DOWNSIDE-UP

By

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To my lifetime and biggest supporters,

my mother, father, and sister.

I would not be where I am today without you.
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In my series of graphite drawings, time, energy, and dedication manifest in tangible piles, performing as active agents within a nonsensical world. Through the loss of linear perspective, space and time adrift, permitting the logic of the unconscious to unfold. The organized chaos of the dream world creates a paradox as a pattern of adornments and embellishments balances and outweighs sense. As the judgement of reason remains in the conscious, my self-portrait remains stationary amid a bizarre world. Through a metamorphosis, my past mediocrities transform into elements of beauty, as I become a fantastical monument to my vexation, acting within the spectacle of the absurd.

Through the initial form of crumpled paper, a metaphor for failure, I begin the exploration of a dual transformation. Placed upon my head as a crown for my unconscious, the natural lines, ridges, and edges within the crumpled paper determines the ultimate placement for my drawings, paintings, and still life textiles. Each element is drawn individually from life and
placed through a system of collage. Combining pieces of my ripped, unraveled, cut, and 
crumpled drawings and paintings into singular compositions, I compose an illogical world where 
fruitless attempts become fragments of intrigue.
Much Madness is divinest Sense -
To a discerning Eye -
Much Sense - the starkest Madness -
’Tis the Majority
In this, as all, prevail -
Assent - and you are sane -
Demur - you’re straightway dangerous -
And handled with a Chain –

Emily Dickinson, “Much Madness is divinest Sense”
INTRODUCTION

Line, stripe, and pattern assemble in masses, constructing piles of confusion. Mounds of fabric balance and twist, reaching and plunging into white spacelessness. Among the assortment of still life textiles, ripped and torn drawings and paintings dwell, masquerading in the chaos. Amid the tangle of draped and twisting promenade, my self-portrait gazes beyond the frame, an accumulation of textiles weighing upon my head. Crowned as sovereign creator of an absurd fantasy, my self-portrait remains awkwardly still, presenting a consciousness within a dreamspace.

With the literal dismantling of my failed artworks in the real world, I design an unreal world in the form of drawing where reality remains subservient to fantasy. Using pieces of my ripped drawings, cut up paintings, and various textiles as still life props, a new world emerges through graphite on paper. Pinning each piece individually to a soft body mannequin, I draw from observation, composing a new world where physical objects become adorned abstraction. Placing my self-portrait as the central element of the figuration, theatre arrives through the performance of ridiculous melodramatics and overly embellished costumes. As my garment expands, it too transforms into an active agent, acting as another character in my illogical spectacle. Through the process of observational drawing, my past fruitless attempts experience metamorphoses, revealing beauty through a new way of looking.
I struggled with my art practice the first two years of my graduate career. Consistently producing unsatisfactory results with a few rare elements of success, I became disillusioned, seriously questioning myself and my art practice. In parallel to Sisyphus, who continuously rolled an immense boulder up a hill, only to watch it fall, I felt an "interminable sentence...remain[ing] locked into the repetition of this forever failing action" (Feuvre 154). Overtime, I became more fragile and less confident in my work. Not only did the work fail both conceptually and aesthetically, the work also remained unauthentic. With the voices of various peers and faculty members in my head, I found myself making work to please them. Through the attempt to satisfy conflicted voices and opinions, I lost my sense of self. Without conception from a genuine place, the work remained dishonest and meaningless.

Ultimately I returned to the observational basics of drawing and painting. I realized I enjoyed the challenge of *seeing* without the overwhelming shadow of conceptual thought. Stripping my process to its bones, I made a number of new oil paintings strictly from observation, painting objects personal to me. While my observational still life work existed as small studies, my momentum returned with the discovery of new ways of seeing. I regained my confidence as an artist. With Robert Mueller’s assignment to draw a crumpled piece of paper as a singular still life, the idea of my crippling failure started to realize as a conceptual foundation.

