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Fractured women: The Psychological effects of rape

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Fractured Women: The Psychological Effects of Rape

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Preface

“Life and art, once entwined, can quickly become inseparable... Making art can feel dangerous and revealing. Making art precipitates self-doubt, stirring deep waters that lay between what you know you should be, and what you fear you might be.”¹

Stirring deep waters has long been dangerous for me, so to undertake a thesis conceived around dredging those waters was a risk. The thought of publicly facing my deepest secrets was not in any way comforting, even though I was willing and ready to do so. Everybody has skeletons in their closet. Most of us keep them there, in fact. try to hide them there. Then without warning when looking for something innocuous, those hidden skeletons come crashing down and smack you on the head. That is how my past has been for me. Although I never tried to hide my skeletons, I never tried to reveal them either. In return, I would find myself tripping over them when least expecting it. The constant challenge of never knowing when my past would turn around and bite me was not a very comfortable way to live.

Since my arrival at the Rochester Institute of Technology, I have tried to find ways to resolve issues within myself. It started out with material choices. The obvious was to find a way to work with both textiles and metal as a way of reconciling my B.F.A. in Fashion Design and my pursuit of a M.F.A. in Metal/Jewelry. As I began trying to

resolve such issues. I was forced to deal with others. A major car accident two and a half months after my arrival in Rochester forced me to again manage the excruciating physical pain of my recurrent back problems. From there it seemed as if everything started to spin out of control, as the day to day stressors of life started to pile up and take on a life of their own. Surmounting financial stress, depression, physical pain, the emotional isolation of moving to a city where I knew no one, and having to produce artwork started to snowball out of control; a snowball that seemed unstoppable because of unresolved issues in my past. As I started to regain control of my life, I began to realize that I could no longer keep my skeletons in the closet. So, I decided to expose my history as a survivor of rape.

Perhaps one of the reasons I could never, nor will ever, totally resolve this issue in my life is because of the way it happened. There are some things that human beings do that defy understanding, and even if we “could” understand, do we really want to? I was first raped when I was fifteen. While traumatic, it was a random act of violence that I could accept as such and not as a personal assault. I was again raped when I was nineteen. This time it was by someone that I knew, had dated, and in fact, trusted enough to confide in about my rape at age fifteen. This happened in 1983, before the existence of terms such as date rape or acquaintance rape. At the time of this experience, I had no way of processing it or of understanding its impact on my life. In 1983 I could not even call what happened to me rape. In fact, I was unable to call it rape for eight years. It was a soul-wounding experience that had no rationale and created a black hole in my life. Perhaps its effect on me was so pronounced because I had no way of understanding how anybody could do this to another person, especially one that they knew. Because of these
experiences. I realized that rape is a misunderstood crime. Rape is generally viewed by society as a sex crime. The fact is that rape has nothing to do with sex. Rape is a violent crime that negates its victim.

That rape was not understood by society kept readdressing itself in my life. The first time I remember was in 1990. During the Texas Gubernatorial race with Ann Richards, Clayton Williams made an off handed remark to an informal gathering of reporters. In a presumably humorous comment he compared bad weather to rape by saying, “as long as it’s inevitable, you might as well lie back and enjoy it.” This slip of the tongue did cost Williams the race and serves as an example of public perception of rape. It is not a bothersome sex act that one could somehow find enjoyable. Who in their right mind would make jokes about a murder victim or any other victim of a violent crime? It was at this time that I first realized that I wanted to publicly address the subject of rape to show what it is really about and how it affects its victims. Another glaring reminder for me occurred in 1991 during the highly publicized rape trial of Kennedy cousin William Kennedy Smith. After his acquittal, I saw an interview with one of the female jurors from the trial. When asked why she felt he was not guilty she said something to the effect that he didn’t have to rape that girl. he was too good looking- as if rape had anything to do with appearances. I was incensed. Today we have the Kobe Bryant case. Even though we have rape shield laws, the accuser is being put on trial in the media which are bringing into question her actions before and after the alleged incident, suggesting her actions are in some way responsible for her alleged rape. Each of these examples illustrates that as a society we still do not understand what rape is and why it happens.
Rape historically has been used as a way to show control. Throughout history as one culture overthrew another, one of the first things the victor would do was rape the women as a show of dominance and a statement to the vanquished men that they were powerless. A contemporary example of such an act can be shown during the civil war in Rwanda. “During the Rwandan genocide, thousands of women were targeted by Hutu militia and soldiers... Tutsi women were individually raped, gang raped, raped with objects such as sticks or gun barrels, held in sexual slavery or sexually mutilated.”  

These cases were documented by Human Rights Watch and other rights groups leading to the conviction of Akayesu by the Rwandan Tribunal in 1998. This was the first time an international court has punished sexual violence occurring during a civil war, and the first time rape was found to be an act of genocide to destroy a group.  

In contemporary America, rape as a means of social control would never be tolerated. However, it is not seen for the act of violence that it is. Rape has been, and to a certain extent, remains a crime of shame. However the shame is felt by the victim, not the perpetrator, resulting in a crime in which many victims blame themselves. In traditional Japanese culture the shame associated with rape was so severe that the victim would commit seppaku or ritualistic suicide. Until recently victims were blamed in the court of law as well. It took almost twenty years of legislation to establish the rape shield laws. In 1991 the standard-setting case of Michigan v. Lucas established that it was illegal for the victim to be questioned about her behavior, appearance, or past. Ever since the rape shield laws have been enacted, the report of rape has been on the rise, but it still remains an underreported crime. In the ten years between 1983 and 1993, rape has increased four times.

