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Julie E. Kinzelman: graduate thesis, MFA in imaging arts, Rochester Institute of Technology

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I am quite sure I could fill a book acknowledging all those who have played an important part in supporting me throughout my degree. I include the past three years in their entirety because that is where the idea for this thesis began and developed. Unfortunately, I did not arrive in Rochester with the topic for my thesis in mind. Perhaps if I did, the experience could have been quicker and less painful. However, as many have pointed out to me, the experience, including the mental anguish, is unique to each of us, and is a necessary part of the creative work. I am fortunate enough to have had tremendous support and love to guide me through this degree. Although I realize this was a personal exploration, I feel as though certain individuals carried me through the process. Most importantly there was my family, to whom this thesis is dedicated: my parents, Patty and David, and my siblings, Stephanie and David. I thank them with all my heart for answering my questions and assuring my path.

My heartfelt thanks also goes to the special friends I have made along the way. These people brought happiness to me at times when I felt lost. They allowed me to sit in their presence and struggle to figure it all out. They provided the immediate balance necessary to live through the cumbersome obstacles.

Finally, I would like to thank my thesis board members for offering guidance, possibilities, professional as well as personal advice, and remedies to my creative conflicts. Tina Lent, Jeff Weiss and Ken White have always been more than board members because of the experiences we have shared together outside, as well as inside, the academic environment. Each of them individually has provided support while I was seeking direction and continually communicated their confidence in my abilities. I can't thank them enough for responding to me honestly and nonjudgmentally.
I left Lubbock, Texas, to further develop my education, my work, and most importantly, my life. I realized then that it was necessary to separate myself from the small, protective, art environment I had been engulfed in for four years. I suppose it happens in every institution where people like myself exhaust the resources available to them and realize they must move on before their work begins to resemble those around them. At the time I felt stuck in a program where technical discourse was encouraged with complete disregard for engaging the students in contemporary ideological or historical issues. I knew that something was missing from our critiques. I had no historical influences to compare my work to, except for the icons of 20th century photography, Ansel Adams, Alfred Steiglitz and Paul Strand, who popularized straight, traditional photography. These were the examples I was to emulate. As a result, the bulk of my work throughout those years seemed to focus on the technical aspects of photography, avoiding feeling and emotion.

This narrow, one-sided approach to creating images seemed somewhat confusing to me. I was forced to work intuitively and viscerally to free my emotions because I had not been taught how my feelings could dictate my images. I struggled for my images to be seen as a strong, independent body of work. I wanted to be taken seriously as a woman artist. I remember constantly fighting to prove myself and fearing that I would not be recognized for my talent or individuality. As a result, I felt my ideas and personal development had been stymied by a male-dominated, homogenous environment.

I decided to find a master’s program that would compensate for this one-sided education. I began searching for programs that concentrated on contemporary issues, art theory and philosophy, as well as maintained a faculty representing artists of both genders. So after extensive research, I chose the Rochester Institute of Technology with no expectations or prior knowledge of how a graduate program could and should function. On arrival, I was overwhelmed with both excitement and anxiety at the opportunity of having total freedom after years of guidelines and structure. Two years into the program I finally felt I had made the right decision.
ART HISTORICAL INFLUENCES

Throughout my graduate work, my influences have shifted as my imagery changed. It seems that in the beginning I found so many artists exciting because of their different philosophies, mediums and backgrounds. To me these Conceptual, predominately Postmodern, artists were working in ways I had never experienced. It seemed to me that my art never extended beyond the purity of a black and white photograph. The exposure to these artists, their ideas and their manipulation of the medium, brought new insight into my work. It wasn’t the new use of the medium alone, but how these artists manipulated it to convey meaning and expression. I realized there was more to photography than the silver that lay on the surface.

Content in photography was never considered as having great importance throughout my undergraduate degree. If our images retained high tonal quality and illustrated flawless technical control, we were considered successful. My first quarter at R.I.T., however, stimulated the locked up emotions I had suppressed for years in Texas. I recognize my first year in Rochester as a pivotal point in my academic career. It was a time to break free of technical restraints and begin exploring new mediums and art theory to validate my reliance on feeling and intuition.

