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Revealing at the unraveling

Marie Florence Griffin

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REVEALING AT THE UNRAVELING

BY

MARIE FLORENCE GRIFFIN

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Art in Imaging Arts

Rochester Institute of Technology

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REVEALING AT THE UNRAVELING

By

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B.A., Art, Cornell College, 2001
M.F.A., Imaging Arts, Rochester Institute of Technology, 2004

ABSTRACT

This thesis paper exhibits the progression of my photographic studies over the last two years at The Rochester Institute of Technology. This thesis paper explains the thought process behind the art work and defines the influences and interpretation within each body of work. Through digital processes the work portrays issues of identity that revolve around the body politic through the dictates of Western culture, particularly advertising, on the body's surface. The images also emphasize the emotional responses resulting from the violence, seduction and manipulation that culture presumes on an individual's identity.
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INTRODUCTION

Culture is the greatest contributor to how we project and define the public and private body. My abstract works allow me to question issues of body image and identity. I am interested in the dichotomy of the exterior image versus the interior, and how they affect one another. More importantly, I am concerned with socialized body language that is displayed by outward appearance. I am fascinated by the questions put forth by French philosopher, Paul Valéry’s concept of the internal body as the “self we experience.” Respectively, he also speaks of the external body as the “self” we code through external signifiers.¹

By employing abstraction as a means of simplifying and reducing loaded concepts to the simplicity of implied metaphors, the work can visually portray a sense of emotion. Subjects in my work, like shiney material, beautification products on skin and ripe fruit are composed to relate to the same senses that advertising addresses. Through the visual appeal of color and texture, the pulled threads display the explosive distress of defining a self-image within the confining masquerade of pop-culture. The black space displaces the outside world, enabling the frame to act as a screen through which a body’s appearance is perceived. This strategy conceals and reveals seductive truths on the surfaces of the body image. The intrigue of vibrant color and lush texture stops beauty in its tracks, to question the abrasive surface of the fraying material. Here the torn material is used as a mask, revealing an interior identity that is not a tangible subject, but rather an inherent interpretation of an emotive experience.
The work began in a very general direction, as a study of the body. Over the course of two years the work became more defined as I focused my research and reflected on a personal body image, creating intuitively inspired pieces. Nancy Etcoff, a psychologist at Massachusetts General Hospital, and faculty at Harvard Medical School, states in her book, *Survival of the Prettiest*, “The painter seeks to recreate the body in a state of perfection; the dressmaker seeks to arrange drapery so beautifully that the actual body becomes a mere starting point.” I have transformed the body into expressions of life’s experiences. I wanted to find a visual way of interpreting social influences of the body image based on how we code, essentially define an identity. Secondly, society’s influence on the unique characteristics of individuality establishing it in a broader sense by categorizing and stereotyping. In my artistic studies I have always had an interest in the body in relation to the essence of humanity. As my studies progressed, I realize I had never really made it past the surface and decided that in order to refine my interpretation of the body I needed to clearly understand my interests in representing my idea of the bodies’ image through photography. Within the wonderful confines of graduate studies I began to research my interests in the identity of the body through photography.

The first artists I began to look at were those who dealt with the nude figure and/or the body’s representation. With artists like, Anne Wilson, Hannah Wilke, Frida Kahlo, Mariko
Mori, Edward Weston, Duane Michaels and Arno Minkkinen, I found Ruth Bernhard's photographic studies to apply to my interests. Ruth Bernhard delicately portrays the female figure in her works like, *In the Box*, 1962, (figure 1.3). I find her work intriguing because of their acute attention to form. The form becomes powerful in expressing the delicate sensitivity that occurs when relating to the body beyond its covering. In her later days as a teacher, she emphasized that the photographer should be in tune with his or her subject prior to photographing in order to make smart pictures. Unaware of my not yet matured interests in the body, I decided I needed to first develop a more intuitive sense of self beyond the surface. This way I could better communicate my position about the body, resulting in images that surpass the aesthetic of the model and photographed body, and impose my ideas about understanding the body through looking at images. Photography can objectify the intricate beauty of a surface appealing to all senses. Therefore, I began using myself as subject. I did not identify with my body as being
beautiful, or sexually desirable, as I did when choosing my models. Through photographing myself, I began to consider other potentials of the body. Ruth Bernhard states in Peter Lacey’s book, *The History of the Nude in Photography*, “I have chosen the female form in particular, it is because beauty has been debased and exploited in our sensual twentieth century. We seem to have a need to turn innocent nature into evil ugliness by the twist of the mind. Woman has been the target of much that is sordid and cheap, especially in photography.” She also says that, “When I am in the studio I am a sculptor with light. I want the nudes in my studio to be like sculptures, an abstraction of the body, of the physical. I see the power of the muscles and bones as well as the beauty of the skin. My nudes are ideals of my own feelings about being a woman, not an expression of erotic power, or a love object.” I relate to her ideas of the body because, my passion for the nude as a subject is beyond the objectivity of the body. The body can be confined in its interpretation through the frame of the camera, clothing, form and in Bernhard’s image, the box. I am interested in freeing its spirit and revealing the subject’s personality that helps to shape the character of their exterior projection of Self.

