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Abstract

The objective of this thesis paper is to highlight my artistic process, current projects, and research strategies emerging from my studio practice. First, this thesis describes and elaborates my practice of “reconstruction,” the reasons I find it effective, and the personal history behind it. I also discuss the goals of my work and how I intend to carry it forward into the future. Throughout my work I seek to tell a story that resonates with my personal history, communicating to audiences both the vulnerabilities and transitions of life experience.

My work invites the viewer into a collective space where the larger narratives about our human experience are shared. I excavate story through parallel tracks of written and visual responses exposing the vulnerabilities of truth-telling. From the rending and fragmentation of surface contexts, I construct wholeness. The intersection of fracture and collision creates relevant moments of access for each viewer. The results provide a kaleidoscopic lens through which my own anecdotal and contemplative moments become a means for reconnecting the audience to their own stories and images.

THE ART OF RECONSTRUCTION

by

Kristina Starowitz

B.F.A., Syracuse University, 2003

B.A., Syracuse University, 2003

A.S., Onondaga Community College, 1998

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Studio Arts.

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The Art of Reconstruction

I work in the art of reconstruction. I define this as the practice of rebuilding stories and images from words, pictures, and ideas that I am drawn to as they resonate with my purpose and the trajectory of my own life story.

I've always been drawn to collage. When I was twelve, a friend made me feel deeply neglected, leaving me out of a group activity within our social circle. I searched through envelopes of 4x6 photos, cutting and tearing pictures of our circle of friends and us, turning it into a comic book narrative about a vampire named Andy who was a jerk that no one wanted to be around. A photo of Andy leaping off the top stair of our church's back sanctuary was a keystone in the narrative. I pasted bat wings on him, defining him — as I saw him — in that single comic frame. So at twelve, I had already begun experimenting with shifting the dynamics of a story through my art-making. The work was serious but also silly, reflecting my inner world. The comic artwork communicated truth through humor. I've found this equation applies to both work and life: humorous = true + surprising. Throughout my pieces, humor ebbs and flows as I continue to observe and develop my relationship to it.

In those moments that felt the worst to me, I sought to translate what I was feeling through curating the objects around me; I would select items that resonated with my emotional state at the time and would make something out of them. In doing so, I changed the narrative. In a world where my experience was often called into question by others — and eventually by me as well — this was something I could rely on: splicing together resonant moments to tell a new story.

The process began as a surreptitious activity. Repurposing elements of the world around me was not something I initially felt I had permission to do; I didn't understand the activity to be

art-making. I would either hide this work or resist the urge to create it in the first place. I did not understand this urge to edit existing images and artwork, nor my urge to change the context of images, until I allowed full engagement with this editing and extraction as a part of my artistic practice.

As I lean into this urge, I realize it's about reconstruction. It's about collage. It's about finding the places where there is an entry into a story and illuminating several doorways for the viewer. My impulse is to extract fractal components from stories, works of art, and bits of contemporary visual culture, separating them from their original surface contexts. I select images that draw a line through my own personal narratives and personal history stories. I bend back to the past and reach out to current "culture containers" such as magazines and my own images of events happening around me, in order to pull together a language that speaks to me and reflects my personal symbols. In reconstructing these resonant images, a new narrative space starts to form. The altered context becomes a lens through which I view the parts together as a newly constructed entity. It is here in this new space that I tell my story.

What previously felt to me like a weakness, lack of ability, or even a creative block, has actually emerged as one of my core creative strengths. This is my ability: to see and change the context of a thing by knowingly pulling it into my constructed narrative. This is my language: "trans-contextual thought." It is how I find story and how I process my reality. Carl Jung describes this hidden part of ourselves as our shadow self. Jungian analyst Robert A. Johnson says:

"...our own shadow, that dumping ground for all those characteristics of our personality that we disown. ...these disowned parts are extremely valuable and cannot be

disregarded. ...To honor and accept one's own shadow is a profound spiritual discipline. It is whole-making and thus holy and the most important experience of a lifetime."

(Johnson, 1991, pp. ix-x).

It is the things that are hidden in shadow that are our source of personal power. Those things that we separate and shame away — that nonetheless still exist there in the darkness — are the things that we need the most. In order to find wholeness in our fractured reality, we need to resolve these parts of ourselves in the light of day.

"The persona is what we would like to be and how we wish to be seen by the world.

