

# **Stony Brook University**



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# **Looking Inward**

A Thesis presented by

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to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Fine Arts**

in

**Studio Art**

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Abstract of the Thesis

**Looking Inward**

by

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in

**Studio Art**

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**2009**

This thesis will thoroughly examine my projects during my study in the MFA program at Stony Brook University. I will talk about the historical events and the people that influenced me, and how they inspired my work to grow. I will also discuss my motivation and my process of making art, as well as the connections between my projects. My later work begins from my memories and my surroundings; the work itself becomes a sort of self-examination. I approach the work conceptually in order to open up the process to greater possibilities. I enjoy researching the history of specific locations and keeping track of the slight, inevitable changes that would alter the appearance of a place.

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## I. Introduction



**Figure 1: A Polaroid picture of an ordinary chair in front of my house**

At dawn, I was on my way home. After drinking, I had a burning pain in my stomach so I rushed home to rest. In front of my house, I saw a chair and it attracted me. It was an ordinary chair that someone just happened to put there. When I first saw it, I had a very strange feeling that I still cannot explain. I took some Polaroid pictures in order to capture the moment. I hurried because the sunrise changed the color of the scenery quickly. I finally stopped taking pictures after the sun light had changed the look of everything. Then I went home and took a nap. After I woke up, I could not remember the strong feeling I had experienced. What kind of feeling had I felt? Was it a little shock about an object which was located in an improper place? I cannot explain it although I have felt similarly quite often. Whenever I face this kind



of feeling, I try to capture the moment by taking pictures or drawing. I show the images to people, but they always fail to show exactly what I felt. That is why I am making art. I keep trying to find a way to make things clear through art.

I approach the work conceptually in order to open the process to greater possibilities. Before I left my home country, South Korea, my work often started from the environment and history of specific spaces: my neighborhood, the area near my school, the island of my grandmother's home and so on. My work tended to be more concerned with socio-political issues. I enjoyed researching the history of specific locations and keeping track of the slight, inevitable changes that would alter the appearance of a place. However, I found that after moving to the United States, almost all of my ideas came from within and from my memories. Being a foreigner in an unfamiliar place turned my thoughts and work inwards. The work itself became a sort of self-examination; yet, my projects still display an interest in *the idea of place*.

Initially, the conceptual background of my art came from my personal experience in a small island, Bogildo, located in South Korea. While Bogildo was being modernized, I thought about the relationship between nature, art and devastating human activities. I made every effort to save Bogildo from destruction in the name of progress and modernization, and was away from school for a whole year. This time and experience was pivotal to developing the process of recording and reporting as a tool for my work. However, while I was working on a project based on my research on Bogildo, I felt distressed about my position as a human

being in Nature. Originally I separated human activity from nature in my work, but then I noticed that creating this binary opposition appeared didactic.

Gradually, my work evolved toward recording and reporting the destructive effects of human activity on nature, influenced largely by historical events in my country. In 1980's South Korea, the Minjung Art (People's Art) movement was started to combat the coercion of the military junta. Many artists followed the movement's tenets and produced works which included political slogans. Although their initial intention was good, over time, the movement became authoritarian. That is why I took a neutral attitude when dealing with socio-political issues, objects, and places. I did not present my opinion but rather provided my research, in the hope that audiences would think for themselves.

During the three years in the MFA program at Stony Brook University, I tried to refocus my work by observing myself more than my surroundings. In *Remembrance of Things Past*, for example, I kept a photographic record of all the subway stations I passed through during my first year in New York City. I would take a picture of a subway entrance lamp, record the name of the station, and leave. No longer merely a means for transportation, the vast network of train lines became a way of organizing my memories. In this way, my works became more personal and intimate, but the contents included a diverse range of emotions familiar to anyone involved in diverse relationships and situations.

Sometimes, I am more fascinated by artists' lives than their works. I think their lives cannot be separated from their works. In the second chapter, I will talk

about the artists who influenced my work and life, from Sophie Calle and Janine Antoni to George Tooker. By researching the artists and their works, I learned a better way to communicate with others, ways to think about the relationships between myself and others and express my ideas through drawing.

This thesis will closely examine my past projects during my study in the MFA program at Stony Brook University. During my first solo show, *Free-contact*, I found the connection between spectators and my installation very interesting. The responses of the viewers to the mode of contact that I suggested were diverse: some were excited to play through my work, others got scared and hesitated, and some seemed to be moved silently. Such interaction with viewers is pivotal for my projects. In my second solo show, *Beings*, viewers were also a part of the piece. After completing the large installation exhibition, I continued with new work based on the same idea and created an animation. For the *Compass of Desire*, the viewers' interaction was necessary. Later, I will describe why the interaction with viewers is important to my work.

