As I recall...

Megan Gulland
Rochester Institute of Technology
School for American Crafts

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
in candidacy for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

AS I RECALL…

by Megan E. Gulland

January 1, 2011
## Signature Page

Approved by:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rick Hirsch: Chief Advisor</td>
<td>Associate Professor of Ceramics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eileen Bushnell: Associate Advisor</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tybre Newcomer: Associate Advisor</td>
<td>Visiting Assistant Professor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don Arday: Chairperson</td>
<td>Interim Chair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Blank spaces for signatures and dates.*
Copyright Release Form

AS I RECALL…

I, Megan E. Gulland, hereby grant permission to the Wallace Memorial Library of the Rochester Institute of Technology to reproduce my thesis in whole or in part that any reproduction will not be for commercial use or profit.

____________________
Megan E Gulland

MM/DD/YY
Dedication

For my husband, my equilibrium, who hung in there and supported me throughout this process. Thank you to my family for all your love, support and sacrifice. A special thank you to my professors and peers for pushing both me and my work.
# Table of Contents

SIGNATURE PAGE ........................................................................................................ii
COPYWRIGHT RELEASE FORM ...........................................................................iii
DEDICATION ............................................................................................................iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS ...............................................................................................v
ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................1
INTRODUCTION/ BACKGROUND ..........................................................................2-5
HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES ....................................6-16
THESIS REVIEW .....................................................................................................17-23
STORIES, IMAGES, AND EXPLANATIONS ..................................................24-56
WORKS CITED .......................................................................................................57
IMAGES CITED .......................................................................................................58-59
**Abstract**

This body of work presents a visual memoir of my childhood. Told through these self-portraits, this work captures the essence of my memories. Though the sculptures portray my present age as storyteller, the content comes from my childhood. I am exploring the roots of my love of storytelling by joining my passion for clay with the events of my past. The process of making these portraits, for me, closely reflects the process of growing up. In a similar way, as I built, I learned the limits and possibilities of the clay. Now, even as an adult I reflect on my emotions and translate these highs and lows into my pieces. I want the viewer to connect with the narrative on a personal level through the emotional content of the work. Though all the sculptures are self-portraits I hope the audience will identify with the pieces, laugh out loud and possibly be inspired to begin telling stories of their own.
Introduction/ Background

Storytelling has always played a large role in my family. In one of my earliest memories I was five years old and was sitting in the backseat of my dad’s car. I was still small enough that my knees did not bend over the edge of the seat and I was busy staring at the pink shoelaces in my L.A. Gear rhinestone sneakers, singing along with Cindy Lauper. Unexpectedly, my dad ejected the cassette tape and began telling my sister and I a story we still remember today—about a young boy named Carfee and his friend named Crow Crow (his name doubled to explain that he was from the Crow tribe). My father developed and unfolded the story over time, telling us a new segment when he would take us to dinner once a week. All week long I would look forward to hearing the next installment. When he finished this story my dad made up a theme song and to this day my sister and I will still break out into the song he created for us, singing and laughing while we try to sort out the more blurry details. My father invented many other stories but Carfee and Crow Crow is the one that still lingers most strongly in my mind.

When my dad was young, his grandfather used to tell him stories meant not to entertain, but to terrify. One year while at the Grand Canyon my father decided to relay one of his grandfather’s stories to my sister and I. I can not remember all of the details but I do recall there was a man who at night would hear low chanting saying “Um Bah, Um Bah, Gonna Tumble Down…” I believe these noises were coming from the rocks above the man’s head, and that they were trying to warn him about a rockslide. In the end, however, the man did not heed the warning and was crushed by the falling rocks. The next day we went to see the canyon but all my sister and I could hear was the rocks chanting about tumbling down, so we refused to go near the edge to see how deep the
canyon was. To this day whenever I see a “falling rocks” sign I can still hear my dad’s voice chanting “Um Bah, Um Bah, Gonna Tumble Down…” Reflecting on these stories I can truly appreciate what a good storyteller my dad truly is. Storytelling is an art form which I feel he has passed on to me and the craft is all about capturing your audience’s attention and being able to hold it until the very end. To this day when my family is gathered together, most of our conversations begin with “remember the story about…” or “tell me again about the story when…” and usually end with all of us in tears from laughing so hard.

Another family member who has greatly influenced my love for storytelling is my maternal grandfather whom I called Ging Ging. Ging Ging was what you might call a “Good old southern boy.” His family had settled Clearwater, Florida in the 1800’s and he never lived anywhere else. His father was a dentist and would travel to nearby towns to practice. I can remember Ging Ging telling me, as well as acting out the stories about helping his dad with extractions. His dad would first take a swig of whiskey before he offered it to the patient. He would then have my grandfather hold the patient down while he grabbed the tooth and pulled, sometimes walking all the way around the patient until the tooth gave way. He would then take another swig as well as offering one to the patient before handing them a piece of cotton or cloth to bite down on to stop the bleeding. Back then and to this day I can still feel my jaw aching just imagining the pain his patients went through. These kinds of tangible feelings and emotions are something I try to evoke in my viewers when telling my stories through my sculptures.

When I was in middle school and high school I would occasionally spend the weekend with my Ging Ging. We would hang out by the pool or go out on his boat named “Dirty Mary”
and I would ask him to tell me stories from his past. I wanted to hear about everything and I would listen and laugh as he relayed his past to me. When he was in high school he was the quarterback of the football team. Due to an unusual tackle he was blinded in one eye. I can remember staring at his milky eye and thinking it was his mind’s eye and through it he could see and replay events from his past. He would tell me stories about building sailboats and using them to smuggle moonshine into Clearwater via the Tampa Bay. One story I particularly loved to hear, was about the time when one of his boats caught fire and exploded because of all the moonshine it carried. We would laugh as he recalled jumping off the boat and watching it burn. My grandfather could manage to find the humor in any story or situation and I believe that this is a trait I have inherited from him.

