Polar dependence

Aspasia Tsoutsoura

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.rit.edu/theses

Recommended Citation
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences

In Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

POLAR DEPENDENCE

By

Aspasia Tsoutsoura

06/22/2011
Thesis Approval

Thesis Title: Polar Dependence

Thesis Author: Aspasia Tsoutsoura

Chief Advisor: Tom Lightfoot
(Please type)

______________________________
(Signature)
Date: __________________________

Associate Advisor: Elizabeth Kronfield
(Please type)

______________________________
(Signature)
Date: __________________________

Associate Advisor: Keith Howard
(Please type)

______________________________
(Signature)
Date: __________________________

Department Chairperson: Don Arday
(Please type)

______________________________
(Signature)
Date: __________________________
THESIS REPRODUCTION PERMISSION STATEMENT

I understand that I must submit a print copy of my thesis or dissertation to the Rochester Institute of Technology archives, per current RIT guidelines for the completion of my degree. I hereby grant to Rochester Institute of Technology and its agents the nonexclusive license to archive and make accessible my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media in perpetuity. I retain all other ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

PRINT REPRODUCTION PERMISSION GRANTED

I, ASPASIA TSOUTSOURA, hereby grant permission to the Rochester Institute of Technology to reproduce my print thesis or dissertation in whole or in part. Any reproduction will not be for commercial use or profit.

INCLUSION IN THE RIT DIGITAL MEDIA LIBRARY ELECTRONIC THESIS & DISSERTATION (ETD) ARCHIVE

I, ASPASIA TSOUTSOURA, additionally grant to the Rochester Institute of Technology Digital Media Library (RIT DML) the non-exclusive license to archive and provide electronic access to my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media in perpetuity. I understand that my work, in addition to its bibliographic record and abstract, will be available to the world-wide community of scholars and researchers through the RIT DML. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation. I am aware that the Rochester Institute of Technology does not require registration of copyright for ETDs.

I hereby certify that, if appropriate, I have obtained and attached written permission statements from the owners of each third party copyrighted matter to be included in my thesis or dissertation. I certify that the version I submitted is the same as that approved by my committee.

Signature of Author: _____________________________ Date:______________
# CONTENTS

Abstract ................................................. 1
List of General Illustrations ...................... 2
List of Illustrations of my work .................. 3

1. INTRODUCTION

Original thesis proposal ........................... 5

2. CONTENT

Evolution of Thesis Work ......................... 7
Discussion of Philosophical Ideas ............... 14
Discussion of Influential Artists ................. 15
Concerns that I had while working on the Thesis Body of Work . 22
Body of Work ......................................... 24
  o 3D Installations and Sculpture Work ........ 24
  o About Printmaking ............................. 32
  o 2D – Printmaking Work ...................... 34
Installing the Work in the Gallery Space ....... 39

3. CONCLUSION

General Observations about my work ............ 42
Where to go next .................................. 42

BIBLIOGRAPHY ...................................... 44
ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploration of the relation between contrasting pairs and materials. For my thesis body of work I chose metal and soft materials to be my opposites. Through sculptures and prints I explore the feelings and thoughts their juxtaposition causes, bringing out both their strong and weak characteristics and showing their interdependence.

Polar Dependence is what characterizes these two “opposites”, showing the need for these differences in our personal life and relationships. It asks the viewer to think beyond the ordinary use of these materials, to contemplate their qualities, the relationship between soft and strong, cold and warm, and how these are related to our qualities as humans. My intention is to show respect for both elements and to reflect the beauty that results when opposites come together. They need to co-exist because we need both.
LIST OF GENERAL ILLUSTRATIONS

- Number/Page -

- 7/18 - Kelley, “Arena #10 (Dogs), 1990, ARTstore Collections
- 9/19 - Meret Oppenheim, “Fur Covered Cup, Saucer, and Spoon”, 1936, ARTstore Collections
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS OF MY WORK

-Number/Page-

-1/8- “Untitled”, 2007, fur, salt, velvet string, fake flowers, H96 x W24 x D24 inches

-2/9- “Untitled -2”, 2007, polyester fiber, strings, fake flowers, H72 x W24 x D24 inches

-3/11- “Becoming Softer”, 2007, metallic gate, fur, tulle, lace, yarn, polyester filler, H55 x W60 inches

-11/23- “A sense in between”, 2009, steel, fur, polyester fiberfill, H96 x W60 x D44 inches

-12/24- “Absence”, 2009, steel (wire and plate), H1 x W36 x D24 inches

-13/26- “Reversed Structure”, 2009, mattress structure, bamboo fiber, H8 x W53 x D72 inches

-14/28- “Expanding Balance”, 2009, cast iron, cotton fabric, polyester filler, H52 x W126 x D4 inches

