2010

Time Preserved

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Time Preserved

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

by

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Artist Statement

My paintings are a combination of transparent images merged with paint and wax. As each piece of art develops, the process is the same. The beginning relies on memory or some connection to my past. Then, the progression evolves through a symbolic infancy with an emerging learning experience, which ultimately transforms into a creative piece, along the road less traveled…to the journey’s end.

The transparency comes from the image transfer process, which produces a “ghostly” or antique image due to the deteriorated effect of the image in the transfer. The photographic transfers suggest the image without being so bold as to dominate the overall piece of artwork.

The encaustic medium that I use to create the surfaces in my work allows me to explore the features of a sculptural medium. I am able to carve into, apply texture, and build up relief on the surface of each piece. The paint hidden in the crevices or layered on the surface adds emphasis and creates focal points in the painting.
Time Preserved

Time it was and what a time it was...
It was a time of innocence, a time of confidences...
Long ago it must be...
I have a photograph...Preserve your memories...They’re all that’s left you.
-Simon & Garfunkel, 1968 – Bookends

Journey’s Beginning: Memories

Static displays are not part of who I am any more than static displays are part of nature. Just as nature changes daily or over time, my artwork also evolves over time. The dynamic world is the canvas upon which my lens reflects. The dynamic world of nature becomes one of uncertainty especially when, in the sentiments of poet Robert Frost (1874 -1963), one is traveling along the path not taken.

Is there anything more perfect than nature? Nature has always fascinated me, as well as the human interaction within it. The colors found in nature are perfect, they complement each other better than any artist could arrange them. Colors that seem to be unreal can be found in the most unlikely places in nature, and sometimes color seems absent though we know it is really there. A winter snowstorm creates a pure black and white vista for the eye to behold although we know there is color beneath. The phenomena of sun, light, rain, and stages of growth are fascinating and magical. Scientifically, we know how it happens but to see nature evolve, and wonder how it progresses so easily with no human assistance, well, it is quite inspirational.

I am awestruck by the intensity of nature and how small and miniscule we are in comparison to our universe. Nature is perfect from my lens. It does not need any help from us. It is ancient and we are only a part of it for a very short period of time. When we leave this
earth, we have no physical impact on it. If an earthquake or tsunami hits, it has tremendous impact on every inhabitant instantaneously.

My photography mostly deals with nature and my desire to immerse my soul in it. I feel refreshed and recharged by spending a day hiking or walking to find that perfect shot. I find beauty in ordinary things and attempt to capture it to share with other people. I strive to do it in a way that enhances or captivates the viewer beyond a simple snapshot. I alter and filter my photographs through a series of processes to attract the attention of the viewer.

As technology becomes more integrated in our everyday lives, such as with cameras in cell phones, I often wonder what separates a snapshot from art. Anyone can take a photograph, but is it common practice to take a “good” photograph? The number of people with a general understanding of photographic composition is growing. Why then is my photography or experience any better than the average person? What makes my photography unique? These questions are a driving force in the creation of my artwork.

My process involves creating a photographic transfer with contact paper over a laser jet photograph and applying it to a wood panel. After that is done, I paint the background, apply wax, and continue to manipulate the surface with texture, heat, and color. When I began this process, I felt that I had to use a heavy hand with surface manipulation in order to justify the pieces as art. As I worked through the process, I realized that sometimes the photograph can stand on its own with only the wax. This is because I allow stories to develop from the image. In the development of a story, I use media and image altering techniques in varying degrees to arrive at a final product.

One constant in my work has been depiction of limitless space in my imagery. Deep space has many opportunities for me to explore by creating a feeling that anything is possible,
creating a fresh start. This metaphor is very important to me, as I have grown into an artist through life-altering events and dynamic experiences. A fresh start and hope are essential to me now in my life, as well as in my art.

