DEIRDRE A. SCAGGS
PANTOMIME: A PERSONAL RESEARCH

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Master of Fine Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
Deirdre A. Scaggs, B.F.A

The Ohio State University
2001

Master’s Examination Committee:
Tony Mendoza, Advisor
Carmel Buckley
Todd Slaughter

Approved by
Tony Mendoza
Advisor
Department of Art
ABSTRACT

Traditionally, the silhouette was used to create a profile portrait of a person prior to the accessibility of the photograph. In my photography I am combining traditional silhouette portraiture with the zoetrope (a simple animation device from the 19th century). The animation device allows a sequence of images to become constant loops of motion, where the viewer controls the speed and duration of that motion. I align the cyclic nature of the animations to psychological states and memory.

I have searched my own memory and utilized personal experience to create this body of symbolic imagery. In my images a woman balances a book on her head, but it is constantly slipping off and being pushed back on. Perhaps this relates to old-fashioned ideals of being a lady, or perhaps it relates to the balance and imbalance of psychological states. This duality is important, which is why the images appear twice; Once in a triptych form, life-size on the wall and again in animation form, smaller and more intimate.
Dedicated to everyone I love
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank my committee; Tony Mendoza, Carmel Buckley and Todd Slaughter for constantly pushing me forward and never losing faith in me.

I give special thanks to Rebekah Modrak for always asking the most difficult questions which helped me develop this body of word and allowed me to critically question my own method of working.

I would also like to thank Kristina Roberts for devoting so much of her time to helping me and being a wonderful friend. I thank Francis Schanberger for comic relief and lastly my husband, Randall Szott, for extreme patience.
VITA

February 26, 1975 .................. Born – Vanceburg, Kentucky

1998 ............................. B.F.A. Photography, University of Louisville

1994 - 1999 ....................... Special Collections Assistant,
University of Louisville Photographic Archives
Louisville, Kentucky

1999 – present ...................... Graduate Teaching Assistant
The Ohio State University

PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Art
Minor Field: Psychology
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .................................................................................................................. ii

Dedication .............................................................................................................. iii

Acknowledgments ................................................................................................. iv

Vita ......................................................................................................................... v

List of Figures ....................................................................................................... vii

Chapters:

1. Introduction ..................................................................................................... 1

2. Description ....................................................................................................... 8
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>“Infinite Charm” 32x40 silver gelatin print</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>“19 Years’ 25 mirrors, 19 xeroxes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>“Food Diary” The day I got married. Vellum</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Early zoetrope representation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>“Pantomime” installation overview</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>“Pantomime” detail</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Untitled gesture (balance)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Untitled gesture (eating)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Untitled gesture (vanity)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Untitled gesture (dummy)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Untitled gesture (laughter)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Untitled gesture (control)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Untitled gesture (speaking)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>Untitled gesture (breathing)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

I am fascinated yet frightened by all aspects of time. I am also captivated and consumed by the memories that fill my mind. I dwell on the past in reminiscences and lamentations. I think of past lovers, missed chances, youth, and ignorance. It is not to be mistaken that I regret the past, for I do not live in memories in that respect, it is its fantasy that holds me. I believe that many people live for the future, but often I fear the future. It is unknown and the past is friendlier, a fabrication of known memories with fanciful imaginations. When I lie in bed at night I create mini dramas in my mind, fantasies of events that I will never carry out. I do it as a distraction, not from circumstances but from my own anxieties, and so I do not get nervous. It is part of the panic I used to feel at a time when my confidence was shaken. For one year I had attacks of anxiety on a daily basis and I was filled with insecurities and traits that I cannot tolerate in other people.

I am a vain person, I am too conscious of my weight, my hair, my complexion, and my demeanor. It makes me feel shallow, but I have always enjoyed attention and I wonder how I became comfortable with objectification. It must have something to do with being an only child.
Any fear I possess, I see as a weakness that indicates insecurity, so I try to understand and combat my fears. The only exception is my fear of time, which will always be out of my control. I have read stories where time runs backward, parallel, or where it simply does not exist. I would like to live in a place like the South Pole where there is one sunset and sunrise per year. In six months of darkness how do you define a day? You sleep when you are tired and wake when hunger drives you from bed. Maybe that is why I am so fascinated by dreams that link to the subconscious. I wonder where the images from my dreams come from? Last night I dreamt that I spontaneously called an old lover on the telephone. I told him I wanted to see him and promptly boarded a plane to London. When I got there he took me straight to his bedroom but when I put my arms around him he was puffy and bloated.

