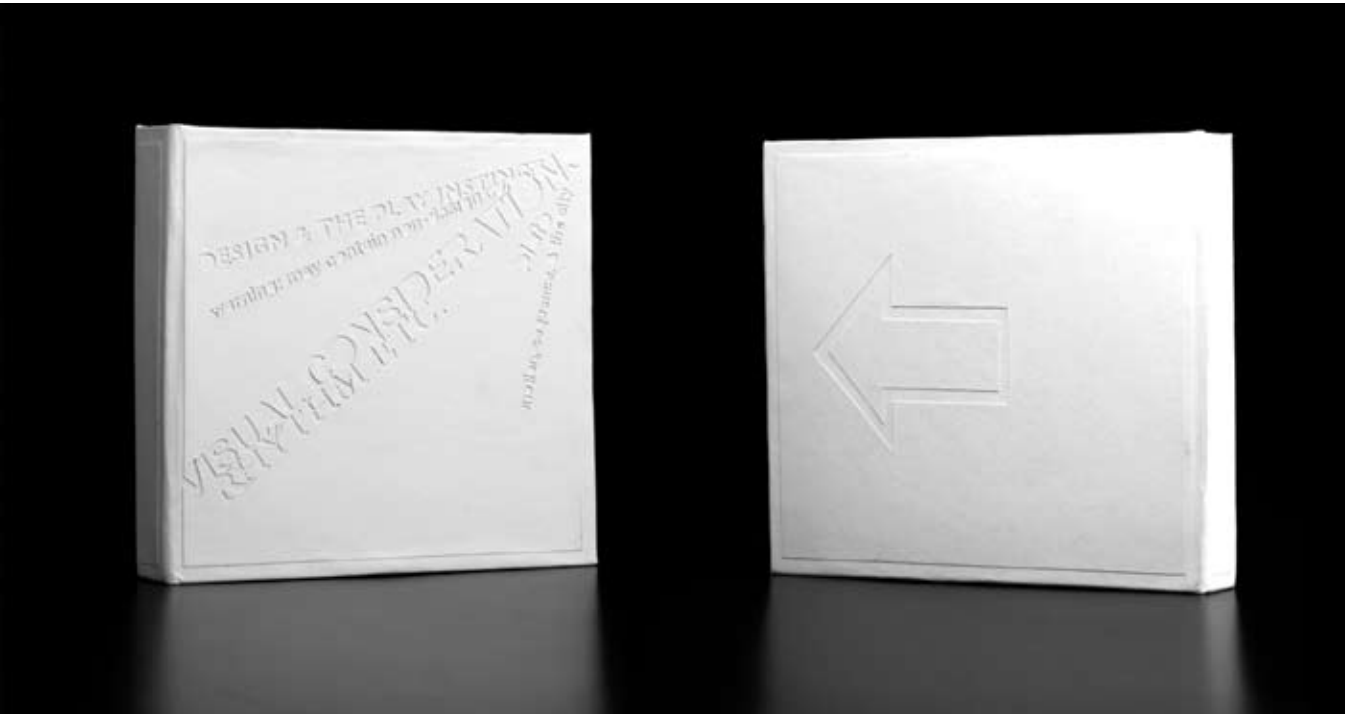
POP-UP BOOK



VISUAL THINKING

Experiments using the morphology led me to develop a personal relationship with a challenging project. It essentially led me to authenticity. The purpose of the project was to challenge myself through learning a new craft and a new way to look at typography. The form was found through a journey of influences, and the desire to combine two-dimensional and three-dimensional typographical solutions. The result was a book containing six pop-up constructions. Each of the six was built as a reaction to specific readings ranging from Plato to Paul Rand.

« Influences all occupying the same space in my mind formed endless connections that my hands translated into three-dimensional scenes.



CREATIVE PROJECT

DESIGN BOOKLET

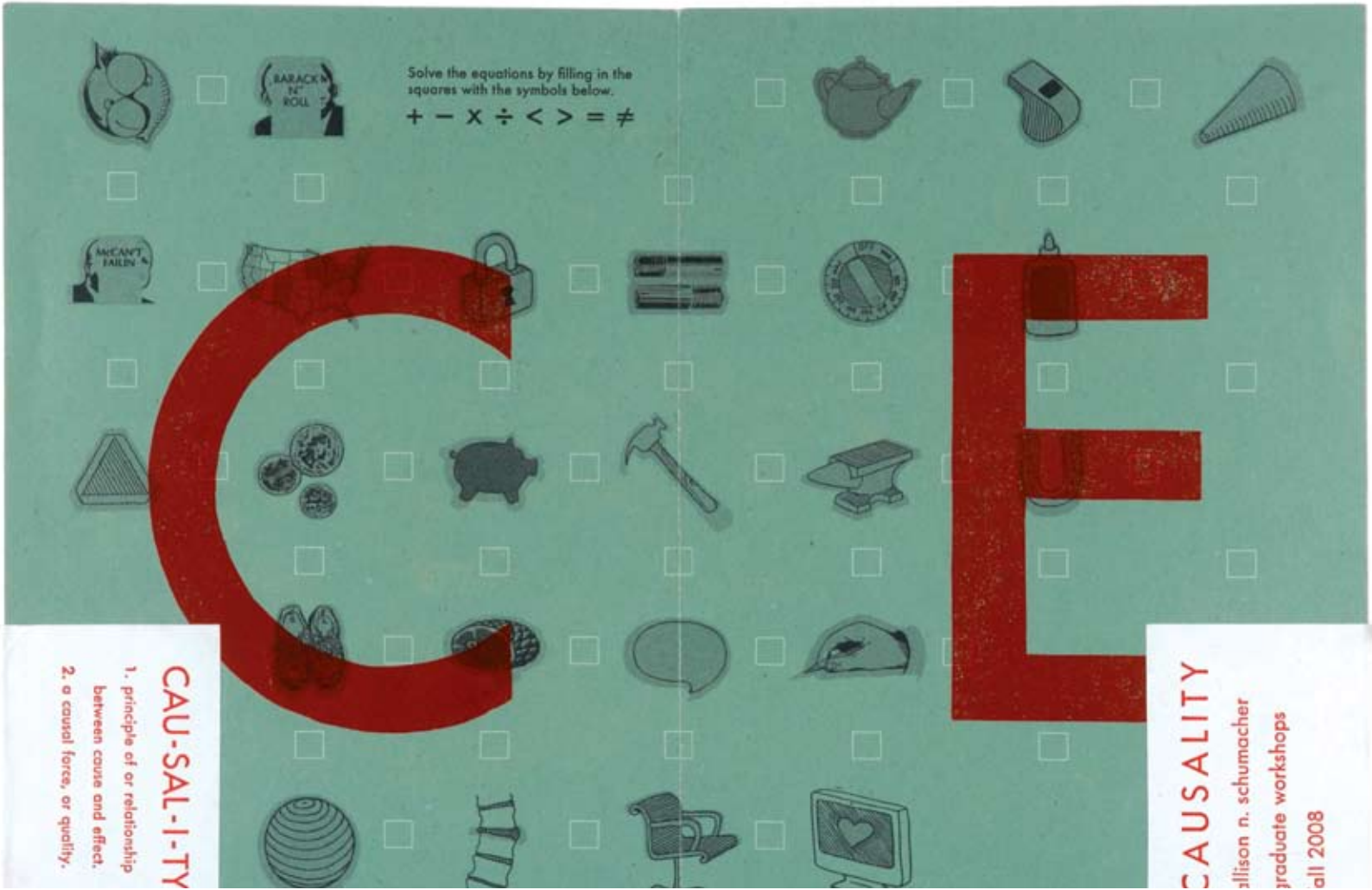
CAUSALITY

At the beginning of my third semester of a two-year graduate program at Virginia Commonwealth University, I found myself engaged by Susan Sontag's *On Photography*. I sat in bed intrigued by her uniquely long opening sentences and noticed that I had sunk into a slouch. I set the book down and pushed myself up with both arms. I heard a pop in my lumbar and sharp pain shot down my left leg, up my spine and left me unable to move my leg for about eight hours. While being examined by the chiropractor the next morning he knew, without asking, how my condition developed. I was in this predicament for two reasons: stress, and years of sitting behind a computer.

The chiropractor told me that it would be impossible to heal if I carried on this way. I tried to explain that my livelihood and education relied on my ability to sit and focus for long periods of time. "That's life," I thought. I can't slow down in graduate school. I would just have to work with the pain, and fit the therapy in where possible. A couple days of shooting pain soon defeated that idea, and I realized that I was going to have to take the doctor's advice and change the way I live and work.

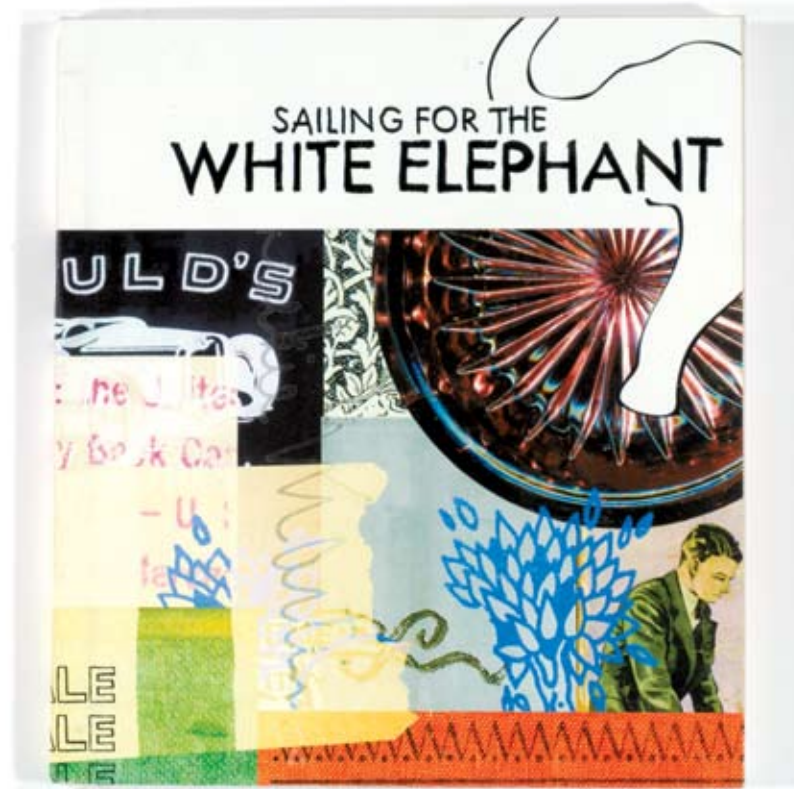
These events taught me to be more mindful of my actions and habits, but ultimately, I know I cannot control what I am unaware of. This sixteen-page signature reveals the authentic experience of the random, and not so random equations in life. Sometimes you will feel an effect before you ever are aware of its cause.

» The Causality cover is an inkjet print on tinted paper. The large letterforms were hand-carved out of a linoleum block and letter pressed. The white label is a letterpressed sticker with a perforated seam at the opening of the signature.



» The signature spreads are playful compositions of my Fall 2008 graduate design work. Images are accompanied by poetry and writing which explains my discoveries throughout the semester.





« This book is a good merge between hand and digital techniques. The cover is a digital collage of scanned objects I purchased at yard sales. The book includes hand-drawn elements, custom photography, a post-it note checklist seen below in yellow, hand-stitched binding, and French fold pages.

SAILING FOR THE WHITE ELEPHANT

As a strong supporter of buying second-hand things, yard sailing has been a hobby of mine for years. I have always taken an interest in the histories of the objects I purchase and the relationship formed between buyer and seller. Why do objects move so quickly from treasure to trash and in a moment, become prized again? I began by examining polar opposite themes in yard sailing: expensive vs. cheap, new vs. used, antique vs. trash, familiar vs. unfamiliar, etc. Every category centered on the 'personal object' and the phenomenon of a possession moving from usable to disposable. So I decided to construct a book telling the story of the ritual and often overlooked details of outdoor thrifting. The story encourages the continuation and expansion of this anthropological phenomenon.