**Time One: Infancy**

After five years of teaching high school, burn out was apparent with my lack of motivation to create my own art. I attended a presentation by teachers from Henrico County at the state art education conference, which changed my life. The presentation focused on keeping teachers’ creative spark alive in our daily lives. I realized then that I suffered from a common problem experienced by many art teachers who teach art all day long. Many of us return home after a long day of teaching art without a desire to produce any original work. So, I took my first steps toward making a huge change in my life by enrolling in a jewelry making class offered by the Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts (MIS-IAR) Program through Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). I felt immediate rejuvenation being surrounded by other professionals that were involved in the class, which made me apply to the program.

Being forced to create my own art in a four-hour window one day a week was a key component in regaining my creative focus, but the drive to create artwork flourished more in the hours outside of class. I felt compelled to create, not simply to finish an assignment but because I was becoming bombarded with new ideas. Visiting art galleries with friends and art colleagues helped with my exploration as I experimented with various media in my search for my individual style.

The first two-thirds of my time in this program were spent in search of direction. I knew that photographs inspired me but I didn’t want to simply paint from my photographs. I
researched various artists who inspired me but each time I experimented with their styles I felt lost and without purpose. The artist who intrigued me the most was Jasper Johns (b.1930) because of his groundbreaking use of encaustic medium. I wanted to combine my photographs into my paintings without having collage-like imagery. Once I used wax on top of these photographs, photo transfers, and paint, I was finally able to meld these media in a way that merged and eased the transitions between media.

**Time Two: Childhood**

As I began to find my way, I made a point of challenging myself and stepping outside of my comfort zone, knowing that doing this was the only way to grow and push the limits of my capabilities. For instance, my first successful painting with encaustic and photo transfer, *Solitude* (Appendix, 1), was a photograph of me leaning against a tree. This particular photograph had gone through multiple revisions in painting styles as I tried to merge my photography and paint until I finally stumbled upon the encaustic process. The photograph was taken towards the beginning of my MIS-IAR program, and also the beginning of a life-altering event in my life – the dissolution of my marriage. By the time I finished this piece, a year of hurting, healing, and exploring had taken place. I originally struggled with the photo transfer being on canvas while using acrylic paint. I was unhappy with the clear definition seen between the image transfer and painting. So, I next tried oil paint on top of the canvas and even painted on some areas of the image transfer but I was still not pleased with the transition between mediums. I cut the only section of the canvas that I thought had potential and glued it to a piece of wood. I then began painting the background and continued the image of the photograph by painting onto the wood surrounding it. This was a better transition but did not truly come
together as a whole until the wax was applied to the entire surface, hiding the various transitions and changes, and allowing congruency to take place. This painting was a turning point in my work as well as signaling a new era in my life.

My next foray into encaustics was *Vertical Blue* (Appendix, 2). Here, I used a tree as the focal point of the painting and extended the organic line of the branches through the wax. This extension of the tree branches into the background allowed me to transition between photograph and paint in a smooth manner. The composition reached upward just as the vertical shape of the panel allowed. Because this piece was successful, my first inclination was to do another natural scene but I forced myself to try to use man-made objects as my next subject matter to see if I could figure out a way to merge the two together. *Ride the Sky* (Appendix, 3) forced me to think less of extending imagery into the wax, but allowing the wax and colors to become more of a driving force in the piece itself. Instead of pulling the image into the background, I allowed the wax and the paint to be separate.

*Somewhere North Carolina* (Appendix, 4) was one of the most successful pieces I’ve created. I was finally able to bring texture into the piece as a main focal point because of the size and negative space the spare composition provided. *Still Standing* (Appendix, 5) offered the same opportunities to incorporate color and texture but allowed me a bolder and more confident approach the second time around.

