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# **Visual Negotiations of Revolt**

A Thesis Presented

by

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to

The Graduate School

In Partial Fulfillment of the

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for the Degree of

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In

**Studio Art**

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Abstract of Thesis  
**Visual Negotiations of Revolt**

by

**Julianne Gadoury**

**Master of Fine Arts**

in

**Studio Art**

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2010

This written portion of the MFA requirement will complement the exhibitions I've presented and concepts I have negotiated during my three years of study at Stony Brook University. The visual projects I will explore in this thesis include *Polar Bears in Space*, 2008; *Please Stand By*, 2009; *Stoned*, 2009, and *Stoned II* 2010. I will discuss the influences that have informed the work; personal and general reactions to the artworks once presented; and new theoretical concepts emerging from the artwork after presentation. I will detail and break down my process of creation and discuss my beliefs on art as a medium of translation. During my study at Stony Brook University, I completed a 15-credit certificate in Advanced Cultural Studies. In several of these Cultural Studies courses, I took the opportunity of writing about my work in the context of material studied in the term. I will detail the solidification of my ideas, and my goals for working with non-traditional educational opportunities within the arts at museums and community organizations. I am working towards creating an arts organization that involves community programming, and an artist in residence program.

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## Introduction

My three years of study in the Masters of Fine Arts program at Stony Brook University has been a period of solidification and refinement. I started the program with a deep commitment to an art practice that reflected on social and political events, but I was not able to effectively articulate the driving force behind that commitment, or to recognize connections between themes and events that I was drawn to explore. Each year in the program I refined my practice to be able to more quickly recognize and employ themes and imagery that to me are worth exploring more thoroughly. Fundamentally I am a mixed-media artist whose choice of media and inspirations are not predetermined by a category, but rather react and flow in conversation with what is most impressing upon my consciousness at any given time. I have always felt a deep necessity for making art, but was unsure about the role my artwork should take in expressing my reactions to political and social events. It was unclear if the work should be a tool to highlight my own views and opinions, or if it should creatively explain particular situations. Throughout my graduate study, I have come to recognize my artwork as the visual residue of both a meditative art practice, and raw emotion in reaction to the political act. Art is for me an inherent method of communication that allows me to visually construct an object or experience in order to better understand political happenings. This need for creation is fueled by my inner desire to react to these situations, and not simply forget that they are happening, or fail to place them into context within my own life and life in general.

I have titled my thesis, *Visual Negotiations of Revolt*, as a tribute to my studies at Stony Brook. My work is a pause, or agreement reached between many factors that are in

constant negotiation and conversation. My experiences, relationships, skills, hand, and materials inform the ideas I explore. There is constant fluctuation between which components inform each other, and which components take the forefront as the work develops. I am forced to embrace occurrences that develop within a work even if starts to diverge from my original conception of what the work should be. This lack of a predetermined outcome in my work is important for me to express, as there is often a misconception that artists who react to political or social happenings through their work are simply executing a statement. I do however see my work as a revolt, and recognizing the work as a revolt has helped me to better understand the course I am interested in taking, when approaching art making.

In the spring of 2009, I was lucky enough to participate in a seminar on Marcel Proust's novel, *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, taught by Julia Kristeva. Kristeva, who has had a long-time interest in etymology, discussed how revolt and revolution derive from the root word *volvere*: to spin or turn around a center. Although revolt does mean to turn back and away from something, the word revolution did not take up its current usage indicating a political overthrow until the French Revolution. Prior to 1789, the word revolution was used more commonly to indicate a full rotation or cycle such as when referring to a planetary orbit. A revolt or revolution is not initiated with the task of turning away from something in order to have nothing, such as with anarchy, but rather to turn away from something in order to keep moving around and moving forward. My choice to include the word revolt in the title of my thesis is an effort to describe my desire to visually investigate political and social occurrences that have impacted me so strongly that I feel I need to create work that acknowledges the occurrence, but also stems from the necessity to react against it. My work



is a revolt in order to address, turn away from, and move forward beyond the occurrence. Moving forward and completing this revolution is personal, and the artwork is not to be read as a prescription for how others should react to occurrences.

When asked what kind of work I do, I answer that I am a printmaker and installation artist. Many people use printmaking as a secondary medium that supports other artistic efforts, but my mind primarily develops imagery in terms of the printmaking process. I feel most comfortable working with printmaking, even if it is not always the prevalent element in my installations. I think what I enjoy most is knowing and feeling the materiality of a medium by pushing its properties. Pushing the chemical properties by breaking down and rubbing a paper- by applying glue, coffee, and water to really feel what can be accomplished. That is one of the reasons I'm so drawn to printmaking. There is so much room for expression in the multiple steps of any process, that I see them all as not a hindrance to getting out what my hand and mind want to achieve, but rather integral to that end. There is room for fluctuation and conversation between the starting point of an idea that my mind wants to pursue, and what can happen in conversation between my hand and the material. I might start developing an idea by drawing it out on the plate, but it is through the marks that my hand can achieve on the plate, and the process by which I choose, apply, and wipe the ink on the plate, and get to know the image through making decisions in wiping ink off plate, that the final image develops. I enjoy the ability to investigate an image through wiping the plate differently several times, and getting many proofs to later work with. I am drawn to printmaking because of this non-commitment, this recognition of conversation, an ability to develop, and not cling to a predetermined outcome. I recognize that I can't always predict the best result for an image when there is no way of knowing all of the expressions that will

come out of the ink, the wiping, and the paper choices if I allow them to speak. I also like the control available for achieving the clean image and expression available through a more controlled wipe.

This thesis will journey through my relationship with printmaking and installation art, and attempt to explain my involuntary inspirations from social and political events. I will end with a look at future projects I am working toward, and how they might be influenced by the refinements that I worked through during my past three years of study.

## **Why Create Art? Why Create Social Art?**

This section will be an attempt to further explore and argue for the necessity for creating Social Art. The question is asked, “Why make art as a reaction to social forces and happenings when it is not a popular contemporary subject matter?” I believe in order to understand the necessity for making and viewing Social Art, a perspective rooted in the postmodernism themes of deconstruction and post-structuralism, needs to be adopted. If this postmodern viewpoint were applied to social and political art, then one might see that the physical result of the work is actually a new facet in the conversation on the issue. Social Art cannot be confined to strict definitions of what it historically has been or what it should be now. We need to approach Social Art as an opportunity for new conversation. In my own practice, I try to capture and translate into art my reactions to social forces and happenings. Somewhere between the raw emotion of reacting to behaviors that effect humanity, and the meditative, repetitive, making of art, a work is produced that is a marriage of both these events.

First, I will look at my own involuntary connection with, and artistic inspiration from, social issues. Why make art that is driven by a concept when the artist risks simply illustrating that concept, and not creating a solely aesthetic experience?

Although there can be no definite formula applied to all artists who self-proclaim the production of Social Art, I would like to offer a subjective autobiographical suggestion based on Jean- Francois Lyotard’s notion of reaching the sublime through removal of the sensation of terror.

“Delight, or the negative pleasure arises from the removal of the threat of pain. Certain ‘objects’ and certain ‘sensations’ are pregnant with a threat to

our self-preservation, and Edmund Burke refers to that threat as terror: shadows, solitude, silence and the approach of death. Language or life will soon be extinguished. What is sublime is the feeling that something will happen, despite everything, within this threatening void, that something will take place, and will announce that everything is not over (Lyotard, 84).”

