With Thoughts That Make For Peace

By

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The title to my thesis exhibition is called, *With thoughts that make for peace*. This title is taken from an Emily Dickinson poem *The Oriole*. This line possesses the essences in which I have been searching for the three years I have been at the University of Georgia.

I have always counted things. I count because it calms me down. I count random things, like steps, cracks in the sidewalk, tiles in the ceiling and how many times the word “like” is used during a conversation. The counting was something I do to stop myself of thinking too much. I’m always worried about what was and what will be. Where I have to go and what needs to be done. I’m not even good with math. Yes, I can always find the answer to X, but sometimes I forget what number I’m on and I have to recount, and recount, and recount. The counting forces me to be present or just still. And yes, I need to be still. My rocking back and forth makes people with motion sickness a little queasy. And so I count.

This is the artist statement, which I like to share with people. It tells you nothing about what my work looks likes, but tells you a little about me. Although my aesthetics lean towards the clean and refine, I am not concerned with what my work actually looks like. It is about the process that is taken to make the object and the evidence of time spent in doing so. Sometimes the object or piece of art is considered to be beautiful while other times it could be seen as crafty. In either case it is about the steps in which I force my mind to take to create the work. I have never asked myself why I needed to calm down until I started my work here at the University of Georgia.
I have always known what I wanted to do with my life. I wanted to be an artist. Even as a young child I would answer the aged old question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I would answer with, "I'm going to be the next Van Gough." After graduating from John Randolph Tucker High School in Richmond, Virginia I got into all three art schools in which I applied to. Weeks before the first day of college I found out I wasn't an American citizen and had no way of paying for school. The dream of being an artist would have to be put on hold. I started working for some of the major banks in the country; NationsBank now Bank of America and Capital One Financial, just to name a couple. The years went by and I found myself becoming increasingly unhappy with my career. I was able to save enough money to walk away from the world of finance to the world of art. In 2003 I was a wide-eyed freshman at Virginia Commonwealth University.

My first semester there I had a defining moment in my life. My drawing studio professor Bill Fisher gave us a project. The project was simple. We were to draw on a sheet of paper three feet wide by four feet in height. We could draw anything we wanted to. We could have other people draw on it. We could use any materials to make the marks, from charcoal to magic markers and anything in between. When it was time to critique the drawings he asked one question and one question only. "Is there anything here you have never seen before?" My jaw dropped and I sat in amazement.

Prior to this moment I had always drawn representational images from still lifes to portraits, using the most traditional of materials such as pencils, pastels and watercolors. After that critique I realized that I wanted to be more abstract and to simplify and clarify my mark making into what I consider to be my two essential marks. These were the tick or hash mark, which for me can represent time or the
accumulation of something and the circle which can represent any and everything similar to the Ray and Charles Eames movie, "The Powers of Ten". In this movie the circles start off as the stars and universes in space then these circles eventually become the very cells in your body. When I saw this film for the first time, I felt it embodied what I was thinking as far as mark making and the concepts it encompassed. Although I use different materials and different processes to make marks from printmaking to sculptural materials, all these processes and materials are for me a form of drawing and mark making. The motion my hand makes while I crochet is similar to a circular shape. Cutting into a book is as series of tick marks and wiping an intaglio plate is an exaggerated form of that same tick mark.

Prior to joining the program in the fall of 2008, my work consisted of prints, as well as two-dimensional and three-dimensional drawings, conveying elements of numbers using the fore-mentioned marks. The numbers represented the things I was counting and accumulating. One day while counting the steps from my front door to where my car parked I realized what I was really doing. I had walked all the way to my car and turned back not once, not twice, but three times to check to see if I locked my front door. What was triggering me to do this? Why was I checking it to see if the door was locked? I knew logically that I had locked the door, but why was I watching myself relock the door over and over again? There was something in my mind that was telling me to check. There was a voice in my head that was telling me something was wrong, and telling me about worries that didn’t exist, and giving me doubts about what I knew to be true, and what I thought was true. Elizabeth Meriwether Gilmer had written, "It is
a queer thing, but imaginary troubles are harder to bear than actual ones." The counting was a coping mechanism. I was counting to stop myself from thinking these thoughts, thoughts that had no relevance other than to worry or stress me. I had come to the realization that every piece of artwork that I had made was a mini meditation, a much needed rest and stillness, which my true self was longing for even though it may not have known it at the time. My true self was fighting with my mind or that inner voice inside my head. "It's hard to fight an enemy who has outposts in your head." The best weapon to combat this enemy for me was to come up with simple constructs to create my work. When concentrating on one act and one thing at a time, it forces me to be at peace, to be present and to be still.

It has been said: "Stillness is the language God speaks, and everything else is a bad translation." Stillness is really another word for space. Becoming conscious the timeless dimension within ourselves, that which is beyond thought, beyond ego. It may be the stillness that pervades the world of nature, or the stillness in your room in the early hours of the morning, or the silent gaps in between it. Thought is a form. Being aware of stillness means to be still. To be still is to be conscious without thought. You are never more essentially, more deeply, yourself than when you are still. When you are still, you are who you were before you temporarily assumed the physical and mental form called a person. You are also who you will be when the form dissolves. When you are still, you are who you are beyond your temporal existence: consciousness—unconditioned, formless, eternal—


2 Sam Horn, Take the Bull by the Horns (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 31.

In meditation classes the first thing the instructor will ask you to do is to clear your mind. The first thing that pops into my head when they say this is, "What do you mean, clear my mind?" Then the constant bombardment of thoughts will rush into my head after that. Are we what Rene Descartes quoted, "I think, therefore I am"? How can we be just a thought? In a performance piece where I sat and folded origami butterflies and pinned them to the wall called I am, I had this statement printed on each of the 6,799 butterflies in which I had folded. "I believe that I am not a collection of thoughts; more than what words can mean; beyond their sounds, separate from my mind, but trapped within its' creation." My research is about the mind and how we use it or how it uses us. It's about finding calmness, stillness, timelessness and hopefully peace.