I have looked forward to dreaming ever since I was a child. When I was little (and as an adult) I have had two recurring dreams. In one there was a witch outside my bedroom door and in order to reach the bedroom, I had to jump. In the second, I would wander the hallways of a house. A grand dilapidated mansion with oversized ceilings and tattered upholstery. There was never anyone in the house other than me, and I could never find my way out. I would open one doorway only to find another - it was an endless maze. My dreams and my imaginations were interchangeable as a child, I could lie in bed at night and think about what I wanted to dream and then dream about it later. I was an only child and I needed to be able to amuse myself. I created fantasy worlds since I was alone much of the time, and I enjoyed being alone wandering the hills of our farm. Everything was fantastical and I had immense freedom, there were no rules.
In my early works I created images intuitively, working from my imagination. I was interested in time even then, trying to create images which did not indicate a particular time period. I worked in black and white because it is an abstraction of reality. Infinite charm is a shrouded figure framed by a curved archway that is etched into the negative. The woman is looking upward, and is frozen in statue stillness. I titled it “Infinite Charm” to indicate her timelessness, her inability to be affected by time, and to always maintain that guiling statuesque charm.
I continued with similar concepts trying to be more critical rather than intuitive. I felt that investigating my personal issues with time would be an honest and therefore more effective way of art making. I made systematic investigations into the passage of time. I counted, rather obsessively, days and hours. I counted the years I was alive up until my grandmother’s death and the amount of time that has passed since then. I placed images of my grandmother, when she was near my age, behind pieces of mirror that had been etched to reveal her image. There were 19 images of her, and six unaltered pieces of mirror, which were stacked in two piles.
The piece was never resolved aesthetically, but I enjoyed the way the mirror functioned to bring the viewer into the present. As a finished piece, there was not enough for the viewer to interpret or relate to.

I continued explorations of this nature constantly dissatisfied with the work I was producing and ultimately I abandoned each project. To combat my apparent lack of discipline I created a year-long project for myself. On March 6, 2000, I began recording everything that I ate during the course of a day. The project was not about weight issues, but more about creating an abstract diary and a record of time.

Figure 1.3 “Food Diary” The day I got married. Vellum.
Now that I am finished with the project I can look through it and recall events/acts which I would not have ordinarily remembered, and it becomes a personal diary that only I can decode. It is also like looking through someone else's refrigerator or medicine cabinet. Whenever I go to someone's bathroom I look in their medicine cabinet and I am not sure what I hope to find – an assortment of prescription drugs or the brand of deodorant that they use. The food diary allows people to view a year of my life in that way. It also enables me to see a year, physically page by page as an accumulation.

At some point within this project I began to think of different ways to symbolize the ideas I wanted to express. I wanted the work to be something that the viewer could respond to and not merely be a confusing personal expression. I looked back to the time I had panic attacks and tried to isolate one aspect of that time that would characterize it. I thought a great deal about breathing as an involuntary action. It was my breathing – rapid and uncontrolled that frightened me so much. I imagined different way to symbolize breathing and thought of various solutions. One solution was tape over a person's mouth, another breathing in and out of a paper bag, and finally breathing into a balloon. This symbolization could not just be a single image, I needed a way to animate them, and to turn the images into a loop that would indicate the cyclical nature of breathing and panic.

I did not want the work to be a video piece; a video would only allow motion to go in one direction. I needed something that offered me more control. I researched early animation devices to see how they worked and whether or not they would work for me.
I discovered the zoetrope, which is a 19th century optical toy, used for entertainment, like and early television. The zoetrope was designed with a series of drawings on the interior wall of a cylinder. The cylinder contained slots for the viewer to peer through, and while turning the base, created a sense of motion in the still images.
CHAPTER 2

I created four zoetropes, which stood on a tall base approximately 5.5 feet high. Each cylinder had 2 rows of slots, and each row contained 12 small images. Each sequence is a slight progression that ends where it began, so that when the zoetrope is spun the animation becomes cyclical. Corresponding to each sequence is a life-size triptych on the wall. The life-size images are more ominous and ambiguous, the animations are personal and show the frustration/humour that comes out only when in motion.