Eventually Ging Ging fell ill and was moved to our house. He retained his sense of humor and my family and I would sit and listen to all that he had to say. We eventually decided to record all of his stories so that they would not be lost forever. By the time he passed we had recorded hours and hours of his memories and adventures. As I grew older I too discovered my love of storytelling, enjoying capturing my friends’ attention while making them wonder where the story was going.

As I reflect on the stories from my past and the people who told them to me, I considered what is truly important and influential about them. I have come to believe that the most important aspects for me are the emotional and physical sensations that these tales can bring back. I am able to almost feel the wind in my hair and smell the water as my grandpa and I cruise down the river as he tells his tales. I am always amazed by the power of memory. While creating my thesis exhibition I tried to find stories from my past that evoked and
expressed these types of emotions. I have always considered myself a very expressive and animated storyteller, using the skills and traits passed down to me from my family. While telling stories I try to create a setting for my listeners or viewers. I accentuate dominant emotions and gestures in order to grab their attention while at the same time allowing them to relate on a personal level. As humans we all have the same spectrum of emotions and if I can get an audience to share what I am feeling then I consider myself a successful storyteller. Both my father and grandfather were able to mesmerize me in this way and now I in turn utilize the same approaches while telling my own stories.
**Historical and Contemporary Influences**

This body of work focuses on story telling and its role in the structuring of my personal history and mythology. I have always enjoyed telling stories and making others laugh. I knew I wanted to use narrative in my work but I was unsure how to go about this. In order to gain perspective on how to use sculpture to tell my stories, I peered into the past. In Art History courses, I was particularly impressed with some of the earliest examples of artwork, whose main purpose was to tell a story. In the figure wall paintings of the late Paleolithic period, Santander Spain, artists recorded the events that were unfolding within their environment, hence an early form of storytelling through art. These paintings provide us with a narrative of their lives and remind us of the powerful and innate need humans have always had to create visual images. These images reinforce my belief that when you are drawn to art you will find a way to create it. These bison were painted with the earliest kind of paint, developed and worked with in order to match colors and more importantly, to fulfill the need to create. This thought always reminds me of my own compulsion and need to create art from the time that I was very small. Instead of filling my little girl purse with lip-gloss and nail polish, I was always carrying crayons, paper, pencils, beads and other shiny things I would find and pick up. Before I even knew what art was I was compelled to create it.
Another piece I have always been drawn to is the Venus of Willendorf (fig. 2) I believe it is due to the fact it is the earliest representation of the female body. I can still hear my Art History professor’s voice talking about how her bulbous breasts and hips representing her fertility. I was drawn to the honesty of her form, which at the same time also revealed ridiculously tiny arms, that seemed to me to be almost last minute additions. I can identify with this piece in many ways. I try to be as honest as possible with the representation of my body, but my favorite part to sculpt is the face and the torso. Sculpting the female body, with its curves and softness, is for me the most delightful part of the figure.

The work of Antonio Canova is inspirational and a style I hope to mirror. The piece Pauline Bonaparte as Venus (fig. 3) is a clear example of his mastery of media. Canova uses a smooth, soft style while creating Pauline and yet it seems very modeled and almost stylized. Although I desire my sculptural faces to be read as more realistic and portray extreme emotion, I am drawn to and inspired by his technique. I have spent a great deal of time in the sculpture garden of the Metropolitan Museum of Art studying this type of figurative work and my own work emulates the smooth and idealized skin and hair of these forms. As much as I have sought to mimic the classical style of Canova, my figures have remained true to both my own size and physical attributes.
Although I knew which sculptural style I wanted to use in the work, I was still confused about how to use my sculptures to tell my stories. One of the historic examples that stood out for me was the Sistine Chapel, what I believe to be one of the most ambitious stories ever told through art. Michelangelo’s ceiling in this chapel completed between 1508 and 1512 illustrates and illuminates a vast amount of content about the doctrine of the Catholic Church across an enormous span of space. In addition to using art to embody narrative, this work also provided me with examples of figurative work that conveyed powerful emotional content. Specifically, I was drawn to the panel of the Expulsion from Paradise (fig. 4). Within this panel Michelangelo presents the viewer with two aspects of the story, each taking place on a different side of the tree of knowledge. One part of the story shows Eve succumbing to temptation and convincing Adam to eat the fruit while the second half shows them being cast out of the garden. The manifestation of sorrow and shame in both the facial expressions and body positions of Adam and Eve is very powerful to this day, and influenced the ways in which I used expression and gesture to enhance emotion in many of my pieces. “Gas Station Creeper” is an example of my work that was influence by what I saw in the Sistine Chapel. It uses exaggerated gesture and facial expression to convey extreme emotion.
The work of Elisabeth-Louise Vigee-Lebrun has also been influential. In particular, it is her method of working with paint and canvas that I have tried to emulate while working with clay. Her surfaces are very smooth resulting in an almost idealized depiction of skin that is both soft and almost translucent. One of the favorite portrait artists of Queen Marie-Antoinette, Vigee-Lebrun painted a number of portraits of the queen and her surroundings, including Queen Marie-Antoinette and her children (fig. 5).

At the time this painting was created Marie-Antoinette’s reputation was poor to say the least and this piece functioned to depict the narrative of the loving mother and obedient wife that were not readily accessible to the public. The painting was meant to counteract the newspapers reports of the time that were
continually portraying her as a party girl having wild flings with a variety of lovers. For me, the power of the painting is its use of subtlety to convey the emotion of a desperate queen trying to regain a good reputation. Although I felt that this was a powerful way to approach emotional content and narrative, I decided I was neither subtle nor ambiguous in my emotions or personality. The work of Vigae-Lebrun did show me, however, how to reign myself in a bit. Vigae-Lebrun retained both the nobility and femininity of her patrons, by creating work that could be taken seriously as well as admired for subtle detail. Like Lebrun my stories are within the artwork but not spelled out blatantly for the viewer.

