

LOSS OF INNOCENCE

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Loss of Innocence uses sculpture, two-dimensional imagery, and text to explore the moment when children lose their innocence or realize their mortality. In the introduction, I explain that there are many factors, such as age and personality, which determine how children will deal with traumatic events in their lives and the duration of time that must pass before they move past the event. Often, children will combine childhood fantasy with random facts to create their own satisfactory explanation of what has happened. In my problem in lieu of thesis, I discuss work that I created with these thoughts in mind. I explore how the sculpture, two-dimensional imagery, and text work together to convey the emotion of innocence lost.

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CHAPTER 1

LOSS OF INNOCENCE

I am interested in exploring images and concepts related to the mental and emotional effects of loss. The loss of innocence is of particular interest. The loss of naivety is a highly personal phenomenon that narrows the gap between childish fantasy and harsh reality. Although my innocence was lost with the death of immediate family members, loss of innocence may be triggered by a variety of circumstances. Usually there is a death in some form associated with this time period, be it literal, sexual, or emotional. There are also many elements of emotion, such as fear and sadness, associated with this threshold. The main goal of my ceramic sculpture is to convey these emotions to the audience.

The viewers experience will be based on his or her identifications with the imagery I use. I work with a combination of ceramic forms, two-dimensional images, and sometimes, found objects to invoke varying reactions in the viewer. Questions I frequently deal with include, “When do children recognize their mortality?” and, “How do children rationalize serious events or losses in their lives when they do not have the capacity for logical, adult thought?”

The psychological community has asked these questions for years and there are several variables that must be considered before answers to the questions may be suggested. William Kroen Ph.D., has published a book on the grieving processes of children, and he states that the age of the child and the cognitive developments he or she

has achieved are major variables in determining how they handle loss. Personality characteristics and the home environment also determine how children react in the aftermath of tragic events and the time necessary for the child to cope with the event. 1

Over the past two years, I have been identifying the variables present at the moments of loss in my life, illustrating the variables in text and image, and documenting my reaction to those events. I find that this psychological introspection helps me to better understand my own emotions and enables me to communicate through images with which the viewer can associate a memory or feeling. Two-dimensional images, specifically prints, help to convey emotion in my work and offer a visual outline for the viewer to follow. I constantly maintain a vocabulary of simple prints and drawings. Each drawing represents a specific event or emotion in my life. Some of these images are as universal as a stick-figure family, while some are highly encoded, such as a pair of lead shoes. I can rearrange these prints with each new work to create a different story. Although these prints have very specific meanings to me, they are open to a wide range of interpretations by the audience. This allows the viewer to project his or her own experiences of lost innocence onto the work. I have not limited myself to the world of two-dimensional imagery, but I have also documented my emotions through text. As with the prints, my writings are encoded with symbolism. This textual communication may be a simple ironic statement or a brief short story. Regardless of the nature of the writings I have tried to maintain a balance between two-dimensional imagery, and the three-dimensional forms that contain them.

¹Kroen, William C, ^{Ph}.D., Helping Children Cope With the Loss of a Loved One, A Guide for Grownups,

My use of clay is also an important factor in the relation of emotion to the audience. I use clay for many reasons. Fired clay is a highly permanent material. When I use it as a container for other, less permanent materials, such as paper or wax, it gives it the quality of a sarcophagus and provides a sense of protection. The second reason I use clay is for the cold, hard tactual qualities it has after it has been fired. This texture is important to my work because it provides a sharp contrast between other, impermanent and softer, materials I often use in my sculptures. My ceramic forms further reinforce the idea of loss by emulating a sarcophagus. Many of the forms that I work with are box-like structures that both display and protect the objects inside of them. In more recent work I have begun to alter the structure of my forms so that they have more visual connotations for the viewer and can better add to the vocabulary of my images.

Statement of Problem

I propose to create a body of work for my project that will find ways to further impact the viewer by framing emotional loss through explorations of innocence and the loss of innocence. I will explore the psychological impact of loss through the combination of ceramic sculpture and printed images. I wish to further develop my visual vocabulary through drawing and printmaking. During this process I will also explore the relationship between the hard clay surface and other, more delicate, materials I may include in the pieces. Questions that will be addressed while I am making this work are as follows:

1. How does the combination of three-dimensional forms and two-dimensional images help to communicate emotion to the viewer?
2. How does the use of text reinforce or undermine the vocabulary of my two-dimensional images?
3. How does the addition of non-clay objects relate to the clay structure and how do they communicate emotion?

Methodology

I propose to make five to eight sculptures employing clay, prints, found objects, and other media I find fascinating in invoking the sense of innocence loss in the viewer. After the work is completed I will select two of my sculptures for the subject of a paper. I will consider the questions mentioned above and discuss each one, as it is appropriate to the work.