After setting this project aside for a year, I have come back to it with new knowledge and understanding. Yard sailing can end a personal relationship with an object and begin a new one with someone else. This new chapter does not erase the previous one; it simply provides a level of mystery if the stories go untold. Collectors look for authenticity in an object's verifiable history and specific markings it acquired along its journey. This quality can be described as *Historical Authenticity*. Yes, it can be found in museums or galleries, but it can also be as close as a Saturday morning in a stranger's yard.

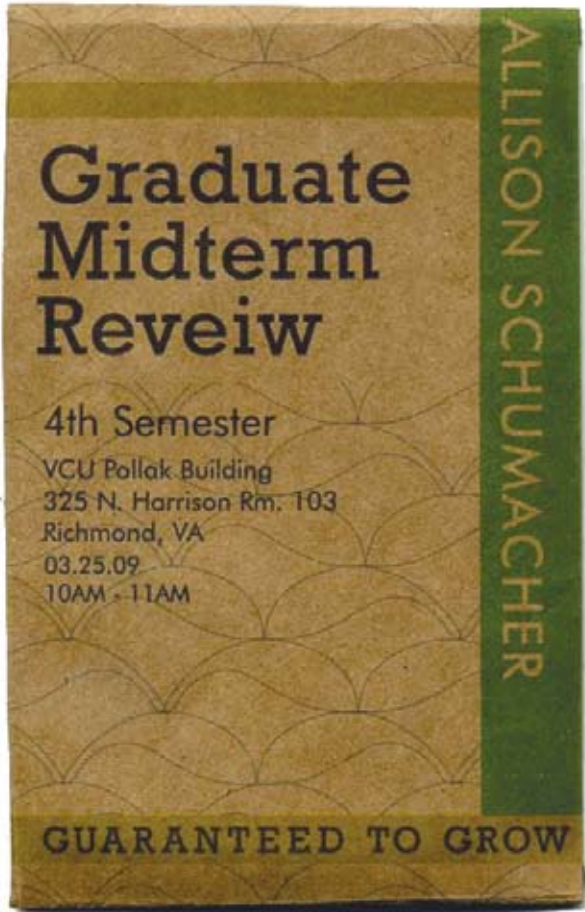




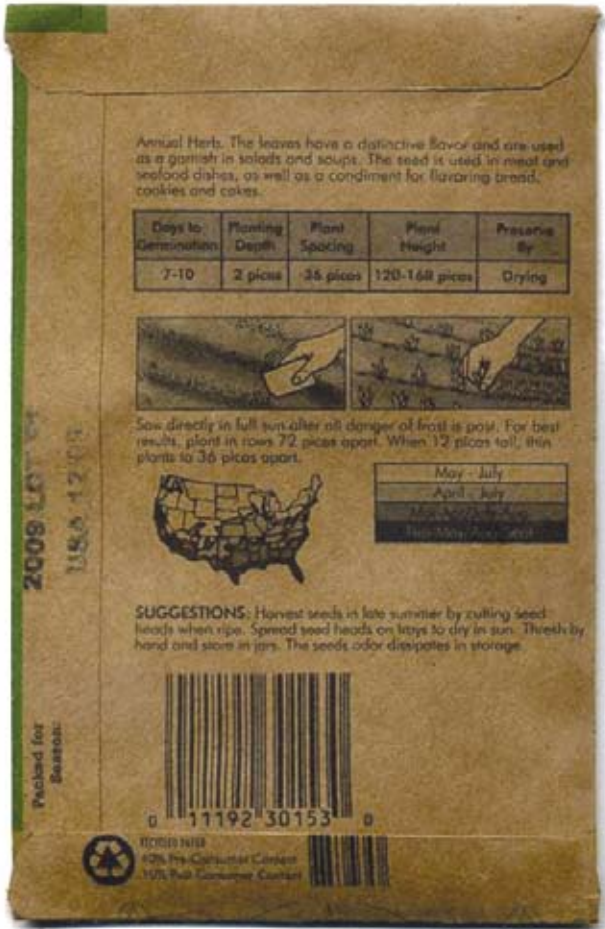


« I visited 72 yard sales to find the perfect photographic images for this book. In each yard or garage, I met new characters, heard stories about children, grand children, memories. Each had objects that no longer served a purpose to their owner beyond the few dollars it might bring to the household.





▲ Each committee member received a seed packet made from recycled grocery bags and an inkjet printer.



GUARANTEED TO GROW

Throughout the journey of my creative project I frequently became frustrated with my work, wanting answers without asking the right questions. I needed to know what this project was going to be. I wanted conclusions, something I could deeply understand, a solution to my seemingly endless problem. None could be found. I had to accept that the process could not be hurried.

When midterm came in spring, 2009, I was up for review by my committee. I handmade seed packets as invitations to my evaluation. Each contained a different seed, and the packet included correct planting instructions. The only information missing from the packets was the names of the plants. My point being that, even though you don't know what it will be, you can let things grow and find out.

“Don’t search for the answers. Which could not be given to you now. Because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way to the answer.”

— *Rainer Maria Rilke*



MEMORY OBJECTS

In order to discover the essence, or authentic nature of a place, it is necessary to experience it first hand, root around, discover its secrets, and take parts of it with you (both emotionally and physically.) The physical collection taken from latitude 42.01 North, longitude -94.81 West not only provides information about the landscape, but has also created a deeper relationship between the place (Schumacher family farm) and myself (the collector.) I grew up in this place, but many times took for granted the amazing environment around me. At the time, it was beyond my capacity to understand how each piece of gravel or cornhusk could evoke undeniable feelings of pain or joy and ignite memories from the deepest confines of the minds that experienced this place.

What appear to be jars full of dirt, metal, and organic materials are actually memory objects. What I mean by memory objects is that each specimen can evoke an emotion or memory when placed in the right hands. If presented to any one of the thirteen children that grew up on the Schumacher family farm, these objects would stimulate discussion and a series of stories related to their original environment or any digression that may follow. However, since these objects relate to a distinct location and to these specific people, when presented to a stranger, they may evoke unrelated stories or nothing at all. Without knowing what the objects are or where they are from, they are simply that—objects. But when detailed information is provided, the collection becomes more than a series of beautiful jars full of dirt, it allows the viewer to imagine his/her own version of this place.

◀ The central jar contains snow collected from the main farmyard in December of 2008. Upon transferring the melted snow from the original opaque vessel to a transparent jar, a seed sprouted and grew a small plant.





◀ Here, the detailed information is separate from the jars, but at the final exhibition the information was presented by applying clear printed labels to each jar stating what the object is and where it was found on the farm place. (See page 52)

COLLECTION: SMALL JARS

- 1 walnut: barn storage room
- 2 climbing tree: front yard
- 3 tractor seat filler: the shop
- 4 tractor seat cover: the shop
- 5 metal shavings: the shop
- 6 rusted hardware: the shop
- 7 wood: grandpa's old shop
- 8 hornet's nest: grandpa's old shop
- 9 paint chips: grandpa's old shop

COLLECTION: STACKED JARS

- 10 paint chips: fuel holding tanks
- 11 snow: east of the shop
- 12 corn husks: barn
- 13 animal bedding: barn
- 14 gravel: farm yard near light post
- 15 corn: west field
- 16 worktable scraps: grandpa's old shop
- 17 soil: west field
- 18 mud: west field

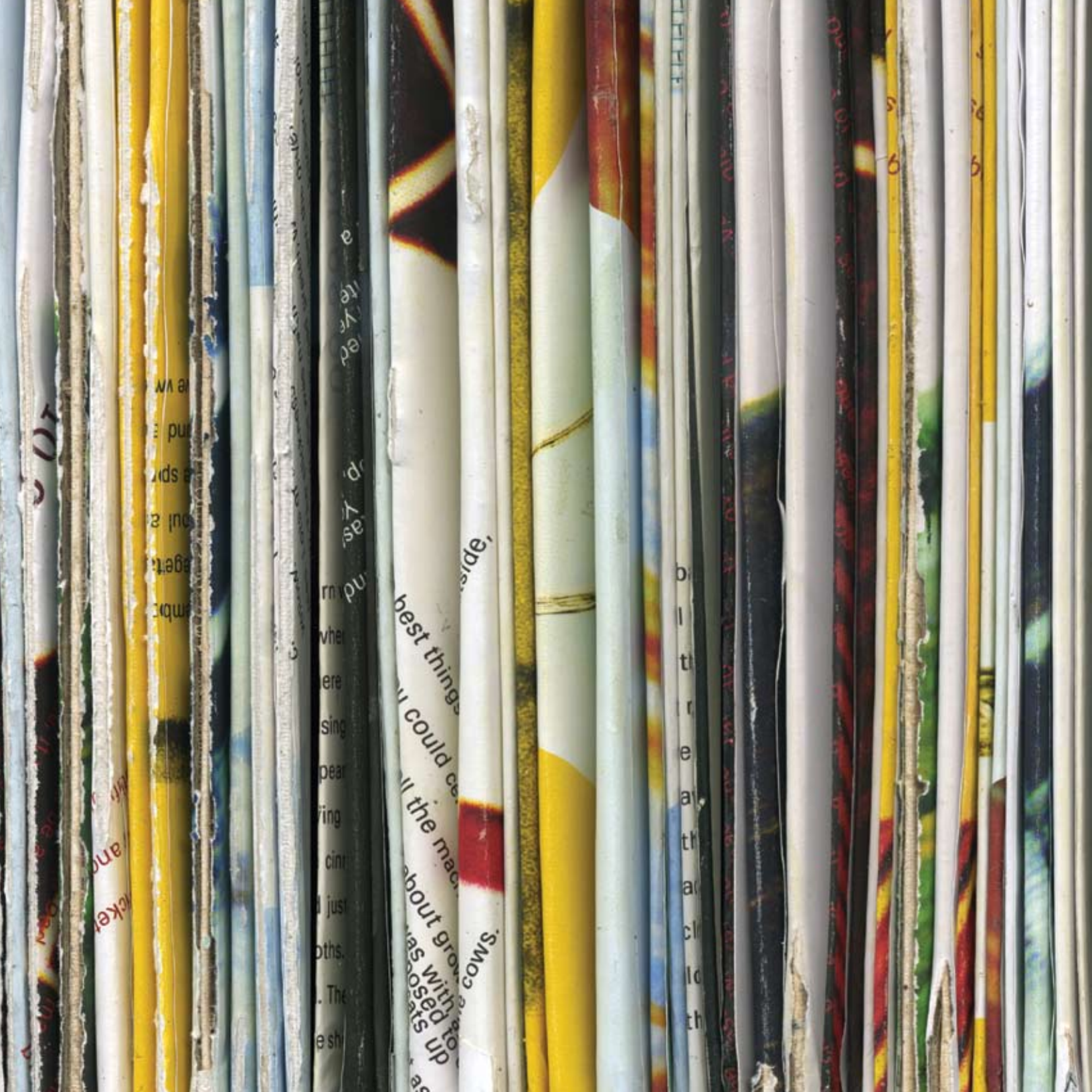
SCHUMACHER FAMILY FARM

This book is a collection of memories from one small farm in west-central Iowa: latitude 42.01 North, longitude -94.81 West. I initiated my research by email, asking my aunts and uncles questions about their environment and lives growing up in this place. The memories of relatives I barely knew came streaming to me with surprising enthusiasm, and brought back nostalgia for the farm on which I too, grew up. It was interesting to find that much of what these thirteen siblings experienced, in terms of sensory perception, have not changed for at least the last 70 years. I know what my grandfather's machine shed smells like or the pigs in the barn, or the way the dust shoots up into the air and hangs like fog behind a truck moving down a gravel road. Similarities between my relatives' memories and my own left me with the great challenge of depicting other people's memories through my eyes.