In my next studio session, (see Containing Identity, 2002, (figure 1.2), instead of contorting my body in strange positions, as an attempt in squeezing into the frame, I removed my clothes unveiling myself, and spread them around the frame. Hopping into the center, I created images where the clothing mimics me instead of me trying to play the role of my clothing.
As I began to photograph it became apparent that as a female I needed to understand how the female body is identified in art and photography. My body's appearance became less important than the portrayal of an identity. I was influenced by Ruth Bernhard's inspiration of the body, not as an object of "erotic power or love," but as an image of creative genius, stability and self-awareness. I contorted my body and tensed my muscles to define the complexity and frustration of feelings of being unique, different from expectations of Western society's standard of normal.

In previous photographic studies (see Curious Light, 2001, (figure 1.4). I used mixed media, mainly textures of strange materials to imply metaphors of rough, edgy, smooth and flowing on 3-dimensional panels behind images in glass mounts of nude figures blended in dark unidentifiable places. My ultimate goal was to continue this study applying the same ideas through textured surfaces, but also to unify the materials within two-dimensional space. I saw
digital processes as a way to resolve this. In my initial attempt I created images using the same concepts I was working with in the series, *Different Identities*, 2002, where the clothing mimics me instead of me trying to play the role of my clothing. I selected a pile of my clothing in the same shape as the image of my fetal body and put it on the table. I am crouched inside and under a table due to the confinement of identities that are associated with my clothing. The idea was that the piles of clothes on top of the table are a representation of my body, but not of my identity. Hence, the reason I confront the viewer with eyes open, while at the same time comfortably ignoring the viewer with eyes closed, acknowledging that either way the viewer stereotypes me. In the grand scheme of things the viewer becomes society. Through the gaze we interpret all things projected on us.\(^5\) Photography changes the way individuals may perceive themselves. Captured in a moment of time I saw my body as a separate entity of the person I identified with on a daily basis. I thought to move forward, exploring the confinement beyond
the frame, skin and reduction of the Black and White medium.

Black and White materials proved to be too graphic, not as expressive in meaning as color. To enhance the reality and energy of the work, I switched to color. Color was a way of enhancing a personality, sometimes a mood suggestive of a feeling or opinion. The same colors can be dark or bright which imply different physiological reactions of either a bold, passive, inane or serious response.
Clothing symbolically covers the hidden mysteries of a visceral life underneath. Are we confined by our self-image, in a contained social space? Why is so much attention placed on the meaning of material? In the group exhibition, *Conceptual Textiles: Material Meanings*, 1996, artists use fabrics to define “cloth’s physical characteristics of the body, they address the question posed by Ewa Lajer-Bercharth, ‘How does my body matter, that is, how exactly does it mean, and how does its materiality allow signification?’” Even if individuals do not care about their projected self-image they are still being affected by others’ assumptions. People are introduced to the concepts of clothing at a young age, from first having to wear them in public, to the more complex concerns of having to wear what is deemed appropriate due to weather and social events. From early on individuals are limited by society’s rigid gender classifications i.e., pink dresses for girls, blue shorts for boys. Though an identity is never lost, awareness of culture’s power to influence the concept of self is visually represented on the outside by the display of appearance.

A persistent curiosity about the body and its meaning motivates my work, as seen in the series *Clothes Piles*, 2002, (figure 2.1). How does a society, specifically Western culture, place social meaning on the body? The changing characteristics and technological advancements in
how material is promoted also affect the public opinion of the body, which in turn affects the individual's perception. For example, the use of computer software aiding in the manipulation of the body aesthetic has promoted a new way of addressing the surface of the figure. For example, Beauty Salons or Plastic Surgeons take an original photograph and change the image into a new figure allowing the individual to perceive the outcome before actually getting the service done. This presentation is a collage of past and future projections of the body, supposedly a transformation into new ideals. The ideals of manipulating the promotion of beauty, sexuality and desire for perfection, power and control are still the same. The body evolves into a direct replication of its surrounding environment and current influences. For example, in my series of works, Body Projection, 2002, (figure 2.2), The nylon material acts as
patterns of swirled colors mimicking the affect of touching a computer screen. My body folds in malleable shapes in attempt to fit into the box, literally the camera’s frame, my suitcase or a fast food drive-up menu. Metaphorically, the “box” is the framing devise that society bases a standard for imposing idealistic concepts of materiality. At a glance, this seems to be an extension of fashion and the influence of popular media. To further understand how fashion defines various projected stereotypes, I began comparing myself to my clothing, exploring
its environment by mimicking its form. In my work, clothing becomes a metaphor for the neurotic act of becoming physically costumed consumed by culture.

