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In search of delicious

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DEDICATION

To Ariya

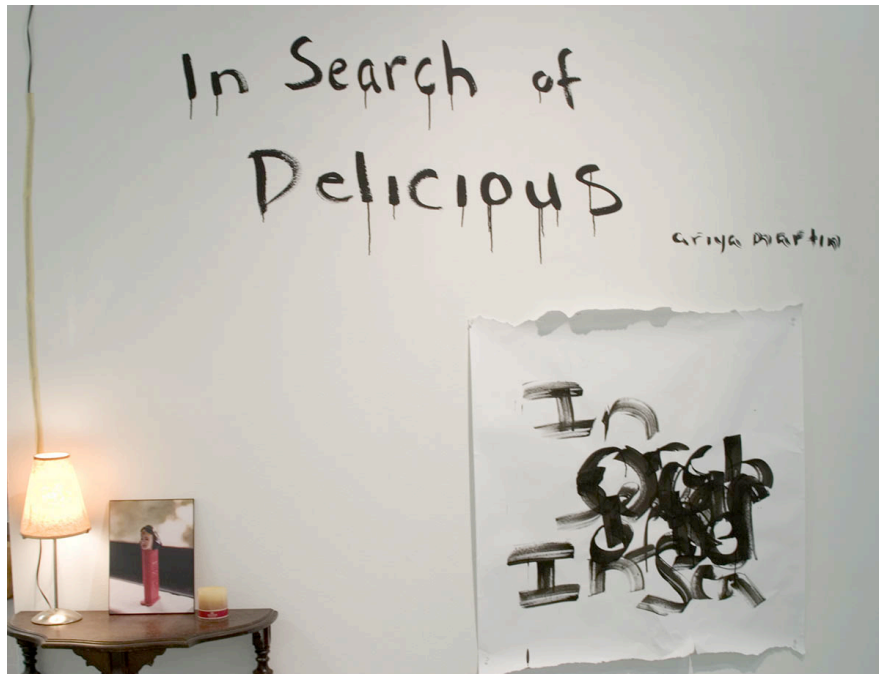
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although the work is mine, I received much love and support.

I would like to thank my parents.

I would also like to thank my committee members: Judy Levy, Elaine O'Neil and Jeff Weiss.

I am also grateful to Leyla Safavi, Susana Reisman, Kevin Burns, Tara Malik, Molly Theriault, Lee Iannone, Odetta Norton, Marcy James and Ellen Goldstein who helped with all the things, great and small.



BY

ARIYA MARTIN

ABSTRACT

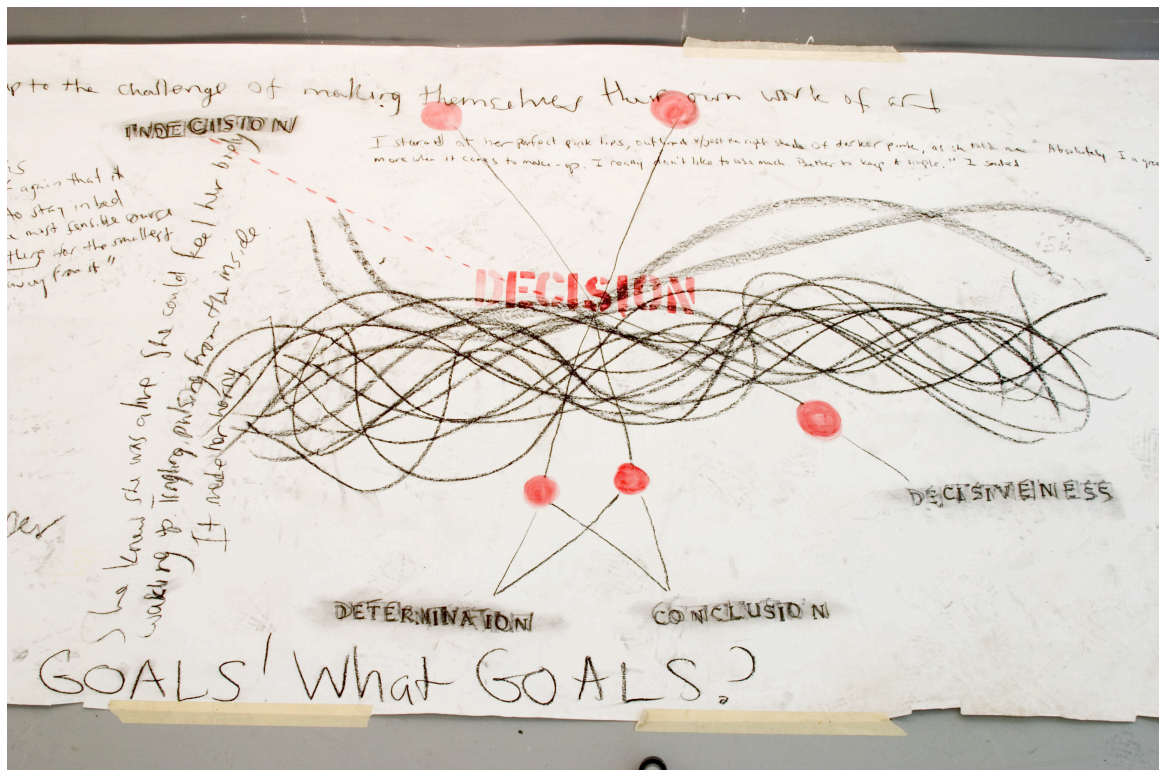
What is art? What is good art? Who are considered Artists, and why? Most important, can the very process by which we go through every day in our lives lead to an acceptable form of art-making? Furthermore, can life, my life, be put into a visual format to be viewed from outside of my life?

Over the last two years I have been working with words as images, with a concept of installation as dialogue between the space, the artist, and the viewer. In my recently completed thesis show the work dealt with both the challenge of “writing a picture”, and about asking questions: questions about Art, about myself as a creator of things, about my aesthetics and about life itself.

Of course, one never knows if they are asking the right questions, they can only have faith that their own concerns and struggles have applications with which other people can identify.

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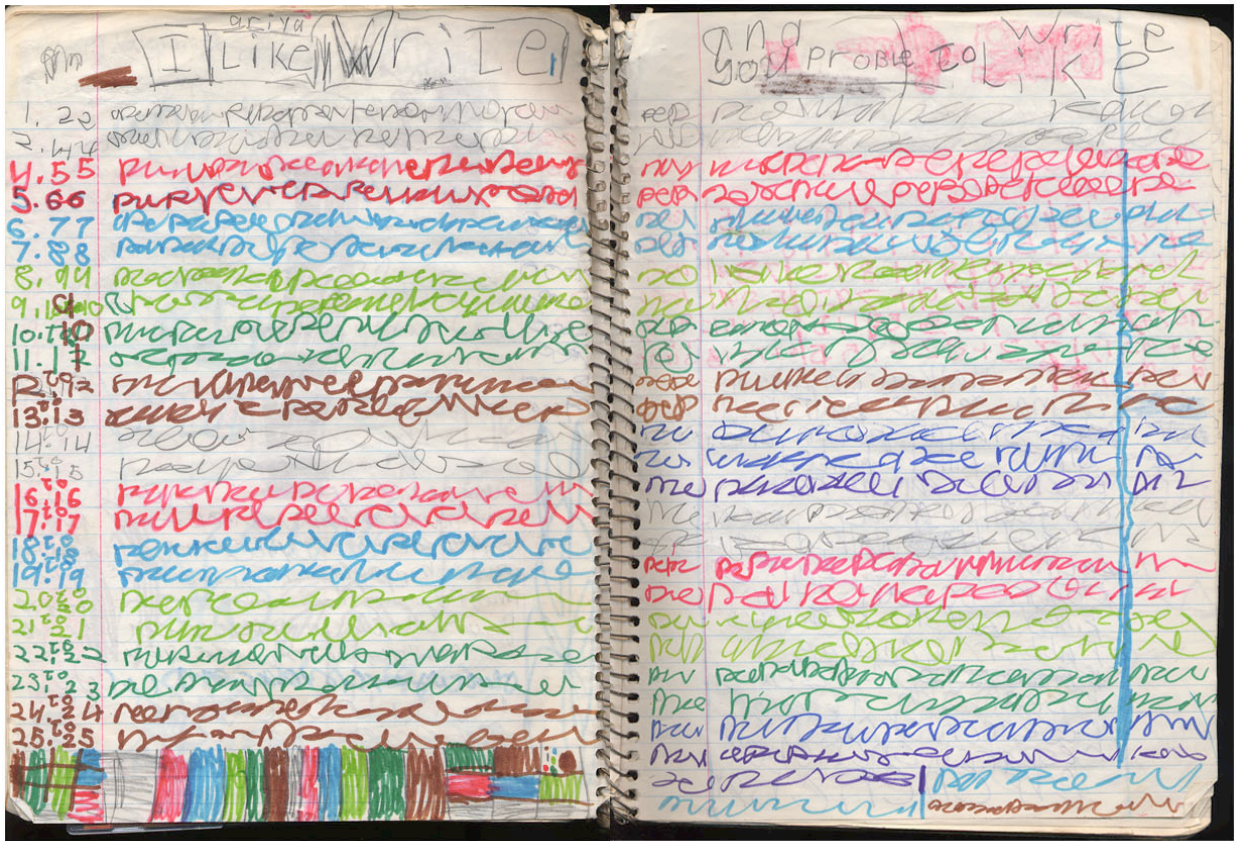
BEFORE

“everyday, in countless ways, you and I convince ourselves about ourselves. True art, when it happens to us, challenges the ‘I’ that we are.”¹ Jeannette Winterson

I: have curly hair and hazel eyes, am a youngest child, believe in mental telepathy and fate, am not a workaholic, am indecisive, am too sensitive, get depressed, cry too much, have a knack for bringing people together, have good ideas, lack discipline, am insecure, am a good dancer, love mountains and adventures, sleep too much, am flighty and whimsical, am serious and introspective, think too much, can’t say no, care too much, always put other people first, am never satisfied, never satisfied, never satisfied.

My work is about me— about living in that place where I make art, think about art, and challenge my assumptions of art. My work is about answers, choices, fear, forgiveness, fragments, freedom, happiness, movement, obsession, process, questions, sadness, searching, stasis, struggle, tension.

¹ Winterson, Art Objects, p.15



Journal pages

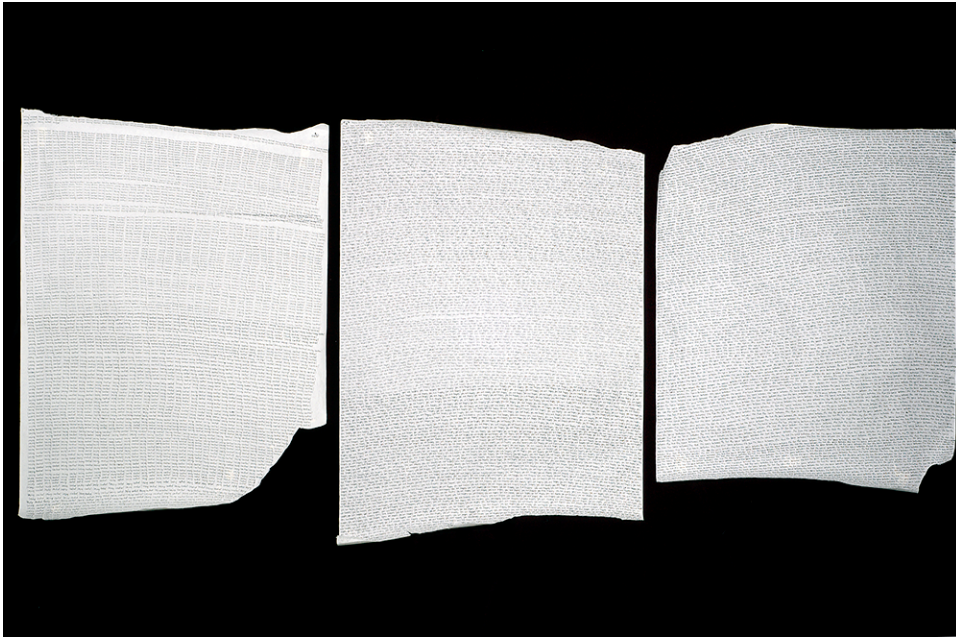
I remember “writing.”

At three years old I filled notebooks with my writing--wavy lines going across the page. It poured out. No space too sacred--lines and margins meant nothing to me. I never thought of them as scribbles, I truly believed they were words that anyone else could read. In my mind sentences formed; I told my mom about my day; I wrote poetry. To put my thoughts on paper was important, but equally cherished was the physical, dynamic act of hand gripping the utensil, arm moving, making gestures across paper. I put my body as well as my mind into the act.

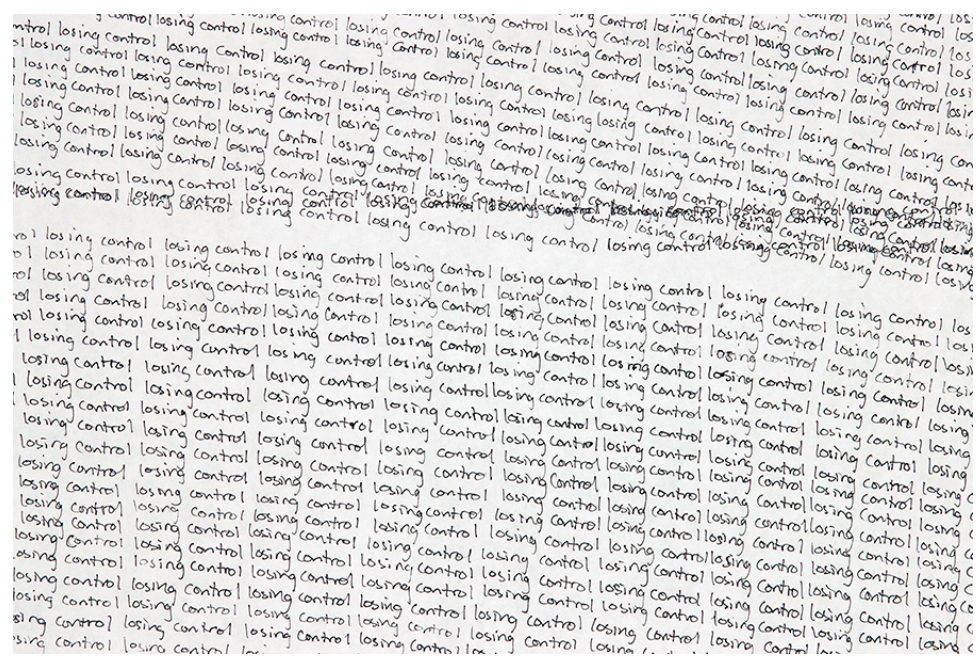
At twenty-seven I entered RIT as a fairly traditional photographer, my portfolio consisted of black and white, sepia-toned prints and for my first walkthrough I continued

in that vein, staying safe, save for printing the images 20x24, which was large by my standard.

