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A Fragmented World

Documentation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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May, 2013

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Artist Statement

My altered photographic and abstract mixed media work is driven by my process-oriented exploration of materials and imagery. I am more interested in the act of creating than in planning for a final result. This allows me freedom in my approaches and the ability to choose from a diverse variety of media, techniques, and subject matter.

I use both additive and subtractive processes in producing my work, which includes photography, computer graphics, acrylics, image transfers, and encaustics. My photographs serve as a springboard for ideas by providing me with themes to investigate. Figures and faces, cities and landscapes, and abstracted natural forms are the subjects that occur most frequently in my work. The final result of each piece is shaped by my focus on the layers, textures, and visual relationships that are formed by combining and transforming imagery.

A Fragmented World

Introduction

One of the first lessons I recall being taught is the notion that the little things matter most in life. It is a combination of those little things, both positive and negative, and how they are handled that make a person develop into who they are. Everything we do and see in this life is made up of other smaller components and it is important to realize the impact each piece has on the whole.

From an early age I had an interest in art. However, I did not pursue it until my junior year of high school. It was time to start looking at colleges and I had no clue what direction I wanted to go. I had an array of ideas about who and what I should be. These thoughts pushed me in one direction or another but never for long. During the fall of my junior year, while working on the set crew for a school play, a teacher recognized my potential as an art student and worked with me to arrange my schedule. By graduation, I had completed the school's art program and was accepted by James Madison University as an art major.

Throughout my college career, I tried several concentrations but could never envision a future. I realized that becoming a professional artist and making a living that way would be a long shot and wanted to choose an easier road to travel down. I chose photography and graphic design because I loved capturing aspects of reality and believed that the design industry would be a safe career choice. After working through the majority of the program, I began to struggle with the idea that I would be sitting at a desk in a cubical five days a week for the rest of my life. I came to the realization that I did not have the attention span necessary for that lifestyle. Thus, I picked up a new concentration and added an art education minor to my degree program. After all, it was an art teacher who discovered me and pushed me in the right direction. She helped me

to examine my life experiences and realize my interest in the artistic exploration of the world around me.

Upon completion of my Bachelor of Fine Arts and teacher certification programs, I was hired to teach art at a high school in Stafford, Virginia. At first, I struggled while dealing with the challenges of the apparent social norms of the area. Interacting with students and teaching what I loved came naturally to me, but I just couldn't grasp what parents and students considered to be acceptable behaviors and attitudes. I came across many students who were pushed into the art classroom because there was no other place for them. They lacked dedication and motivation in every area of life. Along the way, I discovered that even my most talented students seemed to believe that doing only what was necessary to get by was enough. As a result, I have made it my personal goal to teach students that mediocrity is not acceptable. I push them to meet and surpass high expectations. I want them to realize and understand that everything in life builds on their experiences and creations. They need to see the parts as well as the whole. They should explore along the way and not just focus on the end result.

My own need for exploration is what drove me to enter the Virginia Commonwealth University's Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art (MIS-IAR) Program. I hoped that the program would afford me the opportunity to learn new techniques while interacting with other art teachers. I also wanted special time for myself so that I could focus on my own needs as an artist searching for direction in both life and profession. My chosen areas of concentration are photography and mixed media arts. The majority of my work includes ideas and processes from both areas of study with varying subject matter. However, my intention is always the same. I want viewers to see my hand, the process, and the visual pieces to every artistic puzzle I create. I want them to analyze my imagery and discover their own interpretation

of the story being told. My works are to be viewed as single, unified images from a distance, but up close I allow the little things to be apparent.

My Aesthetics

My focus in my work is to question, adapt, and display the visual elements of my surroundings. These elements revolve around the themes of simplification, isolation, and identity. The processes that I use in my work are what heighten the meaning of my experiences. I have found that little details and the path taken are what matter the most. This idea is reflected in my choice of subject matter, processes, and presentation. I desire an easy to interpret approach with instantaneous communication. In other words, it is my recognizable subject matter that provides a way for the viewer to connect to both the forms I create and their content.

My images are ones that include architecture, landscapes, cityscapes, open fields, and portraiture. The views from every car I sit in and the daily, ever present media inspire me to adapt the images of this world into something more thought provoking. I am driven to break apart the whole of my experiences and emphasize the fragments that it is composed of. My alternative processes and mixed media approaches help me to emphasize fragments, allowing the viewer to look closer at the finer details.