Possibly, this involuntary inspiration from social issues, stems from an obsession with terror, deprivation of human rights, and annihilation of existence. Perhaps my mind is so fixated on this terror of annihilation that even though the terror is not immediate to me, that terror is so gripping that I cannot help but see injustices and instances of possible terror in other social interactions.

As Lyotard suggests, the sublime is the acknowledgement that “something will take place” that will signify that there is no immediate annihilation. How can the socially driven artist reach the sublime, if they are fixating on a terror that is happening on a larger scale than just one’s own deprivation? It seems as if any protest would be rendered ineffective, as the object of the protest is so diverse that it can no longer be pinpointed to a specific root. There are infinite sources and connections to this object of protest and therefore the argument against deprivation and terror is diffused. Even though no assurance can be given from the untraceable infinite roots associated with a specific deprivation, I feel that by not acknowledging an injustice then there is no hope of even aspiring toward the sublime. You simply acknowledge that there is no solution, and become a bystander to further injustices. Even if Social Art cannot reach the sublime, and remove all threat of danger from the world, at least the artist recognizes that an effort against injustice is an acknowledgement that progress toward the sublime is better than becoming a bystander.

The social artist instead makes an effort through art to capture and translate reactions to social forces and happenings. It is important for the artist to approach this reaction by not

representing the actual injustice or its effects, but rather to look between these relational events, and attempt to illustrate the sensation of or reaction to the event. The in-between can always be divided, and therefore situations can always be rethought from a different perspective or attitude. The artist could try and capture the sensation of the event as the affected experiences it; the artist could attempt to record the sensation of his/her own immediate experience in relation to the event; the artist could capture the reverberation of those sensations and reactions to the event as it has come in contact with, and bounced off of the affected and larger society. This representation, or translation of sensation, is described by Gilles Deleuze about Francis Bacon's paintings:

“In the same manner, painting will establish a relationship between these forces and the visible scream (the mouth that screams). But the forces that produce the scream, that convulse the body until they emerge at the mouth as a scrubbed zone, must not be confused with the visible spectacle before which one screams, nor even with the perceptible and sensible objects whose action decomposes and recomposes our pain (Deleuze, 51).”

The above only describes the concept of the work of art and not yet the actual product that is a residue of both concept and production. These negotiations are what Deleuze describes as what the artist has to eliminate and process, as they are already present within the blank canvas (Deleuze, 81).

The actual production of the work of art is, of course very much dependent upon the skills of the artist. Marks and fields of color are subjective aesthetic negotiations. In my own practice, the physical making of the art is often repetitive and meditative, and requires a mastery of skill in order to control what is put onto the paper, but also in order to submerge oneself in the pure aesthetic judgments of producing work.

In one step of developing the work of art we have a social happening that invokes a deprivation or terror, and in another step we have a repetitive and meditative creation that is not only informed by logical reason, but aesthetic reason. The physical work of art is neither fully one side nor the other of development, but a space in-between. By Lyotard's definition of the sublime, the work of art would not reach the sublime even though it is a residue lying between a negative and positive sensation, because it does not offer the consolation that deprivation and annihilation will not occur. This forces us to see where elements of the sublime can come in contact to create a new sublime. This degree of the sublime would be in relationship to the artwork as a physical product, as opposed to the sublime in relation to the artwork's informing factors: the social occurrence, and the meditative art practice. The sublime reached in respect to the social injustice would be reassurance that annihilation would not occur, and the sublime reached in respect to aesthetic creation would be the assurance of control over medium, in order to achieve desired imagery. If one could enter the space of the artwork holding onto a weak and permeable thought of the sublime, then one would recognize the terror and pleasure associated with the development of a work not in order to reach a state of transcendence, but to reach a degree of sublime in knowing that something was achieved. There is a new creation or residue, and not a void. This artwork as residue would be as Deleuze suggests when, "movement of translation occurs between two spasms, between the two movements of a contraction on one place (Deleuze, 37)."

Lyotard describes how the demand for information has gained appeal through the advancement and ease of use of computers. One feels more engaged, and in power of information if they have the ability to control and access what information they see. This desire for power of information is winning the competition in the name of capitalism by

collecting more ‘players’ who feel as if they are involved in something. The arts find themselves in a difficult position if they are hurtling towards approaching life from a capitalistic and information hungry society. The arts might simply be regulated to an elitist activity, that presents no opportunity for advancement, or gains of informational capital. The arts have to fight to defend their worth when their worth seems only quantifiable in economic terms.

“The aim nowadays is not that sentimentality you still find in the slightest sketch by a Cezanne or a Degas, it is rather that the one who receives should not receive, it is that s/he does not let him/herself be put out, it is his/her self-constitution as active subject in relation to what is addressed to him/her: let him/her reconstitute himself immediately and identify himself or herself as someone who intervenes. What we live by and judge by is exactly this will to action. If a computer invites us to play or lets us play, the interest valorized it that the one receiving should manifest his or her capacity for the initiative, activity, etc. We are thus still derivatives from the Cartesian model of ‘mankind oneself master and possessor...’ It implies that retreat of the possibility by which alone we are fit to receive and, as a result, to modify and do, and perhaps even to enjoy (Lyotard, 117).”

We need to rethink the ability to create as a means of reaching a degree of the sublime: or annihilation of terror or deprivation. This sublime can be reached through art as a physical residue of both the sensation of terror and meditative aesthetic reasoning. We should create in order to reach the sublime, and not to gain more informational capital. It is not until we can understand creation as a tool toward reaching the sublime that we can stop the hurtling forward toward isolation and eventually annihilation. Quality of life can be enhanced if participation in life’s activities is felt necessary and the arts can be a space for that participation. If the community does not feel a part of the arts, and does not see the need for it, then they have no need for the artist. Most jobs in the arts are still located in the major

metropolitan areas, and this migration debases the importance of preserving local interests and heritage within the arts.

The stones or obstructions in a field are brushed aside, and continually made into the boundary of the land as we accept as package of life that is placed in front of us. Creation is a way out of packaged thought, a way out of the routine of being told how to enjoy, being told to ignore, being told to be passive.



## **Polar Bears and Bystanders**

Aside from singular disparate projects developed in the Fall of 2007, *Polar Bears in Space 2008*, was my first major cohesive project during my graduate study. I began working on the idea of incorporating polar bears in outer space in late December 2007. I wanted to start focusing more on social issues with which I had a personal connection, and felt strongly about. Constructing abstract relationships to political action was not satisfying to me knowing that most viewers hated hearing and seeing in another medium the dialogue and events of politics. Viewers deal with political debate every day on the radio, TV, and in conversation. Generally, many people feel helpless to affect political action in any way and have given up believing that any discussion on issues will produce a concrete result. They then become bystanders to the information they are presented, as they are not ignorant of situations or information, but choose not to take action. The Oxford English Dictionary defines bystander as: “One who is present without taking part in what is going on; a passive spectator (O.E.D.)”

It was during this time that I was researching different situations when a person could become a bystander, that I also found the definition of the sociological imagination developed by American sociologist C. Wright Mills. The concept of the sociological imagination is the need to think imaginatively beyond what individuals can empirically observe in order to grasp the social domain in all its dimensions. He describes the ability to connect impersonal and remote historical forces to the incidents in individual lives. The concept of the Sociological Imagination described exactly what I was trying to achieve through art.

