The ephemeral form and objects of inspection

Desirée Rose Schanding

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The Ephemeral Form and Objects of Inspection

Master of Fine Arts in Imaging Science Thesis

By: Desireé Schanding

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Thesis Committee:

Chair:
Angela Kelly

Members:
Alex Miokovic
Keith Howard
Myra Greene
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**Abstract**

The series *The Ephemeral Form* is my attempt to communicate the ways in which women are similar in order to empower women so that they may overcome their differences creating a way for more open communication. This series of prints explore the notion of femaleness from a personal perspective and aesthetic. The main subject in each piece is the female torso as a static figure or a figure in motion. There is a specimen-like quality to the images as well as direct references to medieval panel paintings. Within each image the torso of the female is transparent revealing the biology of the figure. This is to show the viewer the similarities between the figures. On the surface of the figure in the image are markings and road maps, like scars, to
represent the figure as a real being with a personal history. The image, when completed, looks very old and antiquated similar to a Medieval panel painting. I use the paintings and deteriorated quality of them as a metaphor for how I see the female body as it has been scrutinized and the idea of it has been transformed over time. These are the themes discussed in this paper. It is my intention that these works speak to how the female body is constantly revealing and concealing its self, opening up and closing off. The idea of femaleness is constantly changing, creating a cycle of confusion and revelation, and I depict this through the construction of the whole piece through many layers of images, decay and deterioration.

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INTRODUCTION

The series The Ephemeral Form and Objects of Inspection are comprised of sixteen Four Color Intaglio-Type prints that depict women, connecting them through their anatomical and biological traits. The underlying idea signifies that since we are made of the same basic physical elements, and our bodies perform such particular tasks, that we might find common ground.

This series of works brings to the surface, both symbolically and literally, that which lies within. Each print is created to resemble a medieval panel painting, suggesting an icon of the female form. In appearance the images consist of the female torso posing either static or moving. In each torso, elements of internal anatomy are revealed. The images appear old and decayed. The original historical paintings upon which my creations are based were created solely for the
church. The church had control over almost every aspect of the lives of the people during the Middle Ages, and the reason that we have much of the art that society values is because it was created for the church. The weight of the subject matter inherent to the original panels (Christian saints) allows each individual piece in the series to hold a societal/spiritual value, present across different historical eras. Religious icons of the Middle Ages reflect similar features - they invariably have gold leaf backgrounds and contain the visage of the Virgin Mary holding the infant Christ child. The pieces in this series were made using scanned images of the icons which makes the artwork seem more authentic. The series employs the look of deteriorated medieval panel paintings as a metaphor for revealing what is normally unseen. The paint on actual Medieval panel paintings have decayed and chipped away to reveal the original surface, often wood or stone, which serves as the structure that supports the painting as a whole. Within each of my images of the feminine torso, one can see a graphic depiction of anatomy lying between the shoulders and above the knees. Identifying internal physical characteristics is a strategy employed to depict all women as equal - as women are made of the same biological materials - specifically, that women’s biological and physical embodiment are how they are physically represented to the world. The work specifically calls to attention the breasts, vagina, ovaries, uterus, womb and the uniqueness of the female form. Showing these various internal and external body parts allows the work to show the viewer that all women, in the most general of forms, are physically congruous.

In The Ephemeral Form the body is opened, almost dissected, to reveal the structure and support system of the female human figure. Though human bodies eventually die, the idea of what is essentially (biologically speaking, image wise and considering differences) woman
survives with lasting power, as do the original panel paintings. Even though the medieval art has deteriorated, it carries with it a transcendent influence, allowing for the creation of contemporary icons that speak to the uniqueness of the female body as well as the commonalities between a woman’s biology. The use of iconic panels also serves as a metaphor for a history that women carry with them - the histories that lie deep within our social consciousness. It is suggested by Dr. Paula J. Caplan that girls/women know that society as a whole prefers boys to girls. A survey taken in 1980 at the time she wrote her book, *Between Women: Lowering the Barriers*, reported that the majority of people in the United States preferred to have a boy rather than a girl. Fewer people felt this way than they did a century ago and people complained saying that this was due to “a break-down in the family-and-home ideal”.