CHAPTER 2

The first piece I wish to discuss is Adult. This is a mixed media piece that incorporates clay, photo-transparency, photo-etching, wax, fiber, casters and clothing. The sculpture is a small, life-size suitcase with a window in the front containing a photograph of a woman standing in front of an airplane. The luggage tag is a photo-etching of that same woman, slightly older and standing with a man. Above the suitcase is hung a tattered piece of white lingerie on which is stamped, "Adult 1958-1998."

As with other works completed for my problem in lieu of thesis this piece of sculpture conveys a sense of innocence lost. The ceramic suitcase form works in unison with the photo images to construct a narrative. The narrative told with the piece derives from my own speculations about the imagery and the iconography. (However the audience may have had different experiences that lead them to another conclusion.) The luggage is a recognizable icon that symbolizes a journey, or a departure from one place or environment. The audience may assume that because the black and white image shows a young woman standing in front of the plane, she is the owner of the suitcase. A photograph of her with a man replaces the usual address label on the luggage tag. This tells the viewer that the woman is going to see this man and, because she is older in the picture, is going to be with him for a long time. The lingerie hanging directly above the suitcase gives the viewer some idea of the nature of their relationship. They are a romantic couple and are possibly married. The lingerie is white to symbolize purity and naivete, but it is also worn and old. Perhaps this naivete faded long ago. The word

"Adult" stamped on the nightgown, along with a date, is an important bit of information that tells the viewer the span of this woman's adult life.

If it were not for the two-dimensional images attached to the suitcase, the viewer would not have a person with which to associate the suitcase and the lingerie. The imagery makes the emotion of the piece stronger and more personal. The viewer can imagine themselves in that woman's place and remember what it is like to leave adolescence for adult responsibilities.

The use of text on the lingerie marks the beginning and end of the woman's adult life. This piece of information strengthens the narrative and reveals the end of the story. The woman is already dead. It does not rehash what the viewer already knows, but gives them new information. For this reason I believe that the text is an essential element to the work.

The addition of the non-clay objects to the ceramic structure provides a contrast in textures that is interesting on both a formal and conceptual level. Some of the textures, such as the fringe and the metal chain connecting the luggage tag to the suitcase, add to the believability of the suitcase as an actual object. Other textures, such as the wax covering the photographs and the softness of the clothing provide a warmth that balances the cold feel of the clay. The finished surface of the suitcase looks as if it has been aged. The tattered night gown reinforces this quality as does the obvious age of the photographs. The weathered feel of this piece alludes to memories of the past that the viewer can associate with memories from his or her own life. The materials added to the clay finish the sculpture.

The second piece I will write about is entitled, Dream Machines. This piece consists of three wall hanging ceramic forms. Inside each form is approximately fifteen feet of prints silk-screened onto two-inch-wide paper. The paper is fed through an interior wall in the structure and exits through a slit in the front. The three sculptures that make up Dream Machines represent three different people that have passed on in my life. The waking thoughts I have about them are very different than how they are depicted in my dreams. This work illustrates the emotions that I have for each of these people in my subconscious. Each sculpture, or person, has its own set of prints associated with him or her. I purposefully chose not to give the audience clues as to the specific correlation between these pieces and the deceased members of my family, but the prints streaming out describe what emotion I associate with each personality.

On the surface of each sculpture I have written either "Dream 1", "Dream 2" or, "Dream 3" to help the viewer better understand the context of the emotion. On the opposite side of each piece I have printed a line drawing of a crate precariously suspended over a bed. A rope hoists the crate over a pulley and it is weighed down by a 100lb barbell. A pair of scissors is about to cut the rope causing it to fall on the bed. I chose to put this image on the sides of each piece to describe these dreams as unsettling and ominous. I use more of my own visual vocabulary to express emotion on the prints that exit the "Dream Machines." To represent anger I use a pointed finger. Guilt is expressed by an image of my grandmother and her plea for me not to leave her alone. The feeling of being judged is shown with the profile of an eye with arrows aimed in the direction of the stare. The two-dimensional images are the strongest communicators in this piece. The structure of the ceramic form is a container for these

images. The crux of Dream Machines lies in the visual vocabulary that is used to express an emotion.

Text is used in "Dream Machines" to help the viewer understand the context in which the prints are to be seen. The printing of "Dream 1, Dream, 2 or, Dream 3" lets the viewer know that these images derive from the sub-consciousness. Because of this, I feel the text is extremely important in the interpretation of the work. It does not undermine the vocabulary of my two-dimensional images, but helps them to be better understood.