-15/30- “Alternate Bonds”, 2009, yarn, wire H58xW24 inches

-16/33- “TWOgether-1”, 2009, four Color Intaglio-Type Print, H32 x W22 inches

-17/34- “TWOgether-2”, 2009, Four Color Intaglio-Type Print, H32 x W22 inches

-18/35- “Punched on Cotton”, 2009, Photo Intaglio-Type Print, H48 x W32 inches

-19/36- “Juxtaposition”, 2009, Four Color Intaglio-Type Print, H48 x W32 inches

-20/39- Installation view #1, Bevier gallery, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY

-21/39- Installation view #2, Bevier gallery, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY
-22/40- Installation view #3, Bevier gallery, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY

-23/40- Installation view #4, Bevier gallery, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY
INTRODUCTION

*Original Thesis Statement:*

My work is inspired by the balance that is always present in nature and in every aspect of human life. I often notice the existence of strong bonds between opposites and I am drawn by the sublime beauty that wreathes round these contrasting pairs. For my work I chose metal and soft materials, like cloth and fiber, to be my opposites. I explore the relations between these materials and I am interested in the natural properties of these two contrasting elements. I want to emphasize both their attractive and unattractive properties and bring out both their strong and weak characteristics. I find intriguing that, although these two elements are so different by nature, at the same time, they are so interdependent and complement each other. Metal is cold, heavy and rigid and needs some of the warmth, softness and lightness of a soft material, while on the other side, a soft object could be sensitive and unstable by itself and needs the strength, stability and protective properties of metal.

These two materials have a symbolic use in my work and they reflect the various and many contradicting qualities we have as human beings. The soft materials and objects, as presented in my work, are related to us, when we feel soft, fragile, sensitive and warm. The metal forms and objects reflect human traits that come as a result of the difficulties, disappointments and betrayals in our life; situations that sometimes make us cold and distant, but at the same time stronger and more confident. These are two different qualities that exist to a certain degree in every human. Some of us have one stronger than the other, but we all try to achieve a balance of these qualities in our life. This balance can be achieved either by developing one’s weak side or by relationships with people that are developed on the opposite side. There is a need for both
warm and cold, soft and strong feelings in our lives; the existence of the one gives value to the other and the absence of the one makes us realize the importance of the other.

My influences come from various artists and art movements of the 20th century, but, mostly from Conceptual and Minimal Art. Joseph Beuys, Mona Hatoum, Mike Kelley, Claes Oldenburg, Meret Oppenheim and Carl Andre are artists who have influenced my work in terms of materials and concept. Joseph Beuys had a strong influence on my work, especially concerning the symbolic use of materials. He was obsessed with some specific materials, like felt and fat that he kept using in his pieces. The idea of warmth played a central and crucial role for him.

I will explore and visualize my thoughts through three-dimensional objects and installations, along with a series of prints. I will be working with metal, casted, welded or as a found object, along with soft materials, like fur, fabrics, fiberfill, foam, etc. for my 3D installations. I will combine them based on the properties of the materials and the feelings they cause. In their own way each will have something important to offer, visually and conceptually, in the final piece. I want to show respect for both materials and the concepts they represent; they need to co-exist because we need both.

Most of my prints will be Four Color and Photo Intaglio-Type, making compositions with the materials I use for my 3D installations, or from detail pictures of them. I am, also, thinking of making some pieces combining prints with materials I use for my 3D work.

In general, my thesis work will have the simple, clean lines and forms of Minimal Art, emphasizing the contrasting materials and their properties. It will engage viewers enough to think beyond the ordinary use of these materials, which usually go by unnoticed in our everyday lives. Hopefully, it will inspire viewers to contemplate their qualities, the relation between soft
and strong, cold and warm, and the interdependence between them. My intention will be to make viewers reflect upon themselves and the thoughts that the juxtaposition of these contrasting materials causes. I expect them to realize the need for these two “opposites” as I am presenting them and, then, examine the need for this type of difference in our personal lives and relationships. Finally, I want my whole body of work to reflect the beauty that results when opposites are together, combined in harmony with a strong bond; the beauty that comes from this union.

CONTENT

Evolution of Thesis Work:

Before I start talking about my thesis body of work I think that it is important to give an idea of what kind of work I was doing as I finished my BFA and started the MFA program. Through the objects and installations I created, I explored ideas that were related to my inner need for warmth. Ideas of warmth, comfort, purity, serenity and security were always of interest to me.

The colors and materials I used served these ideas. I always used materials like fur, fiber, wool and fabric that are soft and warm in touch and color, materials that make you want to touch them and feel them, that calm us and warm our senses. The choice of colors was also important for what I intended to express. The dominant color was white, because I relate it with dreams, purity and serenity. Colors in pale tones helped me create a sense of warmth and comfort.

