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Exploring the relevancy of written and drawn representations in a digital age

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Exploring the Relevancy of Written and Drawn Representations in a Digital Age

An Honors Program Project Presented to

the Faculty of the Undergraduate

College of Visual and Performing Arts

James Madison University

by Shelby Alexandra Hanson

May 2015

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Art, Design, and Art History, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors Program.

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PUBLIC PRESENTATION

This work is accepted for presentation, in part or in full, at [venue] ArtWorks Gallery on [date] 2/2/15.
# Table of Contents

- Acknowledgements  
- Artist Statement  
- Context and Reflection  
- List of Materials  
- Method  
  - Screenprinting  
  - Intaglio  
  - Relief Etching  
  - Lithography  
- Glossary  
- Exhibition Documentation  
- Bibliography
Acknowledgements

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Additionally, I am thankful to Artworks Gallery Director, Philip Bannister; Assistant Director, Lindsay Shaw; and Graduate Assistant to the Director, Patricia Drummond for selecting me for an exhibition. I also appreciate Stephen Meyer for photographing the reception and all of the spring 2015 interns of ArtWorks Gallery for their help with installing and de-installing the show.

Furthermore, I would also like to express my appreciation to Director of School of Art, Design, and Art History, Dr. Kathy Schwartz, for nominating me for the Senior Honors Achievement award. It was an honor to be considered.
Artist Statement

I am a collector; A collector of letters, notes, photographs, newspaper clippings, and childhood drawings and paintings. Other artifacts such as stamps, menus, subway cards, and tickets may also find their way into the myriad stacks of paperwork in my room. The disorganized child who could never find anything slowly morphed into a more organized person in an effort to ward off her mom’s propensity to throw things away.

Once the Age of the Internet and social media took over, the letters and cards arriving in the mail diminished. It is because I realized that letters were growing to be a less important form of communication that these documents became even more significant to me. In my current work, I combine the artifacts that I have collected and layer them in such a way that pattern and color will provide a relevancy to viewers. As the viewer looks beyond, very often a meaningful letter from my childhood begins to emerge as a focal point, as the color and pattern recede into the background. Preservation is important to me and by reworking the artifacts, I can illustrate that letter writing and childhood art are personal, enduring, and universal.

Printmaking is the medium I choose to work with and explore. I opt for a collage, multi-image approach, and am attracted to the individuality of monotypes and the weight of three-dimensional objects. Lately, I have been incorporating found materials and discarded items as well as experimenting with textures of different surfaces like plexiglass and wood into my work.
Context & Reflection

My creative body of work began with *The Monthly Update* monotypes, featuring a letter from my mom detailing the latest news about our family and friends. My mom was not keen on sending letters—she would write them, but never send them. This was a special occasion and the beginning of her actually sending them more often. There is something about the action of receiving a letter and sending one back that I have always enjoyed as they require thought, effort, time, and interaction. When I mentioned the Age of the Internet, social media, and texting in my artist statement, these were the things that I missed through communicating by mail.

My grandma Hanson is one of my family members who writes me the most. It is because of this I wanted to include a letter from her in my work so I composed *A Letter From The Hanson’s* monotypes. Furthermore, I found her handwriting reminiscent of 19th century script, which was a time where letters were a very popular means of communication through the revolutionary penny post (what is known as snail mail today). During the 19th century, the appearance of letters from women included ornamentation of paper and stark black ink. This edition was meant to acknowledge a time where letter writing flourished by including flowery elements and a raised, deep black ink, but also to de-formalize Victorian qualities through childhood marks and imagery.

In addition to letters, my family also sent me drawings or paintings that I created as a child, newspaper or magazine art articles, or certain toys that I played with. When I looked at these documents or objects that I have received as a whole, it showed a passing of time, change, and impermanence. I wanted to convey this in my work by combining letters with childhood imagery through printmaking. I turned those prints into pieces reminiscent of objects that went out of style over time. Artifacts of this nature include the light
box with Let There Be Powder and view finder slide toys with A Bottle of Vodka & Pack of Marlboro Reds.

During the process of my thesis, I was focused on showing the significance of creating, sending, and keeping documents and objects in a time where technology seems to undermine them. In the beginning I incorporated pieces of myself and my brothers’ childhood notes, art, and letters given to me by my mom, dad, and grandma. Using articles from myself and my family was the most uncomplicated way to show how written and drawn representations are intimate and enduring since it is an archive of replicated documents and objects that I have collected throughout my life. However, my body of work evolved into something more along the way.

