Diary

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Diary

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 work reflects the change, growth, metamorphosis, duality, and balance that exists in my life. I focus on the process of change and necessity for adaptation. I’m interested in finding balance among the chaos of everyday living. I’m an observer, an introvert, and a thinker. I see and experience opposing forces all around me. Some are simple observations, such as good versus evil, chaos versus order, organic versus geometric, while some are more personal, such as anxiety versus depression, conflict between the inner versus outer self, disorganization versus obsessive compulsive. I’m fascinated by the delicate point at which opposing forces meet to create balance.

I use a variety of papers, found objects, fiber, paint, drawing, and stitching to represent things that are picked up along my journey. Using a variety of materials and imagery represents the chaos of life. Editing, rearranging, dissecting, and reassembling these materials and imagery with deliberate choice are a way to balance the chaos I see and experience to take back control.

Chapter 1: Retrieving my Identity

After completing my undergraduate degree from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in Art Education, I focused on being an art teacher. All of my creative energy was directed into my teaching. While I gained experience in my profession and found it very rewarding, my personal artwork was neglected. I began the Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts (MIS-IAR) program at VCU to focus on becoming an artist again. In the beginning, I found the transition from teacher to student difficult. I felt that I had lost my artistic voice and personal style. I needed to explore who I was as an artist before I could create work that I felt represented me.

Throughout my time in the MIS-IAR program I have developed a personal style, fine tuned my technique, and learned how to visually and verbally translate my ideas and aesthetics. I’ve overcome my fears and insecurities about creating artwork and have found a confident artist in myself. The classes I’ve taken have encouraged me to find creative solutions when making art, given me license to explore alternate materials, and challenged me to focus on my own work.

Chapter 2: The Pursuit of Balance

I consider myself to be a mixed media artist. I like to have the option of using a variety of materials and processes. My work combines painting, collage, drawing, and both traditional and nontraditional stitching. I use hand, machine, and free motion stitching as a drawing tool, design element, and to aid in construction. The papers and fabrics I use to collage are frequently bits and
pieces of old book pages, notes, or scraps of fabric with interesting patterns or shapes. I also use my own hand-painted papers.

I am more interested in the process than the product. I work spontaneously, combining a variety of materials and techniques. Although I sometimes begin with a specific size and shape for my composition, I allow each piece to expand and grow into its final format. I rarely work large because using the sewing machine for stitching limits the size of paper or fabric I can use. In addition, keeping a modest size invokes an intimacy between the viewer and the work itself. Viewers are encouraged to come up close to look at the work.

I try to work intuitively but it is inevitable that analytical thought helps to steer me in one direction or another. I am influenced by my surroundings, what I see and experience. I do not begin to work with a concrete idea but recurring imagery in my work is apparent. Patterns and shapes found in nature make up the majority of my imagery. I often use circles, ellipses, and loops that remind me of pebbles, eggs, or cells. I use patterns that mimic those found in wood grain, honeycombs, or leaves. For example, a strong organic influence is seen in *Summer 3* (Appendix, 1) in the pod-like leaves of the plant. These natural and biomorphic elements can be also seen throughout my body of work in the patterned fabrics and papers I choose. Often, I contrast and balance these organic elements with a geometric counterpart, like a rectangle, square, or straight line.

I draw upon my own personal experience for my ideas. Inclusion of stitching creates a symbolic tie between my current work and my childhood, growing up quilting and sewing. I also include symbols, letters, and numbers to invoke the idea of a secret code between the past and present. These symbolic icons signal a potential conversation between the work and the viewer.

My work reflects my interest in creating balance, in art and in everyday living. I observe
opposing forces all around me, such as chaos versus order and good versus evil. I recognize conflict within myself, such as finding balance among high and low moods, the inner personality and the mask that is portrayed to others, being disorganized versus overly controlling. I internalize those opposing forces and translate them into my work by purposefully creating a chaotic atmosphere and finding the delicate point at which the opposing forces meet to find balance. I do this in many ways. Working with a variety of materials represents the flood of information I am exposed to on a daily basis, such as expectations, social interactions, and responsibilities. This represents the disorganization of life. It is my goal to prioritize, arrange, and categorize these daily tasks to create stability. I work to find balance in the materials, regaining control of them. I also demonstrate this by combining contrasting elements such as geometric and organic shapes, traditional drawing materials and the stitched line, and using new materials and found objects. For example, in Purple Vines (Appendix, 2 and 2a) I have combined several papers by stitching them together. Using squares and rectangles of cut fabric has created a geometric patchwork. The organic, curvilinear pattern was then overlaid on top of the geometric background. The surface design was applied in many ways. In the top center square, the design was painted on the green background using blue paint. The contour lines were traced by stitching with violet thread. Then, I continued to stitch the design on the rectangle to the left. The negative space around the stitching was then painted using a light green. Then, I attached the fabric shapes that resemble plants to the section on the far right. These shapes are heavily stitched using the same violet thread. Finally, I added an additional organic design using light green paint and stitching to accentuate the design.

