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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
In Candidacy for the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS



**College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology**

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Breeding Contempt

Amanda Lee

May 1, 2005



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Introduction

As a Masters of Fine Arts candidate my written thesis will journalize and give credit to the cathartic processes inherent in my creative work and experience. Much like my personal individual self, I break my artwork into compartmentalized pieces so that I might scrutinize every detail. In my life there is a constant pursuit of control and clarity to help distinguish and give absoluteness to the art that I create. This body of work demonstrates the pouring out of abundant pain, anger, helplessness and deep confusion. The sculpture I have created has taken much of the mystery out of my own feelings and has given them confirmation. Experiencing the wholeness of the several parts and pieces in both my work and in my person, has urged me to exhibit the importance of individual uniqueness in art making.

My proposed thesis statement: Breeding Contempt is a body of work that intends to investigate the breaking down of the inhibited creative spirit and the elements of dysfunction that contribute to the manifestation of a contemptuous, individual subconscious. How does incubating free will with good intentions set up restrictions of the creative conscious and present the opportunity for self-denial? My exploration into the measurement of identity will consist of finding a visual language to express the characteristics of my own identity achievement, disclosure and asceticism. The urgency to find order and direction in the uniqueness of my own experience has evolved into a commitment to personify my self through art making. The necessity to recognize fundamental platforms that birth my growth process, and ultimately to emerge as an artist, is a struggle for discovery of individuation and personal validation.

Life Experiences Provide a Narrative Base

Discovering the value of my own terrors meant releasing any belief systems long enough to develop sensitivity to the details of my own methodology. Emancipation from the unrealistic boundaries I was to exist in has led to an outrageous epiphany of my own spirit. In life experiences, the first recognition of your own spirit delivers a freedom that becomes more precious than all else. To know that this potential realization exists establishes a passion to possess that freedom without compromising the integrity of the commitment. I believe that this experience is applicable to every individual, and perhaps through this investigation I will provide a visceral experience that is not confusing, but instead will describe a journey of maturation and the significance of personifying life through art making.

Punishment, protection and preservation are the three elements of dysfunction that I incorporated throughout this body of work. I insist that they are administered at an early age, and are nursed through existence by our own will. The suggested paradigm of the family system immediately establishes an unrealistic habitation and punitive fantasy. The initial guidelines of behavior and roles in childhood materialize into a perpetual cycle of self-loathing and fear that is suffocating to the spirit. The same fear creates an urgency to protect one's self from life and uncertainty. In that process there is a dangerous element of preservation that provides comfort and a sense of control. By expressing my individual fears through concepts that address entrapment, abandonment, isolation and suffocation, I can begin to identify the source and the dysfunction of my own behavior.

Feminist Erotica writer Kathy Acker wrote There is a way in which you play with what you most fear in order to learn how to deal with it.¹ In searching for explanations regarding the inhabited spirit, I've grown to respect this thinking as a kind of anthem. Without the confrontation of my individual fears, I risk losing the creative resources I have as an art maker. With acknowledgment of the realistic dynamics that makes me who I am, I am capable of drawing upon resources from the past and present that can be isolated and insular from the original people and situations. Kathy Acker also spoke out on the definition of the word *safe*. The motivation amplified in the context of this word is one that I often reference in my work. The duality of protection and preservation becomes horribly misconstrued into what Acker describes as,

Submissive women, hiding in houses and marriages following societies rules (do as you're told and don't step out of the lines) internalizing certain norms or actively searching for who to be, without recognizing that the mystery of who to be lies within ones own feeling of identity and pleasure.²

Entering into existence through physicality is the initial choice made by our parents. I believe that entering into existence on the personal, psychological and conscious level is determined by the individual through evolution and experience. Hope Edelman, a non fiction author writes that there are just two basic human motivators: desire and fear. Every decision we make, every action we take, springs from this divided

¹ v.vale. Angry Women (Juno Books, 1st edition 1992) pg 38

² v.vale. Angry Women (Juno Books, 1st edition 1992) pg 39

well.³

The division between desire and fear is blurred and often programmed against us by those who we are designed at birth to trust and form bonds with. These first connections are our parents. This is where I, at an early age began transforming fantasy into environments that I could control. I still operate between reality and my fantasies which become dangerously confusing and destructive. However, the process of art making demands specific maintenance that allows both the real and the dream to co-exist.

I was four years old when my mother decided to immerse us in the Baptist world, solicited by the fear of eternal burning.⁴ The options as a child were limited to the references of my childish experience. Naturally I trusted my mother and believed that I would be eternally punished if I did not recite and obey the guidelines of the Baptist Doctrine. I exchanged my spirit for a contract that reserved my a seat at the right hand of God, protected my eternal security, and confirmed my destiny as servant to the church.

This religious obedience would also be my first of several memories referencing the dynamics of safety and terror. My mother was our a guide, responsible and accountable for not only her behavior but for the decisions of her children. Our delusion was the horrifying and destructive equation of perfection and salvation. I began to fight my own humanness, uniqueness, and limited my expressiveness those early childhood years. This later became an agonizing pattern to break. The urge to shut down and to settle into complacency frightened me enough to decode the source of my dysfunction and obtain the human right to my own creative freedom. This freedom from

³ Hanauer, Cathi. The Bitch in The House (HarperCollins, 2002) pg 178

⁴ Holy Bible: New International Version (Zondervan Publishing House) pg 1156

fear, manipulation and abusiveness suffocated and challenged the very nature and preciousness of my persona. My mother, a former pageant queen, honestly believed that she was protecting me. I believe she could not see past the decisions she was making because of her own fears and confusion. I created artwork to depict this aspect of my relationship with her, and entitled the sculpture **Miss Guided**.