The series *The Ephemeral Form and Objects of Inspection* is created to explore the way that women are involved with one another; how their lives overlap and interact. Women often seem to have difficulties communicating with one another - this behavior has been well-documented in her multiple case-studies described in her book mentioned earlier. Dr. Caplan suggests through her psychoanalytic research, that women have been considered second-class citizens subjugated by men (in the West at least until the late twentieth century). In her research she found that women had an overwhelming tendency to protect their mothers. Because women could potentially take on the role of Mother they refrained from critically analyzing their own mothers. Caplan also suggests that some women genuinely felt their mothers could do no wrong. Despite feminism’s goal of equality, Caplan states that many women surveyed said they could not rally with other women for equality because the media, friends and neighbors considered that kind of behavior unfeminine and according to Caplan’s research, femininity is a highly coveted trait.
My thesis work attempts to communicate the connection between women. If women realize that at a most basic level, they share commonalities with each other; they could start building and rebuilding relationships with each other from this newfound common ground.

The French philosopher Luce Irigaray's research reveals that women have been defined by using organic unthinking specimens as ways to explain and explore what it means to be a woman i.e. mother = nature. Irigaray suggests that because philosophy has always talked about women in this way that women began to act out in ways which would substantiate those modes of thought. She postulates that women, in purposefully acting out stereotypes are subversive to those stereotypes therefore obliterating any possibility that they could be true. She calls this Mimesis. Along with Mimesis she talks about strategic-essentialism which is a tool employed in order to allow for better communication amongst all women no matter their race, nationality, or creed. If one focuses only on commonalities when trying to reach a goal then success in achieving said goal would be easier. When considering feminism in all its facets and different movements, Irigaray seeks to focus on the fact that they are all women and are made up of the same essential parts. By communicating on this basic level of understanding, it will be easier to accomplish goals. These ideas are reflected in *The Ephemeral Form* and *Objects of Inspection* in terms of its focus on what women have in common.

The second half of the body of work, *Objects of Inspection* depicts the female torso in much the same way as in *The Ephemeral Form* but adds to the ideas by bringing forth social implications to understanding the bonds that women share. The *Inspection* series attempts to bring to light very sensitive subject matter that women must face on a daily basis. The figures in this series are confronted by the ephemera of everyday life and must make decisions based on their circumstances. This series is discussed in chapter two.
CHAPTER 1

The series itself is set up into two halves. *The Ephemeral Form* is comprised of eight 22" X 32" 4-Color Inversion Intaglio-Type prints. This part of the series is where the entire show receives its name. The first observation one may notice in the series is that a photographic representation of the female torso is at the center of every image. Another is that the torso has been opened up, revealing the inner anatomy of the female human body. The torsos pose static while the rest of the image keeps the viewer's eye moving. The cool-toned figure rests against the gold, tattered and worn background of the faux panel paintings.

Objects representing the idea of mortality rest in and outside the contours of the body reminding viewers of their own ephemeral nature. The entire image has the appearance of a
decayed and rotted painting that is falling apart so that where the paint has chipped away, one may see the wooden panel underneath. The ability to see the structure of the painting (how it was made) parallels seeing the inside of the human female form. *The Ephemeral Form* (ephemeral means something that is transient in nature) is a strategy employed to speak to other women about strengths and weaknesses, similarities and differences so that there may be reconciliation amongst our sex. Women can agree that there are innumerable differences between them, but if we recognize that women face so many of the same daily struggles that all mankind faces then we can break down barriers. The term *ephemeral* was chosen because of its seemingly contradictory meaning. Yes, a person’s body is ephemeral – our bodies decay (which is reflected in the decayed and rotting panel paintings) but the idea and history of what “woman” is lasts throughout relative history. But at the same time the idea of woman is always changing as we change and evolve as a society.