*Polar Bears in Space 2008*, plays upon the stereotype of the polar bear as the mascot for global warming. I wanted to use the polar bear as a metaphor to discuss the lack of serious attention we give to global warming; pushing to the back of our minds many issues that affect us socially and on the global level. The idea that there is someone else in the world, an other, who holds the responsibility to address issues, is questioned throughout the work. Being a bystander to information can come in the form of watching a bully on the playground, and it can also come in the form of knowing that there are currently genocides taking place and not taking a stance against this atrocity. My own interest in this issue comes not only from my own reaction to the situations where I have personally been a bystander, but also in feeling helpless to have any affect on a situation.

There are many reasons why people choose not to participate in the events they are witness to. The phenomenon in psychology described as the bystander effect describes two reasons why people are more likely to not aid in situations: diffusion of responsibility and the need to behave in correct and socially acceptable ways. With wide social injustices there are many observers so there is not as much individual pressure to take action since the responsibility shared among all those who are witness. This diffusion of responsibility is a narrow-minded approach that forgets the power of community over the individual. One institution imposes regulations that create injustices for citizens at various social strata and they see no ability to question the authority of that institution. Sigmund Freud describes this community uprising as a signifier of civilization:

“Perhaps we may begin by explaining that the element of civilization enters on the scene with the first attempt to regulate these social relationships if the attempt were not made, the relationships would be subject to the arbitrary will of the individual: that is to say the physically stronger man would decide them in the sense of his own interests and instinctual impulses. Nothing would be changed in this if the stronger man should in turn meet someone

even stronger than he. Human life in common is only made possible when a majority comes together which is stronger than separate individuals and which remains united against all separate individuals. The power of this community is then set up as 'right' in opposition to the power of the individual, which is condemned as 'brute force'. This replacement of the power of the individual by the power of a community constitutes the decisive step of civilization (Freud, 42)."

Is it because of a need to behave in correct and socially acceptable ways that tells us that we should not challenge an institution? We are allowing the more powerful to act instinctually for their own aims, and use the middle and lower classes for pawns. When rights and opportunities are distributed proportionally to income and power, instead of fairly among all citizens, of course the individual with the most power/income will benefit. These basic human instinctual tendencies, one would think, would be checked and balanced for the greater good of the community and civilization, but we have yet to see the connection between governmental policies and our own lives.

More fundamental than these causes for inaction is the Freudian explanation of the aim of man to attain basic needs in order to achieve happiness:

"They strive for happiness; they want to become happy and to remain so. This endeavor has two sides, a positive and a negative aim. It aims, on the one hand, at an absence of pain and unpleasure, and, on the other, at the experiencing of strong feelings of pleasure. What we call happiness in the strictest sense comes from the (preferably sudden) satisfaction of needs (Freud, 23)."

Again, for most people the needs of others, and the afflictions that are imposed upon them by forces that they seem unable to contend with, are not of extreme precedent when others of the same social status are not contending with them. Their basic needs are met, and the necessity for change or improvement does not become apparent until it is translated concretely for them as a direct attack on the ability to gain those basic needs. This is another

example of when the concept of the sociological imagination could help. Citizens fail to see in advance how larger social forces can trickle down and affect everyone, including themselves. When the majority chooses inaction then the second factor behind the bystander effect takes place. When other observers fail to react, individuals often take this as a sign that action is not needed or appropriate. Thought is repressed and colonized by social standards.

“It was discovered that a person becomes neurotic because he cannot tolerate the amount of frustration which society imposes on him in the service of its cultural ideals, and it was inferred from this that the abolition or reduction of those demands would result in a return to possibilities of happiness (Freud, 34).”

The difference described here lies with the people who have the authority or believe they can affect policy, and those who are taught by translation from society and media not to think of the implications of social forces. They are taught not to question, and that it is socially unacceptable to keep mentioning to others at your same social level issues that you will never be able to effect.

Art can depict social critique and be used as a positive tool to make accessible, and make light of situations of misery. The idea that art can only be entertainment and an escapist tool disregards social art that has been created for hundreds of years. Contrary to the notion that people do not want yet again to hear political and social dialogue, political and socially conscious art is an intermediary vehicle where people can feel comfortable discussing and viewing the realities behind issues. This is one reason why political cartoons are so popular and can be enjoyed by even adolescents who most likely cannot fully grasp the joke the artist is trying to make.

When creating initial sketches for *Polar Bears in Space*, I was also researching the prints done in the early 1800s by Francisco Goya both for their aesthetics, and their social

and political commentary. Goya's *Disasters of War* series includes 85 etchings that depict the consequences of the war in Spain against Napoleon Bonaparte. Goya not only focused on the physical damages that war does to individuals and the nation, but also the psychological reasons behind going to war. Goya's Biographer interprets, "The sleep or dream of reason brings forth monsters running to the scene of the author asleep at his table, while creatures of the night scramble about his head." His "Intention is to rake the irrational, superstitious, the anti-human in social life but Goya himself talks of the monsters coming into his drawings as if he had no control over them (Gwyn, 121)." This depiction of social assumptions by the average citizen in Spain at the time of war is a great example of how art can effect the viewer, but the full translation of the image can only be fully realized by the combination of the artists intent, the outcome as visual object, and the past knowledge and experiences the audience brings when looking at the artwork.

The metaphor of the polar bear initially represented the action of ignoring information, and feeling helpless to it. While doing sketches and developing the piece, I was unable to divorce the associations of global warming with the polar bear, and therefore could no longer ignore the opinions and information surrounding this global issue as being an important source feeding my visual work. In this instance, I was able to react to the knowledge that the viewer would bring to the piece, but the piece was not initially constructed based on of the knowledge and preferences of the receiver. Good visual artwork can speak to multiple audiences, that can bring their own prior knowledge to the translation. If work is created for a specific audience, then the artist risks only communicating with like-minded individuals, and limits the potential for communication and dialogue.

"In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful. Not only is any reference to a certain public or

its representatives misleading, but even the concept of an “ideal” receiver is detrimental in the theoretical consideration of art, since all it posits is the existence and nature of man as such... Is a translation meant for readers who do not understand the original? This would seem to explain adequately the divergence of their standing in the realm of art. Moreover, it seems to be the only conceivable way for saying “ the same thing” repeatedly (Benjamin, 69).”

I was also considering what metaphor can be used that can be enjoyed by many different people at different age levels and different social strata. The assumptions and prior knowledge of the various viewers who I recognize as heterogeneous are considered, as that is one element that will make up the translation that they receive from the artwork. The interpretation of my ideas, reactions, and experiences through visual mediums I have to recognize as not the only force that will be telling the story to the viewer. An interpretation by a gallery assistant, a written artist statement, past experiences, and a viewer’s knowledge all make up the message that is created through the vehicle of the visual artwork. In this sense visual artwork is a mode for an infinite number of translations. It has been important for me to keep this in mind when creating work so as to not be overly ambiguous or overly didactic.

*Polar Bears in Space 2008*, was represented as two separate installations. The first installation included a life size wire polar bear, Styrofoam icebergs floating in a large fountain, Styrofoam iceberg forms on land, and prints depicting different scenes of polar bears in space. The wire used for the polar bear allowed the viewer to see the form, but not as concretely as if it were a solid bear. The viewer sees through the wire polar bear just as many times as we look past the issues that affect us.

