

THE PERSONAL BECOMES PUBLIC

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BFA Thesis Paper  
University of Nevada, Reno  
March 15, 2021

I remember looking through old family photo albums that my parents have kept and being able to see the timeline of my family and I throughout the years. As I scanned through the albums, I was surprised to come across countless photos of myself as a young boy with a big smile on my face. This observation seemed unusual to me because when I attempt to recall these memories, I seldom saw or even remember myself as being "happy."

All my life I have struggled with numerous personal obstacles, such as Attention Deficit Disorder, physical health issues, shyness, sensitivity, and anxiety. I also found it extremely difficult to process and express these feelings, especially at a young age; unable to comprehend what these struggles were and having the same difficulties even now in adulthood. The feeling of disconnect when viewing old photographs of myself as a "happy" child made it seem as though none of those memories were real or had ever actually occurred. Several years later, these observations are what led me to the work that made up my midway exhibition. One piece, for example, entitled *The Boy I Don't Remember* (Fig. 1), incorporated two photographic images as references and recreating them into one composition. The first image was a photograph of myself as a smiling young child, and layered on top of that, a recent photograph of myself conveying a troubled expression. The clashing of these two emotions depict how I appear as a child through old photographs, as well as how I have always viewed myself personally.

The work of my thesis project focuses on emotion, memory, personal experience, and aims to relate to, and evoke genuine reactions and feelings from the viewer. These ideas are portrayed through self-portraiture and fusing aspects of realism and abstraction. In this paper, I will first discuss my scientific research findings that investigate how emotion directly effects memory recall. I will then analyze the timeline of my art practice and how it has gradually evolved into its current state, as well as how my work will continue to evolve for the purpose of

the thesis exhibition and beyond. I will also discuss how the influence of certain artists and art movements have navigated their way into my work to help communicate my messages with the viewer.

*The Mind, Explained* is a limited documentary series on Netflix that discusses popular topics related to the functions of the human brain, such as memory, dreams, anxiety, mindfulness, and psychedelics. Since a large part of my current work deals with recalling and addressing personal memories and experiences, I focused on the episode covering memory. Some key topics discussed in this episode that relate to me and my art practice include, the accuracy of our memory when recalling certain major or significant events in our lives, one example being the terrorist attacks in New York City on September 11, 2001, a survey and study of the memory of the average 70-year-old individual, as well as the significance of story, place, and emotion in relation to memory.

Melanie Mignucci is a young individual in this episode who was interviewed about her memory of 9/11. She had explained that her mother was working in New York City at that time. She also recalled seeing smoke accumulating over the water of the Long Island sound from the window of her elementary school classroom. However, her classroom windows did not look over the water, the World Trade Center was over forty miles away, and the smoke was traveling in the opposite direction of where her elementary school was located. This raises the question of how was Melanie able to remember the details of this event relatively clearly when her memory turned out to be not so accurate after all?

Elizabeth Phelps, a neuroscientist, mentions in the episode that "50% of the details of that memory change in a year even though most people are convinced they are 100% right" ("Memory"). Phelps goes on further to mention that people might remember correctly the gist of

that day, but not so much the smaller details like "who they were with, what they were doing when they heard, and what exactly they saw" ("Memory"). With this insight about memory and the human brain, I was able to find a connection within myself. When I look at the content of my artwork, there are few instances that touch on a specific event from the past, though it does occur. Most of my work is more about how these struggles and obstacles that are being portrayed visually have affected me throughout my lifetime. Not necessarily specific moments but more of a collective representation of several related moments in a single composition. I can remember the most important details, however, the smaller and less significant details, or what Phelps mentions as "contextual details" fall through the cracks. With emotional memories, or "episodic memories" which include the memory of personal experiences, "we tend to remember the central aspects. So, our attention kind of zooms in on the core of that experience, so we might forget some of the peripheral details... perhaps what a perpetrator was wearing, but we'll remember the gun" ("Memory"). This may also partially explain why I seem confident in recalling more vividly experiences that were profoundly emotional or negative over "happy" or neutral ones.

Phelps and Sharot explore this phenomenon further in an article entitled *How (and Why) Emotion Enhances the Subjective Sense of Recollection* where they conducted a study involving students and their recollection of the events of 9/11. The study revealed that the accuracy of details was the same for both 9/11 and for details in memories of daily events, both which have declined over time. What was most interesting about this study was that the "ratings of vividness, recollection, and belief in the accuracy of memory declined only for the memories of mundane events" (Phelps and Sharot). In other words, the more emotional a memory or an event, the more likely a person is to be confident in their ability to recall that memory. Phelps and Sharot have claimed in this article that not only does there exist a "dissociation between memory for

contextual details and the subjective sense of recollection for emotional events" but also that it is scientifically proven that emotion has the ability to boost the recollective experience (148).

