

THESIS

IN REPEAT: SCARS, STRUCTURES AND SURFACES

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

IN REPEAT: SCARS, STRUCTURES AND SURFACES

This body of work investigates the veiling and revealing of physical and emotional scars. A link is made between these kinds of scarring by observing the structured space that the body provides for the psyche. While equating the body with a container, these artworks animate the cyclical nature of re-growth and regression through a breadth of forms.

In my studio practice, I explore cloth as a gendered, sexually charged space. Through their relationships to the body and their cultural associations, the textile materials in my work probe the boundaries of body and psyche, public and private, and decorative and abject. How can cloth capture subtle and metaphorical relationships in the healing and scarring process of the body and the psyche?

Cloth, as the ubiquitous second skin, provides access points for the viewer. In a global society, the symbolism of cloth can often be contradictory. Throughout history, women's dress has included garments that act as veils. Simultaneously, veils embody protection, modesty, seduction and subtle combinations of all three. In many of these works, qualities of transparency are emphasized to explore what is exposed and what is hidden in the body and the psyche.

This body of work is comprised of four handwoven pieces and two painted textile pieces.

Omissions (Fig. 1), *Old Growths* (Fig. 2) *Bandage* (Fig. 3) and *Optional Endings 1-5* (Fig. 4) are handwoven while *My Body at Home* (Fig. 5) and *My Body at Home II* (Fig. 6) are soft wall sculptures.

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PART I: Introduction to Themes

Wound, scab, scar, new growth: this is the cycle of healing for the skin. The cycle of healing for the psyche takes a similar sequence and form. Over time, the skin still reveals a shadow of the event that caused the scar, but it is outwardly the most peaceful stage of healing. There is a story, memory and emotion contained in the scar. A scar is the mark of a story that, on the surface, is private. It is an implication of what lies beneath and within.

The relationship between scars and the act of veiling are at the core of my work. In my work, I focus on camouflaging absences, covering unwanted parts of the psyche or body, and creating barriers between public and personal lives. The cultural and gendered experience of veiling is explored through three interviews with international students living in my neighborhood. The interviews and accompanying research provide tangible, narrative structure to the complex and politicized concepts of veiling. These concepts add depth to the understanding of my own use of veil symbolism.

In this body of work, skin and veil become interchangeable. The skin is the body's protection from bacteria and symbolizes the desire for perfection in body and mind. Garments such as the veil protect the skin from weather and cover parts of the body that are meant to be private. The layers of covering and protection associated with the body are paralleled by layers of denial and repression that protect the disowned parts of the psyche.

The way that the eye is both attracted to and repulsed by interruptions in the skin's surface mirrors the psyche's coping mechanisms. At times, emotions and memories are stored so well that they can't be recalled on command. Alternately, the psyche veils itself with trauma that has

left its mark and overcompensates to dissociate from trauma. The scar is a container and a protective space where the memory can be stored and endured privately.

The causes of scars remain in storage in the body and the mind, and sometimes can shape actions for a person's entire life. The experience of one person's resurfacing scar tissue can even be passed on to future generations. When the body suffers an injury, cells in the skin rush to close the wound and clean up any bacteria that enters the body. As the skin heals, red and white blood cells fight infection and aid in the formation of new tissue.¹ While the cells in the epidermis can regenerate, a wound that extends into the dermis must go through the process of tissue repair.² The new tissue grows in a pattern different from the original tissue and becomes the scar that appears on the surface of the skin.

Fibers that create scar tissue are less flexible and less soft.³ "Scar tissue is functionally deficient when compared to uninjured tissue and has no hair follicles, sweat glands or sebaceous glands."⁴ Because the skin that is scarred interrupts the homogeneity of the surface surrounding it, the scar can become a focal point. The skin is bumpy, discolored or mangled at the site of the scar. In Part II of this paper, the impact of scars and the discomfort associated with seeing is discussed in relation to my body of work and the post-structuralist Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection.

Through comparison of thematic overlaps with three artists, my body of work is examined piece-by-piece in Part IV. Scars, veiling and layers are considered through repetition, gravity,

¹ Madeleine Flanagan, *Wound Healing and Skin Integrity: Principles and Practice* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), ProQuest Ebook Central, pg 41-42,

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csu/detail.action?docID=1132830>.

² Ibid, 35.

³ Ibid, 46-7.

⁴ Ibid, 47.

transparency, hollowness and abjection. The works of Lenore Tawney, Anne Wilson and Eva Hesse are analyzed as influences and utilized to offer precedents to my own work.