3 Ibid., 1.
times faster than any other crime. In fact, the rape rate in the United States is four times that of Germany, thirteen times that of England, and twenty times that of Japan. In the United States it is estimated that a woman is raped every 1.3 minutes and that one out of every three women will be sexually assaulted during her lifetime. The statistics are far too staggering for this crime to remain a taboo subject. The mere mention of the word rape makes people uncomfortable and it is virtually a conversation killer. which is why I rarely broached the subject. even with my closest friends. The reality is that this is part of who I am. This aspect of my past does not change who I am or make me any less of a person. My acceptance and public acknowledgement of this is part of my transition from victim to survivor.

Rape is a crime that alters its victim, leaving her with a life in which she feels she has no control or voice. Life becomes a constant struggle to regain a sense of control. Victims struggle to feel safe: that it is safe to walk alone at night, that it is safe to trust another individual, or even that it is safe to trust their own judgment. These constant struggles may dissipate with time but they never really go away. It is a slow process to stop being controlled by your past and begin to take control back for yourself. For the victim, one of the hardest aspects of rape to deal with is the feeling of detachment. This crime makes people feel uncomfortable which isolates the victim. Ironically, it is often the people that are the closest to the victim that are pushed the farthest away. One of the healthiest ways to begin to regain control of your life is by finding your voice and making yourself heard. As a rape survivor and a strong, articulate woman, I felt a personal

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5 Ibid, 71.
6 Ibid, 71.
obligation and a social responsibility to give my voice to rape. My thesis was the perfect opportunity.
I. Introduction

"To be a hero, to be heroic, is to be oneself." – Jose Ortega Y Gasset

In society today, being yourself takes an internal strength and self-awareness that most people do not even think about, let alone attempt. Perhaps it is due to the fears: of not fitting in, of exposing your frailties, or of being misunderstood. It is my belief that in order to make art you have to be yourself and be true to yourself. "(B)ecoming an artist consists of learning to accept yourself, which makes your work personal, and in following your own voice, which makes your work distinctive."¹ The path everyone takes to understanding oneself is different. For me it consisted of accepting my unique perspective on life: my intense empathy for the people around me, my non-stop desire to learn, but most importantly, my need to accept my past. By this I mean my lifelong battle with depression, childhood experiences in a volatile and dysfunctional family, and most traumatically, my two experiences as a rape survivor. The way I experienced the highs and lows in my life have all been influenced by these life experiences. So, when faced with the daunting challenge of choosing a thesis topic, I decided to face my past, to accept it, and to explore how it has made me who I am.

The most difficult aspect of my past has been my rapes at ages fifteen and nineteen. They left me with no choice but to pursue the subject of rape for my thesis.

¹ Bayles, Art & Fear, 3.
Personally I had issues of rape that I wanted to reveal. Rape is not about sex. It is about power, dominance, control, and the subjugation of another individual. It is the disregard of the victim for the self-indulgence of the perpetrator. I wanted people to somehow understand that rape is a violent crime not a sexual crime, and that this act of violence has a life altering effect on the survivor. Although rape is not experienced solely by women, they are the far majority of the victims and for the purpose of my thesis that is the form of rape I will refer to.

The emotions of a rape victim run the gamut from guilt to murderous rage. In order to present a comprehensible thesis exhibition I had to limit what I wanted to show. After careful consideration, I decided to focus on presenting the long term effects of rape. I decided to express this in three phases: anger and rage, the wounded spirit, and their affect on relationships and the ability to interact with people. All of these aspects deal with the psyche and my thesis became *Fractured Women: The Psychological Effects of Rape*.

I knew that my thesis not only had to be a way to accept my past experiences, but also a way to merge my history of interests. My creative background has traveled a wandering path which has included poetry, architecture, metal, fashion design and textiles, as well as conceptual performances. Once I had a clear idea of what I wanted to accomplish, I immediately had an understanding of how I wanted to present my show. I had a vision of metal work, hand dyed silks, and poetry. I also knew that I wanted to do an installation. This would be a way for me to construct and control the environment. Once I got to this point I began to think about what I do in my poetry. In my poetry I use metaphor and personification to symbolically represent a specific idea or emotion in a
universal manner. I thought my poetic insight could be beneficial to my thesis work because my poetry is about an emotional state rather than a physical description. An example of this is my poem 2002.

2002

I had a dream
Of pure beauty
Sheer elegance
It haunted me for years
Then I held it in my hand
And it haunts me still

This poem was written about the car that I owned at the time. a car that I had wanted for years, a BMW 2002 tii. For the longest time, I admired these older cars, then I owned one and I had to live with the reality. It was nothing but problems and a money pit. The poem reveals my car for what it symbolized in my life, not for what it was physically. But then I live in a world where what things symbolize or reveal are more important to me than their physicality. I am always looking below the surface to see something’s place in life.
II. Evolution and Symbolism

"Art is the reaching out into the ugliness of the world for vagrant beauty and the imprisoning of it in a tangible dream." - George Jean Nathan

I have often said of myself that I am backwards. that I function the opposite of everyone else. So it came as no surprise to me that I knew how I wanted my show to be presented before I knew what I wanted the work to look like. I knew that I wanted my show to be an installation, a secluded environment that would force the viewer to experience the work without distraction. Creating an installation was a way for me to manipulate space and create mood, much as an architect does. Since my years at Virginia Tech’s architecture program, I have come to realize the importance of space, movement, color, and lighting to an environment. These elements function together to influence the inhabitant. By creating an installation. I could influence the viewer’s perception of the artwork.