In her article entitled *Negative Emotion Enhances Memory Accuracy*, Elizabeth Kensinger also gives some interesting insight on the effects of negative emotion on memory and that what really is affected is the small details. In one study participants were asked to view a series of scenes, some consisting of negative objects against a neutral background such as a snake by a river, and others consisting of a neutral object against a neutral background, such as a monkey in a forest. Afterwards, when asked about which objects and backgrounds they had studied, participants were better at remembering the details of the negative objects over the neutral ones. For example, they were more accurate in describing the characteristics of the snake rather than the monkey and were less able to remember the details of the backgrounds presented with a negative item (the river) compared to those presented with a neutral item (the forest). "These results emphasize that the effects of emotion on memory for detail can be critically affected by the type of detail being assessed" (Kensinger).

Returning to *The Mind, Explained*, one interesting study that was conducted and discussed gathered the information of the recalled memories of the average 70-year-old individual and displayed the information on a graph. From the individuals that were a part of the study, the graph stated that the average 70-year-old retains sufficient memories from their recent past. However, moving back in time, their memories begin to drastically decline between their mid-50s and 30s, as well as very few memories retained from childhood before the age of five. The most consistent amount of recalled memories, however, took place during the teenage years and 20s. Phelps reinforces these research findings by stating that "when you're getting through high school, you're having a lot of momentous occasions in that stage of your life. And when we

think about our life stories, those change moments are the ones that stand out as the ones that kind of define us and define our lives going forward" ("Memory").

As I studied the graph, I began to examine and retrace my own memory timeline and have personally found Phelps' statement to be true. Although I am still very young, I do feel that so much of what has happened and what I have experienced from as far back in childhood as I can remember has immediately begun to affect me and the way that I think about and perceive the future.

Another notable topic that is discussed in this episode explains how emotion, place, and story serve as foundations for some of our strongest memories. "When we have an emotional experience, our amygdala, the emotional center of the brain, which sits right next to the hippocampus, actually up-regulates the hippocampus and allows it to form a more detailed and stronger memory" ("Memory"). There are a few pieces that I have created for both my midway and thesis exhibition that are the result of several significant and related memories being brought together. *Better off Silent* (Fig. 2), is one example that touches on my choice of being silent after constantly being ignored by those I have tried to help. Having the mouth of the figure wiped away with an eraser emphasizes this idea. The emotional capacity behind this particular piece has maintained such significance that the emotions and message being portrayed continue to resonate with me.

Memories may also have a strong connection to a sense of place. In the study done with selected individuals and their memories of 9/11, the one detail that most of them were consistent about was their location. "And when you take a closer look at the hippocampus, there seem to be cells that are specifically responsive to time and place" ("Memory"). The content of my current art practice comes from a very personal place and involves events that are tied to home and

family/domestic life, as well as social issues concerning school, relationships, etc. A majority of my most significant memories also happen to be attached to a certain location, and those locations have the ability to conjure up those memories whenever I am physically there or thinking about it. For example, whenever I pass by my elementary school from childhood, I automatically associate that location with memories of struggle with academia, mental health, and self-esteem due to my A.D.D., as well as teachers who were often impatient with me because it took longer for me than other students to understand the material being taught to us. This ultimately made school a place I dreaded going to everyday.

A sense of place that is tied to memory leads to the third topic of how story is a foundation of memory. In a study where two groups of people were asked to memorize a list of words, one group studied and rehearsed the list, and on average remembered 13% of the words. The second group placed the words into self-constructed stories or narratives and on average remembered 93% of the words. "The more that you can associate things you want to remember with structures you already have in your mind, the easier it's going to be to remember" ("Memory"). There are many ways to retrieve and tap into old memories by establishing a narrative. A narrative exists behind every piece that I have created based on memory, and not only do narratives help me grasp a stronger understanding and accuracy of the messages being portrayed, but they also aim to help the viewer feel a sense of connection or relatability to some of their own personal stories.

*Better off Heard* (fig. 3), is one example of a narrative that is very important for two reasons. For one, since this piece was inspired by a recent event, it allowed me to reflect on a memory that was still fresh in my mind. And two, it also speaks to a life-long struggle of being unable to stand up for myself verbally against bullies in times when speaking up would have

been the better choice rather than remaining quiet. The encounter that I had that inspired this piece made me realize that certain challenges such as bullies is something that is still prevalent well into adulthood and is not only reserved for childhood. The degree of abstraction not only emphasizes the psychological consequences of remaining silent in situations where speaking up would have been the better choice, but also the idea of quickly recording something because you don't want to forget how it made you feel, and letting the emotion constitute the mark-making, similar to how we quickly jot down notes for things we want to remember for later. Depicting very recent events in my artwork has also opened a new door for exploring and expressing "new" memories that also relate to the old. This is a very exciting discovery for me to investigate later.

In the Netflix documentary, Elizabeth Phelps had mentioned the concept of episodic memory and how it is responsible for emotional and personal experiences. For my thesis research, I decided to investigate this topic more in depth and discovered an article by Stanley B. Klein and Shaun Nichols entitled *Memory and the Sense of Personal Identity*. Within this article I will discuss three topics which include memory as being central to how people think about personal identity, episodic memory versus semantic memory, as well as two case studies involving individuals who suffered brain damage and damage to their memory.

