

THESIS

FORMS OF TRANSFORMATION

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Christy Nelson

Department of Art and Art History

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Advisor: Erika Osborne

Sanam Emami
Paul Flippen
Bryan Dik

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ABSTRACT

FORMS OF TRANSFORMATION

I find used, soiled, discarded, often familial objects and using art agents like encaustic, stretcher frames, and pigment, I change them into new things. This resonates with Bill Brown's Thing Theory which deals with human-object interaction and the shift in perception of an "object" to a "thing." Some of my newly recreated "things" expose holes or scars that can be closed and opened similarly to a wound that is perpetually re-opening and re-healing. Rachel Sussman, Kiki Smith and Louise Bourgeois are three artists who also deal with differing types of healing in their art. Though there are some similarities in how we approach repair, my work revels in the process of tangibly redeeming salvaged forms and freezing them in a moment of restoration. This experience is empowering to me, as it provides a form of therapy and is often a magical interaction. Beyond the symbiotic interaction of the found-objects compelling me to remake them and the process-based catharsis they in turn offer me, I seek to engage the audience with these pieces. As the viewer sees the transformed artworks, I remind them that renewal is possible and ask them to be active participants in the process.

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I would be remiss not to thank the office staff and Wold staff for all of the many day in and day out answers, keys, lighting help, formatting and computer help and all the other things that made the ins and outs of school come out right-side up. Thanks again!

To the community of artists I have found during my time here, thank you, for basically understanding how my brain works—and just getting it.

DEDICATION

To Cameron, who has unfalteringly joined me in this (and every) endeavor of my life. Thank you for being with me and for me on my permanent quest for transformation and healing.

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PART I : THEORY

Being the youngest of seven children, in a single parent household, living below the poverty level in Mississippi shaped my relationship with objects. Clothes were passed down from child to child, rips were mended, and the repair of objects was more likely than replacement. My childhood was not safe nor stable. My family relocated often. Because of this uncertainty, the consistency of my grandparents' farm became a haven for me during our long summer visits and our Christmas stays. Many of the materials I use in my art are found-objects that I have since inherited or gleaned from their estate. This method of salvage and the domestic nature of my materials could place my work within the context of the feminist art of the mid to late 1900s. Indeed Lucy Lippard's 1973 description of the movement does seem to describe my work:

... a uniform density, or overall texture, often sensuously tactile and repetitive or detailed to the point of obsession; the preponderance of circular forms, central focus, inner space (sometimes contradicting the first aspect); a ubiquitous linear 'bag' or parabolic form that turns in on itself; layers, or strata, or veils; an indefinable looseness or flexibility of handling; windows; autobiographical content; animals; a certain kind of fragmentation; a new fondness for the pinks and pastels and ephemeral cloud colors that used to be tabu (sic) unless a woman wanted to be accused of making 'feminine' art. ¹

Although my work exhibits many of the traits described by Lippard, I tend to gravitate towards the more recent commentary of Sarah Worth: "there is no clear similarity among all women's art. The different kind of art men and women produce is less significant than the recognition that they have had different kinds of experience in response to art, because of the social definition of gender." Louise Bourgeois echoes

¹ Lucy Lippard, "Louise Bourgeois: From the Inside Out," *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York, NY: Dutton, 1976), 249.

the sentiment in her statement: "There is no feminist aesthetic. Absolutely not! There is a psychological content. But it is not because I am a woman that I work the way I do. It is because of the experiences I have gone through. The women got together not because they had things in common but because they lacked things—they were treated the same way."² Because of my past, I relate on a tragic level to objects' experiences of being used, broken, and neglected. The kinship I feel for disregarded things combined with the existential, transformative quality of art makes Bill Brown's Thing Theory a more compelling ideology to explore when investigating my work. Thing Theory is a branch of critical theory that dissects human-object interactions. The found objects I use might at first glance appear to be trash: stained napkins, ripped bedding or disassociated zippers. For me, however, these materials hold a palpable power. As Brown writes in his essay "Thing Theory":

We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the window gets filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relationship to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation. As they circulate through our lives, we look through objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture - above all, what they disclose about us), but we only catch a glimpse of things.³

Brown's ideas harken back to the German philosopher Martin Heidegger's distinction between objects and things, which proposes that an object becomes a thing when it no longer serves its usual task. When an object breaks down, it loses its prior expectations and is now accessible in new ways. This idea directly correlates to how I use no longer

² Lippard, "Louise," 249.

³ Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry*, Volume 28, no. 1 (Autumn 2001): 4.

functioning objects and make their new "thingness" into art. Opening new worlds is Heidegger's defined function of the self-sufficient piece of art. So, perhaps my purpose is intrinsic to the nature of art itself: "The setting up of a world and the setting forth of earth are two essential features in the work-being of the work."⁴ I think it is a plausible argument that opening a new world of hope is the functionality I want to maintain. I understand art to be this elevation of matter through a creative action that reveals a new idea or a reborn sensibility. This Heideggerian concept of materials and their productive strife is manifest in my media. My supplies exist inherently as themselves, a stained napkin or an old blanket, in the same way that paint in a tube is not yet a painting. However, once these materials are combined in my work, while they still maintain their original materiality, they now function chiefly as art – to create a new world of understanding. Beyond the found-objects, I also use encaustic which is a combination of beeswax and resin. The tactile and visceral nature of this media is part of the content of my work, while also maintaining its materiality on the surface of a piece. I employ the physicality of encaustic to reinforce my abstractions. This engagement with the materiality of encaustic is part of the way I interact with the productive strife that is inherent to painting and its ability to create new worlds.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 173.

PART II : CONTEXT

Rachel Sussman is a contemporary artist who relies on this same type of material re-contextualization to call attention to the impending doom of the planet. In her series, *The Oldest Living Things in The World*, she deals with concerns of healing in conjunction with the environment. By highlighting the beauty of these living organisms through digital reproduction, she creates a new appreciation and awareness of what we will lose if we do not preserve it. In her series *Sidewalk Kintsukuroi*, Sussman emphasizes the beauty of repair. "Cracks represent something in need of attention, and the surfaces we walk, bike, and drive over are usually overlooked until they're in truly critical condition. By gilding them, it's a way to see what's around us with fresh eyes and to celebrate perseverance."⁵ Kintsukuroi is the Japanese art of "repairing broken pottery with lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. As a philosophy, it treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise."⁶ Sussman's gilded golden medium communicates her content and stands as a metaphor for her environmental and scientific art that attempts to get us to pay attention before it is too late. There is a similar investment of care and demand for urgency in my work. My labor of stitching in *Undone* (Fig. 1) uses the language of mending, while also altering the form of the fabrics. Choosing tattered and stained pieces to elevate through the making process reinforces the aspect of Kintsukuroi and

⁵Allison Meier, "An Artist Mends Cracks in the Sidewalk with Gold," Hyperallergic, last modified February 16, 2017, <https://hyperallergic.com/358112/sidewalk-kintsukuroi-rachel-sussman/>.

⁶"Kintsugi," Wikipedia, last modified February 18, 2019, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kintsugi>.

its value of the history of objects. Sussman addresses the non-permanence of her methods of repair saying, "Over time, even the repairs will be destroyed, they will be walked on and scuffed, and eventually overwritten with something else. Such is the transient nature of everything in the universe."⁷ This ongoing need for repair is something that is important in my work.

The effects of trauma deeply permeate those who survive wounding situations, and these repercussions do not fade over time.⁸ To heal from traumatic events occurring early in life, it often takes a life's work or, as Dr. Dan Allender explains: the fabric of life will need to be unraveled piece by piece in order to be rewoven.⁹ In *Uncovered* (Fig. 2), *Unzipped* (Fig. 3), and *Undone*, the ability for zippers to be zipped, unzipped, and re-zipped speaks to the perpetual cycle of seeking closure. The bodily nature of my unsafe childhood directs my work to be not just about ongoing repair or salvage but also healing in relation to the human body.