The rest of this thesis is organized as follows: In chapter two, I will discuss my influences from the three artists mentioned above and from my dreams. I will go on to examine my work in chapters three to five. My works are conceptual and each has its own style and concept. Despite that, I think that there are some common characteristics which link my works. I will examine this continuum in the last chapter. I will also delineate a contemplation of my future and general thoughts

about being an artist in the contemporary art world. I would like to thank my parents, my teachers, and the academy of Stony Brook University.

## II. Influences

## **Influential artists: Janine Antoni, Sophie Call, and George Tooker**

We will look at images in an effort to see where the invisible becomes visible; we will give attention to our physical presence; we will use our bodies as a vehicle to travel inward; we will see if our touch can be held in an object; we will ask ourselves why we are here in an effort to uncover our intentions for the conference.<sup>1</sup>

I enjoy researching artists' lives because the background knowledge helps me understand more about their works. For me, their lives cannot be separated from their works. I got very interested in Sophie Calle (France, b. 1953) when I heard a story related to her bed and a man. Calle received a letter from an unknown man who admired her work in 1999. In the letter, the man described the break-up with his girlfriend and asked for her consolation by letting him stay in her bed. As a response, Calle packed her bed and sent it to him, asking him to document how he healed and send the bed back after he is released from the pain of his break-up. The communication between Calle and this man was so interesting that she was able to make a piece of art based on this story, in the form of a book she later published. Had she ignored him, like most people would have done, there would be no story. Her positive attitude in life allowed her to make art naturally. Sophie Calle is a writer, photographer, installation artist, and conceptual artist. I read her four books: *Take Care of Yourself*, *Double Game*, *Exquisite Pain*, and *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*. She often presents her photographs along with her writings.

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<sup>1</sup> When the Object Looks Back, Janine Antoni,  
<http://www.artdes.monash.edu.au/outofbounds/abstract.html>

Although she mostly uses photography as a documentation tool, the pictures she took have a strong feeling of existence. When her pictures are juxtaposed with her writing, they reinforce each other. I was inspired by her positive approach to life and art and her way of forming art.

Janine Antoni (Bahamas, b.1964) is another artist who influenced me with her work and life. The process of making art is extremely important for her work. Her works usually involve the performance in the process of the exhibition. In one of her famous projects, *Slumber* (1994), for example, Antoni slept in the gallery during the exhibition. Every night, while she slept, her brainwave signals (REM patterns) were recorded. The next day, she used the recording as a pattern to weave a part of the blanket under which she slept every night. In another project, *Moor*, she collected materials from her friends and relatives and built a large-scale rope:

I asked my friends to give me materials to put into the rope. A lot of people gave me materials from friends who had passed away. Giving them to me to put into the rope is like giving them another life, another form. I wonder whether the viewer can uncover these stories through their experience of the object, whether these stories are somehow held in the material.<sup>2</sup>

In the process of making the rope, she decided to walk on the rope because balance was a key component of *Moor*. By learning to twist the materials together so that they formed a rope that was neither too loose nor too tight, Antoni created

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<sup>2</sup>Janine Antoni, <http://www.pbs.org/art21/slideshow/?slide=107&artindex=44>

an enduring life-line that united a disparate group of people into a unified whole.<sup>3</sup> She trained herself to balance on a tightrope. After months of training, she installed the rope on the beach in front of her grand parents' home and recorded herself walking on it. In the video *Touch*, Antoni appears to perform the impossible act of walking on the horizon, because the rope was matched to the horizon line as seen from the camera. In my work, titled *Compass of Desire*, I collected pieces of fabrics from my family and friends to create the base of a large-scale compass. By quilting the pieces together, I united memories of the people who donated the fabrics. After I researched Antoni's work, I found similarities between my motivation and the process of making the compass and Antoni's way of approaching her projects, *Moor* and *Touch*; the similarities ranged from the way she collected the material from her surroundings to the effort for finding a *place of contemplation* and the failure.