Amanda Lee, *Miss Guided*. 2003.
Steel, Muslin, Plastic.
42 in. x 34 in. x 18 in.

Miss Guided is embroidered on a white banner, suspended on a clothesline, inside a welded steel cage 42 in. x 34 in. x 18 in. One eighth inch rod was used in the construction of the cage. The pageant queen is a screaming muslin bird, dyed and bruised. The bird is wearing long false eyelashes and a rhinestone tiara.

After my mother joined the Baptist church, my father, a quiet and angry atheist took his business career to Cairo, Egypt and married my step-mother. This abandonment left me at the mercy of my own imaginary shame and confusion. The church took us in, providing us with a house, car, groceries, hand-me-down clothes as well as special attention by the several pastors. This focused interest came in the form of three to four one hour counseling sessions and house calls several times a week. While my mother was sanctifying and recovering her soul, I was trapped under the care of the disgruntled

nursery attendants. These caretakers would cage four year old girls in convenient cribs that were crafted right into the walls. The contained spaces clearly suggested a kennel like restraint.

The sculpture **Adapts Nicely** refers to the religious caretakers and their contrived generosity that they offered.



Amanda Lee, *Adapts Nicely*. 2003
Resin, acrylic, bible parchment, plastic, found object.
60 in. x 18in. X 72 in.

The sculpture stands between an iron clothing rack, it was, in fact, the clothing rack that was kept in the church basement and given to my mother for her laundry room. This gift was then handed down to me. A twelve pane window hangs in the center of the work and has the title **Adapts Nicely** spelled out on the glass panes. I next took twelve pages from the New Testament and drew caricatures that referenced our tragic home existence on each paper sheet. These drawings were of dead baby birds, humping bunnies, and a well endowed female lamb about to be butchered on an offering plate. I burned the edges of each page, then I first sealed them in beeswax and finally in clear casting resin. The sculpture stands 65 in. x 24 in. x 72 in. and ironically is my mother's favorite piece installed in my thesis exhibition at the Bevier Gallery, Rochester Institute of Technology.

The summer of 1985, when I had just turned eight, I was unceremoniously

discharged from the Girl Scouts (This occurred because of my destructive behavior and inability to play well with others). This was the summer that my father returned from Egypt. He settled in Minnesota with his former secretary, now my new step-mom, and her two sons. At my father's request, my older sister and I spent five weeks with him and his family at their home in Alexandria. My father was running a resort that kept him busy most of the time. I spent that summer being entertained and educated by my two, newly inherited brothers. I quickly recognized that I had been placed in a situation where my sexuality separated and defined my appeal to the boys, I had little protection, feared confrontation, and I was desperately in need of attention.

Pamela Spring, an educator for Planned Parenthood, wrote an essay on cultivating a reputation for being promiscuous after sexual abuse at an early age.⁵ Similarly I willingly participated in the continuous explorations of my underdeveloped body. At the time it had made me feel more adult, rebellious, in control and powerful. When others discovered our activities, however, the attention shifted forever to all forms of shame and contempt. In Spring's essay, she enforces the same contrasting feelings I experienced.

After that (the sexual abuse from a babysitter) I started to become promiscuous, though it wasn't conscious or deliberate. It was something I did because I felt I was supposed to. It happened in part as a result of the abuse, but obviously I didn't realize it at the time.⁶

I built two sculptures that interpret this experience. The first was art that I produced titled **Just Like a Dog**. The sculpture was built from quarter inch steel rod and

⁵ Tanenbaum, Leora. SLUT! Growing Up Female with a Bad Reputation. (HarperCollins, 2000) pg 79

⁶ Tanenbaum, Leora. SLUT! Growing Up Female with a Bad Reputation. (HarperCollins, 2000) pg 82

welded into a 26 in. x 18 in. x 22 in. cage. Inside the cage hangs a six-legged muslin dog, dyed pink, pointing and antagonizing a clothesline of perfectly hung little white nightgowns that open only from the bottom. Embroidered on each nightgown are the words **Just Like a Dog**.



Amanda Lee, *Just Like a Dog*. 2003.
Steel, muslin, plastic.
26 in. x 18 in. x 22 in.

The terror that this combination of elements hold is repeated in the piece **That's What Little Girls Are Made Of**. The words are separated and embroidered onto starched, white swatches. The labeled cloth is hanging through an incubator that is constructed of glass, storm windows.



Amanda Lee, *That's What Little Girls Are Made Of*. 2003.
Glass, muslin, resin, plastic.
36 in. x 33 in. x 33 in.

On the floor of the incubator lies a splayed, muslin doll that emulates the form of a dissected frog, sucking her thumb. Incisions are made in three different places in the flesh of the specimen and the skin is pulled, pinned and labeled with words of adolescent

behavior disorders. Bait minnows pour out of the incisions and onto the floor of the incubator where fiberglass resin seals in the doll in. The sculpture measures 36 in. x 33 in. x 33 in

At age nine I had created an imaginary existence outside of my family system. There was a tight balance that I tried to maintain between my fantasy world and my real one, a world where I was to behave according to the laws of my environment. I thought that if I played appropriately in the world controlled by my authorities, I could then play any way I desired, in my mind's world. It was a complicated condition that I had developed in order to protect and control my individual self. However, ultimately I confused the separation of fantasy and reality. Carl Jung knew about the healing function of the imagination as he pursued his research on active imagination.⁷ Joan Chodorow, writes on his investigations:

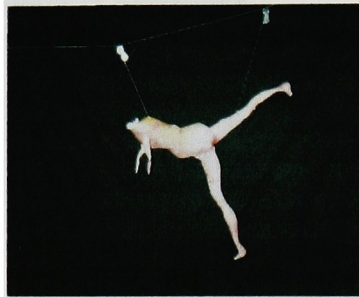
Jung experimented with specific meditative procedures, various 'rites of entry' to engage with his childhood fantasies.....these fantasies seemed to personify his fears and other powerful emotions. Over time, he realized that when he managed to translate his emotions into images, he was inwardly calmed and reassured. He came to see that his task was to find the images that are concealed in the emotions.⁸

I invented stories and explanations that offered comfort and eased my own anxiousness. Although I was consistently reprimanded for telling elaborate lies and not paying attention, I recognized those powerful experiences and creative resources that were exclusively mine. This was a small pocket of information that I chose to acknowledge and protect, fearing further isolation. I believe this became my first choice

⁷ Chodorow, Joan. Jung on Active Imagination (Princeton University Press 1997) pg 1

⁸ Chodorow, Joan. Jung on Active Imagination (Princeton University Press 1997) pg 2

towards autonomy later in my life. I saw hope and pureness independently in my state of existence, and I was able to preserve and honor these values in my adult life. In memory of that experience, I named the sculpture that represents intuition and freedom **Blind Autonomy**.



Amanda Lee, *Blind Autonomy*, 2003.
Muslin.
28 in. x 5 in. x 18 in.

She is a headless, muslin doll with an exposed neck. The armature is suspended from stainless steel pulleys that are fixed on a line, running the length of the College of Imaging Arts and Science's gallery space. The installation is a beautiful statement that confirms the strength of my insight and my understanding of personal power.

With the loss of a conventional childhood remained the challenge to develop into a functioning human being still existed. There was also my obvious struggle to resist the alternative choice of suicide. A lot of time, energy and production was lost as I reinvested in the process of collecting and reestablishing my initial spirit. I reference the created gaps and holes in lost time, into an assembled sculpture called **Capital Loss**. The title, once again embroidered on a small, white nightgown, hangs on a clothesline that is suspended in four small, steel cages. These forms are stacked one on top of each other like building blocks. A muslin doll, dyed pink, exhibits a bar code that is

embroidered on her belly, along with a rose embroidered where a vagina would anatomically be located. The sculpture **Capitol Loss** stands 34 in x 16 in. x 18 in.



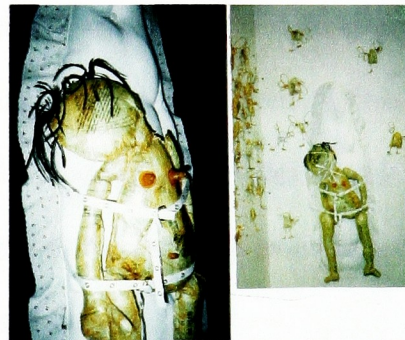
Amanda Lee, **Capitol Loss**. 2003.
Steel, muslin, plastic.
34 in. x 16 in. x 18 in.

Feeling alone, rejected and disgusted, I was desperate to hold onto the chance that if I could be small, fragile, and child-like, I could also be precious enough to be protected. That foolish logic was the beginning of my obsession with diet control and body image. I was living on diet pills, ephedrine, laxatives and ipecac. My bulimia was a cathartic way for me to release my anger and manage my body size.⁹ I was so dangerously thin and malnourished that my skin turned yellow, I was becoming bald, and my teeth were gray. I even started growing a moustache. A dangerous result of this behavior is that I translated the reactions to my appearance by others as a measure of their love and my control. Prozac, three psychiatrists, four junior high school counselors, and my anxious mother confined my existence to the house where we lived. All freedoms and choices were taken away in a desperate means to monitor my breathing and living. I was pretty clever in the beginning. I duck taped wrenches and other flat, heavy tools around my waist before I was weighed, but this behavior was soon discovered.

⁹ Kirby, Jane: Dieting for Dummies, When Dieting Goes Too Far (Wiley Publishing, Inc. 1998) pg 71

My mother then brought in other sources. The appointment was a weekly invader, the pastor from the church, as well as my mother's prayer group, coming to exorcise the diet demons out of me. This presented such a terrifying threat to my boundaries that I panicked and went into diet overdrive. That ultimately landed me on a gurney at age fifteen. The combination of starvation and purging had left my electrolytes at an unreplenished level, ultimately damaging my heart.¹⁰

Because of my relationship with body consciousness, dress patterns have forever appealed to me. I was attracted to their color, language, directions and frailness. For my thesis exhibit I constructed a doll out of vinyl, using dress patterns and Bible pages to cover the surface. This doll illustrated the components that were creating confusion in my spirit and reflected the desired size of an eight year old.



Amanda Lee, *Bedlamb*. 2002.
Dress patterns, vinyl, fabric, acrylic, found object.
49 in. x 10 in. x 26 in.

The body details included black, raven feathered hair, baby bottle nipples, and the tip of a pacifier for a belly button. The strongest detail on the doll was the lullaby stenciled onto her face with the word *hush* capitalized and highlighted. I decided to call her **Bedlamb** and I securely restrained her onto an ironing board that was upholstered in

¹⁰ <http://www.raderprograms.com/ipecacabuse.html>

bright white fabric. Symbolically the ironing board was transformed into a hospital gurney, trimmed with lace, safety pins and pearl buttons. The sculpture hangs on the wall and measures 62 in. x 9 in. x 18 in. I believe that the significance that the theme of change from reality to fantasy that culminated in this powerful, comedy/tragedy referenced my life experiences and produced an emotionally charged artistic story. Like many artists today who are adopting narrative approaches,¹¹ I was attempting to narrate my more personal stories.