When the time came to organize the pile of information I had collected, I became frustrated by the complexity of my problem. The information fanned out, connecting one memory to many others. At first, it seemed that the correct format would be a website, but I was concerned with making my family's memories public and what effects would come from that exposure. Also, at the time these events occurred almost everything on the farm (with exception of the new combines) was very hands-on and generally low-tech. While a website seemed appropriate for the organization of non-linear information, it was not appropriate for the quality of this journey. The tactile experience of holding a book and flipping through the pages was a better fit. But books are normally designed in a linear progression of information and this web of memories could not easily fit into that format. I thought I had found the right form as the information evolved into a triangular book, but it remained unorganized and the structure was far too complex. Ultimately, a more sculptural approach was needed and I found it in an artist's book/rotogon. (See page 30)



◀ The first memory book design demonstrated significant weaknesses. The construction and organization of information seemed disconnected from the concept and only included a fraction of the information collected.

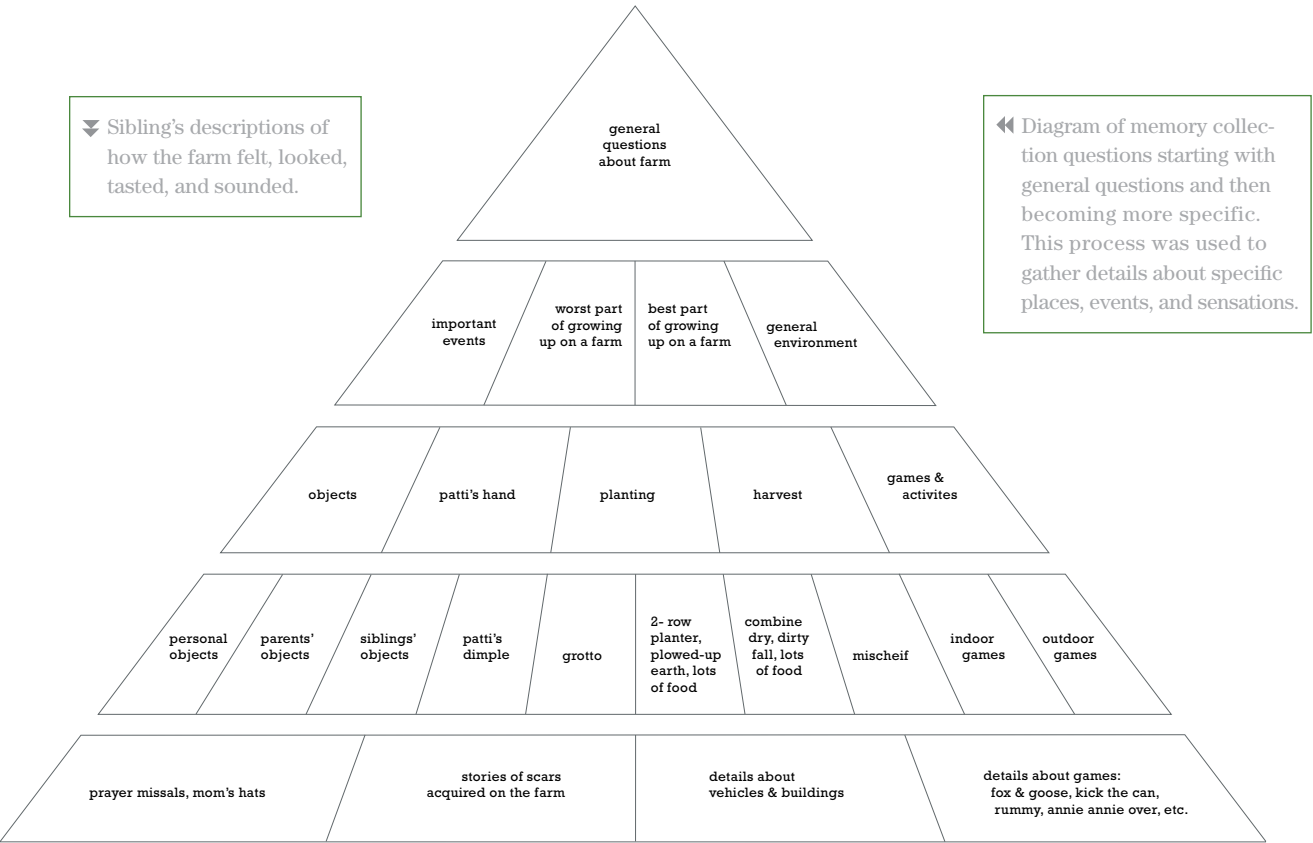
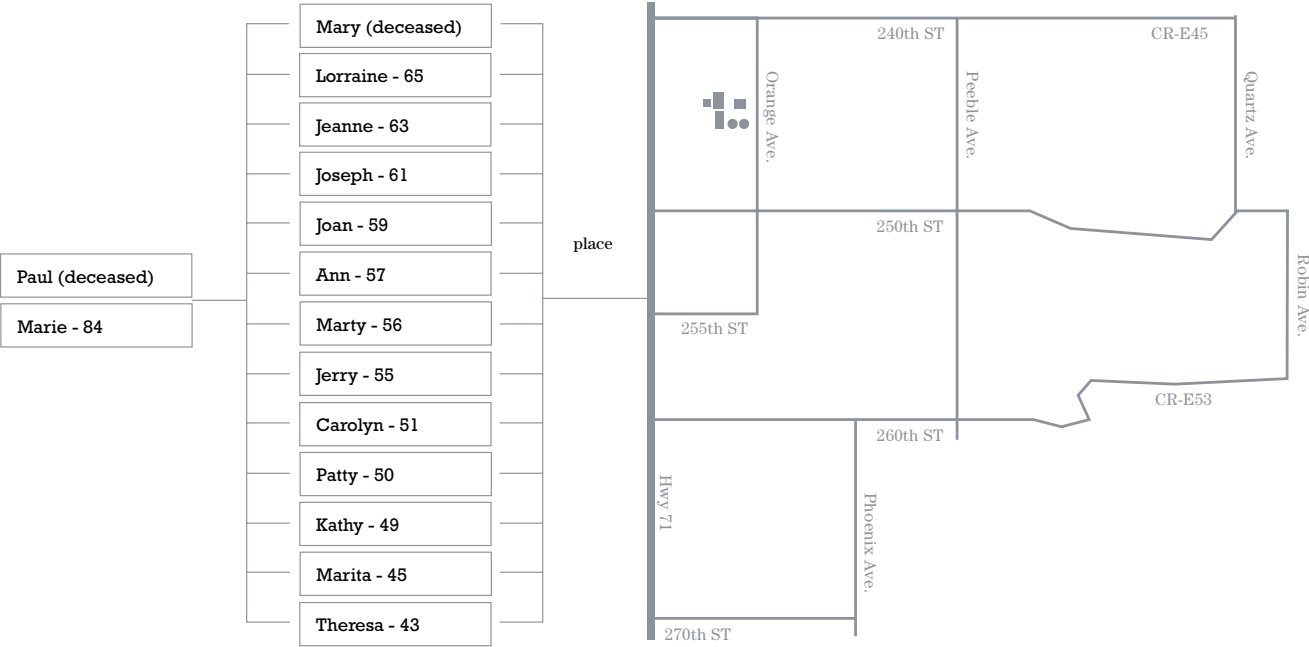


CREATIVE PROJECT
MEMORY BOOK RESEARCH

An invitation was sent to the twelve living siblings. Some were unable to participate, but their memories can be incorporated at a later date. First, I asked general questions about the environment narrowing the memories down to events that occurred on the farm between 1942 & 1983. I asked each person to describe the best and worst parts of growing up on a farm, any memories of a significant event and the sensory experience of the environment.

Responses to the general questions led to more specific memories, which led to more questions. Answers were similar, but no two siblings told the story the same way. For example, one significant event that most remembered was when my aunt Patti got her hand lodged in the gears of the cement mixer. Each child remembers a different person stopping the mixer and the person attributed with saving Patti's hand doesn't even remember being there. Examples like these raise questions about how we can consider authenticity in memory: Can memories be authentic, especially in moments of contradiction with others' memories? Are memories only authentic to an individual? Do memories change the actual events or distort reality?

This graphic illustrates the farm place at latitude 42.00328 North, longitude -94.812538 West and provides basic information about the people involved with the project.



Sibling's descriptions of how the farm felt, looked, tasted, and sounded.

Diagram of memory collection questions starting with general questions and then becoming more specific. This process was used to gather details about specific places, events, and sensations.

TEXTURES

feather beads
hay
pea gravel
groves of trees
freshly turned earth
fuzzy chicks
crisp, fresh corn
slop
water
bunny fur
green grass
fresh wet spring
dry dirty fall

TASTES

yellow apples
fresh baked bread
butter
homemade jelly
french toast
easter candy
mulberries
hot sweet rice
stew
canned asparagus
fresh sweet corn

SMELLS

fresh cut grass
shop grease
wash gas
chickens
diesel fuel
molten metal
burning flux
chamomile tea
old engine oil
big pigs (sows and boars)
little pigs
fresh prairie pizzas
skunk
civet cat
fresh tar
fish

coal fire stove
hulled corn
lilacs and peonies
rain storms
freshly turned earth
clean laundry
hay

SOUNDS

chickens
pigs
cows
grain dryer
cutting torch
whipper mower
water
radio
rifle
grain elevator
tractors
potato planter
welder
cement mixer
crickets
gravel equipment

CREATIVE PROJECT

ROTOGON



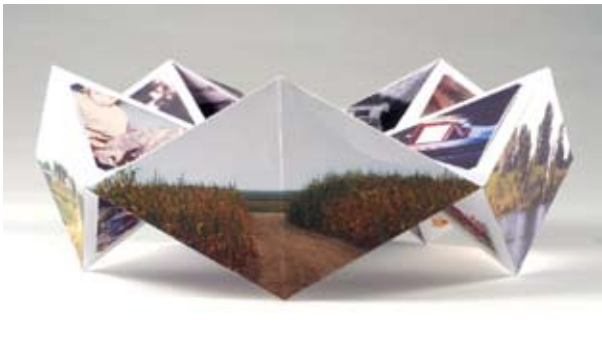
ESTABLISHED 1892

Within my visual research I sought out repeating shapes within the photos my family sent to me and found that the triangle is the most recognizable shape on a farm. The steeple of the barn, the lats in the hayloft, the tops of the silos, perspective of rows in the field, and the tractor, which is a triangle shape from all angles.

My first attempt at a triangular book failed, but I kept searching for the right form. Upon visiting Special Collections at Virginia Commonwealth University's Cabell Library, I came across a small, paper construction that was part of an artist's book. The paper sculpture was made out of triangles, and rotated from the center out when a small amount of pressure was applied. Gay Acompañado, an Archival Assistant for the Arts in the Special Collections department referred to it as a 'rotagon.' Its hypnotizing movements forced me to study it until I knew how it was made. At that moment I knew I had found the perfect form for my memory book.



▼ The defined triangles are removable cards. The back of each card contains the written memories that relate to the image on the front. The cards are removable so that they can be rearranged to create different associations, much like the nature of memory itself.