Figure 2.1 “Pantomime” installation overview. Figure 2.2 “Pantomime” detail.
I remember when I was a little girl; I walked around my grandmother’s living room with a book balanced on my head. I thought balance would help me become more graceful. I wanted to be a lady, and wear frilly little dresses that I could twirl round in so everyone could see my panties. At the time, those dresses made me feel very feminine but I am not sure that I ever grew up to be a “lady”, I did however learn composure and poise. So much composure that I never want others to see when I am upset or unhappy. In that sense these images could also represent my childhood desires, but also an adult attempt to maintain emotional/psychological balance – a continuous shift that slips and is righted, only to slip once again.
Figure 2.3 Untitled gesture (balance).
As a child, we never had junk food in my house. My mother ordered everything from Walnut Acres, a mail order organic farm. We ate buckwheat pancakes, homemade yogurt, and ginger soda (no sugar), therefore I always felt slightly guilty when I ate candy bars and potato chips at my friends’ houses. It seemed to taste too good and be too decadent. I still feel guilty, but now for different reasons. I have grown to feel that being overweight is bad, not only for health reasons but also in terms of beauty. I have fallen prey to societal conventions of attractiveness.
Figure 2.4 Untitled gesture (eating).
If there is a mirror in my proximity, I am going to look into it. What will happen to my vanity as my face fills with lines? Sometimes I imagine I will become a bitter old alcoholic pursuing 17 year old boys, but more realistically I imagine the face I see in the mirror will just be a reflection changed slowly by time. I was always popular with boys and with men, but I was always concerned that it was based on superficiality and that I perpetuated that because I liked the attention. When I feel like I do not look my best, I am always shier and do not exude confidence. How did I become so vain?
Figure 2.5 Untitled gesture (vanity).
I cannot always take myself so seriously. I constantly amuse and baffle myself, and even my neuroses become entertaining. These images become my comic relief. A relief from my own tension and mind, and while they could be interpreted as a form of self-punishment, I see them as an escape from seriousness. Sometimes, all one can do is hit themselves on the head and say “dummy”.
Figure 2.6 Untitled gesture (dummy).
I often laugh at inappropriate moments: at my friends, in public, and in movie theaters. I find humour and irony in my environment and myself. I understand a lot about human motivations and behavior through my studies in psychology. People and their actions become transparent, even my own. Sometimes all that is left in many situations is laughter. Is this laugh an exaltation, hysteria, in ecstasy, or a cry of pain? Perhaps it is all of these things, and I believe laughter can only make us healthier.
Figure 2.7 Untitled gesture (laughter).
I have always hated being told what to do or how to do something. I react horribly to criticism and as a child I was rarely told what to do. My mother never told me to do my homework and the one time she did I refused to do it. I never had a curfew and I became quite responsible and considerate as a young adult, similarly I react the same way in all of my relationships. There has only been one time in my life that someone else had control over me, and I was like his little marionette. I was afraid of him, not physically but mentally, and I spent over two years living with a man who mentally abused me and I loved desperately. How does one prove mental abuse? I am still answering that question, but at the time it made me feel like a stereotypically weak female, and I do not wish to support that stereotype any longer.
Figure 2.8 Untitled gesture (control).
I remember not being able to speak; or rather I was afraid to speak. I have never been very good at verbal expression, and even now in writing this, I am getting writer’s block. Friends and lovers have always complained that I am closed off – too distant. I simply like to work problems out for myself, and I never want to reveal too much, otherwise I would be given away.
Figure 2.9 Untitled gesture (speaking).
I also remember when I forgot how to breathe. The muscles in my chest would tighten and if I tried to let myself breathe naturally I was afraid that nothing would happen. They teach you to control your breathing and count each breath when you experience panic attacks. Breathe in until your lungs cannot hold any more and then breathe out very slowly and completely. It is excruciating and more difficult than anyone could imagine. You become quite aware of your chest inflating and deflating all the while trying to control your thoughts. Remembering how to breathe changed my psychological outlook and that is when I regained control but nearly every day has its struggles.
Figure 2.10 Untitled gesture (breathing).