In With Thoughts That Make For Peace I am showcasing 36-boxed pieces. These boxed pieces all vary in their materials and were made to fit within the dimension of 12 " x 12", by something that would equal 12". I can speak of the significance of the number twelve in history, religion and mathematics. For example the twelve Olympians of ancient Greece, the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve disciples of Jesus, the twelve letters in the Hebrew Alphabet, the twelve days of Christmas, twelve months in a year, in math twelve has a perfect number of divisors and the sum of its divisor is also a perfect number and so on. Although these things are interesting about the number twelve what is important to me is its' relationship to my size, my personal space and the space in which I have to create in. All of the contents of the boxes fit comfortably on my lap, some can easily expand for yards, but can be easily folded or balled back up

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4 www.publicbookself.com

5 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/12_(number)
within the confines of my arms and comfortably carried from one space to another. All of these boxes are stored in such a way that I can easily access it.

The contents of each box were made with materials I already had, things that were given to me, or things that were found. I wanted to challenge myself with using the items and materials that were immediately available to me instead of buying things as needed or as I wanted. I found that limiting myself to the materials that I already had or the materials that were given to me to use was not only challenging, but also liberating. I was using the everyday mundane things in life and re-purposing them to give them a new life, then placing them to bed or in a home once I was done. Each becomes proof, in a sense, that for a point in time I was still, at peace, and in the present moment.

I sit with each material until I can find a way to use them. Once I come up with a construct I repeat the action or the construct needed to make and fill each box. Each box starts out with the same questions, doubts and mental noise. To stop all the noise and useless thoughts I concentrate on the task at hand. The construct is simple. It is not loaded with a myriad of directions that will cause me confusion. In the wise words of the Buddha, "Better than a thousand hollow words, is one word that brings peace." If I am to write out a phrase or to cut out all the unnecessary words in a book, if I concentrate on the one act and the one act alone, my minds does not wander to the past or future. It stays in the present moment. This repetitious activity is a way for me to find peace and stillness within my mind. It is a way for me to control the endless stream of thoughts in my head. It is mindful, mindlessness. Philosopher de Montaigne

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6 Shelton Ranasinghe, Buddha Impetus to Primitive Psyche (USA: Self Published, 2009), 1.
wrote, "Everyone rushes elsewhere into the future, because no one wants to face one's own inner self." I want to face the voice in my head and, the mind made me that is causing me to rush elsewhere and to worry about non-relevant things, to find my true calm and peaceful self. Dorothea Dix once said, "I have learned to live each day as it come and not to borrow trouble by dreading tomorrow. It is the dark menace of the future that makes cowards of us." I cannot say that I have learned to stop borrowing trouble from tomorrow, but I have been able to face it and to figure out how to combat it in the work in the MFA show.

All the boxes are 12"x 12" x 12", 6" x 12" x 12" or 3" x12" x 12" in dimension. Each box is labeled with the title of the piece, the materials used, the dates in which it was constructed and the catalog number. These boxes are housed in a freestanding shelving unit. In front of the shelves of boxes there is a table 6 feet away from the boxes, it is four feet long and three feet wide, with one chair present. The chair is facing the battlement of boxes. On the table is one catalog with information pertaining to each box. The catalog states when each box was made, who gave me the materials to use for its' creation, its' catalog number, the construct used to make each box and most importantly how long it took to create. Viewers are only allowed to view the catalog one-by-one. The boxes will remain on the shelves untouched. I am forcing the viewer to confront the wall, the information in the catalog, and to face that other entity that

inhabits their body. "The brain may be regarded as a kind of parasite of the organism, a pensioner, as it were, who dwells with the body."9

Like a conductor or a director I am staging a scene or an event where only a select few will have the patience, the want, and or the need to sit and contemplate the catalog and the wall of boxes. I have given the viewer all they need to picture and experience what was made. From the words of the American inventor Art Fry, "The creative mind doesn't have to have the whole pattern, it can have just a little piece and be able to envision the whole picture in completion."10 The viewer does not need to see what is inside of any of the boxes. The experience is in the mind, in their thoughts, which I guided them. By giving the viewer access to the catalog, they have my thoughts within a collection of words. Arthur Schopenhauer wrote, "Reading is equivalent to thinking with someone else's head instead of with one's own."11 I want the viewer to come up with their own experience to what is presented to them. The viewer may have doubts to whether or not the information given is true and whether or not there is actually anything inside all of the boxes. Although there are signs saying not to touch the boxes, the boxes are housed in such a way that is easily accessible. The lids are not glued down. The boxes are not under glass and key. There may be some viewers who can't help themselves and have to check. Just as I had to check to see if my front door was locked, I came up with a way for me to stop and realize what was really going on.


10 www.creatingminds.org

am giving the viewer a chance to sit and be still with the piece with a moment of mindful mindlessness, but first they must face their inner voice of endless thoughts, doubts, and worries just as I had.

*With Thoughts That Make For Peace (Detail), 2011*
I am
Fall 2009
6,799 Folded Origami Butterflies Installation and detail
Modern (Wo)man in Search of a Soul, 2010
Cut book pages
12" x 12" x 12"

Thank you Haru, 2010
Crocheted plastic ribbon
12" x 12" x 12"
Oh Sarah, 2010
Mylar, Scotch tape, and fishing line
12" x 12" x 12"

Blair Mandala, 2010
Cut book pages
12" x 12" x 12"
Works Cited


www.creatingminds.org

www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/12_(number)

www.publicbookshelf.com