Influencing the viewer’s perception was an important aspect of the exhibition. Although environment was important. I felt that I could accentuate the environment by also incorporating symbolism. Using the symbolic in my thesis was a natural progression, from the symbolic of the literary to the symbolic of the visual. Once I had broken my thesis into the phases of anger/rage, internal wounds, and relationships, I
started focusing on the psychology of each. From this point I began to layer the symbolism to build dimension that could translate a universal message. My search for the appropriate symbols started with a symbol for rage and violence, for this I turned to nature. The reference of Mother Nature alluded to the feminine. I eventually narrowed my choices of metaphor to earthquakes and volcanoes. Eventually I decided to concentrate on earthquakes. I chose this symbol because it literally illustrated tearing and splintering. I decided to apply the earthquake symbolism to the work by cutting and tearing the work apart. Eventually the work evolved to the figurative and the figures were cut, transforming the body into a landscape of earthquake rubble. The work was representative of physical pain, as well as the emotional splintering of the victim’s identity.

Once the work became figurative, I decided to show all the figures from the back. By doing this I could reduce any obvious sexual overtones. Then I eliminated the head which erased the figure’s identity. Next I eliminated the hands and feet. Without head, hands, or feet the figures became a shell much as a rape victim turns into a shell of what they once were. I felt that the most effective way to utilize the symbolism was to create a dichotomy between visual fragmenting and realistically formed figures. But I did not feel that I wanted the surfaces to be beautiful and realistic. As a contrast to the beautifully formed figures, I decided to apply a texture to the surface that carried the earthquake symbolism to the surface of the figures. To achieve this. I made a hammer that imparted a cracked texture, which worked to create a deliberate division between the textural surface and the realistic form. I decided to apply the earthquake to the figure by running a fracture up the spine which removed it. The spinal column serves as the support and
nerve system for the entire body. Removing it left a weakened and unstable body.

Because of my back problems I live in constant pain and fracturing the spine was a direct reference to that as well. The pain I live with on a daily basis has force me to realize the importance of the spine to the body.

The use of symbolism carried over to the patterns I used on the hand dyed silk. I decided to do silk panels that would represent each phase of the work. After experimenting with different dyeing methods, I found a method called scrunch-and-run which gave me the effects that I desired. Scrunch-and run creates patterns by allowing the dye to concentrate in the folds of the fabric, resulting in areas of dark and light color. For me one of the appealing aspects of scrunch-and-run was the use of fabric manipulation. This process used wet fabric that was manipulated by folding, pleating, or scrunching the fabric in different ways. Then the dye was applied to the fabric by eyedroppers or brushes creating different patterns. With experimentation, I was eventually able to produce patterns that were representative of earthquake fissures, or spine, and muscle tissue. The earthquake patterns developed into bold fissures of color splintering up the center of the silk and radiating out to the sides. The muscle patterns appeared as variegated striations of light and dark red. I have learned from my back pain that muscle has memory and once it is injured it easily reverts back to its wounded state. The muscle pattern also referenced the corporal as well as the personal strength or internal muscle that was required to produce work that was so personally painful on such a taboo subject.

One of the main considerations for the silk was color and it became an important aspect to the symbolism of the work. The importance of white was immediate for its representation of innocence and purity. From there I began to concentrate on the phases I
wanted to express. The obvious color for anger was red. As I began to think about red I realized that it is the color of blood as it leaves the body and is exposed to the air. Also, appropriate since anger is an externalized emotion. Even when anger is internalized it presents itself externally through emotions such as impatience, shortened tempers, or violent outbursts. The representation of the wounded spirit or internalized emotions presented itself to me as blue, traditionally representative of dark or troubled mood and emotion. Blue also represents the color of blood, before it has left the body and been exposed to the air. The third phase was relationships. This area was very complicated but for me it seemed to be the cross between the emotions of anger even rage and the feeling of vulnerability and the wounded spirit that most affect the way the survivor interacts with the people around them. So, I decided that the appropriate color would be the use of red and blue on the silk. Since the only color in the "room" came from the silk and the sculpture, it was important that the silks were the right shade in order to achieve the appropriate emotional quality. To attain this each silk was dyed repeatedly. It was because of my persistence in working and reworking the material that I achieved the appropriate effects and that the silk became an effective part of the installation. There were people who challenged the use of the silk, but I believe they added to the overall emotional impact of the show.

All of these elements came together in the execution of the 12'x16' installation. It was completely enclosed by white partition walls except for a four foot entrance way. The entrance was screened off by a 48"x96" muscle silk panel. This barrier literally required the viewer to violate the space to enter the exhibit. For me the muscle patterned silk forced the viewer symbolically to walk through my memories before entering the
space. The viewer then entered a room of white: the far windows and the floor were draped in white cloth. The sense of violation and the tainting of the pure were visible as each person soiled the floor by stepping across the cloth, making them an active participant in the show. As viewers walked forward the first piece that they came to was *Fractured Woman #1* which rested on a 20”x20”x36” pedestal against the left hand wall. She measured 22”x8”x2” in size. This figure was seen from the back with arms resting by her side. She was presented reclining on a red muscle silk and was covered with a semi-sheer, light weight white silk crepe. Her form was just visible beneath the silk.

Continuing forward, the next piece that you approached was *Fractured Woman #6*. This 30”x9”x3” figure showed a female from the back in a charging motion with a bent right arm raised as if moving forward and a bent left arm dropped and reaching back. She was suspended from the ceiling with fishing line, looped through the opening of the spine, twelve inches from the left wall. Behind her was a red earthquake silk. The silk was cut where the fissures were pattered on the silk and pinned to the wall to fan out the cuts. The piece was suspended beneath an air vent that created a slight spin.

As you turned to the right you came upon *Fractured Woman #3* and *Fractured Woman #4*. These two pieces were presented on tiered pedestals that were pushed flush against each other with enough room to walk around the pedestals, which were made with acrylic tops to revealed crumpled and soiled sheets of poetry. *Fractured Woman #3* was presented on a 38”x24”x20” pedestal. The pedestal for *Fractured Woman #4* measured 24”x24”x30.” Draped over the two pedestals to reveal the poetry beneath was a blue earthquake silk. The figures were positioned on top of the silk. The reclining figure, *Fractured Woman #3*, measured 34”x9”x3”. Her bent right arm was raised above her
missing head; her left arm was eliminated just below the shoulder; and her right leg was missing just below the butt. The left leg was slightly curved to create a gentle “S” with the right arm. *Fractured Woman #4* measured 17”x11”x11.” She was shown in the fetal position with the arms severed in the middle of the upper arm and the legs removed at the knee. She was presented on her side.