I call the piece "Touch" because it is about that moment or that desire to walk on the horizon, which is obviously an impossibility and only an illusion that can be accomplished through the video camera. And you can see I'm hardly balancing there in that place of my desire. Thinking about what the horizon means to us, it's sort of a place of contemplation... But for me, I'm interested in it as a place that doesn't really exist. That if we were to try to go to that place, the horizon would just recede further."<sup>4</sup>

After she created *Touch*, Antoni decided to make an art work about "falling". From making a rope to walking on the rope and falling from the rope, the process appeared as a very smooth transition, seamlessly connecting her projects with each other. I appreciated this smooth connection, because it allowed the pieces to

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<sup>3</sup> Biography of Janine Antoni, <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/antoni/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> Art:21, Interview with Janine Antoni, 2003, <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/antoni/clip1.html>



complement and enhance each other, and her artistic identity to be stronger through her work.

Although I can easily relate to conceptual artists, like the ones mentioned above, I can find in myself strong influences by artists of widely varying media. Even though I do not paint with oil on the canvas, I respect painters who explore their thoughts on the two dimensional surface. I choose media depending on my concept; if painting is the best way to manifest the concept, I will use it. George Tooker (US. b. 1920) is one of the painters who have influenced me. I discovered the similarities between his thought and mine a short while after my first solo exhibition, *Free-contact*. I was introduced to his drawings when I had a critique with one of the faculty members, Professor Martin Levine. Some critics have described his style as "magic realism," but he was not interested in the illusionary effects that many of the painters of that style espouse. He has regarded himself as more of a reporter or observer of society than an interpreter.<sup>5</sup> His paintings are realistic; despite occasional use of strong colors, they mostly involve grey, pastel tones. I was especially deeply impressed by two of his lithographs: *Embrace* and *Voice*. The subjects of both works are pairs of people.

I was struck by the similarities between Tooker's *Embrace* and the dream that led me to create *Free-contact*, as well as between *Voice* and the form I had chosen for my installation. The similarities, including walls that separate people, longing, hugging, and listening seem to aspire to common feelings between people.

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<sup>5</sup> George Tooker Biography Gallery in leninimports.com

In *Embrace*, I could directly connect its background to my dream placed in the demilitarized zone (DMZ) in Korea. The DMZ resembles a nature preserve, completely forbidden to the people, which seemed similar for me to the bare mountainous landscape in the background of *Embrace*. That dream led me to create *Free-contact*, as I will discuss in a later chapter. The drawing *Voice* is separated in half by a wall, with a man on each of its sides. The man on the left leans on the wall, trying to listen to the other's "voice". The man on the right side of the wall is talking with his mouth open. The eyes of both men are big and filled with sorrow.

After that, I acquainted myself more thoroughly with Tooker's work, and visited his exhibition at the National Academy Museum in Manhattan which I found rich and delicate. Compared with his drawings, my installation *Free-contact* was more physical and complicated. The installation required an extreme amount of labor; I had to sew the sleeves and other shapes in the fabric wall, as well as construct a long and complex frame. By presenting the project as an installation, I encouraged invaluable physical interaction between audience members that is not attainable through drawing. Still, I appreciated Tooker's drawings which provided a direct rendering of his idea.

## **How my dreams affect my work**

Dreams are one of the most important sources of my art work. They affect my work to the point that I cannot separate them from my projects. I like to stay in bed even if I am not sleeping. Just staying in bed half asleep gives me an opportunity to distance myself from all the worries of everyday life and allows me to concentrate and draw blueprints of my work in my mind. It somehow releases my creativity. When I had a dream about the wall in the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) after watching a documentary on Korean television, I imagined a soft orange wall dividing space, representing the DMZ wall. It was a special wall that allowed pairs of people to interact with each other through the wall. After I dreamt about hugging another person through the wall, I tried to find more social gestures that two people can engage in to display love such as shaking or holding hands. But thinking about the interaction by itself is not enough. I wanted to create some physical evidence to make the dream real for others. I could explain the difference between dreaming and making art in this way: drawing in my mind is as same as drawing on the surface of the water, but making art is as same as carving on stone. So while I lay in bed, I am waiting to become ready to incarnate and present my idea with images collected in this semi-lucid state. The process of creating blueprints in bed is similar to the same process in awake life; the only difference is, in dream there is nothing tangible. The time I spend in my bed thinking about a concept is the happiest time of the day. It is time for looking inward, driven by my curiosity.

The installation *Beings* is one of the projects I created influenced by a recurring dream. That dream was so beautiful that it haunted me for months. Every night, the dream placed me in a huge space, in front of a gigantic blue trampoline. Black “beings” were playing on it. Like most dreams, it was strange but beautiful and poetic. After repeating the image in my mind for a while, I started conceptualizing the visuals into a more concrete form. As I thought more about it and refined it, I interpreted and combined it with my experiences. It gained personal meaning; it was not a dream anymore, but a personal piece of work.