Creating a compositional equilibrium illustrates my struggle to find balance in all aspects of my life. Opposing forces need each other to exist. Without dark there would be no light.
Without chaos there would be no order. Polar opposites contrast and define each other. However, in order to coexist in nature these conflicting areas must meet in the middle and find balance.

**Chapter 3: Controlling Chaos**

During my coursework I also worked with crafts, focusing on fiber. I learned about the history and tradition of quilting and stitching in many different cultures. It seemed appropriate that I would include in my work a medium that grew and evolved throughout the years, and was used all over the world. In a way stitching can be viewed as a universal language or common bond between people.

My method of creating focuses on the importance of the process. I typically begin with an assortment of seemingly random materials at my fingertips. I sift, shift, and shuffle looking for order in randomness. I examine the colors, textures, and shapes looking for possible combinations. I think of each piece as a part of myself. These small bits are symbolic elements that represent aspects of my personality. I look at these deconstructed fragments, analyze and study them. I decipher the perceived information to solve the puzzle of how to compose them and make them whole again. I am changing, growing, adapting, and editing along with my work. When keeping a personal journal or diary, information is recorded that can be broken down and analyzed. These smaller bits of information are connected either by gluing or sewing them together. The choices I make during the creative process with materials, placement, and colors allow me to organize a cohesive composition. Editing, rearranging, dissecting, and reassembling these materials and imagery with deliberate choice are a way to balance the chaos I see in the bulk of materials, and in turn, my life.

I use a variety of materials to represent a myriad of personal experiences. For example,
collecting things like scraps of fabric from my Grama’s sewing basket or pages torn from a favorite book are directly related to memories of my childhood. In *Orange Wave* (Appendix, 3 and 3a), the printed pages are from an old textbook and the green and black fabric was left over scraps from my Grama’s skirt after she hemmed it up. The orange fabric was snipped off of the selvage, the fabric edge that is usually discarded. I rescued it from the wastepaper basket. The hand-painted papers are salvaged scraps from previous projects or cut from dropcloths. The barrage of material and information, combined with ever varying emotions, can be overwhelming. In combining all of these elements to allow them to coexist peacefully, I reign in the chaos and create order.

I often incorporate hand and machine stitching into my work. I spent a lot of my childhood with my Grama, who taught me to sew and to make quilts. I can see now the correlation between creating a collage and constructing a quilt. You must begin with small pieces that are combined into a larger finished product. When helping my Grama make a quilt, I learned that each piece of fabric had a story. Whether it was the beginning of a story, such as that of new fabric bought at the store, or an old story, like fabric from my Grampa’s plaid golfing pants. each of these small pieces had to be united to form a whole cohesive composition. Growing up learning to sew and making quilts also allowed me to appreciate history within an artwork. Recognizing this history helped me to form a bond between construction and expression when creating.

The influence of quilting can be seen in my collage work *Summer 2* (Appendix, 4). The base fabrics and papers are arranged in a modified grid layout, similar to the rows of a pattern-oriented quilt. I create rows and columns using pieces that vary in size and shape constructing a grid that seems more organic than geometric. When creating a quilt, the blocks are typically laid
out and pinned in the desired arrangement. The pinning temporarily secures the pieces until they are sewn together. Instead of pinning my pieces, which would be difficult and damage the papers, I temporarily attached them using freezer paper. Freezer paper is coated in a wax that can be ironed on to a piece of fabric or paper. This will hold it together but can be removed with no damage or residue left on the materials.