...The ego is what we are and know about consciously. The shadow is that part of us we fail to see or know." (Johnson, 1991, p. 3).

Kept separate within the individual, these scattered elements of the self are the feckless and diffused portions of our identities. When these psychic fragments are resolved through a conscious process of unification and decompartmentalization, this is the space where each person takes hold of their unique power to re-story.

In my life experience, I've discovered that the partial story is boring. The untold story, where our roughest edges continue to be hidden or obscured, can never fully model or speak to the human experience. I want to know the whole of it—those parts that can only reveal themselves in pictures. I want to experience the part that is only exposed to the light of day in our most vulnerable moments. I want to center the real you and the real me. What else is there?

I recall being shamed at one point when — to initiate a visual dialogue with my own work — I chose to return to and sift through my sketchbook to glean fodder from my past images. I was told that going back to old things would not benefit me and that I should "make something new." However, I was not interested in starting from a white page in that moment.

This work of reconstruction is about finding the intersection of things in the past — convergences that offer the possibility of potential interactions together — and building up something novel. I have a stack of existing images filed in my mind, waiting for appropriate ‘other’ images to come along and overlay to create new intersections in each of the works.

My approach to objects and images of my own creation is much the same as my approach to the found objects of others. All preciousness of the original work is released while an investigation of its ability to intersect in new and different ways with other objects and images is undertaken. As work is created in my studio, I remain aware of its simultaneous individuality while it also remains as potential fodder as a future base or reactant for a combinative new work.

As I separate elements from their origins and reconstruct them into something else — using my specific language — the resulting work pulls those elements into a context different from what any of the parts meant before. I see it as adding to the cultural conversation, not at the expense or the destruction of what has come before, but rather, acknowledging what has come before as a necessary component or stepping stone to the current arrival of new work.

Psychological and Philosophical Influences: Methodology, Human Perception and Limitations of Words as Symbols

“In art you tell the truth. In art comes the truth, but it comes in a way that touches you immediately, not intellectually.” –Edith Kramer (Markarova, E. & E Kuchuk, E., 2011)

I resonate with art therapy pioneer, Edith Kramer's notion of "the truth" that comes to us in art and the search for truth that happens beyond or without words. The instantaneous connections that she refers to that can be made with art are the kind of truths I am looking for when I enter into my process of making. In her book, *Philosophical Sketches*, American philosopher Susan Langer states that "The primary function of art is to objectify experience so that we can contemplate and understand it" (Langer, 1962, p. 90). That being said, to *create an object* from a story that can then be objectified, contemplated and understood gets at the kind of truths that Edith Kramer speaks of. That is where my collage objects originate from and these are the kinds of truths they are facilitating into being.

My methodologies are largely based in Jungian Psychological theory. The process I use with my collage work most closely resembles Carl Jung's "Active Imagination," aptly described as allowing a dreaming state to occur in your unconscious mind, while your conscious mind is awake and aware, but actively "staying out of the way." I often talk about not letting decisions be judged, not second-guessing my choices, and allowing things to go together without critical questioning. The critical voice can re-enter when the process is complete in order to work with the story-object that has been created during the process.

This process is different from what one might refer to as daydreaming, which falls into the category of "passive fantasy", where one has been drifting along, and suddenly "snaps back into reality" and the contents of the daydream seem to evaporate. In Active Imagination, the connections made between concepts are just as powerful and comparable to connections that would be made in a dream. While dreams may not be remembered fully because they occur while the individual is sleeping, Active Imagination draws on these same powerful parts of the mind that make sense of our world while we are asleep, but in this case, while remaining in a

state of active participation. Because of its connections to dream theory, traditional dream interpretation could be employed as a starting point for understanding stories that come up through the Active Imagination. However, as one feels more confident in thinking about hidden meaning and the kinds of symbols that feel familiar to them, personal reflection, discussions with others, and general reading about the history of symbols are helpful to find resonant meaning for the Active Imagination stories. And then, of course, all of these methods of interpretation can be applied to a created story object that is created through this process.

Active Imagination happens at what Jung refers to as “The Imaginative level,” a third meeting place between both the conscious and unconscious minds, where a conversation can take place between the two. When it comes down to it, everything you make that comes from you, comes from your Active Imagination. How much you develop those stories has to do with the ways that you engage with those stories. The conversation can be verbal, but it does not have to be. I use my collage work as a storytelling device where I create an object that embodies a story while transcending the limitations of words as symbols.