With Mueller’s crumpled paper assignment in mind, I ripped, cut, and tore my past forsaken drawings and paintings, creating *detritus*. I will refer to the remaining scraps of my past failures as *detritus* throughout the course of this paper. Replicating my *detritus* through observational drawing, I used the initial form of a crumpled piece of paper as my guide. In
addition to the introduction of my self-portrait, I combined observational still life drawing with a system of collage, relying on the crumpled paper for placement purposes and overall form. I learned, "It is only with the collapse of our constructions of reality that we first discover that the world is not the way we imagine" (84). Through the purposeful dismantling of my insufficient work, my reality, I discovered new options, seizing the opportunity to design an unreality. I created a place of stability through the elements and principles of design and instability with my own orchestration of possibility and freeplay. My fantastical unreality provided me with a place to reflect on failure with a mindset previously unavailable to me. Because pieces of reality will always seep into an unreal place contrived by the mind, my new world would never exist as a true escape; however, my unreality gave me an infinite space to meditate on the real, fabricating beauty from my once useless work.

With a neverending white space surrounding my self-portrait, I silenced reality. No longer feeling obligated to please the voices of my faculty and peers, I could reflect on my work in a quiet place. While I once permitted the ideas of others to infiltrate my thoughts, I now gained control. Looking directly at the viewer, my self-portrait acts authoritatively, dominating the viewer through my gaze.

Living within a nonsensical dream place, my less than mediocre works no longer functioned as burdens; instead, the pieces of my work existed as elements of an assemblage within spacelessness and timelessness. Repurposing my detritus in my drawings, I formulated meaning through the transformation of art, creating my own “private vocabulary of images” (Hustvedt 33); however, the overall “value of the work doesn't reside in the props employed to construct that meaning but in the authenticity of that manifestation" (Feuvre 93).
In Pursuit of Beauty

The search for structure in my drawings begins with my pursuit of beauty. In the film Next (2007), Nicolas Cage’s character quotes the Italian impressionist painter, Elio Carletti (1925-1980), stating, “Beauty is a summation of the parts, working together in such a way that nothing is needed to be added, taken away, or altered.” While the movie Next certainly leaves something to be desired, I find Carletti’s quote to be profound, correlating directly with my own belief in regard to the beautiful.

For myself, beauty correlates with aesthetics. While imagery can remain anywhere from the traditionally beautiful, such as William-Adolphe Bouguereau’s The Birth of Venus (1879), to the grotesque, such as Jenny Saville’s Fulcrum (1999), these paintings both manage to convey the elements and principles of design, elevating both the overall composition and ingenuity of each image. Both painters portray the female nude from idealistic to unconventional; however, they both fabricate beauty through aesthetics. Line, shape, form, space, color, texture, balance, emphasis, movement, repetition, rhythm, and harmony are elements and principles present in both of these images. When I was a senior in high school, my art instructor etched design into my mind, forever existing as the ideal.

Dave Hickey defines beauty in his book, The Invisible Dragon, stating, “Beauty is the agency that causes visual pleasure in the beholder” (2), he continues, “…beauty functions as the pathos” (8). Of course, visual pleasure can be defined from countless perspectives, which Carletti, in particular, leaves open to interpretation in his quote. Hickey argues for the visual pleasure in the audience. I am more concerned with creating visual pleasure from my own viewpoint, foremost functioning to please myself. With appeal functioning as pathos, I elicit my
own emotions during the process of making, creating genuine work which also adopts the rules of aesthetics.
ONCE UPON A TIME(LESSNESS AND SPACELESSNESS)

Once upon a time, in a faraway land, like Oz, Neverland, or Wonderland, a wicked witch melts, children fly, and a little, English girl holds conversations with a smiling cat. The moment “once upon a time” is spoken, the audience suspends their disbelief, and are transported to a spaceless, timeless dreamplace where they accept the irrational. The words *spaceless* and *timeless* suggest the existence of a fairy tale narrative as *anywhere* and *anytime*. Oz, Neverland, and Wonderland live within fairy tale stories, accessible only through the realm of the unconscious. The protagonists in these stories, Dorothy, Wendy, and Alice, all fall asleep. Only dreaming provides them with access to worlds of fantasy and illusion. They must fall unconscious.

In my body of work, the unconscious and the dream world are synonymous entities used interchangeably. I represent the imagination found in dreams through an infinite, white spacelessness, a place where “the human mind is capable of forming mental images of things not actually present” (Tolkien 5). In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice travels through Wonderland, continuously shrinking and growing. The dramatic change in scale suggests “the queer uncertainty of spatial and temporal relations in the unconscious” (Peterson 428).