The element of bodily harm is less present in Sussman's work, but it comes through clearly in Kiki Smith's early work. Smith's work from the 1980s deals primarily with ideas of body and illness. Of her work, she said in an interview with Carlo McCormick: "I remember reading this article someone wrote about me and realizing how two of the main systems I was working on were systems that were weak in my body. I thought it was interesting that, in the end, what I was doing was a kind of self-healing, a building or manifesting of those parts of my body that are inherently weak.

⁷ Meier, "An Artist."

⁸ Savneet Talwar, "Accessing traumatic memory through art making: An art therapy trauma protocol (ATTP)," *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 34, no. 1 (2007): 23, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2006.09.001>.

⁹ Dan Allender, *The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse: Revised and Updated* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1995), 44.

Maybe I could go to a doctor instead."¹⁰ Her material choices are tactile and fragile.

Paper-maché and beeswax are used to hold the vulnerable aspect of the human form.

I really like making things delicate. I guess you could call them "girls' materials;" but they're just things that are associated with girls: soft materials like paper-maché...I like that quality of fragility. In making work that's about the body, playing with the indestructibility of life, where life is this ferocious force that keeps propelling us; at the same time, it's also about how you can just pierce it and it dies.¹¹

The physical harm I experienced in my life led to the body becoming a significant theme in my work. I explored representing bodily harm in some of my earlier pieces, such as the painting *Gashes* (Fig. 4). For this work, I used a fair, skin-toned encaustic pour and carved into it – literally gashing or piercing the material as it lay on the wooden substrate. I soon realized that the result was too evocative of gouged flesh to permit any read of protection or veiling that I also wanted my work to hold. Smith's paper-maché and beeswax works allow for the vulnerable aspect of the human form, without being overly visceral.

Over time, I was able to find a similar quality in my own work to that of Smith's through the process of dipping fabric scraps into encaustic and reforming them as they cooled. The resulting work created a skin-like surface that functioned to reference the body in a less literal and more emotive way. For example, *Uncovered*, employs a medium, flesh-tone palette, with an overall shape and scale suggestive of the female form. *Unzipped*, made out of a mattress cover, also holds connotations of an intimate, protective covering that feels related to the body, even though it is blue instead of a flesh tone. These pieces' irregular edges have more freedom to express emotion,

¹⁰ Kiki Smith, "Kiki Smith," interviewed by Carlo McCormick, *Journal of Contemporary Art*, <http://www.jca-online.com/ksmith.html>.

¹¹ Smith, interview.

fragility and vulnerability than the former works bound to a square or rectangular substrate.

Bodily harm causes one to be vulnerable and fragile. Physical healing can take time and often leaves scars behind. The psychological harm that one experiences as a result of bodily harm can leave enduring damage and requires life-long processing times. The psychological damage Louise Bourgeois experienced as a child impacted her artistic practice and shaped her desire to understand and restore her own psyche. From a young age, Bourgeois' father teased her mercilessly for not being the son he had wanted (and eventually got). He did this at dinner parties, making loud prolonged jokes about her not having a penis. This oversexualized environment caused trauma to young Bourgeois to the point that as an adult she wrote in her piece *Child Abuse*, "Everything I do was inspired by my early life."¹² To deal with the childhood trauma inflicted by her father, and the complexity of her grief over her father's death, she began psychoanalysis in 1951. Bourgeois relished in the self-knowledge these sessions provided her and underwent analysis as often as four times a week. Even after thirty years of treatment, she carried her demons and her compulsive need to create. "I am my work," she declared. "I am not what I am as a person."¹³ Even though she invested extensive time and money in these therapy sessions for much of her adult life, Bourgeois ultimately stated in her written piece *Freud's Toys*: "The truth is that Freud did nothing for artists, or for the artist's problem, the artist's torment – to be an artist

¹² Louise Bourgeois, *Deconstruction of the Father/Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews 1923-1997*, ed. Marie Laure Bernadac and Hans-Ulrich Obrist (London: Violette Editions, 1998) 133.

