1. THE WAY I WANT TO WRITE IT

By

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MASTER OF FINE ARTS
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Date
These are the reasons I used to make art (and sometimes still do): I like to make a mess then clean it up, I like to turn ugly things into pretty things and pretty things into ugly pretty things, I like to be alone with a pile of junk, I like to think, I like to get dirty and messy and covered with stuff, I love to use my hands to make things, I like to fit random things together (it’s like a puzzle), I love to create because it’s meditative, it’s also cathartic, it makes me cry and it feels really good because I’m alone (I hate to cry in front of other people), I like to be alone, I can let it all hang out, I’m the only one judging it, you can make things anywhere!, you can make things and then send them to people, it makes me feel like a little kid, I can draw like a little kid, no one will reprimand me about anything when I am alone making art, I don’t have to talk to anyone, I don’t have to wear any shoes, I can listen to the same song on repeat, my cat can get oil pastel stuck in the fur on his paws.
Before grad school I felt like I made art for me, then it became about everyone else. The whole time I’ve been here I have been too scared, too beat down, too discouraged to feel confident enough to make the art I wanted to make, the art I always made before I came here. Nothing here was good enough, finished enough, pretty enough, ugly enough, well printed enough, printed at all, half the time it was simply ignored and on and on. The only reason I could make anything that was the tiniest bit true to me was because I started collaborating with two supportive individuals. The work we have made together was my saving grace. It empowered me. I have cut, sanded, spray-painted, moved furniture hundreds of times, climbed super tall ladders (even in the face of my huge fear of heights), shot thousands of staples into things until my palm was screaming, I have ripped up 50 feet of carpet, painted and painted and painted, drilled hundreds of things, scrubbed, hauled, lifted, taped, hunted for and discovered hundreds of things. I have begged, bartered and borrowed everything. I have learned how to cook, bake, sew, surge, stuff, drink and talk to people, and make things happen.

I had a utopian undergraduate experience at the University of California, Santa Cruz. At twenty-one I graduated and realized I was losing my community this included my friends and art facilities. The only option to regain all of those things seemed to be to go to graduate school and get my MFA. I applied with one of my best friends, Audrey, and incredibly, we were both accepted. The first year was hell. I had no idea graduate school was so little about making your own work and so much about figuring out how to navigate social bureaucracy. I drank way too much coffee and alcohol, slept not nearly enough, got super sick a lot and made some of the same work I had made the last year of
undergrad. Finally I said fuck it and started making some really ugly sculptures. Who said I had to just print-make?

Part way into the second semester when I thought I was going to lose my mind I drove up to New York City with six other people. We saw some amazing art exhibitions and ended up listening to an amazing artist, Petah Coyne, give a talk on her work. I was floored. I had never heard someone speak so candidly about his or her own life and art making. She talked about how important it was for her to do nothing but read and go for walks for a few months of the year. It is so important! That was the way I had always done it at school. I would go and go until Christmas rolled around and while at home for that month long break I would do nothing but read and drink tea and the same in the summer. You have to have that time to re-gather yourself. After New York, we came back to Athens and Audrey and our new friend Erin decided to put some of our newly discovered enthusiasm to good use. Audrey and I were living in a giant house with tons of extra space so the three of us took a room upstairs to make an installation in and we invited the other four people from the New York trip to put work up throughout the rest of the house. What we made became the first of many collaborative installations. This one we called Francoise. It was a room filled with numerous rolls of newsprint as well as fabric scraps stapled to the walls and ceilings. Erin fabricated a spinning round bed frame and the three of us upholstered it in white satiny fabric. We also cut, sanded and stenciled wood panels to create a new floor and brought in spray-painted tables and lamps. We hid soap in the folds of fabric and newsprint and had a Françoise Hardy song playing on repeat to complete the mood. This was my first foray into true collaboration. It was everything I had ever anticipated plus more. The three of us gave constant critique before,
during and after working. We went until we could go no longer and we got so much done in so little time! If one of us was bored or stuck we would switch places and things would keep moving along. Brainstorming together hailed so many more ideas than if you were thinking alone. With Francoise we had found a way to express, in a positive fashion, all the frustration we felt at school and over living in the south. We had also succeeded in creating a safe environment where we could begin to nourish our budding creative community. We had empowered each other and ourselves. It felt really good.