The method that I use most frequently starts with multiple copies of a main photograph and supporting images. I cut them into fragments and then reassemble the main photograph by layering and overlapping. By doing this, the overall original photographs are obscured but the details are visible. Elements from various layers of the works can be read side-by-side, thereby creating new relationships of spontaneously applied or orchestrated, juxtaposed images. It is the presentation of these fragmented images that allows me to translate my environment through

process.

Early on, I began an approach of experimentation and self-discovery through the integration of media. I experimented with various image transfer techniques that allowed for an immense array of possibilities. I continued to experiment and the processes I learned allowed me to mask, layer, texturize, combine, and alter images. I often used acrylic gel medium transfers. In this process, photographs and ephemera could be printed and applied to a surface with a layer of medium. After allowing the medium to dry, the paper backing can be removed by wetting and rubbing. The resulting images vary based on an unlimited number of factors of application and removal. What intrigued me the most was the ability to turn a relatively simple image into a piece with multiple layers of interest. Later, I discovered that this transfer process could be emulated by using beeswax as a collage medium. Images and objects can be embedded in wax, and the resulting image can contain semitransparent areas revealing each layer. These manual forms of image editing and altering allowed me to fully focus on process.

Over time, I began to incorporate transfer techniques and media exploration in the paintings and three-dimensional works that I was creating. I continually merged several types of media. My work stems from my photography but I am motivated to investigate new ideas and processes. I do this in search of an increased understanding of the unlimited symbolic and functional potential of working in mixed media.

Influences

The first time I was able to appreciate portrait photography was when I discovered the work of Sally Mann (1951-). Until that point, I had assumed that all it took to capture a person's likeness was a camera and a quick click of a button. It was through her work that I learned the

necessity of inspiration, preparation, and composition in portraiture. Her black and white portraits capture emotion while showing identity. With her collection *Immediate Family* (1992), she explored typical childhood themes but also darker ideas of loneliness and insecurity. In her later works, she photographed close ups of faces and landscapes which most often showed degeneration. It was works such as these that influenced me to look closer at my surroundings and find the stories that the world is trying to tell or perhaps even trying to hide. These are stories of growth and transformation.

In addition to Mann, I have had the opportunity to study the work of painter Joseph Stella (1877-1946). Stella's work inspired a concern in me for how I plan and design my compositions. It was his work that motivated me to first consider how the parts of a work can and should function as a whole. Stella used lines forcefully and allowed them to be seen as edges that divide and combine. Stella's *Brooklyn Bridge* (1919–1920) demonstrates an energetic arrangement that is both representational and abstracted. The divisions on his canvas forced my eyes to look deep within and find the finer details. It is works like this that have influenced me in my attempts to create visions of interlocking fragments of color, space, and form.

I am intrigued by alternative process photography and those who continue to work manually, despite new digital technologies. The techniques used by photographer Jerry Uelsman (1934-) have motivated me to explore techniques that involve my hand, as well as my computer. He produces composite photographs with multiple negatives and a wide range of darkroom techniques. Uelsman believes that the final image does not need to be from a single negative but rather may be composed of many. In his work *Untitled* (1982), he merged several images to create a work that is surreal in nature. The roots of a tree emerge from the ground and gradually build their way up and merge with an old house. The idea of transforming realistic images into

surrealist works appealed to me. By combining a manual process and an approach enhanced by technology, I was able to create digital negatives for printing and transfers of images that use a high dynamic range of value and contrast.

Through these influences, I have gained an interest and understanding of layering in both concept and process. This combination is something that I seek in my own work. These techniques help to quickly gain the attention of the viewer, while slowly expressing a deeper meaning. With relatable subject matter viewers are drawn in, but it is with the process and layers that viewers can experience the story that is being told.

Photographic Artworks and Processes

The descriptive photographs of Sally Mann and Jerry Uelsman pushed me to investigate new methods of capturing my surroundings. I searched for a photographic technique in which I could simultaneously capture the detail in both light and dark areas of the image, while providing a high range of contrast. It is the photographic process of high dynamic range (HDR) photography that has allowed me to reveal details that would otherwise be disguised in the shadows of my images. In addition to HDR photography, I enjoy the exploration and results of alternative process photographic methods, such as multiple exposures using contact negatives.