This was my first major installation where I started to see printmaking as a large-scale, site specific, three-dimensional medium; a practice and approach that I would carry

with me throughout my graduate study and hopefully beyond. I was still committed to printmaking as a medium, and felt an affinity for the process and technique, but was breaking away from the print being the sole medium method of my artistic output. The prints explored for this work were placed on the top of three-dimensional Styrofoam icebergs, and covered in plexi glass. This removed the print off of the wall, but they were still enclosed within a 2-dimensional rectangle on top of a slanted pedestal. This was also the first time when I allowed myself the time and structure to focus on one theme of exploration within prints. I felt, and still often feel, that I had been making prints with varied subject matter but hadn't allowed myself to focus on one theme exclusively, in order to fully investigate visual options. I wanted to try different presentations of the polar bears, but also focus on challenging myself to create combinations of printing techniques that would be a result of experimentation and evaluation of the most successful attempts. I gave a greater power of interpretation of the final result over to the process making the print, instead of having the majority of the print being decided upon from conception of the idea. I was able to dedicate a lot of time to printing in the studio, by embracing experimentations and accepting challenges. This approach to imagery is one that I am continually longing for. Throughout graduate school I have felt that because I have had to divide my time between many different necessities, much of my work has been created and recreated within my imagination. When I reach the point of being able to physically work on artwork, it is generally the result of a long period of refinement in my imagination. When I start to create I do not have much leeway for experimentation and play because generally an installation date is looming. I am looking forward to residencies in the future where I will have no other commitments for even a short

period of time, so that I may feel comfortable with lots of experimentation and play within the work.

The second time that I was able to present *Polar Bears in Space* was during the first year group show at the Lawrence Alloway Memorial Gallery, *This is What We Came With...2008*. This installation occurred only one month after the original installation that was held in the Wang Center. I wanted to continue my focus on a singular theme by trying to present the work in an entirely new way in order to challenge myself to be creative and see the work differently. During this installation, the prints went back onto the wall, but I approached the wall as a giant piece of paper on which I could create a giant print. I still presented my original rectangular prints from the previous installation, but now created a large landscape including the darkness of outer space, and the jagged coolness of an iceberg. I started to use the process of printmaking as a medium instead of solely a final result. I created a large collograph plate using contact paper and various tapes that I was able to print multiple times in blue. The nature of collograph prints make them very difficult to edition, and for this installation it was working in my favor, because I was looking to achieve varying textures. I also created a swirling collograph plate made up of brushed acrylic medium. This plate was again printed many times in black so that once in the gallery, I could select which areas I would like to tear and collage onto the wall. The result of the installation was a collaged environment that was constructed entirely by printed textures, and four of the original rectangular prints.





Above: *Rejected*, 2008   Below: *Polar Bears in Space*, 2008



*Shut Up and Eat Your Cheeseburger, 2008*



*Negligence Killed the Polar Bear, 2008*



*Above: Polar Bears in Space (Installation Shot) April, 2008*

*Below: Polar Bears in Space (Installation Shot) April, 2008*



*Above: Polar Bears in Space (Installation Shot) April, 2008*

*Below: Polar Bears in Space (Installation Shot) May, 2008*

## **Please Stand By**

My second year show, *Please Stand By 2009*, was not one cohesive installation, but rather a grouping of smaller installations that had a common theme. This show came after a period of ten months where I did not show my work anywhere else in the University, so I ended up having a lot of work that needed curating. The result was a fully packed gallery. I have always had a tendency to put many different facets of a concept into my artwork, as well as lean toward a busy aesthetic. Although this might seem like a good trait, it often leads to cluttered pieces that are trying to say too much, and as a result, doesn't get the message across to the viewer. I had four or five different mini-installations that could have just as easily been individually used as the sole focus for a show, instead of packed into a 'group show' with other works. Since this show, I have continually tried to 'tame down' my work by letting individual ideas have a voice that is clearly presented, and thoroughly explored. My first reaction to the constant critique of over-packing my work was that I could make it work, because I had plenty of other ideas that I could express in other artworks. The critique was that I didn't have to put all of my ideas into every piece, but contrary, I felt what I was presenting were not all of my ideas. This is still a negotiation that I have with myself today. I tend to enjoy fantastical presentations that are packed with imagery and surprises for the viewer. I have to go against this aesthetic preference, and realize that when I choose fewer objects to place within a space, the message is often clearer, and allows individual elements in the room to breathe and interact with each other. Not including everything I want to express in a particular work does not mean that I am excluding things. It simply means that I

have to be selective as to the most effective presentation of what I want to communicate. I have to treat the idea as a body of work that can be explored through multiple pieces.

Regardless of the large amounts of work included in *Please Stand By*, I was very happy with the show, and felt it provided for some breakthroughs in personal recognition about my aesthetic. While installing this exhibition I had a sense of excitement that my fantasies were coming true. I thought about when I was in middle and high school, I realized that I could create whatever I wanted simply for enjoyment, and not necessarily to serve a purpose. One of my high school creations was a large, human-sized, paper maché, Dr. Seussian bird. It was created because I knew I would derive a huge amount of joy out of making the bird, and answering the challenges of materiality, space, and other variables that my bird would now encounter once he was out of my head and in the environment of my reality.

The paper maché bird has the most relevance to this exhibition, as there was also a wire bird included in *Please Stand By*. When making the wire bird I was enjoying the lines and forms of the wire that made up the bird, and watching the bird come to life and develop personality. I brought my bird into this world and now it exists with the possibility of making an impression on others- effecting their thoughts and senses. The function of the bird lies in the pleasure of its creation, and what it communicates to other viewers.



*Learning Early (Installation Shot) February, 2009*

In creating this exhibition I could sense and feel the impact, before the show was even open to the public that my creations would have upon the viewer. I could not define that impact, but I knew that there was something magical in the gift of space I was given inside the gallery. I thought back to my creations when I was younger, and realized that this was no longer my bedroom. A larger public would be coming to see this exhibition. A lot of the pieces looked almost haphazard, but were evident that they were made by hand, and that were of a primal and necessary nature to my being. I use the word primal because during installation of *Please Stand By*, I was worried about the raw quality of a few of the pieces,



