Me and You

Nicole Andreoni

Virginia Commonwealth University

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Me and You

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

ME AND YOU

By Nicole Michele Andreoni, MFA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2010.

Major Director: Barbara Tisserat
Associate Professor, School of the Arts,
Department of Painting and Printmaking

My work seeks to reveal the relationships between woman and man, woman and self, and woman and the space which she inhabits. Through personal memoirs and everyday observations the private becomes public, and moments of intimacy transpire. Intimacy requires dialogue, transparency, reciprocity, and self-disclosure, all things that I have been reflecting upon in my work over the last two years.

Relationships are formed within the works and through the experience of the viewer with the art. Figures and abstraction coexist next to one another informing the viewer of things familiar, creating closeness, while also spatially confusing the viewer, creating a distance. Moments are filtered through abstraction and illuminated through touch. These moments, while often small and fractured, combine together to create a full and complete reflection of the self and the other.
Me and you

These words are personal, connected, one affected by the other; they are intimate.

If I say me and you, I mean us

Us collapses the distance between me and you--it no longer describes individuals but rather expresses a relationship

When I talk about a drawing, I talk about touch

The drawing is a place where your eye meets my hand

The surface of the drawing is as close as I can get to me touching you
I am not what I am; I am what I do with my hands.¹

Louise Bourgeois
The dictionary defines touch as the following:

**touch (v.)**
- be or put something in contact
- press something lightly
- have effect on somebody or something
- affect somebody emotionally
- consume something
- interfere with something

**touch (n.)**
- put body in contact with something
- light stroke
- contact made
- feeling sense
- felt qualities
- detail
- communication

Touch is both active and passive; it is an action and a reaction. It is something felt with the body. It can be soft, controlled, erratic, hard, intense, firm, gentle, affectionate, passionate, warm or cool. It can be specific or exploratory, refined or clumsy.

My experiments have included materials such as silk tissue paper, drawing paper, copper, charcoal, pastel, watercolor, and oil stick. Each of these materials responds distinctly to my touch. Paper, copper, and silk tissue act as a ground or resting place where charcoal, ink, watercolor, and oil stick are built up through layering, creating a density that
refers to a slow build up of surface. Weight shifts back and forth between surface and material; what is often light appears heavy and what was strong appears delicate and fragile.

Similarly the process of etching creates a dynamic whereby two distinct surfaces, one pliable and one resilient are merged through pressure and contact. This process of giving and receiving between distinct and seemingly incompatible materials forms a connection between material and concept. Touch informs the quality of the mark made on a plate or a sheet of paper. At times the line is specific, at times it is ambiguous, in all instances the line is responsive. The action of touch and the quality of surface provide a sensitivity found throughout the work.
To seduce is a harmonious merger of the two, and it is the greatest art of all. I am still motivated by an attraction to the “Other,” which is a mysterious beauty. Seduction is a form of convincing. I am the indefatigable seducer. Beauty is the pursuit of the “Other.”

Louise Bourgeois
Seduction

Seduction is a powerful thing. It lures you in and consumes you. It is physical and emotional. In my work, the material itself is seductive as is the subject matter.

The silk tissue drawings entice and generate a curiosity regarding the material being used. The paper reacts to the movement of the body, rising and falling as though breathing. As the viewer steps closer to investigate, the drawing responds by moving, sometimes towards the body, other times away from it. The silk tissue is fragile, with the ability to be moved by a simple shift of the airflow. Yet it supports markings with oil sticks, a material that has a density much heavier than the seemingly weightless paper.

Other materials employed also have a seductive quality. Charcoal is densely applied, smeared, erased, and littered with fingerprints. It is velvety black and deep. The drawing sits on the paper’s surface. Through layers of mark making the surface is built up while other areas in the drawing remain open and empty. The image begins to emerge in space and then recedes. The combination of material and image creates a sense of something moving towards you, then away. The material draws you in. You find yourself moving closer to examine it and the space becomes disoriented. What was a positive image is now a negative space, confusing your relationship to both.