To the right as viewers moved forward they approached the final piece *Fractured Woman #5*. She rested on an 84”x48”x6” platform. The 60”x30”x6” figure was presented on an earthquake silk of red fissures and blue background with muted tones of purple where the two colors ran into each other. She was seen as a reclining figure from the back with severed arms resting by her side and severed legs. The completely severed limbs were arranged on top of each other to appear as tousled debris. On the wall was a red muscle silk measuring 45”x26”: in pale letters, the title *Fractured Women* appeared. The edges of the silk were fringed. On the approaching wall as you exited were an 8”x10” thesis statement and a 12”x12”x45” pedestal with a comment book.

The success of the blending of such a wide variety of artforms was not an easy task to achieve. I feel that it was the use of symbolism that tied everything together and elicited such strong emotional responses. I know this from the comments that I received in person and in my comment book. Some of those comments included “It gave me chills,” “I couldn’t breath,” and “Thank you.” The “Thank you” came from another rape victim. I feel that everything that I went through to get to the point to do this work was validated in her ability to approach me and reveal her own experience to me, a total stranger. I knew the success of my show when I heard her comment, “I knew what the work was about as soon as I entered. I didn’t need to read the title or the thesis statement
to know.” Her comments confirmed that I not only was able to express my own emotions and experiences but those of others as well.
III. Body of Work

1. Entrance
2. Installation Overview
3. Fractured Woman #1
4. Fractured Woman #6- Outside View & Detail
5. Fractured Woman #6- Interior view
6. Fractured Women #3 & #4
7. Fractured Woman #3
8. Fractured Woman #4- Inside and Outside Views
9. Title Silk Pannell & Fractured Woman #5
10. Fractured Woman #2
Fractured Women Entrance
Muscle
Dyed Silk
48”x96”
Fractured Woman #1
Copper, Solvent Dye, Silk
22"x7"x1.5"
Fractured Woman #6
Interior View
Fractured Woman #3 & Fractured Woman #4
Copper, Dyed Silk, Poetry
38"x24"x20"
24"x24"x30"
Fractured Woman #3
Copper
34"x11"x3"
Fractured Woman #4
Inside & Outside View
Copper
15"x8"x10"
Fractured Woman #2
Sterling Silver, Solvent Dye
5"x2"x.5"
Historical Antecedents

"I had to take a good look at myself...thus, this piece emerged. I was reminded about how life, to me, is a never ending learning process, a journey of discovering ourselves. what we are capable of and what we are not, what we hold in the endless sea of our soul...who are you?" - Roxanne Swentsell

What drives an artist to make art? Perhaps more importantly, what drives an artist to make the art they make? For everyone the answer is different. For Frida Kahlo, Magdalena Abakanowicz, and Ana Mendieta, I feel the impetus was to resolve childhood suffering. Each woman experienced trauma during their formative years. Frida Kahlo survived childhood polio, as well as a violent bus accident at age eighteen that broke her back and impaled a steel rod through her pelvis. Magdalena Abakanowicz was born to Polish aristocracy in 1930. As a teenager she witnessed the horrors of WWII and was thirteen years old when her family had to leave behind their rural lifestyle to flee the Nazi invasion of Poland. Her family’s social status forced her to change her name. The violence that surrounded her can be exemplified by her witnessing her mother’s arm being shot off in their own home. Ana Mendieta was exiled from her Cuban homeland at the age of thirteen to live in the U.S. through an exodus program sponsored by Castro’s Cuba and the U.S. While in the U.S. she became part of the Iowa foster care system.
living in foster homes and orphanages. Each woman used their adversities to shape the way they expressed themselves in their art.

"(T)he accident and its painful aftermath made Frida an artist. It forced her to try to find wholeness by painting self-portraits in which she turns her body inside out to chart her states of mind not in terms of action or facial expression, but in terms of things done to her body."² Kahlo's use of an earthquake fissured body to reveal a broken spine in the painting *The Broken Column* conveyed both her emotional and physical anguish. As Kahlo declared both her strength and her vulnerability in *The Broken Column*, it is evident that her paintings were not just physical self-portraits but psychological self-portraits.³ So were my sculptures. The general shape and proportions of the figures were drawn from my own body. The fact that the figures were nude had nothing to do with sensuality, rather the naked figures represented helplessness and vulnerability as they did for Kahlo.⁴ These sculptures became self-portraits not just in terms of image but even more importantly in psychology. The fractured, naked bodies were representative of my, and all rape victims', wounded and vulnerable state of mind. Just as Kahlo's self portraits were about much more than facial expression, my work became about the universal pain of loss of self, vulnerability, internalized anger/rage, and the way these emotions taint our ability to trust and interact with people. My work conveyed the emotions that applied not only to rape victims but to everyone. Kahlo also knew the importance of color and "color's emotional capacity to drive home emotional truths."⁵ I believe that without my

³ Ibid, 180.
⁴ Ibid, 187.
⁵ Ibid, 144.
use of color in the dyed silk the emotional impact of the installation would not have been the same.