The artists I was influenced by then were indirectly related to my work. I was developing a language to define my own work at the time, as well as working to understand their work. During this time I was not focused on a particular genre of art or even specific artists. Rather, I was absorbing everything as quickly as I could without losing myself. This was a time of introspection and growth. I was extremely conscious of how everything (new environment, friends, studies) related to me and as a result how my work illustrated these experiences visually. During the middle of my second year my work became extremely focused and I turned to certain artists to help me understand my own developing philosophy. At the time, my work included 4x5 sheets of black paper covered in graphite. With complete disregard for the photographic medium, I approached the 300+ pieces of silver-laden paper as photographs. This body of work marked the beginnings of my thesis concentration and consequently developed into the “Book of Thoughts” which was the first piece in the show.

Throughout this time, and for the remainder of my thesis work, I became interested in the works of Gerhard Richter, Vija Celmins, Cy Twombly, On Kawara, Hanne Darboven, and Ann Hamilton. Initially, and as a result of the work I was producing in
the spring of 1993, I was attracted to the work of Gerhard Richter and Vija Celmins. The majority of their work visually resembles photographs utilizing a trompe l’oeil style. In the mid-sixties both Richter and Celmins were producing visually similar work but on two different continents: Richter in Germany and Celmins in the United States.

The term “photopaintings” Gerhard Richter uses to describe his trompe l’oeil paintings could easily describe the canvases of Vija Celmins. Ostensibly, these are straightforward, detailed, and in Richter’s case enlarged copies of found photographs. Both Richter’s and Celmins’ work undoubtedly embrace and even celebrate the comings, I became fascinated by painted imagery that could fool me into thinking I was approaching a photograph. A further definition of the use of trompe l’oeil painting in Richter’s work describes his paintings as “A condensed analog of reality that, by posing as a photograph, arouses expectations of certainty and, by being a painting, refuses them again” (Nasgaard, 1988, 49). Most of Richter’s photopaintings are streaked, partially erased or slightly out-of-focus, leaving the image disturbed. His paintings are both black and white and color, although the color creeps in more often than is usually recognized. His subject matter varies from airplanes, cars, family portraits, holiday outings, to pieces of furniture. Richter’s intent in utilizing photographs to launch his paintings was a willful act of negation. He chose to copy photographs primarily to escape the banal alternative options of art making that were available in the early 1960’s: the heriocics of socialist realism, the spirituality of an Yves Klein, or the idealism of the Zero Group (Nasgaard, 1988, 40). It was only in the anti-art stances or art-
less subject matter and style of early Pop Art that he could discover his own authenticity. Richter’s solution was to copy photographs as if ready-mades, regardless of their subject matter or artistic visual worth. His logic in this methodology was to find a way to work that had nothing to do with received ideas about art or formal invention. As he explains, “The photograph was necessary to correct my seeing, to avoid getting caught in stylization, to forget habits and background and paint against my will” (Nasgaard, 1988, 40). His intent with his ordinary subject matter was to avoid any special attention drawn to the content. However, as commonplace as the subject matter of his photopaintings may appear, the universal accessibility of the photograph prevails. One cannot approach his paintings without associating their own real, past events personally and historically, due to the reality of the original photograph that lies behind the transparency of paint. Thus it is that in his efforts to glorify the ordinary we as viewers are able to embrace art all around us. It is his love for the common, sometimes banal, subjects in life that I share.

Vija Celmins continues to be one of the greatest influences on me since I began my thesis preparation. She is an artist who seems to represent so much of what my art is about: Minimalism, over-simplification of the ordinary, and process orientation. In so many ways Vija Celmins’ work has helped validate much of my work’s development, from applying graphite onto black paper, to incorporating photographs into my drawings. Initially, I was fascinated by the simplicity and minimalism of her graphite drawings, which for me consistently reinvent the photograph. Her paintings, similar to Gerhard Richter’s, read as dense, sharp photo-
graphic fields from a certain distance, yet they soften and lose focus at a closer range, making one aware of their surface tactility. The art of Vija Celmins, like that of Gerhard Richter, is neither concerned with art history as subject matter nor removed from critical issues and traditions. Vija Celmins quickly separated herself from the abstract expressionist work being produced throughout the sixties. Rejecting traditional ideas about composition, she chose to concentrate on ordinary household objects, such as an electric space heater, hot plate, a fan and her refrigerator. Celmins’ ordinary still-life subjects presented head-on in the center of the canvas, are painted not as full of contrast as Richter’s paintings, but in a range of grays. The only color she applies on occasion are accents to the grisaille subject and background that envelope the canvas.

