MESSAGES FROM THE INTERIOR

A Thesis

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for the degree Master of Fine Arts in the
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by

Margaret Pesco, B.A.

* * * * *

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Master's Examination Committee:

Oona Nelson
M. J. Bole
Georg Heimdal
Laura Lisbon

Approved by

[Signature]
Adviser
Department of Art
To my brother, Steve Pesco
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VITA

January 14, 1969 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Born - Bronx, NY

1991 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . B.A., Kenyon College
Gambier, OH

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INTRODUCTION

Sitting in my studio with my work, I am challenged to express in words, things that have come into being through fluid movements of mind and body, of conscious and subconscious thought. I look to the walls of my studio and my art emerges like ghosts from my life. At once, they are opaque and then transparent, and trembling, with the many voices that were at one time contained within me.

It has been my goal to speak with one particular voice. This voice, I feel has been lost between the worlds of the material and the imagery. This voice that I have long sought to find and make sense of, is oddly silent. It simply functions as a bridge between the world I am consciously aware of as reality and the other place that is more evasive and mysterious. This second world most clearly surfaces in my dreams.

I have chosen to represent this voice between images and words. This voice speaks from the physical space that surrounds the cut-out images of my work as well as the mental space that exists between the ideas and feelings that are implied but never fully revealed. Images of the figure in combination with images of objects appearing with fragments of stories, functions to speak about the compartmentalization I feel in my life and my struggle for connections between the logical and illogical. It is my hope that my work will trigger the silent voice in another individual. These pieces begin to tell
a story but need the viewer to complete it. The viewer will hopefully look to his of life as a source of inspiration.

To describe my work seems quite difficult, at least at this time. In the following chapters, I hope to guide the reader through my experiences and thoughts to elucidate the foremost motivating factors for my work. Finally, I will address the form my work takes to bear witness to the feelings and thoughts that I struggled to communicate with others.
CHAPTER I

In a room about four feet by three feet, a young girl sits and draws. She has adapted this small walk-in food closet as her playroom. Among all her toys, a constant supply of loose leaf paper proves her favorite. As I look back at myself as a child working feverishly through hundreds of sheets of paper, filling every moment of every day with new adventures, new games, and new fictions, I know that something of that experience has stayed with me all of my life.

Like most children, I rode the line between reality and fantasy. I spent as much time in my head as outside of it. Although I was taught that some things are real and others are not, this never seemed to settle well with me. Somehow it was not enough to explain how I experienced life. There had to be something more.

I had nightmares for as far back as I can remember. Dreams are my most vivid childhood memories. The material memories I have from that time are also marked by my dream life in that they frequent my dreams. Of course as a child these dreams made little sense to me other than the fact they terrified me. I did not sleep much in the early years of my life. i feared what awaited me in the shadow of night. I remember finding my way in the dark to my parent’s bedroom. I would wake my mother up and tell her of my nightmare. She would send me back to bed with instructions to just say a prayer and it would be better. However, religion held little comfort for me. Falling back to
sleep, I would dream of a demonic Christ rising off the crucifix and choking me with those same rosary beads, I held so tightly in my hand before drifting off to sleep. Other times, I would not even make it to my parent's room because there were terrible dreams about my family and I was afraid to see if it was true. Nothing was sacred in this world of night.

In time, as most children, I came to realize that what happened in my sleep was not real. Not real because these experiences did not occur in my physical and conscious world. So the, I had journeys in two worlds or two lives. However, one life seemed to make more sense to me than the other. In my waking hours, the life I lead with my eyes open, is ordered. There are rules, and boundaries that contain those rules. In sleep, in the subconscious, these rules do not apply. If there are any rules they are unknown to me. In addition, it is through my body that I experience my physical reality, which is then understood by my mind. In sleep, in my mind, my body is simply a vehicle for flight. It is a container for the spirit. The body in my dreams can die every night. The next night, it lives again.