In the past, my photographs questioned the role of clothing as a literal cover-up, a way of disguising the body into the facets of stereotyping. The work embraces the act of associative viewing, which describes a way of visually assigning meaning to objects and subjects of choice based on personal experience and societal values. How do individuals begin to define a personal place that is filtered from society's influence? I am interested in creating an environment that provokes self-awareness and questions the determination of desire, sexuality, beauty and truth through the dictates of Western culture.

Artist Judith Golden creates pictures using mixed media to play roles that engage in parts of her personality, but the icons are not really how she is perceived in the outside world.
The outside world may see her as a woman fitting into the social decadence, which people tend to decorate themselves to fit the current social agenda, but they do not see her apart from social aspects that she is referencing in her adornment. People view famous stars as icons, not knowing who they are as individuals. *Magazine Series*, 1975, (figure 2.3), describes the idea of the mask or front put on through pop-culture and media. In her use of magazine covers like, *People Magazine*, 1976-1978, (figure 2.4), she assumes other made-up characters mocking the idea of icon in pop-culture, by cutting away the face or eyes and replacing them with hers. Her work assumes roles that are everything to do with cultural influences, which have nothing to do with her personality. In a performative manner my work became portrayals of the outward roles I play through my clothing that perhaps identify my personality. These sequences of images continue the exploration of perceiving an identity; only now the body is consumed in its adornment. In strange, humorous ways I contrive my body in public and private places, like my suitcase, fast food drive-up menu or closet portraying a young, energetic, female out to show the world that I am not who or what I may be perceived as, but I can be in imitating my environment by putting a certain act on. This idea relates to Cindy Sherman's work in creating what she calls Film Stills.

Sherman is bold in her performative images, such as, *Untitled #66*, 1980, (figure 2.5), and in, *Untitled #67*, 1980, (figure 2.6). She also has a sense of humor and abrasive truth about
the female body. Rochelle Steiner concludes in her essay, *Cast of Characters*, in Sherman's book, “...her images imply that what we see in others and what others see in us is always and only a façade. ...Sherman's work also confirms our freedom to choose how we present ourselves to the world: we can adopt any role we want and we can change it on a daily basis.”5&6 For me, Sherman's work addresses how desire and sexual tension is created in a society dominated by the influence of meaning upon the surface, aspired by the projected image within media - art, film, TV, etc. There is a dichotomy in the aesthetics of beauty and trauma in all of her work. This questions the idea of a so-called "act" put on in the theatrics of a marketable or seducible culture. The mimicking of true meaning seems to detract from reality itself, causing the idea of embellishment and fantasy to appear more interesting than the obvious truth within the real.

I continue in search of defining materiality through stereotyping in the series of work, *Piled Jeans*, 2002, (figure 2.7), and *Closet Shelf*, 2002, (figure 2.8). I create images where I am confined in the same space that I store my clothing on the floor on the shelves in my closet. Until I wear

Figure 2.5

Figure 2.6
the clothing in public, upon which the costuming is then exploited as a figuratively definable identity. Like Sherman, I take on an assumed social role by imitating my clothing; I satirically mock the silly attributes of clothing, like designer labels, materials and colors. The sculptural effects of these images in figure 2.8, result in coming to terms with having control over my identity. In this phase of the work, I recognize the limitations in my desire to convey a broader and more meaningful statement by using myself as a subject.
ABSTRACTION