PART II: Scars and Abjection

While these works exhibit marks or flaws, they are constructed with a fragile appearance and give form to the relationship of scars on the body and psyche. In the work, layers of physical material and overlapping layers of metaphor and meaning in the work present the permeability between public and private spaces. Layers of decorative surfaces help to overcompensate for or to hide unacceptable aspects of the psyche or body. The viewing experience is meant to spark emotions of abjection that are associated with scars in the psyche.

Historically, skin has been seen as an identifier of inner purity, class and race. Skin has determined status and, sometimes, value in society. Currently, flawless, youthful skin is a signifier of wealth, prosperity and glamour, while the history of purity, class and race still linger. In this layered and complex perspective of skin, flawed and scarred skin is seen as unsightly. All manner of methods can be purchased to disguise, cover or eliminate flaws.

While the Western obsession with perfect skin is acknowledged as problematic, my work is focused on the quest for perfection as a metaphor for the psyche. Instead of focusing on whether scars or flaws are actually beautiful, my studio investigations consider why scars are viewed with disgust. The body of work delves into the discomfort of hiding and revealing flaws. Through Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection and the development of selfhood, the discomfort is considered from a psychological perspective.

Kristeva is an influential post-structuralist thinker who contributes to fields of semiotics, psychoanalysis and feminism. Kristeva challenged the concept of the "self" as a separate self-aware being. She argued for the idea of subjectivity instead of self. "Instead of a model of a self

that is stable and unified, Kristeva offers us one of a self that is always in process and heterogeneous. The self's affective energies continue to destabilize any given self-understanding. Moreover, we are also affected by the people around us, especially the people we love.”⁵

Kristeva examines the fragile and unsettled nature of human identity in states such as pregnancy. During pregnancy, there is no clear distinction between subject and object and a woman often experiences the feeling of being two entities in one body. The relationship between the newly born child and mother continues to blur the lines between self and other. Children only begin to separate themselves when they begin to dispel foreign objects from their mouths and later catch a glimpse of themselves in a mirror.⁶

The act of separation from foreign objects is what Kristeva called abjection. This was the topic of her book, *Power of Horror*.⁷ Since 1980, when the book was published, artists have developed work with parallel concepts. Because the abject is so inseparable from the body and culturally accepted norms, it often coincides with work concerning social issues. Physiological examples of the abject include sweat, pus, milk, and the mother's body. These are the things that disgust and captivate us because we cannot say they are this or they are that, they are me or they are not me.

Because the abject spans these boundaries it is unsettling to the individual's sense of identity. Abjection is a reminder that there is more than the binary of self and other. “It hovers at the borders of selfhood. What makes something abject and not simply repressed is that it does not entirely disappear from consciousness. The abject is what does not respect boundaries.”⁸

⁵ Noelle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 41-42.

⁶ Noelle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 35.

⁷ Ibid, 45-46.

⁸ Noelle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 46.

In my work, abjection manifests subtly. The first glimpse does not illicit discomfort. Relief and installation elements appear decorative because of the repetition of form and surface design. But the viewer who chooses to linger with the emotive environment of the work will find tension, numbness and vulnerability in the spaces between threads and forms. Discomfort is elicited by what is seemingly missing or what is added.

Gaps, slits, hollowness and layers act as portals between the interior and exterior experience of abjection. The psychoanalyst Lacan described “erotogenic” zones of the body as the openings, gaps and cuts that occupy both inside and outside environments of the body. Gaps and cuts include mouth, eyelids, and anus, and contribute to the breakdown of the boundaries of self.⁹ “Then, on the surface of being, in that region where being wants to be both visible and hidden, the movements of opening and closing are so numerous, so frequently inverted, and so charged with hesitation, that we could conclude on the following formula: man is [a] half-open being.”¹⁰

The work is referential of the body and the second-skin of cloth, and follows the abject path of scars. Veiling is the chosen covering or camouflaging method for scars or the abject. Cultural attempts to control the abject have resulted in the development of private spaces.¹¹

“Private space is marked by an exterior material boundary and an interior surplus of signification.”¹²

⁹ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 104.

¹⁰ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Spaces*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 222.

¹¹ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 104-05.

¹² Ibid, 159.