Maybe all my dreams are strongly related to my memories. Maybe they are just a way to look into my memory through a distorting lens. I do not know the mechanisms that give rise to dreams, but I want to retain the mystery as it is now. I am not interested in washing the dreams out and making them clear.

### III. Free Contact

I recall watching a documentary on TV about families forced to live apart after the Korean War. Fifty years after the painful separation, the North Korean and South Korean governments staged an event where the families were reunited. After the brief reunion, they were separated once again. I was shocked when I was watching the old members of the separated families crying and touching the bus windows. Their ages reflected the length of their suffering. They could not touch each other anymore but they tried to hold each others' warmth matching their hands on the window. The scene was embedded in my mind; I still cannot forget it.

After I watched the TV special, I had a dream about it. In my dream, I was walking along the wall at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in Korea. It was a foggy dawn and I was alone. The wall seemed soft and flexible, made out of a thin orange material that resembled silicone. Because it was so soft, if I pushed it, it stretched and deformed. In my dream, I saw that somebody on the other side pushed his hand toward me. I couldn't see the person, but the hand was clearly cast on the surface of the wall. I looked at it for a while and put my hand onto the wall again, where the other person's hand was. Soon, we felt disarmed and hugged each other, having the wall wrapped between us. Although I do not have any family in North Korea, I felt like I met my family.

This dream led me to think about invisible walls in the world. There are still too many walls in our lives. There are people who cannot visit their relatives and friends freely between India and Pakistan, between the United States and Mexico, between Israel and Palestine, etc. The idea of building walls is so abstract that it is

difficult to understand and accept it. *Free-contact* is a way of imagining how people who are unable to be physically together with their loved ones can still long for them.

In *Free-contact*, I separated the gallery space in two halves by building a soft orange fabric wall. The gallery had two entrances, which provide access to each of two halves of the room. Viewers entered one of the two halves and interacted with each other through the fabric wall. The wall panels were formed in a way that coaxed certain gestures/interaction between the two sides.



**Figure 2: *Free-contact* - the two entrances of the gallery**   **Figure 3: *Free-contact*, Installation view**

The two walls opposite to each side of the fabric wall had five drawings each. Each drawing was circular, one inch in diameter, and placed in front of an LED light, inside a black box. Each box was closed, with a small hole in the front, where a magnifying glass was mounted. The viewers could look at the drawings through the magnifying glass. The drawings displayed pairs of people hugging, shaking hands,

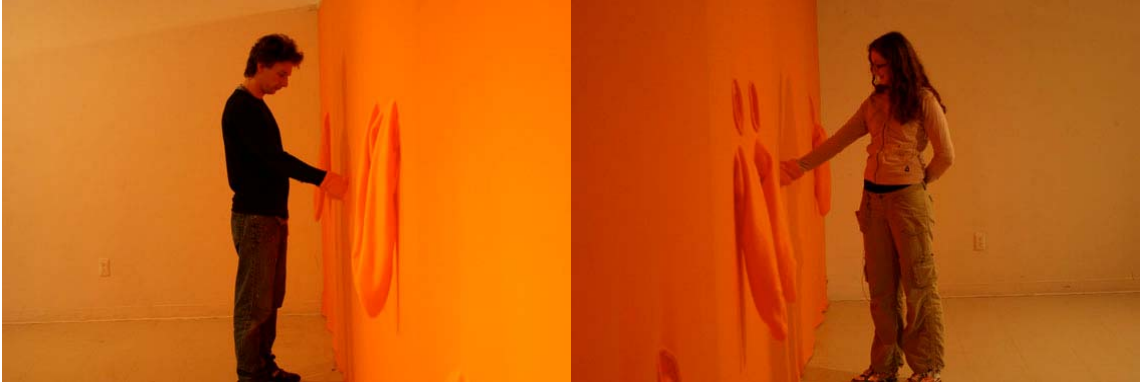
holding hands, one person sitting on the other's lap, or holding one's arm around the other's waist, informing the viewers how to interact with the wall.