In the contemporary art world I have many influences. The work of Jenny Saville has been very significant to my work. Her work also deals with emotional honesty, albeit on the gruesome side of the scale. One of her pieces that I found particularly intriguing is Ruben’s Flap (fig. 6) in which a woman is shown with an upward view. This piece catches the figure in a moment of complete vulnerability, giving the viewer a sense of glimpsing the ‘true’ woman inside. I wanted to have this same sense of exposure when I was creating my pieces. A great exercise for me was to have my pictures taken in many different posses I could use for my sculptures. I was completely nude
except for a pair of cotton underpants. I asked the photographer to have the most honest lighting possible. I wanted to see all of the little dents and rolls as clearly and truly as possible. I must admit it was very hard at first to see myself in that light from so many angles but as I began to sculpt myself I began to love each fold and crease more and more. I imagine this is how Saville feels as she paints. She must love each and every plump fold of skin otherwise it could not be her subject matter. Although her pieces still feel somewhat shocking in a culture that demands slim perfection in women, I believe her love for the female form is shown through her depiction of the more plump female. When observing my own pieces, I hope viewers see the beauty I find in the folds and sagginess of my own skin.

Some of my contemporary influences emerged from my desire to create wall pieces that combined the figure with other objects. The work of Patti Warashina captured my attention with work like Tiger Lily (fig 7). Warashina was working in the early 60s during a time when the roles of women were changing from being almost exclusively homemakers and mothers to being more career based individuals. Her work seeks to conceptually empower women by physically juxtaposing the figure with a household object commonly associated with their domestic identity. In ‘Tiger Lily’ she uses the setting of an altarpiece to
show the power of the female. The figure is interacting with the lily reflecting on and associating with the beauty of the form while at the same time acknowledging its wild and untamed identity. Warashina’s work has a more broadly political agenda than my own, but provides an authoritative and inspirational reference for my own work which deals with the interaction of the figure with other objects and forms.

During the beginning of my thesis year I was contemplating the idea of making the figures child sized and even using the body type of a child to represent myself in the stories. This interest led me to research Judy Fox. Her pieces utilize this very idea as a means of representing historical as well as mythical figures. In her piece Olympia (fig. 8) she uses the body type of a small child to portray the famous figure from a painting by Edouard Manet. I am in awe of the manner in which Fox is able to manipulate the clay so beautifully. Her figures have a very classical style, like that of Canova, that suits this piece. Fox has chosen to re-contextualize the content of the painting Olympia (fig. 9) by portraying the main subject matter as a small child, rather than a grown woman. Much of the controversy of Fox’s work is comes through her use of children as models. Even though using a child’s body would suit the chronological narrative of some of my pieces, I decided that I did not
want any additional controversy brought into my work. As the work developed, I decided that I wanted to portray myself in my present age as the storyteller. Additionally, I wanted to omit any sexual implications by displaying my lower body nude. I wanted to be recognized as a woman while still maintaining the association to childhood and innocence by reflecting on the “uniform” of my youth, the underpants that I preferred to run around and play in.

The idea of personal narrative is the entire basis of my work. Not only am I telling stories from my past, I am also portraying myself as the storyteller. These pieces for me also envelope my attitude, experiences, sense of humor and playfulness. Contemporary artists which I feel work in a similar way are Frida Kahlo, Grayson Perry and Robert Arneson.

Frida Kahlo utilized self-portraiture to tell stories of her life. Almost all of her paintings are a
personal narrative. In the piece The Broken Column (fig. 10), Kahlo uses a crumbling column to represent her spine. She was in a terrible bus accident which broke many of her bones and made her existence painful especially as she aged. The imagery in this painting shows Kahlo wearing her back brace with nails in her skin representing the continual pain she felt over her whole body. Her paintings are very literal and at the same time using a great deal of metaphorical imagery. Each piece is very personal and emotional, she does not hide the details of her feelings from the viewer. In a similar way, I use emotions expressed on my face as well as body position to tell my stories. Since I only wanted to hint at my stories and not spell them out as Kahlo does I only incorporated small clues to the true meaning of my work. However, if the viewer wanted to know my inspiration he or she could listen or read the stories for themselves.

Perry’s work is influenced by historical Greek and Folk pottery. He hand builds large vases and lidded forms then uses the traditional form as a venue to portray contemporary issues. In the

figure 11, How I thought of myself
piece How I thought of myself (fig. 11), Perry is
dressed as his alter ego Claire. This piece serves to show the public how he views himself. In
other works he uses imagery of himself as well as Claire in scenes of child abuse as well as
religious imagery. Though my work includes personal narrative by telling personal stories, Perry
uses personal narrative to represent topics for which he is passionate about. Perry uses his
imagery to represent social issues and shed light on topics that he believes need to be dealt with.
Where my work carries a sense of playfulness, Perry’s utilizes metaphor to portray his political
and sociological views.

Robert Arneson also utilized personal narrative and himself as a
metaphor to represent social issues which he was passionate about. Many of his
pieces portrayed his personal feelings about the Vietnam war and the
government. He did an entire series of pieces which he called “War Heads” in
which he used his own head and face as the model but then placed bomb war
heads coming out of them. What I found most influential about Arnesons’ pieces
was the fact that even though he was dealing with heavy political issues he still

figure 12, No Pain
used humor in the form of satire. While looking through the vast repertoire of work the main piece which caught my eye to influence my own work was a piece called No Pain (fig. 12). This piece is an example of how I want my pieces to convey emotion. This is one of his later works and the body has been omitted entirely. Many of his earlier works contained the upper body perched on a pedestal usually with arms crossed in front of his chest seen in the piece California Artist (fig. 13). Later when he created figure 12 the body disappeared entirely and what was left was raw emotion.

While making my body of work I wanted each face to be consistent. Not in the way to where they all looked the same but I wanted each to have the level of intensity if this piece. If I was happy I wanted it to be evident, same with all the emotions. I did not want the viewer to have to guess as to what I was thinking or feeling. Although my motive for my pieces differs from Arneson’s, I believe we both utilized personal narrative in order to convey our views and emotions on specific topics.