The series, *The Ephemeral Form* was created to address how women have the same body parts - the same actual, physical bits of flesh. Because of this and when displayed in a row, the works are noticeably lined up like specimens to be studied. The women/models for the images were photographed from all sides so that in the end the viewer would be able to see the female figure from 360 degrees, as though she were on a spinning pedestal. The images were created using a similar formula for all of the pieces in the series. Each image shows a woman's torso from mid-thigh up to the lower part of the breast, arms raised above the head. The torso is opened up to reveal different parts of the human anatomy but the parts do not all fit properly adding an awkwardness that comes with feeling good in one’s own skin. The pieces are also arranged in this way in an effort to both visually complicate the images, and to avoid any kind of
formulaic predictability between the images. Varying the positions of the anatomical aspects of the work prevents the viewer from becoming complacent.

In the series, cracks and road maps are overlaid on the images in order to suggest the idea of memory and history of women. This also works as a way to suggest the importance of psychology - an interlacing, interwoven road map of each figure’s memory and, in turn, each figure’s history moves across the body in each print. Giving physicality to memory and actual history helps the viewer understand that there are both personal and cultural histories behind each woman. The physical markings symbolize a rite of passage and inevitably the mark of time - a mapping that has no choice but to scar the body with experience. This suggests that the women carry the memories of womanhood with them at all times. The road maps are not specific to any of the women in the artwork. This approach is necessary in order to create and emphasize a singular bond between all women. The cracks and maps also add to the degenerative quality that all the pieces have in common furthering the metaphor of the panel painting i.e. the natural decay over time on the figures exposes the bones, the muscles and the internal organs underneath the skin of each ephemeral female form.

The visual metaphor of the ephemeral and decay extends through to the idea of mortality. The bones and skeletons, though in reality are inorganic, force the viewer to imagine decaying bodies. The other structural component that runs throughout the series is that the color of the bodies remains cool in nature while the backgrounds are for the most part golden warm tones.

The piece *Ephemeral #1* depicts a thin woman with a distinct curve in her back: she is physically fit. Of all the bodies displayed in the series, hers could be considered the most beautiful by some of today's standards where having a thin and curvy body at the same time is
coveted. The anatomical aspects covering the figure in this image are the thigh and lower abdominal muscles related to the idea that she has a physically fit body. However, the internal parts of the body revealed in this image do not correspond with their true anatomical positioning. The color of the body is bluish-teal with brown undertones resembling copper that has a patina on it. Another work in this series relating to *Ephemeral #1* is *Ephemeral #5* because of their sex appeal. *Ephemeral #5* shows a woman from the back. Her pelvis is the anatomical structure on display and this serves two purposes. Viewing a woman's backside has sex appeal for many men and curvy hips are no exception. The pelvis reminds us of a woman's primary difference because it houses the many important functions of being a woman i.e. the uterus, pelvis. This image is meant to be titillating and contemplative simultaneously. *Ephemeral #3* also stays within the bounds of the main concepts in the work. The figure is turned three quarters and facing the left. The flesh of the stomach is removed revealing the arteries and ovaries of a woman's anatomy placing on display a major aspect of what physically makes her a woman.

A major feminist artist of the last half century, Hannah Wilke, in *S.O.S. Starification Object Series*, wanted to create “a positive image to wipe out the prejudices, aggression and fear”, that she felt society associated with a woman's genitalia. Wilke used herself as a model posing in the codes of fashion standards usually with props - sunglasses, scarves, hair curlers etc. She chewed gum and sculpted tiny vagina shapes out of them placing them all over her upper torso and face. “The chewing gum sculptures symbolized internal scarring women have faced throughout history”. Chewing gum was her metaphor for the American woman, stating, “Chew her up - get what you want out of her, throw her out and pop in a new piece”. *S.O.S.* was her call for help.
Ephemeral #6 shows a torso in full-frontal nudity revealing the structure of the vagina like a tattoo across her abdomen. Like most tattoos the structure of her vagina is fearlessly on display in hopes of deflating the taboo associated with women's genitalia. Excessive exposure to images of taboos helps give the populous a new sensibility. Not only is the vagina structurally drawn on the woman's body but it is also in the print twice more, this time with the muscles of the vaginal opening on display. This is what a woman looks like. Usually a woman's genitals are covered up as it is the custom in most countries that people should wear clothes in public places yet it is likely that you will find references to male genitalia in open public places. It is not uncommon to refer to certain architecture as phallic and no one turns a glance but as soon as you reference the vagina or compare it to a Georgia O'Keeffe painting, people express discomfort.