Figure 4: *Free-contact, Drawings* (Installation detail)

In contemporary society, keeping the personal distance is very important. I have found that Americans are very uncomfortable with physical contact and touching. In Canada, touching children's heads is prohibited for school teachers. The media regularly broadcasts news about diseases related to physical contact. No one is allowed to touch another's body freely. However, all these facts made the tactile element in *Free-contact* more interesting. The first impression of most spectators was that of being hesitant to touch the art work or interact with the strangers on the other side through it. But the sound of giggling and laughing of viewers reassured them and guided them to interact with each other. It was amazing to see people disarming themselves, even though they were not able to see each other. I call it "anonymous affection" which we need in such an individualist and lonely society.





**Figure 5: *Free-contact*, Installation view (left side of the wall)**

**Figure 6: *Free-contact*, Installation view (right side of the wall)**

The reactions of the audience to the installation were varied. The gallery was located in the University, so the visitors included a number of students. Usually, they were afraid to touch the art work or hesitant to interact with people. If they had a group of friends with them, though, they tended to use the installation for playing. I had to ask them to be gentle with the work because the fabric was delicately sewn and it could be torn. Some others seemed to be more emotionally touched. One of the students who visited the show was unexpectedly moved by the piece and said that she will tell her mom who is in the hospital about how the experience affected her. Such interaction and feedback from the audience is important for my projects. I enjoy how viewers interpret my work in their own way. On the other hand, it seemed that the physical interaction blurred out my initial concept, which was to suggest to the viewers to think about the invisible walls in the world. The occasional misbehavior of the visitors made me think about displaying my writings in the next exhibition. The reason I did not display my writing was to

avoid being didactic; it could however help the audience get the idea suggested through the project.

Color was one of the crucial elements in this project. Color has a lot to do with the type of interaction encouraged by the piece. The size of the fabric wall, as well as the lack of other distinctive colors in the room, makes the color of the fabric a dominant element. It dominates the image of the piece, even reflecting on the white gallery walls, ceiling and floor. This way, it significantly affects the viewers' behavior. I chose orange because it is not only vibrant, cheerful and encourages lively interaction, but it is also neutral and created a dream-like environment. On the other hand, it was probably an important factor in some people's overly energetic behavior. To generate less playful behavior, a more somber color would be helpful. For example, burnt umber could provoke a more subdued response.



**Figure 7: *Free-handshake*, Detail**



**Figure 8: *Free-handshake*, Installation view**

The soft fleece fabric was the ideal material for the *Free-contact* project. One year before this exhibition, I had shown a smaller-scale version of this idea at the College Art Association (CAA) exhibition at the Hunter College gallery in New York City. The piece, titled *Free-handshake*, invited viewers to share a handshake, forming the negative space of the gesture with dark orange resin, attached to a wooden frame (see Figure 7 and Figure 8). The concept was the same as in *Free-contact* but the material was significantly different. I chose the resin initially, because it appeared as a dark-orange thin and flexible wall, similar to my dream. Although I tasted the fun aspect of interactive art through *Free-handshake*, the resin resembled human flesh in appearance and texture and made most people feel strange. Applying this experience to *Free-contact*, I switched the main material from resin to warm and soft fleece fabric. As a result, the pleasant snuggling feeling from the fabric allowed the visitors to stay longer in the gallery.

The exhibition was successful and I received a lot of valuable feedback. I would like to exhibit this project in a historic place such as the DMZ in Korea as a public art work and I am planning to pursue this. I hope this piece can be a part of a movement for peace.

#### IV. Beings



**Figure 9: *Beings*, Installation view**

*Beings* is the most poetic and dream-like project in the body of work I produced while at Stony Brook University. It is a big kinetic sculpture made with mixed media. The idea of *Beings* is based on a recurring dream. In my dream, there were several black “beings” playing on a gigantic blue trampoline. That scene persisted in my mind, until I decided to reproduce it in my work. As a result, I created a trampoline and the black smooth irregular shapes for my solo exhibition.

The trampoline had six legs, casted with plaster and concrete from my own leg and placed on the floor upside down so that the feet were at the top. The metal tubular frame of the trampoline, shaped as an irregular hexagon, was supported by

these feet. In the case of a real trampoline, feet play on the trampoline instead of supporting it. “Beings” can be interpreted as individual souls, but I felt they were connected to me, as if they were different versions of my own self, and I wanted to express it by using replicas of my own legs to support the whole structure. Springs were used to attach the trampoline surface, made as an irregular hexagon, cut out from a 15ft sq. piece of canvas and painted in a bright shade of blue, to the frame, completing the structure of the trampoline.