The need to look at reality as closely as possible has been the key to her work from her early days as a graduate student at the University of California at Los Angeles. It only then seems logical that she used photographs as source material for her paintings. Celmins’ "Ocean," "Galaxy," and "Desert Floor" drawings are all based directly on photographs she has taken or obtained from other sources. Here, her choices of subject matter are not based on the idea of representing a specific place. Nor does she use her choice as a statement about what can and cannot be content for art. Her process of artmaking again parallels that of Richter by strictly concentrating on issues of art making. She has said, "I like looking and describing, using images to explore the process of making" (Tannenbaum, 1992, 19). Although photographic on first glimpse, Richter’s paintings and Celmins’
drawings visually and tactically remind the viewer of the artist's presence. Nothing is spontaneous. Rather, the surface is built up diligently layer by layer. Although both of these artists have affected me with their sublime treatment of the commonplace, only later did I realize there is a conscious negation of subject matter by both of them. However, the layering of complexities both aesthetically and conceptually is what keeps their work alive and exciting to me. For example, upon repeated viewings I am stunned by the sublime photoreproduction. As I begin to interact with the work, I recognize the application of paint or graphite on the surface. I step back again to analyze the formal approaches of handiwork. I research only to conclude that in fact the romanticized usage of the subject matter is not romanticized at all and resolutely deflects any tendency to subjectively identify with it. Both Richter and Celmins reconstruct the photograph so that it retains its fascination as reproduction of reality. At the same time, though, the view of that reality in relation to the photograph remains complex and confusing. Vary rarely do many artists grab my attention longer than my aesthetic interests in them last. I suppose with Celmins and Richter, it is because of the unanswered questions that I am left contemplating.

Focusing on the works of Cy Twombly has helped to encourage a sense of freedom through self expression, both in my production of the piece “Book of Thoughts,” as well as in the chalkboard landscapes. My turn toward Twombly liberated my work from the rigid, controlled ways of working I was familiar with through photography, and allowed me to turn to sketches that were lose and
gestural. Again, it was the minimal, yet abstract, simplicity in Twombly's canvases, although large in size that attracted me to his work.

Roland Barthes once described Cy Twombly's work as an "allusive field of writing, that can be deciphered but not interpreted" since it produces nothing but an "effect" (Bastian, 1985, 19). I was immediately drawn to Twombly's large, grey paintings from the 1960's that were covered in primitive looking markings resembling residual layers of chalk exposed on the surface of a chalkboard. In an empty plane of grey paint, subtle, loose writing scores the surface in a mesmerizing fluidity. Although his canvases are not filled to the edges, I find myself filling in the empty space with my silent thoughts and feelings. One part of Twombly's work that I have always been influenced by is his use of text and language. With much of my work, I apply text to the surfaces of both photographs and paper. By doing so a peculiar tension is created within the layers, first in deciphering the words and second in interpreting them aesthetically. The use of text and language can inevitably act as a catalyst in engaging me with a piece. I immediately begin to decode the message delivered on one level by merely reading and translating. On another level, the text can act aesthetically, taking up form and movement, or in other words, gesture is a form of non-verbal communication. Throughout my work I use words expressionistically as a layering device. Each word loosely gestured on top of another adds a new texture to the overall surface. In Twombly's grey paintings from 1967-71, the language of flow and fracture comes from the early modern fascination with motion in many of the Futurist artist's works, like those of Giacomo
Balla. "In this context, the 'rational' side of futurism—its analytic, semi-scientific decomposition of movement—was stressed" (Varndoe, 1994, 41). However, Twombly seems to have reacted without reason to the Futurists' ability to combine linear sequences with sporadic flux. His surfaces never include geometry or straight edges, but are characterized by expressionistic, childlike rows of loose gestures. Among the most obvious of these images are those banded with rows of loops that have been compared to handwriting exercises for children.