In Ephemeral #2, the figure is seen from the side and faces the right. There is a Byzantine starry sky behind her as well as a lattice of metal work. Revealed within the figure is a spinal cord that floats seemingly in the right place. Along the sides of the figure are smaller images of the same figure tugging and pulling on her body as in a struggle. This piece reflects a larger message embedded in the entire series—we struggle through this skin that is womanliness/humanness.

The last three works in this series reflect themes that pertain specifically to the nature of human transience. There is one called Ephemeral #8 that shows the female form from the side and facing the left. This figure is green in color and rather large in stature. She is not a classic beauty in the least. She could be considered a rotund beauty from a Rubens painting but in contemporary terms she is outcast. Surrounding the figure there is a decorative metal design. Along the sides of the image the design continues but disrupting it are small skeletal figures. The
The skeleton has been broken into fourths so that the skull is at the top then the rib cage, the pelvis and the legs follow on down to the bottom of the image. The skeleton is a direct reference to mortality. Tracing the body along the thigh area is a road map that undulates with the figures curves. This roadmap is a reflection, a metaphor for the human body's history and memory. For many artists the body carries with it “the trace of culture, memory and history”. Jon Bird reflects, concerning the artwork of Nancy Spero and Kiki Smith:

Foucault, following Montaigne (whose essay 'Of Experience' describes his own experience through the exigencies of the body), has drawn our attention to the body-as-text, a construction that, through its modalities and materiality, attests to lived experience and social being: a body, moreover, whose dispositions and inscriptions changed according to the reigning regimes of truth…

Through creating this series I have been able to create a non-comedic parody by using certain stereotypes about women and their bodies to criticize and deflate those same stereotypes.

The print entitled *Ephemeral #4* shows the female torso turned at a three quarter view to the right. This image is different in terms of color palette because it is mainly white with a purple, pink and black torso. The body is bruised with bluish black skin where the intestines are pulled and stretched outside the body. On either side of the figure one notices the back of a skull with the length of the spinal cord hanging down to the bottom of the page as a reminder of the inevitable. To push the idea of mortality a bit further and grander there is *Ephemeral # 7*. This piece is comprised of dark browns, reds and greens in contrast to the brighter colors of the other pieces. The figure is tall and thick, almost masculine in comparison to the other female figures.
muscle and the ligaments of the thigh. In contrast to the other pieces where the symbols representing death are much smaller in size compared to the female figure, here a very large set of ribs and skeletal arms covers the entire image looming over the figure as an oppressive reminder of her ephemeral and transient nature. Internationally acclaimed photographer Sally Mann has been consistently intrigued by death in her artwork. Her curiosity about death stems directly from the influence of her father, a physician, who as she recalls, once claimed jokingly, that “there were three avenues for artistic expression: Sex, Death and Whimsy”.9 Sally Mann’s book *What Remains* displays her fascination with death and mortality. In this book her images focus on human death and decomposition. Here displayed are images of her own deceased beloved pet, landscapes of her farm after police ran down a fugitive from the law, and of the Civil War battlefields of Antietam in Maryland, as well as portraits of her own children, now grown. In the introductory essay to her book, Mann states, “When the land subsumes the dead, they become the rich body of earth, the dark matter of creation. As I walk the fields of this farm, beneath my feet shift the bones of incalculable bodies; death is the sculptor of the ravishing landscape, the terrible mother, the damp creator of life, by whom we are one day devoured.” 10
CHAPTER 2