The science of the human mind corroborates the importance of imagination being the glue that binds together our perceptions as a cohesive experience. Cognitive scientists Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner explain this as “bringing input from distinct sources together in a third space, a mental frame in which salient features from each interact to give rise to new structures and new ideas take flight. Imagination provides our entire existence” (Sousanis, 2015, p. 91).

How Our Minds Work to Collage Our Experiences

“‘To encounter’ the world outside of ourselves...our vision captures disconnected static snapshots, an incomplete picture riddled with gaps. It is the imagination, Etienne Pelaprat and Michael Cole assert, that fills in the gaps and links fragments to create stable and single images but make it possible for us to think and act. Image is an act of imagination. In which we are always engaged.” (Sousanis, 2015, p. 90)

Both the process of collaging and viewing a collage, mirror how we as human beings experience the world. The process of looking around at fragmented images and putting together a story is actually our biological make up. To create a synthesis from a fragmented whole is actually how our brains already work. So for a collage that is a story made up of fragments positioned together in a way to tell that story, our brains naturally look at all the images together and put together the story for us. Right away we get impressions of what’s happening in smaller relationships, as well as the overall overarching information about the entirety.

The expressiveness of mid-1900’s artist Alberto Giacometti as he was finding lines also mirror this visual effect where more than one line can represent the same part of an object because it is representative of how our eyes perceive the object. We don’t question it. There is a sense of truth in it. Not just that “the right line” is in there somewhere, but that it is the combination of lines existing together that speak to some truth of the human experience, speaking to our way of seeing.

Inkeri Sava and Kari Nuutinen’s performative exchange of words and images in active dialogue as described in their 2003 article *At the Meeting Place of Word and Picture: Between Art and Inquiry*, speaks to my goals of engagement when my work is encountered by the viewer. They describe the experience of the text and image together as challenging the viewer to give up older ways of reading and seeing, and instead, to “play back and forth across the different parts”

(Sava & Nuutinen, 2003, p. 517) In their experience, as is the case for me, “the...experience demands... an active participant in giving meanings for the questions he or she may raise” from the multi-layered intertextual performance observed between the components (Sava & Nuutinen, 2003, p. 517).

In my work I engage parallel tracks of conversation as I create a piece, one verbal, and one visual. They exist on their own free from each other, but are interrelated as they are both in the same time and place engaging with a story that I am processing. “texts and pictures can form an intertextual surface, an associative texture... [Images and text] form a mutual, living dialogue, a unified story or dialogical state” (Sava & Nuutinen, 2003, p. 532). Mirroring the desires of Sava and Nuutinen in their intertextual experiment, “I am interested in crossing borders or often of being on the borderline, in the space between” (Sava & Nuutinen, 2003, p. 520).

In the end, once I have an image and a journal of writing, sometimes a poem arises during the process; other times, I look at the writing, and based on what is there (and with knowledge of the visual) I will create a poem, haiku, inside out haiku or anecdote that gets at the truths I have become more aware of as they reveal themselves to me through the process of Active Imagination.

Collaged Images in Rhizomatic Relationship

When considering the theory behind my work, I lean into the discussion of graphic novels which examine the impact of combining images in composition as well as the stereoscopic effect of communicating through the combination of text and images. The visual presents itself as simultaneously relational in its entirety as opposed to the verbal where words are perceived and appear in a distinct linear sequence. As art historian Michael Baxandall

describes it, “While an image *is*, text is always *about*” (Baxandall, 1985, p. 1). In his 2015 book *Unflattening*, Nick Sousanis asserts that meaning in imagery is conveyed by the placement, structure and orientation of the components that make up the whole. In his discussion of graphic novels, he describes an inter-association of images through layering, overlapping, intersecting and bringing them into relationship with each other. These images together become a visual entity, a story perceived simultaneously. Meaning, like consciousness, emerges out of the interaction with all of the elements at once, as opposed to the sequential linear path that a worded description of the story would take. The entire story exists all-at-once and simultaneously, all of the parts of the image in rhizomatic relation to the whole.

Interrelationship of Text and Images

As is the case with our own bodily experience of stereoscopic vision, looking at a story simultaneously from two vantage points increases our perception of depth. In this same way, further meaning and understanding come from the combination of both visual and verbal thought processes together. My collaged images engage the right hemisphere of the brain with its continuous and simultaneous processing, which allow the images to themselves “*be*” the told story. At the same time, the left brain organizes all of my verbal and written thoughts into a linear sequence of comprehension.

