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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
PRINTED IMAGERY ON FABRIC  
A THESIS SUBMITTED  
TO THE FACULTY OF THE COLLEGE OF FINE AND APPLIED ARTS  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS  
DEPARTMENT OF WEAVING AND TEXTILE DESIGN  
BY  
SHERYL FATLA  
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK  
MAY, 1978

*approved 5/5/78*  
*Dr. Robert H. Johnston, Dean*  
*College of Fine and Applied Arts*

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Thesis Proposal for the Master of Fine Arts Degree

College of Fine and Applied Arts  
Rochester Institute of Technology

Title: Printed Imagery on Fabric

Submitted by: Sherry Fatla Date: January 5, 1977

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The purpose of this thesis is to print fabrics with the intention of changing the images by manipulating the fabric. The printed fabrics will be cut and re-sewn, torn or folded to effectively shatter the image. I will use techniques such as block printing, screen printing and non-silver photographic processes. I will document the pieces by recording my emotional interaction with the works, as well as the actual processes involved. Included in the thesis will be reproductions of the printed images before they are changed.

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## INTRODUCTION

Personal imagery, dream imagery, visions of time fading away... Time changes our perception of our own experiences. It rearranges, distorts, smooths over rough edges that are too hard to remember exactly as they were.

Sometimes the memory looms larger than it really was in the perspective of our experiences. It takes on a special quality that sets it apart, makes it appear and reappear more than others.

In remembering, time sequences distort. A flash of recollection brings a segment of an event into focus early in the memory, when it really occurred near the end. There is a continual shifting of sequence in this way as we try to remember. The pieces I have done are visual records of my remembering. In each one, the order of events is jumbled but the image remains the same. It occurs and reoccurs, in fragments, until, looking at the entire "vision," the memory is complete. The essence is there. All the parts are there.



## CHAPTER I

## CONCEPT

## Photography, the Beginning...

I photograph to record people, places, events as they are right now and never will be again. I have on film a mood, an expression that tells me more about a person than they ever could. The people who are with me now will not always be here. They are very much a part of my life right now and the only way for me to keep this part of my life is with photographs.

The photographs are ghosts. Dreams. Memories fade away, leaving their ghosts behind. I am recording my fast-fading dreams and memories on film and fabric. I am--by the act of choosing images to photograph--selecting my memories! I am deciding what and who are important to me now and commemorating their part in my life. I print on fabric because it physically softens the image, as time softens memory.

There's a sadness that comes with the awareness that things aren't always going to be this way, people won't always look the same, a sadness from deep inside the human part of the self that says, "but I don't want to change, grow old." The commemorations are then desperate attempts to stop the process, stop time--the person in the photograph will always be that old...

I had to explain my reasons for photographing as a means of explaining my approach to fabric printing, at least at this stage of development in my work. For some time now I have been photographing friends, family and special places. When I decided to do my thesis on printed fabrics it seemed only natural that the imagery would come from my own photographs. I had originally intended to do a series of prints combining people and places which I had

recently photographed. I selected a few and began experimenting with multiple images on photoscreens. They seemed interesting at first, then I realized that it was possible to include too much in a print, obliterating any subtleties in a particular image. I began to print only portions of the screens, using a small piece of matboard in place of a squeegee. One image in particular intrigued me, and I printed it over and over. It became more and more powerful in my eyes until I decided to use just one image in the series of prints that would be my thesis.

Sandy, the subject of the photograph, is my sister. One instant of clowning caught by the camera became transformed into an elegant, mysterious gesture. I was enchanted by the lines of face, neck and hand and found an attraction to the essence of the woman so changed. The original black and white photograph is not that interesting, the face distorted, background confusing. As a high contrast kodalith image, superfluous elements dropped out and the gesture of the figure became elegant, mysterious and not clearly defined. The figure in profile is no longer my sister. She is timeless. The rather flat "snapshot" became transformed, above reality, evocative.