"With a double vision of the tragedy of the past and the potential of the future. Abakanowicz returns to sculpture its memorial function. She commemorates not heroes or battles, but our species in its struggles to control destructive impulses and evolve to the point that we may respect, rather than seeking only to tame the forces of nature." 6 Abakanowicz instills in her work a sense of her past universalized to include all humanity. Abakanowicz said of her work that "longings, disappointments, and fears teach me how to build their shapes." Part of her way of instilling her sense of emotion in the viewer was to create an environment. To her, "...art was not an object, but a participatory experience, an environment into which the spectator enters bodily and experiences physically as well as mentally." 7 Environment for me served very much the same purpose, though I used the environment more symbolically to convey more specific emotions rather than a monument to mankind.

Abakanowicz's work symbolized the collective unconscious rather than the western metaphorical. My work, though bridging the universal, was very metaphorical. Each symbol had a specific purpose, to reveal aspects of a story that needed to be told. For Abakanowicz and me texture served the important purpose of eliciting emotion. For me, texture was deliberate and used not only to set a mood but to differentiate the inside of the sculpture from the outside. Throughout the process of making the pieces I was continually asked which side I was going to show. I really could not answer because both sides had importance to me. Fractured Woman #4 was created to be experienced both

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7 Ibid, 120.
inside and out. Unlike my other sculptures the texture on this piece was applied to the inside of the form. This piece was about the internal struggles and losses and the empty hollow feeling of losing your identity. Abakanowicz felt similar emotions when she was driven from her childhood home. Although our traumas were very different, the resulting emotions were very similar and our desire to express them took us on similar paths.

Abakanowicz worked so personally and intensely that she said she would often get physically ill while realizing a cycle. For me to maintain my sanity and health while working on my thesis work I paced myself, especially during the conceptual development of the work. While working on the physical pieces, it took a while for me to connect all the aspects of the different phases. The emotional aspects of evolving the work was the most difficult part and one that I had to be guided through by my committee.

Ana Mendieta was a woman who approached her art in terms of herself: her culture and her alienation from her cultural identity, woman and a woman’s representation in society, body and body image, and intellect. Her work in some ways was an expression of the time. The feminist work of the 70’s was very much involved with the body and body image. Mendieta’s work evolved from displaying her own body to using her body as an outline or imprint. By using her own body she also brought into play her own psychology. Perhaps in doing so she became even more aware of her actions and began to own them. The use of her body became not only symbolic but deliberate. In her recreation of a rape scene she took control of a situation in which a woman’s control was removed from the equation. She set up this event by inviting friends to her apartment for dinner. When they arrived they found the door ajar, the apartment a mess, and Mendieta half-naked, tied and bending over a table. This event

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was recorded through photography. I can only imagine what her guests and passers by must have felt as they walked into the room. This recreation of a rape scene was one of several that she did while at Iowa University in response to a rape-murder incident on campus. By doing these pieces she put herself in a situation where unknowing viewers would happen upon her much in the same way unsuspecting viewers happened upon my past as they walked into my installation. I saw her work as studies in human nature, as a way to experience rape from the victim’s, the perpetrator’s, and the witness’s point of view. “For (her), the body as the subject of violence, eroticism, and death, was the body as woman.”9 The concept of woman as symbol, a culture, herself, and the female body as landscape was crucial to her work. Her use of her body as landscape in her later work was symbolic on multiple levels as Mother Earth, feminine Cuban culture, autonomous object, and her personal psyche.10 Mendieta was a rare artist who could work on several levels at once. Her intellect pushed an idea until it became so layered that it was at once intensely personal and consciously universal. Her work remains an example “of how an individual can create works which not only exemplify particular aspects of (the) specific, but speak to universal experiences and emotions.”11 Perhaps it is that layering of meaning that most attracted me to her work and that I most identify with in my own work.

Using the autobiographical in art, although contemporary, is not new. Artists that have been able to infuse their ideology and experiences in their work have produced some of the strongest art of the twentieth century. Kahlo, Abakanowicz, and Mendieta, each in their own way, took their painful past and utilized it in their work to make it unique. All three women experienced the cruelties and injustices of life at an early age.

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10 Ibid, 35.
11 Ibid, 163.
However, rather than let it eat away at them, they found ways to use it to make them and their art stronger. “Today artists often back away from engaging the times and places of their life, choosing instead the largely intellectual challenge of engaging the times and places of art.” 12 Each woman chose to listen to her own voice rather than embrace the movements of contemporary art and in some ways rejected it, thus, allowing their “…most personal histories (to) hold crystalline memories for absorption into evocative work. Sometimes such moments are part of why we become artists and the works that moved us take on heroic importance.” 13 It is exactly these qualities that attracted me to the art of these women and why they paved the way for artists such as me to mature. For me their work was not a blue print to copy but a process to follow. As S. T. Coleridge said, “(t)o admire on principle is the only way to imitate without loss of originality.” It was through artists such as these that I was able to find the courage to create work so intensely personal and to understand that the work must be universal.

If each of these women had stopped at the personal level the work would not have endured the test of time. Working in such a manner can be emotionally dangerous and if artists like them had not established that being vulnerable in art would be accepted, I would have had no way of referring to my own work. These women refused to cater to fears of being misunderstood which would have left them dependent upon their audience. 14 For me it was important to consider my audience, to consider their part in the environment and plausible reactions, but not to spare their reaction. I had no intention of making my work safe or viewer friendly. My favorite art has always been art that makes you feel. I wanted my audience to feel, even if that feeling was unease. One of my goals

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12 Bayles, Art & Fear, 54.
13 Ibid, 53.
14 Ibid, 40.
was for the audience to feel uncomfortable. Rape is an uncomfortable subject. From the responses that I received I feel that I was successful.
The Broken Column
Frida Kahlo
1944
Magdalena Abakanowicz
Backs
1976-80
Rape Scene
Ana Mendieta’s Apartment, Iowa
1973
V. Technique

"In making art you need to give yourself room to respond authentically, both to your subject matter and your materials. Art happens between you and something–a subject, an idea, a technique–and both you and that something need to be free to move."  