In the winter I took Patti Ambrogio's class "Video as Moving Image" and discovered the joy of working with a video camera. It has taken me a while to pin down what video provided me, but I now know that I embraced it for a couple of reasons. With video I could include so much more than I had been able to with a photograph, and the video camera in hand was a constant companion, and witness to my life. I continued to photograph, but the camera became a secondary tool, it would come in to document, functioning as a keeper of records. I also reconnected to my passion for writing; in the last walkthrough I exhibited no photography. I showed scrolls of writing- sharpie on white paper. The size ranged from approximately 45" x 36" to pieces that went all the way down the wall and along the floor. In the smaller scrolls I used repeated phrases as both the visual and conceptual element, and I had copied the first three chapters from the book The Cinderella Complex. I had also gathered over two hundred books on self-help, self-realization, and creativity and displayed them stacked precariously in a circle. Displaying scrolls and stacks of self-help books was my first attempt at installation.



Scrolls of writing (left to right: “losing control,” “you are happy,” “the space between”)



"Losing control," detail

Much of my second year in graduate school I spent frustrated, continually trying to force sense onto my work. I felt lost and disconnected. One day I'm building a house in which to put butterflies that I had ordered, the next day I'm drawing circles on a piece of paper and the next I'm in the school parking lot video taping one of my many break downs. I continued to struggle with words on paper, even though I used the video camera as my primary tool. I kept the camera with me at all times. Silently, and without judgment, it watched me get drunk, deliberate over bathroom tile, leave my boyfriend of fifteen years, and drive across the country.

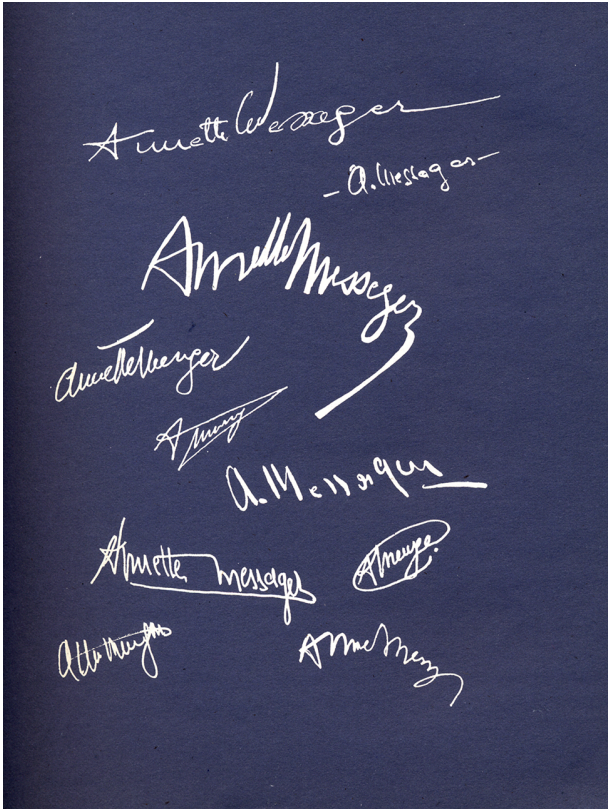
In February I received a studio as a gift. Paralyzed with fear, I had no idea what to do in there. The space was intimidating. I felt pressure to make something significant and it meant that people would now expect something bigger from me. I moved my computer and books there, but was not sure how to proceed. I threw a party. Then, in May I left Rochester and moved to Missoula, Montana to work for a photography school. I had moved out, on my own, truly, for the first time. During an artists' group meeting, formed by a few of the staff and instructors, I showed my videos. They received the work seriously. Many of them remarked on how honest it was and how uncomfortable it made them. Previous to this, the only people who had seen the videos (which were very personal) had been my committee members and my closest friends. These people in Montana didn't know me, were not in art school, had no alliances. Their positive response helped me to take my own work seriously and to continue making my life my work of art.

When I returned to Rochester in October I had five months until my thesis show and it was at this time that I began to use the walls in the studio. At first I had taped

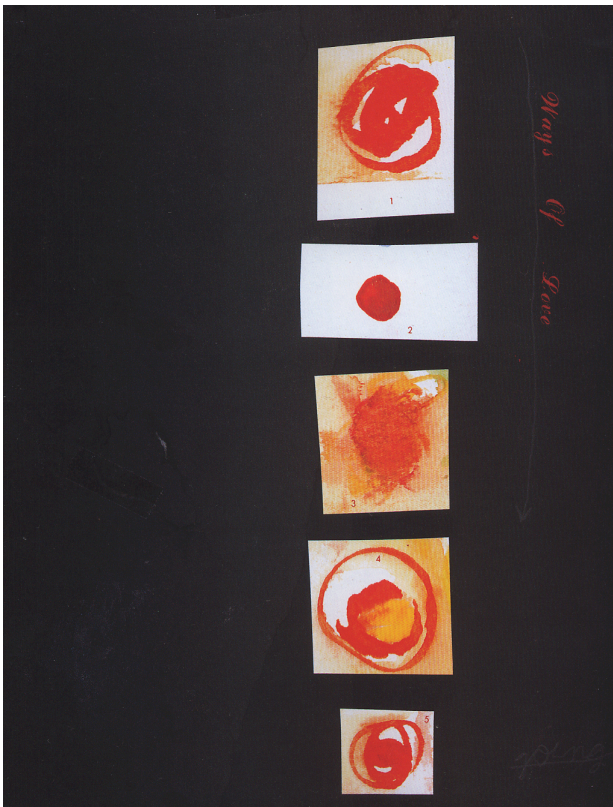
photographs and words on scrolls of paper to the wall. I had made a dartboard in the spring, which I used for a video. Coming back to it I realized that the dartboard on its own was an interesting visual element that also incorporated words. I began to think about the walls as my canvas. My thoughts flew out and onto the wall where they combined with a visual expression.



Detail of dartboard I made in the studio



Annette Messenger



Sabrina Ward Harrison

PRE-SHOW: Interior Dialogue

“it takes a smart person to hide their weaknesses but a genius to exploit them.”

Adam Sheridan

On the phone with my friend Adam I wrote this down on a scrap of paper, tucked it into my journal, where it stayed until a year later.

My story is this: I am sitting outside with my notebook open, pen in hand, the sun on my back, in a backyard, in Missoula, Montana. It's not my house or my backyard, or my two dogs that I throw sticks for and affectionately scratch behind the ear. Brody, the big, white Shepard starts his routine, barking at the neighbor's little boxer. They run up and down the length of chain-link fence that separates them, barking the whole time, until I drag him into the house. Now I am writing in my studio in Rochester, New York, looking out the third story, one side all windows, watching pigeons and clouds move across the sky, listening to The Truth about Charlie soundtrack that Molly gave me before I left Missoula, mixed in with laughter from the studio above. Next, I am in an apartment, not mine, which feels more like my home than any other apartment I've lived in. I replace a burnt out light bulb, I do yoga first thing, I'm surrounded by so many good books on art and catalogs of artists whose work I've been looking at like Sol Lewitt, Gerhard Richter, and Marcel Broodthaers, and Simon the cat.

Un coup de dés jamais grand bien même lancé dans des circonstances étouffées, du fait d'un naufrage
 Soit que l'âme blanche étale farieux sous une inclinaison plane désespérément d'aile la sienne rebondie
 par avance d'un mal à deviner le vol et cauvant les faillissements rampant au ras du bords liés à
 l'intérieur résine

L'ombre enfouie dans ^{la} cette profondeur
 par cette voile alternative
~~Essaimant la part d'insomnie~~
~~Essaimant la part d'insomnie~~
 jusqu'à adapter à l'ouvrage
 sa grande profondeur en
 tout que la coupe d'un
 bâtiment fructif de l'un
 ou l'autre bord
 Le Maître hors d'anciens
 calculs où la maison en
 avec l'âge oublié surgi
 jadis il

MURAGE
 SOIT QUE
 LABIMEB
 LANCHIE
 LADEFUR

A B C D E F G H I J
 K L M N O P Q R S
 T U V W X Y Z A B
 C O U P D E D E S
 J A M A I S Q U A
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 N S T A N C E S E
 T E R M I N E L L E S
 D U F O N D U N

Marcel Broodthaers

Could I be one of these artists someday? What does it take to get to where they have gotten in their careers?

A series of events, or is it the alignment of the stars setting the course of this life leading up to this moment: In a backyard on Blaine Street, in a studio given to me, in my parents' house reminding myself that I am an adult, in an apartment on my own, in a car driving across the country, in bed with a boy. I write when my belly flips and churns, when my veins are pulsing and the hairs on my body conduct electricity—I write to

remember. But, what do I hope to record? Maybe by looking back at what I've written I will be able to see myself clearly. I will know my own mind.

In 1992 Isabel Allende's daughter was dying. I read her story. I share very little with either woman and yet Allende's words resonate with me. She writes, "I am a raft without a rudder, adrift on a sea of pain. During these long months I have been peeling away like an onion, layer after layer, changing; I am not the same woman, my daughter has given me the opportunity to look inside myself and discover interior spaces- empty, dark, strangely peaceful- I had never explored before."³ I have been having strong dreams, mostly about boys that have come and gone from my life. Some I have had relationships with, but some I have barely even been friends with, maybe only passing by one another at school and exchanging a smile. I wake up in the middle of the night with the urge to call, to connect to the past-- to open all the doors of infinite possibilities: to have love, to be independent, to live in L.A., New York City, and Montana. I wake in the early morning, wide awake, 5:30 a.m., too early to get up, feeling with such conviction that someone out there must have been dreaming about me too. I have more faith in these semi-conscious, altered states than in my waking compulsions. I read my horoscopes, daily, from newspapers and online sites, and get tarot card readings from my friend Molly. I'm obsessed, desperate for insight into my own life. I could read significance in a sneeze. "Everything is standing out on its own, because everything is a possibility, everything is a clue, everything is talking to you."⁴

I never knew my grandma, really. I was fifteen when she died. Going through her clothes I can't fathom what possessed her to shop so much. To fill the house with

³ Allende, Paula, p.272

⁴ Osbon, A Joseph Campbell Companion, p.68

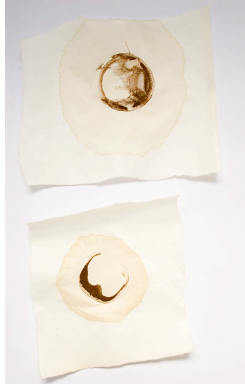
clothes that she would never wear- it's absurd, excessive, tags still hanging in them, showing the fruit of her keen eye for bargains. Did she love my grandfather? He adored her. Did she lead a satisfying life? Would she put on her hot pink pants and matching pink and white gingham jacket and parade around the suburban house in Queens believing she was a beautiful movie star? Did that make her happy? Who am I to claim perfection or to know anything about happiness? Driving back to Rochester, after seeing my grandfather, it is late October, the car filled with garbage bags of grandma's things: clothes, shoes, purses and belts. The leaves are so vibrant. My grandfather can't see fall from his window, he relies on photographs from the past. I should take a picture and send it to him, but I don't.

I spend my life in circles just pushing things from one place to another. The clothes go in one corner, then another. The stacks of miscellaneous paper go next to the desk, then against the wall. The books go on one shelf then another.

I wish I could be an island. Then I wouldn't get distracted. Just turn the phone off, don't call or talk to anyone- JUST DO WORK- sleep in the studio, just juice and focus on work. It's about my space and making a place for myself and my things. This is it. BE HERE NOW. Funny thing is, I look at what I do to occupy my time, the things I do when I'm not doing the "real" work, and they all have a visual presence. I like how the juicer makes these organic, skin-like things and when Leyla does Turkish coffee readings- instead of turning the cup over onto a saucer I am putting them on paper and when I wax I am keeping the pieces of cloth that have the hair I ripped out.



Dried juice pulp



Coffee stains



Wax and hair

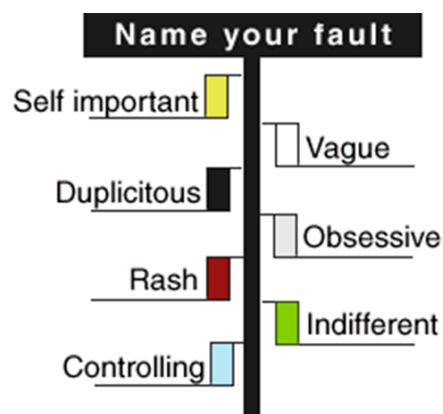
Why does a woman who takes risks make men uncomfortable? How am I taking risks? I can't explain it with any art-talk feminist jargon bullshit. I can be direct, I'm honest, I ask the Questions- but are they the right questions?

I don't want formulas and expensive materials. I am not running an ad campaign. I want every day objects. I want pieces of my life. Most important is that the words, walls, paper, speaks, hums, sings, resonates, vibrates, wails, screams, whispers. I'm thinking of Travis and Dustin's thread installation.⁵ I loved how when I looked at it from the hallway it looked like one single ribbon, and then, when I entered it was many single strings of thread and the way the light played through it and how I had to move in and around it. Looking at other artists, other MFA shows, I'm beginning to know what I am not. I will never be a Zone System, 4x5 photographer or an artist who relies on theory to do or explain her work. I rely on intuition and emotion. It has never been important to me how someone made the picture; what lens, what f-stop. I care about the story, and how the artist conveys that story through light and shadow and f-stops and shutter speeds.

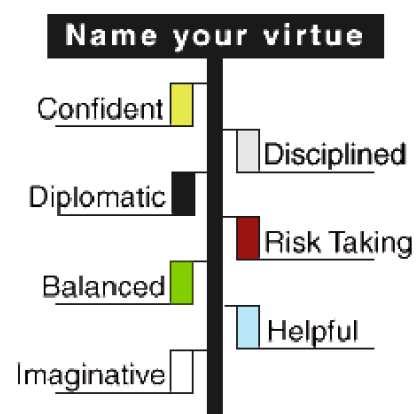
⁵ Two undergraduates did an installation in classroom 2070 where they strung red thread from one side of the wall to the other all the way down the wall.

There isn't a lot of time left in school. I want to marry my work. This is the only chance I really have to indulge. And last year I totally disengaged. I'm coming back and being kinder to myself. Well, I am trying, even though I constantly catch myself in countdown mode. Trying to capitalize on who I am and let the work inform me. Even though I wrote that on a sticky note last year, it is just starting to happen.