**Figure 10:** *Beings*, Installation detail

I tried to create a complex and visually appealing motion resembling what I witnessed in my dream. Reproducing the motion, however, I faced a variety of

technical challenges. Each “being” consisted internally of several compartments, each of which inflated and deflated independently using compressed nitrogen. The inflation and deflation was controlled by a microcontroller, allowing for programmable and controlled motion patterns. A tank provided enough compressed nitrogen for the mechanism to work continuously for several hours. The result was a set of velvet black “beings” in perpetual slow motion and deformation, which seemed random but was centrally controlled.

I kept the gallery dark and silent during the exhibition. The slow and subtle motions of the “beings” and the sounds from the mechanism helped to draw the viewers’ attention to the movement. When a valve opened, letting nitrogen flow, it created a sound resembling human breathing, which made it feel alive and which added a feeling of life. Strengthening this impression, the valves opened and closed in sync, producing a steady sound very similar to a beating heart. When I decided to use the air tank and the electric valves, I expected to have some sounds produced by the mechanism, and it was a fortunate event that the sounds fit the project so well and became an important aspect of *Beings*.

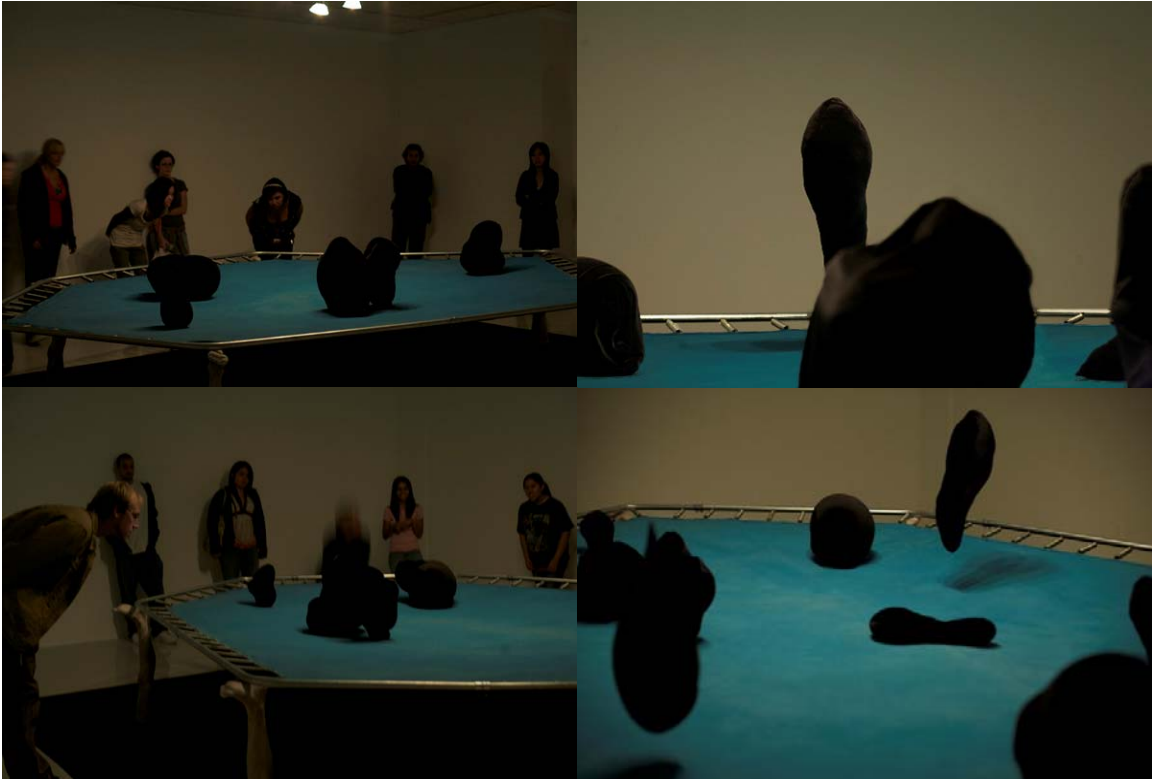


Figure 11: *Beings*, Installation view and details

Although I was satisfied with the result of the exhibition and the positive feedback I have received, I knew that the motion of the “beings” had technical limitations and would not be able to be as freely as in my dream. This fact led me to study how to create an animation to gain more freedom in reproducing my dream. Working in animation seemed perfect for meliorating *Beings*. The animation version of *Beings* starts with a girl sleeping on her bed. The camera zooms into her eyes and it shows a tear drop resting between her eye and nose. The tear drop slowly starts to move and gets darker. It runs down her face, and when it eventually drops from her face, the camera zooms out, and the scene is gradually replaced by a view of the trampoline, as the teardrop changes into one of the “beings”. There are