This article begins immediately with the proposal that memories of our past directly affect our sense of personal identity, and that if we had no recollection of past experiences our ideas of having existed in the past would be "dramatically compromised" (Klein and Nichols). This statement resonates especially with pieces such as *The Boy I Don't Remember* or *Conflict* (Fig. 4), which dealt with the clashing of two emotions and the struggle to remember a "happy" past self.



Briefly mentioned earlier, memories that are episodic are considered experiences that have a direct reference to the self. For a memory to be episodic, it must contain the three main criteria which are time, place, and self. When the event took place, where the event happened, and that it directly involved the individual. When critically evaluating these three criteria, I can put all the pieces together and eventually establish a narrative, which I also mentioned earlier as having an important role in my work. "In particular, episodic memory has been thought to involve re-experiencing events from one's past, thus providing its owner with content by which he or she is able to construct a personal narrative, that is his or her life stories" (Klein and Nichols).

This article also mentions what is known as semantic memory, which is essentially the opposite of episodic memory. "Semantic memory lacks a source tag; it does not specify when or where the memory was acquired; rather, it is retrieved as knowledge without regard to where and when that knowledge was obtained" (Klein and Nichols). Semantic memory contains relatively generic and context-free information about the world, such as grapes are edible, or Carson City is the capital of Nevada, and although semantic memory typically does not refer to the self, it can express facts about the self. For example, Robert Ibarra was born in Inglewood, California in 1996.

The following two case studies further investigate these two memory functions. The first case study involved a 43-year-old male who was in a biking accident and suffered broken ribs, multiple fractures of his pelvis, a collapsed lung, and head trauma. In reference to personal ownership and episodic memory, the individual recalled being able to remember certain events from his past, however, he did not feel like the memories belonged to him. "In other words, they lacked ownership" (Klein and Nichols). In the second case study, a patient semantically relearned

his personal history following a case of severe episodic amnesia for most of his past life history. The individual stated that the reclaimed memories seemed to lack a feel of real happening in his life. “They were to him, more like stories and facts told to him by others (which, indeed, they were!)” (Klein and Nichols). These two unique case studies challenges what is considered episodic memory versus what is considered semantic memory. It also makes me think about my own personal recollections and how I sometimes rely on sources that serve as evidence as being factual, such as photographs or stories told to me by others.

Prior to conducting this research on memory, I had realized that the work of my midway exhibition had already begun touching on a lot of these topics. The work of my midway incorporated memory to investigate personal trauma, while also bringing attention to how memory is very fragile and unreliable. Most of my research has helped reinforce my arguments. However, my extensive research on memory has also encouraged me to reevaluate the work of my midway and question how accurately I was portraying these experiences. In result, for my thesis exhibition, a couple of the pieces serve as a response to certain pieces that were in the midway.

For example, *So Far Gone* (Fig. 5), was a piece that represents how certain aspects of my past no longer exist and only exist through my memories of them, and how letting go of people, past situations, and circumstances that provided me with a sense of security has been an ongoing struggle. This was depicted through the subject reaching out of the composition while being consumed by darkness all around him. *Better off Gone* (fig. 6), on the other hand, serves as a response to *So Far Gone* as the subject is still portrayed reaching out, but what is holding him back is a cluster of hands which represent all the things he is better off without. Rendering the

hands in light graphite gives them a ghostly feeling and emphasizes that they represent the past, and how my past continues to exist only through memory.

It is important that I discuss why drawing is my current medium of choice, specifically charcoal and graphite. I have always been attracted to the medium of drawing. I enjoy its simplicity and accessibility, as well as its ability and tendency to be underestimated. From being able to carry a sketchbook and pencil with me just about anywhere and create whatever comes to mind in the moment, to having the capability of serving as detailed and complete works of art. The term "drawing" itself is also essentially universal since it has never been given a concrete definition.

In her introductory text *Vitamin D: New Perspectives in Drawing*, Emma Dexter discusses these complex ideas related to drawing in a variety of ways that help the reader gain a deeper understanding and new perspectives on what drawing can be, what it has been considered as throughout history, and where it stands today in the contemporary world.

One point that Dexter mentions is how drawing is something that just about all humans partake in throughout their lives. As children we gift drawings to our parents, we use drawing as a universal language when verbal communication fails, and it serves as a form of record of our existence; footprints in the snow, breath on a window, tracing lines with our finger in the sand, and airplanes leaving vapor trails in the sky. "We literally draw in and on the material world" (Dexter).

Dexter also mentions the artist Bruce Nauman as an example of how all forms of making can be seen as a form of drawing. Nauman utilized drawing in his work in a unique way by creating drawings that analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of a piece after its completion. By considering the importance and benefits of drawing in relation to other mediums, Nauman had

influenced younger artists that came after him to integrate drawing in their own multi-media practices in all settings and to approach all work as a form of drawing.