The patterns on the various papers in *Summer 2* are reminiscent of fabric patterns. The hand-painted paper was decorated using acrylic paint and hand-cut stencils. The diamond-like pattern stencil can be seen on two of the papers in orange and green paint in the upper left and lower right corners. The cream colored watercolor paper in the upper right has painted pink circles and brown triangles. The grey paper on the lower left side of the composition is also painted and has a piece of tissue paper layered on it that consists of the negative shapes of the circles cut from it. Some of these circles cut from the tissue paper were used in this piece and attached with acrylic medium. Some of the circles added are fabric. The circles that have text on them were taken from pages of old library books. The text is in reverse, this takes away the importance of what the text means and uses it as a design element only. Some of the circles are stitched over using free motion stitching to mimic the pattern seen in the commercially decorative paper.

Mimicking and repeating design elements helps to bring order and sense to a piece. In *Summer 1* (Appendix, 5) examples of free motion machine stitching can be seen throughout. Free motion stitching allows me to draw with the sewing machine needle, much like using a continuous line from a pencil or pen. This is done by dropping the feed dogs on the sewing machine. Lowering the part that feeds the fabric through the machine and under the needle gives you the ability to control the direction and speed. In *Summer 1*, these are the sewn lines that are
reminiscent of branches, roots, or veins. I overlapped the stitching in the circles in a repetitive motion or by radiating out from the centers. Adding stitching brings emphasis to the shapes. The repetition creates a pattern which brings attention to them as well. I emphasize these circular elements to hint at their importance. As the author and symbolist, Elizabeth S. Helfman (1911- ) said, “The most important shape of all was the circle. There have always been circles in nature. Circle after circle spreads out when you drop a pebble into still water. Circles of growth inside a tree trunk are revealed when the tree is cut down.” (Helfman, 69)

I often use circles and ellipses as a reference to a cycle. This relates to the cycle of life or the process of artistic creation and destruction because I work by constructing and deconstructing and by reusing materials. This repetition can be seen in Small in Nature 8 (Appendix, 6) from my Small in Nature series. The circular shapes were cut from pages of text. Some of these pieces were layered over other circles cut from green hand-painted paper. Others had circular shapes cut out from them, leaving a loop of paper. Once these were attached to the ground, they were sewn over with dark plum colored thread to further accentuate them.

I am bombarded by information every day. The torrent of to-do lists, appointments to meet, phone calls to make, papers to grade, ideas for my art or student lessons can be overwhelming and chaotic. I often make lists to organize the abundance of thoughts running through my head. This is my way to control the chaos of daily life. When creating art, I use a myriad of materials and processes to represent this idea of chaos and disorganization. Consciously arranging these elements and finding a harmonious composition will regain control of the chaos I’ve created.
Chapter 4: Inspiration and Adaption

My artistic influences are innumerable. It’s in my nature to observe, collect, and record. Some artist’s influence can be seen in my color choices or design elements. In others, I feel a connection to their creative struggles. Yet, others inspire me to be creative. In particular, I have always felt a kinship with Henri Matisse’s (1869-1954) collage work. Though my work does not look like his, his inspiration can be seen within my work. I share his attraction to pattern, organic shapes, and color. I particularly like his paper cut-outs where he created works using scissors as his tool. *The Beasts of the Sea* (1950) is an example of one of Matisse’s paper cuts. The papers he used in his constructions were often hand-painted. He also frequently used basic geometric shapes. These stable shapes seem to anchor the background, so that the lighter organic shapes are free to dance upon the page. Matisse also used the positive and negative shapes from the papers that were cut. This original piece holds the history or the memory of the shape cut out in negative.

I often use the positive and negative cut shapes in my work in paper and in fabric. In my work *Morning Glory* (Appendix, 7 and 7a) I have constructed a geometric background using various hand-painted papers and book pages. These pages are secured to each other using stitching. The organic shapes, that mimic those of morning glories, are cut from a piece of black fabric. The positive and negative shapes cut from the fabric are easily visible in this piece. The black fabric circles were cut from the rectangle and the center star-like shapes were cut from the circles. The fabric is attached with fusible web and stitched over. Traditionally, fusible web is ironed on when attaching pieces of fabric to stabilize it for stitching. I used it when layering paper or fabric. It is permanent and remains a part of the image, unlike the temporary use of freezer paper.
I am also drawn to the work of Hannelore Baron (1926-1987) who is known for her mixed media collages and boxes. Her work is a combination of old and used materials including paper and fabric. I identify with her idea of including objects that previously held another function which lends a little piece of history to the composition. This provides a link from the past to the present and future. Baron used fabric in her work as a link to her childhood and her family owned textile shop. Some of these materials can be seen in War Letters (1975). Like Baron, I often use fabric in my work as a reference to my childhood. In my work Blue Leaves (Appendix, 8 and 8a), I have sewn together pieces of canvas and paper to create the ground. The canvas was salvaged from an unstretched painting. The papers were originally used as studio dropcloths. I use paper or fabric dropcloths because they record the history of my creative processes. This past history can then be used as a foundation for a new piece.

