I Want to Live in a Rainbow World Where All the Rainbow Colours Roll Around Getting Muddy

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Masters of Arts in Art, Visual Arts

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Abstract

I Want to Live in a Rainbow World Where All the Rainbow Colours Roll Around Getting Muddy

By

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Masters of Arts in Art, Visual Arts

Through a meditative and physically demanding creative process, transcendental questions are asked: Can fun be recreated? And can simulated experiences be genuine? Lived moments are documented in journals, through poems, watercolor paintings, and drawings, and then executed through the physical construction of text-based objects and performances. The natural environment is compared to interpersonal relationships, and the bridge becomes a metaphor for the body, a wave, or a rainbow. By fragmenting my internal space into an external and public statement, my practice investigates whether the grand gesture is inevitably a futile gesture.
Process

"Just stop thinking, worrying, looking over your shoulder, wondering doubting, fearing, hurting, hoping for some easy way out, struggling, grasping, confusing, itching, scratching, mumbling, bumbling, grumbling, humbling, stumbling, rumbling, rambling, gambling, tumbling, scumbling, scrambling, hitching, hatching, bitching, moaning, groaning, honing, boning, horse shitting, hair splitting, nit picking, pisstrickling, nose sticking ass gouging, eyeball poking, finger pointing, alleyway sneaking, long waiting, small stepping, evil eyeing, backscratching, searching, perching, besmirching, grinding, grinding, grinding, grinding away at yourself.
Stop it and just do!

--Sol LeWitt’s advice to fellow artist Eva Hesse on dealing with a case of creative block.

(LeWitt)

The notebooks are a way for me to document my life visually; interpersonal relationships and life events are interpreted into a multimedia, small-scale research logs. Within my creative process experiences are the beginning of art, and directly from the experiences come the notebooks. I draw my friends, I draw places, and I create patterns using my surroundings. I write down the things that people say to me that are beautiful, and the way that I feel. These experiences fluidly and poetically evolve into notebook pages. Women artists and writers such as Louis Bourgeois, Audrey Woolen, Ree Morton, Sofia Coppola, and Virginia Woolf, along with
the punk rock Riot Grrrls are examples of the power that comes from creating art in bedrooms and in journals.

Louis Bourgeois works on her journals, which she refers to as Tender Compulsions, in her bed before she goes to sleep each night. “I prepare my images calmly. They are personal. A tree, its branches, a sort of landscape that goes up and down and swirls into a spiral. I remember in particular the life I led near the water, both in France and in New York. Each day is new, and each drawing, along with the notes on the back, tells me how I’m doing.” Bourgeois uses drawing as a way to remember and to calm herself each night. She is able to gauge her feelings and identify how she is doing through drawing. She speaks of her sketchbooks as a way to convert anxiety into something that is more conquerable. She states “Anxiety is undefined, but when you draw, you suddenly see what you’re afraid of. It’s a conversion. This is very important. Drawings help me identify and define a worry, and then transform it at least into a fear. When you’re afraid, you can do something about it.” Bourgeois is able to use her notebooks to identify things she is anxious about, once she has identified her fear she is able to take direct actions towards changing her circumstances or perspective in a positive way (Gaudry). Notebooks and drawings are a form of empowerment for many creative women.

Audrey Woolen is currently a grad student at Cal Arts, whose work centers around the idea that sadness is a form of empowerment for girls, especially when expressed on social media. She calls her theory the Sad Girl Theory and when asked what she is currently working on by Nylon Magazine, she states

I’m writing a book. At least, I’m saying I’m writing a book to justify how much time I’m spending alone in my room freaking out about words. If you’re freaking out about words, say you’re writing a book. If you’re freaking out about colors existing, say you’re making abstract paintings, you know? I count freaking out as a kind of work, so right now, I’m
freaking out about girls, our histories and our futures, words, and how they change what
girls are, our histories and our futures, bodies, and how they change words, and how they
change what girls are (Tunnicliffe).
Like Bourgeois, Woolen uses time in her room writing and creating, and “freaking out” as a
form of empowerment. Writing a book or making an abstract painting are active examples of
this. Bourgeois’s journals are confessional, asking questions about what it means to be useful as
a girl or a women, and Woolen’s book is used as a justification, as confidence, and validation of
worth. The time spent alone expressing what it is like to be a woman overcoming anxieties and
fears by creating something bigger than one’s self becomes a victory for the self and in turn
validated one’s existence and worth. The work created becomes the physical manifestation of the
win. Bourgeois and Woolen use drawing and writing as forms of meditation and empowerment.