PART III: The Veil

While the concept of the veil has developed into a personal symbol in my own work, it is clearly derived from cultural and religious veiling practices. Several years ago, I read this description of the veil: “Putting a veil over something increases its action or feeling. This is known among women far and wide. There was a phrase my grandmother used, ‘veiling the bowl.’ It meant to put a white cloth over a bowl of kneaded dough to cause the bread to rise. The veil for the bread and the veil for the psyche serve the same purpose.”¹³

The passage is from an explanation of an initiation fairytale in *Women Who Run with the Wolves*. In the fairytale, a young woman is wrapped in veils and sent into the forest to avoid execution. The author differentiates hiding and disguising, and defines the veil as a symbol for privacy, focus, protection and “...women’s ability to take on whatever presence or essence they wish.”¹⁴

Especially since September 11, 2001, the West has perceived veiling as a signifier of Islam, terrorism and subordinate women. In light of this tension, it is not surprising that the veil has become a highly politicized garment. However, the historical significance of veiling practices is culturally and religiously diverse. Throughout time, religions that have used veiling include Judaism, Christianity, Paganism, Hinduism, and Islam.¹⁵ The breadth of veiling practices makes

¹³ Clarissa Pinkola Estes, *Women Who Run with the Wolves* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 441.

¹⁴ Ibid, 442.

¹⁵ Jennifer Heath, introduction to *The Veil*, ed. Jennifer Heath (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008) 27-28.

categorization quite difficult. “In some lands it is a physical fabric; in others it exists in makeup, married names, and other masking practices. The veil is not one thing; it shape-shifts.”¹⁶

Bridal-wear materials are often incorporated into my work. As a teenager, I aspired to be a fashion designer and apprenticed in a shop that tailored bridal gowns. Then, in college, I worked at David’s Bridal. In the alterations room, I was surrounded by fluffy gowns and long beaded veils. The repetition of the color, fabrics and motifs was suffocating. Time circled in the tasks that I repeated over and over. The same three styles of dresses came through the line 100 times. I rarely met the brides and often worked alone.

When I left my position at David’s Bridal, veils and bridal materials became a theme in my art works. After my experience with the homogenized versions of veils, I sought out stories and narratives that could reinstate meaning in this symbolic garment. While there are many connections between veiling in my work and my personal experience, I have kept the telling of these stories to a minimum. Instead, I focus on the overarching themes whose relevance cross the boundaries of culture and religion to offer an emotive atmosphere.

To represent complexities of personal experience within the wide breadth of veiling practices, I conducted interviews with three women in my neighborhood who are each from a different cultural background. These three examples correlate with key concepts of veiling as camouflage, cover and separation that are present in my body of work.

Shuchi is from India and has been in the US studying and living with her husband and daughter since 2015. While sitting in her living room, she shows me a sari, choli and chunni, which are traditional Indian garments. Shuchi describes the general shift away from traditional clothing in

¹⁶ Mohja Kahf, “From Her Royal Body the Robe Was Removed,” in *The Veil*, ed. Jennifer Heath (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 40.

exchange for Western styles. In some regions, the chunni, a long scarf, is still worn as a veil around the head. However, in the cities, the garment is draped around the shoulders. Shuchi shows me how she would wear her chunni around her neck with the long tails flowing behind her. She says that she would never go to see her father-in-law without the chunni. The reason for this, she explains, is the comfort of modesty. This is fascinating to me, because the delicate, brightly-colored chunni, accentuates her body and hardly covers any of it.

The sari is also considered a veiling garment. In an essay on veiling, Roxanne Kamayani Gupta remarks, “While women in the affluent West purchase the dream of sexual attractiveness through cosmetic surgery, in India the sari, both revealing and concealing the body it covers, conveys the full gamut of sexual expression: From holy woman to prostitute, dancing girl to Mother Theresa, the sari equals female sexuality, either its renunciation, control, or exploitation.”¹⁷ Gupta goes on to describe the sari as a boundary or barrier that separates the inner and outer world. She compares this to the “original veil” of the baby in the womb who experiences sounds and light with layers of skin and amniotic fluid separating it from the sources of these experiences.¹⁸

Indian veiling garments are symbolic of a boundary that emphasizes the body through what is or isn’t covered. By developing layers of skin-like fabric in *My Body at Home II*, I have created an environment where underlying forms peek through an overlay that is simultaneously decorative and disconcerting. I have played with the experience of revealed sexuality through pointy, circular, and bodily forms and a blending of interior and exterior spaces. The pointed forms and sharp metal pins keep the viewer at a distance, but the soft, delicate fabrics draw the viewer in.

¹⁷ Roxanne Kamayani Gupta, “Going the Whole Nine Yards,” in *The Veil*, ed. Jennifer Heath (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 70.

¹⁸ Roxanne Kamayani Gupta, “Going the Whole Nine Yards,” in *The Veil*, ed. Jennifer Heath (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 73-4.