What is so remarkable (and again similar to Richter and Celmins) is Twombly's struggle to make a (personal) art through methods that may appear so artless. Several of Twombly's first exhibitions received criticism that characterized his work as "chaotically subjective" (Varndoe, 1994, 42), with an inability to deconstruct them in terms of traditional, art-historical expectations. So in Twombly's failure to satisfy the available critical categories, his later work was being located in relation to Post-Minimal aesthetics that was then beginning to emerge. "In such art, doggedly programmatic activity—nailing nails, filling in circles, drawing rows of loops—was used by many artists as a way to give voice to, rather than suppress, a distinctive psychic individuality" (Varndoe, 1994, 42). Post-Minimalism experimented with the personal meaning and the self that can emerge without scheme and therefore perhaps become more authentic. Here, in Twombly's methods, or lack thereof, he resembles Richter and Celmins. All three believed in the banality of scheme and subject matter in art. Art exists not for its own authority but as a means to get into the work and allow it to develop.

The individual works of On Kawara, Hanne
Darboven, and Ann Hamilton have had an indirect influence and affect on my work since 1993. My interest and fascination with them stems from a multitude of interests and sensations. Through them I have strengthened my interests in and understanding of Conceptual and Installation Art.

There has always been something methodical and conceptual about the work of Hanne Darboven. Through her I have learned how to discipline myself as I am producing work, setting aside time daily, strictly to draw or shoot. During these times I recall the obsessive nature of Darboven’s work, documenting time and epochs by covering walls with calendar pages. I continue to be attracted to her underlying themes of honoring remembrance as the past appears physically in writing in the present. Her installations include walls covered with hundreds of picture frames of photographs, postcards, calendar pages, pages with text and numbers. The primary idea of Darboven’s work is assimilation or transformation. For example, taking something like knowledge and breaking it down to be absorbed or transcribing periods of time and texts into visual symbols. “The objective character of the time periods thus represented is infused with subjective tension by the selection of handwritten notes and quotations” (Tsuzuki, 1990, 1). The interesting effect of her work is that it forces us to experience time in space while at the same moment visually experience it through representation. In other words, time spaces turn into image spaces.

Much like the work of Hanne Darboven, the artist On Kawara takes the literalness of the “concept” and expands it into an everyday aesthetic. Every day between 1966 and 1976 On Kawara painted the date isolated on a black canvas. His
paintings define biography in a literal sense, “bio” meaning life and “graphy” meaning writing. In the work of On Kawara we discover something about the time in which both he and we lived. On Kawara does not comment or express himself about the time he documents, instead, he registers. Within Kawara’s paintings are two combined elements: the act of creating or painting the pictures, and the concept to which it refers. Therefore, they act as both a concept and a painting. Each date painting receives its own box in which newspaper headlines of that day are also kept. His abstract, minimal symbols, absent of all formal aesthetics, leaves many unanswered questions. For example, the most obvious question, “what is time?” This philosophic contemplation may remind us of our irreversible lives that may have included pain, sadness, joy or other feelings from past experiences. Through this method of recalling, viewers are forced to remember and unfold certain events of their lives. Although this process can be at first a personal one, only later do we realize that the days of life are universally felt. The original concept for my piece “Book of Thoughts” stemmed from this daily ritual of working that Hanne Darboven and On Kawara practice. At first I was forcing myself to concentrate on developing stronger work habits. Everyday I would draw 3-5 drawings and diaristically chronicle both time and thought. To me, my gestures expressed thoughts, feelings, people and events of each passing day. The experience of producing for me is as great as finally experiencing art itself.

The communal engagement Ann Hamilton encourages through her ambitious installations instigates an abundance of impressions and heightens
our receptivity. This experience, sometimes deafening, is the power of art. In its strength it can leave us questioning, confused, excited and contemplative. The scale of Ann Hamilton’s installations is immense in both their elaborate assembly and sensory impact. Through the concepts that developed her art, I have become interested in the sensory experience and how this activity relates to personal history. So much of the sensory experience for me lies within the production of a piece. I am aware of such transformation, through producing and observing work. The challenge lies first in illustrating my experiences, while second being inclusive to my viewers. In a 1990 interview in San Francisco, Ann Hamilton acknowledged, “I think it’s very much a part of the structure of it, which is about acknowledging the individual voice, the individual experience...” (Bruce, Solnit and Spector, 1992, 33). She controls this experience for the viewer by making work that, “slows you down, focuses you, makes a state of presentness” (Bruce, Solnit and Spector, 1992, 34). It is through the work of Gerhard Richter, Vija Celmins, Cy Twombly, On Kawara, Hanne Darboven and finally Ann Hamilton that my “experiences” have been receptive. It is through their work that my motivation to create and produce work is enhanced.
THESIS SHOW