more black “beings” jumping and deforming on the trampoline. The trampoline lies in a large space, and a few observers surround it. The camera zooms in to one of the observers, a girl (the same girl from the beginning). When she blinks, the scene dissolves into the first scene of the sleeping girl, and the animation continues in a perpetual loop. Since there was no dialogue, music was a very important element for determining the mood of the piece. I collaborated with a musician, Phil Salathe, who created a beautiful soundtrack for the animation. The sound was slow and minimal but moody and sentimental. The animation came out one minute and thirty seconds long. It was very short but it clearly explained to the audience where the idea of *Beings* came from and what I wanted to show through this project. The feedback from the animation was significantly different from the installation piece.

I noticed that the animation makes it much more straightforward to define the mood and transfer an experience to the audience; I would not be able to get that from, for example, a verbal description. On the other hand, the installation was not so straight-forward, leaving more freedom for interpretation. The same idea took two very different faces in the two projects. I think that it is the beauty of art that the same idea can be approached so differently, and the same feeling expressed in different media and varying ways. Viewing the subjects using multiple perspectives, one for each medium I used, enriched and strengthened my idea. The process of researching and learning is not always amusing; sometimes I confront roadblocks which make the problem seem unsolvable. However, I learned that there are always ways to manifest my idea; to this purpose, I have found collaboration with others very helpful, especially in overcoming the technical obstacles.

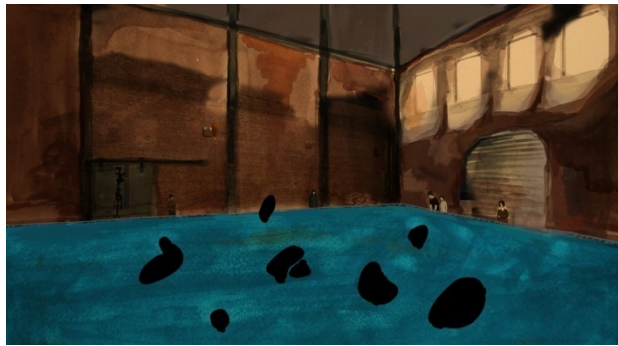
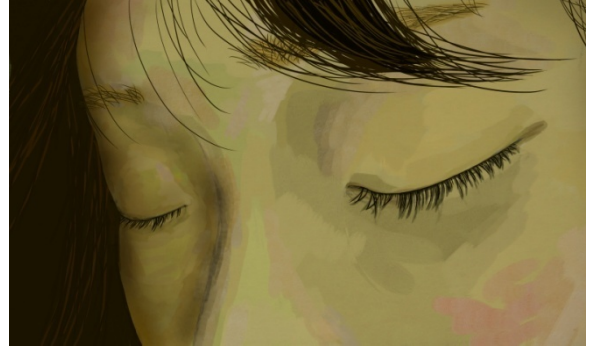


Figure 12: *Beings*, captured still images from the animation

## V. Compass



Figure 13: *Compass*, Installation view

com·pass<sup>6</sup>

–noun

1. an instrument for determining directions, as by means of a freely rotating magnetized needle that indicates magnetic north.
2. the enclosing line or limits of any area; perimeter
3. space within limits; area; extent; range; scope

–verb (used with object)

10. to go or move round; make the circuit of
11. to extend or stretch around; hem in; surround; encircle: An old stone wall compasses their property.

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<sup>6</sup> Dictionary, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/compass>

12. to attain or achieve; accomplish; obtain.

15. to comprehend; to grasp, as with the mind: His mind could not compass the extent of the disaster.

I am always curious if it is possible to be a good person and a good artist at the same time. Is it indeed possible to achieve love and success simultaneously? These are simple, maybe childish questions, but I could never find a satisfactory answer.

One day I looked at a compass and my thoughts turned to my father. He is a historian and is known to carry a compass wherever he goes because it offers him a semblance of certainty. When I asked him why he carries the compass all the time, he answered, "Because sometimes, I need a direction." I laughed because I thought it was nonsense. However, when I recalled his words after leaving South Korea, I was challenged to extend the metaphor to my life.