¹³ The Art Story, "Louise Bourgeois," accessed November 24, 2017, <http://www.theartstory.org/artist-bourgeois-louise.htm>.

involves some suffering. That's why artists repeat themselves – because they have no access to a cure."¹⁴ Freud also agreed with this – confessing in his essay *Dostoevsky and Parricide* (1926): "Before the problem of the creative artist, psychoanalysis must lay down its arms."¹⁵ Loose pages of writings found in Bourgeois apartment the year of her death, brought to light an intriguing component to the question of the success of her treatments.¹⁶ According to these loose pages, "the cure" would have, more than likely, endangered Bourgeois artistic practice. Her therapist's goal, she well understood, was to allay her phobias and mute her aggression: to flatten, in short, her emotional highs and lows onto the dulled plane of "acceptable femininity." Conformity, however, contravened the outsider edge so critical to Bourgeois' artistic vision, which reveled in messy, uncontrollable forms and hinged on a manic, eruptive sort of creativity. To be cured was to relinquish her aspirations to artistic greatness: a contradiction that Bourgeois surely realized.¹⁷ Whether Bourgeois was actually seeking psychological peace or if she was instead looking for artistic fodder, her artistic practice was often congruent with her therapy.

Bourgeois used art as her parallel form of psychoanalysis, providing unique access to her unconscious, as well as a kind of emotional release. Her writings *The*

¹⁴ Bourgeois, *Deconstruction*, 190.

¹⁵ Christopher Turner, "Analysing (sic) Louise Bourgeois: art, therapy and Freud," last modified April 6, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/apr/06/louise-bourgeois-freud>.

¹⁶ Even though the analysis was not wholly effective in her view, she did see it as a form of metamorphosis—though somewhat of a dark metamorphosis..."promising the transformation of seething misery into what Freud described as 'common unhappiness.'" "A maggot," Bourgeois wrote, "is actually a symbol of resurrection." See Turner, "Analysing."

¹⁷ Courtney Fiske, "Louise Bourgeois: The Return of the Repressed," last modified September 3, 2012, https://brooklynrail.org/2012/09/art_books/louise-bourgeois-the-return-of-the-repressed.

Return of the Repressed, establish the crucial role played by psychoanalysis in Bourgeois' artistic development, and their richness of detail and emotional range confirm Lucy Lippard's observation that "rarely has an abstract art been so directly and honestly informed by its maker's psyche."¹⁸ For Bourgeois, "Art [was] a guarantee of [her] sanity."¹⁹ Unlike Bourgeois and Smith, I am not seeking a cure in my artistic practice. I use my creative process as a way to access levels of healing, knowing that there are many (possibly infinite) layers of the wounds to my being. Each step of healing gives me a new amount of growth and purpose, not just in my art, but also my life.

It was a homework assignment from an Emotion-Focused Therapy session that connected my passion for creating with struggling through my deepest wounds. I was asked to make an artwork about the feeling of safety and *Familiar Roads I* (Fig. 5), and *Familiar Roads II* (Fig. 6) were the resulting works. In these two paintings, I used gouache paint to illustrate pattern imagery from my grandmother's quilts and then painted them as if overlaid on shapes from photographs taken on road trips with my husband. These pieces brought a level of satisfaction in making that I had not previously experienced. In more recent years, my materials have shifted from representing and depicting items of significance through paint, to using the found-objects directly. I still use art agents such as encaustic or stretcher frames in my practice, but the authenticity of the biographical materials has become a pivotal part of the content in my work. *Disposable* (Fig. 7) references this sincerity through the utilization of used and discarded paper towels. The materials I use have a similar and

¹⁸Philip Larratt-Smith, "Introduction: Sculpture as Symptom," Pora, accessed November 30, 2017, <http://proa.org/eng/exhibition-louise-bourgeois-textos.php>.