I am in my studio. It's quiet. I've decided not to follow my usual routine: come in, boil water, turn on music, roll a cigarette. Instead, I'm going to face my fears. I have been in hiding for two days, only leaving the house for a couple of hours yesterday, and barely able to even get out of bed. My weariness is indescribable. I just feel so heavy-like something's pushing down on me. What could it be? Maybe it's fear. I'm afraid to tackle the next step. I long for clarity. I'm hitting that wall again. I get depressed when I don't know what to do, or when someone questions the work. Putting a voice to this fear would help. Getting messy always helps. It makes me happy to tear up paper and get my hands dirty from rubbing charcoal and to stand on the table and stretch my arm out as far as it can go to write "happily ever after."



Matthew Ritchie



Matthew Ritchie



My studio, January '05

I don't want my art to be consumed, but I have to put it out there. I have to have courage to take risks. It's a risk to do this kind of work at RIT. I keep hearing a voice telling me it has to be really good, but WHAT is THAT? Who determines good? The artist? The audience? The critic? The venue? By whose standards is the work defined?

The work is rough, but I like it like that. If I write on a napkin then it's on a fucking napkin! It is about things relating in ways that make sense to me based on circumstance, experience. However, I contradict myself. I want to be Tara Donovan or Tim Hawkinson and then I do work that isn't slick at all. It has an aesthetic, but it's messy and raw, expressive--about process not about product. Yet, at the same time I'm human, I'm still a sucker for packaging. I will pay five dollars for chocolate the size of a travel bar of soap, just because of the box it comes in, or because it's inclusion of

lavender or some other natural ingredient promotes health benefits. Maybe I need to reconcile with these disparities and allow myself and my work to just be - like Yoko Ono⁶ or Linda Montano. I wish I had the guts to walk around in a chicken suit. Maybe one day...



Tim Hawkinson, ink and colored pencil



Tara Donovan, left: plastic cups, right: plastic straws

⁶ “I think it is nice to abandon what you have as much as possible, as many mental possessions as the physical ones, as they clutter your mind. It is nice to maintain poverty of environment, sound, thinking, and belief. It is nice to keep oneself small, like a grain of rice, instead of expanding. Make yourself dispensable, like paper. See little, hear little, think little.” Stiles, Kristine and Peter Selz, ed., Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: a sourcebook of artists' writings, p.739

How do you remove yourself from the everyday, and yet speak about exactly that?

How does an artist become obsessive- how do they find their niche, their passions, what gets them up in the morning? By doing meditation? By setting intention?

Art koans cannot be solved intellectually. It's important that you don't try to rationalize them. Simply be aware of the feeling you'll be asked to express. Sit with the barrier, be it. Sit with the question, not the solution. Art koan practice: express your barrier. All of us have barriers, ranging from inconsequential obstacles that sometimes get in our way to profound barriers that arrest our activity or development... for this practice...choose a barrier that is particularly strong and persistent, one that you can easily identify with in terms of the feelings it evokes in you. *Sit with the feeling evoked by the barrier until the presence of that feeling can be felt strongly throughout your body and mind. Center that feeling in the hara and use the feeling as a guide and resonance as a compass.*⁷

I sit with my fears and insecurities. They are strong. They pull me down. I am afraid of responsibility, of being an adult. I worry about my capabilities and whether or not I can do this on my own. How will I make money? How will I know what the work is supposed to look like? Where will it get me ultimately?

My father had given me Lewis Hyde's book The Gift, and as I read it the notion of what I do, and how I want it to be received, began to make sense. Hyde said, "a work of art is a gift, not a commodity." Look at what's happened to art. How artists treat their art. They just want to make a name for themselves as quickly as possible, they don't seem to be in it for the long haul, as a way of life. How museums treat art, example, the new MoMA: "The expanded building, a cool granite and glass fortress designed by the Japanese architect Yoshio Taniguchi, ultimately cost \$858 million- a sum that was raised largely during a period in which the city suffered a terrorist attack and an economic recession, while other big New York museums were laying people off and reducing

⁷ Loori, The Zen of Creativity, p.126

hours;”⁸ “Three restaurants, two bookstores, two theaters and enormous special exhibition space in this plain-showy building will readily become what the Modern now seems bent on embracing – entertainment;”⁹ “The \$20 ticket price, the highest of any general art museum admission in the nation, is directed at dual constituencies. One is locals and aficionados of a certain class- those who will bypass the single-admission fee because they can manage a \$75 annual membership (\$150 for a family). The other is tourists, who have a list of sites to see and expect to pay.”¹⁰

I must remember art is a business. I mean, I have to make money somewhere in this, make work that can have a price tag. Yet, somehow artists, like Maurizio Cattelan or Komar and Melamid¹¹, have found a way to engage in the process and really enjoy playing. Somehow they have also managed to make a good amount of money doing what they love. How to strike a balance between imagination and logic, between art as gift and art as career and commodity? “All cultures and all artists have felt the tension between gift exchange and the market, between self-forgetfulness of art and the self aggrandizement of the merchant, and how that tension is to be resolved has been a subject of debate since before Aristotle. Eros and logos have a distinctly new relationship in a mass society... the exploitation of the arts which we find in the twentieth century is without precedent. The particular manner in which radio, television, the

⁸ Weisslink email. Hugh Eakin, “MoMA's Funding: A Very Modern Art, Indeed” 7 November 2004.

⁹ Weisslink e-mail. Alan G. Artner, “Reimagining MoMA: Now, not then, is the new focus,” *Chicago Tribune* 21 November 2004.

¹⁰ Weisslink e-mail. Christopher Knight, “Can MoMA go modern?” *New York Times* 7 November 2004.

¹¹ I love the project Komar and Melamid did with the Thai elephants, getting them to paint, and the paintings they did based on worldwide surveys asking people what shapes, colors, themes, etc they liked to see in a painting.

movies, and the recording industry have commercialized song and drama is wholly new... the more we allow such commodity art to define and control our gifts, the less gifted we will become, as individuals and as a society. The true commerce of art is gift exchange..."¹² After one of our meetings, before Jeff left my studio, he suggested that maybe I should think of my work as a gift.

So many new artists every year. How does our world have enough room for all of them? Does it expand, or is it inevitable that some fail? Is that why I'm afraid to try, because I see how many young successful artists are out there? Is there room for me? How can there be? Leyla's angry with me. She says my work is good, but it doesn't really matter what she thinks- I need to believe in it. Looking at artists who do this kind of work lets me know it's possible. There needs to be balance between being scared, and just throwing stuff up instinctively and impatiently, and being scared to not do the right thing which leads me to not doing anything. I came to grad school to supposedly pursue a degree in photography. Now I have begun to pursue a different ritual.

Simon Schama says, "Art begins with resistance to loss." At first I believed this, but recently I have been making work to test that belief. Maybe art is made to be lost—it's all about the making, and what happens after is not loss but meaning and clarity and more ideas. How can I show my fear, but not get consumed by it? How can I take that fear and express it? I think I'm finally beginning to understand that the work- once created becomes independent of the creator. It must have a life that extends beyond. Even if the work is autobiographical. Then it can start to teach me- my strengths, my weaknesses, my failures and successes. I want to have faith that "my art will show me

¹² Hyde, The Gift, p.158

what I truly love- cherish- am passionate about.”¹³ Is my work “an act of terrorism, against worn-out assumptions” of what photography is? I need to stand up for myself and my time. The studio is for: unlearning, finding my own rhythm, listening, doing.

Rauschenberg spoke of “wanting to work in the gap between art and life and of his desire to acknowledge the ‘random order’ of experience... He sets challenges for himself by direct action: finding, doing, experimenting, constructing. Myriad possibilities and variations are decisively addressed. Often a ‘mistake’ allows new insight and is welcome.”¹⁴ I want to work like this.

There isn’t a day I come into my studio when I know what my task is- what I’m supposed to accomplish in that day- in the time that I’m there. So, what to do? I made some juice, now I’m writing, but am I writing just because I still don’t know how to resolve the work on the walls? And what about my writing? It can’t just be all over the place. Well it can, but do I want it to be so crazy? Maybe. Maybe that’s appropriate. All this junk, with bits and pieces that are really good. Don’t make decisions- just write and then see what sense comes out if it. I remember in college having to rewrite papers, and even though I hated to do it they always improved. My sentences got tighter and the ideas were clearer. So is this the same? Maybe I put it all out then refine the mess. Again, as usual, I don’t have a plan. No single focus to structure the work and writing around. Like my papers, the more I rewrite the clearer my ideas became.

¹³ Winterson, Art Objects, p.27

¹⁴ Hopps, Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective, p.21

Things to keep present as I work

Themes:

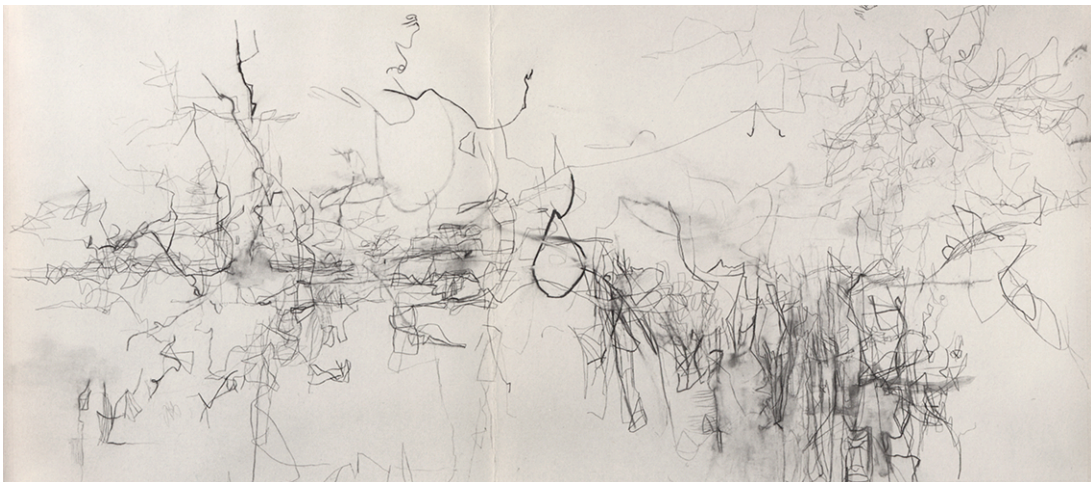
- *Fear of making the wrong decision*
- *Anger @ not making any decision, or someone else deciding*
- *Loss when a choice is made*

Considerations:

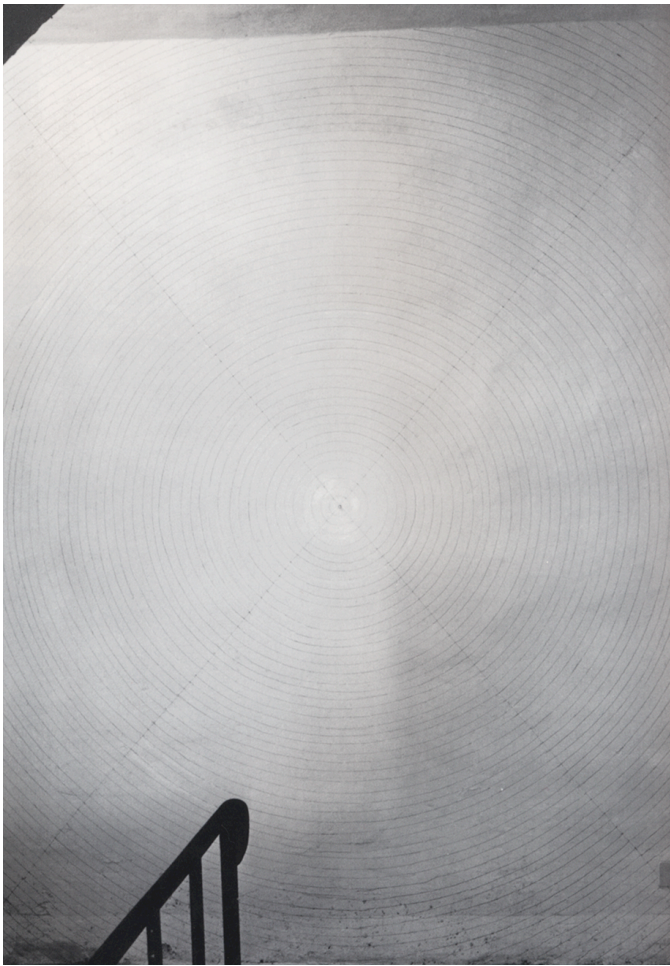
- *Aesthetic quality*
- *Can people identify with the themes?*
- *Questions and answers*
- *What do I want people to leave with?*

THE SHOW IS NOT THE STOPPING POINT. IT IS NOT THE FINAL PRODUCT.

I am looking more at conceptual artists than strictly artists that use text in their work. Sol Lewitt says, “what the work of art looks like isn’t too important. It has to look like something if it has physical form. No matter what form it may finally have it must begin with an idea.”(24) “The revelation of this first wall drawing was in its frank temporality (wall drawing #1 1968), its seeming obliviousness to issues of commercial viability, and in its conceptualizer’s denial of the exclusivity of authorial execution of a handmade artwork... I never think about selling a work of art while doing it.”(37) In the preface to the catalogue of Lewitt’s show in 1969, “When Attitude becomes Form,” Scott Burton wrote, “art has been veritably invaded by life, if life means flux, change, chance, time, unpredictability. Sometimes the difference between the two is sheer consciousness, the awareness that what seemed to be a stain on the wall is in fact a work of art.”(42)



Christine Hiebert



Sol Lewitt

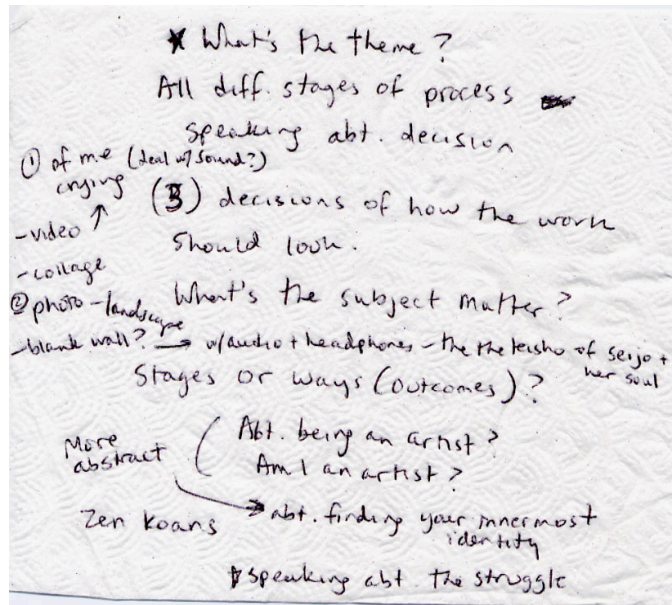
I have revelations in everyday acts. Susana, Erin, Tara and I hiked Hi-Tor, in Naples, NY. It was cold and the stream that we followed was frozen. We came to one part of the hike where we had to make a decision. We could either go straight, hanging onto the rock face, or we could scramble up and over on the ledge above. We chose the ledge. I went first. As they watched me, all they saw was how I was doing it. It appeared to them as though I wasn't scared at all. When I had made it across I turned to watch Erin. From the other side it looked so easy, when I knew how hard it had just been for me. Erin got stuck at the very end. She just needed to put her foot down, and from my new perspective she should've just been able to jump down. She kept trying to put her

foot down, and it was so close, but she couldn't see where to go. Finally she just had to have faith that the ground was closer than it felt and it would catch her.