I start to examine the next layer of interpreting the body image, by also including visual implications of the sexuality and sensuality of the subject. Susan Stewart states in her book, *On Longing*, "In order for the body to exist as a standard of measurement, it must itself be exaggerated into an abstraction of an ideal."¹ I employ abstraction as a visual way of simplifying today's body image. I relate my reasons for abstraction to Laura Cottingham's essay, "Are You Experienced?" *Feminism, Art And The Body Politic*, "...as a way of transcending the body in order to get outside of the corporal limitations of the human frame."² It is natural to abstract things and ideas on a daily basis, in order to personalize and define experiences. As individuals, it is typical to take things out of their original context and give them a personal meaning. Jerry Saltz states in his essay, "The Other Side of Photography", from the exhibition book, *Abstraction in Contemporary Photography*, "Abstraction frees the viewer to think for himself, with a clear mind and an open slate not crowded with expectations -- and leads to a greater rather than a lesser confidence and intelligence. Though more difficult to understand at first in the end a freedom is gained that allows one to accept the rich multiplicity of meaning."³ Abstraction is used to guide my viewer in relating to the expression of feelings without some of the external associations of a particular identity pertaining to race, sex, age, and size. Abstraction also
aids in seeing and thinking metaphorically, which helps broaden viewer's perspectives. For example, I use materials like, the skin of fruit, the pit of a peach, tear sheets from fashion advertisements, pieces of hair, threads of material, color dye, and the seam in the crotch of a pair of old tights becoming the metaphors for defining the birth of an identity; a coming to terms with the idea of self based on cultural influences.

Specifically, my thesis focuses on a pair of stockings, *The Tights, 2003*, (figure 3.1), worn to pieces in high school, containing memories of adolescence, a difficult time for most teenagers. They became a metaphor for the progression of life's experiences. These stockings speak to a complex set of associations between femininity, fetish, fashion, in the sense of appeal and sexuality; a hard concept for young women to define for themselves. The subject is decontextualized from its original environment and scrutinized by an unsuspecting viewer. In an abstracted form, the images invoke the concept of façade, exploiting the realness of the individual by deconstructing the connection of self and the surrounding environment.
I become interested in exploring the disconnect between the adorned surface and the unadorned individual. Attention is focused on the inherent details of the images, creating a visual dialogue between them. My obsessive approach fetishizes the intricate details embedded in the material.

Again, Cindy Sherman continues to influence my ideas of how the female body is perceived. The shocking tension between erotic implications and intentions of what may be considered disgusting and ugly is beautiful in truth. If the figure in her image, *Untitled #250, 1992* (figure 3.2), of a decrepit woman birthing or accepting phallic shit in a bed of wigs was very real, would the viewer accept this visual display as sexually endearing? So, what is gross for some is attractive for others. It can be surprising to find beauty in what would normally be considered disgusting and/or abnormal, by the pure fact that it is a true function of life. I question whether obsessing over clothing and all its confinements are really the issue at hand.

Terminology like desire, fetishism and sexuality become prevalent in the work. Defining the ideology of fetishism in relation to my studies is the result of obsessing over materialistic
ideals that relate to the fantasy of a desired object. Current culture is always capitalizing in the reinvention of the body image through materialistic fads, especially in advertising. This also causes a change in how we interpret the body and its role/occupation in society. The tears in the nylon, initiate a connection as a sexualized object, yet unappealing in their torn condition, resulting as a once fetishized object. To paraphrase Robert Malbert in his essay, “Fetish and Form in Contemporary Art”, relating to the Freud’s concept of *disavowal*, “where it is said that the fetishist disavows his perception of difference, he simultaneously affirms and denies his perception of the missing phallus. The result is a splitting of the ego, allowing him to retain the cherished illusion while giving it up as incompatible with reality.” Malbert also states earlier in his essay: “In a diluted sense, a fetish need no longer be a private obsession, hidden in shame, but a ‘taste’ to be flaunted, a mark of individuality, wealth or daring... also for the fashionable dresser, since it brings to the fore the possibilities of disguise and play inherent to the masquerade.” His concept sums up my ideas of the front put on by the individual to “disguise” an identity in order to fit a societal standard.
I began to remember my attachments and associations to my garments, which really had nothing to do with coding myself. Instead, I related to the material based on associations of memories, time and place. I photographed a series of images called, *Abscessed Fruit*. In the image, *Abscessed Fruit #12*, 2003, (figure 4.1), the torn mask has been stained in colors that evoke a sense of tragedy as a metaphor attributing to the acts of violence done towards women from the abundance of images we find in media today. The torn mask is stretched over the glimmering heel of a slender stiletto shoe on a tear sheet from a social magazine.
The tights have been worn to exhaustion ripping at the strongest seam, the crotch, being a vulnerable place disrespected and respected by society in strange ways. In most of the images, specifically, *Abscessed Fruit # 10*, 2003 (figure 4.2), the tear is revealed as a bloody gash or orifice saturated in pain. I look at Andres Serrano’s *Morgue* series, (see figures 4.3 and 4.4),
which describes emotional tragedies experienced by the abused subject that are portrayed on the outside through grotesque trauma. As photographic abstractions the images challenge the viewer to consider the importance of interpreting a presumed story by analyzing the surface of the subject.