Each new painting provided a different obstacle for me to overcome, and I charged towards these with a bull-headed determination towards discovery. This was not only essential to my development as an artist but also therapeutic in my discovery of myself. That my art was so much a part of me and could not be dismissed was a personal revelation.
Time Three: Pseudo-Adulthood

The whole point of being inspired by another artist is to respect and appreciate their craft, and to push it further while making it your own. Anyone who has any interest in photography has been introduced to Ansel Adams (1902 – 1984) for his proficiency in creating a wide range of values in his photographs. The depth and dimension in his imagery makes the viewer feel that nature is larger than life and reinforces the idea that man is small in comparison. This thought mirrors my admiration of nature in my artwork as well as my love of photography.

In keeping with my desire to challenge myself, I moved onto what appears to be black and white imagery. During a snowstorm I took a journey through a park and documented it, it appeared to be seemingly colorless. The white of the snow covering the ground, trees, and surrounding greenery along with the clouds and snow falling from the sky lent it an even more subdued quality. Amid the snow, I captured a bright orange construction barrel that looked surreal compared to the colorless landscape, which surrounded it. The snow made everything appear pristine and pure. The quiet as I walked through the park gave it a heavenly quality that I was almost fearful to disturb. The photographs appear to be black and white due to the amount of snow and only occasionally can the viewer glimpse bits of color.

Out of this photo shoot, I chose nine photographs and created image transfers of them with contact paper and transferred them onto nine separate panels, entitled A Walk in the Park in the Snow (Appendix, 6). First, I applied refined beeswax to the surface of each panel. I used refined beeswax because of its transparency and lack of yellow tint in order to preserve true color of each image transfer beneath. Then, I created a window within each of these panels by taking a small thumbnail photograph of the same image and laying it onto the surface of the wax. Next, I applied another layer of wax. The various layers are needed to create a sense of depth between
images. The small thumbnail images that appear in each panel are small intimate vignettes that invite the viewer’s close inspection. I developed each piece to stand alone, or they can be presented together in a series.

**Time Four: Adulthood**

I next began to create sculptural pieces, which I eventually labeled as nests. The inspiration for these pieces came from scraps cut off my photographs that were collecting neatly in a bowl to be thrown away. As I continued to collect these pieces, I began to contemplate the piles and thought about making order from the chaos as birds do when making nests. I correlated that to the disorder in my life and my desire to create order. The process entailed placing the shreds of the paper from the photographs inside a bowl and lacquering them together with a final topcoat of wax for a look of solidity and cohesiveness. This sculptural form created from my cast off clippings is called *Nest 1* (Appendix, 7).

This process of working in series developed when I was making books. I had no interest in creating traditional books but when I worked with serial imagery I had to invent my approach once again. In *Path Down Memory Lane*, (Appendix, 8) I took left over photographs, cropped them, glued them back to back, dipped them in wax, and strung them together. I presented this piece as an installation. This opened up ideas for serial imagery and allowed me to try various modes of presentation.

At this point, I began to look at my photographs and the journeys taken through them. The journeys primarily correlate to my life. For instance, *A Walk in the Park in the Snow* (Appendix, 6) began with such purity, not only for the pristine quality of the snow but also due to the person with whom I shared the walk. Later on, my feelings toward the man and the images
created during our walk together were drastically altered, changing my perception on the way I viewed them as art as well as the memories associated with them. The remnants of this photo shoot I tore into pieces. Out of these shards in my sadness and anger, I created my *Empty Nest* (Appendix, 9). I was so carried away with the act of tearing the paper and applying the shellac to the shell of photographs that the inside became a cesspool with a tar-like substance, which caused the photographs to be incomprehensible to the viewer. The final stages of this process, using a photograph of that trip, is a wax-dipped crumbled up photograph placed inside the empty nest with a very small folded photograph of the man walking with my dogs. This is discreetly tucked under the crumbled photograph, which represents my broken dreams that came in part as a result of his broken promises.