There then takes place a kinetic interaction of the two ways of thinking. In his discussions on the function and possibilities of graphic novels, Nick Sousanis describes the ability of connections made in the right brain through visual thinking and visual perception as “connecting dots”, “traversing gaps between fragments”, and “stitching them together into a meaningful

whole” (Sousanis, 2015, p. 61). We move back and forth between two modes of perception in our minds, in the same way that our eyes capture two views of an object simultaneously.

Here again I can find a comparison not just to collage as a medium, but in the way Alberto Giacometti finds truth in his expressive line work by mirroring this same effect of simultaneous processing in drawing. This is how our eyes and mind collect information. I would argue that the cognitive approach all humans share for making sense of the world around us is similar to my own approach to collaging and making meaning out of what I see.

Artistic Influences

Artists that develop a visual story are my lineage. I come to where I am now through many years in dialogue with painterly story-tellers, assembling all component elements together in unexpected ways to illustrate or illuminate the messy truth of lived experiences. Stories about trauma, stories about genealogy, stories about the connected feminine, stories that just get at all the parts of the human experience. The common factor for my influences is their attention to the whole of human experience. They have a conscious relationship to the shadow-self in their work.

I am influenced by portrait and figurative artists like Lucian Freud, Alice Neil, John Singer Sargent and Odd Nerdrum derive story through the features and expressions of a person, thus giving a connective insight into the whole of human experience. I also feel a kinship to painters like Francis Bacon, Jerome Witkin and Eric Fischl who work through the messiness and vulnerability of the human experience in their situational figurative artworks. They cast their characters in an environment, sitting amidst their various truths and traumas. In the case of

Francis Bacon's use of space, the relationship that the shape of the environment has to the figure evokes a sense of the internal emotional struggles and turmoil that in waking life remain unseen.

Alberto Giacometti's charcoal drawings, like my own works in charcoal, feature expressive lines that search out the subject, allowing one's eyes to move between the subtle possibilities of bodily structure. The linear multiplicity mirrors the way our eyes naturally move back and forth between points when viewing life around us. It strikes an element of truth to our human biology because of the way it functions when we experience viewing the work.

Andrew Wyeth depicts *places* that tell a story. He carefully crafts images with details of varied intensities where some engage as active elements while others fade away. A picture of a place that holds so much of the experience of being human relates both to the space as a metaphor for the human condition, as well as speaking to the experience of being *in* a place and what it feels like to exist there. I can relate this to my own experience of being in the world, occupying different spaces, and my awareness of what it is to exist here as a human being.

Wyeth's work greatly influenced my 2018 Route 20 farmland collages. These visual stories were created using burst photography to derive the experience I have had since my childhood as I traversed the farmlands of Central New York on "America's longest highway" running from Massachusetts to Oregon. The method of image capture speaks to the way it feels to pass by at 55 miles per hour, where every bend in the road continuously reveals new spaces of rural contemplation. These collaged transfer images represent the subtleties of place and time that can be derived from a story whose truth is not in a replicable space's representation, but a collage of many brief encounters and experiences of contemplation as seen through the frame of a car window.

Photographer Elinor Carucci is an example of one of the most painterly photographers I

have ever encountered. The moments she has captured — through years of personal experience as a woman, a daughter, a wife, a mother — are archetypal. There is a sense of being in this present moment with her and her children while at the same time being every woman, every mother since the beginning of time. In her work one sees acknowledgement of the whole of being human, and that is what calls me in. These are the kinds of stories I dialogue with in my work.

I have long had the experience of being able to engage with any artist as well as any topic outside of the art world and come away with applications for my own artistic practice based on traversing the contexts and seeing pertinent metaphorical overlays. I look at the ways they are exploring and researching within their work, and when I ask myself what the equivalent aspects of my work are. I am able to derive considerations on how to push my work further within my own practice based on the practices and experiences of the other artists who influence me.

The Path of Reconstruction: Arriving at Synthesis

It took the process of assessing all of my work from the last decade in chronology in order to recognize that I have already been on this journey of reconstructed narrative for many years. The work could all be considered collage of one kind or another, reconstructions of images, both my own and from found sources. It became clear through researching and annotating the history of my artistic practice that this is my process. It is clear that this is what I do; and that my process has merit and connective history. Not only does all of my past work fall into the framework of reconstruction, but the future is ripe with possibilities as I move into this process with a heightened level of awareness.