HAND/DIGITAL EXPERIMENTS

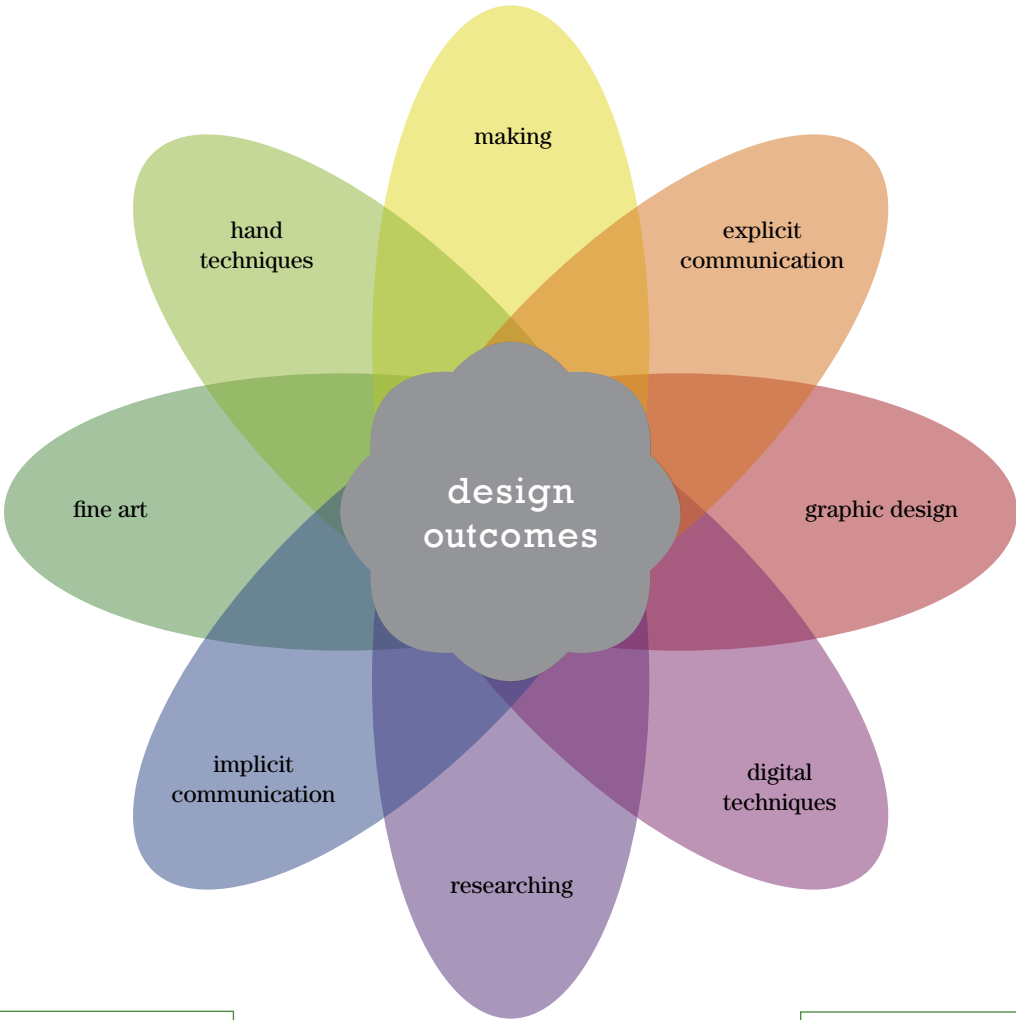
In order to clearly speak about craft, materials, and process, I had to experience them in action. Constraints were set to ensure that results could be evaluated throughout the project. I set general constraints: a small, manageable working surface of five by seven inches on a sturdy, cost effective chip-board backing; the subject matter needed to be familiar, simple, and stay relatively consistent.

During the research for the farm book project I discovered that the triangle was the most common shape found on a farm. The tractor is a triangle shape from all angles. Even the indexes of a tractor are triangles: from the tire tracks to the perspective of rows in the field to the slow vehicle sign on the back. Beyond its triangular shape and the more obvious connection as a farm implement, the tractor is the best farm symbol to use for this project for another reason: The tractor places emphasis on a relationship between man and machine, and implies a complex process and/or craft.

I began this project by making a list of hand and digital techniques that I could experiment with. The morphology made me aware of my options so that I could combine techniques in ways I never had. When I started making tractor studies, I concentrated on variations in material, style, and technique. Each idea presented room for variation, which I used until it was exhausted or I became bored.

»Some techniques involve both digital and analog methods, or may be executed using either.

HAND TECHNIQUES	EITHER/MIX	DIGITAL TECHNIQUES
monotype	photocopy transfer	photograph
collagraph	acrylic transfer	2D scan
stamp	stencil	3D scan
distress/burn	emboss	motion scan
repurpose	draw/paint	filter
bleach/dye	expose	refine
punch/cut	collage	over-print
stitch/weave	distort	
ink/water	copy/fax	
sculpt		



» As I constructed the tractor studies, I evaluated the decisions I was balancing in my process.

« The elements of this diagram are not meant to be read as polar opposites, but simply equal, but different, elements in my process

CREATIVE PROJECT

TRACTOR STUDIES

DRAW/PAINT

- 1 marker drawing: aerial view of tractor
newsprint & chipboard background
- 2 Adobe Illustrator drawing,
printed & mounted
- 3 brown paper collage & acrylic paint
- 5 tractor tire treads: acrylic paint,
gesso, shoe polish & sandpaper
- 7 color pencil drawing

FOUND OBJECT COLLAGE

- 4 abstract tractor collage in the
style of Synthetic Cubism

MOTION SCAN

- 6 toy tractor rolled over scanner bed,
modified in Adobe Photoshop,
printed & mounted

TRACE

- 8 drawing from #7 traced
in Adobe Illustrator,
printed & mounted

MIX

- 9 distressed background,
layered photocopy transfer
under watercolor pencil

RUST/TRANSFER

- 10 rusted paper with iron & vinegar
chemical reaction, layered with
photocopy transfer

SEW

- 11 simplified embroidered tractor
on fabric paper

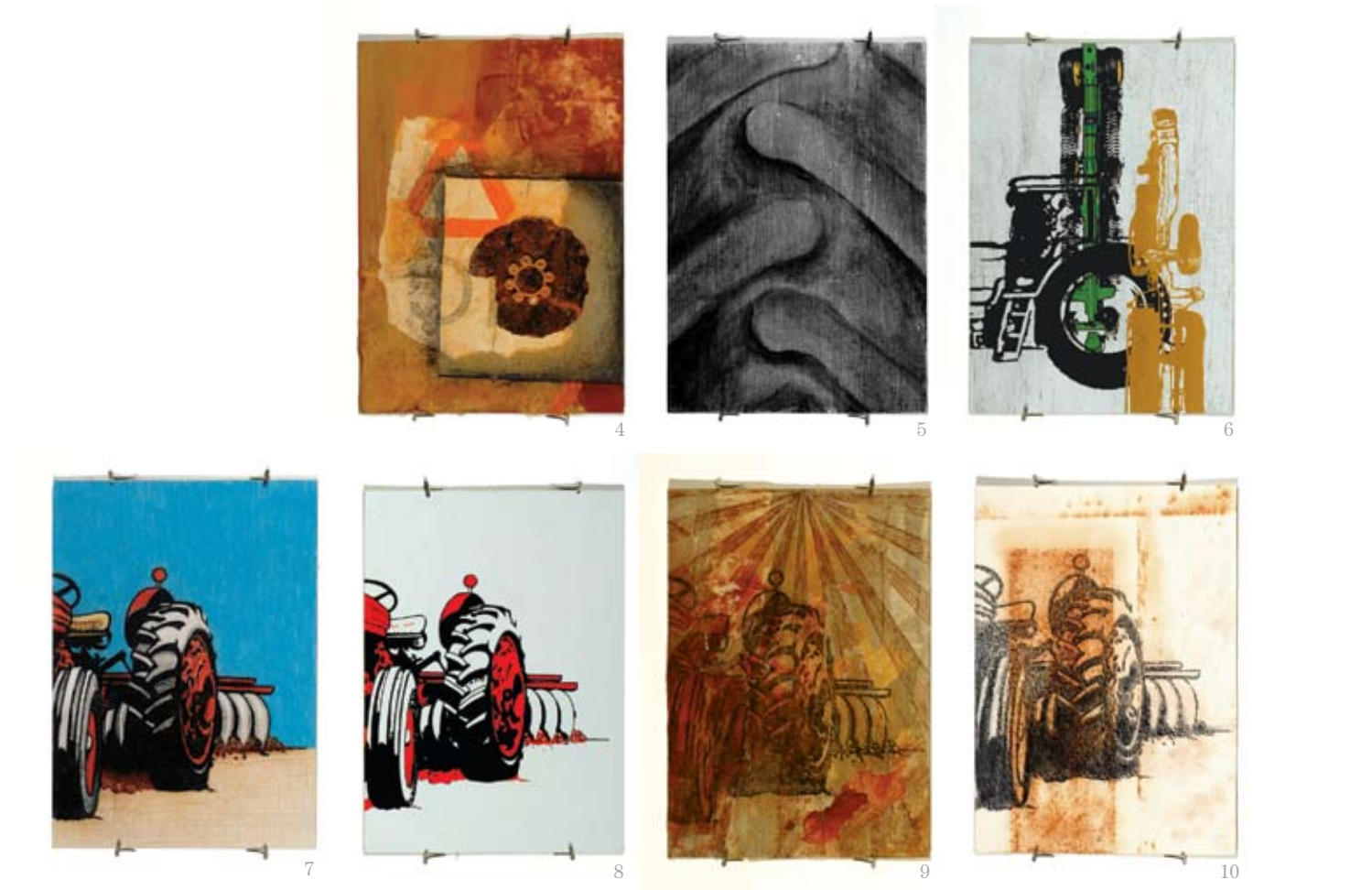
EMBOSS

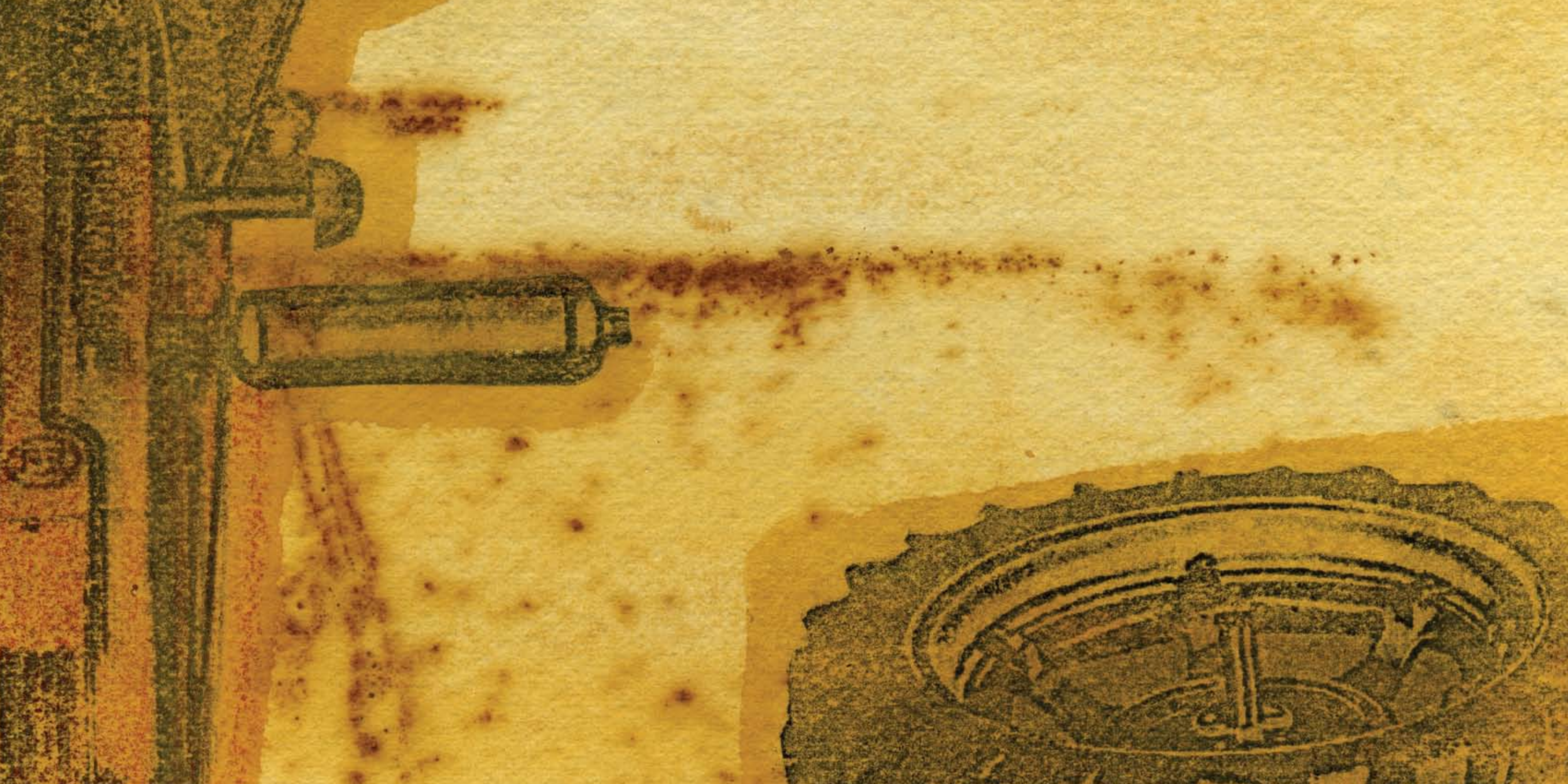
- 12 raised tractor embossment on
fine art paper
- 14 paper collage layered with gold,
heat-embossed tractor

SUN PRINT

- 13 stencil on construction paper left
in direct sunlight for three hours

►► At first, the tractors were made to serve as a teaching aid, demonstrating the use of many materials and styles to solve one problem. The goal was to teach the value of experimentation. I soon discovered that the studies would be more valuable if they had a concept or purpose beyond simply communicating ‘tractor.’