As a craftsperson I try to meet the highest quality of craftsmanship possible while understanding the work that has been made before me. All of the pieces I have written about in this section I would consider to be works of art and artists I look up to. There are sculptures and paintings and to me they have a high level of craftsmanship which I hope to learn from and aspire to.
Thesis Review

At the beginning of my thesis year the only facts that I knew for certain were that I wanted to sculpt figures and I wanted to tell stories from my past. My ideas about how to go about this underwent a great deal of transformation. My first idea was to make partial figures from the torso up. These figures were cropped because I believed my stories could be best told by focusing on the hands, arms and faces, the most overtly expressive portion of our bodies I worked on “As I Recall”, as I explored this idea. The original emotion or question I wanted this piece to convey was “What should I make from my thesis?” and it eventually became the image for my postcard. Although I enjoyed creating this sculpture, I could not ignore the question of why the rest of the body was cut off and I moved toward creating pieces that included the whole form.

After creating this first piece I began to think more about the emotions I was connecting to the stories. I decided to practice creating facial expressions. As I was making these facial responses to emotions I began thinking about how proud I am of these feelings. I considered the idea of presenting each emotion “with pride” by placing them on plaques similar to the way in which a hunter displays his trophies. I was not, however, able to leave behind the idea of death when it came to the idea of mounting.

Discussions with my committee generated the idea of making a collage for each story I was interested in portraying. I collected images of facial expressions that related to each story. From these collages I began to make maquettes to help work through my ideas. I made four or five models depicting specific emotions as well as physical gestures that would emphasize the emotion. Studying these maquettes allowed me to choose
which figure or figures would work best for depicting my story. The next issue was the scale that I wanted these figures to have. For me, the “Soft Sand” story was the most important so I decided to make it life size.

Since I had just started making figures at the end of my first year, I was lost as to how to begin building a structurally sound large figure. I also needed to decide which clay body would work best for my work. While researching this question, I found a book “The figure in clay, contemporary sculpting techniques by master artists.” It featured the work of many clay artists including Crystal Boger, Adrian Arleo, and Doug Jeck. The book followed each artist through their building process beginning along with their selection of a clay body. I decided to use the low fire white earthenware body used by Crystal Boger. This particular clay body is formulated with nylon fibers to produce a strong and dense clay especially at the bone dry state. I found that the nylon fibers were incredibly helpful during the transportations of the figures to the kiln. If for example, a finger broke, it would not fall off because the fibers would hold it in place until I could repair it.

Within this same book, the artist Adrian Arleo was shown doing preliminary work for a clay figure. She was making collages similar to mine but was also including found objects such as bird nests and abandoned wasp nests. Arleo would then make a maquette of the figure before the building process actually began. Her work and process gave me the idea to look through my family albums and find pictures of my younger self to inspire the faces and emotions on particular pieces. An album from when I was around five or six revealed the perfect face for my soft sand piece so I incorporated it in my collage. My research also revealed that Arleo also used supports on the inside of her figures which would aid in both the stability as she built and help to
reduce slumping as the piece was being fired. I also used her idea of building the head separate then attaching it after the features were complete. This allowed me to freely maneuver the head so that I could manipulate the clay in any way I needed. Once the facial features were done I would then attach the head and then add the hair which also helped connect and support the head to the body.

I was also inspired by Doug Jeck, who was shown building a life size standing figure; something that I had never attempted. My first standing figure was only three feet tall but needed support at the ankles. Mr. Jeck used angle irons, like the kind used under shelves, along with foam rubber in between the clay and the metal to support the ankles and lower legs as he built. I adopted this process and these supports enabled me to build the figure higher without worrying she would fall over. I did, however, have to lay her down as she dried in order to keep the ankles in tacked. After this piece was fired I used another technique I saw in the book. I glued threaded rod up through the feet and into the hips in order to attach her to her pedestal. These rods were invisible to the viewer and made her look as though she was simply standing on her own.

Since-building figurative work was a relatively new process for me, I had a great deal of learning to do. Many of my pieces suffered construction problems. As the life-size figure dried, her arms slid forward and broke off. These however were easily reattached after the firing and the cracks were hidden by automotive filler. I also learned that firing needs to be done slowly but not too slowly. Holding my kiln at quartz conversion for too long resulted in my standing figure being flattened out a bit. All of these events were a great and relatively fast learning experience. The appendages were particularly problematic and were exacerbated by the dry Rochester air. I was used to the slow drying times of humid Alabama but up north it is a battle to keep work
damp while it was being constructed. Several of my pieces dried before I could finish building them and had to be completed with auto filler. I think the drying problem was also due to the fact that I was usually working on at least six figures at a time to deal with my time constraints. This is an issue that I will need to carefully consider as my career progresses.

These artist featured in “The figure in Clay” inspired the technical side of my work but I also learned a great deal about the portrayal of expression from the artist Philippe Faraut. Faraut’s portrait work has very clean and beautiful surfaces, reminiscent of ancient roman and Greek statues. I wanted my figures to look soft and touchable as if the skin would dent under a slight touch. Philippe is also known for his books and instructional videos on portrait sculpting. One of these books, “Portrait Sculpting, Anatomy and Expressions in Clay” was especially inspirational for the creation of my own work. This book starts with the very basics of portrait sculpting including demonstrating how to construct an armature and useful tools, something that was particularly helpful. The first chapter of this book also reads like an anatomy text. Faraut begins by sculpting a skull and showing the slight differences between the male and female skeleton as well as the difference between skulls from different geographic locations, information that is crucial to sculpting the head. From the skull he moves to explain how muscles and ligaments are attached, anatomical features which are essential to facial expressions and by extension, conveying emotions. I came to understand which muscles were active within particular emotions.