One last topic that is discussed in this article involves the "status" of drawing in history and in contemporary society. Historically, in Western art, drawing was considered the most basic and essential tool for sculptors and painters and was highly valued during the Italian Renaissance. The status of drawing, however, has always been somewhat problematic because of its reputation as a preliminary tool to all other mediums. However, the late twentieth century saw a growth in popularity and appreciation and has given contemporary artists the opportunity and confidence to choose drawing as their principal medium and that their work would not suffer or be considered less than as a result.

In the introductory chapter of *Drawing: Space, Form, and Expression*, Wayne Enstice and Melody Peters also examine the role of drawing in history and in the contemporary world. Drawing was a valued tool, however, it was not granted the status of a legitimate art form, but merely as preparatory studies for painting and sculpture. However, at the end of the twentieth century, the growing popularity and curiosity of preparatory drawings had led to the rise of exhibitions that were dedicated to artist's working drawings. "Among all visual-art forms, preparatory drawings put the viewer most in touch with what an artist thinks and feels" (7). These findings have led to the decision to include preparatory mockups in my thesis exhibition. These mockups give the viewer another perspective of my creative and experimental process, and how I ended up with the finished product or drawing. In addition to the rising interest and popularity of working drawings, finished drawings today are widely granted the equal status as a complete and independent art form.

Self-portraiture, and the human figure in general has always been the primary subject matter of my work. I have used portraiture in the past to practice skill development and to portray the characteristics and personalities of friends and family. My use of self-portraiture has more recently become a tool in incorporating personal experience to create an emotional connection with the viewer. Historically, artists such as Francis Bacon and Philip Guston, throughout their careers, have used the human face and figure to emphasize personal hardship. Even during the period of modernism, which was dominated by abstraction, they both never fully abandoned the human figure and recognizable objects.

In addition to Bacon and Guston, Thomas Eakins is another artist who incorporates self-portraiture in his work to create a narrative of his personal struggles in relation to his mental state at the end of the nineteenth century. In his painting entitled *Wrestlers* (Fig. 7), he has become the main event with all five figures representing himself. It was said that the figures referenced his sexual orientation, mental state, and social ineptness, though none of this was ever confirmed. "What matters for understanding *Wrestlers* is that by the late 1890s Eakins had suffered repeated emotional traumas and losses that led him to a state of reflection and, at times, desolation" (Fort 91).

In his portrait pieces, Eakins insisted on portraying his subject's doubleness. The facial features, expressions, and stances, as well as their hidden and complex identity underneath the surface. He rejected the concept of idealization and beauty of outward appearances. In *Wrestlers*, the faces of only two figures are just barely legible. "Instead, the body language conveys Eakins' intimate thoughts" (91). The two standing figures are cut off mid-torso and signify intellectually and physically mutilated men. The suited figure may be a coach or a teacher. But without his mind, the teacher is powerless. Together, the half figures, one fully dressed and the other almost

completely undressed, represent the conflicting dualities Eakins suffered and the psychologically fragmented state he was in when he created this piece.

Eakins experienced several professional and personal hardships. He was dismissed from several teaching positions because of his controversial style of teaching involving the use of live nude models. Those who were suspicious were unable to accept that the relationship between artist and model was innocent, objective, and professional. His private life was also surrounded by illness and death. With the suicide of his niece and eventually the death of his father, his trauma must have been incredibly overwhelming as the Eakins family was known to be very close. Thomas's father also had a huge influence on him as he had "a strong patriarchic hold over Thomas, both financially and emotionally" (93). Thomas's father would also miss the chance to see his son reach success in his artistic career. This realization may have caused Thomas to transform *Wrestlers* from a straightforward scene into a more personal statement.

Another artist who incorporates self-portraiture into their work is William Kentridge. Kentridge is a contemporary artist from Johannesburg, South Africa who is well known for his short, animated films made from charcoal drawings between 1989 and 2003 (Fig. 8). Kentridge utilized a unique form of stop-action animation within his work. Instead of making a separate drawing on individual sheets of paper for each frame of a film, he continuously erased and redrew parts of each drawing and photographed each alteration with previous marks remaining visible under the new marks.

Kentridge's films are rooted in the dark history of apartheid, the system of racial segregation that occurred in South Africa from 1948 to 1994, and its aftermath, including its ongoing impact on the psyches of victims and perpetrators. "His technique metaphorically parallels the acts of effacement and remembrance that characterize South Africa's post-apartheid

state-a nation erasing and redrawing itself" (Robertson and McDaniel 158). Kentridge employs self-portraiture in some of his drawings to convey how he is personally affected by his country's history. "His animations deal with the political and social themes from a personal and, at times, autobiographical point of view" (William Kentridge). Kentridge also hopes that through his physical process of drawing, erasing, recording, and spending the time required to make these drawings, the viewer will acknowledge his efforts as a compassionate act. He states, "but there is also something in the activity of both contemplating, depicting, and spending the time with it which I hope, as an artist, redeems the activity from one of simply exploitation and abuse" (Art21).

When I first began making art, I was taught to draw from observation, both from life and from reference images. I began with drawing simple and well-known animated characters for a short time, and eventually moved on to realism, specifically portrait drawings of famous individuals as well as people that I knew personally. I am not exactly sure why I decided to transition to realism, perhaps I saw it as the next step in developing my drawing skills.