The images and spaces created within these works bounce between abstraction and figures. The female forms found in these works often play with the boundaries of being erotic. Images of hair and bare bodies are cropped, revealing and concealing just enough information to allow things to remain vague and yet strangely familiar.
Intimacy

*I long and seek after*

Sappho

Intimacy requires dialogue, transparency, reciprocity, and self-disclosure. It is emotional, physical, and sexual. It speaks of desire and longing. It exists within relationships between people, within physical and formal spaces, and between artist, subject, material, and viewer. It is often connected with private utterances or actions and comes from a close or long association.

In my work I seek to explore the intimacies of daily life and personal relationships. Images of women, body parts and landscapes establish a sense of the familiar, while more abstract images create a sense of the unknown. The work strives to make the personal more accessible through shared experiences of love and desire, sexuality, vulnerability, beauty, the sacred and the mundane.
As Baudelaire says, "the beautiful is always strange" by which he means, of course, that it is always strangely familiar.

Dave Hickey

Louise Bourgeois stated that beauty is not a noun. Rather it is a verb, something that is felt through experience and then projected onto an object. In the book *The Six Names of Beauty*, the author Crispin Sartwell defines beauty as seen through the eyes of different cultures. The English translation of beauty refers to a longing. He describes it in the following:

*Longing itself is an enduring, which is also to say unstated, state of desire. So in the broadest sense, the experience of beauty is always erotic, is always a wanting. Since we all long, beauty is a universal object of human experience.*
Yugen, the Japanese equivalent of beauty, is defined by Sartwell as:

...something obscure and profound, mysterious and elusive. It invites you or seduces you to tumble into it, to lose yourself. It does not move toward a conception of perfection, but rather it seeks a kind of suggestiveness in absence: in holes or emptiness.\textsuperscript{viii}

In my final thesis show, the suite of etchings, titled \textit{ME & YOU}, is based on these two ideas of beauty. The subject matter of the prints bounces back and forth between figure and landscape, abstraction and representation. Images of hair and cropped bodies make reference to examinations of the self. However as the images become more abstracted they become less about people and objects and more about space and texture. The less information given the more evocative they become. The reduction and simplification of the figure results in an ambiguity whereby the viewer is able to navigate the work in a way that informs their longing. The viewer is confronted with works that contain strangely familiar yet unrecognizable imagery. As a result of the indistinctness of the images, what was once a personal experience has now become more universal.
Veils and Curtains

By definition both veils and curtains are objects that are used to hide and cover or separate one thing from another. Veils are mostly associated with the body while curtains refer to a place. Veils hint at sensuality and the unknown, hiding and revealing the body. They are also used as shields for sacred things or to honor an object or space. When placed on the body the veil is often used as protection, especially to guard women from the male gaze or evil spirits. Curtains are hung, not worn, and are used to obscure or conceal a space. *Curtains* is also a slang term used to refer to women’s hair.

My use of the curtains began with my candidacy show. The show took place within Richmond’s Central National Bank, a building that has been deserted for the past fifteen years. I needed a way to transform the exhibition space from a corporate, masculine, empty space to one of greater intimacy. I wanted the space to be separate—both from the outside “public” world and the interior space that surrounded the two rooms. I endeavored to create the feeling that one was entering a different space—a feminine space—warm, inviting, playful, light, and safe.
Room One- The panels

The curtains in this room acted as a wall, an extension of the space. They were printed with an abstractly patterned bra shaped infinity sign in a pale pink. The fabric was moderately transparent, allowing light to filter through while still creating a barrier from the external environment. As the light shifted outside, it altered the color inside, reacting with the painted walls and the print on the curtain. It created a pink glow that varied the warmth of the room and therefore affected the mood over time.