Working with one image. Printing it over and over, manipulating it, changing it, using it. It was not until I experimented with overlapping in the first print (Plate 1) that I began to appreciate the subtleties in that image. Previously I had printed it as a negative cyanotype, one clear print. The grace and elegance were evident in the isolated image, but not as appreciably as when the image repeated, overlapped, and, because of uneven distribution of ink during the printing process, changed. Areas "dropped out" or lightened, which drew attention to the line of the neck, or the arm. Sometimes the entire face changed when the nose or lips weren't completely printed;



variations occurred when the back of the head and hair printed differently. This first piece of fabric was so rich in variety of detail, so strong in suggestion, that I felt the image had to be used again and again, each step strengthening the visual impact of the print. I was really struck by some of the faces and gestures. They seemed to stand out, actually come forward on the fabric plane, as if to clarify the rest of the images, as if to say, this is it! This is the essence of this form, the rest are mere shadows, suggestions of what it can be.

The play of imagery moving back and forth was the first step towards the rest of the prints.

I had the concepts of fragmentation, movement, and depth in mind and proceeded to first work at fragmenting the image. Movement and depth would be suggested by the use of color in specific areas and differences in the amount of ink deposited with each screening.

I began the thesis with the intention of printing images that would then be cut up or folded and stitched in such a way as to alter--fragment--the image, yet retain enough of the literal imagery. The process of print disintegration through xeroxing changed the approach. One section of the first print (Plate 1) was chosen to be isolated and copied on the color xerox machine, using Arches print-making paper, which affected the quality of the copy (Plate 2). In areas of the print where very little ink had penetrated the screen, the xerox copier had picked up only the darkest part, highlighting a section of the fabric itself, thereby introducing new elements into the image and changing it again. The finest textures had dropped out and tonal areas were rendered as dots or globby shapes. The xeroxed image was then copied in succession, ten times, until it seemed suitably "broken down." The last of the color xerox copies was then black and white xeroxed and cut

into squares for one study and vertical strips for another (Plates 3,4).

The first print in the image-breakdown series is of the entire square-of-squares paper xerox study (Plate 5). The rest of the screens were made from enlarged portions of this image. As I stated in the introduction, the essence is there. All the parts are there. It developed at Mr. Bujnowski's urging to "push" the image, "see what it can do." The square diffuses, softens at the edges, blends into its repeated image, moves forward and back into the fabric plane. It provides the information for the successive prints.

## Memory and the Prints

Elements of the pieces: fragments (small memories)  
 enlargements of the fragments--  
 the special memories that  
 reoccur (in smaller ones)

Disintegration, destruction, reconstruction. Imagery constantly changing. Shapes overlapping, receding, progressing in space. Image distortion...Disintegration, destruction, reconstruction. One image: head, neck, hand, printed over and over. Fragments.

All of the prints illustrate the concept of fragmentation. Image destruction began when the xerox was cut, as parts most recognizable were cut into and separated. Putting the pieces back together, puzzle-like, was the reconstruction. Each print represents a stage of the image disintegration. (Plates 13 through 16 can be considered a series within the series, dwelling on the final phase of the image breakdown, a return to the complete image). The screens are portions of the reconstructed xerox, each being larger than the last. With enlargement the shapes comprising the elements change and distort. Small ones meld together as one, smaller ones drop out entirely, resulting in gradual abstraction of the image and abstraction within the abstraction. The uneven printing technique further changes and distorts the shapes-within-shapes. In each print there is disintegration of a recognizable image, destruction of portions of that image by enlargement and/or printing methods, and reconstruction of imagery by overlapping, overprinting, and viewing the entire piece to "see" the whole image, part by part.

The concept of memory is represented in pieces which combine more than one screen (Plates 7,9,10,11,13). In these, one screen was printed more often than the others,

representing the total idea/memory. The other screen or screens are enlargements of the first, printed fewer times. They highlight more important elements, like the fragments of memory which reoccur, out of sequence, when remembering. They are the parts (people, places, events) which stand out and keep "coming back" in the memory. Color is used to emphasize certain elements, reinforcing the idea that specific memory fragments reoccur and stand out.

.



### Reasons For...

The idea of shattering an image began with a series of prints done in May 1976. They were screened designs which I had torn into strips or cut into squares, then rearranged and sewn back together. Even torn apart the original image was discernible. I thought about the motives behind tearing up something I had made, the implications of physically altering something which I had carefully planned and printed. Was it an indirect act upon myself? Did I feel a need to destroy a part of me, transferring that action to something which had come from me? Destruction, reconstruction...