Baron’s work expressed other key themes, such as examining polar opposites. She used stitching and string in her artwork to illustrate this concept. For example, binding could represent the “horror of being bound or the satisfaction of closure.” (Schaffner, 4) Baron’s work was intensely introspective and personal. Her small work is similar in size to the pages of a book, suggesting a visual diary. Working at a small size invites the viewer in close, creating an intimacy between the viewer and the artwork. I also work small for this reason. Also, once the viewer is encouraged to take a closer look they will notice the small details of my work, such as the stitching which cannot be appreciated from afar.

While in the MIS-IAR program, I was introduced to several local working Richmond artists through visits to their studios. After visiting painter Sally Bowring’s studio, and hearing her talk about her process of working, I was inspired. She uses an alternative approach to painting, working flat on wood paneling and applying color with a spray bottle. This prompted
me to think about using nontraditional methods or processes to create art. Instead of using a brush, I often use my scissors or stitched line as the drawing tool. In *Summer 2* (Appendix, 4) I have attached cut circles of paper and fabric and mimicked the repeated circles using free motion stitching. I often experiment with materials or processes in a way that is unconventional. Using the freezer paper and fusible web are examples of this. I often include fabric and paper that previously held another function, such as fabric from old sheets or paper from a gift box. In the *Symbols* series (Appendix, 9) I used thinned paint with water or acrylic medium, working in layers. I allowed the paint to drip and run. I also splattered on water, let it sit for a minute and then wiped it off taking some of the paint with it. This left a stain, a memory of the action. I also use a hot iron to heat up the water or medium to lift off areas of color. I was exploring alternate ways of layering images by adapting materials to create a purpose other than its original intention. Being introduced to artists that challenge conventional art materials and processes has inspired me. In a way, I was given permission to experiment. This led to my use of materials such as cut stencils and masks, and using sewing materials on paper and as drawing elements.

We also visited Cindy Neuschwander’s studio. Although we don’t share a common bond of materials or imagery, I was influenced by her work. In one series, she allowed herself the freedom to work small and explore the materials. The small pieces reminded me of book pages. She described that creating the small pieces provided her a place to unwind, and record her observations of the day. This daily record keeping could be seen as a visual diary. Her daily activity impressed me in terms of my own work. I feel that recording this history and reusing the visual information later connects the past, present, and future. I used this inspiration when creating the series *Small in Nature Series 1-8* (Appendix, 10). These pieces were created as a response to my daily observations. I kept them small and identical in size to suggest a book or
diary. I am inspired by artists whose art or working methods invoke a spark of creativity in me. As an artist, I am an observer and a recorder of the information I am exposed to. My record is personal to my experience and to how I translate the information. In this way, the work becomes my diary.

Chapter 5: My Work is My Diary

A diary is a personal record of daily life. It can capture thoughts, inner feelings, and secrets. Keeping a diary is an outlet for emotions. It is also a way to look back, reflect on thoughts, learn something about yourself, and grow. A diary is usually small and intimate, kept close and private. It can reveal innermost secrets if viewed by others. I relate these ideas closely to making art. My work is my diary. I am telling a story, revealing myself with every choice I make. This idea was captured well by fiction novelist Chuck Palaniuk in his book, *Diary*, when he wrote “…everything you do is a self-portrait. It might look like *Saint George and the Dragon* or *The Rape of the Sabine Women*, but the angle you use, the lighting, the composition, the technique, they’re all you…You are every color and brushstroke…Everything is a self-portrait. Everything is a diary.” (Palaniuk, 132) The choices I make during the creative process are unique to me and my record of personal observations. Whether the choices I make are conscious or not, they are my own. The reason I prefer greens over reds reveals something about myself. The meaning is no less important if it’s not understood or perceived the same by the viewer. The importance to me is in the record, the process.