According to psychoanalytic theory, “the loss of linear perspective...give[s] dreams and fairy tales a logic all their own” (428). In my drawings, I deliver a fantastical dream world of nonsense to my audience through the utilization of white, negative space. The empty, negative space exists as a place for improbable possibilities to occur. Without the existence of linear perspective, the white space acts as both spacelessness and timelessness, permitting the absence of gravity. The representation of my self-portrait, *detritus*, and various other studio objects
Figure 01: Presentiments, 51in x 72in, graphite on paper, 2017
construct the positive space of the drawing, together creating a mass of objects in abstracted form. Without the limitations of gravity, the abstracted form, constructed through textile and object assemblages, performs as an active agent.

Contemporary, representational artist, Julie Heffernan (1956-present), also creates fantastic worlds which bend the expectations of reality. Greatly altering the scale of objects and figures, she creates mysterious, dream-like narratives which contain multiple narratives within a single image. Heffernan’s work caused me to realize the infinite impossibilities capable of manifesting in the world of painting and drawing. An unlimited number of odd objects and carcasses can pile up or fall from the sky, forming into an unexpected, embellished gown. Inactive objects possess the ability to actively engage with the figure, assisting in the creation of a narrative as their own characters within the space.

In dreams, "reality remains implicit behind every manifestation of nonsense, but it is never explicitly represented. The nonsense world is a world of fantasy which shies [sic] clear of reality, yet indicates its existence" (Flescher 141). Aspects of the real world, the familiar, always exist in the dream world, because the unconscious can never escape the conscious. For example, in the 1939 film, *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy falls asleep while a twister falls upon Kansas. In her dream of Oz, she encounters a number of characters. The majority of the characters she meets are actually people she knows in the real world of Kansas. Though Oz exists as a whimsical, fairy tale land, familiar elements of Kansas seep into her dream. In my drawings, I render textiles and objects from observation. My self-portrait is drawn from photographic reference. Both instances, observational and photographic, involve source imagery from the real world; however, through the unrealistic placement of my subject matter in space, the unbelievable transpires.
PLAYING DRESS UP

As an organized chaos, the dreaming mind consists of a multitude of contradictions. Balancing absurdly, complex piles of *detritus*, patterns, and textiles embellish my self-portrait. While the eclectic, patterned materials suggest confusion, they construct aesthetic order through “classic design, symmetry and a legible balance” (Beckley 6). As the daughter of a mother who once owned a bridal gown business, I have maintained a strong adoration for dress through my mother’s affiliation. Attracted to the aesthetic opportunities of costume, I resolved to treat my unsuccessful work as potential clothing articles. According to Kant, “The beautiful can be adorned and ornamented” (48). Through the overwhelming mass of textiles, I exaggerate ornamentation in order to increase the bizarre.

The initial decision to fabricate adornment through my *detritus* and still life fabrics existed as my first step toward their metamorphoses from drawbacks to beauty.

While my *detritus* transformed on paper into bits of ornamentation, I reflected on my
childhood, where I hid between Chantilly lace and taffeta, chiffon and velvet. I remembered the countless times I would sneak into the small backroom of my mother’s bridal business, a confined space with white walls where a seamstress practiced her craft. The seamstress would share her scraps with me, and I would pin layers together, making my own alterations. Decades later, I again amused myself with fabrics, placing them within a spaceless infinity. According to the painter Odd Nerdrum, “Think[ing] in terms of the past and eternity” (17), is an element of kitsch, a derogatory term for the “sentimental, melodramatic and pathetic” (11). Nerdrum, a proud maker of kitsch, reclaimed the word in his book, *On Kitsch*. He argues, “Kitsch as a systematic attempt to escape from everyday life, an escape to a personal past…or to places created by the imagination” (40). Delving further into his book, I quickly realized my series of drawings and overall practice fell into Nerdrum’s definition of kitsch; however, I still cannot refer to my series of drawings as images of escape. Surrounded and partially hidden by my burdens, my self-portrait is constantly reminded of the existence of past deterrents. Even after a metamorphoses into an aesthetically beautiful, abstract form, the memory of the form’s origin remains evident. Elements of reality will always exist as the familiar in dreams. My purpose in pursuing turbulent beauty is not to escape from my shortcomings but to elevate my inadequate work’s potential through a revitalized perspective.