In *Abscessed Fruit # 4*, 2003, (figure 4.5), the subject narrowed by an extreme close-up view is unforgiving, not trusting, afraid, due to the experience of manipulation times before. Therefore, it is divided by the choice or chance at taking risks. I pull threads from the snag of the tights to closely examine their fibers, metaphorically speaking to the idea of biologically looking at a wound, researching its cause and effect. The work *Abscessed Fruit # 1*, and # 7, 2003, (figures 4.6 and 4.7), also portrays a stance in culture where individuals adorn themselves to
disguise how they feel on the inside. It can be hard to live with regret and fear of being less then normal in a culture that depends on exterior social references produced by advertising to display meaning. Coming to terms with defining myself in comparison to the social norm has brought me to the realization that achieving the perfection of normalcy is impossible. In our current culture, the surface becomes the reality. So the metaphors of fruit, skin and fabric in my work appeal to a realistic conception within the foreground and surface of the print. This allows the work to be free of stereotype associated with identity, and to portray a broader perspective. *Red Slit*, and *Blue Tear*, 2003 (figure 4.8 and 4.9), allude to expectations of what may be an exposed vagina but in their curious state they are only eyes manipulating what we see. I am playing a game with my clothing and the viewer. The clothing itself is an act. It is
superficial and not necessarily a relation to identity, but rather to an illusion of how we perceive the body through an unexplainable emotional process.

I relate the work, not only in a visual sense, but conceptually to artist Lucas Samaras, he spent his entire life’s work studying the dynamics of his body, even going so far as gluttony and emaciating himself through dieting.\(^2\) In his works *Polaroid Transformations*, he uses the medium to alter the exterior into a projection of his emotional feelings.\(^3\) I find the work spontaneous in simulating ideas about ones body through different ideas of attraction to the surface. He changes them, perhaps abstracts them into something more visceral then the surface from which they once appeared. Samaras’ work, *Photo Transformation, 2/14/74*, (figure 4.10), changes the literal meanings of the body into emotional responses.
The next series of images, *Fetishized and Aestheticized*, developed into an expressive way of defining the body politic that has been abstracted to a thread and is now establishing the idea of place within abstracted space. The idea of the thread seems so small and insignificant, yet when the whole contextualization of clothing is reduced to the symbolic use of a thread, it becomes easier to understand beyond the literal meanings of threads. In their large scale, approximating 30x40 inches, the isolation of the thread begins to imitate emotional responses of the body as delicate, porous objects with distinguishing form. These forms resemble the shape
of the body, inhibiting space and mimicking the influences of their environment. My goal is to create a space within images, where the viewer perceives ideas of internal feelings associated through personal experience, but cannot place a specific set of classifications or opinions onto the subject. What I try to achieve in my images is the questioning of the dynamic between beauty and trauma; through the emotional and interpretive assumptions of the viewer; and the interplay between public and private spheres.

Artist, Anne Wilson, sculpts “cloth fabrics from her family’s garments” and hair in her work, *Mendings*, 1995, (figure 5.3), she says, “Hair signifies the presence of the body, and the holes and worn areas emphasized with stitching suggest wounds, orifices, burns, disease, or decay... Through Mendings, the body is brought into the drawing room and points to unspoken social constrictions placed on the body and the discursive space within which it exists.” Unlike Wilson who uses the hair to “mend,” I use tightly knotted and curled pieces of hair to fill in as signification of the body, and as representation left behind in the memories that material withholds. Matted,
crumpled pieces of thread and torn materials are evidence of the distortion of reality that exists on the outside, contradicting emotions on the inside.

I employ threads as gestures in their rhythmic pattern. Information has been selectively blocked out leaving the definition of the thread in the foreground to define the black space. The material runs and frays as stress is placed on the threads. At what point does the tension of the thread result in a breaking off or bunching up? The threads are traumatic in the sense that they are manipulated in threatening ways. The streaming material creates shapes relating to a female sensitivity by its circular shapely manner, or to the male in its linear pattern, especially in figures 5.1 and 5.2. The abstraction of threads pulled from the seam of the tights describes the projection of internal feelings, which become undone or released. The colors are not necessarily a precise representation of pain but allude more to the idea of harboring feelings out of fear of being chastised, judged or exploited. The pulled threads are external descriptions of emotional interpretations caused in response to memories. Some carry the burdens of emotional or physical abuse, and others of
great pleasure. The material is free representing the spirit of the body that carry the essences of beauty and ugliness, which exist in the harmonization of the real. The black blocks out the outside world that disillusions freedom of a personal expression that otherwise may bestow fear or exploitation.