The summer before our second year we got the use of the main gallery at Lamar Dodd for a few weeks to do a show. We had balls of newsprint from taking down our previous work, Françoise, so we schlepped them all over to the gallery and tried to hang them up. It didn’t work. With each passing day we got more and more frustrated. Part way into it we brought in fabric and started cutting out shapes and hanging them up. We also went shopping at an old junk shop one day and came across a bunch of old windows and a giant roll of flowered plastic picnic table material. We hung up windows, clotheslines of fabric shapes and covered the floor and vaulted ceiling with the plastic material. Everything started to come together. The next thing we knew we needed was furniture because we wanted people to sit and relax. We gathered what little we had and for the rest, we called up all of our friends and drove around one night picking up porch gliders, chairs and tables. We set it all up and hung Erin’s lamps in the corner. We also had a couple of fans going to create a breeze. Outside you could hear the cicadas. At the opening we had picnic finger food and mimosas. We had created our second collaborative installation entitled Pleasantries (though it was anything but) and had officially made it through to our second year of graduate school.
Over the next two years I became intrigued with making hanging sculptures, this obsession began with a recycling project. We had finished our second collaborative installation, Pleasantries, and we had a ton of left over knotted up string. I decided I wanted to use it to make something instead of simply throwing it away. I had been intending to make plaster molds of string but instead began dipping string in plaster. I loved the weight and height and gross beauty of these pieces and that the plaster was at both a cocoon protecting the brightly colored string and was also a pristine whiteness trying to eclipse the string. I began to play with more hanging sculptures. I had a huge box with bits of torn up paper in it and I began to sew them together with tiny bits of pink cloth and tiny squares of Mylar.

By this time, the thirty-hour review was coming up and Erin, Audrey and I wanted to find a venue, not a gallery space, where we could have a show. Thanks to one of our professors we found an old elementary school that was for the most part abandoned. It was fifteen minutes from Athens in Colbert, Georgia and the mayor just gave us a key. We set to work immediately, tearing out old moldy carpeting, scrubbing the floors and walls with tea tree oil and clearing out all of the spiders. Once that was done we set to work painting and trying to figure out which spaces we wanted to use. We had been getting a ton of pressure to create separate works from some faculty at school. So our solution was to work in the same “space” but in separate rooms. Erin ended up with the hallway between the two rooms Audrey and I had chosen. We kept up our dialogue the whole semester we worked out there; bouncing ideas off of each other, brainstorming, helping each other build components of the work and hang things. In my room, I unraveled string, made tons of ceramic beads and tore up old prints to hang together. I
also rediscovered craft loops and lanyard in my search for more materials. I looped thousands of craft loops together to create huge soft hanging sculptures and tied everything together at the top with lanyard. I cut pieces of wood and screwed in hundreds of hooks and in turn screwed those into the ceiling so that I could hang all of my sculpture from the ceiling at the old school house. I was making and hanging these sculptures simultaneously. I would have to move everything around as I was going too to make sure the space felt right. When I was about to run out of time I stepped back and realized something was missing. I had a forest of colorful fun sculptures, a green floor to resemble grass but I wanted something interactive. The first thing Erin and Audrey said when they walked in was “you should have swings!” They were right and I knew it. I went to our old junk shop and lo and behold there were two swings waiting for me. I went back and installed them right away and tested them out. They were perfect! Finally, with my room in our show, The Silver Lining, I had succeeded in pulling together every facet of my art: printmaking, painting, photography and sculpture. For so long I had been dipping my fingers in every medium I could, yet each one was always so separate. I constantly felt as though I was splintered into fifty different parts. With this forest of hanging sculptures I was finally able to pull all those separate parts together to make a whole. It was also the very first large-scale installation of sculpture I had every created by myself. Though I knew there were things I could improve upon, it gave me great confidence to keep going.

While we were working at the schoolhouse we applied for and received the ICE grant to do a house installation project, entitled the Three-Layer Cake Tour. We were also asked to put a show up at the Atlanta based gallery Eyedrum the following semester in
February. That meant we were going to have to prep and hang a show in February in Atlanta while prepping the start of our Athens-based Three-Layer Cake Tour. When spring semester started we began a video and audio class to learn how to navigate the technology we needed to use in our installations in order to satisfy the terms of the ICE grant. We also began to cut, sew, surge and knot our fabric for the Eyedrum show entitled, Many Blinds. We realized if we were going to drive back and forth everyday to hang a show in Atlanta in a week, we would have to make it a much more formal piece. We decided on the u shapes and the knots and the floor seats with casters. The space we created I like to describe as the place my harem would hang out if I had a harem. What we had created was a lounge parlor.

