Self

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Rochester Institute of Technology
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In Candidacy of the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Self

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I. Abstract

“Self” is a record of developing an understanding of self-portraiture as a tool to tell a story. The resulting show from this body of work is a series of self-portraits completed in varying methods of ceramic firing and surface manipulation processes. This writing travels in order as the thesis developed, as I figured out how to tell a more direct story using my understanding of my surroundings, my relationship to my references, my peers, my professors, my hands and my history. “Self” is a record of the time I spent learning how to transform my material understanding of ceramics, my love for drawing and my study of self-portraiture into a cohesive readable body of works depicting a sense of time, a presence of emotion and a rendering of a reflection.
II. Introduction

“The following thirty-five self-portraits are products of an inward investigation. In ceramics, as a material, I have found the freedom to produce work that has explored and developed my understanding of seeing and drawing. Throughout this process I have made it a priority to focus on being honest in my attempt to capture myself in each image. For me, these pieces are grounded through the information in each layer, each process, and each experience. “

This thesis and its development is an exploration and expansion of how to communicate through self-portraiture supported by ceramic materials. The introduction of ceramic materials and processes has given me liberties in developing a clear and cohesive body of work that exhibit both a strong sense of emotion and time. Even now, when I look at these portraits, I can remember precisely what was happening in my life and environment when that record was made.

For the sake of clarity and consistency with the ideas behind the show, the presentation of this thesis is based on three different components. The first addresses the historical aspects and references, from who and where I took influence and inspiration. The second is the subject matter and drawing treatment behind the image, and why I chose that approach. The third section will be the technical processes and how the material lends itself to the production of the work; furthermore, that the technical processes used were, in many ways, new developments on traditional processes.
III. Historical Aspects

Over the course of my two years in graduate school I learned to see in new ways and use research as a tool in the creation of objects. Previous to this experience, I, just as everyone else, produced artwork driven by my influences and my visual record. Towards the end of my first year I started to really understand and utilize my influences as inspiration.

I began to look more into the past, drawing inspiration from my environment, my peers and my professors/instructors. I began to see the impact of those influences on both my work and myself. I started to develop the opinion that everything we see shapes us in myriad ways; positive or negative, our visual record affects how we see something and the interpretations we make of it. I feel this is true especially in the construction of artwork because the only real invention nowadays is the problem-solving process. In artwork, the same as any creative development, we are building upon memories in different ways, thus forging new paths. The end result is inevitably directed by the limitations or skillfulness of the creator. Learning this led me to use my references more directly as a tool.

After researching a particular selection of artists for this study, my goal then became to recreate aspects of those artworks that I thought were important. Steered by my experience, emotion, and visual record I was now trying to train my hands to mimic gestures that could correspondingly express my existence. When looking at the works subsequently produced, the timeline of which I was absorbing these influences becomes apparent. Learning how these artists viewed their own work, the self-portraiture process in particular, aided my development. This research helped me to engage with artwork that is created with a clear intellectual understanding. In turn, I was challenged to have more clear intentions in my artwork and direction.
Egon Schiele

Egon Schiele captured and embodied strong emotion and sexuality in the things he created, simply and masterfully. The visceral qualities of Egon Schiele’s work sends clear signals to the viewer that I wanted to exemplify. In Schiele’s works there is a very direct and meaningful application of mark making— it was apparent that he was engrossed with the ideas that he was expressing; his own emotion, angst and thoughts of mortality.

Every element in Schiele’s drawings serves the purpose of pointedly telling a story. His figures are constructed masterfully from just the pieces needed to amount to a readable statement. Schiele’s renderings present raw information to the viewer, without words being necessary.

“By stripping the figure of its worldly mantle Schiele attempts to transcend all social conventions in order to reveal that absolute philosophical condition that belongs to everyone.”

In trying to develop my own drawings, I looked to his work for a variety of inspiration, from composition to construction. At that point, the process for my drawings was still evolving and changing. The further I progressed, the more I would try to sit and recreate small hints of what Schiele illustrated in the shortest stroke of a line.

