

COLLISION

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A PROJECT IN LIEU OF THESIS PRESENTED TO THE
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To Dad

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Summary of Project in Lieu of Thesis
Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida
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Degree of Masters of Fine Art

COLLISION

By

Stacy Streeter

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Chair: Robert Mueller
Major: Art

Collision is a personal narrative about loss and grief. I use printmaking, sculpture, and video to explore painful emotions. I am an object maker as well as an image-maker: I make objects that I can play with, touch, group and hold. In a repetitive process hundreds of stuffed animals are deconstructed and reassembled utilizing evocative materials such as wax, thread and oil-based printmaking ink. These objects were presented in various formats from video to a three-dimensional wall grid, and the multiplicity and mutation of the source material references disease, the body, and adolescence.

I have been influenced by the works of Kiki Smith through her storytelling, use of the human body, and her studio practice. I also look at Louise Bourgeois for how she uses a complex autobiography in her work. It is my goal for my work to have the viewer connect or identify with the pain that I suffer along with exploring his or her own experiences of discomfort.

PROJECT REPORT

Introduction

Collision speaks of loss and pain through a personal narrative. At the start of this project, I imagined my work would solely deal with the loss of my father and the pain that his passing caused me. Throughout this journey of creating *Collision*, my project in lieu of thesis became more of an exploration of loss, grief, and acceptance of the premature loss of my father to disease.

At the age of sixteen I lost my father to cancer. I watched as the cancer violently deteriorated his body and mind within a nine-month period. As the cancer began to spread internally my father's activities started to slow down. I watched my strong, muscular, goofy, father who service as U.S. Navy Senior Chief, coached my softball team, golfed every weekend, and made me laugh constantly wither away into a skeleton with pale yellow skin, before my very eyes. His medication made it hard for him to communicate. My father was for all intents and purposes taken from me long before the cancer completely killed his body.

The emotional toll was tremendous. I have carried the after effects of this trauma ever since and wanted to explore this emotional wound. I soon realized that I was looking for some way to accept, cope and understand this devastating loss.

In this project report, I am going to discuss the evolution of my approach to the theme of loss and grief through the lens of printmaking. I will briefly discuss my earliest explorations and the formation of the ideas, processes, and materials that led to the creation of the work in *Collision*. I will also elaborate on artists that have had a major influence on my studio practice, way of thinking, and the production of my work.

When first trying to create work that dealt with loss I was using the process of collage to create maps. These maps were an attempt to map my memory and contain my thoughts and emotions. These drawn maps began as collograph, evolved into collage, and finally wall installations. I tried to capture my emotional state, represent the constant uprooting of home life as a military child and the memories of my father's travels. I was using maps to stay connected to my past and have the memory of my father present. The sense of space and time was evident in this work but my father and my feelings were not as clear.

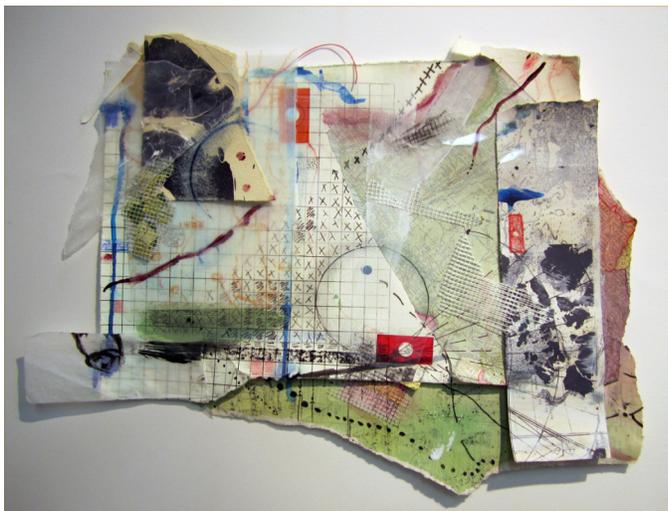


Figure 1. *Mapping the Mind*. Paper, ink, paint, tape, mylar, and silkscreen. 15 inches by 9 inches. 2010

I began using the image of the cancer cell to represent cancer and experiment with latex paint. First, I would cut the paint with a laser cutter into the various sizes of cells. Last, I would print woodblocks of the images of cancer onto the latex shapes. The latex paint represented the spread of cancer and how that material would stay forever just like my painful memories.