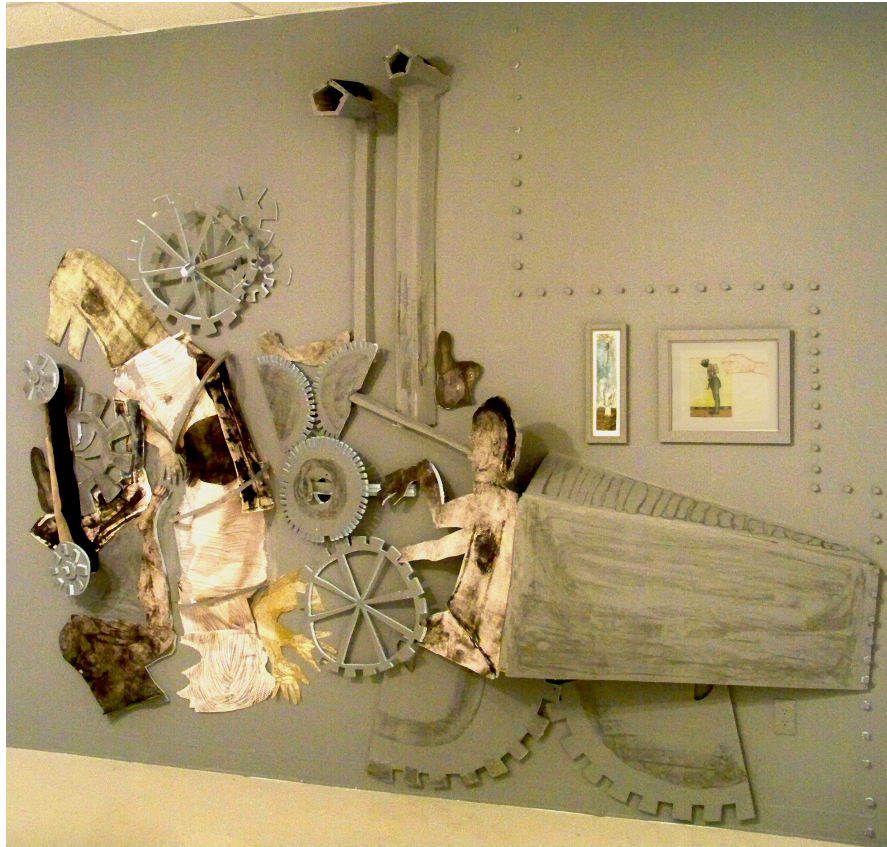
namely *Lemmings* and my installation, *Bodies and Machines*. I felt a pressure that all work to be displayed would have a clean polished aesthetic. This cleanness is entirely against my aesthetic and process as I consider myself what Susan Rothenberg would call, ‘a dirty brush painter.’ I was standing in the gallery a few hours before it was scheduled to open, and I finally realized that this ‘arts and crafts’ aesthetic that comes across in my work, was one that I appreciated in almost all of my art heroes. The artwork of James Castle has always inspired me as an example of work that someone created simply out of necessity to create. Castle, a deaf artist, had trouble communicating while growing up. His parents ran a post office out of their home, and Castle would gather extra junk mail flyers, string, packaging paper, and soot from the woodstove to create works of art. Often his works are representations of objects that he saw in his reality: a pitcher, a woodstove, a chair, and a shirt. If *Please Stand By* was over packed and expressed an ‘arts and crafts’ aesthetic, then I couldn’t be happier that at least it would be obvious that like a child, I felt it necessary to create the pieces without regard for a sophisticated polished outcome.

In the installation *Bodies and Machines*, which took up one wall of *Please Stand By*, I approached the wall in the similar style of my earlier installation, *Polar Bears in Space*. I painted the wall a uniform gray, and added Styrofoam cutouts and print textures to the wall in order to create a large environment. I also included rectangular two-dimensional prints that were integrated into the environment on the wall. During *Polar Bears in Space* I was critiqued for having the rectangular prints presented as ‘port holes’ or ‘windows’ within an environment, which didn’t read as fully integrated together. I felt it was necessary for me to hang on to this choice of presentation as an example of blurring of the boundaries between life and art. Even though the environment in both installations were made up of print textures

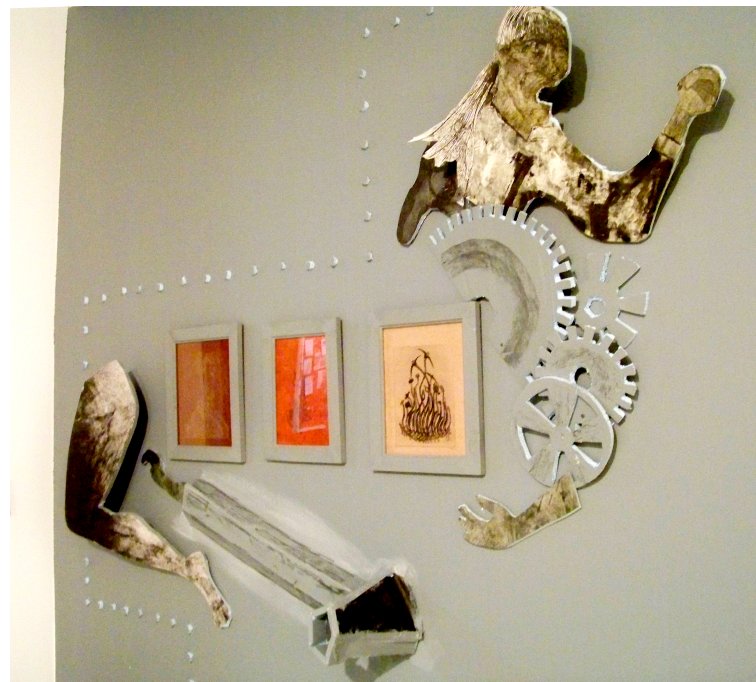
on the wall, I read those as a representation of what could be possible within reality, and the rectangular prints in frames as signifying 'art'. I continue in my current projects to try and attain a blurring of reality, fantasy, and art as a presentation of how I view the world.



*Bodies and Machines (Installation Shot) February, 2009*



Above: *Bodies and Machines (Installation Shot) February, 2009*



Below: *Bodies and Machines (Installation Shot) February, 2009*

There are still ideas that I began to explore visually in *Please Stand By* that I would like the opportunity to explore further in the future. One example is the large-scale woodcuts that I made for the installation, *Deadly Priorities*. For these woodcuts, I researched more extensively the woodcuts by the German Expressionists, and also the sketch-like quality of Leonard Baskin. When sketching out the basic forms for the figures, I tried to overemphasize the characteristics of the extremities and the face in order to lend as much emotion to the figures as possible. I carved out all the lines that were included in my initial sketches on the wood, instead of just carving a polished finished design. By approaching the carving loosely, it allowed me to enjoy the physical process more, as I wasn't concerned with making specific pre-determined lines easily visible. It also allowed me to be more creative in large areas of the figures that had little sketching or line work. I filled these areas with a buildup of color and decorative patterning. In *Deadly Priorities* I removed the figures off the wall, and created supports so that the prints could be free standing. After completion of the installation, I now think that I could fill an entire gallery with these figures, but perhaps keep them on the wall, or in low relief. The inspiration for *Deadly Priorities* came as a reaction to the food riots that were happening all around the world, but especially in Haiti during 2008. The prices of basic foods such as corn and rice rose to such a high price and demand that the people of Haiti were not able to afford the food. People were starving, and riots sprung up across the city of Port-au-Prince. Five people died in these riots. Meanwhile, in the United States, our subsidized crops of corn and rice are in constant surplus, and often go to waste. The crop that the United States desperately wants to nourish itself with is oil. Because of this thirst for oil and capital growth, we are blind to the possibility of redistributing our own

surpluses. In Haiti, the majority of people live on less than two dollars a day. *Deadly Priorities* is a demonstration of people trying to consume gasoline while there is rice and corn at their feet.