Why are viewers still appalled when artwork deals with the “ugly” parts or situations of the body even when the idea is only implied through the metaphors of material and media? Artist Boyd Webb questions the realities of the world and the body in his heavily constructed spaces that he documents with the photograph being the end result of his work. Being able to identify the materials like ribbon, paper and plastic that normally do not relate to the subject encourages the viewer to question their constructed reality. In his works like, *Zygote,*
1993, (figure 5.7), or Sob, 1993, (figure 5.8), “he places what is rarely exposed or discussed on display, such as swirls of bloodied urine coming from a latex penis or ordinary spittle with twisted clay showing art and biology working together in images that appeal and intrigue at the same time.”

I find his process of work very similar to mine by the collection of materials that metaphorically lend themselves to a relation of the body. When looking at Webb’s images, why does it seem like the viewer can relate to the images as if he or she has seen a similar reality before? Boyd Webb would respond by saying, “Art has the ability to replicate life.”

In the same manner, I manipulate the material by abstracting it out of context and placing it to act as the body. At a closer scale, through the optics of the lens, the materials are transformed into a fabricated meaning.
In my final body of work, *Revealing at the Unraveling*, I return directly to advertising as my influence for interpreting the cultural meanings and representations that project into an identity. Advertising, stated by Andy Grundberg, Curator of, *Images of Desire: Portrayals in Recent Advertising Photography*, "by definition deals in the elucidation and refinement of categories, which represent a societal standard that advertisers wish to replicate." I have reduced the ideals of advertising to simple rectangular blocks, which are objects that replicate the size and shape of a magazine image. I also use some of the same applications appealing to color and seductive textures in products such as, beauty creams, and materials like elastic and nylon. The ideals include a sleek view of sensuality, eroticism, fetishism and desirability. The blocks are visually pleasing in their seemingly easy to understand appearance rich in texture and
color, yet destructive in the sense of what is blocked out by the black background. There is no identity visible, but the small flirtatious subtleties that tease the senses. The material appears to be unraveling but the thread takes the form of a serpent bold, large and powerful, not revealing anything, but rather intruding the subjects space. The skin appears infected and falling apart. There is still an essence of desire and intrigue in the lush colors and textures of the surface. The response is more than sexual implications of desire, but also feelings of vulnerability. These images reveal the fantasy, but unravel the reality in their true descriptive beauty of sag, wrinkle, peal, fuzz, hair, bumps, fungus, pores, bruise, indentations, scars etc.
I am now ready to photograph the figure again, having a better understanding of not only myself, but also the social influences that project on an identity. The most recent work, *Body Image*, 2004, (figure 7.1), incorporates all of the sub-series of works I have explored from ideas of the external surface of the body’s identity relating to the internal expression of self, and the mark of culture on the body. The constructed surface of fantasy created by products
of beautification through the tactics of desire and power mask out the interior sensibility. The surface births yet another unique porthole into the defining of an individual. This porthole, the belly button, is personal. It has its own childhood stories sometimes secrets that need to come out in order to feel again. Ultimately, culture determines which parts of the body are exposed and concealed. Fashion enhances the parts revealed. The passage from cloth to skin is projections of the interior identity relating to its external culture. The body can be defined today as a symbol of culture’s power to change the ideal body in a transformation of desire and appeal through lush photographic tactics. I have used the sexy formalities in photography and advertising to mask my personality. Through my artwork I was finally able to express emotions, unrecognizable or explainable to me. The trauma is not only a revealing of the lack of perfection externally, due to the dictates of advertising, but rather it is a denial of the truth. Emotions get buried under the skin and reside somewhere in the idea of Paul Valéry’s concept of, “the third body as the physical machine, which we know about from dissection and study. It is the body we are most estranged from and that beauty covers and helps us to deny.”¹ The truth, beyond the surface, is something that people have to make right with themselves by deciding how feelings should be harbored or shared. After experiencing violence, seduction and manipulation it is hard to trust, believe and learn to love. When emotions are kept secret, it is difficult to express yourself.² The trauma in my images resides in the rejection of self and
emotions the grotesque rotting fruit, wrinkled fungus, knotted hair entangled in shredded thread and open wounds that wail in a lonely dark space that block out fear of risk, decease, and loneliness.