The first two images are examples of my early body of work. For both pieces I used the form of a sphere to imply a secure space, something like a nest, a refuge, made out of soft materials, fur
for the first piece and polyester fiber for the second. White, small blossoms are coming out of the spheres, blooming, with an upward direction. This created an emotional uplift from the secure, warm and comfortable atmosphere that the furry and polyester sphere implies. Finally, a sense of serenity is reflected through both pieces from the white and pale colors, the simplicity of the forms, the lines and the structure of each piece.

Feelings of warmth and comfort were always important for me. In my life, I always seek warmth as an emotion in personal relationships. In my work, I feel this warmth through the materials that I use and the senses of touch and sight. A short experience as a stage designer during my undergraduate studies made me realize my fascination with fabrics and surfaces with soft and textural qualities. One friend of mine, a young film director, asked me if I could help her with the sets for a theatrical play and a TV program on a local channel in Greece. As I was working on that, I had to go to places that were selling fabrics that I needed for the sets. It was the first time that I visited these shops and it felt so nice touching and being between all the fabrics: furs, fibers, laces, tulles. The connection I felt with these materials and the feelings they caused in me were so strong that it was impossible not to incorporate them in my work. That experience made me realize how important the idea of warmth in all its aspects is for me. From that point on the exploration of warm feelings would be my goal and all kinds of soft materials would be the means to express my ideas.

At some point my work started taking a more interesting direction. I had the idea to incorporate a contrasting element along with the soft materials. And this element would be metal. This idea started while I was working on a mattress for a 3D video installation. I had to manipulate the surface of the mattress and as I was cutting it, I saw the metal skeleton that was inside the mattress. The sight of the metal skeleton being hidden below the soft top layer of the mattress
1. “Untitled”, 2007, fur, salt, velvet string, fake flowers, H96 x W24 x D24
was very intriguing. We think of the mattress as a soft and comfortable object on which we rest our body and mind. But inside this soft top layer there is a metal and totally uncomfortable structure, which supports everything, enhances the feeling of comfort through the springs, which are completely hidden. The metallic and soft materials work together to give us a comfortable feeling. Two different elements are combined and each one has something important to offer to the final object. The need to combine these two contrasting materials to build a mattress and the beautiful co-existence between them made me think further about their properties and the relationship between them. This was the point where the idea of working with both elements and exploring the relationships between the two began.

“Becoming Softer” was my first attempt trying to work with both elements. It is an assemblage in pale colors. It is made of a found metallic object (a fence), combined with a variety of fabrics, like fur, tulle, lace and yarn, in a way that the fence loses its own function. My intention was to explore the opposite pairs of warm–cold, soft–strong and to bring out warm feelings along with a sense of happiness and comfort through that juxtaposition. I intended to create a perfect union: a happy, harmonious co-existence when two, different elements come together. In this piece, the metal supports the soft materials and creates a strong base, where the lace, the polyester and the yarn can be developed and play. My choice of using a gate as the metallic element of my piece was based just on its material and visual elements. I didn’t intend to use any of the interpretations a gate can bring, so I manipulated it in a way that the final image wouldn’t remind us of a gate. I wanted to express just a playful, harmonious co-existence of these contrasting materials.
The main influence for me creating this piece was Jessica’s Stockholder’s work. I had just seen many of her pieces and I was impressed. I really liked her compositions, the way she combines a variety of different materials so successfully that they are totally united. In many cases you are not able to recognize at first sight the objects that compose the piece. Her work made me have a
more pluralistic view of materials. I combined a variety of materials, trying to unite them as much as I could.

I made one more similar piece and I soon realized that these attempts, in the end, looked more like an assemblage of contrasting materials, lacking any real conceptual clarity. I soon felt uncomfortable with the way I was approaching my work and felt that it needed a more solidified conceptual approach.

I gradually set my work in a new, more conceptual basis. I focused on the essential properties and characteristics of the two contrasting elements: the strong, heavy, cold, rigid and stable metal, on the one hand, and the softness, warmth, lightness, comfort and instability of a furry and soft object, on the other. I was exploring the relationship of the two elements, trying to show and understand how they interact with each other. I, also, decided to associate the qualities of the contrasting materials with the contrasting qualities that we have as human beings. My intention was to contemplate the contrasting pairs; the importance and interdependence of opposites in every aspect of human life and in nature, in general. I realized that the contrast is what gives importance to everything, is what actually leads to balance and completeness; that without showing the cold, the warm doesn’t seem to be so important. I decided to work with contrasting elements, materials, textures, ideas and show the importance of opposites being together.