I was partially destroying an image (personality deficiency, emotional conflict) but not enough to obliterate it. I was unable to make it unrecognizable. There was enough left of it to piece together the original image by just looking at the entire print. It was as if I knew that I could not solve my problem by only partially thinking it through (partial destruction), that it was still there in all its aspects, if only rearranged (rationalized).

With these ideas still in mind (unsolved) I wrote my thesis proposal, intending to shatter/fragment all the pieces, sometimes by physically tearing the fabrics. But the xerox studies very neatly encompassed all the fragmenting, eliminating the need for further shattering since to do so would render the prints meaningless, strips of jumbled imagery. I wonder if the switch wasn't calculated on my part as a way of avoiding a confrontation with my work. I stated that I would shatter the prints, do violence to them, but would I really? I have a feeling that I was afraid to do it, that I really couldn't do it. My work is still too precious to me, I haven't reached a point of detachment, and so the thought of carrying out my intentions was rejected by some part of me that devised a way to solve the problem instead. I won't attempt to answer the

questions I have raised, but acknowledge that they exist.

I am satisfied with the systematic breakdown of imagery which resulted. Following all the steps was enjoyable--it made sense to do first one print, then another which was derived from it. Possibly the most exciting part was rearranging the paper xerox pieces to form a new image and realizing that countless others could be generated from within that one!



## CHAPTER II

## FRAGMENTS

## A Visualization of Thought Processes

Dealing with space and time--images shooting through space, zooming forward and backward like memories, moving back and forth on a plane of consciousness, the images recede or come forth on the fabric plane. The total effect, or vision, is one image of fragments of that vision that keeps coming at you, as thoughts will when trying to piece together a memory.

fragmented thinking...fragmented seeing...

## CHAPTER III

## APPROACHES

## The Journal; Colors

I began keeping a journal in January 1977 to record my thoughts and feelings as well as the progress of the printed fabrics. The following statement by Paul Klee very simply puts into words something I know to be true. "The domination of life is one of the basic conditions of productive expression."<sup>1</sup>

My moods affect my work, more so than I would like. When I am satisfied with myself, it blossoms, growing rapidly. I work quickly, as if to make up for the lost time of the depression that usually precedes. I found the quote at a time of peace and calm and included it in my journal as a reminder to myself. I thought of it often in the months to come, as I became more and more involved in my thesis. The concept was very clear to me, but actualizing it seemed increasingly difficult. I would begin printing, and then not be sure of how to treat the screen. Most of the time I over-did it, printing and overlapping until the fabric was covered with imagery and no single area caught the eye. The pieces lacked composition. They also lacked the right choice of color for the image. I wanted a soft yet strong statement in each piece, neither background nor printing color overpowering the other. I consistently chose greys, purples and mauves, toned-down and subdued. They were for the most part too subtle. My unhappiness became reflected in the colors I used, and I continued to work with the grey-toned purples without success.

<sup>1</sup>Robert Goldwater and Marco Treves, Artists on Art From the XIV to the XX Century, (Pantheon Books, Inc., 1945) page 442.

There was a long break between spring and fall quarters, a lot of time to think about the prints. It was inevitable that experiences during that time would affect the work when I returned to it--I expected a change. I resumed printing with the same greys and purples, but now wanted more than a subtle statement. Subtlety was necessary to establish the mood I intended, but there was need for something else. The newer pieces became more complex than the others, but more ordered. A structure was established and followed and the results were very strong visual statements. One important change was becoming aware of the fabric as background, beginning the layers of imagery by first layering color. I dip-dyed the fabrics to achieve a ground of moving, flowing tones. This began as a very simple process with the grey and purple prints (Plates 10 and 11) then became more complex in the later pieces. Something happened with those grey prints. I achieved what I had intended from the start--an atmospheric quality, a sense of floating and mystery--by printing a background of two, three or four shades of grey, using two different screens. The images very subtly moved in and out of each other, in space and scale, and across the fabric plane. With a deep purple I overprinted in carefully selected areas to accent the movement. The strong contrast in printing colors was what was lacking in the previous prints. It made all the difference. They now had a sense of life, captured emotions existing on a plane of fabric. My mood changed too, and the next color choices were reds, browns and gold. They were warm and strong, confident colors. A lightweight cotton was dip-dyed and printed by laying down a groundwork of soft brown tones and then overprinting with dark brown to bring the image up. (Plate 9). For the next three prints I dip-dyed heavy textured cotton, layering colors slowly, controlling the overlap and color mixes as much as possible with such