Advertising influences our culture, which in turn has affected my initial vision of the materiality of my tights. My research and artistic exploration has inspired work conveying an understanding of self through the act of pulling the material apart. Resulting in the creation of an ideal that is more illusive to stimulating intuitive insight in the uniqueness of a personality portrayed in the images. These visual perspectives aspire to women and men, based on what the viewer brings to the image. Beauty is no longer an exterior aesthetic, but rather a relation to the experience of identifying with what is behind the surface, transpired in relating to the tactile qualities and movement of the material.
NOTES


"Paul Valéry states that people suffer from the unresolved "three-body problem," which is the idea of the body we "possess," the one we live in, being the most important object, which is the self we experience. The second is the public façade, which is the materialistic, adorned body. The third body is the physical machine, which we know about from dissection and study. "It is the body we are most estranged from and that beauty covers and helps us to deny" (Etcoff, 14).

p. 4 1.1 Ibid. p. 15

p. 6 1.2 Mitchell Margareta K. Ruth Bernhard Between Art & Life. San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 2000

"The modern world conceives education to be concerned with skills and information, not with feelings and imagination. Ruth communicates a different vision when she teaches photography: "creative realization through the 'third-eye'—the camera lens." She promises that students can explore their uniqueness, and she urges them to challenge limitations. From the beginning she wants students to find the place photography can hold in their lives, echoing the way she used photography as a therapeutic language to reinvent herself, over and over again. When Ruth says to pay serious attention to your work, it is really a way to say one must feed the soul to keep it alive. Photography provides a way to bring the outer and inner experience deep within us to focus: life and soul merge" (Mitchell, 14).

p. 7 1.3 Ibid. p. 100.

p.7 1.4 Ibid. p. 104.


"The 'gaze' is an important 'object a' or primary object of desire in Lacanian theory: part of partial-objects outlined by Lacan which structures our desires as adults...In such situations the gaze is disconnected from the eye as seeing and the voice from hearing. They become...silent witnesses to the solipsistic discourse: the pre-mirror stage infant gazes, stares, explores with its eyes – and the gaze itself is among the objects or images taken in..." (Outerbridge, Jr, 31).


"Textiles, quit simply, have functional values and symbolic powers for just about everyone. Art historian Ewa Kuryluk writes, 'The rich symbolism of thread and fabric resonate in everyone because of textiles' omnipresence in swaddling clothes, garments, bedsheets, towels, blankets, (bridal) veils, screens, scrolls, sacks, bags, rugs, and other textiles that provide us with comfort and pleasure' Yet it is the ubiquity of cloth that contributes to analyses which are commonly underdeveloped and unsophisticated. Dismissed as too ordinary, as either purely functional or decorative, as only women's work, textiles are rarely recognized for their rich, complex, and idiosyncratic social and political histories. The works of art included in CONCEPTUAL TEXTILES: Material Meanings not only make reference to these histories, they reveal the power of textiles as messengers of meaning in contemporary society" (Ferris, 8).
p. 13 2.2 Ibid. “Cloth as Memory and Significance of Touch” p. 11


“By using her own face in each of the photographs, Golden feels the viewer can more easily project him/herself into the changing roles. She successfully interweaves the accoutrements that comprise the contemporary mask: makeup, sun glasses, a hat or tie, jewelry, a beard, a cigar or cigarette, a smile, a frown. ...Thus, we are reminded that facial facades typify a person in a social role more than they indicate true identity” (Katzman, 1).


“Many of the artistic processes that have incorporated the artist’s body are really about transcending it, getting outside of the corporal limitations of the human frame, challenging the ideological frames that regulate the movement of bodies in space (for instance, the historical confinement specific to nonwhite and female bodies), and, more philosophically, attempting to resolve the “mind/body problem” as it is entrenched in Western metaphysics” (Cottingham, 121).


p. 29 3.6 Ibid. p. 90.


p. 44 5.1 Ibid. See notes, 2.1, p. 28.


p. 51 5.3 Ibid. p. 30.

p. 53 6.1 Grundberge, Andy. *Images of Desire: Portrayals In Recent Advertising Photography*. Pennsylvania:
Goldie Paley Gallery, 1989; p. 3.

Elsa Longhauser states in the foreword of Images of Desire: “The idea for this exhibition was sparked by the realization that the most potent forms of recent advertising photography are not designed to underscore the desirability of a product but rather to suggest that a glamorous life-style, erotic pleasure, success, or power await the purchaser. “Images of Desire” examines contemporary photography in the service of today’s marketplace – to shift the focus of advertising from substance to illusion and from commerce to art”

p. 63 Conclusion.1 Ibid. See notes Introduction.1.

p. 63 Conclusion.2 Madonna.

In history it is becoming more acceptable for woman to publicize emotions by telling their stories, feelings and opinions, such as Madonna’s song “Express Yourself,” Like A Prayer. 1989.
Artists:


Works by textile artists that look to define meanings deeper than the fabric itself.