**The Nude Costume**

In “The Naked and the Nude”, Kenneth Clark describes the cultural differences between the “naked”, considered shameful, and the “nude”, an educated understanding of a “body reformed” (3). The nude remained the central focus of art for centuries, linking directly to classic disciplines which began with the Greeks in the fifth century. According to John Berger, “To be
on display is to have the surface of one's own skin...turned into a disguise which, in that situation, can never be discarded. The nude is condemned to never being naked. Nudity is a form of dress" (53). Moreover, to the ancient Greeks, nudity as costume suggested a “magical meaning…in a clothed society nudity was special, monstrous, dangerous, and powerful" (Bonfante 545).

The Greek enchantress, Circe, often depicted nude with a mantle around her waist, exploits her nudity in order to address confidence in her strangeness as a powerful, magical being (Buxton 95). In direct correlation with fairy tales, Greek mythology also requires a contemporary audience to suspend their disbelief. In my depiction of the realm of the unconscious, I apply Circe’s costume of strangeness, her nudity, to my self-portrait. With a mantle similar to Circe’s draped across my hips, I “tone down the sensuality of the originally
half-nude” (Kousser 111), drawing attention to myself as an oddity instead. Wearing a nude costume, I create a paradox in my self-portrait, adding another layer of absurdity to my unreality. As layers of enigmas continue to pile, I develop a new accumulation of oddity conceptually. Through their communion, concept and form harmonize.

**The Mobility of Dress**

To speak the language of history painting, artists such as Rembrandt and Van Dyck “…used costume, either antiquated, exotic, or fantastic…thereby elevating the work from a straightforward representation of an ordinary person to a more eloquent display of ideals or aspirations” (Gordenker 100). While Rembrandt and Van Dyck used historical clothing for their portraits, they provided no recognizable background imagery, relying on the purity of the costume “to locate the figure in a fictional realm, very much of his own invention (Gordenker 92).

In my body of work, my failed drawings and paintings combined with still life textiles, create an assemblage which manifests itself in the form of a costume. *Detritus* piles upon my head, weighs across my shoulders, and tangles about my legs. Without a perceivable location,
and with the exception of my self-portrait, my costume exists as the main source of discernible imagery. Akin to Rembrandt and Van Dyck, whose “costume[s] [are] seen to function as a vehicle for travel in time and space” (Shukla 210), my costume functions within timelessness and spacelessness, evoking the unreasonable through the disappearance of gravity. Elements of my costume actively float in space while other aspects effortlessly balance in impossible places. As my costume trails downward, it reconstructs itself into a surface for my body to rest or travel, often imitating a landscape. Through the simultaneous performance of adornment and surface, my costume manipulates “the ability to dress [in order] to speak a language that supplements [and] illuminates...the key to understanding [the] image" as a spectacle of the absurd (Gordenker 87).
THEATRICS OF LIVING OBJECTS AND STILL FIGURES

Since early childhood, I have spent countless hours performing before audiences. With the stage an old friend through my years as an actress, singer, dancer, and entertainer, the decision to perform in my drawings came naturally; however, casting my self-portrait as the leading actor, I required other roles beyond myself. Individually pinning my detritus to a soft body mannequin, I rendered each fragment from life. With this unhindered ability to defy gravity, I took advantage of this new freedom, controlling each piece to fit my formal arrangement. Like Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s (1598-1680) mystical illusion of a frozen spectacle, my work is suspended in timelessness, suggesting movement through the weaving of living draperies, “bound to the artistic fiction of imaginary spaces” (9).