With this direction, it certainly helped that, as a student at RIT, I was forced to become more engaged with sculpture. The first time I tried to work with metal I felt fascinated working with this material, whether working with a found object or welding and casting raw metal. This had an important role in my decision to incorporate metal in my work. I found myself working with metal and feeling the same excitement that I had when working with fabrics, furs and fibers. This
was an observation that could also raise contemplation on a conceptual basis about contrasting things and what creates an interrelation and interdependence between them.

Discussion of philosophical ideas:

When I read Plato’s Philebus I found that some ideas that are discussed are closely related to the basic idea that I was exploring on my thesis body of work: the need and importance for opposites in our lives, since the existence of the one gives value to the other and the absence of the one makes us realize the importance of the other.

In Plato’s Philebus, there is a discussion about which is the greatest good in life, pleasure or thought? Philebus has asserted the view that the good for all living creatures consists in enjoyment, pleasure, delight, and whatever can be classed as consonant therewith. Whereas, Socrates claims that the good is not that, but thought, intelligence, memory and things akin to these prove better and more valuable than pleasure for all such beings as can participate in them. Trying to have a critical inspection of the life of pleasure and the life of intelligence, Socrates found important to see them separately. In one case we would have no intelligence in the life of pleasure, and in the other no pleasure in the life of intelligence. If either of them is the good, it must have no need of anything else to be added to it. And if they find that either has such a need, presumably it ceases to be possible for it to be the true good. Socrates proves that neither of these two lives contains the good. What is good is also sufficient and complete by itself. But neither of these two lives is sufficient and complete, which means that neither of these two lives is good. And Socrates and Protarchus agree that the best is a combined life, the joint life consisting in a mixture of the two. Towards the end of their discussion in Plato’s Philebus, Socrates says: “Well
so it is here: our discussion has made it plain to us, now as at the outset, that we must not look for the Good in the unmixed life, but in the mixed.”

As we see, Socrates proves that neither of these two lives is good, because neither is sufficient by itself, and that the best is the mixture, the combination of the two. This is what I am trying to communicate with my body of work; the idea that the best in our life is in the mixture of warm and cold, soft and strong. With visual means I am trying to prove that the warmth by itself is not sufficient, but it is the presence of coldness that makes warmth important and desirable. The truth and the good is always somewhere in the middle, is a mixture of opposite things.

*Discussion of influential artists:*

The artistic influences in my work come from various artists and art movements of the 20th century. I have been influenced from artists, like Joseph Beuys, Mike Kelley, Claes Oldenburg, Meret Oppenheim and Carl Andre. All these artists belong to different art movements, from Fluxus and Surrealism, to Minimal and Conceptual Art.

An artist, who was one of my first influences, is Joseph Beuys. I feel connected with him mostly in the concept and the symbolic use of materials. As I was reading articles about his work, I was surprised to see how important “warmth” was for his concept. As the art historian Ulrich Clewing mentions “Beuys had a clear weakness for a symbolic way of expressing himself; “warmth” in particular played a central and crucial role for him, not only in a physical sense”. The myth of felt and fat as an original experience bestowing life and warmth was something that Beuys cultivated with idealistic zeal. These two materials had always a great importance in his work and Beuys kept using them in his pieces. Some examples are: “The Sled”, 1969 (image 4),

---

2 Ulrich Clewing. *Felt and Fat: Joseph Beuys*. Deutsche Bank art magazine, Issue 26, 2005
“Ja ja ja ja ja, Nee nee nee nee nee”, 1969 (image 5), “Felt Suit”, 1970 (image 6), “Chair with Fat”, 1963. The nutritive energy of fat and the protective, warmth retaining property of felt were two symbols with which he was able to express his ideas in a particularly direct way.


According to Ulrich Clewing, “For Beuys, “warmth” was first of all a metaphor, in keeping with the fact that he generally accorded his objects, collages and notations a highly symbolic meaning. This propensity for symbolism also extended to his public activities, his actions and performances, but also to his political involvement. From that point on, the cognitive and
emotional category of “warmth” also began taking on social dimensions. The metaphor of warmth is most present in the fat and felt works that Joseph Beuys made throughout his life from the early fifties to his death in 1986 and which count among his most well-known works.\(^3\)

My work doesn’t have any references to political or social issues, and this is the big difference in the concept between my work and Beuys’s work. But I feel a strong connection with him in reference to the importance of “warmth”. Also, his obsession with fat and felt reminds me of my repetitive, symbolic use of fur and steel and he is the first artist that had a strong influence on my work.

Three other artists, who influenced my work, are Mike Kelley, Claes Oldenburg and Meret Oppenheim. Kelley’s work with stuffed animals, like “Arena #10 (Dogs)”, 1990 (image 7), Oldenburg’s soft sculptures, like “Soft Fur Good Humors”, 1963 (image 8) and Oppenheim’s piece “Object”, 1936 (image 9) are works of art that had an influence on the materials that I chose to use in my work. The soft, furry materials that these pieces are made of created a strong feeling in me when I first saw them. I felt a connection with these materials and I started working with these. These materials, finally, formed my concept, since I realized that their warm and soft properties were the reason that I was feeling that connection.