A walk to Java's downtown with my friend Allyson who is in dental school; written on the mirror: "I beg you... to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer." Rainer Maria Rilke. She wanted to know what I was up to, how the work was coming. I didn't want to think about it. She started asking me questions and begrudgingly I responded. Something changed, though, I became energized, I grabbed a napkin and a pen and as we talked I figured out what I was putting in the gallery, and more importantly, why. The theme was the different stages of process and I would include the video of me crying, the landscape photograph, and a wall collaged with all kinds of materials that I had been collecting and one wall would be blank except for headphones where I would play Danan's teisho on "Seijo and her Soul."¹⁵ The subject matter dealt with the question; am I an artist? At that moment I knew this koan¹⁶, which addresses the struggle of finding one's innermost identity, would be central to the work.

¹⁵ This was a tape my father had given me that I had been listening to. A teisho is a Zen talk delivered by a Zen teacher often during intensive meditation retreats. It is a way of demonstrating the Zen teachings rather than talking about them.

¹⁶ A koan is a saying that challenges the habitual and rational thought processes of the mind. The purpose of koans is to jolt the mind out of its habitual thought processes. The disciple must grapple with the koan again and again, trying to tease out its intuitive meaning. Only a realization or *kensho* will reveal its true meaning, not logic or reason.



Napkin from Java's

Connecting with people is important to me, but I really think I need to connect with myself, to start doing what only I can do. I'm not going to figure this out by drinking tea. Talking helps, but it only gets you so far. Why do I think it happens for other people, but it can't happen for me? I continually forget what I have learned. I am always worrying about the next problem. I tried to do work at the studio, but didn't get much done. What do I want to express? What are the issues at the core? What would a chart of my future look like? What would my fantasy be? What would make that my reality? What's the worst possible thing that could happen by "going for it," by working your finger down, by being brave and determined and unswerving in your task? Invite the critic in, bake him cookies, make him comfortable. Whatever you do don't try to run.

My therapist recommended I read biographies, to see how other artists have lived, to look for my heroines. In Diane di Prima's memoir:

I loved the mindless concentration, three hours each morning at the blue typing book... and all of us in rows, making little movements. Over and over again. People all ages, earnest, poking the keys. I loved going out of the house in the morning as if to school and yet free-er... my own person,

taking the trolley downtown. The morning to myself, not even intense teen friendships, or mind-boggling classes. Just FRF-FTF-FGF-FVF-FBF, over and over, and the thoughts in my mind. Or lack of them. Finally a moment of peace, uninterrupted. (75)

I am thinking of my grandfather's words, his legacy. "Study like I studied, struggle like I struggled". And something is stirring in me, something like power. Like sex, or love, like kundalini or vision. Something fills my belly and rises to my throat. It is the taste of possibility.

Poems I've been writing, yes, and poems I will write. But this is more than the poems, is the shape of a life. Mine. Life. Lived in the vision of art to be achieved. Lived in possibility. Rise to it. Yes. No reason it should not be me. Myself as I stand here. Take up the challenge. The knowing: no matter what I will be a poet. Be great, whatever that means. Fulfill the dreams. This is Vision, but it is not hope. I can taste the struggles, the things I now leave behind (I am fourteen). Simple comforts of the regular human world, sentimentalized for a moment into a worth, a worthiness they didn't usually have for me even then. But now I am leaving them behind, never having had them. Now I am leaving them perhaps for good. Leaving the quiet unquestioned living and dying, the simple one-love-and-marriage, children, material pleasures, easy securities. I am leaving the houses I will never own. Dishwashers. Carpets. Dull respect of dull neighbors. None of this matters really. I have already seen it all for the prison it is, but for that one moment it matters tremendously.

Looking at the sky I know I will be poet, and knowing that know what I will lose. Have only the dimmest sense of what I will gain. What I step into. What might be mine... Keats said it: I am certain of nothing, but the Holiness of Heart's Affections and the Truth of the Imagination. (78)

Yeah, so my art isn't going to be in the next Whitney biennial, but I'm starting to enjoy the process. I am still working on how to make the decision web on the wall, what pieces to connect to it and how to make it more dynamic visually. I sent my annual holiday card. When I was at school for Jeff's class both Bill and Lee thanked me and said that what I had written really made their day: "Everyday, EVERY DAY, is a new day. You decide." They both said that they had been having a shitty day and the card made it a little better. Judy thinks I should put it in the show.

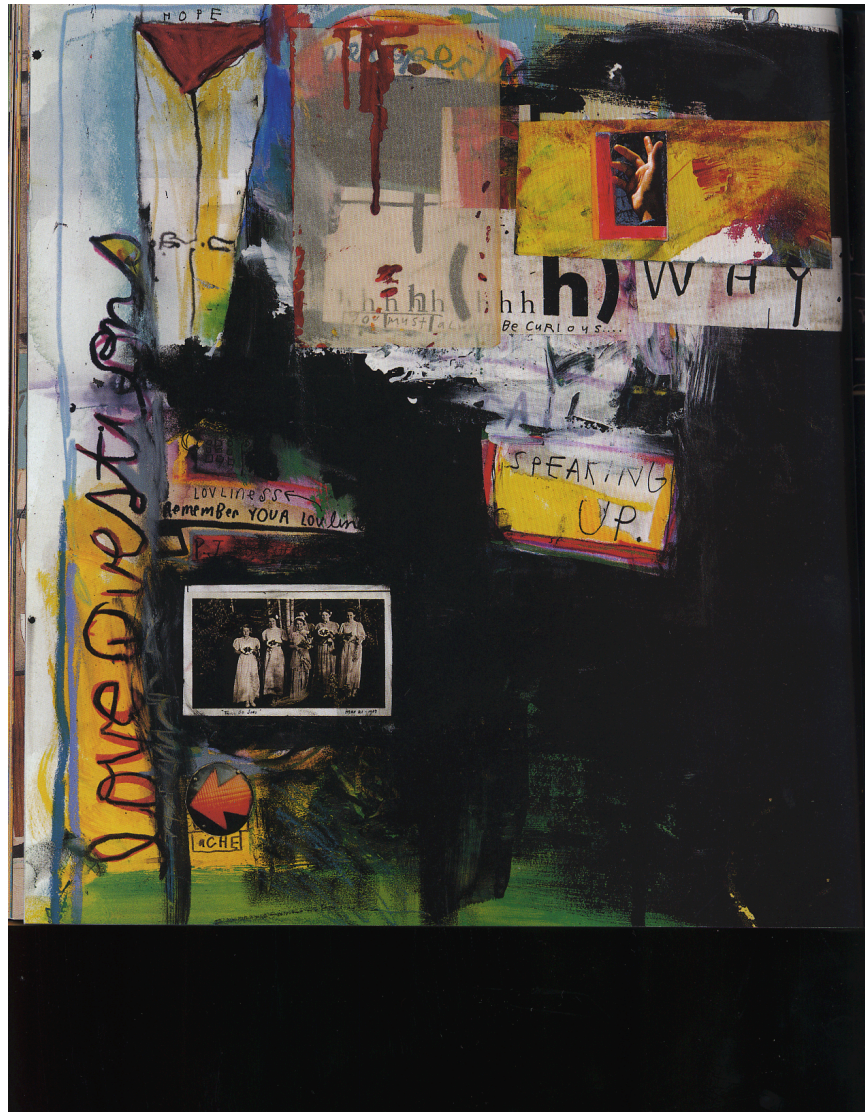


Holiday card from Jan '05

I can't stop time, slow it down, or reverse it. So why do I drag my feet- it doesn't change anything- just makes life harder. Get to it! Just go to the studio even if you don't know what the fuck you're doing there. Even if you don't believe in yourself. Even if you think you're a fucking fraud. Then we are all frauds!

Am I just blind to acknowledging that I have something because right now I don't feel like I have a plan and I don't have anything ready. I have no walls done. I'm starting to hate everything. I want to redo it all.

What do I want in my life? How do I want it to look and feel? How do I want to represent that?



Sabrina Ward Harrison

Why do I still think that someone is going to make me happy? If I'm not happy- if I can't wake up and be happy on my own how do I expect it to be someone else's job? Just me. Alone. I shouldn't be in a relationship until I know how to balance my life- my time doing my work and my time spent with other people, or with another person. How do women do it? Be artists and wives and mothers? How do they have the energy and time to look beautiful every day?

Dec 23: Trying to let go of all my attachments. It's hard. It seems as though all I've been doing this week is make cookies, which is fine, it's all a part of learning to slow down and pay attention to everything I do, not to rush through the cookies to get to the next thing.

Jan 28: Piles of books, a couch... where's the work? I need to believe it to see it in my mind. Or is it the other way around. I just need to get into the gallery and start seeing it to believe it. If I plan on being in the gallery during the day and changing/adding/subtracting at night then that's a lot for two weeks. How can I do this without it being all over the place? People are going to want answers and explanations- some kind of coherency at least. I have none of that. I'll just have to see how people react.

It's a month before the show. I am getting clearer on things as I work with more focus in the studio. I am able to move. I am not afraid to make changes. I am finally painting over the dartboard and the words on the wall next to it. I understand so much more about how the paint works, how the ink works on the wall. You don't learn anything by staring at the wall and thinking about what to do, or guessing how things might change how materials may react. I know the materials better now.

THE SHOW

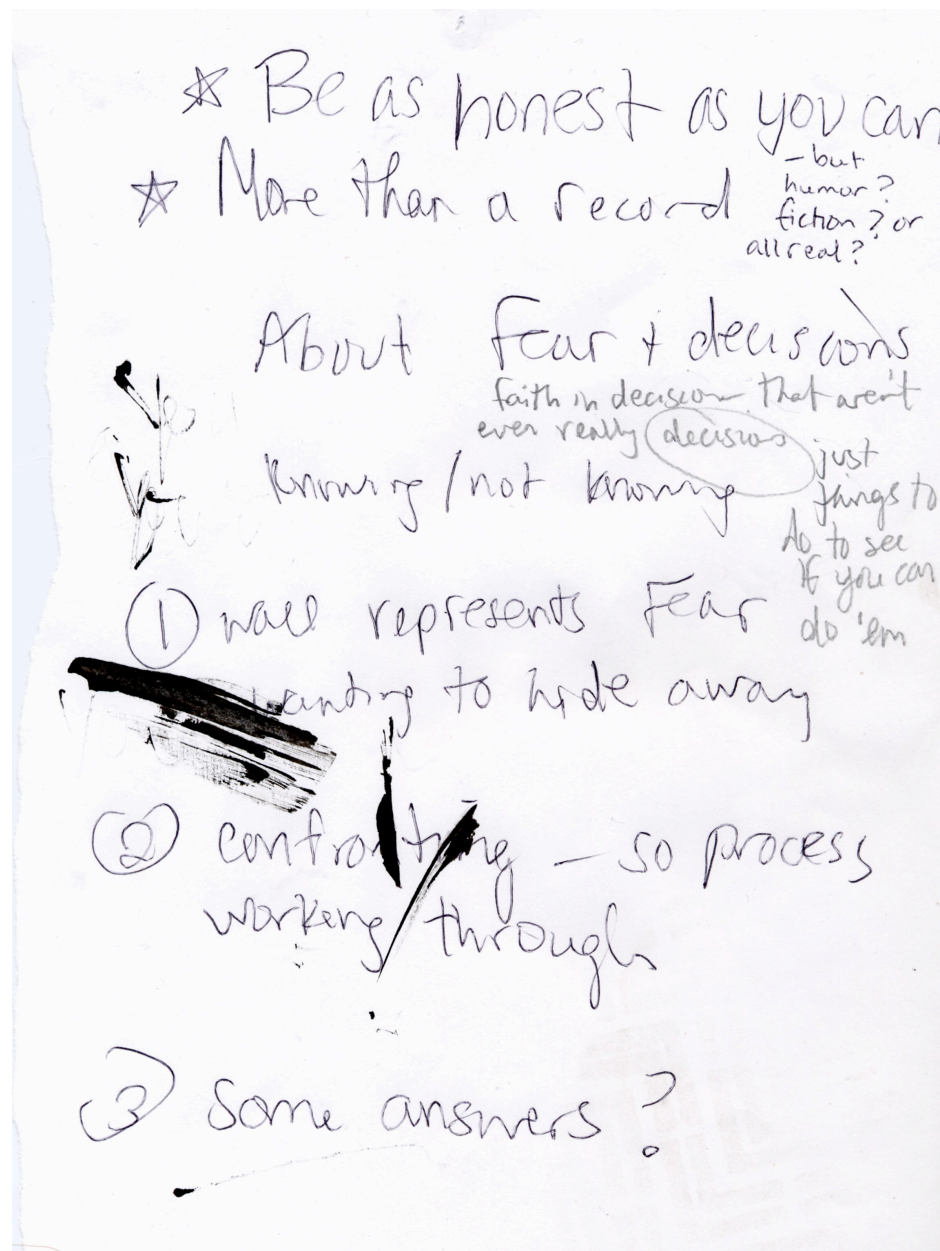
“strange though this may sound, not knowing where one is going- being lost, being a loser- reveals the greatest possible faith and optimism, as against collective security and collective significance. To believe, one must have lost God; to paint, one must have lost art.”¹⁷ Gerhard Richter

Over a period of three weeks I transformed the gallery space into a growing, changing, dynamic organism. It resembled my studio, but became more than that. I created a space for people to enter and have conversations, to look at work, to listen, to share their thoughts, form opinions and ask questions. It was interaction as installation and art as process and life.



Thesis detail, photograph by Lee Iannone

¹⁷ Obrist, Gerhard Richter- The Daily Practice of Painting, p. 15



Thesis detail

Two weeks before the show I had the compulsion to put frames around everything. It made me completely anxious to feel as though I hadn't gotten any closer to an answer, to having finished anything. Hard to not want to package it, wrap it with a pretty bow and call it done. I had to force myself to stay open and to not let outside influences, the collective security of modes of display, dictate how to approach this show.



Thesis Installation

On the Monday of Spring Break I began installing the work. Although I knew that I wouldn't "finish" the work before the gallery officially opened I wanted to have the space configured the way I wanted it—I needed to know where the couch was going, where the title wall would be, and then I wanted to start working on the walls, and be immersed in the process. The energy I needed to sustain myself throughout this process came from confirmation I received both from likely and unlikely sources. In a review of New York City art Holland Cotter said, "what I'd like is more art that's unstable, smart, political, messy, ephemeral and having to do with life." What affirmation! Then, while on the computer checking my horoscope it said, "there are some things money can't replace. Preserve them carefully." Again, this reminded me to value, and pay attention to, the materials, the conversations that were to take place and to honor my method of working.