In *Swing (2011)* I created a dreamlike childhood scene with a makeshift tire swing

that was being attacked by latex cancer cells. A sculpted foam black tire was hung from the gallery ceiling with thick brown rope and a swarm of woodcut printed latex cancer cells halting the swings motion. *Swing* represented the abrupt end to my childhood. I was illustrating cancer cells, but I wanted to illustrate the devastation they caused. If I was to create an embodied experience in the viewer, I needed to transform a familiar childhood symbol in an unfamiliar way.



Figure 2. *Swing*. Foam, rope, and woodcuts on latex paint. 4 feet by 3 feet by 10 feet.

2011.

The issue of multiplication, the spreading of the cancer cells continued to stymie my work. Until, one day I was browsing at a local used bookstore and opened the book, *Bunches and Bunches of Bunnies*. The book exploded with tons of little bunny illustrations and I thought to myself, “these little guys are multiplying like cancer cells!” After further examination of this discarded book from a local elementary school, I learned that it was a children's multiplication book. The illustrated bunnies were created from a color offset printing process and each bunny was dressed in its own unique outfit. The bunnies as a whole would be considered a family, but they retained their

individuality. From here my ideas about cancer and multiplication started to stir.

In the summer of 2011 I traveled to Europe for a study abroad program called UF in Berlin. Before I even left the states I knew that I wanted to use the rabbit in my work. Every time I saw a rabbit I would take a picture, rip the image off a poster, or purchase it. I would walk around my apartment yelling “BUNNIES” night and day. I was obsessed with this rabbit, this idea, and this disease. While submerged in the culture of Berlin I began to take notice of the thousands of posters that were attached to the sides of buildings, fences, and light posts. There was something about the layering and stacking of these offset prints that made me gravitate towards them. The rabbits running through my mind and my uncontrollable need to do something, anything, with these posters, made me decide to combine the two, both the bunnies and the posters, and explore the idea of “multiplying like rabbits”. The first body of work, titled *Composing the Multiple*, where I created a series of collage rabbit drawings from found posters around Berlin. I used the backside of the posters to create the surface for each rabbit. Wheat paste, was used to attach the posters to the wall, made the offset ink bleed creating beautiful color variations and texture. The collage drawings do not take on the true shape of a rabbit, but instead they hint at the rabbit’s physical features. The second series was titled *Excavating the Multiple*. I created black and white digital photos of rabbits in public spaces that documented a drawing that was left behind. These rabbits were created from the tearing and removal of the layers of the posters, like the removal of the layers of skin and tissue; this allowed the rabbit to present itself. This was an early stage of performance that later influenced the work in *Collision*.



Figure 3. *Composing the Multiple #1*. posters and tape. 2011.

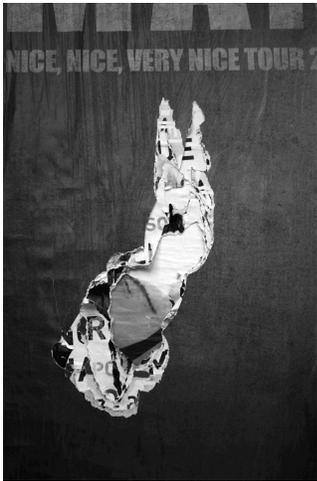


Figure 4. *Excavating the Multiple #7*. digital photograph. 2011.

During my early research, I learned that there was a distinction between the term bunny and rabbit according to the Oxford dictionary. The word “bunny” is used as a “term of endearment” where the word “rabbit” is a food source. From here on I have used the word bunny in my work because I am referring to a toy bunny that could be loved by a child.

Once I returned home to Gainesville, I started to put together all of my notes, images, and ideas on the bunny. I also started a collection of toy stuffed bunnies that

would be the material for my work. I created numerous monoprints with the bunny. The monoprints were created with black oil based ink, paper, and the stuffed animal. These prints showed great mark making and tonal range which were created from the fur of one bunny. Though the prints are highly detailed and beautiful, they still lacked the emotional connection to the personal pain and loss. It was the dedication and exploration of my ideas in the early works that led to the creation of *Collision*.

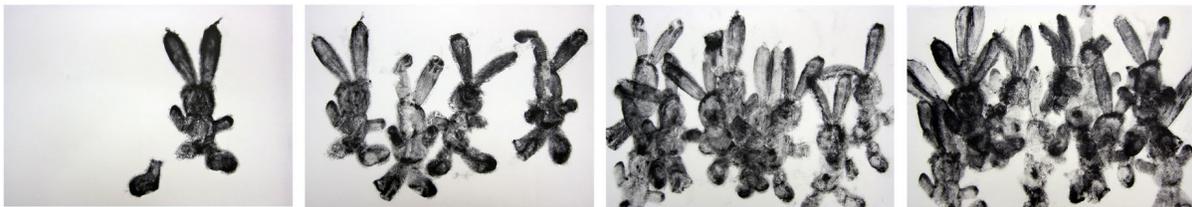


Figure 5. *Multiplying Rabbits*. ink on paper. 2011.