The final stages in completing this body of artwork for my thesis exhibition involved developing a way to create consistency between each sculpture. I was intent on not threatening the individual uniqueness within each work. Artistically, it was important that the context in which the work would be viewed would not diminish or contrive the creative scenarios. The solution that emerged unified my work and pushed the concept of entrapment and suffocation by incubating each artwork in thin plastic sheets. I first stitched the plastic to the rods of the cages, leaving *holes of opportunity* that would symbolize the precious feeling of hope. I designed plastic bags stitched around the dolls of heads, covering just enough to *preserve, protect* and *punish*.

In the observations made by David Bayles and Ted Orland, making art depends upon noticing things-things about yourself, your methods, your subject matter.¹² For me this same condition exists with images and expressive information that creates parallels to individual human experiences. Understanding personal expressiveness comes easily when it is possible to reach into the deepest recesses of your soul and access

¹¹ <http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/2aa/2aa670.htm>

¹² Bayles, David and Ted Orland: Art and Fear (Capra Press 1995) pg 109

information that your subconscious provides. Memories that are hidden and protected deliver a rich reservoir of creative magic or potential. Once that magic is birthed, the art work pours out as a pure, visualized existence.

The Sculpture Process

There are a combination of materials that I experimented with and researched for my thesis work. The first applications began with welded steel. I originally was introduced to the artistic processes of working with welded steel when I was an undergraduate student in Michigan. For my thesis work, I concentrated on further research MIG welding (Metal Inert Gas) or as it even is called GMAW (Gas Metal Arc Welding).

MIG welding uses an aluminum alloy wire as a combined electrode and filler (DC, EP). By using a positive electrode, the oxide layer is efficiently removed from the aluminum surface, which is essential for avoiding lack of fusion and magnetic forces as small droplets, spray transfer. This gives a deep penetration capability of the process and makes it possible to weld in all positions. It is important for the quality of the weld that the spray transfer is obtained.¹

I worked with both steel plate and rod, and finally eliminated most of the steel plate solutions. I saw that too much steel was overpowering so I concentrated on minimizing it, while still achieving the effects of a caged environment. In **Miss Guided I** used small amounts of steel plate for weight and stability. Aesthetically this solution worked well with the visual weight.



¹ <http://www.alu-info.dk/Html/alulib/modul/A00526.htm>



Amanda Lee, **Capitol Loss**. 2003.
Steel, muslin Plastic.
36 in. x 12 in. x 16 in.

Needing various sizes of cages in **Capitol Loss**, I could explore the idea of turning this sculpture into a dangerous toy. To fasten the blocks together I used zip ties and they threateningly poked through the openings of the cages like porcupine quills. The use of welded steel directed these pieces and suggested a strong visual harshness that became an important parallel to my own past feelings of rage.

Earlier art work at RIT allowed me to play with methods of assemblage in fabrics and paper. In this thesis, I have had success with using matte medium and poly acrylic for sealing dress patterns and similar fragile papers. The material, when layered with one of these sealing agents, becomes translucent and leathery. This allows me to cut and stitch it together. With the thinness of the dress patterns and Bible pages I had to work small, much like the methods I used for the sister dolls in **The Importance of a Balanced Diet**.



Amanda Lee, **The Importance of a Balanced Diet**. 2002.
Dress patterns, resin, found object, plastic.
52 in. x 28 in. x 18 in.

Wanting to achieve a more lifelike representation of a small child, I started to put sheets of transparent vinyl curtain in between the layers; in this way I could enhance the size of my doll. In **Bedlamb** I added additional transfer text to the face of the doll by using Lazertran paper. Lazertran is a water slide decal paper that transfers your own images onto almost any two or three-dimensional surface.²



Amanda Lee, *Bedlamb*. 2002.
Dress patterns, vinyl, fabric, acrylic, found object.
49 in. x 10 in. x 26 in.

German Artist Hannah Hoch experimented with such materials during the middle of the twentieth century. She used photos, other paper objects, pieces of machines and various found objects to produce large images.



Hannah Hoch, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*. 1919.
Collage of pasted papers.
44 in. x 35 in.

² <http://www.lazertran.com/New%20Site%20folder/New%20Site/instructions.html>

Her photomontage work was created by cutting up and pasting together imagery that was then recomposed in new and startling contexts. These included photographs of individuals, events, posters, book jackets and a variety of typefaces.³ Her arrangement of media is drawn specifically from places that pertain to the events of a significant time in history. I also try to establish occurrences by choosing materials that relate directly to the conceptual direction of my work.

Muslin is another material I enjoy working with, it responds to a lot of stress treatments and damage. I have discovered that the fabric absorbs dyes in various concentrations without washing out. The effect of the bruised color used for the muslin dolls, together with welded steel, created the effect of both anger and sensuousness. This juxtaposition of materials and objects mirrored my internal battles with safety and devastation. The application of fiberglass resin onto the muslin produced a glassy, hard, surface. I felt that this technique of sealing the fabric did not compromise the shape contained inside. The sculpture **Act Accordingly** uses this combination of materials quite successfully.



Amanda Lee. *Act Accordingly*. 2002.
Muslin, resin.
9 in. x 4 in. x 13 in

Application of text is evident throughout the work created for this thesis. In some cases I have embroidered individual words singularly onto two inch, white cloth

³ Arnason, H. Harvard: History of Modern Art (Prentice Hall, Inc. 3rd edition 1986) pg 241

swatches. In other art components I have transferred text onto the material or object using the transfer art product Lazertran. **Adapts Nicely** has a combination of Bible text and hand painted text that together create an effective conflict between my words and the printed scriptures from the Bible. I wanted to challenge the viewers' interpretation of each unique sculpture by providing written information that served as an element of conflict or surprise. The small white dresses that were sewn together were transformed by embroidering **Just Like A Dog** onto them. The idea that the dresses only opened from the bottom was subtle yet shocking when content and context merged for the viewer.