The landscape of my dream world is rich and varied. At different times, that world appears to me in brilliant colors, black and white, and sometimes even animated. The parts of my dreams that make the most sense to me, are the moments that reveal a thread between the two worlds. Although the conscious filters through the subconscious, the logic is fragmented and twisted. It is also the most illogical and emotional parts of dreams that stay with me the longest. In my sleep, all the parts of my waking reality are reclaimed by the most primal part of my understanding. That is to say, in my dreams
I begin to realize the impact of my reality to my total person. It is a personal battle of nature vs nurture, of structure vs chaos. It is something that has always troubled me. It is in art that I have found a venue for expressing this rift of comprehension.

It may be inherent in the process of creating art, an alchemistic mix of intellect and emotion, of fact and fictions, that an artist can produce mirrors to humanity with the potential for illuminating that which might become and that which has been lost. I am bringing myself, in my entirety before the viewer, in my art. We are all trying to understand our characters in a story of life, where we are unwittingly participants as coauthors. It is my hope that through my images, my stories, others will bring their lives go the art work in order to make a connection. Through my investigations, I hope to make better sense of my life and perhaps assist another in unearthing a better understanding of themselves.
CHAPTER II

Six years ago, I began an endeavor to create art under the guidance of academic tutors. I brought to this study my nightmares and events in my life that fed the dreams. Art appeared to be the best avenue for the expression of these things. I wanted to reach in and touch someone’s heart the way life did mine. Early on that need translated into narrative sculptural pieces. Yet this was not enough. None of what I did during this period seemed to capture the intensity of the feelings I wanted to portray.

These smaller sculptural pieces then grew into installations. I began to create work that was site specific. This meant that I first needed to know the space, and create work specifically for that space. I worked within the site to create an environment. For me, at this time, and installation meant the total physical transformation of a space. The site had to become a painting that the viewer could enter and become totally enveloped. I felt that this would ensure the intensity of the feeling and message. However, in time, this too became problematic for me. I directed too much of my energy toward the physical transformation of the space rather than towards the direct expression of my content. I lost the edge in my communication. My voice, my message, became a muffled whisper in a sea of objects.

As I began the Graduate Art Program at The Ohio State University, I moved away from installation for a while. I directed my attention toward the question of form.
I tried sculpture, video, writing, and painting. From this research, I realized a few things. The narrative remained throughout this period of investigation and it always had its beginning in words or text. It became clear to me that writing held a strong and constant role. I found prose, my voice, the content, was clear and strong. I could also see that although the form of my work was under question, the content remained.

I looked to writing to guide my search for form. With words, I found I could immerse the reader in a similar fashion to installation. For me, this method seemed more direct and somehow more honest than my previous attempts with other media. For many, the words worked well enough because of the clarity of expression, but I needed more. The physical expression remained an issue. I felt the only true way to get at the kinds of feelings and emotions I wanted was to find a way to engulf the viewer physically and mentally. Words alone did only part of the job. My hand had to come into the work and the presence of a certain raw-ness needed to come through the material. This seemed the only way for me to accurately speak about feelings of displacement caused by the warring sides of the conscious and subconscious.

Everything I have tried to do has related to my own perception of mind and thought. I looked to my writing to direct the physical product. I went through a certain dissection of thought as I created and reread a poem. I found the mental space between words and images to be the best model. This mental space became the basis for my work in both the mental process as well as the physical product and experience. The gap between words and images seems to be the best forum to also speak about the gap between the conscious and subconscious. Language allows us to understand the world
as we know it. I have tried to find the cracks in this structure of perception and understanding to speak about the parts of us which we have no words and thus little understanding.
CHAPTER III

Messages from the Interior is a product of this research during my studies at The Ohio State University. It is an installation. It is different from the older installations in that it is not a seamless physical transformation of a space. This installation consists of many individual pieces. The transformation of the site is created by dependency of separate works that function as one. The work was not made specifically for that space. However, the work was intentionally made to be seen together. In this way, the installation is also dependent on the viewer perceiving a feeling or tone from the space that hosts this collection of work. These pieces are then bound by a room and captured in its light. They exist, speak, and breathe as one. They could not exist otherwise. This can be seen in Plate I and II.