"Ballet and opera, with their musical heightening of emotion and narrative suspension of disbelief" (Duncan 35), begins with the raising of the curtain. The theatre presents illusions to its audience, transporting them to another world beyond the stage. Bernini, took advantage of the visual and dramatic arts in his sculptures, “forg[ing] an art apparently live like theatre...the resemblance to a performing body, was concerned with the rendering of lifelike figures, 'liveliness' coupled to a seeming lifelikeness on which it depended” (Warwick 9). The figures in Bernini’s sculptures display motion and emotion,
appearing to move swiftly through space as dancers in a ballet. In Bernini’s sculpture, *Apollo and Daphne*, draperies cascade and encircle the figures as Daphne’s hands extend into space, caught in the moment of transformation and escape. Bernini creates an illusion of transformation as he returns to Ovid’s epic, *Metamorphoses*. In my series of drawings, like Bernini returning to Ovid, I desired to showcase a moment of metamorphoses as well; yet, while Bernini turned to myth, I looked inward.

While the drawn textiles appear alive, actively whirling in spacelessness, my self-portrait conveys stillness. Engulfed by piles of pattern, texture, and foolery, my body bends awkwardly, a serious expression on my face. Amid the illogicality of my dreamspace, my composed, melodramatic expression evokes a paradox. My self-portrait ignores the overwhelming defiance of gravity, remaining resolute, transfixed on the viewer. The dramatics of my self-portrait ultimately narrates the story of my unconscious through my perceived consciousness. While my self-portrait recognizes the dreamspace as a place of endless play and possibility, I am still aware of the reality outside of my fantasy.

**A Conscious Unconscious**

Acting as both artist and model, I bind myself to representational art as a woman. As both subject and object, I have the opportunity to decide how I look through my own perspective, evoking “an embodied subject” (Meskimmon xv). I present a fictional autobiography where I am cast as the leading role, reflecting a conflicting persona. My facial expression remains still; however, my body language evokes playful, childlike gestures, bending in unity with my *detritus*.

While the contemporary artist Amy Cutler (1974-present) does not explicitly present
herself as the main character in her illustrative narratives, her work exists as a direct response to personal thoughts and experiences through metaphorical autobiographical imagery. Some women sew stripes on tigers, while other women, dressed in ball gowns, dance on tables with chairs upon their heads. The women in her illustrations know Cutler’s world, living and acting within it as a normal, accepted reality. Like actors in a play, her women do not question their world, and they do not recognize their audience beyond the frame. Living within Cutler’s designed realm, her women accept it as truth.

While the depicted imagery in my drawings evokes the absurdity of the dream realm, my pensive gaze meets my observer located outside of the frame unlike Cutler’s women. Holding my gaze, “the spectator is met with the subject of the work, rather than a representation of a woman which permits [the spectator] to objectify her” (29). Moreover, through my gaze, the spectator beyond the frame of my sleeping mind becomes “the beheld - held in place outside the space of the [work] by the authority of glance and illusion” (Hickey 46). However, by meeting the viewer’s gaze from within an illogical realm, I create a paradox, connecting the unreal of the unconscious with the real of the conscious.

Asserting an active role through the gaze, I suggest a new awareness to my self-portrait.
In parallel to an actor “breaking the fourth wall” in a theater production, my gaze breaks the boundaries of my framed mind, dominating the image with my gaze. According to Meskimmon, in regard to women artists painting self-portraits, “This ‘conscience' of the production of the self-portrait scrutinizes the practitioner and the work which she is making” (30), in my case, the inadequate works I previously made. Through the representation of myself as artist and maker, I join a history of women artists, such as Artemisia Gentileschi, Sofonisba Anguissola, and Elisabeth Vigee-Le Brun, illustrating themselves within the confines of their studio spaces. Unlike numerous women artists before me, my drawings do not include a physical studio space; instead, I evoke a space of the mind, where the intangible artwork as concept has the ability to manifest itself into an eventual reality.
With a strong foundation set in the dream world’s relationship with the fairy tale, my series of drawings suggest a nonsensical narrative. A narrative concerns the telling of a story, which also often includes the act of writing. Moreover, "drawing always connects to writing. It links directly to literature." (Kurczynski 93). With my background in English literature, I also share a connection with the written language as storytelling. The pencil acts as a tool for the purpose of writing and also for the purpose of drawing. With the history of the pencil linked directly to the history of storytelling, pencil drawings evoke a strong bond with the language of narrative.