Jenny Holzer is an example of someone who uses the authority of words successfully in her work.⁴ Her strategies are to address larger issues than feminism from, nevertheless, a woman's viewpoint. She says to get context in there, something different than the content of abstract art.⁶



Jenny Holzer, Installation. 1989-90.
Extended helical tricolor LED signboard
and 17 Indian red granite benches.

From 1983 she created installations. In that of 1989-90 in the Guggenheim Museum in New York, 330 of her bewildering texts were spiraling around the interior of the building. Jenny Holzer uses the installment of language to be the visual substance of

⁴ <http://www.geocities.com/Paris/Rue/5047/holzerbio.html?200525>

⁶ Honour, Hugh and John Flemming: The Visual Arts: A History (Prentice Hall 4th edition 1995) pg

her work.

The incorporation of objects, such as the ironing board in the sculpture **Bedlamb**, is an effort to use a domestic arena where much of my experience can take place. I removed the legs of the ironing board with a hacksaw and upholstered the surface with quilt batting and white cotton fabric. In order to hold the upholstery in place, I fashioned brass tacks with pearl colored buttons and fastened them into the base of the board. Three inch lace was secured around the outer edge of the piece using safety pins. Restraints were attached in order to constrain the doll and create the full narration.

Another object I utilized in my art work was a wooden highchair. The resulting sculpture is called **The Importance of a Balanced Diet**.



Amanda Lee, *The Importance of a Balanced Diet*. 2002.
Dress patterns, resin, found object, plastic.
52 in. x 28 in. x 18 in.

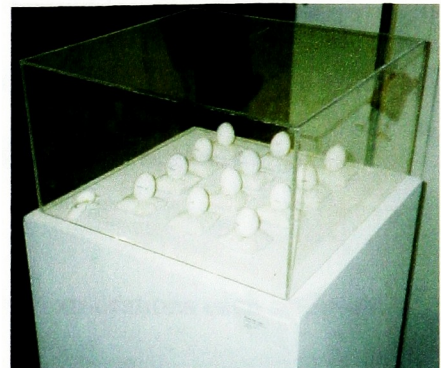
I covered the surface with broken beer bottles, using white tile caulking and epoxy. The stretchers were wrapped in pieces of long, black hair that resembled my own, and tied loosely with thread so that the strands spill out into space. The arms and legs were wrapped in a dirty white wool that undulates and knots to suggest figurative contours. The bottom back leg remains exposed with the texture and stress marks of the wooden leg. The **Balanced Diet** uses a metaphor that expresses the value of poise in a

compromising environment (the exposed lower leg). The materials reinforce the equilibrium of danger and safety.

In working with assemblage, I chose to play with visual repetition in **12 Ways to Kill Time**. This sculpture incorporated thirteen white eggs that had the egg contents extracted with a large syringe. They were then placed in the center of small, white pillows using inverted straight pins. The individual egg shells had one word transferred onto their surface. When aligned it read:

SOMETIMES I TIME THE SUM OF SOME TIMES BY THE TIMING OF SOME

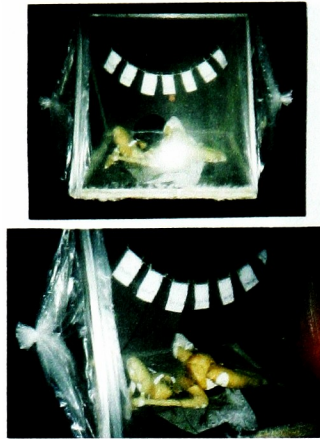
The eggs were intentionally an uneven number that did not fit into a grid structure of three by four with a one inch spatial division. This caused one of the eggs to be excluded from the format. SOMETIMES was broken and pushed out of the alignment , but the message was still decipherable.



Amanda Lee, 12 Ways to Kill Time. 2003.
Laser transfer onto eggs and fabric.
12 in. x 12 in. x 12 in.

One of the more challenging sculptures I assembled was **That's What Little Girls Are Made Of**. It required some abstract possibilities as to narrative interpretations. The frog shaped child was a separate experiment with muslin and fiberglass resin. At first she was cast in a baking pan with the resin, but the pan compromised her distinctive

shape. It was a doll that I was especially successful in constructing. I had invested significant time in creating the details of her expressions and body.



Amanda Lee, *That's What Little Girls Are Made Of*. 2003.
Glass, muslin, resin, plastic.
36 in. x 33 in. x 33 in.

In order to flaunt her, I needed to position her centrally in a format that drew attention to her contorted figure. I thought that an incubator would properly put this doll on display, so I took the most expressive, damaged storm windows I could locate and built a triangular structure that would hold her. I chose this shape because it resembled an attic and the mold and cobwebs clinging to the edge were indicative of neglect and abandonment.

Ultimately, through the evolution of these creative explorations each sculpture became a narrative. Though the parts were from many different sources, they related to one another because of their vintage and chronological dating. This scheme was evident to me, though the viewer could argue the relevance. To avoid confusion in their connectedness I wanted to integrate the works by incorporating one material that could be used in each individual piece. I took long sheets of plastic and covered every piece either in its entirety or partially with strategic intent. Then with the separate structures I formed

a taut skin that was hand stitched on some parts, left shapeless on others. The plastic was difficult to edit so I played extensively with the positioning.



Amanda Lee, *Miss Guided*. 2003.
Steel, Muslin, Plastic.
42 in. x 34 in. x 18 in.

At times the sculpture was so obscured that the imagery became vaguely masked and ineffective. The decisions for finalizing where the plastic would cover the sculpture components were anxiety ridden. This seemed to me an appropriate sentiment experiential for finishing work that was narrative to my personal experiences.