In comparison, my neighbor Nutsayo shows me an image of her wearing a white hat called a tsunokakushi. She is from Japan and the image is of her wedding day. She and her husband are in traditional Shinto costume. Nutsayo is wearing a white kimono and a large white tsunokakushi. The size and shape of the garment act as a kind of disguise for the bride's metaphorical horns. Meaning, the hat keeps her husband from knowing her bad side until they are already married. I ask Nutsayo if her husband knew about this story before the wedding. She says, "Yes," and laughs.

The tsunokakuchi was first documented in a manuscript from 1797. The name of this hat or headdress literally translates to "horn hider." The horn-hider story is described as colloquial and its origin is unknown. The Shinto bride is said to be in an interval of transformation. She is cocooned in a white hat and white kimono. When she emerges she will be revealed as a proper Japanese adult woman.¹⁹ The tsunokakuchi and entire wedding costume capture the essence of a garment's ability to hide, disguise and conceal imperfections. "To be veiled is, to some degree, to be hidden. And right there we have a condition of both great attraction and great repulsion."²⁰

In works such as *Omissions* and *My Body at Home*, the notion of disguising or camouflaging references such veiling practices as the Japanese tsunokakuchi. The two pieces have another thing in common with the tsunokakuchi: the unwanted element that is supposed to be hidden is invisible. The exterior surface becomes a symbol of what would or could or is there, but cannot be seen or held onto. Apparent absence and emptiness are exposed.

¹⁹ Teresa A. Heiner, "Shinto Weddings, Samurai Bride: Inventing Tradition and Fashioning Identity in the Rituals of Bridal Dress in Japan" (doctoral dissertation, Pittsburgh University, 1997), 123-4.

²⁰ Jennifer Heath, introduction to *The Veil*, ed. Jennifer Heath (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008) 6.

My friend and neighbor Hana is from Libya. Hana is writing her dissertation to receive her PhD in microbiology. She tells me about her daughter, who is only 12, who has decided to begin wearing hijab. The usual age is 18, but Hana explains that her daughter knew that the other kids at her school saw her as a good person and she wanted them to know that good people can wear hijab. Hana is proud of her daughter's tenacity but also aware of the difficulties it may bring at her young age. Many Muslim women see the hijab as a veil that protects and covers but is not meant to hide, or create sexual intrigue.²¹ The veil is used as a means for "shaping the self and behavior."²² In contrast to the Indian chunni and tsunokakuchi of Japan, the hijab represents separation from the outside world in order to develop pious inner expression.²³

"As much as the veil is fabric or an article of clothing, it is also a concept."²⁴ While it can be compared to masks and other forms of covering, the veil is unique in several ways. It is almost exclusively a female-gendered garment that creates a female-centric space. In each scenario of veiling, the consideration of what is seen and not seen is present but takes on different forms. Sometimes nothing physical is hidden and the significance is the result of blending cultural and/or religious symbols over time.

While my work has been influenced by my time in bridal-wear shops, and by the cultural diversity of my neighborhood, the end result is a concept that "shape-shifts"²⁵ as I need them to.

²¹ Ana-Mari Almila, introduction to *The Routledge International Handbook for Veils and Veiling Practices*, ed. Ana-Mari Almila and David Inglis (New York: Routledge, 2018), 11.

²² Ana-Mari Almila, introduction to *The Routledge International Handbook for Veils and Veiling Practices*, ed. Ana-Mari Almila and David Inglis (New York: Routledge, 2018), 12.

²³ Marianne Kamp and Noor Borbieva, "Veiling and unveiling in Central Asia: Beliefs and practices, tradition and modernity," in *The Routledge International Handbook for Veils and Veiling Practices*, ed. Ana-Marie Almila and David Inglis (New York: Routledge, 2018), 91.

²⁴ Jennifer Heath, introduction to *The Veil*, ed. Jennifer Heath (Berkley: University of California Press, 2008), 3.

²⁵ Mohja Kahf, "From Her Royal Body the Robe Was Removed," in *The Veil*, ed. Jennifer Heath (Berkley: University of California Press, 2008), 40.

I explore the healthy and detrimental aspects of veiling without judgement or blame. At times, repression, denial, and overcompensation become a veil that blurs vision and separates psyche and body. Whether or not there is someone or something to blame does not change the reality of the cycle of healing that may be repeated several times. In my case, the symbolic veil is a tool that is both friend and foe. I keep the borders of this internal veil in my peripheral vision to remember that it is there.

PART IV: Analysis of Themes through Comparison

In this body of work, I record scars and their implied stories. I celebrate the ubiquity of scars and the permanence of their marks on the body and the mind. I examine the desire to reveal or disguise scarring. I notice relationships between the timelines of healing in the body and in the psyche.