My first attempt at a conceptually driven body of work occurred during the halfway point of my time in community college. I created twelve 8" x 10" black-and-white drawings of individuals all looking in different directions and expressing different emotions. When placed in the form of an interchangeable grid, the subjects are portrayed in communication with one another (Fig. 9). It was during the creation of this work when I was informed by my professor at the time about an artist whom he believed I shared many similarities with. That artist was Robert Longo and his 1980s series entitled *Men in the Cities* (Fig. 10).

Robert Longo is one example of a contemporary artist who inspires my art practice and works with the human figure as well. Longo, based in New York, works in drawing, painting,

sculpture, photography, and film. In his *Men in the Cities* series, Longo reproduced original photographs as drawings that depicted "spasmodic motions of people's bodies. Not elegant, but more like reactions or chaotic gestures" (Goertz). For this series, Longo photographed friends of his on the roof of his house in New York City in 1980 and 1981. He had gained inspiration for the idea behind this body of work from the 1975 Rainer Werner Fassbinder film "The American Soldier," which involved a still-frame of a man getting shot in the back. Longo described this fatal moment appearing as "in-between dying and dancing" (Goertz).

The chaotic gestures of his subjects were also in reference to the punk music at the time. These gestures were achieved through strategies that included objects being thrown at the subjects and tying ropes to them and pulling them in certain directions. None of the models who participated were professional dancers, they were simply friends of Longo who understood what he was trying to achieve. To Longo, "These drawings were always meant to be abstract symbols, not so much figurative art" (Goertz). The subjects dressed in business attire was in relation to what the punks were wearing at the time, which was also similar to how businessmen and women were dressing, and to Longo, it was like a type of uniform that members of society wore.

After the photographs were taken, Longo enlarged them through a projector, and along with his assistant and illustrator, Diane Shea, would draw the figures in graphite and charcoal and removed all details from the background. The drawings ranged in sizes from three-quarter scale to larger-than-life size, with each drawing taking about one week to complete.

When I began researching Longo, I did notice many similarities between the two of us at the time. We both primarily worked in black-and-white, we both incorporated fine, realistic details, we both work with the human figure, and we both utilized plain backgrounds. Also, some of my most recent work has begun incorporating Longo's idea of exaggerated gestures and



movement in order to amplify the emotions of my subjects; characteristics that were not a part of my work prior.

An art movement that has greatly influenced my current work is Cubism. Cubism was an early twentieth century art movement that lasted from 1907 to 1914 in Paris, France, and was invented by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque who were inspired by the late work of Paul Cezanne. “Cubism was invented as a response to Cezanne’s self-appointed mission to deconstruct the world of appearances” (Blistene). The Cubist art form consisted of breaking objects apart and reconstructing them into flat, two-dimensional, geometric-like shapes that ignored the traditional rules of perspective, foreshortening, modeling, etc.

The term "Cubism" came about when it was used by the critic Louis Vauxcelles to describe one of Braque's works in 1908 entitled *Houses at L' Estaque* (Fig. 11), as being "composed of cubes" (Cubism). The Cubists were not interested in copying something for exactly how it looked, their intention was to break away from the traditional values of realism and create a new reality through their new, unique, and innovative style of painting. My current work has transitioned from strictly realist to what I like to call, abstracted realism. Now that my work has begun to adopt qualities of abstraction, the viewer's attention is less focused on the degree of realistic detail and is more focused on what the marks mean.

The most interesting detail about my Cubist influence is that its introduction into my work was completely accidental. In the spring of 2019, I was enrolled in an art history course that covered artists and art movements from the twentieth century, in which I wrote a research paper on the topic of Cubism. While I was enrolled in that art history course, I was also enrolled in a drawing course. In result, because of all the research and information that I was absorbing, the artwork that I was making began to develop characteristics that were reminiscent of the

Cubist aesthetic. And it just so happened that my professor at the time, once again, pointed out the similarities that I was completely unaware of at first. Since my Cubist influence occurred somewhat naturally, I decided to embrace these similarities instead of rejecting them.

Some visual characteristics in my work that I share with Cubism include a limited, or monochromatic color scheme, chiaroscuro or deep contrasts between dark and light, as well as hard lines in order to emphasize the sculptural modeling of the subject(s). These formal qualities are achieved through three methods that I began incorporating in my work. These three methods that helped the Cubist aesthetic seem more apparent in my work include movement, overlapping, and duplicating certain parts of the figure in order to express profound emotion that is tied to personal experiences.

Movement is integrated into my work to help some of my subjects feel more dynamic when it is needed. A method which is also used by Robert Longo. The use of movement is focused mostly on the hands and/or head/face to serve as powerful communicators of emotion. When movement is used it also, in some cases, adds emphasis to the three-dimensional illusion of the figure protruding out of the composition.