an imprecise dyeing method. (Plates 13, 14, 15). The images were the largest in the series, the final screen. The sequence had gone full circle and returned to the original full face, but this time very large. The combination of scale and color produced a strong image, bold and assured, a direct reflection of my emotions and attitudes towards the work. The format changed too. To accommodate the large screens, the fabrics were printed vertically. The circular movement that had been dominant in the horizontal prints was de-emphasized by the illusion of rising and falling in the vertical pieces. In these the background colors established a prominent directional movement and a starting point from which to begin printing.

I felt that I had achieved all that I intended by the time I completed Plate 15. It was a culmination of all the feelings I had tried to convey, the airiest, softest image of all. I decided to print one more piece as an ending and beginning statement. "Sandy" (Plate 16) is a deliberate departure from the others in scale and approach. The fabric is heavyweight canvas, chosen for its color and texture. It abruptly changed the mood flowing from the first to the twelfth print. Printing on an undyed background implied a new reliance on the colors of the individual images, which are bright but subdued. Movement had to be achieved by the placement of each screened image, the change in scale (two different sizes were printed), and the use of color. The canvas was printed in three separate panels which were later sewn together. It represents a break in the tranquil mood established by Plate 15 and symbolizes for me the beginning of new directions in my work. As a beginning it is successful, but there are weaknesses. Largest doesn't mean best. It is a statement to myself and for that reason I feel is appropriately included in my thesis. It serves as a reminder that an idea is never really exhausted, there is

always a new approach to try, a challenge.....

## CHAPTER IV

## TECHNIQUES

## Methods of Printing

When I first isolated the image of Sandy from the others on a photoscreen, the only way to print it was with a very small squeegee. No small squeegees being available, I cut a piece of matboard to fit. Once printing I began to experiment, carrying the ink from all directions, not just the conventional horizontal or vertical strokes. I found that varying the amount of pressure resulted in an uneven print, previously regarded as a mistake. The tones achieved produced a rich overall design, one with an illusion of depth. The small piece of matboard allowed me to eliminate parts of the image by choice, printing with a diagonal or curving motion in any direction. This seemed much more dynamic than the conventional method of printing by registration. I found myself working quickly, spontaneously, adding to my enjoyment of the process. For the first few screens I continued to use matboard. In the case of the largest screens I used squeegees, but always smaller than what would ordinarily be used. In most cases the prints were designed in progress, the screen being quickly lifted and re-positioned without registration.

Color was added in one of two ways. First the fabric was dyed a background color, then completely printed in another color and allowed to dry. Using the same screen I would overprint with the accent color in carefully chosen areas, sometimes registering, sometimes not. This would make some portions of the print appear to float in front of the rest (Plate 9) or one part of an image recede or come forward while the rest of it remained "flat" (Plate 10).

## Making a Kodalith--

### From Paper to Film

The xerox study was photographed on ortho film by a copy camera, which produced a negative kodalith. The next step was to photograph the negative in order to have a positive which could be transferred to a photoscreen and printed.

The negative was used in an enlarger to produce the subsequent enlarged kodaliths. Having such a large negative to work with afforded me a lot of freedom--I did not use a negative carrier and was able to move it around below the condenser, enabling me to project a large part of the image. With increased enlargement the particles blurred together, changing form; small elements dropped out entirely. The possibilities for printing the kodaliths seemed endless, each was so different. I was really only limited by the size of the ortho film I had.

One afternoon produced all the kodaliths used for the series. In a way, most of the work was done there. The image had gone through a very systematic breakdown and reorganization process. The steps were all on film. To print them in multiples would just be a way of expanding an idea--the statement had already been made.