¹⁹Turner, "Analysing."

related story to my own, and through their recreation, I feel heard (while still protected) by letting them tell their stories rather than my own. In this symbiotic way, I give them voices, and in return, they speak for me.

PART III : PROCESS

Beyond feeling heard, the act of making is transformative for me. My work, on a personal level, liberates my soul from old wounds. Sometimes it allows me to transform my memories of an unsafe childhood into a visual haven of comfort and security. At other times it allows me to take an immeasurable emotion or memory and turn it into a qualifiable yet limited representation, which in turn gives me power over it. I ponder over ideas in my head for a season, visualizing them in different forms. Sometimes I make several rounds of edits just in the sketching and imagining stage. Once I come to a juncture that I cannot decipher conceptually, I begin to work with the physical materials. In a way, I am problem-solving, without knowing the specific problem, or if there is even a solution. For me, this "hands-on phase" is similar to play therapy.

While the experience of play does not read in my work, nor is it intended to, it is essential to my transformation process. At present, art therapy and play therapy are used primarily with children to access emotions in a non-invasive manner. Although I am an adult, I too process more effectively through physical actions. I find that my creative process does "allow for free expression of feelings and events without the consequence of societal stigmatization."²⁰ This experience can also provide the opportunity for me to release the feelings of shame associated with past abuse and serve as a means of internal conflict resolution. I use play therapy to safely work through 'emotional memories,' thus relieving anxieties and fears through a stabilizing experience in a non-threatening environment – my studio.²¹

²⁰ Glover, "Play," 284.

²¹ Glover, "Play," 284.

I lose myself in the materials I work with and in how their textures, shapes, and colors interact. I do not approach these supplies with the intent for them to heal; I merely come to them in order to enter their world for a time. By immersing myself in the materials, I find I am able to dance in the realm where past and future do not exist. The immersion in the present, tactile "artland" fills all sensory and mental capacity. Henry Miller's quote from *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch* describes the way painting feels for me: "Whenever I sit down to paint I feel happy, as I feel my way along I whistle and hum and sing and shout. Sometimes I put down the brush and do a jig. I talk to myself too, as I paint. Aloud. (To encourage myself, I suppose.) Yes, I talk a blue streak. Crazy talk I mean. Friends have often said to me: 'I like to drop in on you when you're painting, you make me feel good.'"²² This joyful description captures my own delight in "playing" with paint and materials.

Another influential painter who valued this concept of play is Paul Klee. Klee, a Swiss-born artist associated with Expressionists and the Bauhaus School, believed in the potential of play to access other worlds or levels of authenticity. He invested extensive time documenting and understanding his son Felix's developmental stages, and in Klee's *Creative Credo* he emphasized play and fantasy as an art-making tool.²³ Klee's visual content is often whimsical in a child-like way that reinforces his connection and belief in play as process. In her paper "Childhood, Play and Fantasy as Spiritual Revelation in the Work of Paul Klee," Janine Margaret Ray argues that Klee believed in

²² Henry Miller, *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch* (New York: New Directions Publishing Company 1957) 88.

²³ Janine Margaret Ray, "Childhood, play and fantasy as spiritual revelation in the work of Paul Klee" (MA Diss., Carleton University, 2011), 79, <https://doi.org/10.22215/etd/2011-09244>.

the ability of play and magical fantasy to open new worlds that had been otherwise inaccessible to adults.²⁴ I agree with her research and would say I have found the same connection between play as process and the feeling of magic I experience while making.