The line alone in his works carries a sculptural quality; it defines and sets the figure out and away from the page. Schiele’s lines do more than just build shapes and create figures or objects, his line-work builds walls separating the material from the reality of the subject he is capturing. His use of color sends signals that highlight thoughts, impulses, and feelings. For me this technique dramatically conveyed the feeling of the subject greater than a representational drawing. Colors like red for sex, perversion, and anger and greens and yellows for sickness and distain. If his figures had been handled in a more representational manner they would not have been able to tell the same story.
The appearance of just the subject, without any identifiable context, focuses the viewer’s attention on that figure and forces them to read the person as if there were a series of words written on the surface. This is one of Schiele’s strongest attributes in the capturing of the figure’s reality. In stripping the subject from their environment the subject is now presented as the object. In some ways it turns them into a specimen to be read. Schiele was trying to present reality more than make expressive drawings and stripping the excess information helped to direct all examination to the subject. In most of his drawings I referenced, when subjects are presented with objects, they are usually imposed to support the story being captured. Similar to a photograph, these drawings capture fleeting moments. No time was wasted on rendering useless information; everything present in the drawing serves a purpose to tell the story.

From looking at Schiele’s drawings, I also considered how body positioning and framing has the ability to communicate a story.

Schiele masterfully posed his subjects as twisted, contorted, lying open to the viewer, or wrapped up by their own limbs. Because of this, his self-portraits were most influential on my own work. The manner in which he told entire stories with the rendering of hands in his drawings, was something I wanted to embrace. Schiele would use hands the same way he would use color to deliver a specific message to the viewer. In his works, this ranged from posed situations where the subject is in control, to positions where every muscle is tensed and the subject is in complete torment.

“Maybe a genuine despair at his own alienation and loneliness forces Schiele to draw attention to himself in a hopeless attempt to make contact. But whatever this works reveals of his mental state, they also show the need the artist had to dramatize himself and to strike impressive postures.”

These compositions made me think about how I positioned myself in front of the mirror and how my body, sometimes only my hands, could convey what I felt at the moment. Schiele’s drawings have a sense of honesty. The information presented is a readable thing, the pulling of the face, the locking of the fingers, and the tilt of the head- all dramatic, almost theatrical, but very readable.

Another aspect that greatly contributed to my work from studying Schiele’s paintings and

\[2\] Whitford Frank: Egon Schiele. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 82.
drawings was his use of light washes of color to accentuate characteristics of his subjects. After really examining this in his work, my drawings changed dramatically. The drawings became more simplified where I would just manipulate certain areas that I felt added to the story I was living.

Instead of the washes Schiele used, I used washes of varying materials over my line-work, or raw materials over the image. Iron, cobalt oxide, lithium carbonate took the place of ink and pigment. These and other materials used in this simple fashion brought a new dialog to my work. In some ways it brought a sense of depth that was different from Egon’s but carried a similar impact. Understanding the materials helped me to capture and relay what was happening in my life at the time, whether it was in color or in texture.

Schiele was by far the most influential on this work. His life and devotion to his artwork were incredibly fascinating, it drove me to find something I could relate to and channel into my own work.

*Van Gogh*

To bring variation to this body of work, I referred to Van Gogh. The technical differences in
color, paint thickness, brush stroke, et cetera, in his works lent themselves to changes in his mood and emotion.

“For in fact, what Van Gogh produced was not a coherent artistic output, but a unique autobiography of his feelings.”

This evidence of mood and intensity is the particular point of interest. In the construction of the object, the artist could capture the effects of his temporal environment in his manipulation of the materials. In an effort to create a visually stimulating and readable diary, I recognized the importance of learning these techniques to capture my own life in the objects that I was producing. Absorbing Van Gogh’s work, I began to understand the impact of using surface treatment as way to deliver information. This was different from Schiele’s drawings, record making essentially, whereas Van Gogh’s work has a theatrical quality. Instead of presenting bits of reality Van Gogh distorted it. He painted the weight of the world on his shoulders, intricate layers and complexities of the human experience recorded in thicknesses and color. This was in contrast to Schiele’s works where the information is immediately evident.