### Preparing a Photoscreen

A positive or negative image is used; it can be a kodolith or a drawing in opaque ink on acetate. A screen printing frame is prepared by stretching 10xx dynex over a wooden frame and sealing it with tape. The dynex is then coated with a solution of 10 parts direct emulsion to 1 part potassium dichromate. This is done in dim light. The screen is dried in the dark for at least  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours, then positioned fabric side down on top of the kodolith on the glass of a vacuum table. It is important that the image and screen be in direct contact during exposure because the dark areas of the kodolith protect the coated screen from light; these areas will wash out to allow ink to pass through during printing. The clear parts of the kodolith allow those parts of the screen to receive light; the emulsion in those areas hardens after exposure and will not wash out.

The image and screen are held in place in a vacuum; the table is raised to face a carbon arc lamp and exposed for  $2\frac{1}{2}$ -3 minutes. Immediately after exposure the screen is gently rinsed in lukewarm water on both sides to begin the development. A fine spray is directed over the image to clear the screen in those areas which are to print. The screen is allowed to dry before any printing can be done.

Screen cleaning must be done with care since hot water dissolves the emulsion. Bleach is used to remove the image from the screen.



## CHAPTER V

## MATERIALS; FINISHING TECHNIQUES

The following is a list of the prints, their title, size, type of fabric, dyes and pigments used, and methods of finishing.

1. "Portrait" (Plate 1) 41"x17 $\frac{1}{2}$ "; viscose challis dyed in Cushing Silver Grey and Champagne; printed with Inmont grey; finish: none.
2. "Emergence" (Plate 5) 36 $\frac{1}{4}$ "x41"; commercially dyed silk; printed with Inmont brown; a strip of fabric was sewn to the top edge for hanging; hand-sewn hems at the sides; bottom left unhemmed.
3. "Emergence II" (Plate 6) 42 3/4"x41"; homespun cotton dip-dyed in Cushing Silver Grey; printed with Inmont grey in several shades; a strip of fabric was sewn to the top edge for hanging; hand-sewn hems at the sides; bottom left unhemmed.
4. "Untitled" (Plate 7) 35"x24 $\frac{1}{2}$ "; homespun cotton dyed in Cushing Silver Grey; printed with Inmont dark grey; a strip of fabric was sewn to the top edge for hanging; sides and bottom were left unhemmed.
5. "Repeat" (Plate 8) 39"x31"; viscose challis dyed in Cushing Taupe; printed with Inmont light grey, dark grey, blue-purple; a strip of fabric was sewn to the top edge for hanging; hand-sewn hems at the sides; bottom left unfinished.
6. "Untitled" (Plate 9) 35"x34 3/4"; cotton dip-dyed in Cushing Rust, Crimson, Buttercup Yellow; printed with Inmont pale brown, dark brown; a strip of fabric was sewn to the top edge for hanging; hand-sewn hems at bottom and sides.

7. "Untitled" (Plate 10)  $52\frac{1}{2}" \times 44\frac{3}{4}"$ ; cotton dip-dyed in Cushing Silver Grey and Plum; printed with Inmont grey and purple; a strip of fabric was sewn to the top edge for hanging; hand-sewn hems at bottom and sides.
8. "Untitled" (Plate 11)  $61\frac{1}{4}" \times 44\frac{1}{2}"$ ; cotton dip-dyed in Cushing Silver Grey and Plum; printed with Inmont white, grey, purple; a strip of fabric was sewn to the top edge for hanging; hand-sewn hems at bottom and sides.
9. "Untitled" (Plate 12)  $32\frac{1}{4}" \times 30\frac{1}{4}"$ ; cotton/polyester dyed in Cushing Turkey Red; printed with Inmont pale brown, dark brown; a strip of fabric was sewn to the top edge for hanging; hand-sewn hems at sides; bottom left unfinished.
10. "Untitled" (Plate 13)  $42\frac{1}{4}" \times 52\frac{1}{2}"$ ; homespun cotton dip-dyed in Cushing Turkey Red, Rust, Old Gold; printed with Inmont light brown, dark brown; a strip of fabric was sewn to the top edge for hanging; hand-sewn hems at the sides; bottom left unfinished.
11. "Untitled" (Plate 14)  $42\frac{1}{2}" \times 74\frac{1}{2}"$ ; homespun cotton dip-dyed in Cushing Rust, Turkey Red, Buttercup Yellow; printed with Inmont pale brown, light brown, dark brown; a strip of fabric was sewn to the top edge for hanging; hand-sewn hems at the sides; bottom left unfinished.
12. "Untitled" (Plate 15)  $43" \times 74\frac{1}{4}"$ ; homespun cotton dip-dyed in Cushing Rust, Turkey Red, Buttercup Yellow; printed with Inmont pale brown, light brown; a strip of fabric was sewn to the top edge for hanging; hand-sewn hems at the sides; bottom left unfinished.
13. "Sandy" (Plate 16)  $84\frac{1}{2}" \times 70\frac{1}{2}"$ ; heavy-weight canvas, undyed; printed with Inmont blue, violet, light green, gold; three panels machine-stitched together; hand-sewn hems at sides; bottom left unfinished; six canvas loops