The next installation we made was Three-Layer Cake Tour Part 1: Sebastian’s House. We were offered the use of a home on Cherry Lane owned by one Sebastian Thibedeau and three young,arty guys inhabited it. We recorded sound and video pieces from the old school house and once again gathered all the furniture we had, as well as our friends’ and whatever furniture Sebastian said we could use. We set to work making a giant fort in their living room. Inside the fort and in the bathroom we projected three video pieces and all over the house we had hidden speakers. Outside on the back patio we draped fabric and projected images of the schoolhouse theatre seats as well as the sound of ceramic chimes playing on hidden speakers. We also served four three-layer cakes. With this installation, I gained great confidence in my ability to use sound and video. I realized how many more levels it could add to a work of art, especially one in which you desire the viewers participation.
The last collaborative show we had, One Foot and Four Toes, was this past fall semester. We moved out of the house we had all been living in together, the house in which we made our first installation. We decided it would be a perfect way to say goodbye. We began the project by writing letters to each other at the start of the semester and we each based our project on the letters we received. We approached it the same way as the schoolhouse: we each took a room. I decided to use my old bedroom. All I knew when I started was that I wanted to use video, audio and this amazing pink pantyhose fabric I had. I hung pale pink pantyhose sacks, the same shape as the baby packages in Dumbo, filled with my old toys, clothes and letters in the corner. I covered each windowpane with fuzzy red contact paper so that the whole room took on a red tone. I set up two rocking chairs and between them placed the mobile that hung over my crib when I was a baby. From the closet I projected a distorted image of my childhood music box marionettes onto the sacks hanging in the corner of the room. I recorded the music boxes and the sound of crumpling paper and played it from the closet as well. This piece, like much of my work, was greatly informed by the idea of the loss of innocence. I often think of my work as a visual documentation of my very painful attempt at "growing up". I constantly flip between thinking about moving to the next phase of my life and never feeling like I will reach beyond the age of fourteen. This piece is about this duality: the excitement of being old enough to get married and have babies and also of being scared shitless to move beyond being a child. The childhood paraphernalia has personal connotations, which are negative and positive. I distorted the music box imagery and songs to make them more frightening than they were originally in order to portray the
fear I feel simply thinking about growing up. It is also symbolic of the way your memories of things change, as you get older.

With my thesis work, The Embrace, I have knitted a work of art for myself. I learned how to knit on my 23rd birthday, a few weeks before moving to Georgia. Instead of packing, I would sit in the corner of my bed until 4, 5 or 6 o’clock in the morning knitting. When I would finally wake up the next day, I would immediately attend to my knitting again. It was so meditative, so soothing in a time of stress and nervous anticipation. Since then, I have always turned to knitting during times of high anxiety and stress in order to relax. It would literally take hours and hours away from my very important schoolwork but it would give me a tiny bit of relaxation and relief. Over the past few years I have been wishing I could translate this repetitive, self-therapy into something I could call a “real” piece of art but I just kept making really, really long scarves. The intricacy of a knitting project was never important to me. It was the relentless repetition, the mesmerizing, almost sleep-inducing movement of my hands I loved. It allowed my mind the freedom to wander without worry. So this art piece isn’t what school wanted, or a shared idea between my two collaborators and myself. It is simply, what I wanted to make. I finally took time away from everything else in my life to give myself time to think and decompress. It is a synthesized expression of every feeling I have experienced in the past three years. I have constantly struggled to contain myself, to hide in a pretty way all of the things I don’t want people to see. The more vibrant and beautiful I made this work, the more I knew it would distract from the true nature of its existence: the concealment of emotional fragility and sorrow. The knitted forms are like deflated versions of mall balloons stuffed with smaller balloons and toys.
There are things, whether physical or psychological, which exist inside each shape. They are beautiful to look at and the material is so intriguing that you want to touch it but the forms themselves are like deflated hopes. They are the physical interpretation of the phrase “put on a happy face”. The knitted lanyard, like every other material I have been using for the past three years, is rooted in child-hood arts and crafts. I have a dual purpose for using this material: I want the viewer to feel they can approach and interact with my work and I want to feel the same freedom and enjoyment making art now as I did when I was a little kid.
3 Layer Cake Tom
3 Layer Cake Tour

3 Layer Cake Tour
One foot & four toes

One foot & four toes
one foot + four toes

one foot + four toes
MFA The Embrace 2007