The addition of non-clay objects is essential for this work. The prints exiting the ceramic forms represent dreams. Most people have a soft and fragile, even-flowing, connotation with dreams that cannot be illustrated with the rigidity of clay. The paper used in these sculptures represents these qualities of dreams. The contrast of this texture, combined with the more stable clay form that represents the mind, works well to show the difference in these two aspects of the subconscious.

CHAPTER 3

Conclusion

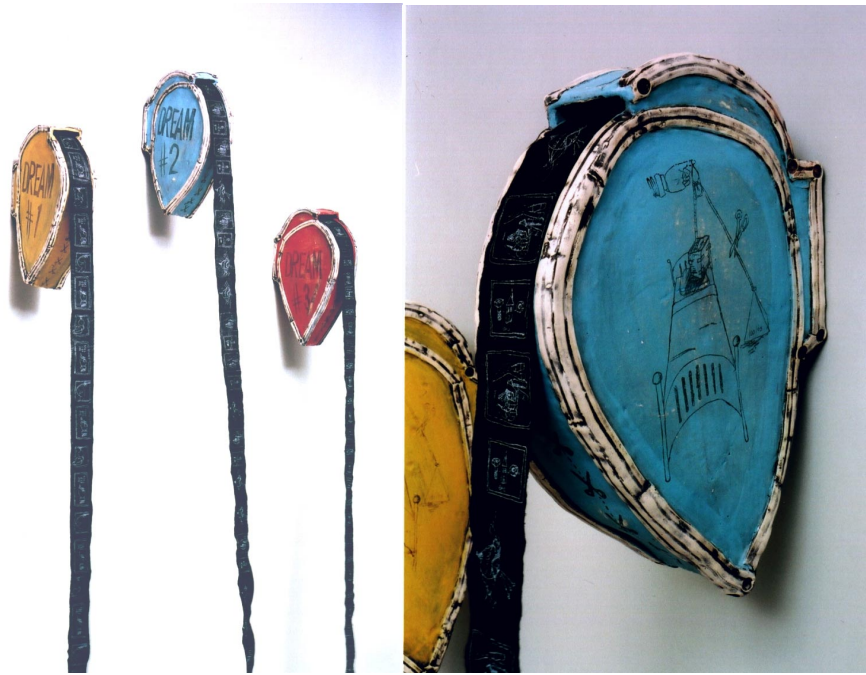
The seven sculptures I have produced for my problem in lieu of thesis have different ranges of emotion. Some are light-hearted and humorous while others are much darker. Works such as "Come Observe the Children" and "Adult" are heavy-handed, but just as important and successful as the whimsical "Diaper...Diaper." In producing this work, I have found that it is the combination of two-dimensional images and three-dimensional forms that express emotion successfully. The three-dimensional form gives the viewer an object to associate with, which may be as literal as a sculpted suitcase or it may be a shape that references something in reality. The two-dimensional imagery added to the sculpture allows me to further communicate emotion through drawings, prints, or text. These two aspects of my art work together to reinforce the intent of the sculpture.

The text used in the works is scarce and does not threaten to give the viewer too much information. It is only used to help the viewer understand the images and forms in their intended context.

The ability to add non-clay materials and objects to the sculptures allows me to experiment with a variety of textures that helps to explain my concept to the viewer. The added found objects complete the pieces. They are essential for these conceptual and esthetical reasons. The additions to the clay allow the audience's imagination to go beyond a ceramic form and enter into a world of rich textures, colors, and surfaces. Each

article that is added to the sculptures gives the viewer more to relate to. For example, one may associate the fringe on the bottom of Adult with their grandmother's couch, thus taking them back to their own female ancestor and her life experiences. The fringe also provides a functional purpose. It fills in the space between the pedestal and the suitcase fleshing out the bottom of the sculpture and allowing it to end gracefully.

The philosophical questions that I started with still remain. "When do children realize their mortality?" and, "How do children rationalize serious events or losses in their lives when they do not have the capacity for logical, adult thought?" The question of when mortality is realized is not something for which I have an answer. I can only provide scenarios in which I, or those close to me, have realized their own mortality. In addressing the question of how children rationalize such serious events, I draw from my own personal experience and try to remember how I coped with loss of innocence. Sometimes coping meant rearranging the situation until it seemed humorous or normal on the surface while keeping darker emotions underneath or barely visible. My work reflects this in its bright colors which have been sanded so that a hint of black shows through. I also illustrate this by keeping the heart of the information for each piece contained and protected within the object. These are questions that will continue to fascinate me and direct my work for the foreseeable future. Perhaps it is fortuitous that these questions are not easily answerable.



Dream Machines

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Adult

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