Thesis

NOTES:

MARCH 1: In gallery – writing repeating phrase “happily ever after” across a thirty-foot wall. Thinking about walls as a metaphor too. The first week was like an incubation period. Lots of stuff happening, but privately, quietly. This week is about birth, genesis, connecting. Kevin helped me move the big stuff with his truck: the chalkboard, the couch and the table. With a few more trips over the next few days, everything else was brought in. Writing on the gallery wall was difficult, it wasn’t dry wall, like the studio, so the surface was a lot rougher. I was using bamboo reeds and Sumi calligraphy ink, and the reeds weren’t writing properly. I tried splitting them a little more so they would take more ink, but then there was too much, and then I tried smashing the nib down and that worked sometimes. There just wasn’t any way of

keeping it consistent. My arm ached. I'd give myself goals to attain; I'd say to myself, "write five more lines before you can take a break."

FIRST DAY, MARCH 7: The first day with the gallery open was so incredibly hard. Went in the morning, like 10 a.m., did a little lighting with Smitty then all of a sudden it was 12 and I was supposed to meet Leyla at the tanning place on Jefferson Road. It seemed frivolous, certainly the last thing I should spend my time and money on, but I decided to go before my trip out to L.A., and also because the ten minutes I lay in that bed was the only time I could completely let go. The noise of the fan and the heat relaxed me and for that time I could just float, be blank. Then back to the gallery. When I got there I left the door unlocked, but closed.

I could never have predicted how emotionally draining it would be to open the door. With the door closed I could struggle in private I could move things around, fuck up, and it wouldn't matter. With the door open I had an audience. When I finally propped it open (after some prompting) people started coming in, looking, asking questions. Myra wondered if the dialogue with the audience was more important or if it was about the artist in that sort of meditative state, doing their thing (more performative, on-display type of thing). The problem is I want both. It's not possible. It was hard to get work done this afternoon with people hanging out. Just need to keep working and talk at the same time- but then it's hard to be really present with the work. Trying to do too much, rushing and ending up forgetting. I had intended to videotape painting the title wall and had the camera set up, but then I painted without remembering to turn the camera on. I need to remember what's important: What I want out of this when the

show is over and everything is packed up, put in storage, given away or thrown out.

Important to document.

Interesting talk with Lee tonight. Stuff about the work- it's exactly like life. This is it! What she saw was that you just do what you can and then you stop when your time is up, i.e. you die. In this case when the work has to be out of the gallery. It's about being brave enough to say I am vulnerable. And I'm realizing installation demands courage in ways that hanging pictures on a wall never did. It's so hard to do it in public. Performance anxiety. Like taking dance classes. Like the dancers I practice with. Most of their time is spent in the studio practicing, staying in shape, and then the performance is something in and of itself. It's different every time even though the elements are the same. The audience might respond differently, the stage might be configured differently, etc. I don't know exactly what I'm doing. I have to figure it out and mess up. I have to accept that people will be coming in and looking; I can't worry about what they think. People kept asking/apologizing when they came in, so I realized I had to just open the door. I couldn't keep it closed and assume people would know they could come in.

After I left the gallery for the day I went to Leyla's and had a complete break down. I am afraid that I have set myself up to fail. Trying to do too much. I'm just so tired of thinking. I have been working for over a week already and I still have two more weeks to go. But Leyla says that she sees it all out there. All the stuff I wanted to talk about: Everyday life, relationships, struggle and trying to figure out what you want and juicing for a week in my studio and struggling with decisions and writing and writing.

I need to go into the gallery unafraid. GET MESSY. Get immersed in doing. I like my hands dirty, I like the walls dripped on and paper ripped up. Put all my emotions

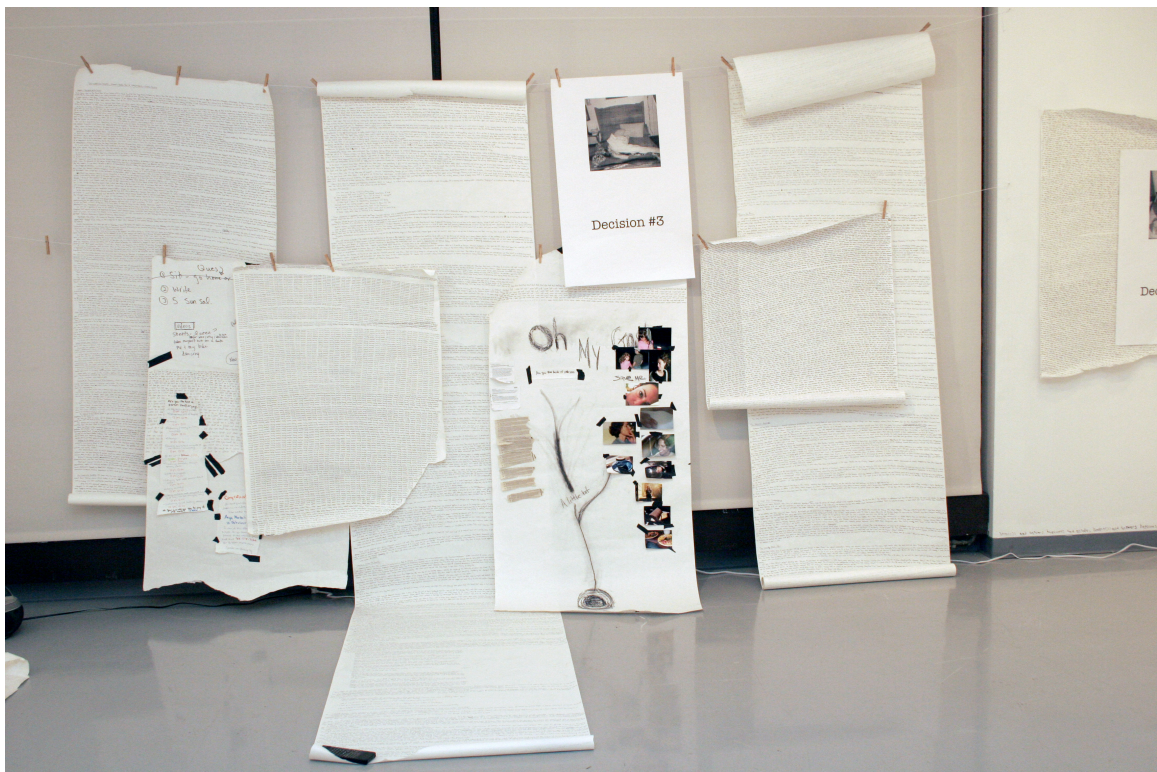
out there. Sad, tired, scared. But why is it so hard to have fun with it? The space is intimidating. The gallery walls look too neat and clean. Can't let them win. Need to overcome.



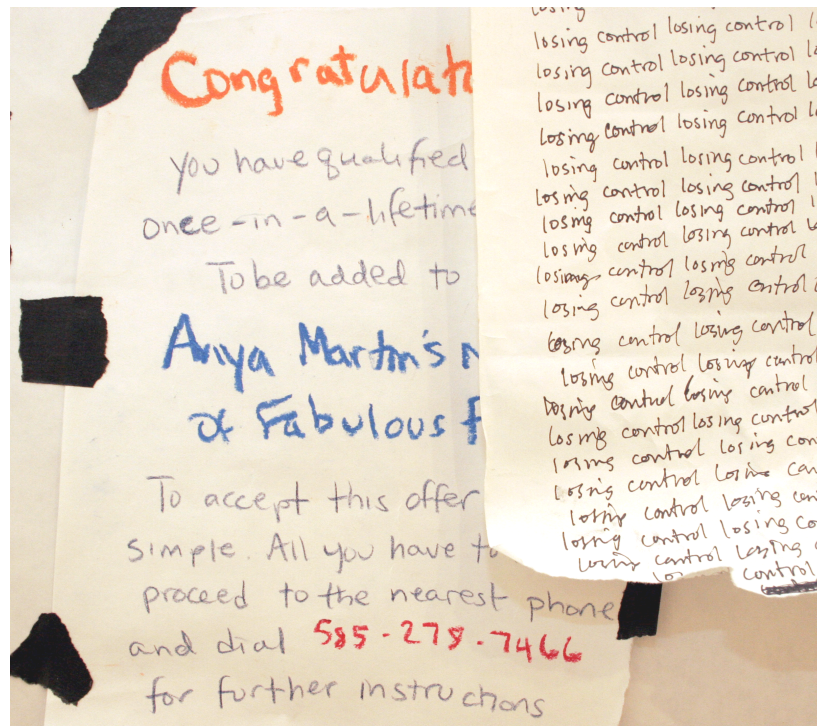
Thesis

SECOND DAY, MARCH 8: As I drove into school I repeated in my head “you don’t scare me, you don’t scare me.” I arrived at the gallery around 9:30 in the morning. I put in my *Klassy Mix*, turned it up and started to work on the wall. I needed to do what I do when I’m in my own studio and not worry about Elaine’s students coming and questioning what the fuck I’m doing. It’s about occupying the space with my “things”: the rubber stamps and stencils, the plastic containers of dead butterflies, the inks and various writing implements, with ME. By playing music like Shaggy “Mr. Lover” I will change their experience in the space, and who am I to say whether it will be a “good” change or not. I wish I had taped my conversations with Lee and Leyla, even if I didn’t

use it for the show. They both continually remind me to be kinder to myself and to have faith in my thoughts and actions. Not only do I respect their opinions, but more importantly they make me see the work. Sometimes my judgments and criticisms get in the way of seeing what I have done, and what I can do. Two things I noticed on Tuesday: the reflection of the writing on the floor as I was taking pictures and that I am making the decision web in an entirely different way than I had done it in the past.



Thesis



Thesis detail

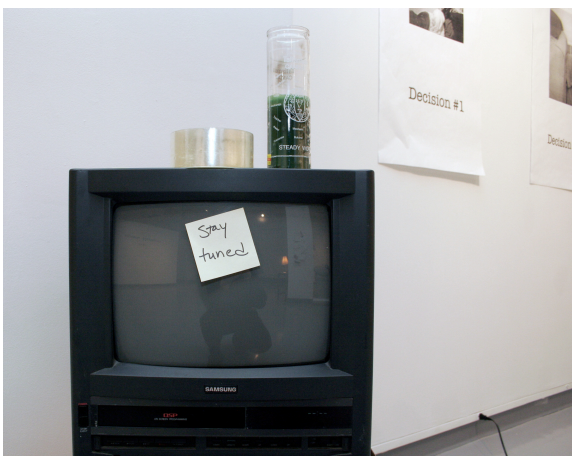
THIRD DAY, MARCH 9: David called this morning from the gallery. He was reading the stuff on the scrolls and so he wanted to make sure I put him on my “Friend’s List.” Yay. That’s cool that he saw it and called. I wonder if anyone else will?

Today I played some of the audio.¹⁸ Leyla therapy, Zen Center talk, and meeting with Ellen. I have stereos placed in different corners. The sound mixes, but you can also hear them separately if you get closer to each one, which was what I had hoped would happen. Lee and I figured out that with 66 lines at approximately 15 minutes per line, it took me 990 minutes/16.5 hours to cover the wall with writing. It seemed like so much longer.

¹⁸ Many of the CD’s that I played were conversations that came from video recordings that I exported and remixed.

FOURTH DAY, MARCH 10: Playing audio: Seijo and her soul, awareness session with Donna, Ellen Jan. 3, Leyla therapy, and me and Marcy. Worked on web mostly and started adding to the writing wall- made the black square for dartboard. Went to dance class, and then came back in the evening because I felt like I needed to have more done before the opening. So tired though. Smitty told me I should just go home and watch TV. Just cleaned up a bit and left.

When I got home it dawned on me that I was trying to finish something that was not supposed to be finished. I didn't want all the dots connected I realized that I really didn't need to do anything else. Had to remind myself that this was a work in progress and so of course I wasn't going to be finished for the opening. And I had accomplished most of the elements that I felt were important to have by Friday. The video was done, the audio was done, that wall was in a good place and so was the web. My art was showing me that we can't resolve anything, which can be frustrating, but maybe that's the point. Nothing is right or wrong—one day it looks one way and another the next.