My work prior to my thesis show had strictly focused on black and white photography. These photographs have been visually complex due to the surreal qualities my Diana camera imparts to photographs. Images are blurred and visually difficult to interpret, leaving the viewer struggling to piece together the subject matter. However, with the development of my thesis work I noticed the need to simplify my subject matter. In recent years I have become fascinated with Minimalist work. I began producing work that emphasized space and simplicity, focusing on the little things in life that in the end become the biggest influences in my visual imagery. This new exploration came at a time when my usual reliance on photography was not being satisfied. All attempts to manipulate the photograph, including simply enlarging it, brought me miserable results. I experimented with the opposite extreme and allowed my photos to remain small in size, as well as minimal in subject matter.

From the start, I decided to use this degree as a time to experiment with various forms of medium. Throughout the production of each piece, I tried to experiment first with various processes other than straight photography, that I might not otherwise explore. By doing so, I enjoyed exploring each piece through different possibilities and arriving at a new way to present the concept visually. At no point in the development of this body of thesis work did I consciously decide how many photographs, (if any), I would include in the show. I had not realized, until weeks prior to the opening, that there were scarcely any. This was not a problem for me, but perhaps for others who continued to ask whether or not my degree was in fact photo-related. It seems more likely that thesis shows at R.I.T. (within the past five years) do not include traditional, framed, photographs, but instead experiment with new mediums as well as installation art. I believe I, too, found graduate school a time to experiment and explore. I do not think this program was entirely about academics for me, but more about an individual growth process away from things familiar, like photography and Texas.

As I worked, I realized that my ideas seemed to relate in some way to my southern upbringing and the longing to be back in Texas. I had no intentions of producing a documentary of my life in Texas. Instead, I chose to concentrate on specific icons that in my memory characterize and illustrate some of Texas' more peculiar features. The majority of these seemed obvious and perhaps needed no explanation, but others remained personal and included metaphorical relationships between my parents and the landscape.
The biggest challenge for me, throughout the preparation of the show, was the overall presentation and use of the gallery space. Because the theme of my show focused on my ties to the Texas landscape, I originally thought to create an environment that would bring to life my memories of Texas. However, by doing so, I was placing emphasis on specific pieces while at the same time completely disregarding the integrity of the others. After several possibilities, I decided to treat each piece as its own interpretive landscape, instead of creating an environment in which to place them. In the end, each piece would recreate, comment on or appropriate some part of the Texas landscape.

Throughout the remaining paragraphs I will briefly describe my show, and how one would view the pieces as they were arranged throughout the gallery space. As each piece may be referred to numerically, this does not imply any order in which the work was created.

As one walked into the gallery space, the first piece they would encounter would be the “Book of Thoughts.” This piece began as a study of imagery that conveys photographic elements through mediums other than photography. It includes 280 pieces of 4” x 5” black canson paper covered with graphite and charcoal markings, sewn together in an accordion bound book with lead covers.

The book was created page by page over the course of six months. Each day I would set aside time to draw, in no particular setting. I allowed the environment to influence my gestures, through music, conversation or movement. The dense, handwritten text expresses thoughts, feelings, people and events of each passing day. To me the use...
of graphite on black represents my subtle assertion of personal identity and is reminiscent of a photograph laden with silver. The graphite drawings, lacking in color, become dependent upon light to create form. I decided to place the book on an eight foot long shelf that hung one third of the way up from the bottom of the wall. Tungsten lights were hung to reveal the detail in the graphite and catch the viewer’s eye. The accordion style book was stretched across the shelf and from a distance, appeared long and flat, forming a black horizon line. The positioning of the book along a horizon mimicked the presentation of the horizon line within the next piece, “Texas Landscape” and “Texas Oceanscape.”

The 1 1/2” x 2” photographs in “Texas Landscape” and “Texas Oceanscape” were my attempt to emphasize the immense open landscape of Texas. My memories of Texas include the vastness of land and the open space that connects it with the sky. As flat as the land is, the horizon seems to rise in the center, giving the illusion that you are standing on the outside contour of the earth.