This book also provided essential information about the proportions of the human head. In drawing classes I had always learned facial proportions but when creating a head in 3D, placement of the ears for example, is very important. I had to force myself to continue looking at
the head from all angles. It was very easy to get caught up in the facial expression but if it did not look right from the profile view as well, the piece was not successful. As I practiced many faces and expressions I learned not only about manipulating clay but also about which faces looked most like me. For example, funny and strange expressions looked more like me than say, anger, because I do not usually show anger through my facial expressions. I am usually a fun and silly, not angry, person so I learned to stay away from emotions that did not represent me.

While studying figurative ceramics I was also looking at how contemporary sculptors were working with narrative. I had to define what my work was and was not. I decided to start with what it was not. It was not political, it had no social or cultural motive beyond telling my stories, making others laugh and possibly inspire their inner storyteller. I wanted my viewers to be able to relate to the figures on a personal level. I chose basic human emotions that I am sure everyone has felt before. I portrayed myself at my present age and almost nude in order for the viewer to further relate on a human level. I chose to add underwear to my sculptures because I can remember running around as a child in nothing but white cotton underpants.

Another artist whose work has been inspirational is Tip Toland. Her figures are very realistic and the titles also hint or tell you the figures intent and meaning. To me, her work is very lighthearted and eye catching, wonderful in terms of detail but most importantly, exuding the types of emotion I find fascinating. The finish on Toland’s work is extremely realistic and although I considered using this surface, I felt that if I could not do it well I should not do it at all. I tried to use pastels and paints but my figures continually looked like scary porcelain dolls. I tried other finishing solutions including using color to enhance the emotion I was trying to convey, but I could not achieve the look I wanted. I felt that the color was taking away from the
detail I had put into the sculpture. Since this body of work was so purely about me and my love of both storytelling and ceramics, I decided to make my work look like my favorite stage of clay. When clay is leather hard I believe it is closest to real flesh. It is soft and cool to the touch but it is still delicate and able to be dented. Since this is when I was the most in love with my sculptures I decided to recreate this look after the pieces were fired. I tried a variety of approaches including creating slips and stains which could be painted on prior to firing none of which came out as rich as I wanted. I also tried staining satin glazes but again found them to be too flat.

I took a piece of leather hard clay to the art store in an attempt to match its color with spray-paint, I was able to find the correct colors but I could not get the spray paint to be as smooth as I wanted. Then I took this piece of clay to an auto body paint store—where they were able to match my clay body. This paint provided a base coat which when applied to the figure made it look like raw clay but I still felt that there was something missing. I then realized it needed the speckles of dark grey that were prominent in my clay body. I had a special grey mixed, placed into spray cans and as I painted the base coat of color I stood back and misted the gray onto the wet paint to achieve the specked affect I was after. The effect was so successful, that I had many people ask me how I was keeping my clay from drying out. The clay was no longer cool but it was soft like female skin.

My wall pieces were the last I made before my show. I feel strongly that these pieces are moving in a direction I would like to continue exploring. Originally when I began sketching my ideas of how to depict these particular stories I was going to simply create the emotion with the face, hang it on the wall and have a shelf underneath it with objects from the story. Again I could
not get past the taxidermy idea and my committee assisted me by pointing out the freshness and
playfulness of my maquettes. I began to think of ways to simplify and decided to choose one
item from each story and recreate it as the shelf that could thematically interact with the figure.
During my thesis review it was pointed out that my wall pieces were much more playful. One of
the criticisms of this work involved the weight of the limbs. The torsos seemed to be affected by
gravity but where the figures were coming in contact with the base the impact of weight was less
believable. Also, the figure seated on the spool of thread was moving past the others in a forward
direction due to the use of mixed media.

In the future, I would like to utilize more mixed media within my pieces. I would also
like to try using more than one figure per piece and possibly use them to tell more of the story
instead of just a glimpse. However, the main lesson I believe I have learned while generating this
work is to not spell out the content for the viewer to a great degree: If everything is evident there
is no longer any reason to ponder the work. I want the audience to pause, look and interact with
the work. I enjoy the ambiguity my pieces contain and I enjoy hearing people ponder the
meaning without the stories. I also like the idea of having the stories separate and off to the side
where the viewer can choose to read them or not. Even if the audience reaches a conclusion
about a particular piece is not my conclusion or meaning, I enjoy the fact that there is no wrong
or right answer.
“Soft sand had returned…”

When I was little, I would sit in the sandbox during recess and make what I liked to call ‘soft sand.’ I would dump sand on my pants, shake off the excess, collect the dust left over which was the softest part of the sand, then keep this soft sand in mayo jars. When I was feeling sad or uncomfortable or just weird at home I would stick my hands in these mayo jars and feel this soft sand. Eventually those jars disappeared and I never really though about it again.

When I was in college I began taking ceramic classes. Instead of buying clay, we would make it. In order to do this we would take bags of dry mix, measure them out in particular percentages, and combine them.

My particular clay that I use now is made of:

25 Pounds OM4
10 Pounds Tile 6
20 Pounds EPK
20 Pounds Gold Art
15 Pounds Talk
10 Pounds Wolastonite
3 Pounds Bentonite
1 Hand Full Nylon Fibers

After measuring all of these ingredients out, we combine them in a large metal bowl and mix the materials together. Imagine my surprise and delight the first time I mixed clay and realized I was up to my armpits in soft sand. Feelings of comfort and contentment came rushing through me when I realized my childhood comfort was now my adult passion.

Soft sand had returned.
“Soft Sand had Returned…”
low-fire earthenware, cold finished
Life-size 5’8” woman, 2010
“Soft Sand had Returned…”
(3/4 view)
While contemplating this story, the main emotion which continually came to mind was happiness. I knew I wanted the figure to be in a somewhat childish pose but to stay true to myself as an adult as well as a storyteller. The figure represents me at my present age but is seated like a child with legs sprawled out and arms stretched in front feeling the sand. The figure is sitting on a large pile of sand on a pedestal that mimics a sandbox. I also incorporated glass jars with the powdered version of my clay body representing the ‘soft sand’ with which I use on a daily basis.