\(^3\) Ulrich Clewing. *Felt and Fat: Joseph Beuys*. Deutsche Bank art magazine, Issue 26, 2005
7. Mike Kelley, “Arena #10 (Dogs), 1990

My concept, though, and the way I am using these materials have less to do with these artists’ intention. Mike Kelley, for example, by giving new life to these once-loved, furry animals (that he was finding in second-hand shops), he wanted to elicit both sympathy at their abandonment and annoyance at their sentimentality. He, also, played on the slightly repellent nature of things that had been played with and dribbled on.

Claes Oldenburg, on the other hand, by taking banal objects and turning them into, absurdly large, functionless objects, makes us question the nature of the everyday. And, Meret’s Oppenheim furlined teacup takes its place in the Surrealist lore of alchemical transformation from mineral to organic matter. Transformation from one element to another, like from one world to another. The cup is sensuous, luxuriant and inviting, and at the same time it is repellent as it is skinned animal, hair in the mouth and on the hands, and erotic as all of these.
The main connection I see with Mike Kelley’s soft sculpture work is the use of warm and soft materials. However, in Oldenburg’s soft sculpture beyond the visual similarity of materials, there is a connection in reference to his intention of taking objects and thinking about the absurdity in them. And Oppenheim’s fur covered teacup reminds me of a relation with my last piece, the metal carpet. An object, which we are used to seeing in a certain way, with soft and warm properties, is made of a cold and hard material and, although we still recognize it as a carpet, it brings totally different associations and emotions.

Finally, I have also been influenced by minimalist artist Carl Andre. Andre seeks elegance in the basics: industrial materials, straight lines, right angles, modular units. Talking about himself in “Los Angeles Times” (November 2007) he says, “We speak of some painters as being great colorists. I’m not saying I’m great, but I am a matterist. That’s entirely what I’m interested in, the property of materials and just not interfering with those properties.” For my work, also, the materials, their properties and the feelings they cause have a big importance. Carl Andre’s ideas about the purity of the materials had a great influence on my work. I developed a great appreciation for the iron as iron, the steel as steel, the fibers as fibers and I was fascinated by the beauty of each material by itself. I’m, also, interested in the simple, clean lines of Minimal Art, as well as in the serene atmosphere that minimal artworks create, like Carl Andre’s pieces (image 10). As Nicholas Serota, Director of Whitechapel Art Gallery in London, says referring to Carl Andre’s exhibition in his gallery in 1978, “Andre’s sculpture makes evident that sense of order and serenity which is rare in the contemporary world, but which Andre finds in oriental and Neolithic cultures and which we may discover in his own work, if we are only prepared to pause

---

4 Article about Carl Andre, by Suzanne Muchnic, Seeing beauty in basics: Minimalist sculptor Carl Andre makes the material the star, Los Angeles Times, November 27th, 2007
and open ourselves to the experience it offers”\textsuperscript{5}. While working on my thesis work I noticed that my direction was becoming more and more minimalistic.


\textit{Concerns while working on the Thesis Body of Work:}

I started working on my thesis body of work focusing on the juxtaposition of contrasting elements seen as materials, forms and visual aesthetics. My intention was to combine metal with soft surfaces, contrasting textures and to create contemplations about their qualities; the relation between warm and cold, soft and strong and their interdependence. I, also, wanted to relate these ideas with our qualities as humans and make the viewer reflect on the thoughts that come through the juxtaposition of contrasting elements.

While working on my thesis work I was concerned about how I could manage to make the viewer relate the qualities of the materials to our qualities as humans. How would I manage to start from something so specific and material based and make it refer to human qualities, experiences and feelings?

I decided that reference to everyday objects, like a chair, a mattress, a carpet, would help to make the connection with us as humans. These are objects that come in direct touch with our body on a daily basis. We relate them with certain feelings or thoughts, so I decided that combining the contrasting properties of hard and soft within the spectrum of a specific object related somehow with a human body and its sense of touch, would help the viewer to expand the contemplations that arise through this juxtaposition.
Body of Work:

- 3D Installations and Sculpture Work:

11. “A sense in between”, 2009, steel, fur, polyester fiberfill, H96 x W60 x D44 inches

The first piece of my thesis body of work was the 3D installation “A sense in between”. A real juxtaposition of two chairs, one made out of only metal (steel welded together) and another, next to it, made out of only soft materials (fur and polyester fiber). The metal chair is designed in a way that reflects the characteristics of metal; rigid, stable, austere, angular, looking heavy and uncomfortable. The soft chair, next to it, is designed with curves, looking soft, warm, comfortable and unstable. My intention was to make the viewer feel that neither of these two chairs would be appropriate to sit on. The metal chair feels stable, but uncomfortable, whereas the soft chair feels comfortable, but unstable. There is something missing from both chairs. And
what is missing from each one is what the opposite has. So, what this piece wants to communicate is that the “perfect” or the “ideal” consists of a mixture of opposites and it is not made of just one thing.