After experimenting with various sizes for the images, I decided that by decreasing the size of the photograph, I could emphasize the amount of open space that engulfs the land. I placed the tiny photographs along the horizon or bottom third of the large 24” x 36” mat board, so that the piece would include the space surrounding the images themselves. In other words, the empty mat board continued the perimeters of the sky in the image and expanded it out onto the wall. The lines and framing within the photograph are repeated by the photograph’s positioning on the mat board and by
the thin black frame, which like the photograph, isolates it within the mat.

The progress of the third piece, "Portrait of Mother," and "Portrait of Father," consumed seven months of producing molds and making hundreds of plaster casts of both cruciforms and horseshoes. Within this piece, I chose two icons specific to the southwest to portray metaphorically, my mother and father. I chose to cast the horseshoes and cruciforms in stark white plaster to emulate the texture and feeling of bones. For me, the treatment of this piece was crucial, in order to represent the barren Texas landscape. The texture of the plaster molds visually became similar to the weathered, eroded objects one would find in the desert. It was important to call to mind, and in some way visually represent, my memories of Texas and the landscape.

This piece slowly materialized on a day to day basis, where I would produce six to thirty-six molds each sitting. I began to notice how important the process of making the molds became. Everyday the pile increased, and I became intrigued with its rising quantity. I found this process somewhat of a ritual, very similar to the diaristic drawings I was also producing on a daily basis for the piece "Book of Thoughts."

The concept of the cruciforms developed soon after the production of the horseshoes was underway. I wanted to somehow choose an object that could metaphorically represent what my mother meant to me spiritually. The cruciform was a representation of my mother, not so much a statement on religious beliefs, but how my religious faith materializes through her. I experience God through and in my mother, believing she exemplifies a deeper understanding of faith and spirituality.
At the time this piece was developing, my father underwent back surgery and was, for the first time in my life, physically dependent on the family. Seeing my father weak and dependent was quite a reversal from his role as the provider. This piece became more significant to me as I was realizing that my parents, too, are growing up and growing old. I chose the horseshoe as a representation of my father's lasting strength, stability, and protection of the family.

Both sets of plaster molds were placed within two separate Plexiglas boxes that sat on top of white pillars. The molds became artifacts of time and history within their museum-like presentation. The two pillars sat surrounded by nontraditional representations of the landscape, significantly titled, the “Landscape Series.”

The “Landscape Series” includes four 3’ x 5’ chalkboards with charcoal, graphite and chalk applied to the surfaces. This piece was a direct descendant of the “Book of Thoughts.” After experimenting with graphite on black canson paper, I experimented with drawing onto photographs and gum bichromate images. I found myself exploring different types of surfaces and sizes of images. Soon, my photographs increased to 2’ x 3’ of images I appropriated from Vija Celmins. As I have previously mentioned, her subject matter began as a photograph, and developed into a graphite representation on canvas. I took photographs of her canvases and covered them with graphite markings. I found myself fascinated with layering both aesthetically and conceptually. Consequently, one of Celmins' images of the “Galaxy” that I appropriated and manipulated with chalk, resembled the surface of a chalkboard. About that time, I was studying
the grey paintings of Cy Twombly in which his scribblings with white paint also gave an appearance of oversized chalkboards. The next step in my work's progression seemed logical: include the surface of a chalkboard.