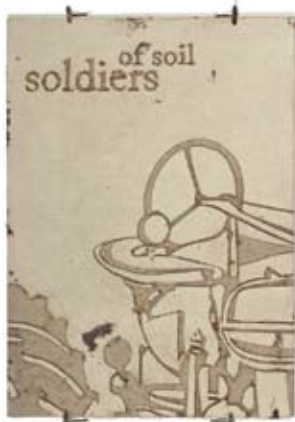
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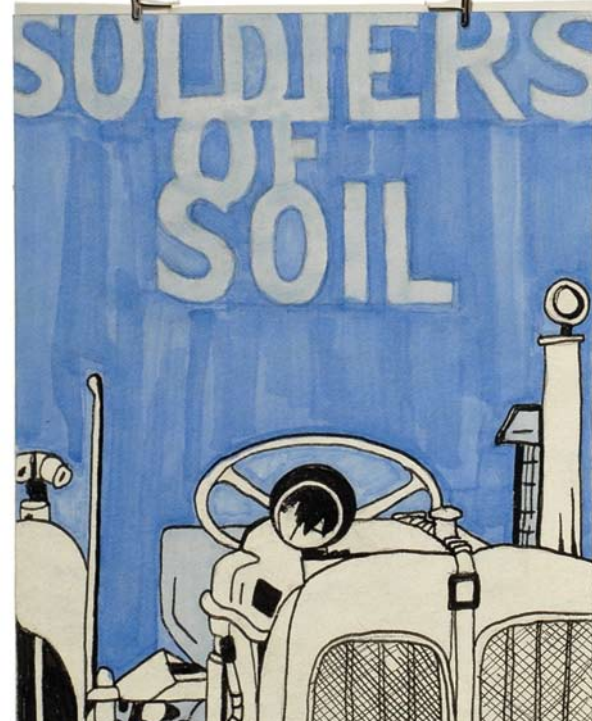
5

SOLDIERS OF SOIL

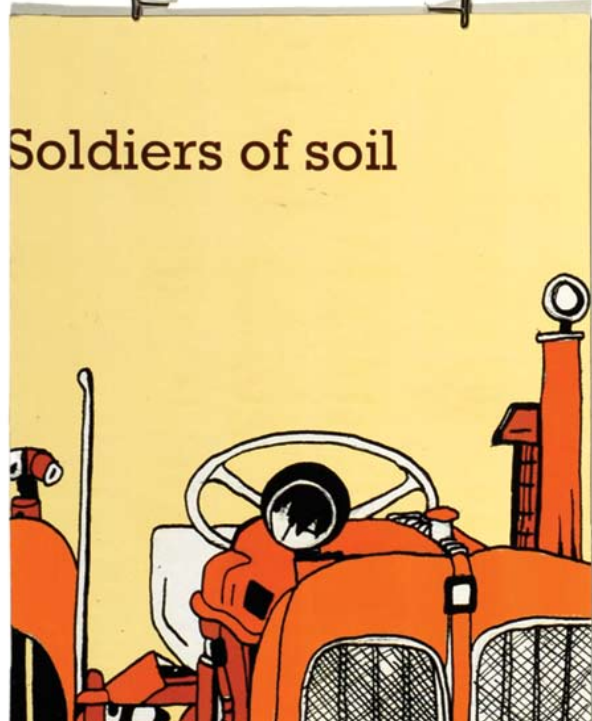
Up until this point text had been the missing element from the tractor studies. I questioned what the appropriate text would be. It needed to communicate dedication to the land, hard work, and a connection between man and machine. The phrase 'soldiers of soil' fulfilled those requirements.

After incorporating text into my designs, I noticed that in every study the tractor seat was empty. Personally, this represents the loss of my grandfather. In a wider scope, it emphasizes the loss of the family farmer. *Big Agra* Corporations (or *Big Agri-Biz*) such as, *Cargill*, *ADM*, and *ConAgra* have now purchased much of the Midwestern farmland that had been privately owned for over a century.

6



10



COLLAGRAPH

- 1 tractor study collage
- 2 collage sealed with gesso (collagraph plate)
- 3 collagraph relief rolled & printed on fine art paper

RELIEF

- 4 text & image were carved from chipboard & sealed with acrylic medium
- 5 plate relief rolled & letter-pressed on fine art paper

ILLUSTRATION

- 6 pen and marker illustration cropped in on the empty tractor seat

SCULPT

- 7 tractor sculpted by punching holes into aluminum flashing, mounted on chipboard

PAINT

- 8 chip board backing removed from aluminum flashing & rubbed ink into the holes

TRANSFER

- 9 watered down ink is blown through holes onto fine art paper, photocopy transfer layered on top

REFINE

- 10 scanned illustration from #6, refined in Adobe Illustrator, printed & mounted.



7

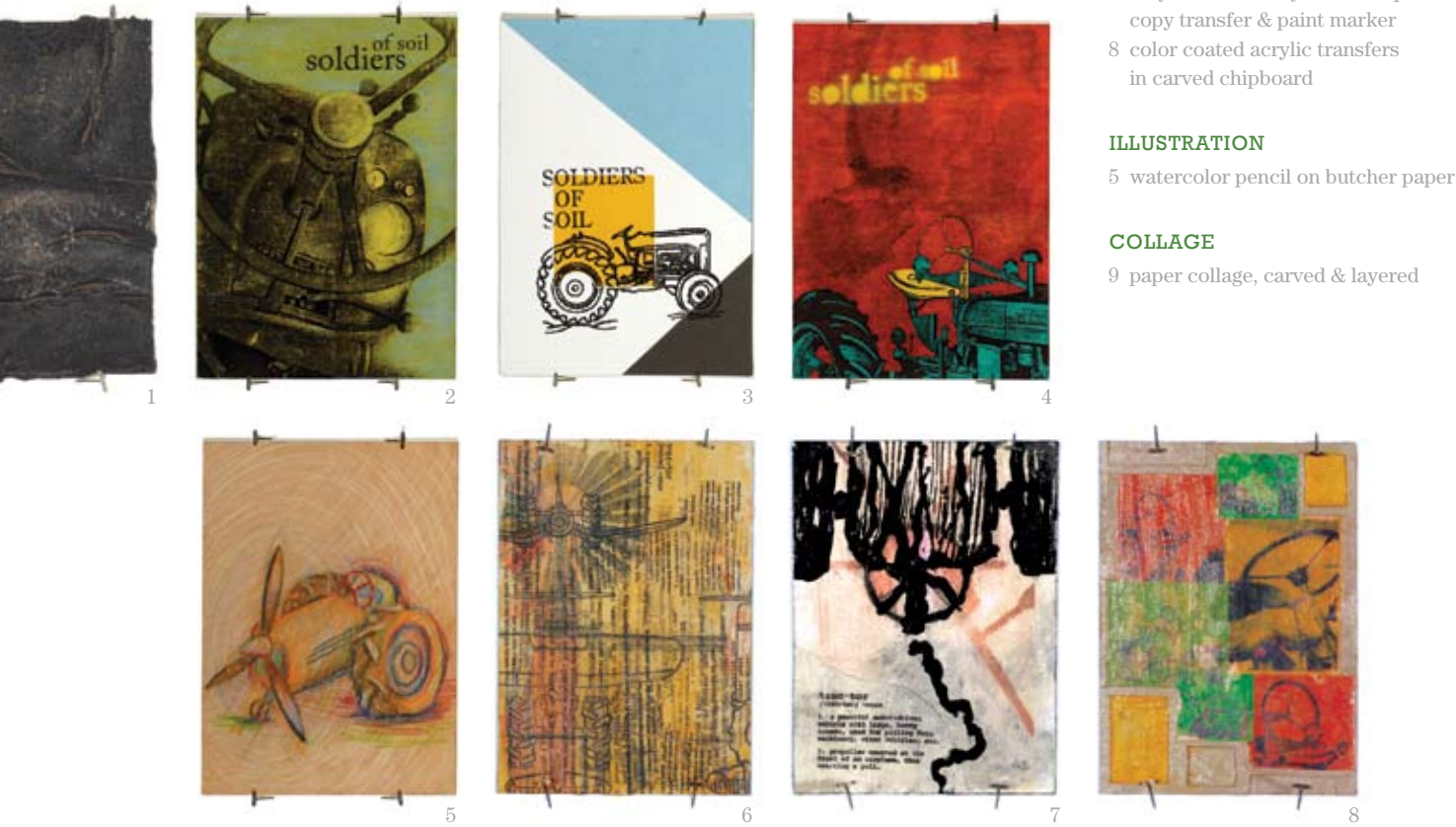


8



9

After focusing on the empty tractor seat, I researched the etymology of the word ‘tractor’. Besides being a farm implement, a tractor can also refer to the propeller/motor combination that propels an airplane forward. This curious definition has a personal relationship to the pilots in the Schumacher family (my grandfather being one of them.) I combined the two kinds of tractors, hoping to find something deeper, but the idea fell flat. However, it allowed me to visualize the Midwestern landscape as it would be seen from the window of an airplane. The bird’s eye view led me to imagine a tractor as something that could be seen from a great distance, and what better symbol than the triangular, reflective ‘slow moving vehicle’ sign from the rear of a tractor.



SCULPT

- 1 molded wet fine art paper into tire tread, painted & distressed

TRANSFER

- 2 digitally refined image, photocopy transfer on paper & stained
- 3 modernist paper collage, layered with a photocopy transfer
- 4 photocopy transfer, distressed & spray painted
- 6 acrylic transfers layered with a photocopy transfer
- 7 acrylic transfer layered with photocopy transfer & paint marker
- 8 color coated acrylic transfers in carved chipboard

ILLUSTRATION

- 5 watercolor pencil on butcher paper

COLLAGE

- 9 paper collage, carved & layered



« The tractors are housed in a handmade box created in a workshop with Annelies Grimbergen.¹ The inside of the box top contains a pattern, which resembles the aerial view of the Midwestern landscape, and the outside is embossed with the shape of the ‘slow moving vehicle sign.’



¹ Annelies Grimbergen is a master of bookbinding and custom portfolio and presentation boxes. She has held numerous workshops in schools throughout Holland and the United States.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

After investigating aerial perspective, I explored the exact location of the farm place that inspired this subject matter. I identified the farm’s latitude and longitude, but the studies did not communicate my personal relationship to this place or why it was being examined. Disappointed but resilient, I returned to a concept concerning corporate buyouts of family farms. This was a larger issue and was worth the effort to investigate its potential.

ConAgra, *Cargill*, and *ADM* are *Big Agra* companies that have a strong hold on the agriculture system in the United States. They genetically engineer crops to produce high-yields and keep grain prices low. They are then awarded large dividends from the government in the form of farm subsidies.² In order to keep the smaller farms, like the Schumacher farm, alive, farmers have to choose between selling their land or continuing to buy the high-yield seeds produced by these companies.