The series *The Ephemeral Form* was created to speak about the female body, to make connections between the female form and mortality - the transience of our very nature. The second part of the series, *Objects of Inspection*, speaks not only about the ephemeral nature of our lives, but deals with more specific aspects of the feminine in society. This series uses very specific imagery that refers to certain ephemera (the objects) in our lives. The ephemeral quality of the symbols focuses on their fleeting nature. The “objects” from the work are the imagery of the fetus, the pregnant belly, the speculum, the abortive device, the cancerous ovary, and the surgical image. Even though women artists such as Hannah Wilke worked to remove the stigma of normally taboo imagery, changing social norms can take a very long time. The work makes an effort to bring to light very sensitive subjects in order to help women realize that these
subjects weigh on many women’s minds. The transience (and thus, the ephemeralness) of these subjects lies in the fact that the ideas regarding them are always changing. One day, it may not be taboo to talk publicly about a recent abortion, just as this current generation can speak more easily than the previous about divorce. This may be difficult to imagine now, but there have always been extremely sensitive subjects particular to women that were socially unmentionable. The artwork speaks to the idea of these events in terms of societal change and does not in any way demean or diminish their significance.

Parts of the visual structure which is used in The Ephemeral Form also lie within the series Objects of Inspection. The internal biological structures depicted in the Inspection series are the womb, ovaries, skeleton, rib cage, spine, pelvis, vagina, and the muscles of the neck. There is still the influence of the medieval panel painting, despite their square format which is not a traditional format for the icons. The square-formatted works, when viewed, are on the wall “parlor” style which provides a variation in the presentation of the two series helping to maintain the viewer’s interest.

These images are a part of my own fictional narrative space. They are symbolic in the sense that I am creating my own index of symbolism to cooperate with the personal narrative that has been created through these images. This allows the work to simultaneously link itself to actual events of the past, while authoring itself into the written history. The works illustrate fictional narratives that reveal very real truths; much the same way a fiction writer will tell stories to demonstrate facts. In an essay speaking about “New Journalism” (what is now known as “creative non-fiction”), the novelist Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. says that “the new journalist isn’t free
to tell nearly as much as a fiction writer, to *show* as much. There are many places he can’t take his reader, whereas the fiction writer can take the reader anywhere, including the planet Jupiter, in case there’s something worth seeing there.”

*Objects of Inspection* depict certain circumstances that American women (and perhaps women of other nationalities) face throughout their lives. Men also face similar societal pressure, but this particular series does not address men. All of the ephemera or “objects” in each square image are symbols of scrutinizing circumstances that women face. The “objects” act like needles in the backs of women as though constantly subjecting them to these intrusive inspections. Starting when women are very young they must see a gynecologist in order to inspect and maintain the health of their reproductive systems. This can be an extremely uncomfortable and emotional event in a young woman’s life and is compounded by her probable virginity considering her adolescent age.

These kinds of inspections continue through life. In *Object #7* there is an elliptical space that holds an image of flesh exposed during surgery, and there are metal forceps pulling a cancerous cyst out of the woman. The cyst becomes a symbol of the woman as a piece of herself is being removed. It is the mark or text on the body’s surface referred to earlier in speaking about Foucault. *Object #1* also shows a woman's torso leaning forward, womb and ovaries exposed. There is a small object in the lower right hand corner of the image that looks like a tangled web of white and dark red material, a cancerous ovary. These two images portray women who are immersed in the struggle that comes with losing their ability to give birth, which, for some means losing their womanhood. The figure in *Object #4* is revealing her uterus and the object under consideration is a baby in the womb. Here the woman has chosen to give birth. *Object #6*
depicts an obese woman whose spinal cord sits atop her skin emphasizing her “otherness” - a symbolic representation of her monstrosity. Acting to further alienate the figure, the “objects” in this image are two abortive devices placed on either side of her body. The idea is that the figure sits on the outside of social acceptability. *Object #8* concentrates on the ever present reminder of a woman’s difference and concentration on her body; a gigantic speculum rests under an archway as in a place of importance looming over the figure of the woman. Yearly gynecological examinations serve as a reminder of biological femininity and the medical consequences of being a woman. Germaine Greer on speaking of exploring her own sex writes: “The little girl is not encouraged to explore her own genitals or to identify the tissues of which they are composed, or to understand the mechanism of lubrication and erection.”¹² She suggests that because mothers have a hard time explaining vaginas and the sex act to their daughters, the mothers are too embarrassed to explain these concepts, that those daughters grow up to find themselves embarrassed too. This is a cycle of repression and if women could talk about their reproductive organs the same way men have always done then perhaps the nature of embarrassment over these topics will diminish; the act of concealment given over to liberation. During a conversation with Professor Angela Kelly of Rochester Institute of Technology, she recalled that during the nineteen seventies at the height of the women’s movement, while in England, women in consciousness-raising groups performed their own gynecological exams at conferences and at home. They bought speculums, and taught each other how to do self-examinations. “It allow[ed] for a certain degree of autonomy. Like breast self examinations, it gave them a base line from which to observe themselves. It gave them a better understanding of
what the [gynecologist] doctor does during an exam.”¹³ Kelly goes on to say that during that
time, these experiences of self awareness were not a substitute for their health care.