Through repetition of form and pattern, the circular time-experience of healing and re-growth is emphasized. Spots, imperfections and awkward additions capture physical and emotional responses of regeneration. Re-growth takes the form of additions to surfaces or objects that lack full integration. These additions represent overcompensation for vulnerabilities.

My weavings are made of very fine silk thread and woven on a loom in satin weave. As in any woven textile, the satin weave warp is a series of yarns that creates the vertical structure of the weaving. Weft yarns build horizontally as they intersect the warp at perpendicular angles. Within the satin weave structure, I develop pattern with discontinuous weft, a classic tapestry technique. It provides me with the control needed to create sections of open work or excessively stuffed, protruding areas.

In the case of *Omissions*, the weaving was taken off the loom exactly as it appears now. Meaning, I did not remove or manipulate threads after weaving. This piece was intentionally woven with uneven surfaces that alternate between very open grids, revealing warp threads, and tightly packed sections, where weft yarns completely cover the warp in traditional tapestry form. By weaving the fabric in this way, I have avoided utilizing subtraction as a tool for pattern, implied distress and space

We could say that the line on the blanket exists not as a composite of the threads of which it is made, but an ordered system of differences among them. Taken together, however, these differences add up to something positive, namely the perception of a continuous line on a coherent surface...Nevertheless the line formed on a woven surface as it is built up from threads is in reality quite unlike a line that is drawn on a surface that already exists.²⁶

I chose to weave the cloth with embedded imperfections that simulate a threadbare antique.

While I could have pulled threads from a thrift-store cloth and achieved a similar effect, weaving the work more accurately addresses my conceptual motivations. Pulling threads is symbolic of an imposing action on a complete object. Purposefully weaving the cloth “incorrectly”, implies that an object (like a person) is formed with and through mistakes. Imposed actions or experiences do compromise objects and people. However, the collaboration between the predisposed nature and the forming of the brain through nurture is a slower process. Together, these processes build the wide-open chasms of vulnerability and tightly packed mounds of shame and secrets in the weavings and the psyche.

Lenore Tawney used open work and Peruvian gauze methods to capture light “...both as a visual and symbolic force” in her weavings.²⁷ “Repeatedly, an ambiguous union of the tangible and the fleeting extends Tawney’s work beyond familiar boundaries.”²⁸ In Tawney’s weavings, individual threads act as drawn lines that cast intricate shadows. Many of the pieces worked in gauze technique take a gestural or undulating form that appears figurative and sculptural. While their sizes vary, the varieties of shapes that cinch inward and expand back out seem intimate in their reference to human silhouettes.

²⁶ Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 64.

²⁷ Katherine Kuh, introduction to *Lenore Tawney*, ed. Kathleen Nugent Mangan (New York: American Craft Museum, 1990) 11.

²⁸ Ibid.

Long shapes, left unwoven to expose warp yarns, amorously appear to float across my weaving *Omissions*. Through repetition and composition, the unwoven shapes become significant. In earlier works of a similar nature, color and subtle structure choices gave the weavings a delicate and beautiful impact. *Omissions* is emotively heavier. Its form is solemn in structure and color. In black monochrome, the piece suggests quiet mournfulness. While the unwoven shapes in this work are significant, they are not necessarily beautiful or ugly. I mean to represent the imperfections of the cloth as emotionally weighty without directing viewers toward judgements of good or bad. The work considers what is not known and what is not said. It acknowledges the unspeakables that linger.

Artist Anne Wilson also implies the private and familial. She leaves viewers with forms and concepts that sit in limbo between something known and unknown. In some pieces, holes emphasized with layers of hair become focal points. The holes lead nowhere. Hairs underline the presence of the holes yet; lead the eye back to masses of hairs elsewhere on the work. Within each composition, asymmetrical balance is achieved through the placement of details that develop high-contrast color effects and line qualities.

Like the holes in Wilson's work, gaps, slits and exposed warp yarns become the focal points of my weaving, *Omissions*. Intersections occur between systematic vertical slits and organic shapes of open work that seem to spread outward. Open areas emphasize the sturdy woven structure around them. The damask striping pattern mimics fabric for satin sheets or suit jackets. *Bandage* and *Optional Endings* 1-5 are also constructed with a satin damask striping. The title *Bandage* refers to the way the shape and color of this piece reference an Ace bandage. This bandage is a homemade one that appears pieced together. The exposed warp creates a raised scar-like surface and subtle color shifts in the warp give the piece a worn or tired look.