I find this component of magic akin to Adorno's "primacy of experience." Martin Hielscher's summary captures this magic when he says:

The critical, deeply anti-systematical aspect of Adorno's philosophy...implies that there is a 'primacy of experience,' of an opaque, somatic, blind quality that exists before the philosophical thought, before the discourse of language, but that sets everything in motion—something that is innovated in the sudden shutter (sic), in love, in a momentary apparition of natural beauty, in bliss and the epiphanies of art, and lost at the same time we try to identify it, which efface any conceptual approach and at the same time calls for it. But it [this primacy] suspends concepts, if one remains true to it, in the sense that each theory can be falsified by what it points at...²⁵

This poetic description captures the magic of art-making for me. I use the word magic because as Adorno depicts, when you try to identify it, it vanishes. Although this primacy is mysterious, it is possible to encounter in the creative experience. Or as Adorno says: "Art is the ever-broken promise of happiness. In order to step out of the suffocating realms of the given and to actually prepare oneself for the encounter with the other, one must know that this other will not appear without a dislocation of the self."²⁶ This shift is not something that can be held or "taken home as in consumerist ideology," it is fleeting.²⁷ Adorno's ideas are embedded in my making, though I do not label things the same way. When people who know my plans for a piece before I start it

²⁴ Ray, "Childhood," 90.

²⁵ Martin Hielscher, "Adorno and Aesthetic Theory," [transcription PDF], 2009, <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/martin-hielscher/videos/>.

²⁶ Hielscher, "Adorno."

²⁷ Hielscher, "Adorno."

see the deviation from those plans and ask why, I usually say "Oh...well, the painting told me not to." The sentiment of this statement is manifest in the process of making *Green Gashes* (Fig. 8) and *Green Serenity* (Fig.9). Both of these pieces were intended to have a gashed (albeit delicately ruffled) mark through the otherwise calm encaustic, exposing the metallic surfaces below. *Green Gashes* held true to my original intention. However, when I was making *Green Serenity* there was a palpable sensation of something outside myself inserting itself into the process and informing me first, not to gash the first poured surface and second, not to do another color pour that was meant to obscure the background surface entirely before receiving its own mark. In this way, I resonate with Ezra Shales' concept of empathy for materials. He uses the example of Louis Kahn's desire to involve the materials in the decision process saying: "Kahn suggested that his fellow architects ask bricks what they want to become, he was arguing for more listening and less doctrine: 'You say to a brick, 'What do you want, brick?' And brick says to you, 'I like an arch'.'"²⁸ For me, it is more of a whispered involvement than a clear statement, but the synergistic setting of the creative process does allow the materials to overrule my plans and collaborate with me.

The mutually beneficial relationship of the maker and materials is present in Martin Hielscher's description of Adorno's thought:

Adorno's understanding of the creative process is not that the subject expresses itself in art, but that the subject is able to throw itself away for the sake of the logic of the material itself and thus it can experience a liberation from itself, a "slight displacement"... But only a strong educated subject, being aware of itself, can give itself up to the demands of the material and the tendencies of the artwork itself. This would be a subject-object relationship where the subject isn't dominating anymore, but [what dominates is] the inner ratio of the object, which – again - needs the subject to be formed.²⁹

²⁸ Ezra Shales, *The Shape of Craft* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018), 22.

²⁹ Hielscher, "Adorno."

I have experienced this same "slight displacement." Because the transformation through making, along with the experience of collaborating with the material is paramount to me, the resulting art is a by-product of the process. Working this way, it is inevitable that some works are more successful than others in their finished state.

Although my work does not visually carry the aspect of play and magic that is imperative for me in my process, the power of "things" is elevated in this body of work. The method of transforming scraps of material and beeswax into significant objects is part of the work's meaning. This process is as important as each object's read with their individual specific histories. Not only do the particular objects hold a personal narrative – a stained sheet, for example, becoming reminiscent of bodies present and absent – but they also contain the persistence of their newfound agency and presence (Fig. 10). These pieces are no longer discarded objects but now are elevated things that haunt the space as they float above the floor, evoking relationships to the viewer's own body, asking for further examination. The redemptive nature – taking discarded objects and changing them into something of significance – of my overall process is vital to the work's meaning. The renewed value of each object is not only proved through my investment of materials and time, but also in the act of putting them on a wall in a place of display and inviting them to be seen.