This work was to become the first work I included in my exhibition. It was simple and cut directly to the point and focused on the essence of my concept: the juxtaposition of two contrasting materials, in a way that would focus on their properties, showing their weak and strong characteristics and raising contemplation about their interdependence.

12. “Absence”, 2009, steel (wire and plate), H1 x W36 x D24

“Absence” is about the importance of warmth and comfort through their absence. I chose to reproduce a carpet, which is an object connected to softness and warmth, using only the metal element (steel). The soft element, which is the basic material that a carpet is made of, is nowhere in this piece. It is only implied through the choice of the object. With this piece I attempted to do a mental juxtaposition, instead of an actual juxtaposition. The viewer will compare the sense that he would have if walking on that metal carpet with the sense he has walking on an actual soft carpet. My intention creating this piece was to show the importance of softness and warmth through their absence and develop an appreciation for both elements (cold and warm, hard and
soft). Something that consists only and strictly from one element can bring us the need to look for the complete opposite, an observation that again indicates the interrelationship that exists between opposite pairs and ideas.

Another interesting aspect of this piece was the process making it. It required lengthy and tedious work. It is made out of a 36” x 24” inch galvanized steel plate, on which I was patiently punching thousands of little holes very close to each other. The next step was to cut small pieces of galvanized steel wire the same length and then, pass each wire through every individual hole of the steel plate. These repetitive movements were both meditative and deeply enjoyable. Through this tedious process I could concentrate on what I was doing, to really connect with the material, contemplate its qualities, feel the need of touching and working with something soft and, finally, think further about my concept and the relationship between contrasting pairs.

At this point, it is important to mention Mona Hatoum’s pieces “Pin Rug”, 1998-1999 and “Doormat II”, 2000-2001. It was after I finished my piece “Absence”, when, during my visit at the Institute of Contemporary Art, in Boston, MA, I saw her “Pin Rug” piece. I was amazed looking at this piece and thinking how similar it was as an idea with the “Absence” piece that I had made. I immediately felt a connection with her and I researched her work, where I found another similar piece of hers, the “Doormat II”. Reading about her work and her concepts I realized that, although our idea about creating a metal rug was so similar, our concepts are quite different. Mona Hatoum’s work deals with issues of identity, dislocation and constraint, and contradictory ideas of attraction and repulsion. With her “Pin Rug” piece she aims to engage the viewer in conflicting emotions of desire and revulsion, fear and fascination. She transformed a familiar every-day, domestic object into something threatening and dangerous. In the “Doormat II” piece, “The friendly Welcome on a doormat is transformed into a threat by pointed metal
pins.”\(^6\) The difference with my piece is that I don’t have any intention in creating feelings of fear or danger. For me the image of a rug made all out of metal materials is what will make us feel the absence of the soft material and help us realize the interdependence and interrelationship of this contrasting pair.

I feel a strong connection with Mona Hatoum’s use of contrasting ideas. Visual welcoming and contrasting physical danger recur in her work, the balance between beauty and danger. “Every aspect of life is full of contradictions”\(^7\) as she stated.

![Image of a mattress structure](image)

13. “Reversed Structure”, 2009, mattress structure, bamboo fiber, H8 x W53 x D72 inches

For “Reversed Structure” I have used an actual mattress as a found object. I chose to use a mattress because it is an object that suggests comfort. I find the structure of this object very

---


intriguing and representative of my idea about the balanced and beautiful co-existence of strong and soft. Its structure consists of a metal skeleton, which supports everything and metal springs that contribute to the sense of comfort that a mattress has. What is more intriguing is that all these metal elements are completely hidden. On the top of the metal structure there are some layers of soft materials, which cover the metal and offer comfort. It is quite interesting how beautifully the metal and the soft materials work together in this object to give us a comfortable and soft feeling. The need of combining the two contrasting materials to build a mattress, the beautiful coexistence between them was something very interesting to me. Two different materials are combined and each one has something important to offer to the final object.

Another reason that I chose to use a mattress is that as an object it is directly related with the human body, since it is where we lay our body after a tough day, where we rest, sleep and dream. I thought that this was a good way to help the viewer reflect on the thoughts that the juxtaposition of contrasting elements cause and the relationship the qualities of the materials have with our qualities as humans.