The last three years have been troubling for me. I have come to understand my dad’s absence in our household, his fidelity issues and problem drinking. I have witnessed the complete disintegration of my parents’ marriage and have attempted to be of support to my mom with her recent diagnosis of D.C.I.S. (Ductal Carcinoma In Situ) with invasive components and two lumpectomy surgeries. It is with my honors thesis that I am addressing in a very personal and public way that the state of my family has changed, while expressing nostalgia for what once was. Overall, the letters, imagery, and artifacts referenced in my work have come to represent human connection, familial or otherwise, as the greatest reverence and task.
List of Materials

Screenprinting

- Photo Emulsion
- Scoop Coater
- Plastic Card
- Paper Towels
- Electric Fan
- Transparent Tape
- Positive Transparency
- NuArc MSP 31x40 Single Point
- Vacuum Exposure Unit
- Photo Emulsion Remover
- Screen with Prop Stick
- Baseboard
- Createx Permanent Pigments
- Super 77 Adhesive
- Registration Pins
- Bucket of Water
- Hydrobooth Washout Booth with Pressure Washer
- Squeegee
- Masking Tape
- Lyntex Medium
- Dura-Lar

Plate Lithography

- Hydraulic Studio Scissor Lifts
- Plate Backer
- Takach 2648 Lithography Presses, 26x48”
- Takach 3400 Etching Presses, 34x60”
- Super 77 Adhesive
- Magnesium Carbonate (Mag)
- Water Tray
- Ink Knife
- Two Sponges
- Bounty Paper Towels
- Hand Roller
- Anti-Tint Solution
- Plate Cleaner
- Tympan
- Tanic Plate Etch (TPE)
- Register Pins
- Tu-Way Drier
- Blotter

### Relief/Intaglio (Photo Etching)

- Small Brayer
- Razor Blade
- Photopolymer Film
- Copper Plate
- 320 Grit Sandpaper
- Orbital Sander
- Positive Transparency
- Aquatint Screen (If Necessary)
- NuArc Flip-Top Platemaker FT40V3UP
- Developer
- Soft Brush
- Alcohol
- Takach Professional Grade Hot Plate, 24x36”
- Takach 2460 Etching Presses, 24x60”
- Ostrander-Seymour Proofing Press, 20x26”
- Small Piece of Mat Board
- Tarlatan
- Ink Knife
- Toothbrush
- Wool Blankets
- Blotters

27” iMac Computers, HP LaserJet 5200dtn Monochromatic Printer, and Epson Expression 11000XL-Graphic Arts Scanners are used to create drafts, final transparencies, and collage elements in my work. A Millington Machine Company Light Table, 40x60”, is also helpful for handmade stencils. Inks, newsprint, and heavy rag paper are essential to each process, as well as the Dahle 130 (30”) Large Format Guillotine Cutter for cropping papers and Gran Adell Drying Racks (32x48”) to keep completed prints flat and safe while drying. Clean up supplies include Soy Solv, Simple Green, and acetone at times. Other
materials that I use are Thai or Japanese papers and methyl cellulose for Chine-collé, water soluble crayons, micron pen, photographs, and found objects.
Method

I utilize different print processes in my work, sometimes resulting hybrids of combined printmaking mediums (relief + intaglio, screenprint + lithography, screenprint + relief). First, I will generally discuss the introductory aspects of my process prior to printing, then further elaborate by explaining screenprinting, relief, intaglio, and lithography procedures separately.

To begin with, I scan in cards, notes, letters, paintings, drawings, or newspaper and magazine articles to the computer. I then select several images to layer and alter through Photoshop. Image manipulation includes converting materials to grayscale, adjusting the lights and darks and changing the opacities. Layers are printed separately onto transparency film to be exposed onto either photo sensitive Z*Acryl film laminated copper plate (for etching), light sensitive aluminum plate (for lithography), or photo emulsion coated screen (for screenprinting). The image on the transparent film is placed reversed and centered onto the metal, emulsion side up in the NuArc Flip Top exposure unit. Screens are placed on top of the transparencies flat side down in the Polylite exposure unit. The screen or plates are then exposed for the allotted amount of light units.

The plate or screen is removed from the exposure unit and separated from the transparency. Plates are placed face up in a tray and screens are taken to the washout room. The surface of the plate is covered with developing solution. Developing solution corresponds with the printing process (developers are not the same for intaglio and lithography). Once the emulsion is completely removed from non-image areas of the lithography plate and the image areas of the etching plate and screen after exposure, the screen is air dried with a fan and the plates can be rinsed in cool water and dried. Lithography plates require a
small amount of TPE (tannic acid, gum Arabic, and asphaltum) on the emulsion side to chemically etch the plate in preparation for printing. Soft paper towels are used for application. The screen and plates are now safe to take into the light and ready for printing.