During this dark time, I found my greatest supporters were my friends and family. Two of my friends knew that I was hurting so they sent me a bouquet of my favorite flowers, which are purple orchids. I dried the orchid petals when they fell off the stems, and saved the stems as well, to make my next nest called *Love Nest* (Appendix, 10). I used the bark from a birch tree one of those friends brought me from Arkansas to build my love nest. I applied shellac over the birch bark and orchid stems and once they stiffened I dripped hot wax over the nest. The dried orchid petals, which resembled hearts, were dipped in encaustic and placed gingerly inside the nest. I realized at this point that my love nest was full to overflowing and my empty nest was just that, empty, indicating to me that it was time to move on.

The first installation piece of art was a step forward for me and I continued my exploration in *Free Fall* (Appendix, 11). I once again took the thumbnails of my photographic journey and glued them back-to-back, dipped them in wax, and strung them together. This time bending them into a U-shape and then stringing them together so that they appeared to be a wave...
cascading down from the ceiling. I created this piece to allow light to shine through the photos, which allowed the viewer to symbolically and literally see two sides of a story at once.

*Sail Away* (Appendix, 12) was a similar installation piece but this time instead of using string and allowing gravity to dictate the form, I used metal jewelry pins to join the photographs together through diagonal corners. This gave it a sail-like appearance, which actually moves with the airflow of the building the same way a sail causes a boat to move. The leftover clippings were used to create other nests. These nests parallel the point in my life which desires to settle down and have children. The nests are currently empty, but they are varied in form and function. My photo pieces provide me with material for other works.

In *Tilted World* (Appendix, 13) I photographed the ocean and pier at an angle and hung the paintings on the diagonal. The horizon line depicted in each skewed image is horizontal bringing a new presentation to my work. For this diamond-shaped series, I applied the oil paint to the surface of the wax and used a heat gun to separate the oil paint from wax, creating a crackled effect. I used the same technique with *Skewed* (Appendix, 14) although in this series I experimented with the vibrancy of colors and amount of paint applied to the wax. I also carved out areas of the painting and rubbed paint into the crevices. This added more texture to the paintings. These titles and images parallel my thoughts and feelings of being off balance, moving from a seemingly solid relationship to being alone again.

In my last-series of paintings, *Being Coy* (Appendix, 15), I used transfers and photos only, omitting paint in order to focus attention on the imagery and textures. In this particular series, I covered the photograph of the koi fish with encaustic and then applied cheesecloth to the wax and fused it to the photograph. From a distance the netting creates the illusion of being in the photograph rather than on the surface of the wax. The title of this piece continues the theme
of nature relating to my own life experiences. Being Coy paralleled my life while I began to date again and play the games men and women tend to play along the way.

**Journey’s End: Path Not Taken**

Throughout my entire life, I have wanted nothing more than to be happily married with a family to take care of; life keeps dealing me a much different hand to play. Being a professional artist was also never a priority, yet somehow my art keeps moving to the forefront of my life. A fitting conclusion to honor nature and my life, the uncertainty of one’s travels, the uncertainty of my next piece of art is found in the poem below:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
   And sorry I could not travel both
   And be one traveler, long I stood
   And looked down one as far as I could
   To where it bent in the undergrowth.

   Then took the other, as just as fair,
   And having perhaps the better claim,
   Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
   Though as for that the passing there
   Had worn them really about the same.

   And both that morning equally lay
   In leaves no step had trodden black.
   Oh, I kept the first for another day!
   Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
   I doubted if I should ever come back.

   I shall be telling this with a sigh
   Somewhere ages and ages hence:
   Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
   I took the one less traveled by,
   And that has made all the difference.

   (Robert Frost, 1916)
Bibliography


Appendix – List of Images

Figure 1. *Solitude*, mixed media, 24”x24”, 2008-2009.

Figure 2. *Vertical Blue*, mixed media, 36”x8”, 2009.

Figure 3. *Ride the Sky*, mixed media, 14”x8”, 2009.

Figure 4. *Somewhere North Carolina*, mixed media, 20”x24”, 2009.

Figure 5. *Still Standing*, mixed media, 32”x32”, 2009.