Room Two (Little Way)

The curtains in this room were more decorative, plain white muslin gathered and bunched to recreate a look of 18th or 19th century drapery (but more playful, lighter in touch and material). They acted as a separation from the world outside, creating a room that was soft and light. In addition, the curtains were in conversation with the fabric construction, *Little Way*, installed within the same room. Notions of the feminine
and the seductive were realized through cascading breast-like forms and through the white fabric of the curtains that mimicked bridal dresses.

**Paper Curtain**

In the piece, *In Between*, a curtain made of silk tissue paper was installed on a window between two rooms. The paper was cut and pasted to the window, creating a veil that only partially revealed the room behind it. The paper also mimicked the shape and color of another curtain that hung within a locked room. The silk tissue reacted to body movement—swaying back and forth as people walked past it from one room to the other. The shapes of the cut curtain parts are akin to fingers. As these “fingers” lifted and moved they appeared to reach out, trying to gently caress those that pass by.

**Curtains/veils and Drawing**

In drawings, curtains function as devices to separate images or spaces; they seem more figurative and less literal. They operate as veils, hiding and revealing, and begin to make reference to hair or clothing.
Silk Tissue- Large Drawings

The larger silk tissue drawings return to a more literal sense of the curtain or veil in combination with a more metaphorical idea. Panels of the paper are pasted or pinned together to create larger sheets and they become more closely related in scale to windows and to the body.
Process: Drawing, Printmaking, and Craft

Drawing

*There is no end to writing or drawing. Being born doesn’t end.*
*Drawing is being born. Drawing is born*ix.

Helene Cixous

Drawing is always a place of beginning. It is direct and fast, created through both observation and invention. It is the most intimate process. Marks are applied with a range of sensitivity, heavily to lightly, each responding to my touch. Layers are built through mark making and the layering of papers, one on top of the other. Marks are laid down, wiped and erased, rubbed and smeared, and redrawn over and over again. At times lines and marks are carefully calculated, while other times they appear clumsy, playful, or searching. Drawing extends me the freedom to explore with my hands what I see with my eyes.
I have utilized many print processes including intaglio, lithography, screenprinting, and monoprinting. Printmaking is a slow process, one that requires planning and yet still allows for the unexpected to happen. The indirect nature of printmaking relinquishes some control over the final outcome. As such, images and plates are frequently worked and reworked. Printmaking engages transference, repetition, and distance. There is a history of an image’s genesis that can be recorded through the use of state proofs. The final print forms a record of my touch- it has been carved, scraped, wiped, brushed, polished, and scratched. Images are easily repeated and can be gathered to create a larger work or reused and recycled into new images. Repetition of images, whether viewed together as a whole or repeated throughout a body of work, creates a sense of devotion and narrative within the work.
Prints mimic what we are as humans: we are all the same and yet every one is different. I also think there’s a spiritual power in repetition, like saying rosaries.

Kiki Smith
Craft

When I speak of craft within my work I am referring to the process of sewing and making things by hand. Craft too is slow. It requires skill, time, and patience. Craft is often associated with women and the domestic. I use aspects of “craft” to transform spaces with sculptural forms and window installations.

In this piece, individual pink sewn forms were placed together on a wall. The sculptural form hung from the ceiling, conjuring up images of falling flowers, barnacles clinging and growing within the interior façade, or of the breasts of the fertility goddess.
The Color Pink

feminine
youth
flesh
flush
blush
blush
cosmetic
floral
memory
learned
familiar
soft
sex
love
Endnotes


ii. “touch” as defined by Websters Dictionary

iii. Bourgeois, Louise “Sunday Afternoons: A Conversation and Remark on Beauty”

  interview by Bill Beckley, *Uncontrollable Beauty*, Page 341


  interview by Bill Beckley, *Uncontrollable Beauty*, Page 331


viii. ibid. Page 113


Works Cited


Nicole Andreoni was born June 1, 1980 in Sellersville, Pennsylvania. She received her BFA in Painting from Tyler School of Art in 2003. In 2001, she studied abroad through Temple University in Rome, Italy. She received her MFA in Painting and Printmaking from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2010. Nicole currently resides in Richmond, Virginia with her husband and two cats.