The aspect of response itself is also an important consideration in what I create.

My work starts as a response to that which strikes a chord within me. I will often seek out ideas, objects, existing materials to respond to, and those become part of my work by the function of their eliciting a desire for response, connection and understanding. My response to finding a collage element that I resonate with is followed by my choice to allow the process of collection to take place. These are the essential micro-level decisions that constitute the actions necessary for the production of any new artwork I am creating.

There is a sense of connectivity in my way of working through the process of reconstruction. My active processing of the world produces a message that I want to share about what I am seeing through my lens. Through the work, I find myself being a part of everything. The method in which I become a part of that everything is by choosing what I will show through my eyes. It's about capturing the elusive messages of truth that lie between moments; molding them into the form that takes shape in my mind that places my imprint on the new story that emerges. The goal in reconstruction is to reach out and connect to everything that matters. The things that I connect with strongly are connected to my past, my present and what I perceive of the future. These are the visual and conceptual messages that I feel I can participate with and build upon a broader cultural conversation.

Positioning of the Work within Broader Cultural Conversations

Conceptually my work engages with the concepts of life and death, beginnings and endings, transitions and rite-of-passage moments. My current work is about what is happening now in my life. It speaks to the lived experience of being an artist and a wife, a mother, a daughter — especially one who has recently lost her mother— along with the specific struggle I face daily as a person with my particular sensitivities in the world. The conversation about what

this experience is like is both complicated and powerful, and I've only just joined the conversation.

In addition to my main themes, I see connections in my work to other larger cultural dialogues as well, including story-telling practices, art therapy processes, archiving of ideas in meaningful and revisitable ways, the archetypal human journey, emotional trauma, mental health, neurodiversity, and community building through story-telling. Staying connected to others in dialogue through the process of building my story is one of the most important parts of creating it. This keeps the trajectory of the work engaged with the world around it, to give audience to the importance of our inner-world. There is also a level of responsibility to move our ideas out into the world where they can benefit others.

The development of personal symbols is another way that my work connects: by relating to the archetypes and commonalities in the collective unconscious of human experience. These are the symbols that reference aspects of my inner world and thus continue to draw me and thus continue to appear in my work. If I look out at the world and see myself in something — as though a mirror is reflecting me back in this thing — then it is part of my story. Likewise, the mirror I create becomes one that others see themselves in, and by encountering my work they gain a deepened understanding of being human.

A Question of Scale: Large Format Collage Prints

How does my process translate when scaled up in this way? I have a history of working in a large scale. I feel that work when created at this size, feels experiential, as

though one is really forced to co-exist with this object in a shared space. The viewer still remains an observer, but the presence of the thing they are viewing is a significant portion of the environment. This contrasts with the potential for a smaller piece that can be looked past or ignored as one moves through a space due to its relative scale to the viewer.

I am always open to what scale can reveal and the way we look at something that takes up so much of our visual plane. With the collage work, scaling up to a large size might feel like a microscopic image projected onto the wall illuminating an entire unseen world inside this specimen object, a world that could be approached and considered in ways that perhaps would be missed at the smaller scale. While I enjoy the psychological impact of a large scale work, I am not tied to working at the larger sizes the way I was in the early years of my practice. I freely consider its role in my work.

When I increased the scale of the collages, I simultaneously edited the piece further and so presented not just a blown-up version of the image, but new iterations of the smaller works which have accounted for the increased size and what that experience will be like. Considerations about preserving the beauty of the ripped edges are made so that those small details become potentially more accessible through the increase in scale. In this iteration, the three larger works become objects of their own as I draw from the shapes and images in the piece to frame the work while maintaining the interest and movement in the shapes and edges. I realize that the process of increasing the scale — and the problems which presented themselves for resolution — were what opened up the opportunities to see new possibilities for how the work could be arranged. The change in scale created a need for editing, which created a new piece, which also has the potential to be reduced in size again.

A Question of Context: Murals and Community Engagement

What does it look like when the process of my inner work expands into community collaboration? When I bring my process to a community mural project, my focus is on finding stories within a community that I share visually within their space to further solidify identity and to strengthen their community through the experience of their stories. This engages scale both in the way of the physical size of the work, and also the breadth of community impact the work can have.