My photographs often serve as a springboard for my mixed media explorations. However, the portraits I take are meant to capture identity and emotion. Thus, most frequently, I allow them to stand on their own. *What Next* (Appendix, 1) is a color HDR portrait of a young lady named Daniella. I photographed her in an alley covered in graffiti. Her posture points to the emotions that are weighing heavy on her heart. The image was produced by taking multiple exposures of the same image and layering them using digital manipulation software. I make my

HDR images by taking three to five photos of the same scene, each at a different shutter speed. The result is a series of photos with variation in the amount of light that entered through the lens. Technology is used to combine the photos and distinguish detail throughout the final image. Additionally, the saturation and contrast are both increased to produce a vivid painterly effect. My goal is to produce photos that heighten reality and stimulate a person's memory. Our human brains capture what we see differently than a camera or computer. High dynamic range processing allows for more thought provoking images and cause the viewer to experience more than with a straight photograph.

Faith Through the Storm (Appendix, 2) depicts a young man reclined on his back. I stood on the shore with my camera fixed to a tripod as I focused on the rapids rushing by, under the shade of storm clouds. All at once, I noticed a break in the clouds and a flood of light rushed through revealing the young man with his arms outstretched toward to the sky. I quickly adjusted my camera, focused, and took several shots. A lens flare appeared in one of the five exposures I had taken. While compressing the multiple exposures into one image, I had the option to leave that particular exposure out, as it diminished highlight details in the other layers. However, I chose to leave it in because the flare added a sense of depth and implied spirituality to the final image. The next step involved converting the image into a digital contact negative. Digital negatives are created by printing digital images on transparent film. I printed a contact negative and created my final print using the light from a 35mm enlarger and traditional darkroom chemicals.

In addition to portraiture, I have found success in landscape photography using technology and multiple exposures to create a high range of contrast and color. *Driftwood* (Appendix, 3) is a typical fall beach scene. Vacationers had abandoned the area and sand grass

had sprung up, but the beauty of nature remained. I captured five shots using different shutter speeds. The first was underexposed, the last was overexposed, and the third was what would be considered the correct exposure. The HDR effect and the resulting increase in tonal range turned a relatively flat image to one of dimension and detail.

Frequently, I take my digital portrait and landscape photographs and combine them using a technique that mimics a manual double exposure and layering of negatives. The desired result is achieved by taking two or more digital images and layering them using photo-editing software. *Broken Fence with Barn* (Appendix, 4) is an example of this process. I began with two regular photographs. The first was the photograph of the barn. The second was of an open field with a broken fence in the foreground. I entered both into an HDR effects program, where a single image can be manipulated to increase the range of tones. After adjustments had been made to both images, I placed them in separate digital layers. The scale of the two images was not consistent, so I resized the barn before positioning it on the horizon. I blended the two layers together and added a visual effect by echoing the roof and internal elements of the barn. This digital echoing process was influenced by a manual technique where offset lower layers are allowed to show through semi-transparent upper layers. The idea of layering images and digital manipulation are what led me to explore techniques where digital negatives could be used to complete manual forms of the digital layering process.

The technique used in *Face of a Child* (Appendix, 5) started when I created contact negatives for four different photographs. The progression was completed by layering the contact negatives and exposing them to light from an enlarger. The resulting image is a fragmented version of the main portrait. There are subtle hints of the other images, which show through and provide more information to the viewer. Along the way, I struggled to find an appropriate

exposure time which led to experimentation with times and the order of placement. After much reflection and problem solving, I decided to *burn* into some sections of the image by exposing them for larger times and *dodge* other areas by covering them to reduce the amount of light that hit the surface. Additionally, I merged two of the negatives digitally. My photographic processes provide a starting point and basis for my mixed media and other technology-based work. It was my interest and concentration in photography, both manual and digital that led to many of my mixed media processes.

Mixed Media Painting and Technology

At the same time I was exploring the techniques and processes of photography, I was also investigating the possibilities of combining images, mixed media, and transfer techniques. The majority of my early work in this process emphasized the use of gel medium and heat transfer techniques. However, instead of leaving transferred images as final projects, I chose to explore the mixing of media by painting and drawing into my images. This was also where I first started to work with fragmented pieces of a whole image. Fragmentation provided an outlet for the investigation of transparency in layers and allowed me to work with larger imagery.