The individual works are plastered shaped panels. Some of these pieces are images of figures and other images are of objects with words inscribed within or around them. The images are but cut-outs. Yet, with plaster and wood, I imply the third dimension. the layer of plaster that hosts the image of the figure is at its thickest is three inches. it is the physicality of the material which suggests that the images are more three dimension. the images of the objects exist on box-like structures that extend four inches from the wall. This too suggests the physical presence of an object. The rendering of the objects which is childlike and flat appears on the surface of the box. My intention
is to have the images extend into the viewers space. The objects on boxes come into our space because of their thickness as seen in Plate III.

The images of the figure, feature the human figure in a fetal or protective position. These images are perhaps the most direct entry into the work. I wanted the figure to function as mirror reflections of human physical and mental conditions of unhappiness and confusion. The individual figures are not specific in identity other than gender. This generalized identification allows the viewer to concentrate on he idea of the body and the position it takes, rather than seeing the figure as a completely other person.

Grouped with the figure is a box-like portraying the image of an object. The box forms are covered in plaster. The white of the plaster allows the image to appear as if it might just be an extension of the wall. The words that are inscribed into the plaster are fragments of stories or poems. These poems and stories that the fragments were taken from were being written at the same time the figure was being constructed. I felt the essence of the meaning would come through the combination of the fragment, object image, and figure. It is up to the viewer to fill in the blanks. Having the words scratched into the surface functions to deny the physical presence of the object depicted and to speak of a voice that comes from within. This works in opposition to the objects and figures emerging into our space. The objects themselves are signifiers for personal memories and associations. They are situated between the figures and words to further express the feeling and tone of the work.

The images of figures, objects, and text are arranged in the gallery space so that they may evoke the perception of another world. The individual pieces float on the wall
space. They inhabit the gallery rather than being displayed. The works are arranged in groupings so that they may function individually and collectively. In smaller groups, there is a figure, an object, and fragmented narrative. The space between is activated. It resembles a memory of a dream where vivid detail surfaces from the fog of the subconscious. Although the pieces are tied together by an area of space the inhibit, they do not make sense as a fluid stream of thought. The area of wall that contains the fragments suggest that they too hold a piece to the puzzle. As a collective group, the art functions in a similar way, hinting at the suggestion of a collective story or dream. They are intimately connected with one another, but it takes the individual pieces to elucidate the whole. It is like a choir of voices coming together to sing one song.

Within this installation is another grouping of work. In addition to the figures, objects, and stories, there is a group of cardboard boxes lining the wall as seen in Plate IV. These boxes are also covered in plaster. They contain images of objects with text. However, the objects that appear on these boxes are much less specific than the objects on the plaster and wood boxes. In many cases, these objects are quite abstract. These pieces represent fleeting but important thought within the installation. They do not express stories but rather moments of thought. To enhance that feeling, precious images and notes exist on throw away backgrounds of cardboard. On the wall, they are bubbles of thought.

It is finally the fleshy warm palette and yellow light that whispers and calls the viewer into space. The colors and mood are but a transparent veil masking the displacement, confusion, and pain expressed by the figures, objects, and words. My use
of watercolour on plaster created a sense of flesh. However, the figures are far from being solid. The paint was actually applied in many transparent layers that were then sanded and sometimes captured in beeswax. This too enhanced the quality of a dream world where everything has a questionable reality. The figures and objects attempt to exist both in our space as well as in a two-dimensional space.
CONCLUSION

After two years of research, I feel that Messages from the Interior is successful. It is successful because I found answers to questions of form and its relationship to installation, as well as questions dealing with materials. I have found new ways of incorporating words and images. I also feel more confident in dealing directly with the fragmentation of images and thoughts as they come to me, through the conscious and subconscious. This body of Work is the foundation for a bridge of understanding and expression. I know that I have entered into a pursuit that will be a lifetime endeavor.
APPENDIX A

PLATES
PLATE I

Untitled 1993
PLATE II

Untitled 1993
PLATE III

Untitled 1993
PLATE IV

Untitled 1993
PLATE V

Untitled 1993
PLATE VIII

Untitled 1993
PLATE IX

Untitled 1993
PLATE X

Untitled 1993