My murals operate as prompts for the sharing of important stories through imagery that can be accessed and contemplated by younger or ability-impaired members of the community. The images in the mural are not meant to portray a complete thought in themselves, but rather create a discussion space by referencing understood language either by direct reference to text displayed within the mural, or by indirectly referencing a story or a song that children know the words to. In the relationship between the text and the image is where the truth of the story happens. A discussion space is built around these elements where the reconstruction of the fractal portions occurs.

In the case of the Jowonio Preschool Murals, the most interesting parts of the story are the activities that occur between the children seeing the images that reference the song they know. Sometimes the teachers prompt with the name of the song, which is also the name of the mural, and then the children more often than not begin to sing together while they are walking down the hall. The singing (an example of play and expression of joy) is elicited by the relationship to the known words and the image in their space prompting the connection. Images of songs were chosen because during the observation and conversation period, it was overwhelmingly clear how important music

and song are to the children and the significant impact they have in enhancing and reinforcing childhood learning and development.

For the mural project at Dr. King Elementary School, there was a direct connection for text and image visible on the wall. On the seventy-five foot cafeteria wall, I carved out seven shapes from floor to ceiling where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Six Principles of Non-Violence" could live, in addition to a community garden in the center. The six principles were not directly written on the wall. Instead, each principle was represented by a focus word, a quote from Dr. King that exemplifies that principle and an image of children engaged in a related activity. The concept is to engage the space as a conversation to work backward to an understanding of the principle by understanding the relationship between the three elements of the mural. This promotes a dynamic interaction — for both children and adults alike — with the important content that can allow them to form the idea of the principle in their own minds, instead of simply teaching and reciting the learned words.

This project involved my working in a subject area in which I lacked expertise. I was aware of that ignorance and knew there were details that I would never see because I am not part of that specific community: I was an outsider due to geographic, racial, and socio-economic differences. This raised my awareness — of the need for articulation of this process and format — along with my goals for the engagement with the work. I don't consider myself the ultimate expert or the final word on the meaning of a thing. Instead, I create "situations of muse" within my work. I perceive doorways through which others may enter into my works of art and move through the process of collecting and collaging their own understanding. This was the first instance where I became actively aware of my inclination to create a discussion space related to my work. Since then, it has been a clear part of my process.

The purpose in the practice of creating a discussion space or a “situation of muse” is well described by Kostas Kiriakakis’ observation about the value of questions and answers in his graphic essay, *A Day at the Park*:

“Answers to the most worth asking questions, which ironically are not meant to be answered regardless of our great efforts to do so. Definitive answers to such questions would rob us of our freedom. Freedom of choosing what’s worthy and what’s not, acting on faith, changing your mind, and being responsible for all these choices.”

(Kiriakakis, 2015, p. 15)

When we use artwork for the purpose of creating these spaces to consider, we contribute to the cultural conversations through our work, as well as present a wider invitation to others to enter the space and contribute as well.

In both of these cases, there is a sense of connecting the points of data that reveal the truth and understanding of the story. The message of each image is communicated through a relationship between parts of the work instead of a direct recitation. Because of this, there is an opportunity for constant re-evaluation and repeated re-engagement with the artwork in the space as one’s understanding grows and changes over time.

Each project is borne out of a process of learning about the community and collaborating to understand how we will talk about what is most important to the community. The finished mural in the space is representative of the community in which it is housed. The community engagement projects designed around the murals functioned to give the students and staff a sense of ownership over the project and to feel both proud of and continuously engaged by the artwork in their space.

Medium and Materials

In the past I have used personal imagery, drawings and paintings in my combinative artworks. In my current body of work, I've chosen to use strictly found images, as an entry point for recognizing symbols that I am resonating with to use in my research. In my process, I maintain a dynamic relationship with my starting objects, by simultaneously recognizing, connecting and detaching. This can be more difficult to achieve with the preciousness of personal imagery which I have a previous relationship to. The more conscious connections I have to an image or object, the more that connection has potential to interrupt the unconscious processes I am engaged with in my work. I think of conscious connections as being more solid, more immobile than the loose connections made in the unconscious mind. The more conscious connections that are crossing over with each other in my work, the more they start to function as a net or a cage that by its nature, will prevent my access to the expansive ocean of my unconscious where the connections form much more loosely. At the same time, these familiar and comfortable elements have an important role in expressing my personal truths. I believe that personal imagery and family ephemera will make its way back into my process as I am able to actively assess its role in the structure of my work.