With each of these sculptures I have created an absurd tone that emerges with my organization of the materials. My sense of humor allows me to face difficult experiences by skewing my perspective of events and individuals. The idea is to present a visual welcome mat for the viewer, and then deliver a message to contradict the artworks unspecified content. Absurdity is medicinal in my approach to the past. It takes the edge off of my painful memories so that I can express them. In the context of humorous art I think of the work Marcel Duchamp titled **Fountain**.



Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*. 1917.
Porcelain.

This porcelain urinal with the signature R. Mutt, was installed in an art exhibition by Duchamp in 1917 as a sculpture.

Duchamp challenged traditional preconceptions of what art is. He stated that it was not important whether or not Mr. Mutt had made the work with his own hands; what mattered was that he had chosen it. Therefore the creation was not important but the idea and selection was.⁷

At first the objects and images I use to create sculpture recall my own feelings of confusion. As I work through confronting certain memories, the confusion separates into themes that clarify my individual ways of behaving. I think that this process is evident in my thesis work. There are levels of anger, ridiculousness, vulnerability and closure that are visually demonstrated and these stages reflect my own personal understanding.

⁷ Butler, Adam. The Art Book. (Phaidon Press Limited 1994) p142

Influence From the Art World

As an adult woman I am influenced by many of the same experiences I had as a child. However, with adulthood I can distinguish personal life patterns from artistic interpretations of experience that many artists confront today. It is significant to me that I relate and respond to the imagery by photographer Diane Arbus. Internationally recognized for her photography, capturing the psychological reality inferred through expression and body language, Diane Arbus states:

Nothing is ever the same as they said it was. It's what I've never seen before that I recognize. It's important to take bad pictures. It's the bad ones that have to do with what you've never done before. They can make you recognize something you hadn't seen in a way that will make you recognize it when you see it again.¹



Diane Arbus. Boy with a Straw Hat. 1967.
Gelatin silver print.

¹ <http://photography.about.com/library/weekly/aa110600a.html>

In her image of **Boy with a Straw Hat**² a portrait of a young boy is rallying support for the Vietnam War. In this photograph I can read the hesitation in his face and still be provoked by the festiveness that does or does not apply to him individually. Diane Arbus has said that she wants to seek with her camera 'things which nobody would see unless I photographed them'.³

Acknowledgment of uniqueness, or what has rarely been seen before, is crucial for the evolution of my own artwork. I am certain that drawing from personal experiences necessitates that the artist have the courage to face terrors and to understand them. Some of these confrontations have been overdrawn and humiliating for me. Others have resulted in painful regression into old behaviors. Ted Orland writes:

In large measure becoming an artist consists of learning to accept yourself, which makes your work personal, and in following your own voice, which makes your work distinctive.⁴

In Jenny Holzer's **Truisms**,⁵ she publicly displays one-line statements such as:

- A LOT OF PROFESSIONALS ARE CRACKPOTS
- PROTECT ME FROM WHAT I WANT
- MOTHER'S SHOULDN'T MAKE TOO MANY SACRAFICES
- YOUR OLDEST FEARS ARE YOUR WORST ONES⁶

She uses language as a medium and billboards, posters, T-shirts, tractor hats, cast bronze

² Honour, Hugh and John Flemming: The Visual Arts: A History (Prentice Hall 4th edition 1995) pg 790

³ Honour, Hugh and John Flemming: The Visual Arts: A History (Prentice Hall 4th edition 1995) pg 790

⁴ Bayles, David and Ted Orland: Art and Fear (Capra Press 1993) pg 3

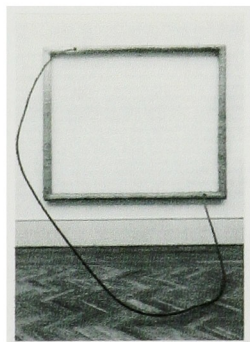
⁵ Honour, Hugh and John Flemming: The Visual Arts: A History (Prentice Hall 4th edition 1995) pg 790

⁶ <http://adaweb.walkerart.org/project/holzer/cgi/pcb.cgi?change>

plaques, inscribed stones and flashing signs as vehicles to convey her message.⁷ Without emulating J. Holzer, I mean to drive my sculptural search with the same poignant ferocity. I see my artistic approach as a challenge to give the obvious visual information and then impose an alternative interpretation persuasively. The narrative sculpture becomes recognizable as language at first, much like Jenny Holzer's *Truisms*, but the context of how or where the language is selectively displayed becomes the convincing factor.

Through in-depth research my increased knowledge of different materials opens up a vast resource for my creative work. I have become fascinated with the various potential of unusual materials and both found and fabricated objects. This is especially evident if and when I initially respond to them on a personal level.

Eva Hesse is another artist who worked informally with various materials in her sculptures. Her installations were hung from the ceiling, leaned against a wall or spilt out over the floor.



Eva Hesse, *Hang Up*. 1966.
Acrylic on cloth over wood and steel.
6 ft. x 7 ft. x 6 ft. 6 in.

The sculptures were of unconventional, often pliable, and impermanent materials such as latex, rubber, fiberglass, rope and cloth. Eva said she wanted her artwork to be 'non art,

⁷ Honour, Hugh and John Flemming: *The Visual Arts: A History* (Prentice Hall 4th edition 1995) pg 790

non cognitive, non anthropomorphic, non geometric, no nothing, everything, but of another kind, vision, sort'.⁸ Robert Hughes writes of Eva Hesse in *American Visions*:

Hesse grew more and more interested in what usually didn't pertain to sculpture. Backing away from its 'male' rigidity, which included the high-style rhetoric of Minimalism, she allowed her fascination with the 'female' and the inward, including what was grotesque and pathetic, to enlarge.....she left a truncated body of work but one of remarkable power: an instrument of feeling that spoke of an inner life, sometimes fraught with anxiety.⁹

Similar to Eva Hesse, I have never been overly impressed with traditional formats for creating sculpture. I have little interest in work that is constructed to promote one's vanity. I honor my ugliest, most humiliating secrets. My own inner monsters and the childlike terrors that hunt me are the internal gold that I have found as an individual artist. The inner search for narration that defines my sculpture installations is my greatest resource.