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Thinking about how surface treatments could inform my artwork, I analyzed what different materials could bring to the discussion. Working over top of initial sketches and renderings of my self-portraits, I would disguise the images with layers of ceramic materials. Some of the artwork where I tried to employ the most distressed display of emotion was to illustrate my personal life experience at that time. In those works, I continuously layered over the initial image; line drawings similar in style to Schiele’s. This allowed me to quickly capture a present moment. I would then build a surface out of glaze, or just use materials that would erode parts of the drawing. This was a way to mimic the texture of a brush stroke. In lieu of using color and a layering of strokes I was building a surface of materials that would leave a similar visual impression. This was another way to illustrate the anxiety and apprehension I was feeling about creating this body of work and the current state of my life. It was a way for me to show aversion to my environment, similar to scratching a photograph, manipulating an image with mark making that exudes aggression.

7. Vincent Van Gogh Self-Portrait 1889
8. Self-Portrait #20
Edvard Munch

Some work of Edvard Munch’s is reminiscent of the properties of black Raku fired surfaces. The westernized style of this Japanese ceramic post-firing reduction begins when the ceramic piece fired has reached its desired temperature. You remove the object and then place it in combustible materials. That unglazed surface is impregnated with carbon and turns a matte black finish. The quality of that black finish creates a romantically lonely surface, devoid of any emotion or information much like a vacuum in space or a blank television screen.

The appearance of anxiety and loneliness are so prevalent in how Munch could depict a small, light-covered figure or face amidst an encroaching darkness, as if being engulfed by an unidentifiable entity. His relative proportion of dark versus light inspired my process greatly. I chose to glaze over tile in the areas of the image that were to remain lighter following the Raku firing process.

9. Edvard Munch Self-Portrait With Skeleton Arm

10. Self-Portrait #8
The glaze acted both literally and figuratively as a glass-like protection over my face and hands, being several shades lighter than the carbon-impregnated negative space that would surround my ‘self.’ While one portion of the surface was being destroyed by this process, the other was being protected from the process. This was a direct reflection of how I was viewing my own reality. My glaze-protected facial features were, like Munch’s, signified the only tangible relationship in my reality, my own person. This was my self-preservation during a time of great loneliness and uncertainty; the unidentifiable surrounding environ. I related to the ghostly images and saw the potential in my processes to capture a similar aesthetic and add feeling in my own medium.

**Lucian Freud**

In some of the works I wanted to convey the impact of reality as a tangible element. In the past, Jerome Witkin’s paintings and the intensity of his subjects have had a heavy impact on how I view the treatment of color and flesh. I remember standing in front of one of his paintings and being able to see how the person felt in it, sick, choking almost. The reality and story that are portrayed are uncompromising, and the color very confrontational by a slight exaggeration in the palettes of the flesh. Witkin’s paintings were the first that I had ever seen portraying an unavoidable brutal reality.

While researching Jerome Witkin I came across Lucian Freud, a painter revered as one of the most influential figure painters of the 20th century. I became intrigued by articles on his work and the description of him being a painter who could cut to the core of the sitter.

“...his nudes are not nudes in the tradition of, say, Titian or Rubens… but are brutally honest depictions of naked bodies shown for what they are.”

I came across a video of him talking about his work, and it changed how I regarded the act of making portraiture and made me understand that is was really a practice of recording reflections.

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4 Mullins, Charlotte, Painting People: Figure Painting Today (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2006), 19.
The act of sitting in front of a mirror for at least an hour every day to capture something of substance was an intense experience. Lucian described his self-portraits as some of the most difficult things he had produced. Some of the portraits he would never finish or would set off to the side for an incredibly long time. Contemplating that, why some would go unfinished, forced me to question further what I was recording. Lucien Freud made me consider my relationship to these objects that I was creating, was what I was producing a true representation of myself?