For this piece I decided to reverse the structure of a mattress to give a different perspective in the way we look at a mattress. The metal skeleton that used to be hidden, is finally revealed, creating a protective space for the soft material (in this case bamboo fiber) that is seated inside. On this mattress the materials become the protagonists. The materials do not function in favor of someone else, they function for themselves.
“Expanded Balance” consists of many cubes mixed together expanding on the wall. There are two types of cubes. The metal cubes are cast in iron, heavy with a rough surface. The soft cubes are sewn by hand, made out of fabric filled with polyester batting. They are light, soft and in pale and romantic colors and patterns. My goal and challenge for this sculpture was to combine all these cubes and find the balance between the two types of materials. After this artwork the idea of “balance” started becoming very important for my concept and my work. This piece, also, made me realize that through my work I seek “beauty”, the beauty that results from the balance of contrasting elements.

One thing that I found very interesting working on this piece was the different process that was required for making the two types of cubes. I experienced two completely opposite ways of working. While working on the metal cubes, I was making the ceramic shell molds for each of the 70 cast iron cubes, engaged in the dirty process. Then, I was part of the iron pours to cast the molds, working so close with fire in difficult conditions. And finally, working on the cast iron
cubes, grinding, cleaning and polishing. While working with the iron, I was covered with safety clothes and protective accessories trying to protect and not hurt myself, carrying a lot of weight and in general overworking my body. And, the next day, working on the soft cubes, I had to be in a very clean and organized space. As I was sewing the soft cubes I had to be very precise and careful in order to sew perfect and identical sized cubes. It was a demanding but also relaxing process, even hypnotic, sitting comfortably in my chair at home and enjoying touching and feeling the soft fabrics.

It was such an interesting experience working with the two opposite materials. And what was more interesting is that I was really enjoying both processes. Both processes were mesmerizing for me. Was the fact that I was working a lot with one material making me enjoy even more the other? Questions like this arose constantly while working on my thesis work, creating much contemplation.
“Alternate Bonds” is a crochet piece of yarn and wire. The idea originated from a previous piece that I made a year before. It was a scarf that I tried to crochet with galvanized steel wire. It was a piece of a concept similar to that of the “Absence” piece (pages 27-29).

So, with this piece I decided to take my concept one step further. I crocheted pieces of yarn and pieces of wire in shapes that reminded me of scarves, which, then, I connected together consecutively (yarn-wire-yarn-wire etc.), so that the final crochet piece had the shape of a
blanket. I like the connection with these objects (scarf and blanket) because both are reminiscent of warmth and comfort and come in contact with our body. This helps the viewer to make the association of the qualities and characteristics of these materials with the qualities that we develop as humans.

The making process was again an important part of the piece, meditative, exploratory and enjoyable. It was important for me to crochet with both materials. I wanted to experience and see how it feels to crochet with wire and then with yarn and how it is to go from one material to the other and have myself obey this process. I noticed that both materials were enjoyable for me to crochet, very different in feeling, but both mesmerizing in the process. And, again, I feel that the fact that I was using one element for some time made me look forward to the other and, at the end, appreciate both materials.

Beauty and balance are also elements that were important for this piece, too, since I want beauty to come as a result of a balanced combination of the two contrasting elements. My final intention was to show appreciation for both elements.

- **About Printmaking:**

While being a graduate student in Rochester Institute of Technology, I had the opportunity to get engaged with Printmaking and the Non-Toxic techniques that Professor Keith Howard has invented. I learnt a variety of techniques which could give me very interesting results. I started to really enjoy printmaking and a new world of expression opened up to me. I found myself attracted to the process of making prints and I liked the fact that it was a process very different than the processes I followed for my 3D work. Being engaged with printmaking at the same
time with sculpture was something that added even more variety to the creative process and gave me the opportunity to stretch my expressive means. It was a challenge for me to manage to express my ideas in a two-dimensional format.

At the same time there were some concerns that I had about my printmaking work in relation to my sculptural work, like: How I would manage to bring together my 3D work with my prints? How I would manage to express successfully my concept and my ideas with 2D work? I was talking about materials and tactile qualities. How would I handle the fact that in my prints I could only have the image of the material and not the actual material? All these were questions to think about while working and putting together my thesis body of work.
16. “TWOgether-1”, 2009, four Color Intaglio-Type Print, H32 x W22 inches
17. “TWogether-2”, 2009, Four Color Intaglio-Type Print, H32 x W22 inches
18. “Punched on Cotton”, 2009, Photo Intaglio-Type Print, H48 x W32 inches
19. “Juxtaposition”, 2009, Four Color Intaglio-Type Print, H48 x W32 inches
For the prints I made for my thesis body of work I used the “Four Color Inversion Intaglio-Type” printmaking technique. It is a process that involves the use of digital halftones made on an inkjet print. Each of the four prints that I have included in my thesis comes from a photograph that I have personally captured. The imagery is inspired from the materials I used for my 3D work. They are close-ups of rich textural surfaces that drew my attention during the creative process of my sculptural work. Using images taken from my own 3D work brings me inspiration and gives unique imagery to my printmaking work.