Smacked

Smacked is an eight-minute video documenting the process of creating a performance-based monoprint. Projected onto a large wall, the video depicts the plush inked bunnies thrown at a wall-mounted panel of cream drawing paper. Though I remain outside the frame, my presence and participation is evidenced by the sound of the impact and the impression, or print, the bunny leaves on the paper.

The bunnies vary in style and scale, ranging from lanky and long-legged to squat and plump and from small (6 in) to large (24 in). After being treated with ink, they are thrown with changing speed and force but no discernible pattern. The bunnies are thrown individually or in groups. Following the impact the inked bunnies fall from view leaving their mark on the wall. These marks layer on top of another during the course of

the performance building a surface of inked impressions obliterating the whiteness of the paper. The multiplication of bunnies and layering of the marks, echo the pattern of diseases that spread and destroy all traces of life.

The frustration of tossing my bunnies can be paired with Kate Gilmore's performance piece *Through the Claw*, where a group of young women dressed in the same flowery dresses forcefully threw 7,500 pounds of brown clay in frustration up against the pristine white walls of Pace Gallery in a two hour period. As my bunnies smack, beat, and obliterate the paper, the various rhythms and violence of sound document my frustration, anxiety, and anger. Sigmund Freud wrote in his essay *The Uncanny*,

“In the unconscious mind we can recognize the dominance of *compulsion to repeat*, which proceeds from instinctual impulses. The compulsions probably depends on the essential nature of the drives themselves ... prepared us for this inner compulsion to repeat is perceived as uncanny.” (Pg.145)

When the repetitive gestures of throwing and mark making are viewed as compulsive acts, then the overall nature of the performance can be perceived as not only instinctual but perhaps uncanny. *Smacked* is a collision between levity and tragedy, comedy and the uncanny, and joy and despair.



Figure 6. Kate Gilmore. *Threw the Claw*. performance still. 2011.



Figure 7. *Smacked*. video installation.2012.

Smothered

Smothered presents one hundred and twenty wall-mounted plush bunnies lathered in black printmaking ink and tacked within a grid that spans 10ft x 12ft. Purchased in bulk from a wholesale toy distributor, each bunny begins this journey identical in size and shape. The bunnies are a group that continue to multiply and are not to be seen as an individual bunny. Though they began the same, each toy undergoes an individual transformation through a ritual-like process of inking, ripping, and re-stitching. They have been repaired, but they are no longer the same. Though each bunny is confined within its own 12 x 12 inch square in the overall grid, it appears free to rotate, turn, and respond to the space within it. Variation in bunny placement creates organic movement through the entire installation, evoking microscopic imagery of cell cultures. Susan Sontag writes that “Cells without inhibitions, cancer cells will continue to grow and extrude in a “chaotic” fashion, destroying the body’s normal cells, architecture, and functions”. (Pg. 63) In *Smothered* the bunnies are not perfectly placed inside their own square in the grid. One may feel a desire to “fix” each bunny as they

move around in a “chaotic fashion” similar to a cancer that is growing out of control. The grid functions as an attempt to control the uncontrollable, yet the organic arrangement within the grid emphasizes the bunnies’ multiplicative nature. The bunnies in *Smothered*, are similar to the illustrated bunnies in *Bunches and Bunches of Bunnies* because they are individuals but also work as a collective. Gallery lights cast low relief shadows on the wall as they shine onto the bunnies creating variable patterns throughout the installation.

The torture and makeshift mending of each bunny in *Smothered* shows a physical manifestation of an internal struggle with loss, death, sorrow, pain, grief and the unknown. Store-bought, mass-produced bunnies serve as a vehicle to explore these ideas but not to relish in the nostalgia of the toy. Louis Bourgeois stated when talking about her sculptures, “They are my documents, I keep watch over them... To reminisce and woolgather is negative. You have to differentiate between memories. Are you going to them or are they coming to you. If you are going to them, you are wasting time. Nostalgia is not productive. If they come to you they are the seed for sculpture.” (Gibbons, 17)

If nostalgia is viewed as a form of escape then *Smothered* does precisely the opposite. “In Charles Baudelaire’s essay *The Philosophy of Toys* he discusses the interaction with children and their toys. His belief is that “the overriding desire of most children is to get at and see *the soul* of their toys, some at the end of a certain period of use, others *straightaway*”. In *Smothered* I had ripped apart each toy to examine them further. I am on the search for an answer to why cancer decided to invade of my father’s organs and take him away from me.