Hearing him say that some portraits would remain unfinished for great lengths of time, made me think that his works had to be contemplated or revered in a certain state of mind to discover the most absolute of truths. It made me understand the relationship that was developing with these objects had to be correct and candid, and I acknowledged that I had to be in a certain mindset to record myself honestly. Previous to this I was referencing artists who’s infamous emotions matched my own, but then I learned to make peace with the events that I was recording and just concentrate on the finite details of how I actually appeared. All of the drawings that I made after this point are the best, most honest representations of my person, and I look significantly aged.
Lucien Freud’s techniques are not traceable like Munch or Van Gogh or Schiele, it forced me to sit and analyze minutiae to produce a good drawing of what was precisely in front of me. I began studying methodology, not technique.

“Its very tempting because of your permanent availability. I do start more self portraits and destroy more than any other picture because … they seem to go wrong so very often and I haven’t found a way of doing them, not that I have found a way of doing anything but I feel they should become easier and they don’t. There’s also an important point, you can’t see yourself like you can other people, all you can see is a reflection, I have tried to paint the actual reflections that I see and that’s why I call them reflection, I avoid trying to avoid anything, any expression on my part which seems to me to be viewing oneself in a pleasant or consistent light, and so I notice from self portraits very often that I look at that people tend to make themselves look or give themselves a sort of grander which I’m not saying the they haven’t got it but they certainly don’t give it to other people, I don’t know if I succeed in this but I’m conscience of themes but I’m conscience of this very much, but then of course I think it would be equally false to make yourself look meaner than you were, if this were possible, because it would be dramatizing it in another way in a way, in a more trivial way in a sense”  

This changed my methods of production, and my portraiture became more simplified, I was stripping more away. I began to concentrate on the act of recording information as it was seen. Freud’s reflections are copying exactly what is in the mirror. Thusly, if I were to sit and study myself, and I were to smile it would be fake, it wouldn’t last for the 45 minutes that I spent in

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front of the mirror. The appearance that I record should be the face of me looking and studying what I’m drawing.

13. Lucian Freud, Reflection Self-Portrait

14. Self-Portrait #40

IV. Development of the Artwork

What I had produced up to my second year at RIT was driven by exploration in building and thinking. Producing a readable work of art that did not rely on my verbal defense was my greatest challenge. I, much like my artwork, was trying to incorporate a million different conversations, influences, and ideas.

Throughout the first year I spent my time trying to simplify the things I produced, trying to get down to the most important information. The use and construction of images is something that comes naturally to me. For the past ten years I have worked as a tattoo artist, and have built an environment in a subculture driven by images. In my work I was using images that I would be accustomed to seeing produced in the folk art subculture of tattoo, a place not accessed or
understood by most people. Because I have a respect and admiration for the imagery, the relocation of it onto other mediums made sense. However, I always felt that the imagery wasn’t necessarily something I should capitalize on in my own artwork—its out of place not on flesh.

I am covered in tattoos, from head to toe. Every day that I look in the mirror, I spend a period of time, no matter how long or short, processing images, looking and thinking. This experience of looking in the mirror seemed to be an interesting subject to examine through the use of materials and drawing, because of the substance of the subject matter. Through different materials and processes I am familiar with in ceramics, I could convey a dialog with readable layers. On white tiles, I would use cobalt oxides to produce a fired blue and white self-portrait, without tattoos, that had a Delft ceramic appearance. From there, I drew the tattoos that cover my upper torso with iron sulfate.
Iron references the metal needles that create tattoos, it’s also an element in the blood. In the tattoo process, the surface of the skin is damaged and bleeds and when iron then rusts because of oxidation, it has the appearance of erosion and wear. I would draw the images on and repeatedly wash them partially away, creating a surface where it looked as if the images burned in and were slowly eroding away over time. This process; the repetition of drawing each day and washing the images away, felt like I was relieving myself of something, getting something off my chest, literally. Furthermore, it had me reaching past my normal conventions, the painting technique having been a long-lurking idea that I had not yet attempted. My search for identity in these images pushed me to try this approach in order to properly convey this story.
This was the first self-portrait I had ever produced and it was created in the beginning of my second year at RIT. Following the first critique of this work is when the production of this body began to take shape and I started to fine-tune what would be produced for the thesis show.