The expression on the face of this piece is very important to the overall sculpture. The emotions I referenced were happiness, contentment, excitement and satisfaction. I looked through many of my childhood photographs to find an expression which captured these emotions. I found a picture of me when I was about five at Christmas time, excitedly about to open a gift with a big dopy grin on my face. This expression had the simplicity of a child and was accented by the pose. I deliberately made the figure looking up at the audience to emphasize the point of view of a child.

Overall I believe this piece was very successful. It exudes the emotions I was hoping my viewers would feel. For me personally, this piece references the excitement I still feel every time I make clay or work with it; the excitement of first discovering soft sand.
“I couldn’t believe the spectrum of emotions…”

One day before school I was at the gas station. While waiting for my tank to fill, a man walked up to me and asked how to get to a neighboring town. I told him the directions and then lingered a bit. He says, “Can I ask you a question? And you can say yes or no. I hope you say yes, but have you ever been with a couple?”

I was really confused by this question; I couldn’t figure out what he was talking about. Then finally I asked and he said, “I mean, sexually.”

I freaked out. I was shocked, disgusted, intrigued and confused all at the same time. Mostly, just flustered. I mean, who asks that? All I wanted was for my gas to finish pumping. I finally answered “No,” and he proceeded to try and persuade me.

Finally, after he said, “It’s the best of both worlds!” I heard the click I had been hoping for, meaning my tank was full. I mumbled something like, “I’m late,” and I went to pay for my gas. I forgot to grab enough money and the poor little old man behind the counter offered to cover the rest as I relayed what had just happened. I couldn’t believe the spectrum of emotions. At one point I think I was even flattered, but mostly just freaked out. To this day I still look out for gas station creepers.
“I couldn’t believe the spectrum of emotions…”
low-fire earthenware, cold finished
Each figure 3’ tall (if standing), 2010
“Storyteller”
“Disgusted”
“Shocked”
“Confused”
“Intrigued”
Usually when I tell this story to people I see a spectrum of emotions coming from my listeners. Most people are horrified as well as bewildered and usually they end up saying “only you Megan…” I admit I have had many strange experiences but I feel I am unique only in my willingness and eagerness to tell my stories. This piece was exciting to make because instead of pulling only one emotion from this story I was also able to portray myself as the storyteller. The body language in these pieces is used to exaggerate and emphasize the emotions. For example, “Disgusted” has a very revolted look on her face and is balled up attempting to cover her body. Each piece portrays a different and distinct emotion from this story that I hope will find resonance with the audience.
“It balut. It good for her…”

When I was a baby, I had a Filipino nanny. Thinking about it now, I never knew her real name because I always called her, “Lola.” Lola was set on my sister and I growing up to be strong girls. One day, my dad came home and found Lola and I in the kitchen. I was in my high chair with something hanging out of my mouth. Upon further investigation, my dad saw it was a baby duck head. Her rushed forward to get it away from me, just as I slurped it up and swallowed it whole.

Still in shock at what he had just seen, he asked Lola what she was feeding me. She replied bluntly, “It balut. It good for her.”

Balut is created when you take a duck egg and right before it hatches, you burry it, allowing the duck to die inside. Then you boil it and eat it like a hard boiled egg, with a dash of vinegar and a pinch of salt.

I am not sure if I would try it today, but I am a pretty strong girl and kind of an adventurous eater, which I believe I owe to my Lola.
“It Balut. It good for her…”
low-fire earthenware, cold finished
18 x 13 x 8, 2010
Growing up I heard this story many times. My dad loved to bet me a dollar that I would not eat strange food, to get me to try new things, for example, the rubbery skin off of a piece of cooked chicken. If I did not take him up on his bet he would usually remind me of what I used to eat and the story would unfurl. Usually I would take the bet and either like it or become sick but inevitably I would be a dollar richer.

While thinking about this story the image of me perched atop an egg while looking proud and satisfied popped into my head. To me the pose looks like a child sitting in a high chair being excited about something they had just eaten. I made this piece to look as though she were kicking or flexing her feet with excitement, and feel strongly that the audience is able to related to this emotion. Because all of the pieces in this body of work are so personal I wanted to be sure the emotions were universal.
“Mahhgee, it’s good for you…”

I had a nanny who though cod liver oil was the cure-all/end-all for almost any ailment. Since I had sensitive skin, she sincerely believed that smearing me with cod liver oil would prevent sunburn or rash.

Everyday before school I would try to avoid her until it was absolutely time to leave. Somehow she always found time to slather me with pure cod liver oil, always saying, over my grunts of protest, “Mahhgee, it’s good for you.”

As soon as I would walk onto the bus and into every class, kids would plug their noses and refuse eye contact. I was that stinky kid in school and the worst part was I knew it and there was nothing I could do about it.
Every time I reflect on this particular story I can smell and taste Cod Liver Oil. A nanny worked with my family during a difficult time in our lives. I only had four visible teeth, two on top and two on bottom, extremely frizzy hair, and large prescription purple glasses and to top it all off I smelled like a dead fish: My nickname at school was “Purple People Eater”. This was not a very wonderful time in my life and I can remember being teased from the time I got on the morning bus until the time I got off the bus in the late afternoon. Looking back to this point in my life I can do nothing but laugh and when I see photos of myself I am amazed I was not teased more.

When I contemplated making a piece about this time in my life, there were many images which went through my head. This image that stood out most involved the nanny Aminta saying “Mahhgee, its good for you…” as she fed me Cod Liver Oil. At first I was going to make the figure dramatically splayed out, gagging and looking like she was gasping for air. I decided instead to create a more subtle posed figure, hunched over and plugging her nose blocking the horrid smell. I believe this piece communicates the story clearly to the viewer.
“She finally smelled the source of my shame…”

When I was young, my mom had a match collection. I always wanted to play with them, but was never allowed, for obvious reasons. One day I snuck into her office and took a handful of matchbooks.