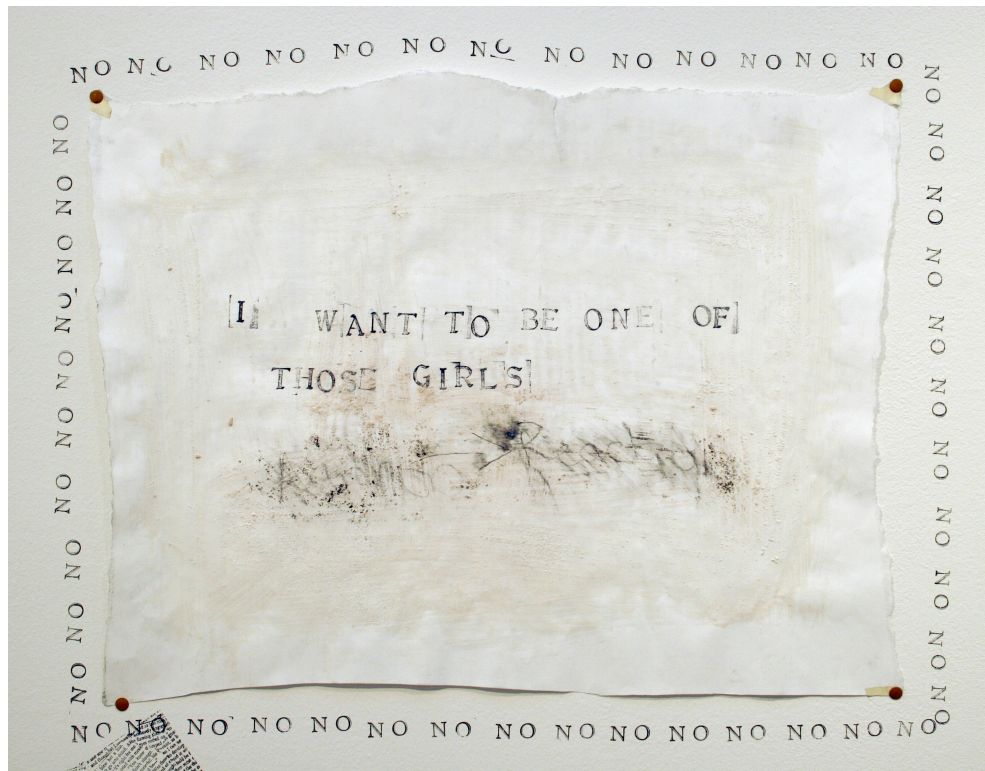
Thesis- where I played my video



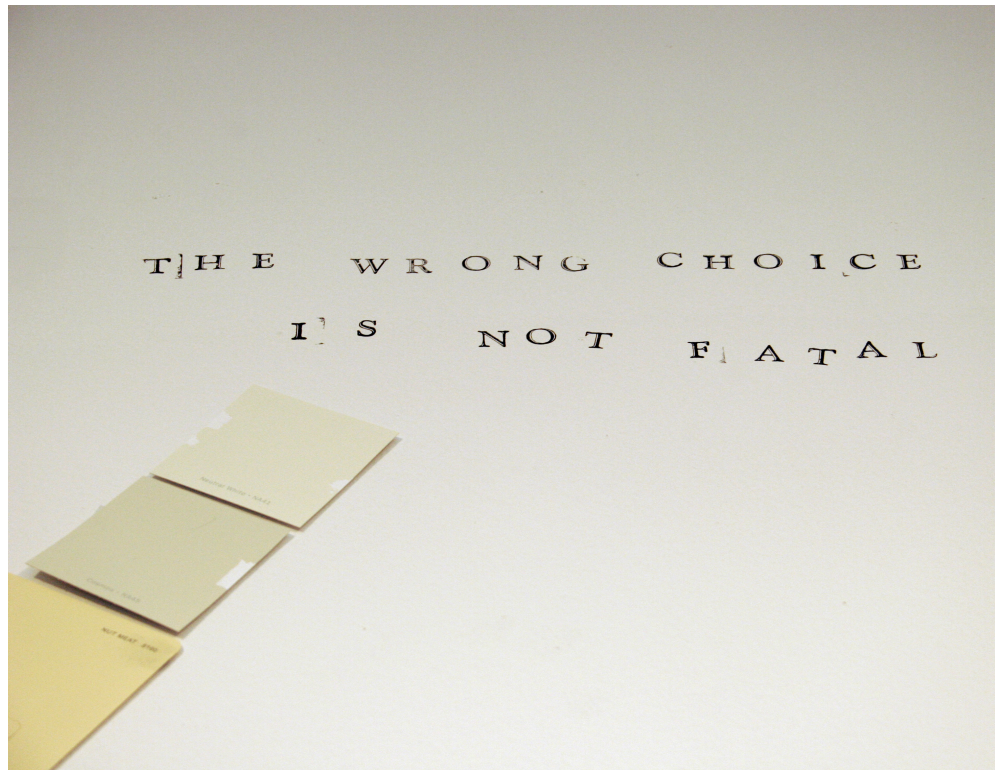
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Thesis- juicer piece



Thesis detail



Thesis detail

FIFTH DAY, MARCH 11 (The Opening): Worked in the gallery, didn't write anything and I can't remember much. I had been agonizing over what to serve for the opening. I liked how Leyla had served bread and wine for hers. I wanted to do something that fit. I ended up serving the food that had sustained me over the past few months, what I had been eating as I worked in the studio or what I grabbed at my parents house: apples, terra potato chips, hummus and pita. Smitty wanted dolmades so my mom got those and we had jellybeans, miniature chocolates and cream puffs. If I really stayed true to the theme I would have had hot water and an assortment of teas.

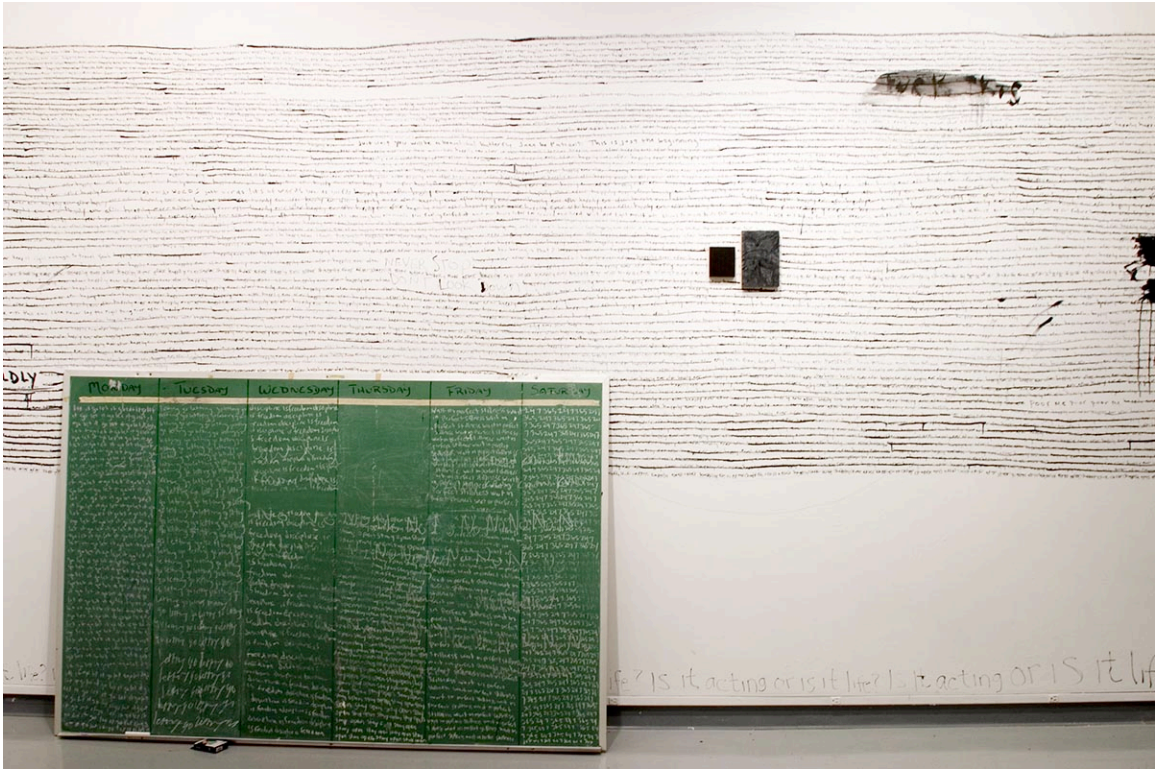
SEVENTH DAY, MARCH 13: Came back to the gallery to clean up- get ready for Monday- felt weird not being there Saturday- needed to stay connected. Not sure

what I'll be doing yet. The opening was really good. Lots of people- family, friends and lots of positive, really good feedback. People really enjoyed the work.

EIGHTH DAY, MARCH 14: Couldn't do much today. I kept leaving the gallery. First for tea, then to get lunch, etc. It was just so hard to continue to change things after the opening. Especially because I knew there were some people who couldn't make the opening that were planning on coming. How do I continue? Things are forming and reforming and breaking and splitting apart: my words, my idea of the work, what I thought it was supposed to be versus what it is.

NINTH DAY, MARCH 15: Gave my talk to Elaine's Fine Art I class. It went well, and Elaine said that they respected both the work and my approach to it. At first I balked at the idea that she had incorporated my thesis show into the curriculum of her class. But as the days went on and I saw these students come in daily I began to understand how much I could get out of this interaction. What felt like pressure at first, had turned into an appreciation for an audience that saw the daily changes and could give me feedback. As part of their assignment Elaine had asked them to email her their daily responses and she forwarded some of them to me. I made them a part of the show by putting them on the wall and putting up paper for other people to write to me.

TENTH DAY, MARCH 16: Today I started to cross the writing out on the big wall. I put a big black line of ink through all the repeated parts and left the places where I had let my conscious thought come out.



Thesis

ELEVENTH DAY, MARCH 17: started covering up whole sections of the wall with black paint and other works on paper. Obliterating the writing. We have to know how to let go of what we hold dearest—the second week is about loss and love, death, destruction, impermanence as well as rebirth. I am learning how to be more playful. I want to take myself less seriously, to allow myself to loosen up and experiment. By letting go of ego I am inviting in the critic and the anxiety and the energy and satisfaction. This was what I needed. Kevin came and we got all the big stuff out: the couch and table and chalkboard.



Thesis detail



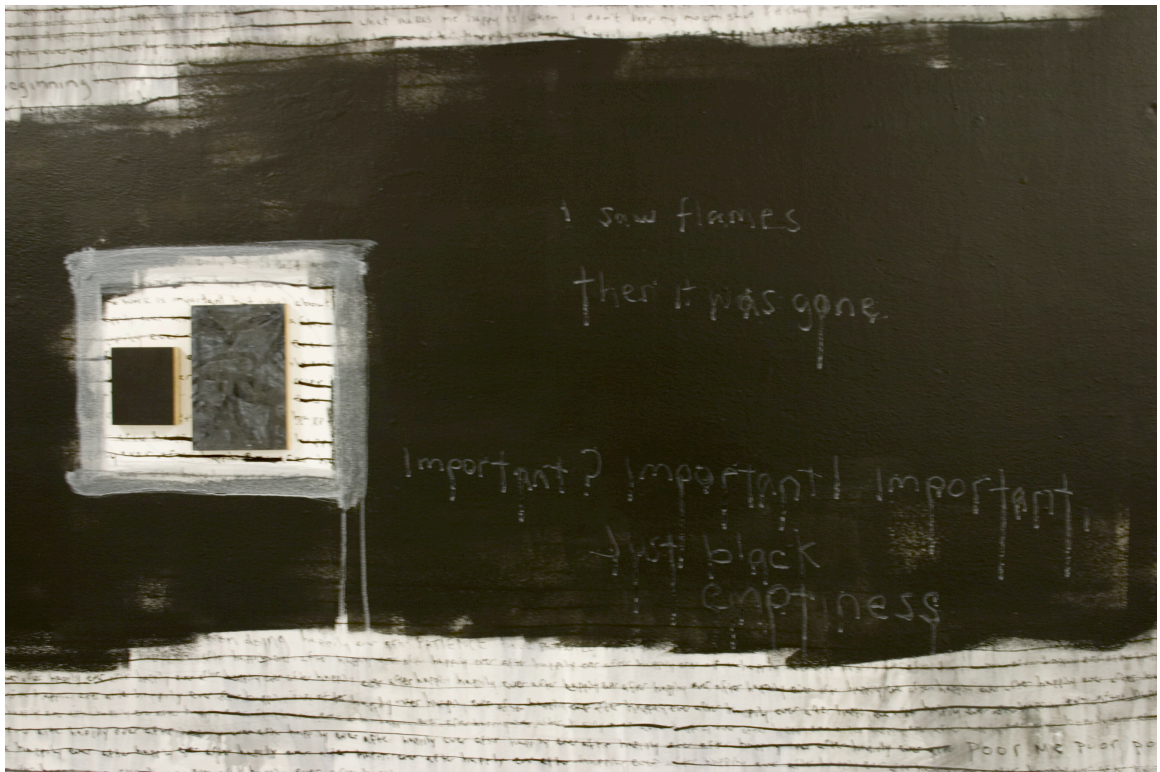
Thesis detail

TWELFTH DAY, MARCH 18: Final day. Need to get everything out. My parents came and helped pack up the scrolls, the juicer piece and smaller works on paper, and took all the flowers. I wanted to do something for the last day so I made a sign for a closing party. No one showed. Lee invited her “stitch 'n' bitch”¹⁹ group and they came. We ordered pizza and I brought a bottle of wine. Lee and I were in the gallery until eleven at night, painting. We primed and used stain blocker and did two, maybe three, coats of the white paint and there were still places that the writing came through. Joked about how I could say that my work was part of a permanent collection. I like the idea that if someone ever stripped the layers of paint on the walls that maybe they would uncover my writing.

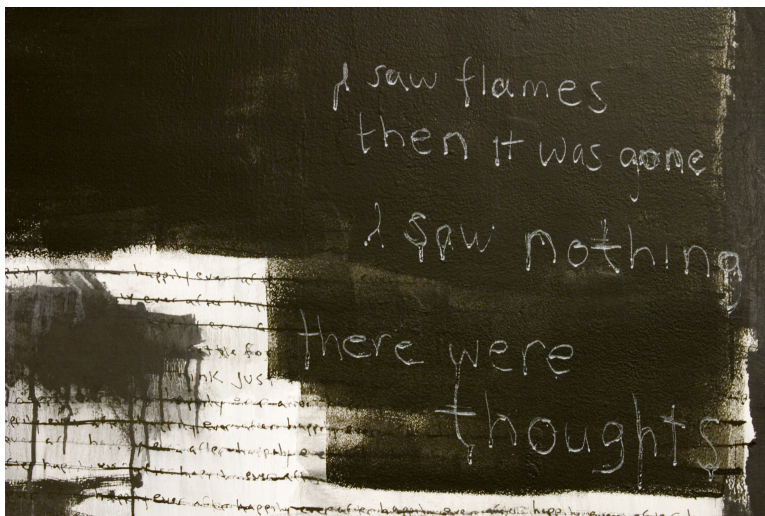


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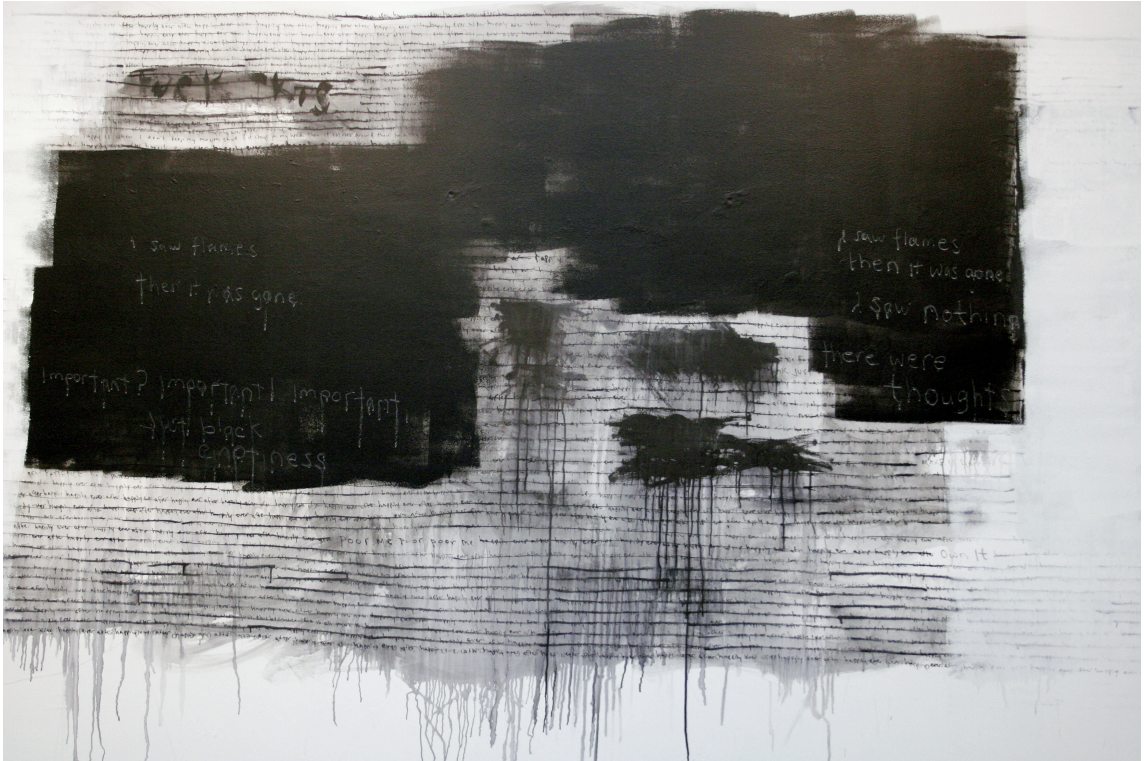
¹⁹ An informal knitting group, started by one of the first-year grad student's wife, that meets regularly at local coffeehouses.