The technical aspects of the work were perhaps my salvation. The challenges of the scale of the sculpture and the issues of working figuratively allowed me to take my mind off of the intensity of the emotional pain and focus on the physical work, which was an abstraction of the emotion. The thesis work although not directly related to the work of the previous year became an extension of that method of working, of letting the concept of the work dictate what the work would be. It became more and more personal as well as sculptural and bigger.

The decision to create figurative sculpture was the evolution of an idea to do a life size body mask. The piece was conceived as body "armor" that would be worn in front of a nude woman. The metal piece would appear as a body double in which the earthquake symbolism would be applied to the sculpture manifesting a fractured woman. I decided to begin with this piece and was encouraged to make a model. From there the rest of the work evolved. Although I had never worked figuratively in metal before, my background in fashion design made for a natural transition from paper and fabric to metal. The most

difficult aspect of the transition was with proportion. The fashion figure is an elongated figure; however, the actual garments are proportionally accurate, and so, even though I was used to drawing an elongated figure, I had the knowledge to be proportionally accurate.

This model gave me the understanding of how the figures were to be formed. The issue of proportion was a challenge in the beginning; I had to make a constant effort to watch the proportion in order to keep the figures realistic, which was one of my goals. Working on the model made me acutely aware of this. The model was started by forming the figure into a wooden cut out of the female form. This cut out shape served as a template for the form. The piece was formed out of eighteen gauge copper and begun after the metal was fully annealed. It was placed over the hole in the particleboard and hammered into the opening. To develop the form I worked the figure from both sides. From the inside, I developed the volume, and from the outside, I created the details such as the spine and the bottom crease of the butt. I worked again from the inside to further push out the butt and shoulder blades. I continued to work like this, annealing as necessary, until the basic form was developed.

While developing the form of the figure, I drew with a sharpie where I needed to build depth. I went in with my hammers and fleshed out the form; I, then, made corrections from the other side. Working like this allowed me to literally draw in the metal with my hammers. Once I felt I had enough depth and form, I trimmed away the excess copper, making sure to leave enough metal to round over the figure. Next, I started to round the edges over stakes. Once I got close enough to the three dimensional form I, again, trimmed away any unnecessary excess with a jeweler’s saw. The difficult part of
this figure was forming the curve of the neck as it met the shoulder. I knew that I would be putting cuts into the figure and decided to let those cuts alleviate much of my problems. The other trouble spot was at the underarm. which was resolved by trimming very close without any rounding over. Then I finished the form by planishing it over stakes with my textured hammer. or thesis hammer, as it became affectionately known to me.

After it was appropriately planished, I then cut the fissures. The size of the model made it possible to do all the cuts with a jeweler’s saw. The first cuts were crafted to make the head, hands, and feet appear as if they had been severed from the body. To make the cuts seem as tears, I angled the saw blade as I was cutting to create sharp edges. I, then, began to cut out the spine using the same method. The cut tapered from 2” wide at the ankles to 1/4” at the base of the neck. I started with a regular saw frame and increased the depth of the frame as needed. Once I cut out the spine, I made the cuts that radiated from the spine through the body. To support the figure while I cut her, I made a large bench pin 18”x10” in size. I drew on the figure to mark where I wanted the cuts. After finishing the cuts in the body I moved to the arms. These cuts came across the arms from both the inside and the outside. Then I made the cuts in the neck and through the shoulders. The finishing touch was to paint the cuts red. For this I used a solvent dye. The appearance was transparent so the copper could still be seen through the red.

Making this model was a great learning process. From this piece, I realized that for me the process of drawing and sawing the cuts tended to become very systematic making them appear as pattern. This is something I would continue to fight while working on the other pieces. Although the piece started out as a model I felt it was
successful enough to stand on its own and it became *Fractured Woman #1*. After she was finished. I looked around my work space to find a place to put her and saw a hook on my bench and hung her there. Hanging the piece turned out to be important. She began to take on a different life there. She had movement and you could see through her and around her. It has often been said that making art is like giving birth. That was true of these sculptures but their birth was not just physical. it was psychological as well. While working on the pieces, each sculpture became alive with an identity and I began to refer to them as “girls”. because they were alive to me.

The making of *Fractured Woman #3, #5, and #6* were continuations of the working process of #1. As I worked on each “girl.” I gained new knowledge and applied it to the next figure. With the first “girl,” I worked the figure dirty the entire time and hammered the firescale into the metal. This created a worn patina that I felt was appropriate to the figure. These pieces were about life experiences and how those experiences wear on you. There were, however. differences in each piece. The primary difference in #3, #4, and #6 was the concentration on body position to relay a state of mind. While working on *Fractured Woman #5*, the first piece that I started. it was pointed out to me that the position of the body could convey my ideas as well as the symbolism of the earthquake fissures. With that in mind, I proceeded with the others carefully. considering what I was trying to reveal in each piece and the appropriate body posture while in that state of mind.

Each of these “girls” was made of fourteen gauge copper. Their process was virtually the same as the model. An outline of the figure was cut into particle board and the copper was hammered into it. One important thing that I learned form the first “girl”
was to screw the copper to the board to prevent her from shifting as I worked. Because I changed to a thicker gauge of metal much of the forming was done hot. The metal was heated to cherry red in the area I was forming then hammered with a variety of hammers, mallets, or stakes. As with the first "girl," I worked the form from both sides. Once the figures were formed enough, they were trimmed then their edges were rounded over stakes to create more volume. They were then planished and cut.