The method of overlapping either illustrates a contrast or conflict of emotion, or it serves to further stress the message that is trying to get across to the viewer. My method of duplicating is similar to my method of overlapping. The duplication or repetition of images is used to emphasize the degree of movement or emotion of the figure.

Though my work shares many similarities with Cubism, the one major difference is that the purpose of Cubism was to break objects apart and reconstruct them into their most basic form of cubes. My work achieves a resemblance to Cubist works through movement, overlapping, and

duplication. I essentially add onto and make my compositions more complex rather than simplifying them down to their simplest form.

For my thesis work, I have aimed to push my experimentation further by breaking into the three-dimensional realm. I wanted to experiment more with the visual aspects of Cubism by cutting one of my drawings into pieces once it was complete, and slightly reconstruct it as fragments that lift off the surface. Through this process, I aim not only to further emphasize the emotional and vulnerable aspects of my work, but to also have it serve as a visual representation of the fragility of memory.

I first became inspired to further investigate my Cubist influence when I visited The Nevada Museum of Art in Reno, Nevada in the fall of 2019 and came across Galen Brown's exhibition entitled *Sine Cere* (Fig. 12). This Reno-born artist creates work in drawing, printmaking, mixed media sculpture, and photography. This exhibition served as a retrospective of Brown's work from 1990 to the present, highlighting his process-based works. His large-scale drawings on scrap museum board is what stood out to me the most. The way in which he constructed, arranged, and built up the square and rectangular shapes reminded me of Cubism, but in a slightly three-dimensional and sculptural form. "Brown's painstaking and often obsessive practice results in works that demonstrate his commitment to erasing the boundaries between art and everyday life" (Galen Brown).

A contemporary artist whose process deals directly with vulnerability is Rose B. Simpson. Simpson is a Native American artist who works primarily in sculpture, and whose current work investigates issues concerning identity, missing and murdered indigenous women in North America, and challenging western concepts surrounding the family unit. In a live video interview earlier this year with Princeton University, one thing that Simpson discussed that stood

out to me was how she explained her process of creating as "exposing the process." *They Rose* (Fig. 13), is one of Simpson's works in which she participated in what is fearful to her by constructing imperfect ceramic figures that display a type of "rawness" (no glaze, and rough, visible handprints). Through her process she creates an outlet for herself to express her vulnerability. To paraphrase what she had said: "This is me, my process, and my vulnerability seen in my process."

Hearing Simpson talk about her artistic process in this way is what inspired me to get creative with how I chose to cut up and reconstruct my drawings. By embracing the purpose and intention of imperfection, and having the work loosely supported by its backing, touching the glass, and not worrying too much about the structural integrity of the fragmented pieces emphasizes how vulnerability is an important aspect of my work and takes a lot of courage to be open about.

With my work consisting of personal emotions and experiences, it seems almost inevitable that it also possesses dark, profound, and sometimes unsettling characteristics. A contemporary artist whose work portrays all of the above and more is Jenny Saville. Jenny Saville is a British painter who is widely known for her large-scale paintings of nude women. Saville's paintings interrogate assumptions about beauty by rendering bodies that are not idealized in any way. Her subjects portray the exact opposite of the refined and accurately proportionate nudes seen in classical art. Her work depicts "distorted, fleshy, and disquieting naked female bodies" (Meagher). She constantly challenges the body ideals that have been forced upon women in Western contemporary culture.

Although my work has nothing to do with issues related to body image, what I appreciate most about Saville is her ability through her subjects to evoke genuine reactions and feelings

from the viewer, which is something that I aim to achieve within my own work. "To magically transform an ordinary sheet of paper into a direct message of your unique response to the subject of your drawing. By this means, the viewer of your drawing-no matter what the subject-can find you, see you" (Edwards 262). Audiences have had mixed feelings about Saville's work and have responded to her paintings with shock, disgust, and confusion. Saville once stated in an interview, "I think it is more that they are difficult. Why do we find bodies like this difficult to look at" (Meagher)? A negative reaction from a viewer stated, "It conjured up every woman's worst nightmare of how she might look with no clothes on" (Meagher). However, on the other hand, others have given her praise and have found reassuring qualities within her work; "I am obese, but now I don't feel bad about it" (Meagher). Saville's work accomplishes getting the viewer to confront their own wide range of inner emotions, both positive and negative.

*All in My Head II* (Fig. 14), was a piece from my midway exhibition and was also one of the first pieces that achieved the genuine viewer response that I was looking for. During a class critique of this piece, the exact words of a fellow student stated, "it's painful to look at." It was these words in reaction to this piece when I realized that I was headed in the right direction.

As I think about my work and the possible directions that it is heading towards after the conclusion of the thesis exhibition, I am looking into artists who work with memory as I continue investigating how memory can further function on both a personal and collective level. One artist is Doris Salcedo. In her series entitled *Atrabiliarios*, 1992-2004 (Fig. 15), she brings attention to the attempted forgotten history of violence towards women in her native country of Columbia. Another artist is Peter Eisenman and his *Memorial to the Murdered Jews in Europe*, 1998-2005 (Fig. 16). This memorial consists of massive rectangular concrete blocks that serve as an abstract memorial to the "Shoah," which is a term used to reference the Nazi Holocaust. This

work reinforces the idea that history is closely related to memory, both personal and collective. One more example is Josephine Taylor. Taylor works primarily in drawing and painting in graphite and diluted ink washes. She plays with contrast by creating very light and fragile works that are rooted in personal experiences, specifically examining the emotional and psychological remains of memory, human connection, and adolescence.