I smuggled them to my clubhouse in the back yard and piled a bunch of leaves together. I struck the first match and the leaves burned fast leaving me with a craving for bigger flames. I found all the leaves and twigs around me and piled them high and threw in four or five matchboxes for good measure. As soon as I lit the pile, it became engulfed in flames and, as beautiful as it was, I soon realized it was spreading. I ran to the pool, grabbed a bucket of water and hobbled back to the fire.

Fortunately I was about to drown the flames but now I felt an extreme sense of guilt, seeing as how I had almost burned down the house. I ran to my nanny and held up my hand asking her if I smelled like smoke. She did a quick sniff and smelled nothing. I told her to smell again and she finally smelled the source of my shame. I broke down crying and relayed the whole story. I can’t remember if I got into trouble or if she decide my own guilt was enough punishment. To this day, I still have the fascination for the beauty of fire, although now it is in the controlled context of a kiln and I do not have to play firefighter with pool water.
“She finally smelled the source of my shame…”
low-fire earthenware, cold finished
13 x 13 x 8, 2010
This piece deals with an unfortunate experience with fire. I was torn between the base being a matchbox or a five gallon bucket like the one I used to extinguish the flames. However, since the matches were the item which started the small inferno, I felt that they would be more significant. I knew I wanted to portray shame as the emotion but I was not sure of how to use the body. At first I was going to have her peering out of the matchbox but then it would not be in line with the rest of the pieces. I finally decided to have her on her knees capturing a moment of begging for forgiveness.

She is holding her hand up to the viewer to see and smell the smoky aroma on them. She is not making eye contact with the audience revealing her shame. This story has always stuck out in my mind because it was the first time I realized that 1) I really enjoyed fire, and 2) I had a large guild complex. I was able to put out the fire safely, but was still compelled to tattle on myself, a personal attribute that continues to plague me to this day. As for the love for fire, I am now in a profession where I can be guilt free. I now can start a fire, in a controlled setting of course, and have no fear of getting in trouble. Instead of feeling guilt, I can now feel pride because this particular fire is creating artwork.
“I am trying to keep the words on the page…”

When I was younger I had a rally hard time in school. I always seemed to be behind the other kids when it came to progress. However, reading was always my worst subject. One night when my mom came to help me with my homework she found me with my arms wrapped around my book on either side. When she asked what I was doing, I replied, ‘I’m trying to keep the words on the page.’

My mom did some research and found a disorder called Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome. It can be described like a mild case of color blindness mixed with chronic eye fatigue. After it was discovered this is what I had, I wore bright fuchsia glasses in order to train my eyes to see that particular color.

I began to improve dramatically in school since the words now stayed where they were supposed to. Looking back now I am so thankful my mm looked up that symptom. If I were any older she may have thought I was on drugs!
“I’m trying to keep the words on the page…”
low-fire earthenware, cold finished
9 x 16 x 8, 2010
This piece represents my eternal struggle with printed text. I have an eye disorder which makes it difficult to read for longer than a few minutes. I had problems throughout my school years and was continually told I would be held back every grade. In this piece I portray myself cradling words on the page. My gaze is wandering past the books edge where many of these words would have fallen off. My mom was the one discovered my problem after finding me with my arms encircling a book. I wanted to show the figure in this particular position struggling to read.

Having this piece in my thesis exhibition was very important to me. It was a reminder that I can and have conquered the difficulties in my life. It also makes me reflect on all the people in my life who helped me along the way. I am reminded of my family who sat with me for hours helping me with my homework as well as continually supporting my artistic ambitions. I am also reminded of all my teachers, after school tutors and professors who offered their wisdom as well as support.
“It took all I had not to destroy the interior of his car…”

So, I was on my second date with this guy. We went to a Mexican restaurant where the servers did not speak very good English. I ordered a chicken burrito with no tomatoes anywhere near it since I am allergic. All was going well until halfway through my meal I started to feel strange. I picked through my burrito and found tomato skin. The chicken had been cooked with it! I stopped eating hoping the allergy would not take hold. Unfortunately, it was too late. The entire ride home I was in agony. My stomach was getting bigger by the second and it took all I had not to destroy the interior of his car. When I got home I ran straight to the bathroom and he insisted on staying until I felt better. However, I only got worse. It was to the point now where I was running to the bathroom every two minutes or so exploding from both ends without time to even close the bathroom door. I couldn’t believe he was still here!

Finally he decided to take me to the hospital. It was twenty minutes away and I had no idea how I could make it there. I had him line his car with plastic and I was almost to the car when I threw up in the bushes and lets just say ruined my pants at the same time. I went and changed and by some miracle made it to the hospital. After they gave me a few shots I don’t remember a thing until the next day.

I woke up around two the next afternoon and he was still there. He had made me three kinds of Jell-O and bought me four kinds of Gatorade since he didn’t know what kind I liked. Needless to say this man is now my husband. I highly recommend getting the most embarrassing moments out of the way early in a relationship because you have nowhere to go but up from there!
“It took all I had not to destroy the interior of his car…”
low-fire earthenware, cold finished
18 x 15 x 8, 2010
I always enjoy telling this story because I believe it always brings a laugh. Not many people can say they ruined their pants and went to the hospital on their second date and continues to be with the same person. My tomato allergy affected me strongly that night but his character was stronger. The imagery of this piece was easy to choose, with the base constructed as a tomato, the catalyst to the entire story. The figure would be sick and in some sort of pose to suggest the ill feeling. I decided to drape the figure across the tomato holding her stomach facing the viewer with cheeks puffed out trying to hold back the sickness. Although this is a greatly embarrassing story containing facts about me ruining a pair of pants, it also is a great love story describing my now husband’s character. At the time, I can remember just wanting him to leave, but now I could not picture him not being in my life.
“My ruuuuug…”

For most people, Oreos® bring back fond memories of sitting around a table with a glass of milk, dunking and savoring the sweet crunchy combo. Not really for me. All I hear when I see this classic black and white treat is, “My ruuuuug!”