The corn engineered by *Big Agra* companies cannot be consumed straight out of the field, but must go through chemical processing in order to become edible.³ Much of the corn grown in the United States is turned into high fructose corn syrup (HFCS). HFCS has replaced sugar as the sweetener in many beverages and foods such as breads, cereals, breakfast bars, lunchmeats, yogurts, soups and condiments. On average, Americans consume about 12 teaspoons per day of HFCS, but teens and other high consumers can take in 80 percent more HFCS than average.⁴

Many of these corporations also partner in making petroleum or nitrogen-based pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers that contribute to the contamination of our food. According to *Environmental Health*, researchers found significant levels of mercury in nine of twenty samples of commercial high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) in 2008. In early 2009, the *Washington Post* reported, “In the second study, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP), a non-profit watchdog group, found that nearly one in three of 55 brand-name foods contained mercury. The chemical was found most commonly in HFCS-containing dairy products, dressings and condiments.”⁵ This newfound knowledge inspired my next studies.

COLLAGE

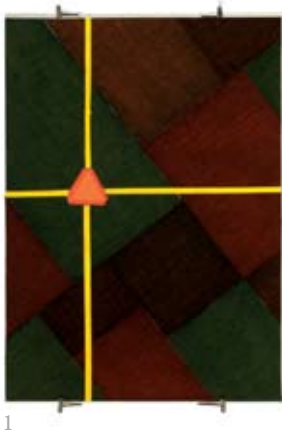
- 1 collaged excess fabric paper from tractor vessel
- 5 digital collage in Photoshop, printed & mounted
- 6 ink jet print on carved chipboard

DRAW

- 2 colored pencil type and image

TRANSFER

- 3 layered acrylic transfers
- 4 acrylic transfer with layered photocopy transfer



To clearly address my concerns about the damage done by *Big Agra*, I first had to find the visual language of the family farm. What values speak clearly of rural America? What object could authentically represent the region I grew up in? I reminisced about my childhood, trying to recall what was comforting to me, secure, and one-of-a-kind. My grandmothers came to mind, with their hand-made clothes, aprons, pillowcases and quilts. Quilts can easily carry information, even a subject this as serious as the over-influence of big agriculture. The relationship is all the better due to the irony between its form and the content I’ve just discussed.

Recalling the calico fabric my grandmother quilted, I designed similar patterns out of *Big Agra* logos. The patterns were then printed and cut to match the patches of land near the Schumacher farm. They were glued onto a five by seven inch piece of chipboard and tinted with watercolor pencils. Stitching was then drawn along the seams for added affect.



▲ Illustration of the ConAgra logo gobbling up plots of land like Pac Man.

² Howard, Phil. “Consolidation in Food and Agriculture: Implications for Farmers & Consumers.” *The Natural Farmer* 17 (2006): 11-12.
³ *King Corn: You Are What You Eat*. Dir. Arron Wolf, Curt Ellis and Ian Cheney. Mosaic Films Incorporated, 2006.
⁴ Judkis, Maura. “Mercury Found in High Fructose Corn Syrup” *U.S. News & World Report* (2009), 1, <http://www.usnews.com/blogs/fresh-greens/2009/01/28/mercury-found-in-high-fructose-corn-syrup.html>. (accessed Febuary 15, 2009).
⁵ “Study Finds High-Fructose Corn Syrup Contains Mercury” *Washington Post Online* (2009), 1, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/26/AR2009012601831.html?referrer=emailarticle>. (accessed Febuary 15, 2009).

WRAPPED IN COMMUNICATION

As a quick experiment, the quilt tractor study communicated so effectively that I was compelled to make it the main project in my demonstrating my investigation of authenticity. But its simulated fabric and stitching were not the most provocative form to match the content. I had to access the communication that comes with an actual, fabric quilt. Quilts usually represent warmth, comfort, security, home, etc. but the design I had in mind would only appear that way from a distance. The piece I was going to make was not a quilt in the truest sense but an ironic message in direct contrast with everything a quilt represents. Would you want to wrap yourself in signifiers of Big Agra, representing power abuse and unethical business standards?

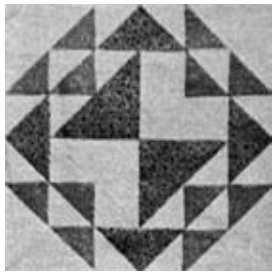
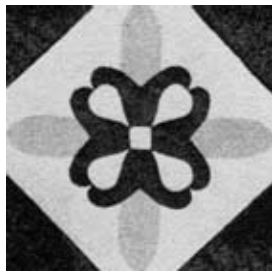
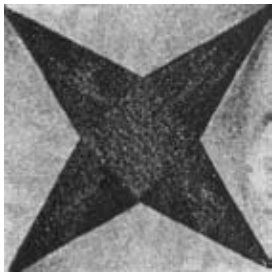
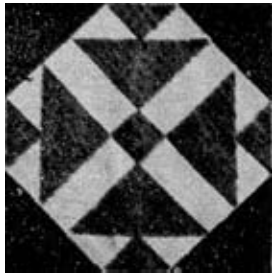
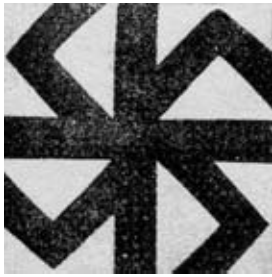
Although my purpose for creating this piece was less about content and more about the creative process, and a discussion on authenticity and reproduction, the content could not be discounted. Without a powerful emotionally moving message, I would be less successful in evaluating the work's effectiveness with little reaction and feedback from my audience. How do visual communicators know they have been successful if they can't determine how their idea communicates to an audience? What is clear to the designer may not be clear to the viewer. The process exalts my message; each detail in the quilt's complex structure makes the work more ironic. The more beautiful I make it, the more ugly its message. When a fellow VCU graduate student, Meena Khalili, first saw the quilt from a distance, she said, "Oh how beautiful!," then upon getting close enough to read the logos, her response changed to "Shit."

“Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Design is knowing which ones to keep”

— *Scott Adams*

► 174 safety pins used to baste the layers of fabric together while stitching the quilt pattern.





FINDING FORM

When the quilt design was quickly set into motion, I experienced a sense of clarity and the fear of defining authenticity started to recede. Originally, formed the quilt pattern by mapping out the patches of land surrounding the Schumacher farm. But upon further evaluation, I found that it was more important for the piece to communicate as a quilt, not as a map. I did some research into traditional American quilts. I came across a book, *The Romance of the Patchwork*, and checked the index for any listings that related to ‘farm.’ There were several: *Farmer’s Puzzle*, *Farmer’s Wife*, *Iowa Star*, *Hen and Chicks*, *Golden Corn*, and *Corn and Beans*.

Farmer’s Puzzle (top) had a curious description: “a favorite in the eighteenth century—the design is very similar to the ‘Swastika.’”¹ This book was published in 1935, predating World War II and Nazi Germany. The Swastika had not yet become the symbol for a political party of genocidal madmen and surely would have been omitted if the book had been published just a few years later.

Hen and Chicks (next down) has a good balance of positive and negative space, but my concept is not about livestock, it is about the land.

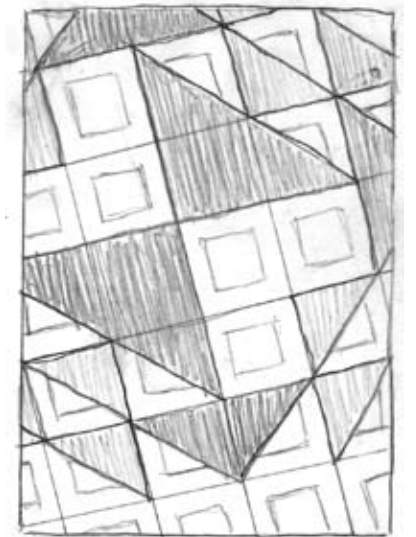
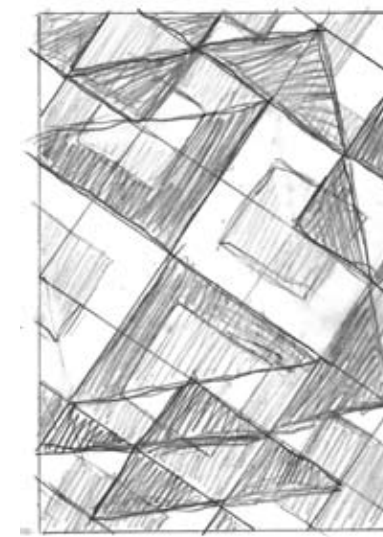
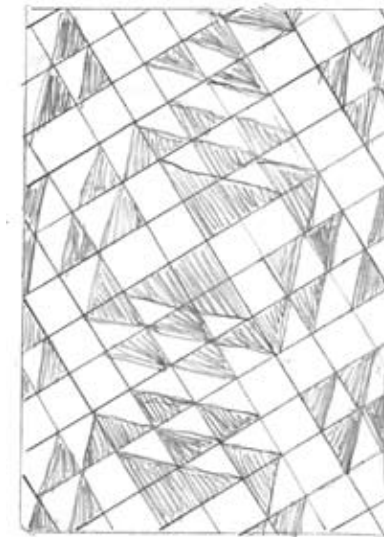
The third pattern is *Iowa Star*, and has a similar conceptual problem. This project may have started with my relationship to Iowa, but the quilt carries a message larger than one state.

The fourth, more organic, pattern is *Golden Corn*. Although a conceptual problem does not present itself in this case, this pattern could not be chosen due to its complexities. This is my first quilt and I need to be realistic about my skill level.

Corn and Beans (last) is conceptually the strongest of the group as it relates to crops in question. Also, this pattern was quilted for a bed in the first “Farm Demonstration Home,” in Missouri, which attests to its popularity and strength as a symbol for the family farm. The strong geometric lines make this pattern relatively simple to produce, but will provide a good level of challenge as I learn this new craft.

Corn and Beans is a good pattern to start with, but I am doing more than sewing a quilt, I am designing one. I went back to my research and sketching to find how quilts are finished and displayed, so I would know how big I should make it and how much fabric I would need for all the components. Traditionally, quilts share the same dimensions as most bed comforters and duvets. I choose to work with the smaller size of a crib quilt (approx. 36 x 48 inches) to make this a realistic endeavor and accommodate the gallery space. Most quilts also have a border sewn on to finish the edges, but a border imprisoned my designs. I would have to finish the outside hem in a way that allowed the planes of the landscape to continue off the edge.

Traditionally, quilts are based on a perpendicular grid of squares, which resembles the aerial perspective tractor studies I had worked on earlier. When I completed those studies, I felt the aerial perspective was easier to understand when shifted diagonally. Straight horizontal and vertical lines appeared to be more like a chessboard than Midwestern farmland. To further the concept in terms of the grid’s relationship to the land, the *Corn and Beans* pattern needed to segment the underlying square pattern to illustrate how farmland is sold off in chunks when a farmer does not see a high enough yield to pay his property taxes. I enlarged the *Corn and Beans* design to cover a large portion of the underlying square pattern, which gave it an appropriate dominating presence. Many of these decisions may not be perceived by the audience but it is important that each choice I make be informed by the content of the message to be truly authentic graphic design.



► Cutting fabric on a curve is a difficult task, but has been made easier by rotary cutting blades.

¹ Hall, Carrie A., and Rose G. Kretsinger. *The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt*. New York, NY: Bonanza Books, 1935.

CREATIVE PROJECT

QUILT DESIGN

Based on the previously mentioned decisions, I designed dozens of quilt variations with my digital calico patterns. Since the logos originated as digital files, I decided that the patterns made from them should remain digital as well to be considered authentic. Within a couple of days, I had the final design of my concept and now it was time to translate it into fabric.

I contacted the VCU Fashion department about printing some custom fabric. Associate Professor, Kristin Caskey, worked with me to print my calico patterns onto a Silk Noil fabric, which had the worn texture I know so well from my grandmother's quilts.