Figure 8. *Smothered*. ink and stuffed toy bunnies. 2012.



Figure 9. *Smothered*. detail. ink and stuffed toy bunnies. 2012.

Cornered

Cornered, installed on the floor, is a collection of children's stuffed toy bunnies in five pastel colors that have been infused in brown casting wax. Hand dipped in a brown wax each bunny has undergone mutations in form and color. Once fully encased in wax twisting, smashing, and pulling into different directions are performed to create a variety

of textures and morphed forms to manipulate the bunnies. The wax acts as a preservative agent that stops the bunnies from decaying any further and leaves them in a constant state of pain and trauma. Alternatively standing, sitting, and reclining, the bunnies are clustered evidence of the inflicted violence. The use of toys in art is explored by Mike Kelly who writes in his essay *Playing with Dead Things: On the Uncanny*, "I am interested in objects with which the viewer empathizes in a human way - though only as long as the viewer, and the object viewed, maintain their sense of being there physically." (Kelly, 75)

The sculptures in *Cornered* are uneasy to view; the viewer has to kneel to have an intimate encounter with these casualties. Close examination reveals bunnies that are worn beyond normal wear and tear. They are not relics from a happy childhood but are emblematic of a troubled past. The bunnies' disfiguring patina points to weathering, aging, disease, and decay. In addition to the wax figures, three bronze bunnies have been mixed within the group on the floor. In order for the bronze sculptures to be memorialized the original object, the bunny, had to perish. The bunny was burned out of the bronze in the same way that a disease destroys the organs only leaving the form behind.

My emotions are conflicted as the bunny is incinerated inside the bronze. First I feel remorse for destroying a helpless stuffed animal but then, when I think of the bunny as a disease that multiplies over and over again, I am comforted by my control to stop their production. Bronze is a strong, timeless material that is difficult to change into any further state, representing the final acceptance of the pain of the past, and will exist beyond my lifetime in memoriam.



Figure 10. *Cornered*. wax, bronze, and stuffed toy bunnies. 2012.



Figure 11. *Cornered*. detail. wax, bronze, and stuffed toy bunnies. 2012.



Figure 12. *Cornered*. detail. wax, bronze, and stuffed toy bunnies. 2012.

Impaled

The final piece in the show represents my father and his absence. It is uncanny that the piece that is the most violent is the one that physically represents a loved one. As the viewer approaches *Impaled* they are confronted with a 5'9" vertical sculpture of bunnies identical in size and in a variety of colors that have been hand dipped in brown casting wax. They have been impaled, twisted, or wrapped onto a steel pole. The pole is held up by a black wooden square base that disappears on to the black floor. As the light shines onto the pole, it creates a strong shadow that outlines the bunnies onto the gallery floor. This shadow represents another body, that of my father, who is not there.

Charles Baudelaire's essay *The Philosophy of Toys* explains that a "child twists and turns his toy, scratches it, shakes it, bumps it against the walls, throws it on the ground. Its marvelous life comes to a stop. The child... makes a supreme effort; at last he opens it up, he is stronger. But where *is the soul?* This is the beginning of melancholy and gloom." (Pg. 204) As I rip apart, twist, push, impale, stab, skewer, smash, and tear each bunny I am on the hunt for answers about my past. Alas, as each bunny is examined from the inside I am unable to find answers, and I constantly encounter the "melancholy and gloom" that seems to repeat itself over and over again when revisiting the past.



Figure 13. *Impaled*. wax, steel, wood, and stuffed toy bunnies. 2012.



Figure 13. *Impaled*. detail. wax, steal, wood, and stuffed toy bunnies. 2012.

Influences

The artists' Louise Bourgeois, Mike Kelley, and Kiki Smith have led and guided my artistic development. Bourgeois *Cell Series* has influenced how I think about my own personal narrative. She is able to create work that has such a complex personal

narrative and conveys her emotions to express her experiences. When describing how Bourgeois works with her personal narrative. Joan Gibbons states in her book *Memory and Contemporary Art*,

“The only thing is that, for Bourgeois, the exercise is not to systematize or to objectify memory, as is in the case with the ancient art of memory, but to find a physical expression not only for that which has occurred but also for complex emotions that accompanied the experience.” (Gibbons page 18)

I relate to her work because she deals with both the “physical expression” and the “emotions that accompany the experience”. My pairing of the physical and emotional expression throughout *Collision* is, like Bourgeois, dealing with a very personal painful past that allows viewers to enter the work.