For prints “TWOgether 1” and “TWOgether 2” I have used a close up of metal surfaces of my 3D work that had a textural interest and I juxtaposed it with a close up of a furry surface. In the “TWOgether 1” print the metal half of the image is from a close up picture of the punched galvanized aluminum plate, that I used to make my 3D piece “Absence”. In the “TWOgether 2” print the metal half of the image is a close up on the surface of a cast iron cube. My intention was to create a balanced composition of two contrasting textural surfaces.

In the “Punched on Cotton” print I wanted to do something more than just a juxtaposition of the two contrasting surfaces. My printmaking work had to be “deeper” and I felt the need to add more meaning to it, so that the ideas that I wanted to communicate would not be so obvious. For the “Punched on Cotton” print I used the image of the very interesting punched aluminum plate that I had left, while making the steel carpet piece “Absence”. I separated the plate from the background of the picture and the background became the paper of the print. The soft element now was the paper, which is actually made of 80% cotton, on which the image of the textural metal surface is printed. The “Juxtaposition” print is based on the same idea. The paper works as the soft element, which is juxtaposed to the printed image of a cast iron cube.
Installing the Work in the Gallery Space:

The Installation of my thesis work was a challenging experience. I had to think and decide what would be the best way to present my 3D and 2D work. Would it be better to show the prints in the same room with sculpture and installation work or separated? I had to find the best way to make the prints work together with the sculptures. I finally decided that I should have the whole body of my work in a single room, since every piece had the same concept and ideas. While creating my work there was no separation in my mind between prints and sculptures. Both means intend to communicate the same ideas. This direction would also lead me to present my prints without frames. I had them attached half an inch off the wall. The fact that the paper of the prints would be exposed to the viewer would give the immediate feeling that installation and sculptural work give. The paper is not seen only as a surface on which to print an image, but also appreciated and communicated as a material. This was something that really bonded the work. The whole installation of the thesis work in the gallery space looked cohesive and successful.

My thesis show was held in Rochester Institute of Technology at “Bevier” gallery. I was very happy with the final result. The work had a sense of clarity and calmness. A minimal aesthetic on a conceptual base characterized the work. The presence of the materials was strong with their tactile qualities made the viewer want to touch, feel and come closer to the materials. I, finally, felt that I had succeed in balancing the two contrasting elements and at the same time stimulate contemplations about their interrelationship and interdependence.
20. Installation view #1, Bevier gallery, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY

21. Installation view #2, Bevier gallery, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY
22. Installation view #3, Bevier gallery, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY

23. Installation view #4, Bevier gallery, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY
3. CONCLUSION

*General Observations regarding my work:*

Having an overall look at my thesis body of work, I can point out some things that are characteristic of my work. Contrast is a basic idea and is always there, in every piece I make. I often produce work that refers to functional objects that relate to humans and talk to our senses. I, also, notice that my work is taking a more minimalist approach. I am more and more interested in pure materials, clear and simple forms, forms that obey the properties of the materials, and the sense of balance and beauty. The process of making a piece, the need for touching and feeling the materials and develop an appreciation for their properties turns out to be very important for me.

Finally, the element of repetition occurs again and again in most of my work. It goes back to my experience of working for years part time in the production line of a pharmaceutical company. My job there was to do the same repetitive movement for eight hours. For me there is something attractive about it and I tried to incorporate that in the process of my artistic work. Focusing on a repetitive movement and finding that rhythm, for me is hypnotic, relaxing and makes me feel released. It is a way to slink away from everything, to sink into my own thoughts, to contemplate, to figure things out and, in general, to sink into my own world. Repeating things gives me a peaceful feeling, a sense of calmness and this calmness is reflected in the final piece. The element of repetition gives, also, to the work the sense of balance that I seek.

*Where to go next:*

Working on this body of work I noticed that I went to a more and more minimalistic direction. I realized that I am greatly attracted to the aesthetics of minimalism and this is something I am
planning to do more consciously for my future pieces. I want to give my work an even simpler and clearer form. I feel the need to drive my explorations to more basic forms and to the essence of the materials. In my mind I imagine big, empty spaces with a strong presence of pure, contrasting materials, in simple and dynamic forms.

I am also interested in trying to explore the relationships between more contrasting pairs or even groups of forms and materials. I plan to continue exploring contrast and balance, but also expand my concept through other materials, as well, like stone, wood, even salt or water.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