Self-portraiture and identity.


Self-portraiture and feminist critique.


Mixed media using primarily photography, fashion and advertising critique, female perspective and identity.


Artist Boyd Webb questions the realities of the world and the body in his heavily constructed spaces that he documents with the photograph being the end result of his work. He also deals with sexuality by placing what is rarely exposed or discussed on display.


Self-portraiture and identity.


Artist Judith Golden exhibits work at exhibition *photo/trans/forms*.


Self-portraiture and identity.


Artist, Arno Minkkinen studies his body's identity in relation to his environment, including the landscape.


Critique on advertising and the found object in its environment.

Mariko Mori works with defining her self-image by creating a space a personal place filled with her own desires.


He uses himself as a study dealing with issues of altering the exterior self through interior motives.


This work also deals with the self-image in a personal space, where in this series he includes pictures of himself as object with other objects of the same critique.


Stories detailing Samaras’ life and interpretations of his images.


Her work Film Stills.


This series of work deals with conflicting beauty and tragedy.


This book includes stories and photographs of Weston’s most popular work, which includes his nude studies and interpretations of the female figure.


This website has the works of Ellen Brooks including her desires and motives behind creating small personal spaces from homemade objects that reflect child-like imitations of creating a safe haven blocking out the characteristics of a real world.


Tears made in different materials reconstructed and photographed by the artist.


Parker, Olivia. [http://www.edelmangallery.com/parker.htm](http://www.edelmangallery.com/parker.htm)

Theory:

This book covers the explanations of how viewers interpret and relate to abstract photography.

This book breaks down the historical, philosophical ideology of Fetishism within society, religion and the sexes, including homosexual, bisexual, male and female sexual fetishes.

Bedford Glossary Critical, 2nd ed., "structuralism/semiotics" and "feminist criticism."
This dictionary breaks down some terminology used in critical feminist theory particularly defining structuralism and semiotics.


The stories in this book express the female genitalia as something more then just anatomy, but also as feelings that relate and sometimes control women's ways of reacting and thinking about their bodies.

Defining beauty in western culture from the influence of religion, science and art theories in history to present day. Furthermore, the section on fashion ideologies and stereotypes in current pop culture are in the interests of my studies.


This book talks about societies impact on the female body as an aesthetic, which houses ideals of the beautiful and the ugly including text on the female perspectives sex and desire.

Photographers as artists that deal with current visions or ideals of the body in advertising.

Socialist feminism versus Radical feminism and the other side of Marxism theory based on Marx's theories in context of Fetishism as a Cultural Discourse. Furthermore, Haraway's idea of the "Cyborg" as an ideal for neutralizing the discriminations within humanity, animals and machines which is based on the externalization of the powers that are non-characteristic of our social being.

Aesthetic use and effects of line, form and light within imagery.

A feminist critique about the ideas and imagery within the pornographic magazine, Hustler, and the relationship between sexuality, sexual representation and class.

The affects of media and society influencing the ideologies of the body and desire.

Nochlin, Linda, Andrea Freaser, Amerlia Jones, Dan Cameron, Collier Schorr, Jan Avgikos, Catherine De Zegher, Adrian Piper, Peggy Phelan, “Feminism & Art (9 Views),” *Artforum International Magazine*, October 2003.

Discusses the feminist movement in art as an intellectual and political revolution. Furthermore, selected female artists use of the body and identity as a means for promoting social awareness of women's changing and/or different role in society.


Sexual stereotypes relating to the differences in gender roles and sex in American culture, as well as the transformation of these definitions in terms of the ideologies of schools and religion.


The history of women's role within the craft of textiles.


Different ways to develop a working methodology and processing ideas into a more concrete formula as a contemporary artist.


Women's sexuality.


Very conservative terminology used to describe the psychological theories of woman's emotions.


This book is a helpful guide for formatting a thesis paper.

Magazines and Articles:


This bulletin is published by the biomedical photography student at Rochester Institute of Technology, which includes science micro images that tend to look like abstract imagery to viewers unaware of what they are actually looking at.
A brief history about artists such as Brancusi, Duchamp, Picasso and Van Gogh’s’ reinvention of the human body and its meaning.

Commentary on Samaras’ recent exhibition at the Whitney including a linear review on the culmination of his life works.

The “Yale girl photographers” reviews of their work and understanding them as individual artists, rather then a cultivated fad of Yale students.

Self-portraiture.

This article talks about how sex and the body is portrayed in recently reviewed art exhibitions.
## WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

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