Ample newsprint and edition paper must be ready. There is not time to stop to cut more paper. Edition paper needs to be pre-punched for registration and ink should already be selected for each layer. I often make tap outs, small samples on paper, to test how my ink color appears dried on paper.

**Screenprinting:**

Shake the ink jar before printing to remove streaks. There must be enough ink to print the image. Ink should appear thick and glossy like mayonnaise. If ink appears to be dry, Lyntex medium or distilled water can be added.

The screen attaches to a baseboard, flat side down. Materials to have on hand include a bucket of water, sponge, small plastic card, squeegee, masking tape, pre-cut papers, adhesive, Dura-lar, and ink. With the screen propped up, register paper using punch or Dura-lar registration using a sheet of proofing paper. This is essential for color alignment. Spraying a small amount of adhesive on the baseboard ensures that the printing paper won’t move during printing. This also helps ensure that the fabric springs back after making contact with the paper.

While the screen is propped up, a line of ink is poured to one side of the stencil. The squeegee is used to flood stroke the mesh, filling the stencil with ink. The angle is kept the same when printing (45-60
degrees), but the pressure is lighter when flood stroking. After the flood stroke, the screen is lowered and the squeegee is used for print stroke. Adding more pressure and using the sharp edge of the blade produce the clearest image.

The screen is lifted and kept in place with the prop stick. The adhesive should have held the print to the baseboard. If not, peel off the print and apply more. Examine the print for problems and then place on the drying rack. The process is repeated for all impressions.

**Intaglio (Photo Etching):**

After developing the plate, it is placed in ferric chloride to etch the image areas. Checking the progress of the etching periodically is essential. When the plate is ready, place the plate on newspaper and use acetone and a toothbrush for removing the film. Plates may be further worked and distressed by roughening the surface using a scraper, burnisher, rocker, or burin, roll in relief, draw or paint on plate, or collage on plate to experiment with different outcomes and solutions prior to printing.

The archival paper must now soak for at least 30 minutes to an hour to remove sizing and soften the fiber. Preheat the hotplate to its lowest setting. By warming the plate slightly, the ink will flow into the crevices more easily. Newspaper is placed under the plate before inking and wiping. A piece of matt board is used to squeegee etching ink across the surface and work the ink into the crevice. The darkest tarlatan (starched cheesecloth) is then used to buff the plate’s surface in a circular motion, removing surface ink. For a brighter print, the plate’s surface can be polished with a piece of newsprint. A paper towel is used to clean the beveled edges. If the plate is not in danger of over heating, it can be left on the hotplate while washing hands and preparing printing paper.
A clean sheet of newsprint larger than the plate is placed on the press bed and the warm plate is positioned image side up. With clean hands, take a sheet of printing paper from the soaking sink and remove excess water with a blotter. The paper is then placed over the plate, followed by three wool blankets in a stair step configuration, smallest to biggest. The press bed is cranked by hand until the blankets make contact with the upper roller. Then, the bed is slowly cranked until the blankets and plate clear the top roller on the other side.

Grasping one corner, the paper is gently lifted from the plate and is examined for print quality.

Relief Etching:

In addition to more traditional materials like wood and linoleum, a copper intaglio plate can be used for relief printing. Preparing, developing, and etching the copper plate remains the same for this process, but inking the metal is different. Using an ink knife, a ribbon of ink is laid out on a glass slab. With a roller or brayer, distribute the ink on the plate’s surface, repositioning it after each cycle to help distribute the ink more evenly. The ink should develop a slight texture and make a subtle “swish” sound. The plate should be placed on newsprint and ink slowly rolled out on the image, making sure the block is evenly inked and built up gradually. The plate is printed similar to intaglio on an etching press or on the antique proofing platen press. Printing can also be accomplished by burnishing with a spoon or baren.
Lithography:

Preparation for printing the aluminum plate includes rounding the corners with scissors (to prevent the plate from catching the sponge and tearing during printings), spraying the back of the plate with Super 77 Adhesive, attaching it to the plate backer on the lithography press. An appropriate sized scraper bar (wider than the image, but shorter than the plate) must be centered and secured in the center of the scraper bar holder.

Dampen sponges at the sink and then fill a water tray with cool tap water. Adding a cap full of fountain solution along with the “clean” sponge. The “dirty” sponge is used to clean the TPE off the plate and then place to the side for when needed.

Length and tack are important when mixing ink. Using an ink knife, combine the chosen ink and a small amount of Tu-Way drier. Then, gradually add magnesium carbonate to help prevent the image from filling in and non image areas from scumming. To test the ink, pull upward with the ink knife. Properly mixed ink should break into short peaks. After mixing, spread a thin ribbon of ink the width of the roller across the ink slab. The ribbon must be rolled out evenly using a slight flipping of the wrist at the end of each cycle. Changing the direction of the rolling pattern by turning the roller over may be required. The texture and sound should be the same as rolling ink for relief printing.