PART IV : ENGAGEMENT

Consciously, I chose to display these works with ample wall space framing each piece. By allowing the work to float in its own microcosm, I feel that their individuality and unique histories are highlighted. The work's content of suffering and hope is universal and speaks to the overall human condition. After their initial interaction with me in the creative process these pieces, without an audience, would exist as stagnant objects on a wall. In the same way that a static score of music changes a practicing musician or a philosopher rereading a text can further enlightenment and alter his thoughts; seeing changes the seer. In his book, *The Object Stares Back*, James Elkin says "ultimately seeing alters the thing that is seen and transforms the seer. Seeing is metamorphosis, not mechanism."³⁰ This awareness empowers me to appreciate the potential of art to be a universal agent of change whenever it is viewed.

Although I intend for my work to have broad appeal, I believe it holds specific power for those who are wounded or suffering. As a victim of such suffering, I can relate to others who have experienced something similar. Like me, survivor populations often lack the vocabulary to express what they are feeling. In fact, trauma is stored in the limbic system which cannot even be fully accessed through verbal cognitive function.³¹ Moreover, survivors fear that in speaking the words they will relive the events that led to the pain. By subtly, or not so subtly, creating an opening for conversation, art allows my voice to enter a dialogue that is often too hard to join with actual words. This entry

³⁰James Elkins, *Just Looking* in *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 11.

³¹ Talwar, "Accessing," 24.

defeats the dynamic of victim silencing and enables me to engage in a dialog with the audience. This communication might not be a straightforward one, but I think it is my faith in the essence of art that encourages me to try to translate the hope of healing and growth to others. I offer my artwork as a visual and experiential interaction to increase the capacity for empathy toward individuals who have survived wounds, especially those that work diligently for a lifetime in order to heal.³²

³² Allender, "The wounded," 159.

PART V : CONCLUSION

In the following statement Noreen Glover briefly summarizes how I relate to art:

“Art is able to prompt deep and personal emotional reactions in the viewer because it beckons for a further connection between the viewer, the artist, and the artwork; yet the artwork itself allows the viewer safety from the emotional intensity it provokes.”³³ In the same way that I offer new worlds to the objects themselves, the act of creating provides new perspectives to others. These pieces are a physical manifestation of the hope that enables me to persevere when the realities of being a wounded person in a broken place feel overwhelming. As the audience sees the transformed artworks, I remind them that renewal is possible and ask them to be active participants in the process.

³³ Glover, “Play,” 284.

FIGURES



Figure 1, Christy Nelson, *Undone*, 2018, Inherited napkins and zippers in encaustic, 4 x 4 feet.



Figure 2, Christy Nelson, *Uncovered*, 2018, Inherited sleeping bag zipper and fabric in encaustic, 2.5 x 3.5 feet.



Figure 3, Christy Nelson, *Unzipped*, 2018, Salvaged mattress cover in encaustic, approx. 1.5 x 1.3 feet.



Figure 4, Christy Nelson, *Gashed*, 2017, Encaustic and oil on panel, 12 x 12 inches.



Figure 5, Christy Nelson, *Familiar Roads I*, 2013, Gouache, 7 x 5 inches.



Figure 6, Christy Nelson, *Familiar Roads II*, 2013, Gouache, 5 x 7 inches.



Figure 7, Christy Nelson, *Disposable*, 2019, Used paper towels in encaustic, 2 x 5 feet.