Using pages of text in my work also hints at the idea of a diary. Sometimes the pages of text appear as a design element only, as seen in *Small in Nature 7* (Appendix, 11). These pieces of paper were taken from pages of my old college textbooks. Using something from my past in a
new work of art includes a bit of myself. This text is not meant to be read. The connection to the artwork is mine alone, not the viewers. I am revealing something about myself but holding the meaning back, suggesting something secret or private. I often use text in my work to suggest the communication of ideas, though the words do not necessarily have literal meaning. Using letters, numbers, and symbols in this way gives the impression of communicating ideas in a cryptic way. I want the viewer to interpret these symbols from their own experiences, not force my own upon them. I’m reminded of Paul Klee’s (1879-1940) use of symbols, letters, and numbers in some of his work, like Secret Script Picture (1932). His combinations of lines, circles, and dots refer to communication and conjure up images of writings from some ancient language. The meaning is withheld and left to the viewer’s imagination.

Chapter 6: The Next Chapter

One of the benefits of keeping a diary is giving myself the opportunity to view my experiences from more than one perspective. In my diary I record information and personal observations. The process of creating provides me an emotional outlet and allows me time to be creative. I work spontaneously, basing my experience on intuition not rationale. I find it interesting to revisit my work later from a new perspective. Creating art and viewing art are two very different experiences. I reflect on the observations and choices I’ve made to gain insight into myself as an artist. This new information will be used in future work. I am constantly editing, changing, and adapting along with my work. I’m continuing to include elements from my past into my current work. It is important for me to consider history and how it relates to the present. I plan to further explore these biographical components as I begin a new chapter of my diary.
Bibliography


Appendix – List of Images

Figure 1.  *Summer 3*, mixed media, 18” x 11 ½”, 2010.

Figure 2.  *Purple Vines*, mixed media, 9 ¾”x 21 ¼”, 2009.

Figure 2a.  *Purple Vines*, (detail), mixed media, 9 ¾”x 21 ¼”, 2009.

Figure 3.  *Orange Wave*, mixed media, 8 ½” x 26 ¼”, 2009.

Figure 3a.  *Orange Wave*, (detail), mixed media, 8 ½” x 26 ¼”, 2009.

Figure 4.  *Summer 2*, mixed media, 10 ½” x 14”, 2010.

Figure 5.  *Summer 1*, mixed media, 12” x 13 ½”, 2010.

Figure 6.  *Small in Nature 8*, mixed media, 6”x 6”, 2010.

Figure 7.  *Morning Glory*, mixed media, 8 ¼” x 23 ¾”, 2009.

Figure 7a.  *Morning Glory*, (detail), mixed media, 8 ¼” x 23 ¾”, 2009.

Figure 8.  *Blue Leaves*, mixed media, 8 ¾” x 18”, 2009.

Figure 8a.  *Blue Leaves*, (detail), mixed media, 8 ¾” x 18”, 2009.

Figure 9.  *Symbols, 1-4*, mixed media on canvas, each 12” x 12”, 2010.

Figure 10.  *Small in Nature Series, 1-8* (top to bottom, left to right), mixed media, each 6”x 6”, 2010.

Figure 11.  *Small in Nature 7*, mixed media, 6”x 6”, 2010.
Figure 1.  *Summer 3*, mixed media, 18” x 11 ½”, 2010.
Figure 2. *Purple Vines*, mixed media, 9 ¾” x 21 ¾”, 2009.

Figure 2a. *Purple Vines*, (detail), mixed media, 9 ¾” x 21 ¾”, 2009.
Figure 3. *Orange Wave*, mixed media, 8 ½” x 26 ¼”, 2009.

Figure 3a. *Orange Wave*, (detail), mixed media, 8 ½” x 26 ¼”, 2009.
Figure 4. *Summer 2*, mixed media, 10 ½” x 14”, 2010.
Figure 5. *Summer 1*, mixed media, 12” x 13 ½”, 2010.
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Figure 7a.  *Morning Glory*, (detail), mixed media, 8 ¼” x 23 ¾”, 2009.
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Figure 9. *Symbols, 1-4*, mixed media on canvas, each 12” x 12”, 2010.
Figure 10.  *Small in Nature Series, 1-8* (top to bottom, left to right), mixed media, each 6”x 6”, 2010.
Figure 11. *Small in Nature 7*, mixed media, 6”x 6”, 2010.
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EDUCATION:
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2008  *Hanover County Art Educators*, Hanover County School Board Office, Hanover, VA