Thesis detail



Thesis detail



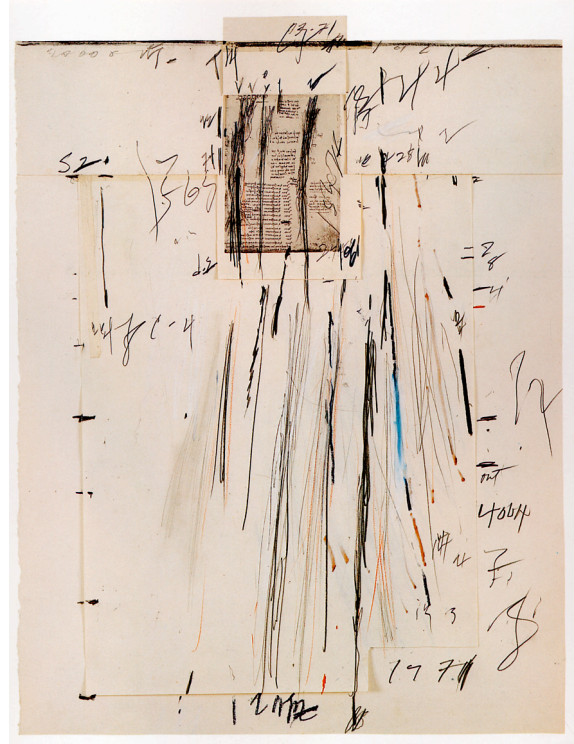
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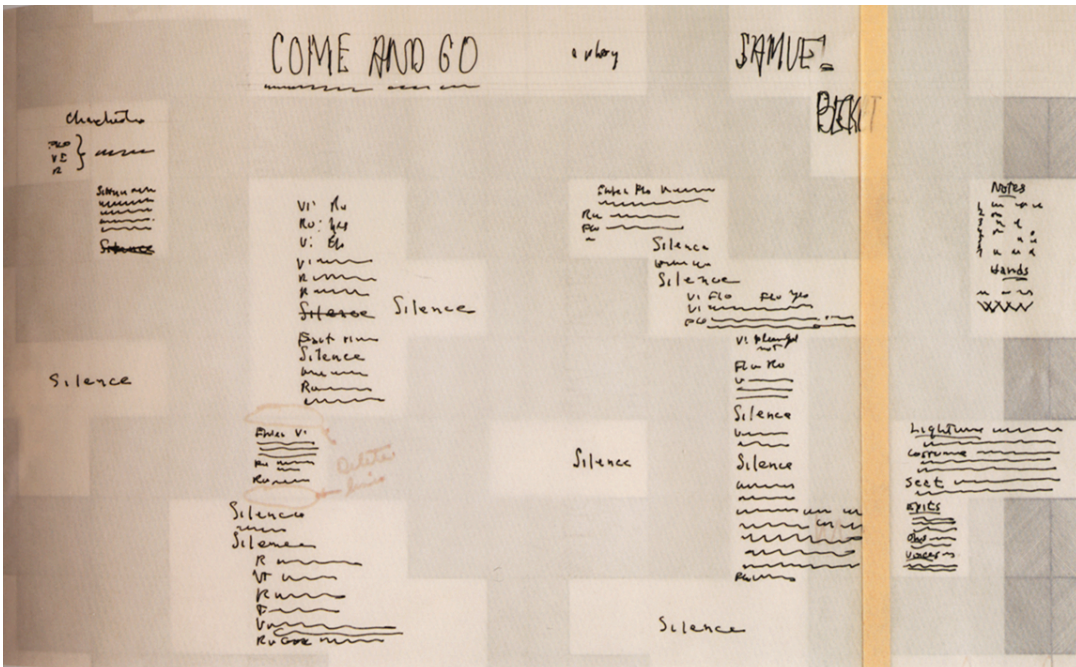
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Cy Twombly



Cy Twombly



Sol Lewitt

POST-SHOW



Thesis detail

Questions are important because they drive the work. They force us to search- and in the searching we create- by stringing clues together. I relate to the world better, I can make sense of it, when I am engaged directly with it. My engagement with it comes through visual and verbal communication, i.e., a camera, video camera, pencil, and spoken words. It is a symbiotic relationship. I give, but I also receive. Understanding this relationship helps me pay attention to those clues.

Jeff's articles are a gift.²⁰ One article I read in February of this year was a lecture on innovation, given by John Perrault, at Cochise College. Perrault says

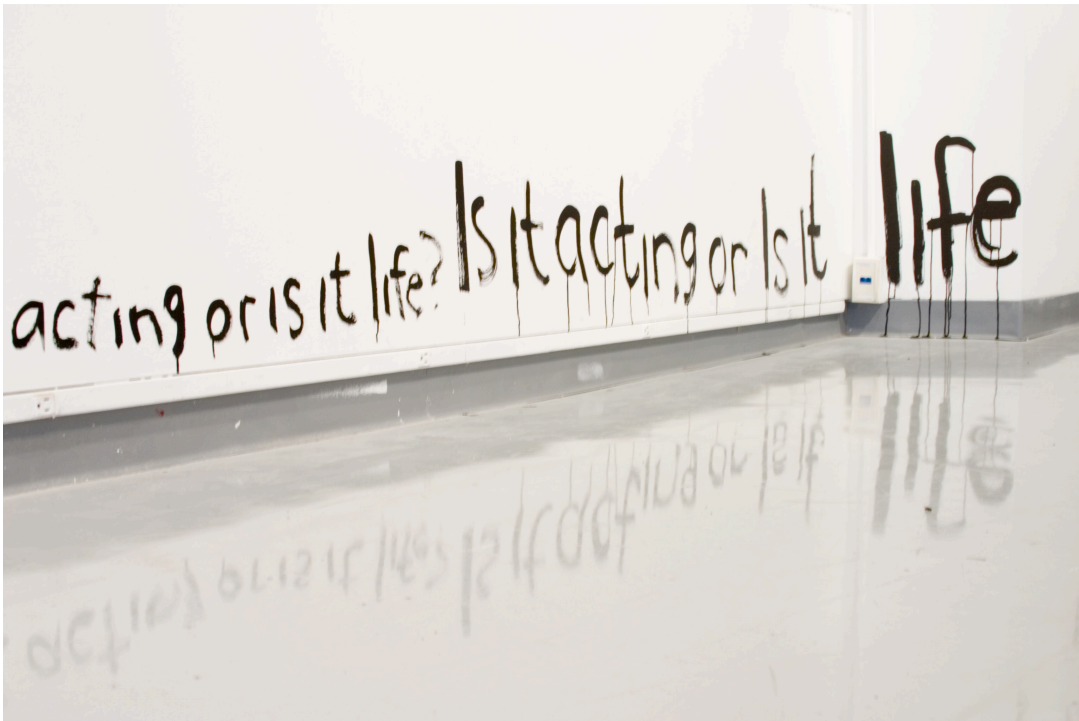
I think there is more to art than innovation. There is a spiritual core to art; nevertheless, its content needs to be communicated in an innovative way. The day old imagery will not wake us up. Then there is the matter of inspiration... you can't just sit around waiting for inspiration; it may never come. You can force it... try to think of art as a situation in which meaning follows creation. What the artist does is discover meaning after he or she creates; this is what Duchamp meant when he said the artist was a medium. But what about communication? That comes later; the communication or transmission is a situation in which the receiver rediscovers or uncovers the meaning—or even better yet, a new meaning. The meaning is the feedback

He goes on to describe some ways to innovate art through forcing inspiration; things I had already begun to do, but it reinforced the direction I was taking. He says, “use a new

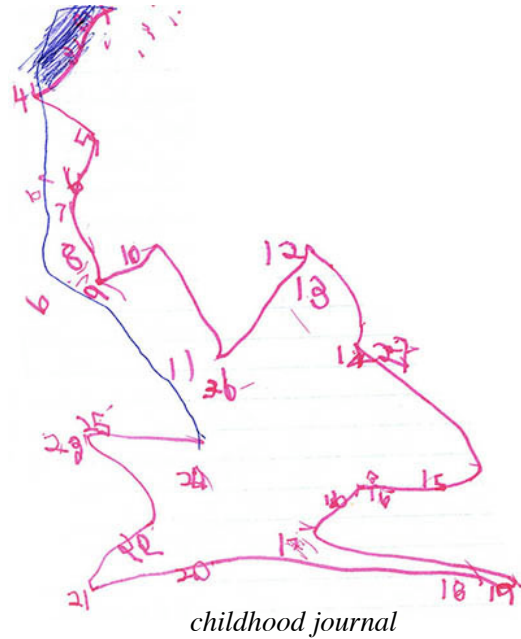
²⁰ Jeff sends articles, daily, via email. They come from different sources, and they cover so many different topics related to the arts, it is impossible to read them all. So, there is a element of serendipity to it.

methodology, a new material, copy something, copy yourself, put together two or more things that have not been joined, find a source outside art, subtract something from art- conceptual art tried to remove even the physical, leaving only language (visible and in some cases oral) can we then subtract language? Add something to art, personal narratives, objects, try to make something that looks as little like art as possible.”

In another article Jeff sent, on Barbara Smith’s performance art, entitled “Feminism and Risk as Her Media,” *Times* staff-writer Christopher Knight writes, “performance was also a means to put more than just a woman’s body in the artistic foreground, as had been common from da Vinci to de Kooning. A woman could put her soul and mind on view as well.” After reading this, I realized my struggle. I had been asking myself: can life, my life, be put into a format where I can view it from outside of my life? Going to the gallery every day was the art, and it was my life too— I was coming into work AND I was coming into the work.



Thesis detail



AFTER: Connecting Dots

“to accept whatever comes regardless of the consequence is to be unafraid to be full of that love which comes from a sense of at-one-ness with whatever and like Cage I am not looking for a world beyond this one, but only a clearer view of the one I inhabit.”²¹

Agnes Martin

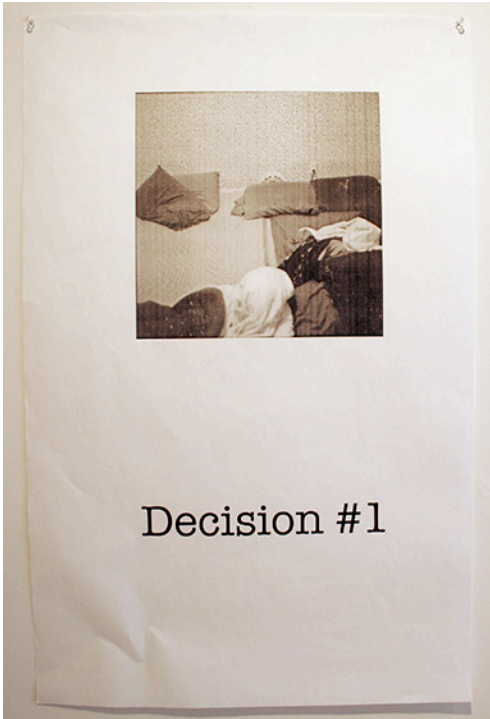
As I sit writing this paper, months after the show and with the big, black void, called life-after-RIT ahead, I go back to the questions.

What did I do? I transformed the space into a growing, changing, dynamic organism. It was not about doing/making work and letting it sit in the gallery it was about being completely present, staying connected to the work the whole time.

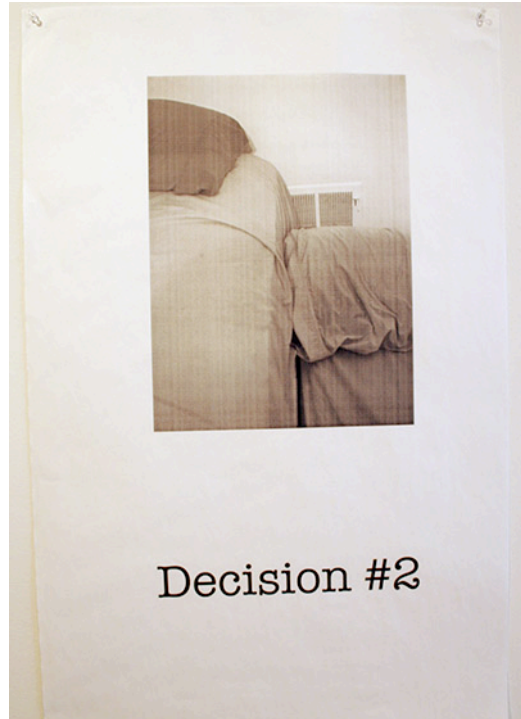
As I prepared a talk for Elaine O’Neil’s Photography as a Fine Art I²² class about my work I remembered what my friend Adam had told me a year ago: “It takes a smart person to hide their weaknesses but a genius to exploit them.” At that moment I understood what I had accomplished. My struggles and fears had been transformed, absorbed. They were no longer obstacles. They had *become* the work.

²¹ Brandauer, Agnes Martin: Works on Paper, p.13

²² A class for Fine Art Photography majors.