In the piece *Foundations of Static Movement* (Appendix, 6), the background was formed using four acrylic gel transfers on wood. I chose to use personal photographs that depicted contrasting landscapes, one of a busy city and one of a desolate beach. To start, I printed a Las Vegas street scene in four equally-sized fragments. This image was captured using a slow shutter speed in order to blur the movement of traffic. Once the first set of images transfers were complete and sanded to a uniform texture, I added an additional layer of photography that included a beach scene with poles lined up in the sand. My last step was to paint back into the

layers and merge the images into one cohesive piece. When the final piece is viewed, it is hard to distinguish one layer, fragment, or photograph from another. It is only when you take a closer look that the diverse imagery is realized.

It was during this next step of my journey that I found my passion for fragmentation and layers of transparency. In *Layers of Joshua* (Appendix, 7), I chose to continue with acrylic gel medium transfers but on a larger scale. Additionally, I continued to work back into my transfers, first subtractively with sandpaper and then additively with acrylic paint. I started with a digital HDR double exposure of my child, Joshua, and a cityscape. I merged the photographs using digital layers. Rather than doing the expected by printing the entire document for transfer, I chose to print fragments of each digital layer. First, I layered the cityscape imagery by using acrylic gel medium transfers and painted back into them. However, in the finished piece, this layer is hard to distinguish. The gestural lines of paint are all that remain. Next, I added a reflection of Joshua's face in the lower left. Lastly, I printed his face in small pieces that could be assembled by overlapping to form the whole of his face. As each layer overlapped, various components were hidden just as they are were in the digital version. When I was satisfied with the final photography-based work, I chose to paint back into the face on the right side of the piece to accentuate the photographic detail. Additionally, I painted gesturally over the cityscape in the upper left to soften the hard lines and give a more energetic feel. The completed work shows the focus and energy of my child as he went through great change in the stability of his life and situation. The fragmentation pushes you to look closer and examine the different pieces of him, just as he was encouraged to examine his surroundings. The much-desired tactile surface textures formed by the various additions and subtractions of media inspired me to focus more on process. It motivated me to seek out additional surface techniques that would add layers of

interest and interaction for the viewer.

While studying additional techniques, I was exposed to the possibilities and effects of beeswax on acrylic image transfers, heat transfers, and printed photographs. This finding led to further investigation and a continually developing marriage of my two areas of concentration.

Mixed Media and Photographic Encaustic Collage

After I discovered the potential of melted wax as a sealant and collage medium, the use of encaustic processes became a common factor in my artwork. My exploration began when I was exposed to Dorland's wax medium. This medium is a wax and resin mixture that improves the luminosity and clarity of colors when applied directly over paint or transferred photographs. In *Abandoned* (Appendix, 8), I started with a black and white laser jet print of my photograph on heat transfer paper. After using an iron to transfer the image to my watercolor paper and allowing it to cool, I spread on a thin layer of wax medium. The Dorland's wax added lucidity to the image as well as a second layer of interest. However, I was not satisfied with the coloration. Despite the physical layering, the image still appeared flat. It was at this point that I decided to explore the addition of texture through melted beeswax. I chose to use clear beeswax and added a small amount of bronze metallic powder. With each brush stroke of hot wax and treatment with the heat gun, the wax moved with fluidity and the metallic powder transformed due to its chemical properties. When I was satisfied with the final look, I allowed the piece to cool and the wax to set into its final position. Through this piece, I learned how to control the thickness of the wax and tinting possibilities, both processes now appear consistently in my art.

With eagerness and desire, I continued my study of wax but this time as a collage medium. I found that melted beeswax could be used to layer the fragments of my photographs

into whole compositions. *City Square* (Appendix, 9) and *Farm Reflected in the Barn* (Appendix, 10) were created simultaneously using parallel processes. I started creating these pieces by compiling HDR photographs of the two contrasting architectural structures. I then used software to digitally layer the main photographs with other elements from their environment. In *City Square*, I chose to displace power lines and a church and position them over the sky and parts of the sidewalk and building. For *Farm Reflected in the Barn*, I chose to digitally overlay an image of the farm land onto the barn that exists on the same property as the barn itself. Upon completion of my imagery, I printed each photo illustration into overlapping fragments and reassembled them using heated beeswax to seal each layer onto the wood panels which served as the base surfaces. Since the clarity of the details within each image were important to me, I had to be careful to use thick enough layers to hold the images together, but not thick enough to distort or cloud them. The beeswax allowed for a similar visual effect as my earlier gel medium transfers. However, it provided a greater sense of depth, increased transparency, and actual texture that I had not been able to achieve previously.