Like Bourgeois and Woolen, drawing and writing in my notebook is an impulse and a
way of calming my own anxiety. It is a way of converting anxieties into identified fears, which
are confronted and exploited. I am thankful for tragedies, losses, and mistakes because from
them I have learned empathy and compassion, radical self-love and to accept my existence. By
accepting fears and anxieties, I accept myself and all the dynamic complexities of the ocean
waves and the rainbow. I don’t humiliate my fears. I appreciate them for shaping me and taking
me to beautiful experiences. The work celebrates the fears. I allow the viewer to experience it
through dangerous circumstances of uneven steps, risky journeys, and fragility of material such
as carefully cutout text within notebook pages.

My work encourages an adolescent like honest similar to many of Sofia Coppola’s
characters in her independent films, or the punk rock Riot Grrrls. Virginia Woolf famously
writes, “A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.” The artist
must have a space to create her art. This place, this room, is first my body and then my notebook.
The notebook is the space for me, while installations and sculptures are spaces for the viewer.

Ree Morton creates large installations and sculptures inspired by sketches from her notebooks. Paired with studio notes these sketches are the beginning of her creative process. The installations and sculptures then become a space, or even a stage, for performances and physical interaction. An example of her sketch becoming a space for physical interaction and performance is her ribbon ladder, titled signs of love, 1976. In this performance she climbed a steep riverbed using a ladder made of ribbons (Morton, Folie).

In my own mentally and physically demanding creative process, my work is born into the notebooks through movement and interaction with nature, and then it progresses. The progression, or next step in the process, is when the work becomes large or three-dimensional. It becomes physically present, rather than flat in a book. I write all the text in my notebooks and each page is essential within my creative process, but only certain pages progress into larger works like installations, murals, and sculptures. Words and colours become tangible, and interact physically with the space and people around them.
Past Work

“I don’t paint nature, I am nature.”

--Jackson Pollock (LEVIN)

_The Grass Grows on it’s Own_, (Appendix A: Image 1), is a twenty-five yard long, six yard tall text based installation cut from recycled pool covers. The text, which is inspired from a poem I wrote in a notebook documenting a month long venture on the Hawaiian island of Oahu, is environmentally driven, and sways in the wind in a similar way that sea kelp sways with the underwater current and waves. Because of the scale of the piece and the weight of the material, the text is obscured when hung. This installation is a grand gesture, and is also a call to action. The drought in California is severe and my poem is meant to emphasize that native grasslands should be left instead of replaced by nonnative plants that require considerably more water. A parallel is drawn between lawns and pool covers. The environment, and urban wildness is contrasted to the synthetic.

Similar to Richard Serra’s Tilted Arc, the sculpture splits the site in which it is located into two separate halves. (Serra, 1981) (Appendix B: Image 1) Tilted Arc was a highly discussed and criticized site-specific sculpture in Federal Plaza in New York City. Serra’s use of space resulted in the removal of the work, and therefore it’s destruction. _The Grass Grows on it’s Own_ also disrupted the normal walkway of faculty and students forcing people to view and interact with the work as it hung from the existing architecture of the CSUN Art and Design Center.
The stubborn animals will all go extinct. The stubborn animals keep going even once they realize they are driving the wrong way on the freeway, exit after exit, mile after mile. They will disappear time after time, until they are gone. They will break the water in my heart. The stubborn animals will all go extinct. The water in my heart has fallen.

Similar to *The Grass Grows on it’s Own*, *The Stubborn Animals* is a poetic response to environmentalist issues. With this work however, the words are cut from the pool cover leaving a gap in cover where the letters appear. This allows the viewer to see through the piece. The location is used to push the viewer right up to the art, making it hard to view, and read. The viewer if forced to make the choice of looking at the whole piece, but having to read the poem backwards, or reading from left to right, but having to walk along the work while reading.
Low Tide Blues (Appendix A: Image 3 and 4) is a painted installation covering the walls of an entire gallery. Each letter was carefully painted around in a way that covered the whole wall with paint except for the actual letter, which remained white in the negative space. The lifespan of the installation from creation to destruction lasted seven days before being painted over. The mantra “LOWTIDEBLUES” was repeated over and over. Because of the time consuming and physically demanding process of painting for as long as 15 hours straight, meditation became a huge part of this installation. The emphasis was on concentration and focus while repeating the phrase, and keeping the paintbrush lines clean. When spelling mistakes were made they were embraced and considered permanent, and the letters and words became muddled.
in the end. Just as fear is accepted in my notebooks mistakes are accepted in the physicality of my work, and the work becomes a beautiful mess.