In *Object #5* a woman has her back turned to a pair of opera glasses referring to the
female as spectacle. The opera glasses symbolize a male character and are positioned in
authority over the retreating female body. The pleasure of voyeurism is when “it is dependent on
the object of this gaze being unaware, not looking back. Voyeurism is a form of
objectification.”¹⁴ In this piece, the woman is objectified because she has become the “property”
of a man’s desire; he has projected his authority over her or the image of her. He looks at her as a
spectacle for his entertainment. The woman is stripped of her identity and becomes subject to the
man’s will, as though she is there to act upon his will.

The word *object* is applied to have different meanings here. By titling the pieces *Objects*,
I am referring both to the ephemera that are in our daily lives, and the idea of woman as an
object of desire (by placing the nudes on a gallery wall). Though in the case of this work, the
figures act as objects to be inspected as an act of scientific and artistic exploration.

In her book *On Photography*, Susan Sontag viewed the camera as a predatory tool. She
felt that when a person was photographed the camera was able to capture knowledge of them that
they themselves did not have, that it was a violation against them, that somehow, the camera
(and by extension, the photographer) was able to possess those in front of the lens. Within this
series of works the camera was employed to gain knowledge of the women that they were
unaware of. That is, until they saw the photographs. This series of images acts as a metaphor for
all women to view the varied aspects of the figures within the images as the different parts of
themselves, i.e. synecdoche, a part of an object that stands for the whole. The images in this
series also act as one large self-portrait as it is my view that the women in the images are also and always me. Therefore if there is a violation then it is one against the self, though it appears that Sontag is speaking more about the act of photographing strangers without their knowledge than the act of photographing a person who has consented.

In Object #3 there are two main components. One is that the torso of the woman is physically turning away from the image of the fetus and symbolically away from the idea of pregnancy. She is contemplating whether or not to have children. The works in the Objects of Inspection series refer to the psychological states of women’s minds as they undergo the scrutiny of everyday life. The second component is the anatomy shown which are the muscles of the neck though they are disguised in a way because they cover the entirety of the female body. The neck muscles refer to the idea of the fetish. Since the whole body of the woman is covered by the neck muscles she by extension has been fetishized. It was initially developed by Sigmund Freud that an object becomes a fetish when “it becomes the focus of (usually male) sexual desire.”\textsuperscript{15} The Surrealist photographer Man Ray made many photographs where the focus was on the sexualized female. From his series Anatomies there is a black and white print of a woman’s neck as she tilts her head back at an extreme angle. Mary Ann Caws, in her book The Surrealist Look: an Erotics of Encounter, stresses the point that this image looks like a penis but also that fluid interpretation is a major part of Surrealism. If this was Man Ray's intention then he has indeed fetishized the female in direct relation to Freud's interpretation. Freud suggested that a male begins to fetishize objects as soon as he recognizes sexual difference (he from that of his mother). Man Ray's photograph is in direct relation to this idea because Freud theorized that the male child develops a fear of castration by merely looking at a woman and that fetishism is a
way to allay his fears. Therefore, he (the male) repossesses his penis (maleness) and his relationship with his mother by making the woman a penis. As it stands, Surrealism, from the feminist perspective, uses the female merely as an outlet for male, heterosexual fantasies. In Surrealist imagery the form and figure of a woman play a central role. Her body is often beheaded and limbless, contorted or fragmented, "a body, quite often in parts." Within Object #3 the neck muscles referenced the surreal. Though the figures in both series seem like surreal figures they do not participate in a male dominated vision. The message in The Ephemeral Form and Objects of Inspection is about the women and not about a fantasy placed upon them. In the work Object #2 the image of a woman is seen behind a window pane that is broken into four grid-like sections. This forces the viewer of the work to play the part of the voyeur who is looking at the female figure who turns away from the idea of that gaze.
CHAPTER 3