After determining that self-portraiture would be the direction to go, I began exploring different ways of capturing images in and on clay. There was a huge amount of ground covered in this exploration of building and finishing techniques. Sitting in front of a mirror every day and looking at myself was, not only an intense experience, but led to this direct record of my current state at those points in time. That kind of diligence is quite difficult. Sometimes I felt as if it was
therapy mixed with a forced introspection. It became a venting place for me to sit and organize everything I had happening in my life. At this time I was ending a long relationship, my uncle was killed in an auto accident, and my dog had been hospitalized. Sitting and drawing became a place to relax, focus on drawing, re-learn how to draw, and get my head and hand to move in accord.

From the culmination of my research and production efforts, the artwork moved through different stages pretty quickly. I started not knowing what I was doing or how to do it, I was learning how to work very hard and fast. This led to the paintings having a common thread in how I would sit and draw each day.

Initially, it seemed appropriate to build one image on multiple tiles. I had made a wall in my studio that could hold about 200 12”x12” tiles to make a massive image. However, splitting the image up onto multiple surfaces was loosing focus and appeared unsettling. There was too much industrial ceramic information and it was detracting from the work. It just looked like a bathroom wall or a tiled counter, and it wasn’t necessary to contextualize that information in the portraits.
At this point I focused on producing work that referenced painting more than ceramics. I wanted to explore more illustrative skills on ceramic materials. Shifting my focus to working on single tiles, I enjoyed the work in that scale and the freedom that came with it. The tiles by themselves seemed more intimate and the focus was now on the image and it’s presentation as a readable subject.

Also by shifting the scale, it was now possible to produce one drawing a day, presenting a sense of time to the work that had previously been lacking. The drawings were becoming diary entries fueled by environment and mental state. Slowly, I felt that I was beginning to capture feeling into my drawings.
This Image was from when I had finally started producing something that I knew was going to work or at least push me in the right direction. The appearance is self-assured, the brush strokes are fast and direct, even if somewhat incorrect. Positioning of the head is tilting back to look proud.

In this tile the mood was much different than the previous, it was produce to look much colder. Around this time there were a couple of personal issues leading to a shift in my mood and temper, causing me to want to have a much more somber appearance in the drawings. To accomplish this I focused on color and composition. I wanted to present the portrait in a solitary way. Ghostly, like Edvard Munch’s self-portrait, With Skeleton Arm. Munch’s drawings, and this one in particular, carried the language
of solitude. I wanted to use this visual language to produce a similar feeling. Purposefully highlighted at the bottom of this work, are my hands. At the time, my girlfriend of several years had left, and despite feeling pretty terrible, my hands hadn’t stopped working. On the contrary, they were still producing, working harder than ever before and with a new reason to be moving.

**Materials**

The beginning of the second year, I started working with blue and white tiles, four handmade tiles with an image of a snake, wrapping around a hand, painted in cobalt oxide. From the critique on this work, I was advised to think about using store-bought tile in order to focus primarily on the treatment of the imagery. This was hard to take in, as I consider myself a self-sufficient artist and had not thought of working in this fashion.

Researching tile manufacturers around upstate NY, I had found two, Dale Tile in Olean, NY and Stuben Tile in Stuben, NY. I called Olean Tile first and set up an appointment for a tour. I then tried to contact Stuben tile for the same but could only find information about the company being in financial trouble and receiving government assistance in 2006.

The tour of Dale Tile was fascinating. Processes previously unknown to me were left and right, with kilns being close to 100 feet long. The tile they made in this factory was much smaller than I had expected, 2”x2” stoneware tile. First, the materials for these tiles was mixed with 4-5% water in 500 gallon rotating drums that were in the shape of a “Y.” The shape of the vat would force the materials together and then spread them apart over and over until the clay; due to lack of water, formed little pellets the size of sunflower seeds. From there, the material was fed via conveyor belts into fifteen-foot ram press machines that press around 200 tiles per minute. Again, because there was so little water, when the tiles were pressed, they would hold together but still feel dry to the touch. This nearly eliminated shrinkage and warping. The tiles were then stacked in sagers and sent on the next conveyor belt to the kiln. The kiln was a train kiln, taking around six hours for a full cycle of tiles to go through. My tour guide asked me why I was interested in tile and I told him what I was doing and that I was looking for unfired tile. He said that they weren’t producing white tile for another week, and that he would take some mid-process and ship them to me through UPS. I thought this was crazy but figured he knew what he was
doing and gladly accepted the offer.