⁸ Honour, Hugh and John Flemming: *The Visual Arts: A History* (Prentice Hall 4th edition 1995) pg 792

⁹ <http://www.artchive.com/artchive/H/hesse.html>

Conclusion

I believe this investigation into breaking down of the inhibited creative spirit and the elements of dysfunction has achieved both visual and conceptual success. The sequence of narrative events can be read visually in this body of work without much uncertainty.

Breeding Contempt has been a clarification of the parallels between early development and reconciliation with my own humanness. Treating each memory as part of a time-line that needs understanding and purging is the valuable cathartic process that took both compassion and strength in my creative work. The information that fuels the creative mind exists, however it has been congested with confusion. Once I was able to trust myself against conforming to life programs and structures that did not belong to me, I could feel and see the loveliness of my own individuality. My self confidence could finally allow me to develop sculpture with creative autonomy.

As artists all of our reserves are attainable through the confrontation of our individual experiences.



Amanda Lee. 2003.

Body of Work

Bevier Gallery

College of Imaging Arts and Sciences

Rochester Institute of Technology

April 4, 2003





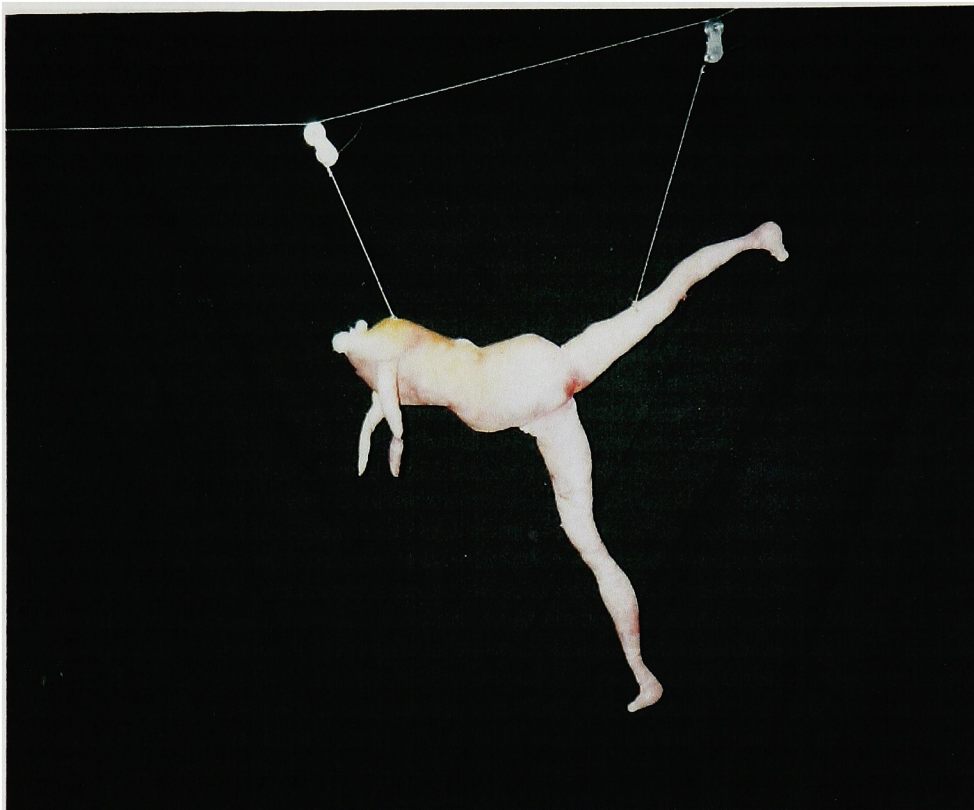
That's What Little Girls Are Made Of

Glass, Muslin, Resin, Plastic
36"x33"x33"