In creating these images I began by photographing the nude female torso. I had no criteria for the models except that they had to be female. In all only six different models were photographed including myself. It was not necessary to absolutely use a different figure for each image because in the final image one cannot tell them apart. They look the same and utterly different simultaneously in order underscore the point made earlier about synecdoche in the work.

I then appropriated the anatomical elements by scanning images from anatomy texts, including a facsimile of a seventeenth century book of woodcuts made by Vesalius. This is important because I wanted to incorporate other types of printmaking in the image making process. I chose to use certain anatomical parts because of their relation to femaleness and because they were muscles or organs that lie within the area of the torso. The anatomy is used to refer to the female reproductive organs and also to remind viewers of their own biology. In order to make the images resemble medieval icons I scanned many images out of books about medieval panel paintings. I used panel paintings which had the most deterioration and the best color. For example, gold was used in the paintings to refer to the heavens and eternity. The color of the specific figures is important in order for them to stay somewhat true to the unique skin tones of an original painting. However, using non-local colors added different emotive qualities in each image. Using these themes in my work underscores the idea of the long-lasting icon. From looking at many panels I made choices about composition so they would resemble that of an original icon. Finally, I cut and pasted all the elements creating the montages using Adobe Photoshop. This is necessary to state because the process by which the prints were made
demands the use of this computer program. Each image as a physical print, by definition, is completely unique. All the images were built from scratch altering the original panel painting to such a degree that it no longer has any meaning as to the original image.

Montage, as an art form, began in the early years of the twentieth century. The Dadaists used collage and montage politically in Berlin during the First World War. During this time, Hannah Höch used collage to make multifaceted works on paper. The act of taking disparate images and placing them in a new context to make a unique image has always interested me because of its direct relation to social political issues in art. Höch was also interested in producing work that explored the different societal roles that women played. Maud Lavin writes that a body in parts connotes violence and it is employed here in order to abruptly stop viewers and make them think about the images in the work; how they relate. Höch in speaking about her artwork states, “I want to blur the firm boundaries that we as people tend to self-assuredly draw around all that we can achieve”. Höch’s Portraits series concentrates on her most pressing concerns: the war between genders, the feminine mask and issues relating to transgender.

Höch’s interest in the feminine permeates this series as well as influence from Nancy Spero: a feminist printmaker and image-maker whose interests center around mythology and how specific myths have been used to construct lore around the idea of Woman. Both Höch and Spero encourage their audiences to keep their minds open to different interpretations of not only their artwork but the world in which the work exists. Nancy Spero's piece entitled Let the Priests Tremble was in an exhibition called The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter from 1982. This piece sparked controversy because feminist critics felt it, “reinscribed the traditional male/female opposition”, it celebrated “otherness” (stemming from the male-
historical perspective as Mother as the ultimate “other”), and for “returning to the Goddess and the Body”.\textsuperscript{18} With interest in the body returning in the 1990’s theoretical understanding of her work and other artists using the body as their main subject changed. It now seems that critics are ready to discuss these ideas rather than criticize artists for exploring them.
CHAPTER 4

Once the image was complete as a digital file, I then began the process of making the final print. The process by which I made these works is called Four-Color Inversion Intaglio-Type. The Four-Color Inversion Intaglio-Type is a new photo-mechanical, non-toxic method for creating an intaglio print. Because there is no actual etching involved it is by definition a type of intaglio thus the naming mechanism: non-toxic intaglio-type. It requires four plates to make a single image. First, using Photoshop, the completed digital file must be changed from an RGB file to a CMYK file. Then, the color channels must be split so that there is one file for each of the four colors. After changing the darkest blacks in each file to eighty-five percent, the files are then printed on a plastic transparency by use of an ink jet printer.