When I was little, my dad used to take us to an ice cream shop called Fosters. I always got an Oreo milk shake. On the way home I started feeling really sick. As soon as we got there I ran straight for the kitchen but didn’t quite make it. I threw up Oreo milk shake all over my dad’s brand new white carpet.

I instantly felt better; I was fine. But my dad, on the other hand, fell to his knees and in quite a dramatic fashion he yelled, “My ruuuuug!” I ran to the bathroom crying as he screamed and cursed and scrubbed the idea of having white carpet with two young children. Eventually, the stain came out and all was forgiven, especially after my sister threw up grape juice a few weeks later. That one never came out.
“My ruuuugu…”
low-fire earthenware, cold finished
11 x 16 x 9, 2010
This piece was a great deal of fun to make, because it referenced an event in which I ruined my father’s prize rug by throwing up all over it. Originally, the figure was going to be hanging out of a pint glass with a straw to represent the milkshake that caused the catastrophe, but I decided against it because of the implied alcoholic context of a pint glass. Eventually I decided to make a shelf in the form of an Oreo Cookie. The crying figure sits on the edge in the corner in order to show the isolation and guilt I felt after throwing up on my Dad’s new white carpet.

The title to this piece is very ambiguous and I realized that although some of the pieces and titles are more self-explanatory, in order for the viewer to entirely grasp the entire scene of this story, the written version would be required. I had one viewer guess that the piece was about junk food and obesity, which made me laugh and feel flattered to think someone was reading so deeply into the imagery. This reminded me what I love so much about art. Although the artist has specific intentions about the content of any work, it is inevitably up to the viewer to decipher the story behind any specific piece.
“This thread gave me the ability to fly…”

I have always been an incredibly vivid dreamer. When I was about eight I had the most freeing dream. I was on top of a building in a very large city. I was at least 100 stories up and I walked to the edge and peered over it. There were cars and taxies crowding the streets as I reached into my pocket and pulled out a spool of black thread. Then I began winding the thread around my hands, when I was finished I jumped. I fell for about fifty stories and then held my hands out to my sides and began to soar. For some reason or another, this thread gave me the ability to fly. I whizzed past the buildings, weaving in and out. When I think about it now I can still feel the wind rushing over my face and in my hair. It was the most wonderful feeling.

To this day, when I am stressed or upset, I can close my eyes and remember the feeling of freedom and carelessness I had in that dream.
“This thread gave me the ability to fly…”
low-fire earthenware, cold finished,
9 x 15 x 8, 2010
The pose for the figure in this piece was originally going to be a standing on top of a building, peering over the edge. I decided to use the string as the focal point because it is the element that gives me the ability to fly. Instead of standing or sitting on the edge of a building while wrapping thread around my hands I used the spool as the edge of the building and depict myself winding the thread directly around my hands. The expression on the face of this piece is one of anticipation and excitement.

I believe this piece is going in a direction I would like to explore further. The mixed media element of the black thread separated this piece from the other wall pieces, which were created entirely of clay. The story behind this piece gave me the idea to begin using more of my dreams as inspiration. This piece is the last piece I made for my show- and I feel it will function as a natural stepping stone for a further body of work.
“As I Recall…”
low-fire earthenware, cold finished
¾ life-size, 2010

Photos by ETC Production Services
(585) 475-7703
Works Cited


**Images Cited**

**Figure 1:** Prehistoric. *Altamira Caves Pair of Bison.* Late Paleolithic Period, yellow, red and brown ochre and charcoal, Santander, Spain. www.artstor.org.easyproxy.rit.edu

**Figure 2:** Unknown Artist. *Venus of Willendorf.* 30,000-25,000 B.C. Carboniferous Limestone, 10.4 cm. Naturhistorisches Museum, Austria. www.artstor.org.easyproxy.rit.edu

**Figure 3:** Canova. Antonio. *Pauline Bonaparte Borghese as Venus; detail of bust from behind.* 1805-1808, Stone, Galleria Borghese, Florence. www.artstor.org.easyproxy.rit.edu

**Figure 4:** Michelangelo. *Sistine Chapel: Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve; Expulsion from Paradise.* 1508-1512, Fresco, Sistine Chapel, Vatican City, Italy. www.artstor.org.easyproxy.rit.edu

**Figure 5:** Vigee-Le brun, Elisabeth-Louise. *Queen Marie-Antoinette and her Children.* 1787, oil on canvas, 275 x 215 cm. Chateau de Versailles, France. www.artstor.org.easyproxy.rit.edu

**Figure 6:** Saville, Jenny. *Ruben’s Flap.* 1998-9, oil on canvas, 120 x 96 in. Gagosian Gallery, Fall 1999. www.artstor.org.easyproxy.rit.edu

**Figure 7:** Warashina, Patti. *Tiger Lily.* 1976, Low-fire ceramic with acrylic, 24 x 15 7/8 x 13 1/4 in. Seattle Art Museum, Washington. www.artstor.org.easyproxy.rit.edu

**Figure 8:** Fox, Judy. *Olympia.* 1995, terra cotta casein, hydrostone, casein, edition of 35, 12 x 12 x 8 inches, P. P. O. W. Spring 1996. www.artstor.org.easyproxy.rit.edu

**Figure 9:** Manet, Edouard. *Olympia.* 1863-65, oil on canvas, 130.5 x 90 cm. Musee de’Orsay, France. www.artstor.org.easyproxy.rit.edu

**Figure 10:** Kahlo, Frida. *The Broken Column.* 1944, oil on masonite, 42 x 33 cm. Museo Dolores Olmeda, Mexico City, Mexico. www.artstor.org.easyproxy.rit.edu

Figure 12: Arneson, Robert. *No Pain*. 1991, bronze, 34 in. x 34 in. x 34 in. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California. www.artstor.org.easyproxy.rit.edu

Figure 13: Arneson, Robert. 1982, stoneware with glass, 68 1/4 in. x 27 1/2 in. x 20 1/4 in. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. www.artstor.org.easyproxy.rit.edu