(Image 3: Low Tide Blues, house paint installation, 2015)
Beach Break (Appendix A: Image 5) is an 11 foot long sculpture created by casting my own left leg and making a glittery blue Aqua Resin string of legs, connecting hip to hip, and ankle to ankle. By connecting the legs, a long, thin form is created. This shape references a wave. This sculpture is paired to a text-based collage (Appendix A: Image 6). A blue Sharpie is used in the back ground to create a wave like pattern on the bottom and top of the piece, while found mesh is cut out and used to spell out the title: “TURN LEGS INTO WAVES AND RUN LIKE MAD.” This collage was made as a response to Beach Break, and both have a fluid wave like movement. The qualities of the notebook, including it’s fragility, translate in these works on a larger scale.
(Appendix A: Image 5: *Beach Break*, fiber glass, aqua resin, acrylic paint, glitter, 2015)

(Appendix A: Image 6: *Turn Legs Into Waves and Run Like Mad*, sharpie and found mesh on handmade paper, 2015)
Philosophy and Intent

“This life can be a sad reality and also a beautiful poem.”

--Dallas Clayton (Clayton, 2016)

Magical, insular, sublime, holistic and expansive moments within nature are additional inspirations for making art, specifically my thesis project. By spending extensive time in nature meditating and performing physically demanding activities such as yoga, acro-yoga, rock climbing, trekking mountains, and surfing ocean waves, I am able to experience self-revolutionary moments. These experiences are used to create synthetic objects similar to a swing, a diving board, a water slide, or a roller coaster. Playgrounds, pools, and amusement parks are examples of places where synthetic structures are used to create feelings of excitement and enjoyment for the public. Rock climbing gyms are marketed to climbers that live in urban areas who want to train or compete, or where weather restricts outside activities. The routes are constructed and renovated to meet the needs of the visitor and the materials are synthetic, yet they are made to simulate natural elements. The recreation of natural playgrounds for entertainment purposes is used by artists in art installations and interactive art exhibits to create experiential works which reference the original happening outside.

In a strikingly similar way, Ann Hamilton’s New York installation “Event of a Thread” asks the viewer to play by inviting them to engage with the work by swinging on swings hung by wires connected to a huge sheet of cloth in the center of the room. When in use the swings make
the cloth flow gracefully in an entrancing rhythm while other visitors lay beneath it, enjoying the moment and echoing voices. In episode #177 from the Art 21 series “Exclusive” Hamilton explains:

   At the beginning we wondered if people would even swing. We were like I hope they don’t just hang there. There is something that happens when you swing. I’m sure there is a neurological explanation for the sense of pleasure that you feel… There was a family that was in here yesterday that was here for three hours. So it has sort of become like a park.

By allowing the viewer to engage in the installation Hamilton is able to create an environment like a park or playground, where the viewer is able to have moments of enjoyment and excitement from the activities made available. The intent of my thesis project is to use documented experiences within nature to create a synthetic structure, a constructed object for the viewer to physically and intellectually play with (Art 21, Episode #177).

   My work confronts fear, environmental issues, pays homage to natural phenomena, and is created to discuss spirituality apart from religion. The entries in my journals are often spiritual prayers and meditations; my sculptures ignite awakening and awareness, as well as act as idols for worshipping nature. So the work is created to discuss and experience spirituality.

   Transcendentalism is a philosophy and movement developed on the east coast in Boston, Massachusetts in the late 1820s. These philosophers studied and wrote extensively on concepts surrounding Immanuel Kant’s faith in the power of divinity, nature and the individual. Kant considered the world in essence to be unknowable, and as the main figure of modern philosophy, his critiques of reason and aesthetics echoed into transcendentalism. Values such as idealism, spirituality, and the non-physical advanced beyond dogmatic traditions and religious
assumptions. Transcendentalism as a movement reconsidered spirituality and the idea of god apart from religion. (Lewis, 2012) According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy,

Transcendentalism is an American literary, political, and philosophical movement of the early nineteenth century, centered around Ralph Waldo Emerson. Other important transcendentalists were Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Amos Bronson Alcott, Frederic Henry Hedge, and Theodore Parker. Stimulated by English and German Romanticism, the Biblical criticism of Herder and Schleiermacher, and the skepticism of Hume, the transcendentalists operated with the sense that a new era was at hand. They were critics of their contemporary society for its unthinking conformity, and urged that each person find, in Emerson's words, “an original relation to the universe”.