My artistic practice since early on has been a gradual and cautious move towards the personal experience. With my early subjects ranging from complete strangers, to subjects involving friends and family, to finally utilizing myself as the subject to bring light to issues that have been longing to be addressed. I have found the courage within myself to talk about these issues through my creative outlet, which has also helped me in investigating and, in turn, understanding these struggles. Incorporating memory and all its complexities into this process has been a vital component of this personal endeavor. It has allowed me to think critically and to evaluate my past and how and why it has affected me so deeply after all these years. The evolution of my work within the last few years leading up to the midway and thesis exhibition makes this transition evident. My art practice has given me the much-needed outlet to express feelings that I have forcibly tucked away for so long. Through my work, I hope to create a space for my viewers to do the same for themselves.

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Figure 1. Robert Ibarra, *The Boy I Don't Remember*, 2019.



Figure 2. Robert Ibarra, *Better off Silent*, 2019.



Figure 3. Robert Ibarra, *Better off Heard*, 2020



Figure 4. Robert Ibarra, *Conflict*, 2019.



Figure 5. Robert Ibarra, *So Far Gone*, 2019.



Fig. 6. Robert Ibarra, *Better off Gone*, 2020.



Figure 7. Thomas Eakins, *Wrestlers*, 1899.  
<https://collections.lacma.org/node/212740>



Figure 8. William Kentridge, *Untitled*, n.d.

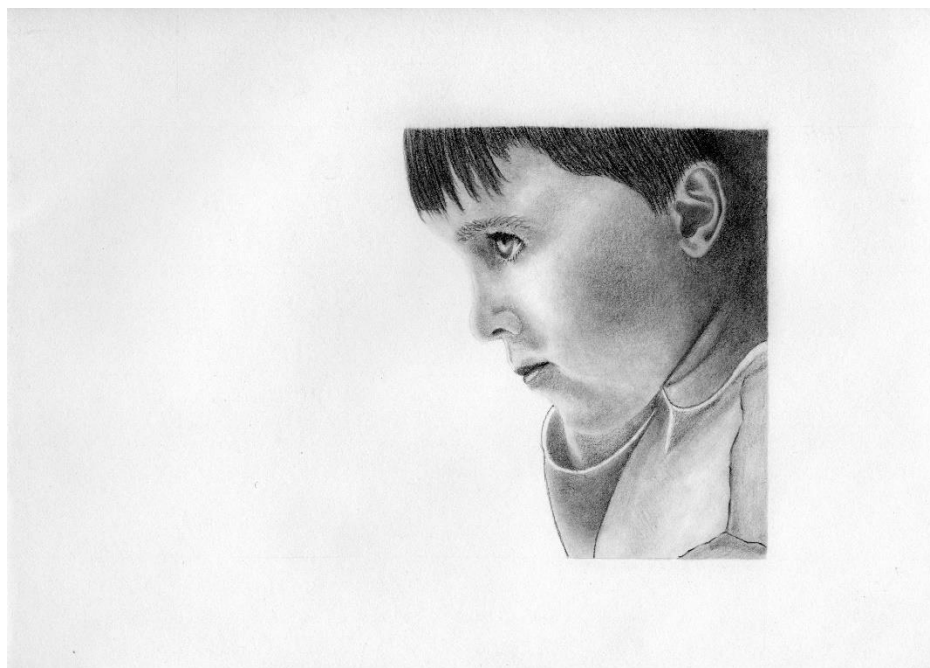


Figure 9. Robert Ibarra, *Connection Through Emotion* (detail), 2017.



Figure 10. Robert Longo, *Men in the Cities*, 1980s.  
<https://www.robertlongo.com/series/meninthecity/>



Figure 11. Georges Braque, *Houses at L'Estaque*, 1908.

<https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=braque+houses+at+l%27estaque&FORM=HDRSC2>



Figure 12. Galen Brown, *Sin Cere* (detail), Mid-1990s -2019.