Historically, strong line acted as the most significant aspect to an artist’s technique in painting and drawing; however, "contemporary drawings need not depend on line, but they do depend on the idea that in drawing, something else besides line... is withdrawn or absent" (97). These drawings, in particular, omit color and background. As a traditional painter, refraining from color and my medium of choice, painting, was a difficult decision. Instead, I work strictly with the values graphite pencils provide. I share my story manifested through design. The background of my images, negative white space of the paper, evokes the unconscious as linear perspective and time do not manifest in my dreams, “suggesting new possibilities" (98). The white space of my drawings suggest the limitless imagination.

Text, Texture, Textile

While my work does not contain literal, poetic verse, the whimsical movement of texture and pattern in my drawings suggests a poetic rhythm. Textiles of ripped and torn paintings, as
well as still life fabrics, actively guide the viewer’s eye through the composition of each drawing. Jacqueline Flescher states, “The backbone of nonsense must be a consciously regulated pattern” (128), which includes “the rhythmic structure of verse” (128). Absurdity within the unconscious functions as a contradiction through the terminology of order and disorder as “order is generally created by language, disorder by reference” (128). When referring to poetry, regulation persists through poetic structure, and chaos presents itself through content. I establish a system of order through compositional balance, rhythm, and repetition. Textiles and textures repeat, measuring each of their counterparts to harmonize. Pandemonium erupts as the laws of
gravity cease. The textiles in my work, deemed in reality as “ordinary...are dignified by metamorphosis"(Hustvedt 59). Transformed into floating spectacles, textiles roam in a non-specific space and weigh upon each other without the institution of sense. Formal arrangement and absurdity overlap, permitting the “wildest fancies without abandoning form” (Kurczynski 133).
CONCLUSION

By intentionally destroying my failed artworks and translating them through observational drawing onto paper, I devised a new way of looking at them instead of as waste. Before dismantling my unsuccessful works, they existed as flat, two dimensional images. Approaching them as objects instead of as precious entities, I could rip, fold, and cut my work without feeling dismayed. Severing my mediocrities became an act of liberation. As three dimensional, still life objects, my disappointments collapsed into simple shapes and forms. While the memory of their origin remained, I would not deter from my pursuit of formal aestheticism. Unwilling to forget their history as ineffectual images, I had the opportunity and ability to create meaningful, honest work.

My disillusionments followed me in the real world, and they continued to follow me into my unconscious. Instead of permitting my fruitless endeavors to haunt me in my dreams, I broke them, I played with them, and I piled them, no longer a victim of their negativity. I perceived my work’s lack of quality through only one perspective. Translating them through the act of drawing provided me with a new way of seeing. I realized a vibrancy in my flawed work, and the endless possibilities with a simple change of sight and mind.

Transformed from flat images, to three dimensional objects, and returned to flatness through drawing, my inadequate work evolved. Instead of living as individual artworks, they merged together, formulating new structures. Through the complexity of composition, my detritus danced. Intertwining and weaving through space, they accumulated. The multiplication of my setbacks paradoxically brought forth order and balance. As single, flat entities, my
drawings and paintings lacked concept, ingenuity, technique, and confidence.

Relocating my ineffectual artworks from the real world and into a mobile collective within a dreamspace, they grasped the ability to flourish. Through the metamorphoses of drawing, they became active paradoxes, combined in a composition together to formulate beauty. With my perspective altered, the infinite spacelessness of my drawings became a place of active change and never-ending potential.
WORKS CITED


AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Brianna Angelakis (b. 1990) was born in Massachusetts. She moved to New Hampshire during her early teen years and moved to Florida in her late teen years. In 2013 she graduated from Flagler College, located in Saint Augustine, Florida, with a B.F.A in Fine Arts and a B.A. in English. Angelakis’ debut solo exhibition, Fairy Tales: The Test of Time, opened in 2014 at Modern Eden Gallery in San Francisco, CA. Her artworks have exhibited internationally including cities such as New York, NY; Los Angeles, CA; San Francisco, CA; Chicago, IL; and Frankfurt, Germany. She has also exhibited in various museums throughout north and central Florida including the Harn Museum of Art, the Cummer Museum of Arts & Gardens, and the Crisp-Ellert Art Museum. She was most recently published on Hi-Fructose Magazine and Manifest INPA4. For more work and information, please visit www.BriannaAngelakis.com.