Old Growths relies on gravity, addition and, once again, repetition. The additions that are woven in are unavoidable waste from the weaving process. Skinny strips that could disappear into the gallery wall become prominent and meaningful through repetition and points of connection between strips. The work is minimal and unassuming. But within each strip, there is tightly packed tension. The bundles of loom waste that become supplementary filler alternately lie on top of and squeeze between other more methodically woven ground wefts.

Eva Hesse's hanging works seem to embody gravity even in apparent weightlessness. When observing works such as *Right After*, the relationships among the objects, the ceiling and the floor are confusing. Lightweight forms and materials become burdensome and droopy. Hesse captures the space and environments around her works through their positioned reference to the body. "Hesse...uses the frame...to contain the unbinding that is enacted precisely there, at the interface of the body and the surrounding environments."²⁹ The liminal qualities of her works are seen in their abilities to be light and heavy, familiar and uncanny, somber and neutral.

In *Old Growths*, nine black strips hang in parallel lines on the wall. Halfway down, the strips twist over each other, interrupting the straight lines they began in. The thin woven strips are very light, but convey weight through their slouching, intertwined postures. There is implied movement in the wefts that travel through the warp and onto the floor, and in the postures of the strips.

The title of this piece alludes to the name for virgin forests, such as the old-growth redwoods near my former home in Santa Cruz, California. Old-growth forests are beloved for reaching significant age without logging activity. In short, the trees are treasured for being old and left

²⁹ Mignon Nixon, "Eva Hesse Retrospective: A Note on Milieu," *October 104*, (2003): 9.

alone. This is the opposite of what a person “should” desire. In Western cultures, we “should” be young forever. We “should” be flawless forever. We “should” be pulled and prodded into perfection forever. Growth means progress, but growths can also signify ugliness and illness. This work considers the connection between these two conditions.

It is noted that some of Hesse’s works respond directly to Robert Morris’s article, “Anti Form.”³⁰ Especially near the end of her life, Hesse lamented the perfection of earlier works saying, “I would like to do a little more wrong at this point.”³¹ In pieces such as *Right After*, the open structure and gaps in the composition are often associated with traumatic displacement she went through as a child immigrating to the United States.³² A friend of Hesse notes, “I guess maybe it was because she had those voids in her life, gaps, and that physical presence of the material maybe gave those gaps a reality.”³³

In the psyche, continual re-surfacing of emotional scars interrupts logic and causes frustration. Like the loom waste in this work, old stories slide between and over the orchestration of a shiny, smooth, sophisticated life. The work is small in comparison to the space it occupies. Large spaces within the weavings draw attention to pressurized textile structures and surfaces, where the weft alternately appears mobile and contained. The leisurely interaction of intensely woven strips offers contradictions: qualities at once inconsequential and suffocating, delicate yet potentially deadly.

³⁰ Elisabeth Sussman, “Eva Hesse Sculpture 1968,” in *Eva Hesse: sculpture*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman and Fred Wasserman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 9.

³¹ Yve-Alain Bois, “Dumb,” in *Eva Hesse: sculpture*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman and Fred Wasserman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 27.

³² Mark Godfrey, “A String of Nots: Eva Hesse’s Hanging Sculpture,” in *Eva Hesse: sculpture*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman and Fred Wasserman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 50.

³³ Fred Wasserman, “Building a Childhood Memory: The Diaries of Eva Hesse’s Early Years,” in *Eva Hesse: sculpture*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman and Fred Wasserman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 101.

While the woven works address questions of the relationship of underlying structure to surface appearances, sewn relief and installation works consider the manipulation of surfaces.

Lightweight surfaces become heavy through layers of stained and painted fabric. *My Body at Home* and *My Body at Home II* convey the enveloping nature of seemingly superficial marks. By capturing the emotions that link loathing and attraction, the sewn relief and installation works engage the abject and the decorative. Layers of overlapping fabric alternately reveal and conceal what is or is not beneath the surface. “If the surface is the location of the body’s meaning, it is because that surface is invisible to the body itself.”³⁴

From a distance, the painted surfaces of the rope or intestine-like forms of *My Body at Home* resemble camouflage. At closer proximity, the patterning is reminiscent of petals or polka-dots. The ten forms that make up this wall installation are almost weightless; hung, not at eye level, but at a level convenient for a hand to place it on a hook. Transparency presents a kind of window that leads to nothing except another side of the surface. There is almost no weight to these hollow constructions. The pretty and delicate ropes hang in the suggestion of complacency. Patterning and color on the surface of *My Body at Home*, transitions from dark to light and back to dark. The result of color and pattern are abstractly decorative forms.