*Deadly Priorities (Installation Shot) February, 2009*



*Deadly Priorities (Installation Shot) February, 2009*



Above: *Deadly Priorities (Installation Detail) February, 2009*

Below: *Deadly Priorities (Installation Detail) February, 2009*

The most rewarding feedback that I have received from the show was the numerous responses that people were simply happy they had the opportunity to see the artwork. These responses came primarily from people who I had never met, and seemed genuinely happy that they had the experience of viewing art. At the core of my personal philosophy on art is the need for artwork to be accessible. Currently, there is a danger of disassociation in our culture between the enjoyment of viewing and producing craft, and viewing and appreciating artwork in a more formal setting such as a gallery or museum. I believe at the root of this disassociation, is a lack of exposure to the arts in formal settings in our everyday lives. When a government or culture does not realize the importance of assimilation to the arts we are raised as a culture that is naïve to expressions of critical and nontraditional thought. Spoken language is only one form of communication, and the arts open up doors to other forms of expression that might be able to more clearly express ideas and feelings to a vastly diverse population.

It seemed that by simply putting my ideas and artwork up in the gallery, a publicly accessible location, was the only thing I needed to do in order to bring my work to the public, and have them be affected by visual artwork. The overwhelming response that I received from students with various educational goals and backgrounds was that they were happy to have the opportunity to see the artwork; it would make me believe that it could be this easy anywhere. Alas, I understand that the variable that was making my show a success, in terms of large amounts of exposure, was that of the institution or University. Would those who have now had the positive experience of viewing my exhibition now feel more comfortable venturing into larger art galleries or museums? I can only hope that my work had this effect,



but what happens when the comforting variable of the institution is removed? The only way to establish a familiarity to the arts is to have it an integral part of our culture and education.

After installing *Please Stand By*, I was debating the idea of putting an artist's statement in the gallery. I wanted viewers to have their own experience of interpreting the artwork within the gallery, but also understood that some of the work had complex content that might benefit from being explained. Once I started writing a statement, the majority of the statement focused not on the artwork itself, but rather on how important I felt it was for the viewer to have an original experience by trying to look critically at the artwork, and deduce for themselves a meaning. Here is the letter that I started to write to the viewer, but decided to never actually put in the gallery:

If you are reading this statement before you have had the chance to view the exhibition (or photos of the exhibition), and personally digest its contents, then you will be missing out on the pleasure of critical thought. This pleasure seems increasingly rare, as there are many forms of media and entertainment available to us that can eliminate the effort involved in critical thought. These media outlets are happy to provide us with clear opinions on a variety of subjects that can appear to be well researched, or presented as fact. Often these opinions and facts are much easier to accept than to research the facts on our own; they can easily fit into our busy schedules.

I want to make clear that this statement was in no way intended as an explanation of the exhibition to the viewer. That would remove one of the greatest experiences one can get out of viewing art, and that is the formation of an individual interpretation and relationship. These reflections are that of the artist, and should be a reflection on myself as a person, and not on the artworks, even though the art is informed by my past experiences. The

interpretation by another viewer allows the artist to see their own art with a completely new set of eyes, as each interpretation is informed by different past experiences and opinions.

## **Stoned I, 2009 An Examination of Process**

For my third-year solo exhibition in the Lawrence Alloway Gallery I decided to experiment and see if I could allow myself to do one installation occupying the entire gallery. I will attempt to discuss the difference between the initial conceptions of the artwork; researching the initial informing ideas; physically creating the work; experiencing the work in the intended space; and reflecting upon the artwork once it is installed. In order to emphasize differentiation between these stages, I will refer to them as steps of the artistic process, but they are steps that happen almost congruently, while still developing individually. These steps are by no means a method or formula that can be followed in order to produce a work or art, nor are they distinct. They need a constant ebb and flow in order to receive stimuli from preceding steps and disseminate gathered knowledge across following stages.

The most repeated element in *Stoned I 2009*, is that of stones. There are three basic varieties and groupings: the prints on paper that represent stone walls, and continue around the three sides of the gallery; the paper maché sculptures resembling stones, yet are spontaneously dispersed in the air inside the gallery; and the real stones that lie in the middle of the gallery.



*Stoned I (Installation Shot) October, 2009*

Because I have re-presented stones in many forms inside the gallery, and brought in real stones, it is important to remember that stones and rocks are a product of nature. They do not exclusively serve humans, nor were they created with that intention. Stones exist outside of their relationship to humans, and therefore I will call stones an appropriated product. Stones have been appropriated from nature in order to serve humans to construct barriers, foundations and pathways. I have been interested in this appropriated product, the stone and stone wall itself, since my childhood growing up in rural New England. Most often when you set foot in any plot of woods in New England you are confronted with stone walls that have an indeterminable attribution of date and laborer who created them. When walking in the woods, I was reminded of the ghosts of the stone walls: the laborer, creator, or previous owner of the land on which I stood, as someone who toiled repetitively in order to create this boundary. This stone wall boundary that was once so necessary to a person in order to invest extensive labor, has now been left idle and restituted to the land as an element of the Earth. The rocks and stone walls are now self sufficient, but have returned to being a product of nature, and still bear the mark of being an appropriated product, as it remains in the woods in

the formation of the wall. I am interested in the spontaneity of the visual formation of the stone wall, and the amount of invested repetitive work involved in its creation by an ancestor who is both not so distant, but still beyond memory. The ‘research’ or the gathering of source material that I needed to inform this element of the installation was minimal, because I had been surrounded by stone walls, for the majority of my life, and had visually explored them as an image in work prior to graduate study.

I researched the many historical and literary examples of the usages of stones. The link throughout all of my gathered examples was that the weight of the stones was highlighted. The appeal of stones is largely due to the weight that is contained in small, easily accessible, natural packages; a weight that could be personally physically felt; and a weight that could be transferred to others. Literary examples include: David and Goliath; Jesus asking, “Who will cast the first stone?”; Ophelia weighing down her garments with stones; and examples of stones being associated with death: Medusa turning her onlookers to stone, turning stone cold, killing two birds with one stone, and of course the physical act of stoning someone to death (a punishment that has been practiced in many parts of the world, including New England during the Salem witch trials of 1692, and continues in extreme practices of Islam today). I recognized stones as having a dense amount of weight compared to their size; a projectile weight; a weight that has been associated with killing or death, but also an object that can provide for a respectable boundary or foundation.

Also included in the installation was the presence of body. During this installation I chose to interpret the body as abstract shapes molded out of fabric that lay among real stones in the middle of the gallery. These fabric shapes were a 3-D interpretation of a reduction woodcut print that I had completed earlier in 2006. In making that print, I was researching

images of trenches dug for mass graves after war, mainly in Europe. Dead bodies would be thrown into these trenches that formed a straight line, and were also stacked upon each other, much like how a stone wall is formed. In this print from 2006, I visually reduced each dead body to a line of color. The print was a line or boundary made up of abstract shapes and lines of color that were stacked upon each other. Three years later in 2009, I wanted to present again these abstract forms, except this time I wanted to bring the shapes into the three-dimensional space of the gallery. I wanted to extend my interpretation of a two-dimensional print by bringing the shapes and lines of color back to life, back to a three-dimensional form on which their conception was originally based.