Thoughts transcend material objects, and ideas of self-reliance were pursued, documented, and studied, especially by Henry David Thoreau. In his book Walden, an autobiography documenting his experience at Walden Pond, and his solidarity within the wilderness. The purpose of his social experiment was to pursue truth, and to experience life fully, rather than mildly, and to avoid passively living without questioning the essence of life and existence. He writes: “Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth.” Thoreau represents transcendentalism by being interested in truth above all else. A staple quote from the book is

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived... I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the
world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have somewhat hastily concluded that it is the chief end of man here to "glorify God and enjoy him forever." (Thoreau, Haight, Emerson, 1942)

This excerpt of Walden is read in the film The Dead Poet’s Society (Weir), and it is referenced in Thunder and Lightning: Weather Past, Present, or Future by Lauren Redniss (Redniss). Walden accurately epitomizes the transcendentalist’s fiery passion for the rebirth of individual thought from the conventional. Time spent in nature allows me to focus on the power of the universe, and my place within it from an honest perspective. My work is meant to recreate the spiritual connection I have with the natural universe and make it easily accessible to the viewer.
Project Description

“The art of art, the glory of expression and the sunshine of the light of letters, is simplicity.”

--Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass (Whitman, 1900)

My thesis project is a large constructed and painted sculpture titled *I Want to Live in a Rainbow World Where all the Rainbow Colours Roll Around Getting Muddy* (Appendix A: Image 7). A sixteen foot long by eight foot tall wood bridge is constructed allowing the viewer to choose whether to walk around, crawl beneath, or walk over and across it. Sheets of plywood are cut to build the exterior or skin of the sculpture while two-by-fours and four-by-fours are used as bones to physically add structure to the piece. The arched shape is inspired by the architecture of a Japanese bridge, a rainbow, a wave, and a yogi’s body in wheel pose. The hand railing across the top of the bridge mimics the rippling crest of a wave, ocean surface topography, or rays of sunshine. The bridge is an abstract form that becomes a metaphor for the environment, a condensed landscape that encompasses many aspects of nature in all of its glory. External house paint is used to cover the entire bridge in rainbow colours with lists of things I am thankful for. Along the stairs instructions are written in red: “Spend your time on the sun shine, moon beam, ocean wave, rainbow bridge naming all the people, places, and experiences that make you happy. Fill your heart with love.” I want to live in a rainbow world, so I created a rainbow bridge to take me there.
(Appendix A: Image 7: I Want to Live in a Rainbow World Where All the Rainbow Colours Roll

_Around Getting Muddy_, Plywood, wood, screws, and external house paint, 2016)
Conclusion

“Forget the room of one’s own - write in the kitchen, lock yourself up in the bathroom. Write on the bus or on the welfare line, on the job or during meals, between sleeping and waking. I write while sitting on the john. No long stretches at the typewriter unless you’re wealthy or have a patron - you may not even own a typewriter. While you wash the floor or clothes listen to the words chanting in your body. When you’re depressed, angry, hurt, when compassion and love possess you. When you cannot help but write.”

--Gloria Anzaldúa (Anzaldúa, Keating, 2019)

The notebooks are born from experiences, and like many other artists I use the process of creating to validate my own feelings and existence, and to identify my anxieties. My notebooks and my body are the spaces I use to create. All the work, and my whole life has evolved into my thesis project. By confronting fear, and agreeing to participate in the work the viewer is able to experience fear and empathy in the same way that I have. The viewer is enticed by colour and honesty. There are moments within my work in which the curiosity and engagement of the viewer is rewarded by small loving details. The ability of the viewer to uncover and uncode the work is rewarded with triumph. The work envelopes with its scale and grandiosity, awakens the present and offers a journey whether physical or spiritual. From the journal pages to physical embodiments of moments: fears are realized, environmental issues are confronted, nature is worshipped, and spiritual and universal relationships are explored.
“You’re standing on a bridge, watching yourself go by. Wow! Look at that!”

--Richard Alpert, Remember, Be Here Now

(Appendix B: Image 2 and 3) (Alpert, 1971)
Work Cited


Appendix A

(Image 1: *The grass grows on it's own*, 4014)

(Image 2: *The stubborn Animals*, 2015)
(Image 3: Low Tide Blues, house paint installation, 2015)

(Image 4: detail of Low Tide Blues, 2015)
(Image 6: *Turn Legs Into Waves and Run Like Mad*, Collage on handmade paper, 2015)

(Image 7: *Beach Break*, Fiber glass, aqua resin, acrylic paint, glitter, 2015)
(Image 7: I Want to Live in a Rainbow World Where All the Rainbow Colours Roll Around

*Getting Muddy*, Plywood, wood, screws, and house paint, 2016)
Appendix B


YOU’RE STANDING
ON A BRIDGE
WATCHING
YOURSELF
GO BY

(Image 2: Alpert, Remember, Be Here Now, 1971)
(Image 3: Alpert, Remember, Be Here Now, 1971)