Time Lapse Gestalt (Appendix, 11) was created using the same basic process as the preceding encaustic pieces. The main differences were its canvas foundation and tinted wax elements. Working with wax on canvas was a struggle due to the inability of wax to adhere permanently to an acrylic primed surface. I resolved this obstacle by applying an encaustic gesso to the canvas as well as a layer of tinted paper. Once my surface was prepared, I collaged my fragments with clear beeswax. The wax intensified the colors and added a smooth sealant. After allowing the wax to set over the final compilation, I chose to add a final layer of tinted wax. With this last layer, I allowed the wax freedom to cloud up in some areas and run smooth in others. The textural variations and disrupted clarity helped to emphasize the constant movement

and change in our worldly surroundings.

The progression of my work from straight photograph to digital processing to mixed media exploration has been very rewarding. Over time, I have expanded my repertoire of media and techniques. This had helped me to create works that are reflective of my interests and representative of my process. I continually work with image transfers and fragmented collage as my preferred processes, and am constantly discovering new techniques and effects. I can easily see myself continuing to work in a similar fashion in the future as I focus on drawing attention to the details in recognizable subject matter.

Conclusion

This MIS-IAR Program has provided me with significant opportunities for growth. I was given the chance and support needed to effectively study, experiment, and create with an emphasis on the finer details of process and media. With accent on the little things in life, I continually question the visual elements that intrigue me and I work to adapt them through process-oriented art. Through this program, I found that my photography and mixed media pieces heighten the meaning of my own experiences. I have been inspired by other artists, teachers, and my students to push my creativity to a higher level and find focus and meaning in my own work. The high standards of process, craftsmanship, and content that I have developed and worked toward over the past few years will continue to aid me in my exploration and interpretation of the world around me.

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Appendix List of Figures

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Figure 1.
What Next, digitally enhanced HDR photograph, 9"x12'', 2011.



Figure 2.
Faith Through the Storm, digital negative based photograph, 8"x10", 2011-2012.



Figure 3.
Driftwood, digitally enhanced HDR photograph, 12"x9", 2012.



Figure 4.
Broken Fence with Barn, digitally enhanced photograph using a multiple layer process,
24"x18", 2011-2012.



Figure 5.
Face of Child, layered digital negative based photograph, 10"x8", 2011.