Four plates are made (Yellow, Magenta, Cyan and Black) after printing the transparencies. The plates are prepared by laminating plastic P.E.T.G. plates with a light sensitive polymer called ImagOn. The plates must dry for twenty-four hours. The plates are then exposed in an exposure unit with the transparencies vacuum sealed on top of the plate. After that, the plates are developed in a 10% Soda Ash and water solution and left to dry for twenty-four hours. After the plates are dry the paper is prepared by soaking it in water for at least ten minutes. The plates are then inked individually and wiped in the intaglio manner. For this process Akua water-based inks are used. Four plates are inked with yellow, magenta, cyan and black Akuakolor ink and printed in succession. The paper is blotted and placed on the press. The plates are placed on the paper ink-side-down. Once all the plates have been run through the press, the paper has a full-color image.
The 4 Color Inversion Intaglio-Type technique is important to the series, because it has a very specific aesthetic that could only be found with this process. The act of working in Photoshop, meticulously cutting and pasting then preparing each individual plate and repeating the tedious process is reminiscent of photography’s original pioneers. The difficulty of processing a Daguerreotype preparing the chemicals and glass was necessary and produces a unique look even with today’s myriad techniques. Digital processes cannot yet reproduce the visual effect of a Daguerreotype. It also could not produce a print where the labor is embedded along with the ink into the paper to become a single solid object as with the Four Color Intaglio-Type. The labor and process are visible to the viewer by looking at each piece where one can see the plate marks on the edges of each printed image.

In setting up the space for viewing this series it was necessary to create a dark and intimate atmosphere. To compliment the look of a medieval icon a small dark space would remind people of a sacred space for meditation and reverence. The walls that held the part of the series entitled The Ephemeral Form was painted a dark matte brown. Each piece was hung in a row one after the other on the wall and framed without glass so there was no barrier between the artwork and the viewer. The second part of the series called Objects of Inspection were hung “parlor style” where six of them hung on a small wall painted dark navy blue, not lined up but at all different heights and one above the other. The last two of the Objects were hung by themselves on a separate wall. The space overall was a small, partially enclosed area where one could meditate on the works.
Conclusion

I began asking myself questions about family members who, once I hit a certain age, began to lose credibility as the “masters of all knowledge”, which is how I perceived them as I was growing up. Realizing that people are full of contradictions and their own personal history of which I had no knowledge allowed me to accept them. In order for me to understand this better I began to make *The Ephemeral Form*. I had to think about what makes women similar and what could define them in *somewhat* universal ways that could be expressed visually. It was obvious to me that one commonality between women was that they shared common anatomy and that this anatomy was distinctly female. Because of the shared anatomy, there was also shared experience. (The sharing is conceptual, visual, figurative but not literal.) If women could focus on shared experience then they may be able to perceive difference from a less alienated point of view. Therefore *Objects of Inspection* was created to speak to these social experiences making it known that the decisions women have to make when it comes to their bodies are not necessarily easily made. It is my experience that all women reveal and conceal (what they consider) personal things at times. Through this act of constantly opening up and closing down barriers like an undulating wave it should become apparent that all women are participating in the same acts of secrecy at times and openness at other times. Through this series of works, it was my intention that women would relate to the art and open up the possibility of open relationships with each other.
6 Statues and monuments to male genitalia can be found in almost every aspect of every culture. “When the penis gods reigned phallic monuments littered the landscape. Egyptians erected obelisks, those lofty, squared-off phalluses with pyramid tips. Some survive – among them a Cleopatra’s Needle relocated to New York’s Central Park and another to London’s Embankment. (The Washington Monument, more than forty stories high, is the 19th century American Version).” Maggie Paley, The Book of the Penis. (Grove Press, NY, NY 2000)


8 Ibid.


10 Ibid.

11 Kurt Vonnegut, Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloons. (Delta Trade, New York, New York, 1999)


13 Kelly Interview 2006


15 Ibid.


Bibliography