I am in the process of actively considering what it means for me to take bits and pieces of other visual conversations in order to gather them together in a new context within my work. I think of the venues I approach for content as "cultural containers." Art and design magazines, movie stills, instructional diagrams, and all printed images offer fodder for my collection of elements that might contribute to a story that I am waiting to tell. As I have worked into this current process, I have also started seeing digital images that I feel drawn to pulling into my work. However, I have not started printing images to use in my collages yet because in the past,

the process of including this kind of technology has broken the flow of ideas at this stage of my art-making. However, I continually consider new methods for reconstruction and new sources of images as they reveal themselves to me.

The Process of Reconstruction

In developing the process to create my recent magazine collages, I've made a number of discoveries about how I work best in this medium. I typically began with a variety of sizes and shapes, and while I'll avoid the Goldilocks and the three bears of it all, I'll say that the scale of images from standard magazines gave me the most flexibility when working on a 6" x 6" panel. I also felt that it was helpful to have a color to respond to on the surface of the panel before I started applying the images.

At this point, having selected my color and 6" x 6" panel, I am ready to start the collection process. I have a number of magazines that I move through either one at a time, or by flipping through multiples at once. Like moving through rooms in a museum, I peruse images at different speeds, and in different combinations. I make the connections that touch me immediately without having to pass through an intellectual process. This focus is informed by Carl Gustav Jung's theory and practice of Active Imagination.

As I am drawn to an image, I make the decision in that moment if I am ready to tear it into the shape it will exist in, or if I will say "pass" on deciding how to rip and tear a piece out and save the rest of that decision-making for later. This is the part of my process that I have set aside for non-linear thinking to reign. I take the whole image page and put it in the "short-list" pile until I am ready to decide what parts of it will be useful to my contextual shift of the group of images in its entirety. To draw the comparison to

my painter's pallet, I am getting out my colors and readying them for mixing. I already have some ideas about how I will use them, and I hold those notions in my internal ethosphere, suspended until later in the process when I will start mixing and applying them to my surface.

There is a difference in the deckle of a ripped edge based on how the paper is braced. Sometimes a wide tall rip is beautiful. Other moments feel right with tight little tears where my fingers find their way around the piece that will be applied to the collage image under reconstruction. Other moments to be added find their way with a clean razor-cut edge.

As I glue the images into the piece, I use repositionable glue so that future decisions can be made about placement during the session that will put pieces behind what is currently there. I can only make decisions based on what I see in front of me in each moment. With each piece applied, the collage changes and decisions are based on a new structure and new relationships that have been formed with each passing placement choice.

I move intuitively without being tied to the control of linear thought patterns that dominate the majority of the day. This is trust in the process, as in the process of life also. Everything relates to the next. This transference into the work accesses my unconscious in the same way as the moments where I turn a corner into daydream, a mind-wandering. This is moving with intention, but not linear thought. When a linear thought pattern emerges during this stage of the process, it has to be accepted and moved on from so that it will not mute the flow of the creative process. In this way it is very much like a meditation with a focused intention. Defusing linear thought is accomplished often by shifting over to the sketchbook for writing or diagramming a thought, so that I can move on from it but save it for later, as it is certainly tied to the piece in some way. This process also exemplifies how I collage or reconstruct my thoughts as they come forth in my mind. The order in which they emerge stops the processes from

progressing forward, so I extract them from their position in my thought flow and reapply them later where they are useful to the entirety of the work.

At some point during the making of the visual work, collected phrases from my sketchbook come together to form the essence of the text that will accompany the work as an additional context for the story it tells.

I move through the selection and placement of images within a piece, using the panel before me as a scale for reference purposes, but not allowing the square edge to dominate the conversation about the edge of the piece itself. Instead, a dynamic edge comes into being as the pieces are placed in response to the last relationships formed on the surface. When the piece feels complete, it can be set aside, ready to be scanned to a digital format and further considered as fodder for a new work, while it continues to remain and exist on its own as a part of the whole of the dialogue within the body of work.

I take note of some initial impressions of what I see in the piece and then come back to it later for a sort of dream analysis; sometimes I also relax into not thinking but feeling the relationships between the elements that are without words. Poetry comes to the forefront as an appropriate way to describe what I see in the work rather than try for a critical analysis of the relationships between the images. This is something I am exploring. I am actively deciding — on an ongoing basis — how much written information to give or withhold to be certain that the viewer has enough information to move in and engage with the work; but I also offer only so much, just to the point at which the viewer can experience seeing part of themselves in the work.