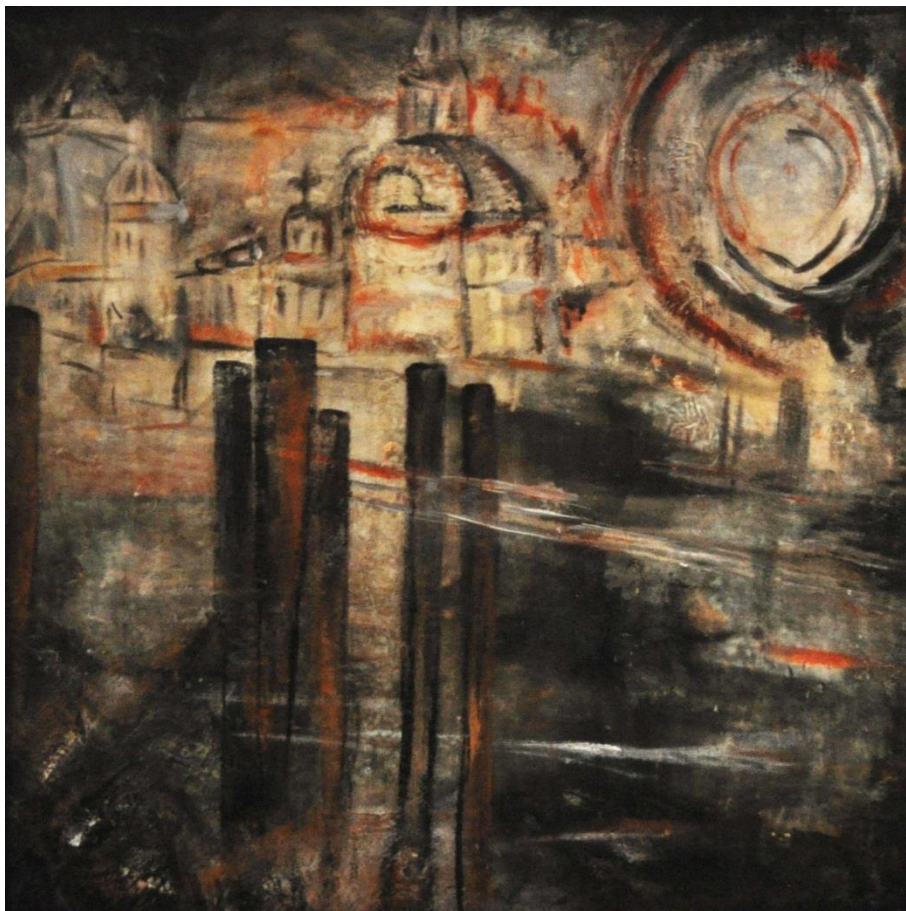


Figure 6.
Foundations of Static Movement, mixed media acrylic painting and gel medium
image transfer, 12"x12", 2010.



Figure 7.
Layers of Joshua, mixed media acrylic painting and gel medium image transfer,
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Figure 8.
Abandoned, mixed media heat and acrylic gel medium transfers under Dorland's wax and
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Figure 9.
City Square, mixed media wax collage, 12"x12", 2012.



Figure 10.
Farm Reflected in the Barn, mixed media wax collage, 12"x24", 2012.



Figure 11.
Time Lapse Gestalt, mixed media wax collage on canvas, 16"x20"x2", 2012.

Linda Michelle Stanczak

EDUCATION:

- 2013 Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia. Emphasis in Photography and Mixed Media.
- 2005 Bachelor of Fine Arts, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia. Emphasis in Sculpture and Art Education.

CERTIFICATION:

- 2005 Teaching Certification in K-12 Art Education, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

- 2005-present Art Instructor, Stafford Senior High School, Stafford County, Stafford, Virginia.
- 2005-present Photo Journalism and Graphic Design Instructor, Stafford Senior High School, Stafford County, Stafford, Virginia.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

- 2005-present National Education Association
Stafford Education Association
- 2004-2006 National Art Education Association
Virginia Art Education Association
- 2004-2005 Kappa Pi Art Honors Fraternity

EXHIBITIONS:

- 2013 *A Fragmented World*, Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art Thesis Exhibition, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA at the Verizon Gallery, Annandale, Virginia.
- 2012 *Regional Juried Exhibition*, Fredericksburg Center for Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, Virginia. Juror: Gina Cavallo Collins. Third Place
- 2012 *Transformations*, National Juried Exhibition, Fredericksburg Center for Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, Virginia. Juror: Rob McAdams. Honorable Mention
- 2012 *Regional Juried Exhibition*, Fredericksburg Center for Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, Virginia. Juror: Justine Geiger

EXHIBITIONS (continued):

- 2011 *Texture and Pattern*, National Juried Exhibition, Fredericksburg Center for Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, Virginia. Juror: Hubert Jackson
- 2010 *Square City*, Regional Juried Show, Ponshop, Fredericksburg, Virginia. Juror: Bob Worthy
- 2005 *Undergraduate Art Show*. James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia. Honorable Mention
- 2002 *Undergraduate Art Show*, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

AWARDS:

- 2012 Third Place, *Regional Juried Exhibition*, Fredericksburg Center for Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, Virginia. Juror: Gina Cavallo Collins.
- 2012 Honorable Mention. *Transformations*, National Juried Exhibition, Fredericksburg Center for Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, Virginia. Juror: Rob McAdams.
- 2011-2012 1st Place, Publication ranking from the Virginia High School League, Stafford High School, Falmouth, Virginia.
- 2010 All American, Publication ranking from National Scholastic Press Association, Stafford High School, Falmouth, Virginia.
- 2008-2010 Trophy Class, Publication ranking from Virginia High School League, Stafford High School, Falmouth, Virginia.
- 2005 Honorable Mention, *Undergraduate Art Show*, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia.
- 2005 Recognized as a Teacher of Promise (TOP) by the Virginia Department of Education in partnership with the Virginia Melken Educator Network.
- 2001 Recipient of The American Youth Foundation's "I Dare You Leadership Award," Methacton High School, Fairview Village, Pennsylvania.