were sewn at equal intervals at the top edge to provide support for a wooden slat for hanging.

## CONCLUSION

There are feelings common to all of us activated by certain conditions. I wanted to stir these feelings in the viewer, communicating visually a mix of ideas and emotions which I can in no other way express. Dreams and memories, thoughts and emotions... To somehow combine elements of all these graphically was my intention. Using one image over and over.....one image existing in its own isolated time and space conveying a message of a common experience, ethereal and fleeting, one we know yet can't identify..... It's a feeling from within that remains locked inside, words being inadequate to describe the sensation felt upon confronting it. It is calming but disquieting. The calm lies in the recognition of the familiar; there is uneasiness in the confrontation, the suddenly seeing what before was so private and hidden. The cut-up sections of the image do not change or lessen the impact. They repeat the message, enlarged particles, recognizable just the same. Larger they grow, swimming in space, over and around each other.

I gained immense satisfaction from seeing an idea through from beginning to end. I have never disciplined myself to where I felt I had exhausted all possibilities or completely explored an idea. In this body of work I did take an idea to completion within an established framework; I have more ideas that stem from the initial concept of fragmentation but which will be carried out quite differently.

I fulfilled all the goals I set for myself, and more. I established a method and rhythm of working that was compatible with my temperament and enhanced the quality of the printed fabrics. The feeling of freedom to develop or adapt any technique to suit my needs was one of the most positive aspects of working on the thesis. I developed

confidence in myself and my work; that feelings be conveyed by the imagery was important to me and I felt sure of how I was accomplishing this. In the beginning I wasn't sure of anything, but there was this idea.....

At first the idea of completing a thesis was frightening and overwhelming. I've come to realize that it is not the most important work I will ever do; it is not impossible to accomplish. The body of work presented here is a step in an ever-continuing process, a statement of change and growth. With this in mind I am confident that the printed images represent the best I can do at this point within the framework of the concept I have developed. My work has not stopped here but will continue to mature and expand, as I do.

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## GLOSSARY

**Contact print:** Made from a negative or positive image on film which is in direct contact with the printing paper during exposure. The result is a print the same size as the original.

**Cyanotype:** A contact printing process also known as the blueprint, discovered in 1842 by Sir John Herschel. Effective on paper, cotton, and silk. The emulsion is prepared in two separate solutions, A: 50 grams ammonium citrate dissolved in 250 ml distilled water, and B: 35 grams potassium ferricyanide dissolved in 250 ml distilled water. Equal parts are mixed and applied to the material to be printed. The result is a blue image on a white background.

**Kodalith:** A trade name for a type of film that produces high contrast images. It is also known as ortho film, graphic arts film, litho film. During development the unexposed emulsion clears, leaving a black image on a transparent base. A small negative (such as 35mm) can be enlarged onto the film or a contact print can be made from a positive or negative image. Development is the same as for a paper print, using Kodalith A and B developer. They are two separate solutions which are mixed together in equal parts only when needed. Once mixed they should be used immediately; together they deteriorate in a few hours.

**Positive from a negative:** When a contact print is made of a negative image a positive image results; when a contact print is made of a positive image a negative image results.











