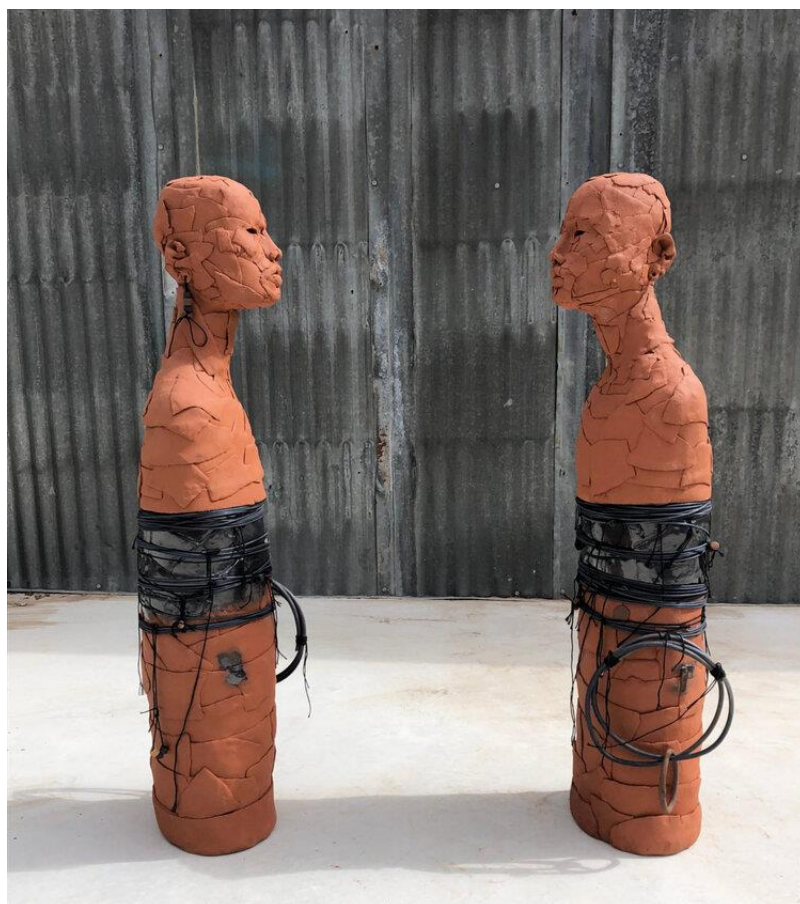


Figure 13. Rose B. Simpson, *They Rose*, 2019.



Figure 14. Robert Ibarra, *All in my Head II*, 2019.

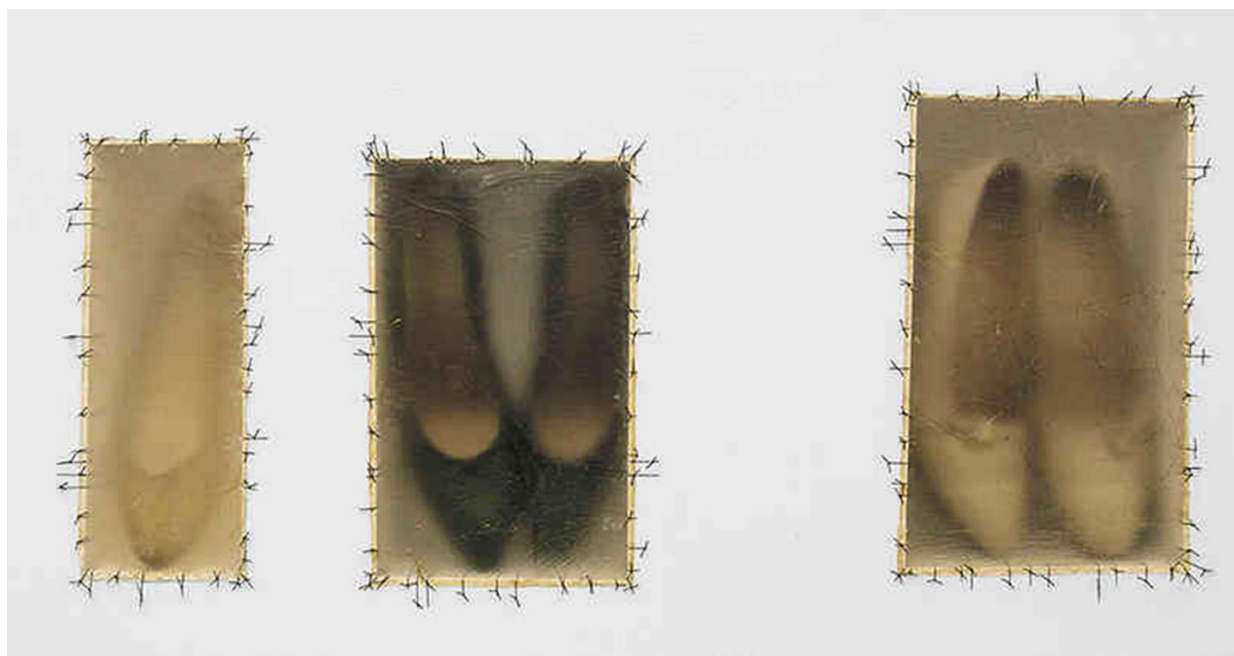


Figure 15. Doris Salcedo, *Atrabiliarios* (detail), 1992-2004.  
<https://www3.mcachicago.org/2015/salcedo/works/atrabiliarios/>





Figure 16. Peter Eisenman, *Memorial to the Murdered Jews in Europe*, 1998-2005.  
<https://eisenmanarchitects.com/BERLIN-MEMORIAL-TO-THE-MURDERED-JEWS-OF-EUROPE-2005>