Figure 6. *A Walk in the Park in the Snow*, mixed media, 20”x20”, 2010.

Figure 7. *Nest 1*, mixed media, 6”x6”x6”, 2010.

Figure 8. *Path Down Memory Lane*, mixed media, 48”x4”x4”, 2010.

Figure 9. *Empty Nest*, mixed media, 4”x8”x8”, 2010.

Figure 10. *Love Nest*, organic materials dipped in beeswax, 6”x6”x6”, 2010.

Figure 11a. *Free Fall*, detail view, mixed media, 120”x4”x4, 2010.

Figure 11b. *Free Fall*, installation view, mixed media, 120”x4”x4”, 2010.

Figure 12. *Sail Away*, mixed media, 72”x4”x4”, 2010.

Figure 13. *Tilted World*, mixed media, 13”x13”, 2010.

Figure 14. *Skewed*, mixed media, 8”x39”, 2010.

Figure 15. *Being Coy*, mixed media, 12”x51”, 2010.
Figure 1. *Solitude*, mixed media, 24”x24”, 2008-2009.
Figure 2. *Vertical Blue*, mixed media, 36”x8”, 2009.
Figure 3. *Ride the Sky*, mixed media, 14”x12”, 2009.
Figure 4. *Somewhere North Carolina*, mixed media, 20”x24”, 2009.
Figure 5. *Still Standing*, mixed media, 32”x32”, 2009.
Figure 6. *A Walk in the Park in the Snow*, mixed media, 20”x20”, 2010.
Figure 7. *Nest 1*, mixed media, 6”x6”x6”, 2010.
Figure 8. *Path Down Memory Lane*, mixed media, 48”x4”x4”, 2010.
Figure 9. *Empty Nest*, mixed media, 4”x8”x8”, 2010.
Figure 10. Love Nest, organic materials dipped in beeswax, 6”x6”x6”, 2010.
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Figure 11b. *Free Fall*, installation view, mixed media, 120”x4”x4”, 2010.
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Figure 13. *Tilted World*, mixed media, 13”x13”, 2010.
Figure 14. *Skewed*, mixed media, 8”x39”, 2010.
Figure 15. *Being Coy*, mixed media, 12”x51”, 2010.
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Education:

2010 Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA Specialization in Painting and Crafts
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2001-2006 Art Teacher, Caroline High School, Caroline County Public Schools, Milton, VA
2000-2001 Art Teacher, Park View High School, Loudoun County Public Schools, Sterling, VA

Exhibitions:

2010 What Lies Beneath, Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts Thesis Exhibition, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA at Plant Zero Presents, Richmond, VA
2010 Art Educator Show, Henrico County Public Schools Central Office, Henrico, VA
2010 Women and Words, art6 Gallery, Richmond, VA
2010 All Media Show, Artworks Gallery, Richmond, VA
2009 Holiday Open House, J. Johnson House, Richmond, VA
2009 ThinkSmall5: The Fifth Biennial International Miniature Invitational Exhibition, art6, Richmond, VA
Exhibitions continued:

2009  
*Women and The Arts*, art6 Gallery, Richmond, VA

2009  
*Art Educator Show*, Henrico County Public Schools Central Office, Henrico, VA

2008  
*All Media Show*, Artworks Gallery, Richmond, VA

2008  
*Art Educator Show*, Henrico County Public Schools Central Office, Henrico, VA

2007  
*All Media Show*, Artworks Gallery, Richmond, VA

2007  
*Art Educator Show*, Henrico County Public Schools Central Office, Henrico, VA

2006  
*Solo Photography Show*, Red Dragon Tattoo, Richmond, VA

Awards:

2010  
3rd *Place*, *Virginia Artists 2010 Juried Exhibition*, The Charles H. Taylor Arts Center, Hampton, VA, Juror: Nancy Sausser

Public Collections:

*A Walk in the Park in the Snow*, The Charles H. Taylor Arts Center, Hampton, VA