Figure 14. Louise Bourgeois. *Cell (Three White Marble Spheres)*. steel, glass, marble, and mirror. 1993.

I relate to the work of Mike Kelley because of his use of toys that explore childhood traumas and the materials of a commodity culture. As I kept researching Kelley I felt a stronger connection to his work. I fell in love with Kelley’s work when I saw the catalog for the show *Childish Things* at The Fruit Market Gallery in Edinburgh. The reading of the catalog led me to the ideas of Baudelaire and how a child searches for

the “soul” of a toy along with Freud’s writings on the uncanny. With even further exploration into Kelley’s work I understood the importance of the commodity and the ready-made that is found in my work. When interviewed for the segment on Memory for Art21, Kelley stated,

“when I first started to work with stuffed animals I was responding to a lot of the dialog in the 80s about commodity culture, but I was really surprised that when everyone looked at these works that they thought it was about child abuse, that wasn’t anything I expected and not only did they think it was about child abuse they thought it was about my abuse ... I have to go with that... that it was about everyone’s abuse, it was a shared culture” (art21)

I connected with his ideas of the ready-made toy because I am a child of the 80’s. These commodity toys are not only a commentary on the mass production of our material world, but also a personal reflection of the toys I collected as a child. I also learned through the making of *Collision* that trauma is a shared culture. The subject of loss that my work is based on is a shared culture. Kelley’s materials, subject matter, and readings that influenced his work have had a profound effect on my own understanding of the work that I made in *Collision*.



Figure 15. Mike Kelley. *Fruit of Thy Lion*. Stuffed animals. stuffed toys.1990.

Kiki Smith influences my studio practice. She creates work in many different mediums and has the same sensibility through out all of her work. Smith uses many different mediums such as plaster, wax, glass, metals, paper, printmaking, bronze, photography, and often works with print shops and foundries. While looking at Kiki Smith I have been able to give myself the permission to move in, out, and in between areas of printmaking and others mediums to better express my ideas. Using different materials allows me to continue to explore, play, and take chances with new works.



Figure 16. Kiki Smith. *Lucy's Daughters*. silk screen on fabric.2011.

Redefining Prints

I am a printmaker that has been influenced by a diverse group of artists and their studio practices. Being an artist whose primary mode of expression is printmaking I have started to find ways to merge the techniques and processes of printmaking into other forms of medium. Where most artists turn towards the print studio to create an image, I have taken my printmaking skills and turned them to video and sculpture. The toy stuffed bunny is the main tool I use for all of my work. I have pushed the boundaries of printmaking by turning the creation of a monoprint into a video and turning multiple ink stuffed toys into a wall relief sculpture. As I open up and explore

different avenues of printmaking I find it very easy to move between disciplines such as photography, sculpture, and video because I allow chance to play a major role in my production of work. As I create one body of work I allow myself the freedom to play and explore other possibilities. Chance is a form of play that allows me freedom to make mistakes without pressure and learn from what I have done.

Conclusion

Collision speaks of a personal narrative about the painful emotions of grief and loss. As an object maker there were times that the process mimicked play when I could touch, hold, and manipulate the stuffed animals of my work. At the start of this project the sole purpose of my work was to deal with loss of my father and the emotions that his passing caused primarily loss and grief. During the creation of *Collision* and surrendering to my feelings and ideas; the soul of my work has made a shift from dealing with one pain, one trauma, and one loss to trying to grasp an understanding of the many different losses, setbacks, traumas, and grief in my life.

This experience has opened a whole new door for my artistic expression. I have told my personal story with inspiration gained by amazing artists, Kiki Smith and Louise Bourgeois through various mediums and symbolic representations of disease, the body, and adolescence. It was my goal to have my work evoke painful emotions for the viewer, so that they may experience the same discomfort I have had to experience in my life. Ironically, transforming these bunnies throughout this project has given me much joy despite the melancholic subject matter, and like my viewers I am a better person for allowing myself to experience, connect, and identify with *Collision*.



Figure 17. *Collision*. Installation view. 2012.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Stacy Streeter is an artist who creates work about a personal narrative that deals with loss and grief. She uses multiple media such as printmaking, video, and sculpture to convey her ideas. While at the University of Florida she was the President of Alagarto: the Printmakers Guild and the graduate student representative. She editioned prints for numerous artist such as Bob Mueller, Julia Morrisroe, Katie Gladdys, Scott Horsely, and A.A. Rucci.

Stacy went to the University of Central Florida (Orlando, Florida) where she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Studio Art in 2009. In May of 2012 she completed her Master of Fine Arts degree from the School of Art and Art History from the University of Florida (Gainesville, Florida).