When applying ink to the plate the clean sponge is used to keep it damp before each cycle of rolling. There should not be an excessive amount of fountain solution on the plate’s surface and it is important to periodically refresh the clean sponge. Inking the plate requires a consistent rolling pattern and less ink than stone lithography.
After the image is charged and ready for printing (image areas will be covered with ink), clean non image areas using plate cleaner when needed. Proofing the plate early and often is essential to make sure it is properly inked. To print, place the rag paper over the plate, back the printing paper with newsprint, and then place the tympan on top. Unlock the press bed and slowly roll it forward and position it so the scraper bar is directly above the plate’s first margin. Pull down the pressure lever of the press and turn the clutch until it engages. Now it is okay to crank at a steady pace until the scraper bar reaches the other margin.

Lift the pressure lever and disengage the clutch after the bed has been returned to the starting point. Remove the tympan and additional newsprint, then take the proofing or printing paper off gently and set to the side to dry. Richer images can be achieved on heavier rag papers by dampening the printing paper in the sink just before it is needed.

Upon completion, the artist divides all of the impressions according to overall print quality. General areas of consideration include registration (proper alignment), image must be sharp or opaque enough (no fuzzy edges or halo shapes around the image), etc. This separation of prints is made easier when comparing prints to the bon à tirer proof. The best impressions are signed and indicate the edition number (ex: 3/9). The edition must consist of at least five prints, with the exception of monotypes.
Glossary

*Aquatint*- A porous ground of rosin particles or spray paint is applied to the plate and etched to achieve a broad range of tonal values.

*Beveling*- Using a file to round the corners and put a slight angle on the edges of an intaglio or relief etching plate. Helps to prevent the paper, blankets, tarlatans, and printers fingers from being cut as well as make it easier to clean excess ink from the plate’s edges prior to printing.

*Bite*- Corrosive action of acid or mordant on a plate.

*Blankets*- Pieces of felt or wool placed between the roller of the upper etching press and the paper/plate. Also referred to as “felts,” blankets help such the paper fibers into the plate’s inked recesses.

*Blotter*- Highly absorbent paper without sizing used to dry dampened paper of excess moisture prior to printing.

*Bon à tirer proof*- The “right to print” proof, designated by the artist as the standard to judge succeeding impressions in the edition.

*Brayer*- Small roller with attached handle used for applying ink to a plate or block.

*Burin*- An engraving tool with a square or lozenge-shaped steel shaft attached to a wood handle.

*Burnisher*- Polished, oval shaped tool used for smoothing or lightening portions of the intaglio plate.

*Chine-collé*- Technique of adhering thin sheets of Japanese paper to a heavier backing sheet during the printing process, meaning “Chinese collage”.

*Color registration*- multiple color prints require a system to ensure colors are placed in exact alignment. Color registration is the precise alignment of two or more colors.
Color trap- A slight overlapping of two or more color areas that helps hide any misalignment in printing.

Edition- Set of identical prints, signed and numbered by the artist.

Edition number- Indicates the total number of prints in the edition and a specific impressions identity. Expressed as a fraction, the number 8/12 would indicate this is the eighth print in a total of twelve.

Flood stroke- The movement of the squeegee that applies the first coat of ink to the stencil prior to printing. The screen is slightly lifted so no ink makes contact with the paper.

Hot plate- Used for warming the plate during printing.

Ink slab- Area for mixing and rolling out inks, often on heavy plate glass or marble.

Length- A long ink is elastic. A short ink breaks into shorter segments when stretched.

Monoprint- A unique impression, created using any printmaking technique or combination of techniques.

Proof- An impression pulled at any stage of the printing process to test the progress of the image.

Rag paper- Paper made from one hundred percent cotton or linen fiber.

Registration- Proper alignment of multiple plates, blocks, etc. for accurate color printing.

Relief etching- Metal plate produced for relief (surface) printing rather than intaglio.

Rocker- Steel tool with multiple teeth used in creating an even texture for mezzotint.

Roller- Shaped like a rolling pin, tool with two handles used for applying ink.

Scraper- Steel tool with three sharp knife-edges and a point. Used to make corrections on a plate.

Tack- Measure of an ink’s stickiness.

Tap out- Small sample or test smear of ink on paper.
Tarlatan- Heavily starched cheesecloth used for wiping intaglio plates.
Exhibition Documentation

For more pictures of the opening, please visit the ArtWorks Flickr. For detailed photographs of my work, visit my Weebly.