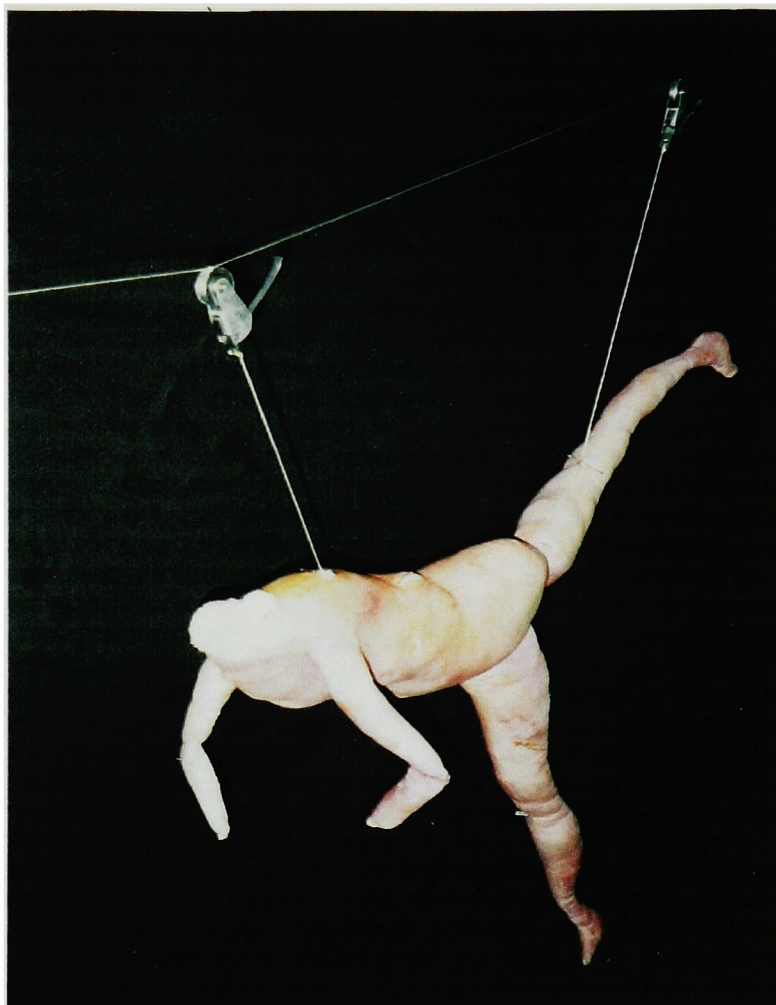
The Importance of a Balanced Diet

Dress patterns, resin, found objects, plastic
52"x28"x18"



Blind Autonomy

Muslin
28"x5"x18"



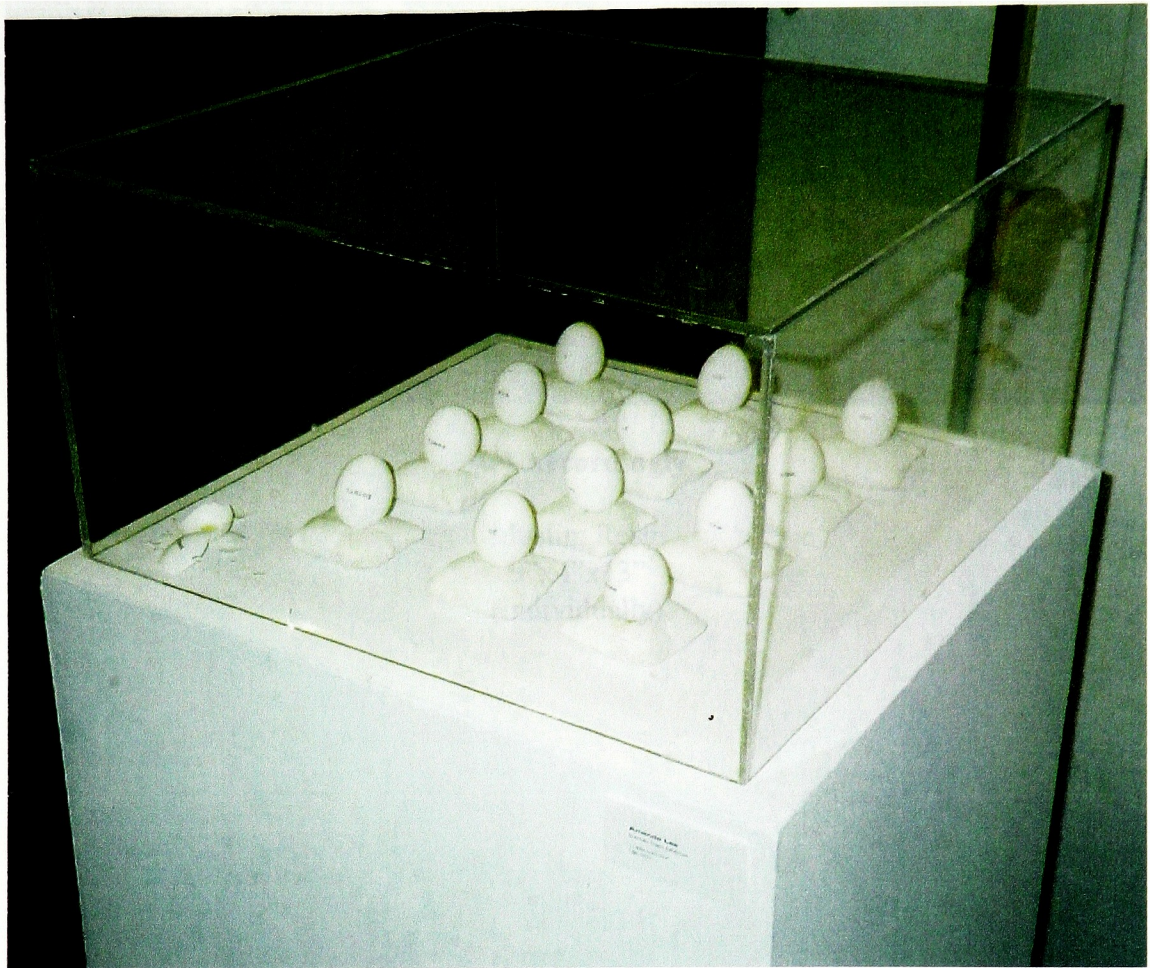
Blind Autonomy
(frontal view)

Muslin
28"x5"x18"



Adapts Nicely

Resin, acrylic, bible parchment, plastic, found objects
60"x18"x72"



12 Ways to Kill Time

Laser transfer onto eggs and fabric
12"x3"x12"



Act Accordingly

Muslin, Resin
9"x4"x13"
(individually)



Act Accordingly
(installed)

Muslin, Resin, Plastic
9"x4"x13"
(individually)



Miss Guided

Steel, Muslin, Plastic
46"x24"x34"



Capitol Loss

Steel, muslin, plastic
36"x12"x16"



Capitol Loss
(detail)

Steel, muslin, plastic
36"x12"x16"



Bedlamb

Dress patterns, vinyl, fabric, acrylic, found objects
49"x10"x26"



Just Like a Dog

Steel, Muslin, Plastic
38"x26"x20"