*Stoned I (Installation Detail) October, 2009*



*Observations 2006*

The only new research that had been completed for *Stoned I 2009*, was that of looking into the historical, literary, and utilitarian usage of real rocks. The rest of the information was simply a new presentation of ideas and forms that had been presented in the past. Yet all of this information, research and visual, started to congeal and stew inside my consciousness – the elements started to negotiate. The time I spent consciously and unconsciously thinking about the elements of *Stoned* cannot be quantified, because each element does not exist in a sterile world without other variables. I had undoubtedly been thinking of stone walls as both a widely appropriated product, and as a product that I myself could appropriate for new presentation, as both print and sculpture. It is hard to date and catalog when a thought concerning each element in the exhibition began to take precedence over others. It is hard to catalog the influences specific to the many different environments in which I operate as a human being. I continuously carry with me the ideas of the stone wall, repetitive labor, visual formations, historical activity, stones as object, weight, projectile weight, oppression, control,

death, mass graves, lifeless bodies, abstracted shapes, and themes explored in prior artwork. These ideas do not sit dormant or idle waiting for the time when I recall them into use to focus on them intently in regards to creating a piece of artwork. Rather they are consciously and subconsciously carried with me, reacting to, and receiving stimuli from multiple environments that weather, shape, and mould them.

Why am I carrying around these myriad ideas and information both consciously and unconsciously? What is the objective in allowing these thoughts to occupy a prominent space in my consciousness? What is the difference between gathering research in order to immediately create an artwork in reaction, and the process of translating research and reactions into a new presentation of ideas? The answer is fairly simple. I do not have a choice in what themes and events in the world strike me so severely that they leave an impression on my consciousness. My brain tries to process these impressions, and usually produces visual symbols and responses with which I associate the themes and sources from which the original impression was made. This processing act of theme or idea into a visual symbol happens naturally and fluidly as opposed to processing according to a series of prescriptive steps. The desired result is not conscious as stated earlier. A finished idea for an artwork does not just appear, but rather goes through a period of fermentation and reaction within the mind, and through immersion in different environments. Therefore, in reacting to themes and events that occur in the world, the initial intention is never to produce an artwork in reaction. The artwork would not be its own occurrence- a conversation between elements to form an original presentation or experience- instead it would simply be a representation of a separate occurrence. By allowing the mind to react naturally to stimuli; recognize prevailing factors that make an impression; fluidly accepting visual associations; and allowing for fermentation



and reaction of ideas in different environments; I was able to approach making the work for the installation as an original presentation of forms and dialogue. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty clarifies:

“What he, the artist expresses cannot, therefore, be the translation of a clearly defined thought, since such clear thoughts are those that have already been said within ourselves or by others. "Conception" cannot precede "execution." Before expression, there is nothing but a vague fever, and only the work itself, completed and understood, will prove that there was something rather than nothing to be found there. Because he has returned to the source of silent and solitary experience on which culture and the exchange of ideas have been built in order to take cognizance of it, the artist launches his work just as a man once launched the first word, not knowing whether it will be anything more than a shout, whether it can detach itself from the flow of individual life in which it was born and give the independent existence of an identifiable meaning to the future of that same individual life...(Merleau-Ponty, 3).”

At this stage, I am filtering unnecessary factors from within my imagination in order to produce the clearest visual representation of my ideas. The resulting elements are then organized, and reorganized imaginatively within the gallery in order to gain the most effective composition, and tension for translation of essential themes. This amount of time cannot be quantified either due to the ebb and flow of ideas and variables that affect my interpretation of the elements, and their essential themes. This process of refinement will continue throughout the process of making the artwork until final installation in the gallery is completed; reacting to factors such as availability of materials, changing stimuli upon the artist from different environments, and time.

In the physical creation of artwork I am limited to factors of the body, acquired skills, and available material. I can only express the skills and traits that I have accumulated through experience within a given craft. I am limited and defined by the type of mark my hand and eye enjoy, and are able to make. I am creating not just as an execution of a desired result, but

the artwork serves as negotiation and relationship between subject and capabilities within physical creation. My prior experience and education with various materials inform this negotiation and communication between the mark that my hand makes, and the mark that my mind and eye find appealing to the subject matter. Allowing myself to be positively challenged by skill, mark, and aesthetics removes myself from simply executing an idea of experience visually, representation of a theme, or visual reaction. The physicality of making a work should be just as important a negotiation, as the challenge of depicting an idea. If the artist did not enjoy making work, then they would simply be using artwork as a tool for effective communication, when generally written and spoken language is the most effective way for dissemination of ideas. By making creation an action that produces its own sensations and dialogue, the artist can then claim to present an original idea in a visual language, instead of simply illustrating an existing idea.

In creating the stone wall plates for the prints, I was conscious my act of mark or trait making as a repetitive process, that allowed me to build my own stone walls. At times when the detailing of each individual stone did feel laborious, I tried to analogize each detail and mark as important in adding to the whole. Distinctions were not at first visible, much as human beings are individualistic regardless if they blend in as a mass of laborers building the stone walls. The individual details blend together much as the viewers who would eventually see the artwork, or dead bodies piled into a mass grave. The tiny details of attention that I felt necessary to include spoke back to the infinite experiences and factors that shape our lives, and who we are as humans.

I decided on creating the paper maché rocks as a tool to fill the space in a way that would force the viewer to negotiate their way inside the gallery, in order to view the other

elements more clearly. I wanted the stones to be an obstruction within the viewer's space, so they would possibly feel like a stone could hit them. Although these were obviously light in weight and made of paper, what would it be like to have to navigate a field of projectile stones?

There were many questions that arose out of the placement of objects in the gallery. I was happy to have this visual vocabulary speak together, and create a new dialogue where questions arose. Upon entering the gallery, many people referred to the fabric forms as pillows, but were confused as to why I would surround these soft inviting objects with rocks? If we were to acknowledge that these abstract forms or pillows were body parts, whose body parts was I trying to represent? Is it more difficult to find out what body part or organ belongs to a person, than an exterior object or extension like a pair of shoes? We don't have the familiarity of each knowing our own limbs and organs as we don't usually see them inside of our bodies, yet we know they exist. If someone were to hold my heart or lung out in front of me and state that it was my organ, would I be able to recognize it?

While *Stoned* was installed, I had the pleasure of observing viewers enter the gallery, and view the work without knowing that I was the artist. In watching the majority of viewers who had no prior knowledge of the show's theme or even existence, it was disappointing to see it be much easier for them not to think of associations outside the gallery or picture plane, and to simply get wrapped up in the mark or trait of each element in the gallery. In watching people scan and traverse the gallery, I could hear the remarks of getting lost in the detail or the beauty of each mark. Are viewers predominately thinking of each mark, or are they trying to absorb the subject matter of the stone wall, and take in the feeling not only of stone walls, but also of their personal associations with stone walls? What do stacked stones mean? The

weight of each individual rock placed upon its foundation, which is also another rock. Where do these walls exist? Do they exist simply in colored paper forming lines upon the horizon of white gallery walls? Have they been plucked from an imaginary landscape that is tethered to a physical location in one's mind? What is at the forefront of consciousness when viewing the work? Are these thoughts oscillating between the appreciation of the trait or mark, and their possible meanings?

I am still somewhat convinced that many people do not know how to enter a space and legitimize its elements for themselves. They are more easily accustomed to a narrative knowledge in which as they look, the story will unfold before them without having to perform any work in their minds. Does the viewer go through each possible variable of information in order to fully take in the elements presented to them in a work of art? Will they dissect the elements in order to gain a new truth, which is their own personal experience of being in a space and time, surrounded by the installation? I sometimes fear that the drive forward is too great in life that there isn't time for thorough contemplation. Contemplation could produce a new personal joy or experience, completely assembled by elements that another person has put in front of you as an expression of their experience. I am offering you the translation of my experience, through my hand, upon these walls, and in this space, and now am giving you this offering to create something for yourself. I found it important and compelling enough to take the time to use my accumulated skills of craft in order to translate to you my experience.