*Fractured Woman* #3 was about emotional scars, so I decided to use a wounded body appearance. The figure was lying on her stomach and appeared to be either struggling to get up or collapsed. As I was drawing the figure, I was having difficulties deciding how to show the arm and leg that were hidden under other parts of the body. It was as if they disappeared. I knew I was going to sever body parts and decided that it would be advantageous to do that asymmetrically at different points on the body, so I decided to cut away the parts that were creating problems. My next major problem was making the cuts in the figure. She was a bit larger than the first and making the cuts with the saw frames were a test in patience and creative saw use. Because of the scale of the piece I had to switch back and forth between the 4" and 8" deep saw frame; the flex in the 12" saw frame made it impossible to use. To reach across the figure as I needed required me to load the saw blade with the teeth facing in rather than out as metalsmiths are taught. By doing this, I was able to saw towards me instead of away which enabled me to cut further across the body. Again I had to look at the results of the final cuts and question placement. In retrospect, I feel she would have been a stronger piece if they had been used more sparingly for greater impact. Less is more.
The obvious difference in Fractured Woman #5. or “big momma” as I referred to her, was scale. Working life-size had its advantages and its disadvantages. The basic figure was formed the same way as the others but because of the scale she needed more volume. which gave me the opportunity to create better definition and muscle tone. The technical issues that she created in planishing and cutting were major. At this point I began to more carefully observe the appearance of the terrain after an earthquake. I realized how the earth shifts in plates, which become subducted or slide beneath other plates. I knew that I wanted to vary the pieces to prevent them all from looking the same, so I decided to cut the figure into pieces. Cutting “big momma” allowed me to planish the figure in smaller more manageable sections, however. cutting across the three dimensional figure created problems. Because of the scale the only option I had available to me was to cut her apart with the TIG welder. I marked where I wanted to cut with a sharpie. The marks could be seen while working but as the heat built up in the piece the ink would burn off and became difficult to see. I had to stop occasionally to see where I was and remark the figure so I would know where I wanted to go. The technique I used with the TIG to achieve the cut was to start from an edge letting the arc burn through the copper. I guided it along the piece in small. repetitive arcing motions that allowed the edges to appear torn. One of the best benefits of using the TIG to cut the form was a certain lack of control. Being a bit of a control freak. the cuts with the saw frame in the other figures were all about control. Nature, however. is random. With less of an ability to control the cuts they became more random and natural. The fact that it was faster and easier was a bonus. There was the potential issue of lost metal. Even using the smallest tungsten tip in the TIG meant a loss of 1/4". Since I decided that I was going to
reconstruct the figure as if it were earthquake rubble with sections rising above each other, the loss of the metal was not important. The fact that the pieces were not a perfect fit made her feel more natural. Once the sections were finished I had to decide how to arrange them. All the pieces were easy to place but there was one problem, because the back was cut apart at the left shoulder, the figure did not want to rest in the proper position. To resolve this, I built little risers that I painted to blend with the silk beneath and propped them under the sculpture to prevent the back from tipping down in the center. This piece became the centerpiece of the installation, not only impressive in scale but execution and presentation as well.

*Fractured Woman* #6, was my angry piece. I chose a charging body position that reinforced a sense of aggression. This piece was executed almost exactly like #3. However, because of my experience with the TIG, I decided to use it to make the cut up the spine. I stopped just shy of the base of the neck and finished the cut with a saw frame. The radiating cuts were made with saw frames. Again the challenge for me was to limit the number of cuts. I feel that I was much more successful with this piece. I liked the effect of painting the cuts from the previous pieces and decided to use the red solvent dye the same way. The use of the silk with this piece was the most effective of the show. The cuts in the figure were reinforced by the tears in the silk. The red solvent dye on the cuts was reinforced by the silk.

*Fractured Woman* #2, measuring 5”x2"x1/2.” was basically a smaller version of #1. This piece was made of eighteen gauge sterling silver. She was cut out of the silver as drawn allowing the stretching of the metal to account for the volume. Her form was begun by hammering into a U-channel then the volume was continued by chasing over
pitch. As with the others, the piece was worked from both sides pushing and compressing
the volume until the desired form was achieved. Once a satisfactory volume was formed,
she was planished with my thesis hammer over hammer heads to smooth out the form.

The cuts were applied to the figure the same as the first “girl.” Because of her size I
decided to make her functional and turned her into a pin. The pin back was applied to the
form to be as inconspicuous as possible. I decided to use steel wire through a tube that
would hook at the other end. The tube was angled to diminish its presence. The steel wire
was tapered at the hook end and polished. The steel was inserted after a patina of liver of
sulfur was applied to the surface in a weak solution with several applications to build up a
soft grey-blue tone. The hook for the pin back was formed by curling one of the cuts back
to form a latch for the steel wire. This was the least obtrusive way to secure the pin. I
wanted as little to be applied to this piece as possible. The cuts were then painted with red
solvent dye. The contrast in scale was a constructive study. I liked the intimacy of this
size. It could be held in the palm of your hand and worn on the body. I think the
contrasts in color were effective, the cool color of the silver tinted blue-gray and the
warm red of the solvent dyes. I had intended to make two more pieces, one for each
phase, but ran out of time. Because the other pieces were never finished I decided not to
put the pin in the show.