Thesis detail



Thesis detail

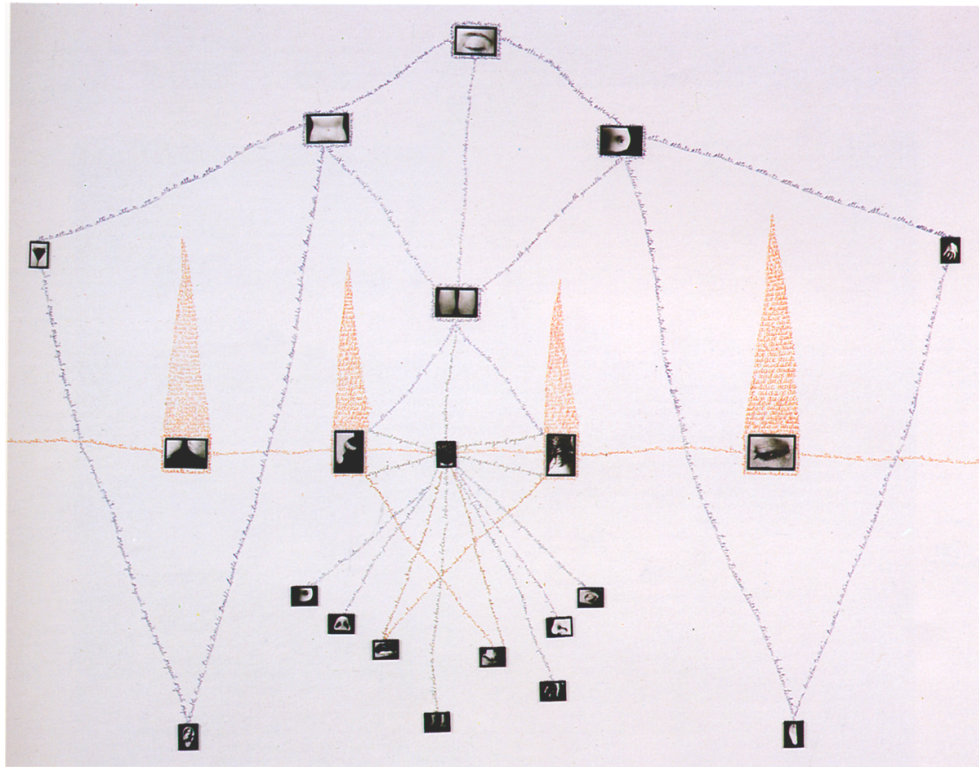
Elaine posed to me in an email, “the answer is not in stone- but how, now that the show is complete, do you understand what is being asked (interpret the question) and what is your answer today. The show was fleeting and so is our answer to any question.”

So, bottom-line— the meaning of this experience: Art is every minute.

RIT is not an art school, and many times I cursed that, but I have come to recognize how sometimes it can be easier to know who and what you are by knowing who and what you are not. Even though the MFA program stresses concept, it is a tiny part of a very large photography school. Art was intellectualized for the most part and I had to find my way, a way to operate on a more honest level. As it turned out that did not include photography, in the way that it was being presented to me. Eventually I used the structure of RIT and the MFA program specifically as a chance for me to find myself. I conducted my thesis show as an experiment and drew upon the formality of the place to

play against the energy and form of my art-making process. Like Duchamp's *Fountain*, it was meant to initiate a debate.²³ I wanted to know who defines art and decides it is good. Am I art? And if this is/If I am, is it good? Did the work (and me) being on display make it all art?

Art is about putting things together- what you're curious about- collecting, processing, congealing and finally presenting it to an audience/viewer.



Annette Messenger

Basically, anything is art. I know that may sound simple, but I believe it— As long as the work is done with intention. Now, that doesn't mean that everyone else is going to see it like that, but I know that every time I make a card for a friend or write a poem or press REC on my video camera there is potential for it to become something that I can share. If I keep it to myself and never show it to anyone it is still art. However, in

²³ Godfrey, *Conceptual Art*, p.30

my mind I would have failed if I didn't put it out there. Even though that is one of the most difficult aspects. Ultimately I care about how my work is perceived and the responses it provokes. Logically I know that a negative response is just as valid as a positive response, yet there were "lessons," specific concepts I was working with and part of my success was my ability to engage with my audience. The dialogue that existed in the gallery space was essential. You never really know where you stand until you get feedback. It's claiming your place in the world. Like in dance class until you claim your space and make yourself known you are just going through the motions; just practicing. It had to be bigger than me. Being in dialogue gave and continues to give me that nourishment. It's the web connecting me to others. I brought something to that gallery that had no precedent. I was living in the space between- in the creative process, right in the eye of the storm and it wasn't enough for just me to experience it, I needed to make it accessible- allow others to live in it.

The first part of realization for me was when Kevin gave me the studio. In this space I was able to look at my every day actions and materials in a different way. Like a dancer who moves one way while walking down the street, and another when moving across the floor in a space designated for practicing dance, it was re-contextualized. Art is the way that I use my senses to make abstract notions concrete. I wanted to know what my own decision-making process looked like: How I interact with people, what I love, what I am confused about- how does it smell, what does it sound like, feel like, look like?



Thesis

Hi Ar, This email about your show just came to me from Lori Foster, a photographer who also runs my website. Her husband is an orchestra musician.
Enjoy!

Love, Dad

Hey, we stopped by your daughters show on Tues....you're right, really powerful, process stuff.

I've woken up the past two mornings thinking how brilliant it was....as in it was so thought provoking, rationalizing, mysterious yet so clear as 'what's it all about' yet 'is this all there is?' I am impressed on the subtle yet present impact it has had on me.

I liked the one quote someone scribbled on the brown piece of paper (maybe it was a post-it note) that said something like.."you don't like to make choices because then a decision has been made..." Sometimes deciding is the end to the creative process.

I liked that the exhibit looked 'effortless'...but what that means is that she really, really thought out every single element and how it related to the whole. It's like an Olympic skater or ballerina; they make it look easy.

Dave liked that the monitor sat on top of an empty toilet tank box.

We keep talking about this exhibit.

Thank you for telling us about it.

Lori (and Dave)²⁴

Elaine O'Neil wrote:

> Dear Ariya:

> Here are a few questions that I came up with after
> reading my class's
> reaction to your show over the past week.

> Given this culture's ideas about the ARTIST - how
> do you think this
> show brings up the question of the artist, or a
> person as an artist?

In this work how did you make yourself
> the work of art?
> How did you decide how much was enough for the first
> day? Can you discuss your concepts of complete and incomplete
in
> relation to what you accomplished every day?
>
>How did you decide about the types of change that
> would happen? Some of the students were expecting dramatic
difference
>each day, but what was written about was often small and subtle
change.

it is impressive how much the work affected my class.

>
> One student wrote about your noticing of all the
> little things that
> make a huge difference when they are considered.
> Early in the show it
> seemed that asking every possible question and
> writing down every idea
> could drive you crazy. The video showed your
> process of deciding
> where to put things and questioning where to put
> things. However, it

²⁴ Martin, Rafe. E-mail to author 17 March 2005.

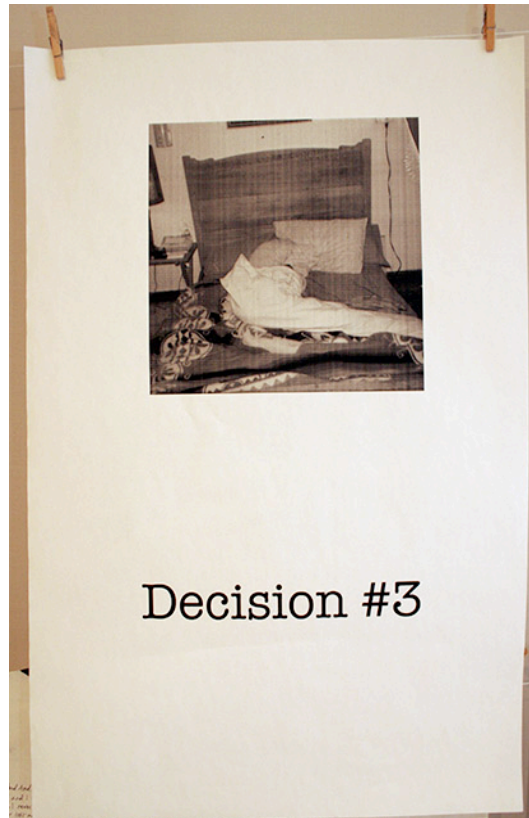
> seemed that later in the week the word
 > "determination" was added, which
 > seemed to be a contradiction to the work that
 > questioned things. As the
 > week went on was there a change in your process?
 >
 > As you have been working have you found any or
 > developed a philosophy
 > about questioning and doubting?
 >
 > Do you use the notes and e-mails you post about the
 > work as information
 > or motivation?
 >
 >
 > Would you consider this work within the genre of the
 > Self-Portrait?
 >
 >
 > One student wrote, ". . . the one word that keeps
 > coming to me is
 > obsession, this idea of being totally absorbed and
 > existing in it with
 > your work. . . . Today I have a totally different
 > sense of the work. It
 > seems to be less about existing in the work as it
 > does about the work
 > existing in her. I get the feeling that I am walking
 > into her mind. . .
 >
 > Today my word for the work is process. . . . I love
 > the video . . . it
 > is like I am there and looking out through her eyes
 > and watching her
 > work almost as a third person enveloped in this
 > space." Where did you
 > hope to place the audience in relation to the
 > installation?
 > Many in the class thought the audio and the
 > television added greatly to
 > their ability to engage with the work and to their
 > understanding of the
 > installation. How did you react to those additions?
 >
 >
 > How do ideas of journaling, writing and words work
 > into your work.
 >
 > Why did you work during the day instead of at night?
 > How did that
 > inform your process and the work?
 >
 > Can you discuss your ideas of beauty, form,

> composition and photography
> in relation to this.
>
> As you worked did the concept of the subject of the
> show change?
>So when I
>walked into the show yesterday I was amazed at the
>realness of it all. What I mean by this is, it showed
>a real person not an "artist" but rather the person as
>a artist. I found it wonderful because unlike many
>shows, actually most shows, hers was not about showing
>off what she can do. She showed herself as an artist;
>she put herself on a level as a human not the
>untouchable artist. Her work shows her passion about
>art and expressing herself.

> Did you find that people tried to determine your
> personality through
> the work or did they use the show to see themselves?

>She discusses how plans fall apart and uses phrases such
>as, "What's worse than being average?"
>and "What's missing?"
>showing what she's
>thinking while creating this installation.
>She explores the challenge
>of making herself her own work of art
>My reaction to this is that Ariya is good at being aware
>of everything, conscious of the little things that make a
>huge difference
>when thought about.²⁵

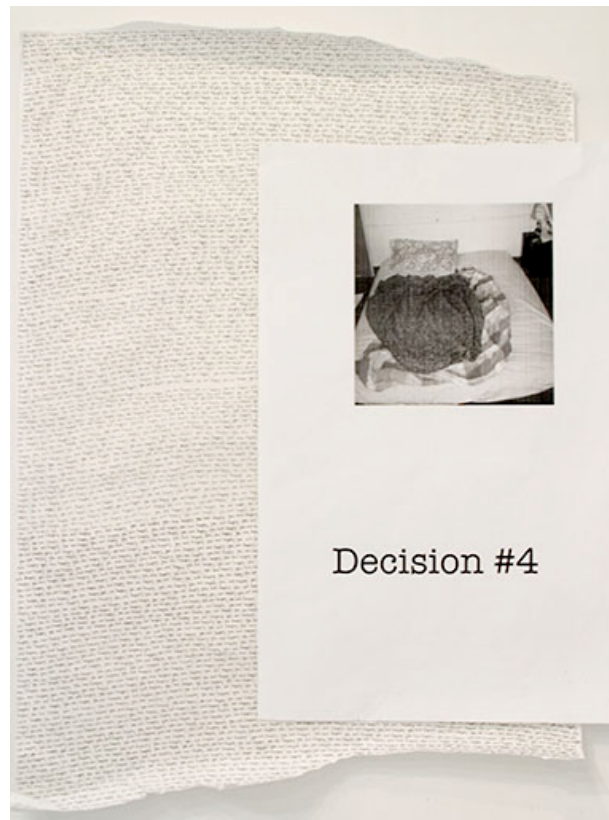
²⁵ O'Neil, Elaine. E-mail to author 9 March 2005.



Thesis detail

After seeing the movie, *Me and You and Everyone We Know*, by Miranda July, I came out thinking that eventually I should make a movie. A movie makes sense—there's dialogue and a soundtrack and visual stuff happening. It's also another way to make art that is different than art seen in a gallery.

We continually have to choose our path. I have difficulty remembering what I have done, so that I can continue to move forward. It is still a mystery how I know what ideas to follow, and then, what materials to use. I have gained a deeper respect and trust for how I respond to all the ideas. I will continue to create. *How* I create is still unknown. I have tools and materials that I will continue to explore and I continue to live and breathe. Sometimes it is as simple as that.



Thesis detail

Through video I discovered sound, dialogue, images- all working and weaving together. My life kept sneaking in so I decided to open the flood gate- to invite all those emotions and experiences in- to do the work about JUST THAT. I dug, and the more I dug I realized that artists work in so many ways.²⁶ There is no Right Way.

²⁶I became interested in reading artists' writing on art and their creative process.

I: am an artist



During Thesis, photograph by Craig Dilger

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Knight, Christopher. "Barbara T Smith, Feminism and Risk as her Media," Los Angeles Times, 11 March 2005.

Schama, Simon. "Unnatural Beauty," The Guardian, 6 Nov 2004.

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Playlist: music I listened to during installation

The Be Good Tanyas, *Blue Horse*

Hem, *Rabbit Songs*

January '05 Mix: A Tribe Called Quest, "Baby Its You" (Remix) Jojo Feat Bow Wow, "Bring It All To Me" Blaque Feat N'sync, "Comin' Round" Bubba Sparxxx, "Dance On Vaseline" David B w/Thievery Corporation, "Deliverance" Bubba Sparxxx, "Let Me Love You" Mario, "Mr Boombastic" Shaggy, "Ready Or Not" Fugees, "Sexual Healing" (remix Barry White) Shaggy, "Sugar" (Gimme Some) (feat. Ludacris & Cee-Lo) Trick Daddy, "the king of carrot flowers" Neutral Milk Hotel, "California Stars" Billy Bragg & Wilco, "Tilt Ya Head Back" Nelly Feat. Christina Aguilera, "Wild Wild Life" Talking Heads, Track 08 Nelly(Suit), "City Of Dreams" Talking Heads, "Gangster Of Love" Talking Heads, "Turn Me On" Kevin Lyttle

Ryan Adams, *Love is Hell*

Cast List:

Leyla Safavi- Leyla is more than a friend and fellow 3rd year MFA student. I practically lived with her.

Myra Greene- professor at RIT

Jeff Weiss- professor at RIT. I learned a tremendous amount about art through Jeff.

Molly Theriault- former director of the Summer Intensive program at Rocky Mountain School of Photographer, where I worked. I was on the phone a lot with Molly after I left Montana. She is incredibly insightful and helped me talk through my ideas when I was frustrated, confused, excited.

Elaine O'Neil- professor at RIT, I was her TA my first year in grad school.

Lee Iannone- friend and 2nd year MFA candidate. She came to the gallery almost every day and photographed.

Smitty DeFoore- friend and fellow 3rd year.

Adam Sheridan- my best friend from college

Donna Thomson- your guide to the discovery and awakening of the conscious self is. Donna has thirty years experience in spiritual study and meditation practice, including 15 years at a Zen meditation center. She has a Masters Degree in Social Work, has worked as an individual and family therapist and is the author of "You Are Energy: How to Access, Conserve and Use Your Energy Effectively."

Ellen Goldstein, CSW- incredible therapist! I used some of our conversations as the audio pieces

Roshi Danan Henry- Teacher and Spiritual Director of the Denver Zen Center. I used his teishos "Seijo and her Soul" and one on acceptance