It is a small wonder to see the needle tremble and slowly land in a single direction. There is something powerful and convincing in something that seems so inexplicable. At times, I thought there is something that leads me to live my life in a way that contradicts the way I think I should live it. I wanted to be with my family, but I have been living apart from them for more than three years because of my studies in the US. I wanted to be an actress, but I am making art. I wanted to be a good friend, but I cannot always listen to my friends' worries, because of the pressure and circumstances of my own life. Although each decision was my choice, I believe that fate plays a role in making me stay in my current place and follow my current line of action.

Continuing with this metaphor, I quilted pieces of fabric collected from my family and friends, creating the base of a large compass. It is flat and round (10ft in diameter) and installed on the floor so that viewers can look down and read the words on it. The circle is divided in four quadrants: "Good Person", "Good Artist", "Good Life" and a direction with no word. A list of words of my desires, such as "good daughter", "good friend", "good studio", "good house" etc. are written in gold color on the pieces of fabric. The audience was asked to participate by rotating the compass needle to select and point to one of the words. The needle was made to always go back to a certain position where there are no words. The empty area in the fabric, where the needle always will return, indicates an unknown place where there is no answer and we have to keep going in our lives.

Creating a mechanism that would ensure that the needle of the compass always returns to the same position slowly, while allowing viewers to rotate it freely more than 360 degrees, was a big technical problem for me. Keeping close to the mechanism of a real compass, I built a structure based on magnets. Twelve strong neodymium magnets were placed on the base, forming a circle around the axis. The magnets were lying on a plane slightly tilted, so that they were closer to the needle in one point of its rotation than the rest. Another magnet was placed on the bottom of the needle, so that it would travel over the circle of magnets. It was oriented so that it would repel the other magnets. This way, the needle was always repelled by the magnets and forced to return to the point of minimum resistance, where the needle magnet was the farthest from the magnets on the base. The mechanism proved to work very well in practice, allowing a smooth and reliable movement.

I started this project at the beginning of the MFA program at Stony Brook University. It was a labor-intensive work that required a tremendous amount of time to complete. Continuing this work throughout my studies at Stony Brook and showing this work at the thesis show gave an extra meaning to this project for me.



Figure 14: *Compass of Desire*, Installation view



Figure 15: *Compass of Desire*, Installation detail



## VI. Conclusions

Through the three-year MFA program at Stony Brook University, I established my way of approaching ideas and forms. During this time, I used a number of different media and techniques: photography, fabric, wood, metal, video, animation, some physical computing, etc. I selected the media carefully for creating my concepts. I learned more about the interaction between materials and the audience when I changed the material from resin to fleece fabric for *Free-contact*, leading in significant differences in the way the piece worked. I had a few projects which necessitated interaction from viewers indirectly before. However, it was my first solo show, *Free-contact*, that made me realize that I was very interested in being involved in the viewer's experience.

The project *Beings* was my first project that did not stem from a concept but from imagery. Reproducing the scene and mood was extremely difficult, because it was all based on a dream. It can be hard or even impossible to implement in reality things appearing in a dream, since a dream follows its own internal logic, with complete disregard to the limitations of reality. I studied new techniques and procedures for creating the motion that I wanted. Collaborating with experts such as musicians and an engineer allowed me to get close to my original idea. *Beings* later also evolved into an animation which freed me from the technical limitations in the installation exhibition. I would like to continue to use the methods I discovered and the animation for my future projects.

The *Compass of Desire* also combined mixed media elements, including fabric, magnets, casted resin, and paint. It was a labor intensive work and needed almost

three years to accomplish. Because it seemed like endless labor, sometimes I was tempted to give up this project, but through sewing up the project, I gained not only a sense of personal fulfillment but also invaluable experience which I want to use in the next version of the *Compass of Desire*. In the future project, I want to continue and improve this piece, making it more clear and minimal.

The places we have known, do not belong only to the world of space, on which we map them for our own convenience. None of them was ever more than a thin slice, held between the contiguous impressions that composed our life at that time; the memory of a particular image is but regret for a particular moment; and houses, roads, avenues are as fugitive, alas, as the years.<sup>7</sup>

During the three years in Stony Brook, I met many people from a diverse background, not only in origin but also in their areas of interest. To embody a concept, I often need a number of different experiences and the assistance of people talented in their field, and collaboration made the creative process of making art energetic and enjoyable. Through working and discussing with engineers and musicians, I was able to open my eyes wider and see my work more objectively. I will continue to seek ways for showing my perspective and communicating it to the broader public. I will continue to study how to be able to zoom in and out and focus on my work in the context of the contemporary society.

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<sup>7</sup> Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*

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