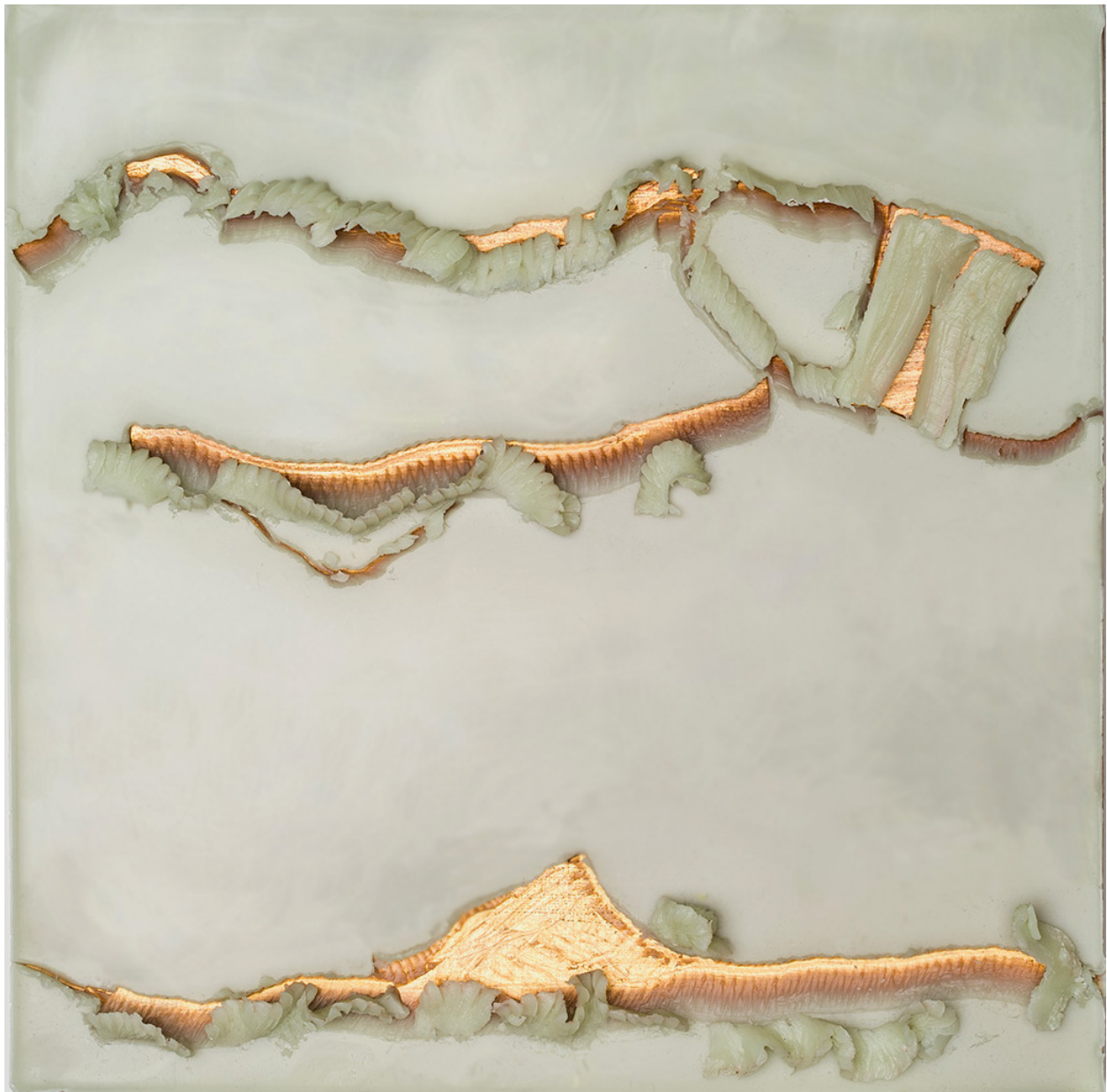


Figure 8, Christy Nelson, *Green Gashes*, 2017, Encaustic on metallic panel, 12 x 12 inches.



Figure 9, Christy Nelson, *Green Serenity*, 2017, Encaustic on metallic panel, 12 x 12 inches.



Figure 10, Christy Nelson, *Stains*, 2018, Sheet in encaustic, Approx. 7 x 7 feet.

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