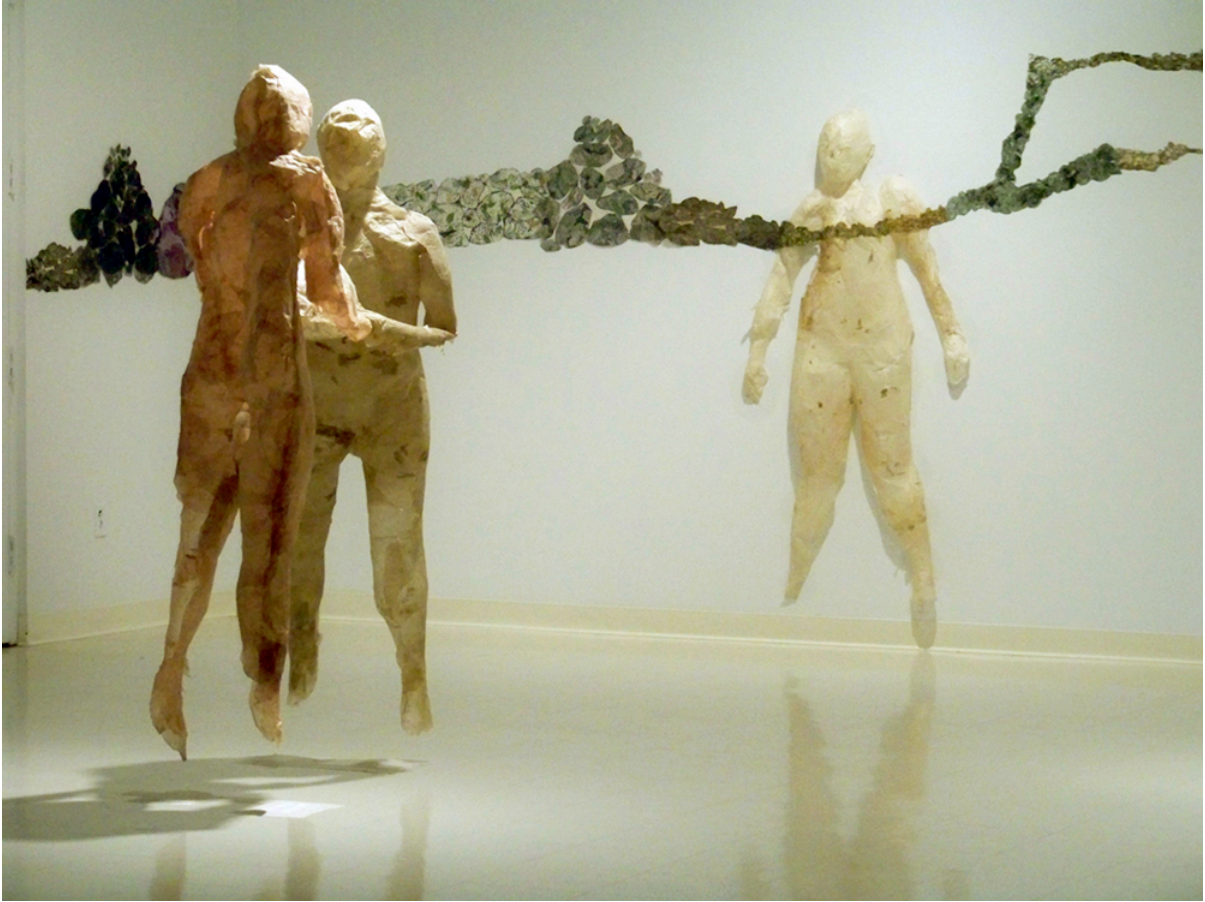
## **Reworking *Stoned***

Many viewers reported that the first installation of *Stoned I* was darker and spoke about death and destruction, while in the second presentation, viewers felt more of a back and forth conversation between destruction and rejuvenation. For *Stoned II*, I cast my body in plaster, and from this plaster cast, pulled paper casts. The result was a return to the figure, no longer abstracted and dismembered. When making the casts, I focused on the materiality of the paper playing with levels of transparency and completeness. The figures ranged from being intact, and fully in the round, to purposefully decomposed scraps and strips of tissue. This return to the complete figure helped the viewer to more easily take in and relate to the subject matter. When arranging the casts on the ground, from the most fully intact figure slowly working toward the most disintegrated figure, many viewers read this trench or line of figures in both directions. They read the body disintegrating into the ground as a natural process that was complimented, and reinforced by the natural elements of stones throughout the rest of the piece. Still, others read the line of figures in the other direction, giving hope towards a renewal of life.



*Above: Stoned II (Installation Shot) February, 2010*

*Below: Stoned II (Installation Detail) February, 2010*



Above: *Stoned II (Installation Detail) February, 2010*

Below: *Stoned II (Installation Detail) February, 2010*

In *Stoned II*, I included a DV video using appropriated footage from artist and colleague, Veronica Peña. Peña's performance work included covering her entire body with pieces of tape and lying down in meditation by the bank of a river. I combined the footage of Peña applying and stripping tape to her body with layers of stones and paper that eventually congealed into one mass. Peña begins the video as a living human who continually covers her flesh in tape. The tape creates a full body mask that puts the artist in a space between life and death. The artist is still walking and moving while wearing this mask, which allows the viewer to see that the paper body casts on the floor of the gallery once too inhabited by a human. They are no longer simply suggestions of a figure, but residues of a life that once was. In the video, footage of snow flurries by the ocean resemble bits of paper or tape flying throughout the sky. Layering in the video continually explores the relationship between all objects that fluctuate between static and living: the figure, paper, stone, water and landscape. The video changed the installation from being a static imaginative representation of ideas through paper and print, to being a conversation between art and life.



## **Future Projects**

My long-term goal is to start an arts organization in New Hampshire that will have community programming as well as an international artist in residence program. I believe in the importance of arts integration in everyday life. I believe organizations in rural settings could help their communities by employing local artisans as teachers for workshops, and by encouraging community members at all age levels to participate in different forms of creation. The inclusion of a community artist-in-residence program that would bring international artists to New Hampshire to create awareness, and a dialogue about contemporary art within the community, would be a significant achievement. Currently, the trend continues that the best and most plentiful opportunities within the arts are located in urban areas. An arts organization in a rural environment would highlight regional cultural history, as well as provide a form of education that would reinforce community participation and interaction.

Currently, I am applying to participate in artist residencies around the country in order to develop my own artistic practice, but also to learn how different organizations are structured. I believe that if I am able to work with and learn from many different non-profit organizations, it will enable me develop a model for my own organization based upon the most appealing and successful models.

Ideally, this arts organization that I develop, will be a long-term commitment that I will be able to develop throughout the rest of my life. I believe that by creating this organization, it will give me the opportunity to continue a life-long commitment to the arts, as well as to help others have the opportunity of participation in the arts.

The choice to work toward a lifestyle that will center around artistic production and programming for a community is a revolt against the idea that a successful life includes the attainment of a high paying 40-hr a week job. I am working toward a life where I can spend the maximum amount of time involved with the arts.

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