Exposed Scaffolding: Text Becomes Part of the Work

While the images also exist on their own in the current body of collage work, the more elusive truth of the story exists in the relationship between three key elements of each piece. Along with the visual imagery, the title acts as a focus word, while a brief and vivid haiku or anecdote also comes into relationship within this nexus of components. Each part exists as a separate doorway into the work, providing context to the whole, while inviting the viewer's own associations to entwine with the story in a variety of ways.

Since the start of the current body of work, the creation of the pieces has included a writing component that moves the considered story along and collects messages coming to mind that are better expressed as text. In the most recent works, I went in with the intention of also letting a haiku or brief anecdote arise from the process. The result is a glimpse of the scaffolding that goes into the image by relating it back to both the title and brief accompanying text. Because part of the process has always been writing, I was able to go back and revisit some of the earlier works and create haiku from the streams of writing that accompanied that particular piece. Both avenues are effective for relating text, however, the haiku created at the same time as the visual work feels more meaningful to me.

The way that the text is being incorporated is currently removed from, but in relationship to, the visual work. One of the ongoing considerations will be the ways that the text can be integrated with the visual elements of the work. I will be looking at examples of ways other artists have done this, and experiment with the next iteration of pieces I develop.

Another possibility in relating the text is that the words could create a constellation to multiple works and other words. The text can work either singularly in relationship or multiple word groupings to multiple images. Although the individual haiku and anecdote relates to the

personal history stories that I write down related to the one collage work, they could be either tangentially related to multiple pieces. The relationship to the text is new and I look forward to seeing how this component of the work develops.

Display Considerations

The arrangement of the body of work displayed accompanying this text is a long gallery wall where each piece has the space to be considered on its own. The way that this body of work is displayed will continue to change as the work develops and as more influences are joined with the work through my process.

One context by which I intend to experiment with the display of my work is that of the family gallery wall. It calls to the language of domestic connection, in which my current life is completely enmeshed. These walls are intriguing to me. They are walls filled with mementos, pictures, partial stories, old house numbers, zip codes and maps. They tell a story with their relationship and arrangement to other objects as well as by their mere presence there. They denote their importance to the family or a member of the family. I see that these walls are typically creating a conversation about how the family came together and what things are important to them now. I'm interested in thinking more about the elements of these displays and drawing a point-to-point comparison to how I might use this kind of display — to draw further meaning from the images that I would include — through collage-and-object pairing, use of words and phrases, perhaps numbers of some significance. I feel that it would follow the same emotional tone as my work by carrying emotional weight, but include a dose of lightness, humor and cheer, echoing my earliest explorations as a twelve-year-old creating the vampire Andy story.

This by its nature would make my “gallery wall” different from the typical domestic display, but it would elicit an association to all the points of meaning and intention behind the purposes that exist there for the sense of a domestic narrative. and so would be a meaningful context in which to experiment with the display of my work.

I see this exploration of display as having a direct contribution to the development of my work. This body of work will benefit from regular exhibition of the new iterations, so that the important questions about how they exist to be encountered by the viewer can be consistently addressed. I see these inquiries both directly and indirectly promoting the work’s progression and the measure of its relevance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my work invites the viewer into a collective space wherein the larger narratives about our human experience are shared. I excavate story through parallel tracks of written and visual responses exposing the vulnerabilities of truth-telling. From the rending and fragmentation of surface contexts, I construct wholeness. The intersection of fracture and collision creates relevant moments of access for each viewer. Ultimately, the results provide a kaleidoscopic lens through which my own anecdotal and contemplative moments become a means for reconnecting the audience to their own stories and images.

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Vita

NAME OF AUTHOR: Kristina Graber Starowitz

PLACE OF BIRTH: Syracuse, New York

DATE OF BIRTH: February 7, 1979

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

Syracuse University

Onondaga Community College

DEGREES AWARDED:

Masters of Fine Arts in Studio Arts, 2021, Syracuse University

Bachelors of Arts in Studio Arts, 2003, Syracuse University

Bachelors of Arts in Psychology, 2003, Syracuse University

Associates of Science in Mathematics and Science, 1998, Onondaga Community College

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Community Mural Project Management 2017-2019; Curatorial & Gallery Project Director for two art spaces from 2006-2013; Story Collector 2003-Current.