On the surface of the chalkboards, I used large graphite stenciled text and white chalk. One board contained the phrase “BEAUTIFUL SUNSET,” the other, “DESERT LANDSCAPE.” These phrases, force the viewer to recall the many representations of landscapes through various mediums they have seen. Within these two boards, I include no signifier, other than text, to represent what a beautiful sunset or desert landscape might look like. One cannot escape the process of reading, defining and interpreting words when presented in any context. To the literate public, words are understandable, and force immediate effort to decipher their meaning in relation to the context in which they are presented. The use of text and language in art can imply various meanings political, sociological, or historical, depending on the intention of the artist. The combination of language with objective subject matter can force viewers to impose their personal interpretations of the text as some greater definition of the subject matter within the piece. For example, in the “Landscape Series,” the two chalkboards that say “BEAUTIFUL SUNSET,” and “DESERT LANDSCAPE” are positioned with simplified drawings of a rib cage and a spinal cord. Within these two pieces, there is no direct relation between the image and text. However, I found it fascinating to hear people relate the ribs and spine to weathered bones found on the landscape. The rib cage, represents my mother's ability to bring unity to the family and the spinal cord represents the support
and strength my father provides. On the other two chalkboards are again, two separate phrases describing the landscape but on a more visceral level. One board carried the phrase “BLESS ED WITH EYES TO SEE,” and the other bore the words “BLESS ED WITH SILENCE TO HEAR.” I chose these specific phrases to describe the experience of “experiencing” the landscape that often times remains indescribable. “BLESS ED WITH EYES TO SEE,” merely is giving thanks for having the ability to recognize significance in the changing landscape. “BLESS ED WITH SILENCE TO HEAR,” describes a situation common to so many, in which no words could describe the overwhelming beauty of a place or setting. Often I encounter such occurrences with nature when my experience is heightened by the solitude and silence that surrounds me. The text on these final pieces is juxtaposed with an empty graphite square that resembles a window. The square also acts as a frame, isolating the empty space on the chalkboards in a way similar to how a window frames our view of the landscape.

The final piece in the show, “Diaristic Postcards,” contains 115 mock postcards, tacked to the wall in one continuous line to describe the horizon. Within this piece, I began by reducing kitsch postcards from Texas to the size of a stamp. The reduced postcards were then placed in the upper right hand corner of my postcard to act as stamps. The viewer would recognize the images as stamps, and notice their affiliation with Texas. In the upper left hand section of the postcard, where normally the front description, or caption is placed, I typed entries from the last three years of my journal. I edited these entries to describe my reflections and memories of Texas. Many of the thoughts included
my struggle with being geographically separated from my family and familiar surroundings. I chose entries that best exemplified my growth process throughout the completion of this degree. These entries, as a result, describe times of depression, as well as rare moments of pleasure in my life. However, the postcards remained blank, with no intention of functioning as an actual postcard. Viewers could read the diaristic messages and speculate as to what was on the front, which consequently was tacked facing the wall, and never seen. Each postcard included the date when the caption was written, offering viewers some time reference to situate themselves. The postcards, however, were not tacked in chronological order to prevent the viewer from reading them narratively. Instead, viewers read randomly arranged thoughts, (in their own voice), and applied their personal histories to situations I was describing.
CONCLUSION

Throughout these past three years at R.I.T., I have at times felt defeated. In the process of regaining my focus and direction, I believe my work, as well as my inner self, has strengthened considerably. It is through enduring these experiences that some personal growth has occurred. As a result, I have begun to recognize my voice and trust my own instincts in the development of my work. My work continues to develop formally, expressively, and conceptually. I believe my work functions as a vehicle to document and illustrate my continuous search within the personal and social realms.

In the end, though, I am left questioning what it means to be an artist. At times I feel art can be meaningless. I lose my way, reject ideas, and try to rediscover what art means again. This cycle becomes my process of learning about myself as an artist, and about art in general. To me, that is the excitement of art; it is an undulating cycle of emotions from one extreme to another. Throughout this degree I have found answers to questions, and along the way, acquired new questions to be answered. Naively, I used to believe that as this degree came to a close, I would feel relieved and complete, as if the pressures of the art world would cease. Although I am much more prepared now, I realize that there is much work to be done, and so many more mountains to conquer.
WORKS CITED


1. Show Detail.


3. Book of Thoughts - Detail.

4. Show Detail.

5. Landscape Series (“Beautiful Sunset”) - Chalkboard, Charcoal, Graphite, Chalk, 60" x 36" x 60", 1995.


7. Show Detail.

8. Landscape Series (“Desert Landscape”) - Chalkboard, Charcoal, Graphite, Chalk, 60" x 36" x 60", 1995.


10. Show Detail.


12. Portrait of Father - Detail.

13. Portrait of Mother - Detail.

15. Texas Landscape - Detail.

16. Texas Oceanscape - Detail.

17. Show Detail.


19. Diaristic Postcards - Detail.

20 Diaristic Postcards - Detail.

*All dimensions are approximate, listed Length x Width x Height.*