Fractured Woman #4, also made of fourteen gauge copper, was very different
from the other pieces. Again I was concentrating on body position and I decided to use a
fetal position. I also decided to remove the arms in the middle of the upper arm while the
removal of the legs at the knees was decided because of the body position; it was about
even with the head and created a balance and a position suggesting someone longing for
the comfort and protection of the womb. Making this piece was a divergence from the others. Because this piece created a vessel-like volume the requirements were very different. The hardest part was to decide how much room to leave to round out the hips. The next resolution was to decide how to cut out the wedge from the figure. By removing a triangle at the hip area, the flat figure could be folded up to instantly form volume. After the pattern was satisfactory it was cut out in copper and textured with my thesis hammer on one side. Then I hammered the figure over air with the texture on the inside to start adding volume to the back and the legs in two channels, one for each leg. Once I created enough volume through the back and leg area, I folded the figure up until the hip areas met. The seams at the hips were welded closed. From there the butt portion of the figure was worked over ball steaks. The first hammer blows were at the corners of the fold to smooth the points. Then the welded seams were filed slightly and hammered with a ball pien hammer to flatten the weld. The seam was left slightly visible. None of these figures were meant to be beautiful, and having the seam remain somewhat visible was almost as if it were scared. The rest of the figure was rounded over a ball steak that fit up into the figure. Most of the hammer work on this figure was done with rawhide or plastic mallets to prevent the interior texture from being distorted and lost. Metal hammers were used over air to add detail. A narrow headed hammer was used to put the crack in the butt area. The butt was again worked over a smaller ball steak to form each cheek. Once the butt was formed, the legs and the back were fully formed with rawhide mallets over air by pushing out the figure from the inside. As I worked the back and added curvature, I was warned that the figure could crack under the arms, and it did. This, however, did not bother me: these cracks were natural fissures. I did keep an eye
on them to make sure they didn’t shoot too far across the body. I rounded over the edges of hip and the back over air with a metal hammer. The legs were domed over steaks with a rawhide mallet. Once I formed the figure to a satisfactory point, I then cut the edges of the neck, arms, and legs with the TIG. The legs were cut to leave the left slightly shorter than the right. At this point I felt as if the cuts were too predictable: since the form of this figure was very different. I decided to use the cuts under the arms and leave them as is and to cut the spine only. Because of the volume and shape of this figure, getting a saw frame through the spine would have been impossible and I used the TIG. also stopping just shy of the neck and fitting a saw frame into the piece to finish the cut in the neck. The nice thing about using the TIG to cut the spine was that it was faster and easier. However, it did leave blobs of melted copper on the inside of the cut. Some of the drips could be pried off with pliers. some had to be cut with a saw frame. or removed by filing. Using the TIG did anneal the area around the cut. In order to work harden the copper, the areas were planished over steaks with a rawhide mallet. I felt that this was one of the strongest pieces of the show.
VI. Conclusion

"My art comes out of rage and displacement .... I think that all art comes out of sublimated rage." – Ana Mendieta

*Fractured Women: The Psychological Effects of Rape* was indeed born of rage. It was born out of 20 years of trying to manage that rage and at least half as many years of trying to let go of it. I have been unable to do that because for me to let go of what happened I have to be able to understand it. I will never be able to understand how someone could so callously disregard another person’s wishes. So, the next best thing was to make peace with what happened. The best way I could do that was to have my voice be heard. I measured the success of the show by the responses I received to it. In that respect it was a total success. Many of the comments I received from people that saw the show and signed my book were very positive. The strongest statement, however, came from the rape victim who found the courage to tell me of her struggle and thank me for the show. I like to think that I somehow helped her find the courage to talk about her struggle and to start her transition from rape victim to rape survivor.

I had no intention of being heroic in my work. I did not decide to do this body of work to be altruistic. In fact, it was quite the opposite; I did this work out of selfishness. It was my way to make sense out of a trauma that was senseless. By doing this work I
could rationalize why this happened to me. It happened to me because I am strong enough not to let it break me. It happened to me because I am sensitive enough to recognize its effect on me. It happened to me because I am creative enough to find a way to turn it into art. Although I had no intentions of altruism in my work. I did recognize that the work was larger than myself. Because of this recognition, I strove to respect that aspect of my work and every other rape victim. In doing so the work was able to evolve past self-indulgence into a humanistic statement. Without that acknowledgement the work would have remained trite and self-absorbed. On the other hand, if heroism had been my primary goal, the work would have been presumptuous and arrogant. It seems that the making of art lies somewhere between the internal and the external: the balance of what is within the self and beyond the self. Without that balance art either becomes self-indulgent or arrogant. But to have that balance in art there must be honesty, especially with yourself. And though I do not see my work as heroic, I do see the honesty in the work as heroic.

The only way Fractured Women: The Psychological Effects of Rape had any chance of being successful was if I was honest. If I was honest with myself about what had happened, how it affected me, and that I am not alone in my pain. My goals were to make the suffering accessible to society and to show how this is a crime that is never forgotten and one which the victim never gets over, by revealing the pain and struggles, and not by being bitter or antagonistic. The best anyone can hope for is to find some way to make peace with the past; the best way to do that is to use the knowledge gained from our suffering to help someone else. I would not have been able to achieve any of these aspects in my work without the willingness to be painfully honest. Without being honest I
would not have been able to get to the truth, the truth in the work, or the truth that the work could not be about me alone. None of us live alone and neither does our art.

The courage necessary to embark upon such a personal and revealing undertaking was made possibly by other artists before me. The work of artists such as Frieda Kahlo, Magdalena Abakanowicz, and Ana Mendieta paved the way for artists who need to work from the inside out. It was women such as these who made the statement that there is a place for such personally revealing art and that there are indeed rewards for going out on a limb or against the grain of the establishment. I suppose the fact that I realized at a young age that I was attracted to emotionally charged work made it possible for me to strive to make emotionally charged work as well. It is necessary to realize though that once you have made that work how it is received is out of your hands. This is especially true of working personally, when there is so much invested in the work and the desired reaction. One of the facts of making art is that as an artist you have no control over others’ reactions to it. So it becomes important to understand what it is exactly that you are trying to achieve in order to get your message across as clearly as possible. However, in art you can only say but so much because of its subjective nature, the viewer will bring themselves into the work. In fact, “(y)our reach as a viewer is vastly greater than your reach as a maker. The art you can experience may have originated a thousand miles away or a thousand years ago, but the art you can make is irrevocably bound to the times and places of your life.”

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16 Bayles, Art & Fear, 52.
Works Cited