When Eva Hesse wrote about her work, she often used negation. She wrote, “I would like the work to be non-work...In its simplistic stand, it achieves its own identity. It is something, it is nothing.”³⁵ Mignon Nixon describes hollowness as “...the unknowability of the other and of the

³⁴ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 127.

³⁵ Elisabeth Sussman, “Eva Hesse Sculpture 1968,” in *Eva Hesse: sculpture*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman and Fred Wasserman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 9.

self,” and points to this quality in Hesse’s work, which “...alternates between filling in and hollowing[,] moves inexorably toward the hollow, or in Hesse’s terms, toward nothing.”³⁶

The forms in *My Body at Home* hover between bodily and utilitarian references. They appear simultaneously constricting and empty. Looping or coiling of each piece is representative of cyclical memories or marks that navigate seemingly hidden tunnels in the psyche. Thoughts, scars and memories that travel through these tunnels affect actions, feelings and patterns of thinking. And yet, the substance of what causes these affects, becomes difficult to pin down. When the core information evades discovery, the surface can act as a point of distraction from what is missing.

In *My Body at Home II* layers of painted fabric are pinned in a cross-section format at the corner intersection of two painted walls. The installation is made of overlapping fabrics with repeated circular motifs. Although the viewer can see behind the uppermost surface, even in places where the painted wall peeks through, it is apparent that this is just another surface, covering one layer with another layer, as if covering one scar with another scar.

In a piece where revealing plays a key role, the painted wall acts as one of several layers. Painting the wall affects the emotive quality of the space and develops an immersive bodily environment. The painted wall behind delicate fabrics adds weight and a stopping point for the piece. Fabric elements and the wall appear connected through color and proximity. Continuing color and pattern changes up the wall present an enveloping experience.

As with *My Body at Home*, from a distance *My Body at Home II* appears to be a decorative pattern. But petal-like forms also reference cells and are pinned to the wall with dark, unpolished

³⁶ Mignon Nixon, “Eva Hesse Retrospective: A Note on Milieu,” *October 104*, (2003): 9.

metal wire. The work is pointy and sharp as well as soft, delicate and sweet. The physical combination of comforting and discomfoting or abject objects can also be seen in Anne Wilson's *Feast*. In this work, she captures a "mutual dissolution between the abstract and the erotic..."³⁷ Each hair and fiber appears intentionally placed in a peculiarly sexual staging of objects. In *My Body at Home II*, the fabric forms are each pinned, but the pins extend far beyond the wall. The hanging devices suggest a temporary nature not unlike the hairs in Wilson's work. The pins also create a physical boundary within the expanse of fabric layers.

My Body at Home II is soft sculpture. Its scale is dependent on the wall where it is installed. As the viewer enters the corner where this piece is installed, the repeated patterns fill their peripheral vision. They are invited to sit on a stool facing the corner. As a common space for time-outs and shame, the corner emphasizes the boundary between privacy and isolation. Sectioned off in the corner, it acts as a sort of sneak-peek into what could be on the other side of the wall, under the skin or on top of the skin. The colors alternate between skin and flesh tones to displace the viewer's frame of reference.

Weightless forms become heavy through repeated layers of applied fabric and color. The decorative nature of this repetition distracts from the constriction of the clustered corner. Variation in the pinned forms blends patterns that are cellular, floral or sexual and moves the eye from the microcosms of individual shapes to the macrocosm of the entire work. In this piece

³⁷ Anne Wilson, Hattie Gordon and Tim Porges, *Anne Wilson* (Winchester: Telos Art Publishing, 2001), 18.

elements hide other portions of neighboring patterns. When speaking about repetition in her work, Wilson said, “Chaos can be structured as non-chaos.”³⁸

Repetition of a form can be visually pleasing even when, at closer observation, its emotive qualities are disconcerting. In a way, repetition has a blinding effective on the viewer. The eye sees enough similarity to believe it can fill in the blanks without actually continuing to look. And yet, when the viewer stays, they may find subtleties that immerse them in the essential information within this repetition.

³⁸ Fred Wasserman, “Building a Childhood Memory: The Diaries of Eva Hesse’s Early Years,” in *Eva Hesse:sculpture*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman and Fred Wasserman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 97.

CONCLUSION

“Not only our memories but the things we have forgotten are housed...Our soul is an abode and by remembering houses and rooms we learn to abide within ourselves.”³⁹

The weavings *Omissions*, *Old Growths*, *Optional Endings 1-5*, *Bandage* as well as the soft sculptures *My Body at Home* and *My Body at Home II* comprise my thesis body of work. The works embody investigations of structural and superficial scars, and the ways that they are hidden or revealed in weavings, textile forms and transformed spaces. These investigations embody vast emotions that lie in the finest details of events or objects.