While I like elements of these other patterns, they are all too busy and the design farthest to the right has what appears to be an evil duck face emerging from the pattern.

The colors were inspired by spot colors used in old farm journals dating from approximately 1930 to 1960.

I created pattern within pattern, so that when two pieces of the same fabric are butted next to each other, there is no worry on how they will line up.



CRAFTING THE NEW

Fabric in hand, I had some questions about this unfamiliar craft, and I paid a visit to a specialty shop, Quilting Adventures, in Richmond, Virginia. I purchase some 'how-to' books and returned to the store, on more than one occasion, to inquire about thread, batting, needles, thimbles, and other tools needed for quilting.



Eager and well equipped, I returned home to begin cutting and piecing together portions of the quilt top. I chose to use a sewing machine for the patching and piecing, not only to ensure the structural integrity of the seams, but to also minimize time spent on this tedious process. After forty-two hours of sewing and ironing down the hems, I was ready to cut the batting and backing to size and commence basting.

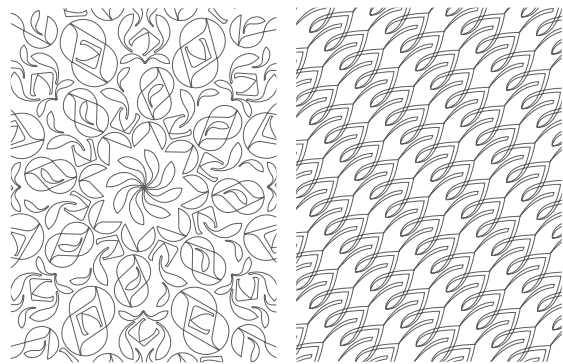
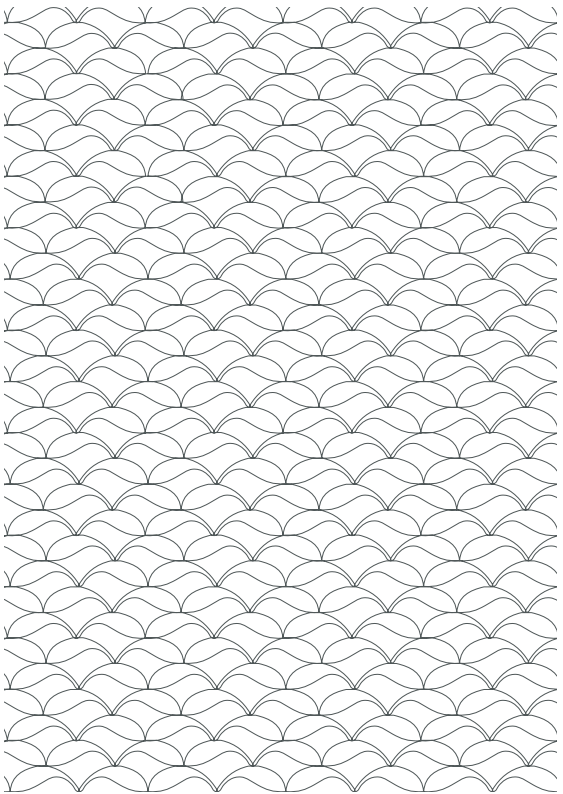
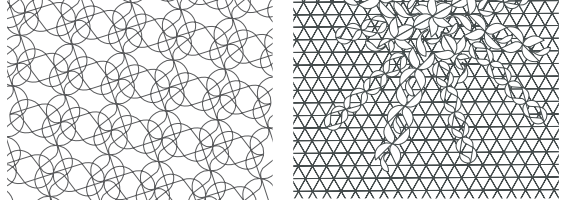


▲ Basting is a term used to describe a means of temporarily securing the three layers of a quilt together while stitching. This is usually done with safety pins or thread.

I was surprised to find that up until this point, technically I had not yet quilted anything. Quilting is the process of actually stitching together the patchwork top, batting and backing in a specified pattern. But what pattern would be appropriate for my quilt? Although it would be subtle, it is none-the-less another layer of information that needed to be taken into consideration. I decided to utilize the shapes already included in the *Big Agra* logos. Each logo contained some kind of plant symbol. In Adobe Illustrator, I made twenty variations of tileable patterns. I had to envision how each might look on the quilt, so I printed out a scaled version of the quilt and printed the patterns on transparency paper to use as an overlay.

After some deliberation, I chose a simple, beautiful and easily repeatable stitching pattern, constructed from the leaf on the *Cargill* logo (see center image). But how do I apply it to the fabric? Most transfer products I saw on the shelf at *Quilting Adventures* could be removed by washing the finished quilt, but my digitally printed logos could not come near water. I asked an employee, and she led me to a powder that would disappear when a hot iron was applied. With that problem solved, I printed one tile of the stitch pattern on cardstock and punched holes along the outline of the pattern. With a pounce, the powder was pushed through the holes onto the fabric.

►► The plant symbols in the other logos were too complex and did not pattern as easily. I needed an even stitching pattern to hold the quilt together without binding.





IDENTIFYING AUTHENTICITY

After seventy-six hours of quilting along the dotted formations, the quilt was finished and I could step back to analyze it. Ultimately, this project was an inquiry into semiotics and process. Using other methods or processes would have changed how the quilt communicated. With each step, I had to decide what was the best fit for the communication of the concept and form. I had found authenticity through my process of making the quilt, but how could I investigate it further?

To better understand semiotics, I had been reading John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* and Walter Benjamin’s *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Now that the quilt was finished, I had time to process these ideas and decided to search for varying degrees of authenticity in reproduction. Using the quilt image as a constant, I could compare the same image represented through different media: digital quilt design, the quilt itself, a photograph of the quilt and the digital reproduction of that photograph.

When it came time to document the quilt, I ran into some trouble. In order to make a fair comparison to the quilt, I needed to print a poster of the quilt the same size as the original. I tried photographing with a high-resolution digital camera, but capturing the whole quilt in one shot, positioned me too far away, and the detail was lost. I tried enlarging a scan of a high-resolution inkjet print of the photograph, but the logo text was completely blown out. Next, I scanned the actual quilt in sections and attempted to tile them together in Adobe Photoshop, but fabric stretches and moves making it impossible to align the pieces. I returned to photography. My thought was that if I hung the quilt on the wall and did not move it, I could shoot the quilt in sections and tile it in Photoshop. But no matter how careful I was about camera placement, this idea failed as well. So what could these failures tell me about reproduction?

Reproductions are traditionally scaled versions of an original to be placed in a book, poster, or other format that cannot accommodate the work at full scale. How does this affect the original? How does our experience of an original work differ from a reproduced image? The physical material of an original work reveals something about its maker. The details and imperfections provide a kind of narrative about its creation. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger suggests that when viewing an original, these details have “the effect of closing the distance in time between the creation of the work and one’s own act of looking at it.”¹ He is describing an experience one can only have in the presence of an original and the reason we desire to see certain pieces in person. The original work affects us and we in turn have an effect on the work. Our sensations characterize the piece as having *Experiential Authenticity*: authenticity found in the synaesthetic experience of a creative artifact or performance.

The image comparison presented here by the quilt reproduction and the quilted swatch of fabric is an inadequate illustration of the ideas of *Experiential Authenticity*, but presents the basic idea within the limited format of this document. These limitations bring up another issue. When an image is reproduced, it no longer exists in only one place and time. It can be used for limitless purposes that the original could not. John Berger writes, “When the camera reproduces a painting, it destroys the uniqueness of an image. As a result its meaning changes. Or, more exactly its meaning multiplies and fragments into many other meanings.”

Does fragmentation mean that a reproduced image cannot be authentic? No. When an image is appropriated for another use, its purpose changes and the new form can become authentic to that purpose. For example, if we crop the quilt photograph to focus on one of the green, *Cargill* patterned areas and place it with an article describing *Cargill*’s unethical business practices, the image becomes authentic to the text and the text authentic to the image, resulting in *Appropriated Authenticity*.



▲ Although a swatch cannot deliver the same experience as the full quilt in real life, it suffices as a tactile experience that reproductions alone cannot provide.

¹ Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. British Broadcasting Corporation: Penguin Books, 1972.

My comparison revealed other forms of authenticity, such as *Conceptual Authenticity*. The original design of this quilt is as equally authentic as any of the others listed here. The digital design is the result of the conceptual process of translating an idea into something visual. The form does not yet match the purpose, but acts as a blueprint to aid in the development of the final form.

Since an image is rarely reproduced at its original dimensions, there hasn't been a need to question its authenticity. For the sake of this comparative study, a full-scale reproduction was used, and ignited discussion. Since full-scale reproductions are so rare, the inkjet poster's authentic quality is circumstantial.

If the original, fabric quilt should ever be destroyed, the full-scale print would become the most accurate reproduction and therefore, the most authentic representation.

DIGITAL DESIGN



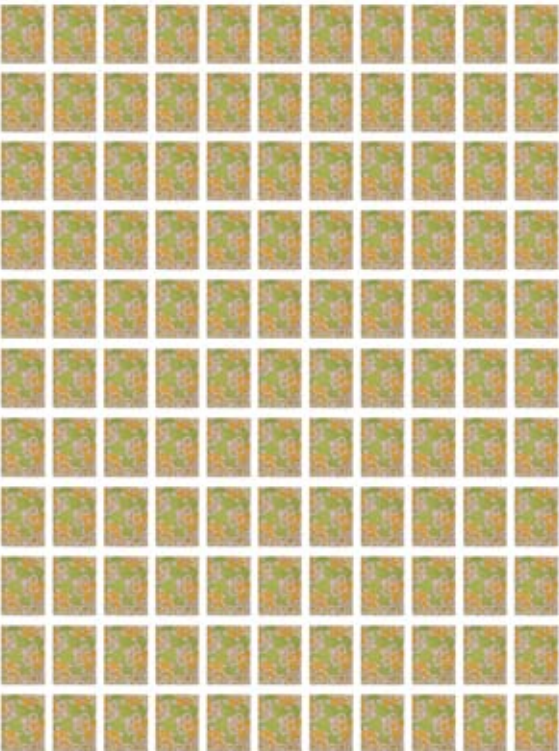
FABRIC QUILT



INKJET PRINT



INKJET PRINT OF MULTIPLES



CONCEPTUAL AUTHENTICITY

Authenticity found in the original realization of a concept.

EXPERIENTIAL AUTHENTICITY

Authenticity found in the synaesthetic experience of a creative artifact or performance.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL AUTHENTICITY

Upon destruction of the original, the most accurate reproduction of the original would become the most authentic representation.

APPROPRIATED AUTHENTICITY

Authenticity found in the use a reproduction of an original for a new purpose.

JUSTIFICATION

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

If we look at a finished piece in an objective manner, we find that it cannot be simply or strictly defined as authentic or inauthentic. Those terms are subject to the work’s purpose or function and the form it takes. For example, a collector of the fine arts might consider recordings of Bach’s Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor by Michael Murry essential, but wouldn’t dream of hanging a print of a Rembrandt on his/her wall. The music was written to be played, the print was made to imitate.

The music example opens room for comparative discussion with consideration to the quilt project. Consider four versions of the same song: the live performance, a recording of the live performance, a studio recording, and a remix of the song by a DJ. The live performance demonstrates the same experiential quality as viewing the quilt in person. The live concert can only be experienced in the same place and time. Any description or reproduction would fail to compare. Just as real-life observation of the quilt’s fabric, stitching, color, smell, texture, etc. can create sensations unattainable by a printed or photographed reproduction.

The concert recording shares the same circumstantial quality as the full-scale print of the quilt. Once the live concert is over, those moments no longer exist, and can never be experienced in the exact same way again. Therefore the recording of the live performance becomes the closest means to the original. In terms of the quilt, if the actual fabric quilt was destroyed, the full-scale print out would become the most authentic form or representation of the quilt.