Two weeks later I received a box of broken tiles in the mail. Only 100 2”x2” tiles survived the journey out of 500. Turns out that the delicate handling of parcels through UPS isn’t done quite gingerly enough for green tile to survive. All very comical to me, so I called and requested more but went to pick them up in person.

On this second trip south from RIT, I decided to try and find Stuben Tile, the other manufacturer. After leaving Dale for the second time I began my search and drove all over Stuben County asking around. From the loose directions I was receiving, and the inadvertent exploration that I was doing, I finally discovered it’s location from the town hall, and the news that it had been closed for a couple of years. I decided to find it in hopes of retrieving abandoned pallets of tile, a reward for my endeavors. After having finally arrived at the building, I learned that it had been reopened by Trikennan Tile Works. I walked into the main section of the factory and was immediately stopped by the closest person to me, Pam. This operation was only about one tenth the size of the other factory. The first thing that I asked Pam was if they would sell me green tile. She looked at me a bit puzzled and said that she didn’t know. From that point on, the whole experience was pretty fabulous. The production of the tile was much different than at Dale Tile. Here, the tile was made with more water content. The clay was cone six stoneware. From the mixer, the majority of what they were producing came out as a slab and was then press cut into the 1’x1’ tile dimensions. The kiln in this building used a conveyor belt to cycle the tiles from wet, to fired, to cool in about 3.5 hours. Pam handed my tour off to an elderly man who didn’t know anything really about the process but was very friendly and entertaining. At one point towards the end of the conveyor belt, he reached in to grab a tile, apparently before the cooling process, and burnt himself. At the end of the tour, Pam approached me and told me that something had gone wrong in a machine a couple days earlier and they had a full pallet of tile that had little flakes of metal through it and was no use to them. She sold me the tile for the cost of the materials to make them. I figured that I could work around the problem.

Transporting the tiles in my car was pretty scary. I decided to do it with the tile stacked in piles of twelve, and was able to fit about twelve stacks in the back of my car. Driving cautiously, the two or so hours back
to Rochester, I only lost about six tiles. This was the best way to move them. So, after this trip, I got greedy since I was getting such a good deal on the tile and went back to get twice the amount. I tried to stack them on their side to get that many in the car. This was the worst way to move them. I could hear the shifting and cracking the whole drive and it continued to worsen. As soon as I hit the brakes it would put pressure on a specific point to adjacent tiles and widen the space between them. Every time I turned my car I would lose a few more tiles. By the time I got back to RIT I had about 150 unbroken tiles sitting in rubble, the same amount as the first. This was depressing, but in the end I had 300 or so tile to test on and use. I could break them for fun if I saw fit, and I did.

Now with so much material, the focus was on method and experimentation. It turned out that the tile I had purchased was a very strong clay body and resistant to rapid heating and cooling.

**Processes**

The tiles in the show can be broken up into four different general firing processes, Raku drawings, line drawings, china paintings, and Raku combinations.

**Raku Drawings**

The removal of glaze to produce an image in a post firing process is what I am calling Raku Drawings. The works in the show that were produced with this technique seem to be the most wholesome and peaceful. There is a visibly relaxed nature that is present in the final product. This comes from the softening of the line construction of the image in the firing. The flow and subtlety of the clear glaze on the surface, and the soft black that become the abstracted background and line color. The firing process would take away hand information and would, in some cases, cause the images to appear almost as a natural thing that was driven by coincidence, not intentionally constructed.
Raku Combinations