Abstract forms and decorative surfaces are caught in overarching and microcosmic repetitions of veiling. Dualities are emphasized in the repetitions within this body of work and in the relationship between each piece: simultaneously heavy and light, dark and light, soft and sharp, comforting and unsettling. Through the symbolic qualities of cloth and allusions to skin, these works refer to both the body and the psyche in scarring, healing and re-growth.

³⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Spaces*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), xxxvii.

FIGURES



Figure 1 *Omissions*, handwoven silk yarn, acid dye 24"x43" 2017



Figure 2 *Old Growths*, handwoven silk yarn, acid dye, loom waste, 6'x 4' (installed), 2017



Figure 3 *Optional Endings 1-5*, handwoven silk yarn, rust dye, acid dye, 24"x44", 2017



Figure 4 *Bandage*, handwoven silk yarn, rust dye, acid dye, 4"x44", 2017



Figure 5 *My Body at Home*, silk organza, pigment dye, thread, 3'x 9' (installed), 2017

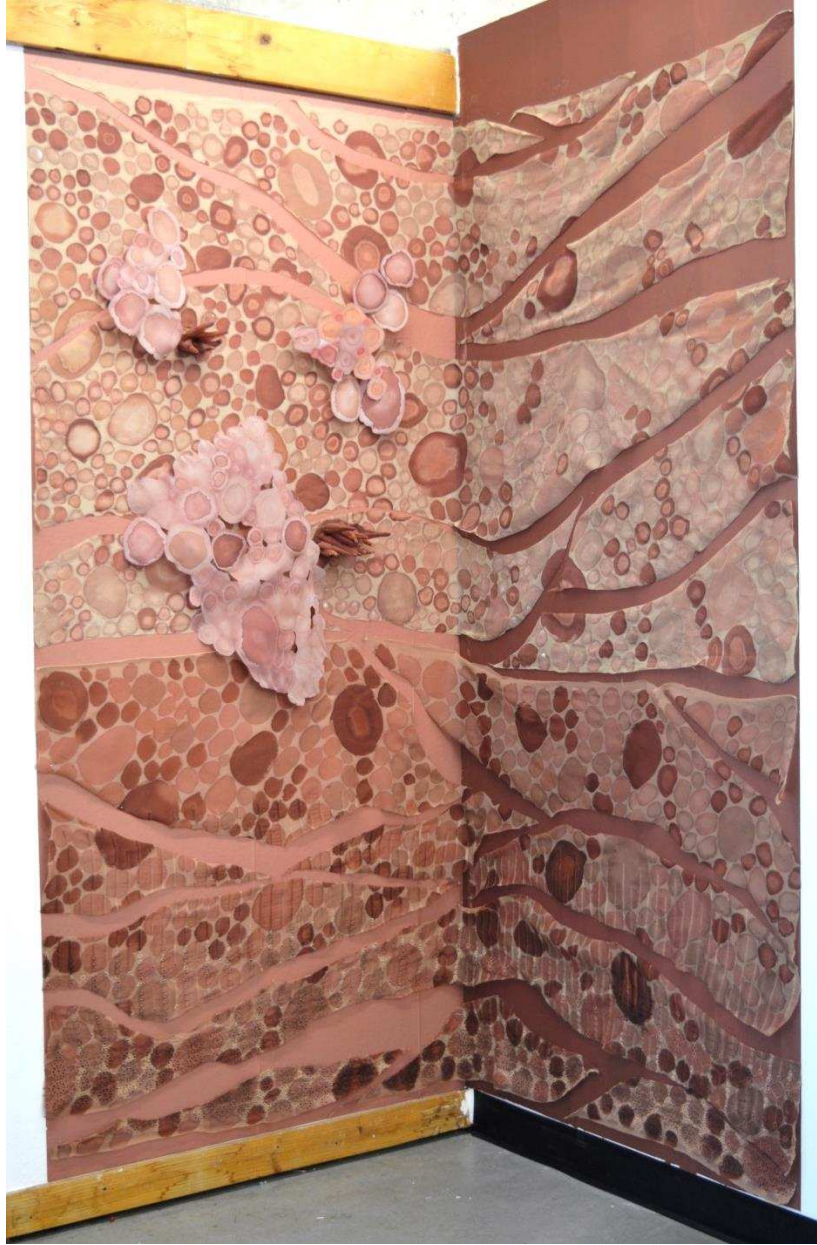


Figure 6 *My Body at Home II*, found fabrics, pigment dye, brazilwood dye, piano wire, thread,
7'x 5' 2018

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