When we consider the studio recording of the song, it can be best compared to the digital quilt design. A performance recorded in a music studio can be honed to meet the original concept the composer had intended. Each studio musician can separately record his/her part over and over until it is flawless, or many recordings may be pieced together to achieve the desired outcome. A digital recording can be as easily manipulated as a digital design on a computer screen. In both cases, perfection is possible and the primary goal.

Lastly, a DJ’s remix is an appropriation of an original for the purpose of providing new meaning or a new work. A DJ may use samples of the song or combine it with other sounds, songs or beats. A reproduction of the quilt could be placed in a book next to other images and text that may or may not relate to the quilt image but provide a different experience of the original work. For example, the quilt image may change in scale (in music comparable to volume) or may be cropped (comparable to sampling).

The subject of authenticity spans far beyond the reaches of graphic design. A similar investigation or comparison could be made with almost any subject, especially within the fine arts. When authenticity is defined as a match between form and purpose, it allows one to break down the factors of any object, place, person, event, message, memory, decision, etc. and evaluate its success. In design, this ability to divide a subject can also help us construct and evaluate our design decisions and ultimately lead us to a deeper understanding of our craft.

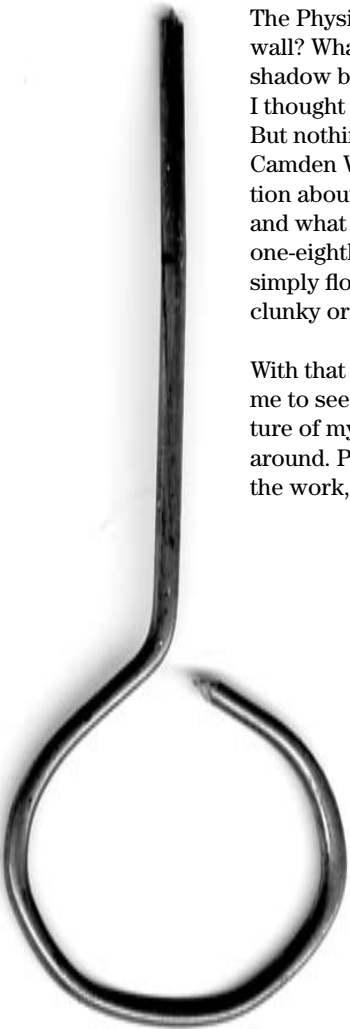
“Design is the application of intent – the opposite of happenstance, and an antidote to accident.”

—*Robert L. Peters*

EXHIBITION

EFFICIENT & MINIMAL

When designing my graduate exhibition, my biggest concern was how the presentation of my projects could relate to the concepts of my thesis. The farm was an overwhelming theme, but in regard to pedestals and hanging devices, I feared that they might become hokey. Research was the best way to find my solution.



The Physical Collection posed the biggest challenge. How could I securely display the jars on the wall? What materials are appropriate? What about lighting? I made sketches consisting of various shadow boxes and shelves with jars resting on top as well as suspended from below or to the side. I thought about building custom boxes with LED lights installed to illuminate the jars from below. But nothing jumped from the page, so I took some sketches to an architect, my secondary advisor, Camden Whitehead. Immediately, Camden found the heart of my concepts. He made an observation about farm life that I had not considered. On a farm, you are efficient with your materials, and what you don't have, you make. He sketched a simple hanging apparatus to be made from a one-eighth tempered steel rod to support the bottom and another to secure the top. The jars would simply float on the wall, leaving only the collection to be observed, and removing my fears about clunky or hokey shelving.

With that problem solved, I needed to find the best way to utilize my gallery space. It was vital for me to see the display before I actually put it up, so I designed a virtual exhibition. I took a picture of my allotted space in the gallery, scaled all of my work to size and began moving the work around. Problems became obvious, and I worked out solutions early. When the time came to hang the work, I simply had to measure, drill and hang.

◀◀ My father and I simplified the hanging system by removing the bottom support from the smaller jars in the original design. We then bent a rod so that it could screw on and fit under the lip of the lid and suspend the jars out from the wall. No screws necessary.



◀◀ The dark line down the center of this image is a grouping of the tractor studies suspended from the ceiling and hung perpendicular to the wall to optimize visibility of all the work.



The rest of the exhibition followed suit in terms of simplicity. The quilt and the posters would hang out from the wall by a couple of inches, so that when someone moved past them, they too, would move. This would draw attention to the difference in the paper and fabric, but the hardware would be hidden behind the work. For the digital projection of the quilt representing *Conceptual Authenticity*, I wanted to refrain from having a computer and projector occupying space on the gallery floor, so I built a custom unit that would suspend them from the rafters on the ceiling.

The rotogon, midterm invitations, signature and books were placed on custom-made pedestals. I wanted to avoid bulky boxes, so the pedestals took on characteristics of tables with a top, one central support and a base. Each was painted the same white as the wall so they would blend in.



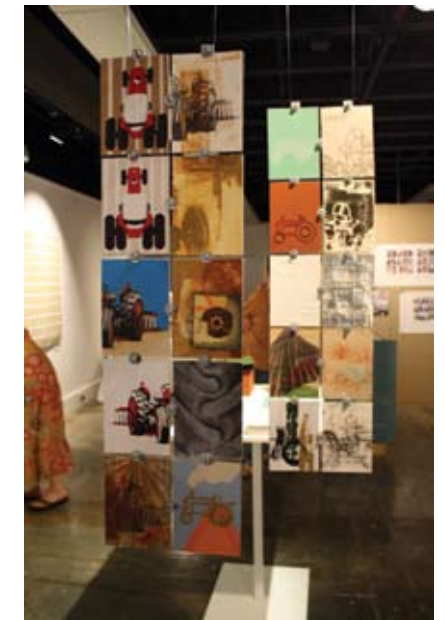
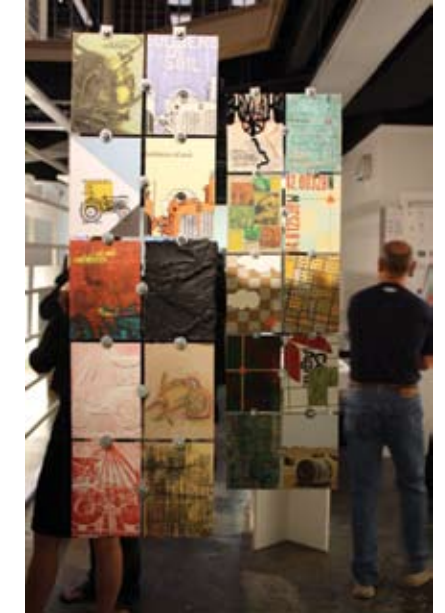
◀◀ White gloves were in place to encourage gallery-goers to pick up and rotate the rotogon.



▶▶ The hardware was kept to a minimum. Nuts and bolts aligned with the form and concept of the tractors.



The tractor studies were my last concern. I had thoughts of growing them out of the floor using the same steel rods that I used with the jars, but that required a base, most likely a bulky piece of wood. That design took up too much room and distracted from the quilt project. I needed to suspend them from the ceiling, but how could I connect them together? In order to solve this problem, I walked around the hardware store for about two hours having conversations with employees about the most effective way to accomplish my goal. In the end, I left the store with sixty washers, nuts and bolts to form thirty sets of connectors (seen below) that sandwich the tractors together in a grid.





SOME QUESTIONS & SOME ANSWERS

This project began with an inclination to think rather than make. Unable to predict the final outcome, I was afraid to experience design as an action. But through the process of crafting each work, I cognitively, creatively and physically found joy through revelation. Ultimately, I found authenticity and a new design philosophy.

When we consider authenticity in our design, it brings insight and clarity to the decision making process. It can also bring a deeper understanding of how we view the world. Of what value is this knowledge?

WRITING
How can writing play a greater role in how we think about authenticity? To better understand how authenticity affects graphic design or any other field, the conversation needs to continue. Authenticity is a complex subject open to new perspectives and theories that can effect how we live, learn, and design.

TEACHING
How can we introduce theories about authenticity into the classroom and improve the way students look at design? With a better understanding of what makes a design authentic, students can learn how to evaluate which processes are essential to their purpose, and mindfully develop form.

DISSEMINATION
What effect, if any, could consideration for authenticity have on the field? When the goal of authenticity is at the forefront of the decision-making process, designers should be able to create more meaningful, resonant communication. Authenticity also stimulates conversation concerning how we work and how we think about our creations.

STAY RIGHT AT THE FORK

Now that I have completed this series of creative projects, it is time to look ahead. It is also time to operate during normal daytime hours, sleep more, take better care of my spine and remind the people I love that although I have been distracted, they are not forgotten. The big questions are: How could this study have been done better? Where could this path of exploration possibly lead next?

IMPROVEMENT
If I could stretch time, the month of March would have lasted a year and I would have completed six quilts with varying levels of hand and digital techniques. By this account, I would have been able to better evaluate how process changes communication. Sometime in the future I may choose new content and start the study again with a focus on process.

SOME PAST, SOME FUTURE
In June 2009 I instructed a three-week screen-printing course at VCU. During the course, I had students complete three projects focusing on social concerns. I had the students print their concepts on fabric squares that will be sewn into large quilted banners to be hung around Richmond, Virginia. In this project, I am utilizing the technical knowledge of quilting acquired during my creative project and optimizing the visual/social language of the quilt in a more literal sense than before.

FUTURE
This creative project has initiated a lifetime of research and interest. It will be present in every-day thoughts and considerations, and is truly, authentically, only the beginning.

“Design creates culture.
Culture shapes values.
Values determine the future.”

— *Robert L. Peters*

GLOSSARY

acrylic transfer - building up acrylic medium or gesso on a printed image until it is thick, then removing the paper by soaking it in water. The image transfers to the acrylic emulsion and may be applied to any surface.

Appropriated Authenticity - authenticity found in using a reproduction of an original for a new purpose.

authenticity - as it relates to graphic design, authenticity is a match between form and purpose. For the designer, its quality is found in the process of simultaneously developing a concept and crafting the design/object.

basting - temporarily holding fabrics together with stitches or safety pins.

batting - the filling or middle layer of a quilt. It provides the bulk and warmth. Also known as wadding.

Big Agra - in terms of this document, *Big Agra* (also known as *Big Agri-Biz*) is defined as the large agricultural corporations, such as *Cargill*, *ADM*, and *ConAgra* that control the majority of grain and food production in the United States.

collagraph - a collage board where the materials are assembled on a flat base or plate (matrix) or substrate to form a relief block with different surface levels and textures. Then it is sealed with gel medium or gesso, coated with ink and printed on paper using a press.

Circumstantial Authenticity - Upon destruction of the original, the most accurate reproduction of the original would become the most authentic representation.

Conceptual Authenticity - authenticity found in the original realization of a concept.

craft - the undeniable meticulous human presence in any work. It bears the “mark of its maker” through the dedication apparent in its execution and is not limited to any one medium.

Experiential Authenticity -authenticity found through the synaesthetic experience of a creative artifact or performance.

farm subsidy - a governmental grant paid to farmers and agribusinesses to supplement their income, manage the supply of agricultural commodities, and influence the cost and supply of such commodities.

morphology - according the Rob Carter’s book *Typographic Form and Communication*, a morphology is a menu of visual possibilities. It consists of a list of syntactic and/or semiotic variables that can be systematically or randomly explored.

photocopy transfer - the process of applying a solvent to transfer photocopy toner to another surface.

piecing - the technique of joining patches of fabric together to create the quilt top.

pounce - powder-filled pad that is wiped over a stencil to mark a quilting stitch pattern.

purpose - the reason something exists, is done, made, or used

thrifting - the act of shopping at a thrift store, flea market, garage sale, or a shop of a charitable organization, usually with the intent of finding interesting items at a cheap price.

transfer - any process that removes a printed image from its original substrate and adheres it to another surface.

quilting - the process of securing together the patchwork top, batting and backing of a quilt.

quilt top - the uppermost layer of a quilt.

yard sailing - the act of seeking or hitting multiple yard sales either purposefully or accidentally.

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