I have been calling a series of techniques Raku Combinations because it is an amalgamation of all the processes and materials I had been working with at RIT. The Raku process lends itself to this method of working quite nicely. I was in direct contact with the work as it was firing and could work with different materials, temperatures, and effects as they were happening. In some cases, the images on the tiles would be pre-planned, but then during the firing process I would begin to manipulate it, usually with the introduction of another material. This would distort and cover the existing image. Iron sulfate, cupric chloride, lithium carbonate, and combustible organic materials were all things I would use and add midway and post-firing to produce a desired effect. For example, lithium carbonate is a strong flux and melts away materials beneath it producing glossy speckled areas that resemble water drops on an ink painting. Combustible organic materials infuse porous surfaces with carbon turning the clay body black, while iron sulfate would turn the clay body orange, red, or brown. It would also stain any cracks those colors.

China Paintings

The use of china paints on tiles is not only user-friendly, but it’s very versatile in that it’s a malleable and salvageable medium. When working with it, its possible to continuously build layers. If an aesthetic was reached that was worth keeping, it could be fired and affixed into an almost indestructible layer that could then be built upon. If it was undesirable, it could be wiped away for a fresh start. These layers however were very delicate, at least until the point of firing. I never had a layer dry between working and firing. There was a
freedom that came along with working with these materials. The colors are rich and the manipulation of the materials has a painterly quality.

24. Self-Portrait #44

**Line Drawings**

In my search for materials to screen print, I began to use china paints and discovered a material called pen oil. The pen oil changed the overall aesthetic of my work. This oil would suspend ceramic materials and allow it to be treated like the smoothest ink I had ever worked with. The materials that I infused into the pen oil concoction, made it much more versatile than the oil’s original purpose. I started using this material instead of water for all my stains and washes. The fact that it would remain wet opened up new
possibilities with the ceramic materials, and produced a more fluid appearance. In contrast to the more familiar way of drawing a line with pen or pencil and it remaining on the surface, lines in this material could be moved or wiped away. Stains mixed into the oil could then be applied with the thinnest of brushes, producing a line that could range from 1/32 of an inch to 1 inch. This made drawing very calligraphic and expressive. The line drawings in the show were produced towards the end of this self-portrait process, and at that point I was becoming more adept with the production of the images. I felt that I was approaching Lucian Freud’s level of expressing honest depiction. The information in the works comes through in the simplest of ways, with the least amount of explanation.

**Framing of the Artwork**

What I wanted to highlight in the presentation of these works was that they were ultimately objects. They were objects that represented tangible milestones, a marker of a time period that could be taken and held in hand. From this thinking it was proposed that the best way to convey this idea was to have the presentation of the tiles be a mix between containers, frames, pedestals and boxes. The appearance of the containers is simple and direct. Its purpose is to support the tile as an object of a collection. In some cases, the boxes were manipulated slightly, either by scratching small amounts of paint off of the inside lines of the frames or by painting that edge to mimic aspects of the tile. This softened the transition between tile and frame giving the appearance that the image was, itself, manipulating its container. Containing these images became a metaphor for finishing this body of work that was both revealing and emotional. It was relieving to pack away a finished portion of my life into sweet, poetic packages. The black of the frames served as the final visual aid to tie each piece together as a cohesive, planned group.
I see this body of work as a culmination of my experience at RIT. During my two years, much of the work that I produced was driven by my desire to make readable work that did not rely on verbal defense or explanation. More often than not, I was trying to integrate so many different conversations, influences, and ideas into one piece that my goal became always to simplify. “Keep it simple stupid,” was a term I became used to hearing from professors and, consequently, in my own head. Of course, keeping it simple is never as simple as it sounds. Towards the end of my time at RIT, I’d been through enough trial, error, and experimentation to finally figure out what simple felt and looked like. These self-portraits are the first actual records that I have ever created of my life and my self. The response I received from colleagues, professors and my committee was one of genuine interest. They were not trying to understand their relation to an object, they were trying to understand me. It was also the first time that I felt that my work was being deeply considered in terms of its surface, its context, and its meaning; not only the meaning it held for the viewer, but the meaning it held for the maker.
VII. Works Cited


Bibliography


