Here / Not Here

Masters of Fine Art Thesis & Research

Taylor Bisanzio
# Table of Contents

I. Introduction……………….. 3  
II. Installation………………… 4 - 5  
III. Text……………………… 6 - 7  
IV. Print………………………. 8  
V. Conclusion………………… 9 - 10  
VI. Works Cited……………… 11  
VII. Show Card……………….. 12  
VIII. Photography…………….. 13 - 23
“A phenomenon that a number of people have noted while in deep depression is the sense of being accompanied by a second self — a wraithlike observer who, not sharing the dementia of his double, is able to watch with dispassionate curiosity as his companion struggles against the oncoming disaster, or decides to embrace it.” (Styron)

I. Introduction

Depression is a frightful experience – one that can alter your psyche and lead you to the deepest fractures of the mind. A tremendous and overbearing shadow, it covers one’s true being like a heavy shroud. You are no longer the person you once were, but an apparition of your former self. “You” are not here. “Encompassing boredom, stillness, / loss of pleasure, the withering of one’s capacity / to dream”, the illness leads the afflicted as a withered spectre (Ross, xv). A thief, it becomes a kidnapper to the soul, in which takes hold and keeps the victim captive (Stern, 95). Suffering from the disease is an experience within itself, as it is “impenetrable, elusive, unfathomable, unknowable, and inexorable” (Stern, 94). It is a mysterious existence.

A manifestation of two years work, Here / Not Here is an installation that exposes the darkest moments of mental illness – allowing the audience to become familiar with their own demons. Although quite personal, with journal entries and self-portraiture, the installation acts as a dialogue to the viewer from the artist. How do you capture such universal themes as sadness and loss? Furthermore, how does one react when seeing such objects? Thus, my work acts as a discourse with the viewer in which they can lose themselves and become one with the illness. Consequently, the dark installation becomes a discourse on psychoanalysis and semiotics – becoming a language of pain in which the viewer is provided with a set of tools to uncover the visual dialect (Alphen, 16). The tools of this language are delivered in the use of repetition, transparency, and distortion.
II. Installation

Hanging in the center of the space, *Through Me* acts as a barrier to the viewer – pushing one to confront the pain of depression before experiencing anything else. Consequently, the viewer is forced to engage in a “construction of self through the gaze of another” (Alphen, 14). Generating a sense of power in the space, each plate stands 5’ by 3’, further enhancing the impact on the audience. Transparent and cloudy, the images are a testament to feeling empty and vacant – encompassing the loss of self attributed with the troubled psyche. Captivating one to walk around the plates to see what figures emerge through the glass, the viewer is able to experience other pieces and people through the portraiture. No longer do they see clearly, but their view is obscured - leaving them in a form of social isolation. Additionally, the act of developing the line work in the pieces is a cathartic experience within itself – using tools to carve out these emotions. Through the use of the dremel drill, the line work is developed through the dragging of the tool through the glass, which allows one to expunge frustration. The charring and skipping action of the dremel further pushes the gritty nature of the subject.

Depicted in *Scroll*, the repetition of the phrase “regret” transcends the entire 60-yard paper roll. Although it may sound trite, ordinary, and common, the word has a vicious and underlying tone for me – a word that continues to haunt my mind. This simple expression relates to the battles with the decisions I have made in the past that have led me on a downward spiral. Because of this, the task of writing “regret” became an exercise for myself; causing intense reflection and awareness. It is in these moments when I find myself paralyzed with painful thoughts of what could be, what was, and what never will be. Written by hand, the phrase appears to lose form and shape as it continues...
to fall down the paper. No longer a word, it appears as an image or scribble. An element of the disease, the morphing of “regret” responds to the “slowing down of normal and physiological processes” that occurs (Crary, 473). As the viewer engages with the piece, he or she experiences “a loss of sense of time” and relation to the outside world as their eye wanders in the text (Ross, xv). This experience further places the audience at one with the troubled mind – “forever is how long the depression will last; never is when the sufferer expects to feel better, to see a favorite place again, or to experience desire or pleasure” (Stern, 97).

Hanging on the opposite side of the space, Black Boxes mirror the solemn solitude of mental illness. Each hanging quietly on the wall, the boxes generate more forms through the shadows peering out beneath. Achieving a sense of mystery, the black forms entice the viewer to examine what they conceal. Like the afflicted soul, the boxes appear to be quiet. However, they hold my darkest moments. Hidden behind the boxes my memories are concealed, only to be open by whoever dares go near and lift the clasp to the past. With the desire to expose myself as much as possible to the viewer, I immediately thought to open my journal. However, upon coming to this idea, I realized that I did not want to remember or relive those moments. In order to obtain the same painful experience within my work, I printed my journal entries in boxes safely guarded with a lid and clasp. Acting as a barrier to my past and the uncertainty of what lies beneath, the boxes act as an enticing obstacle. Do you want to open it? Do you wish to see what lies inside? In turn, they also make the connection to the black boxes found on planes. As a mechanism to hold the planes secrets, one must “unlock” or “uncode” the black box to discover the final moments before the fatal crash.
III. Text

In *Black* Boxes, each journal entry depicted is edited or obscured by blacked out text, repeated imagery, and different transparencies. This use of design further obscures what lies beneath the boxes, which allows the viewer to generate their own conclusions. Although extremely personal accounts of my past, the audience can fill in their own story – connecting to my personal experiences in a new way. The details of the story are no longer important, but the feelings encountered. To bring life to my text, the videos *You Hurt Me, My Bad* and *I Am A Ghost* animate experts from my journals as well. Both grant another experience for the viewer – engaging the audience to come on the journey with me. The symptoms of “slowing down, near immobility, opacity, and looped repetition of the image”, unveil the slow pain and transgression of the disease in the psyche (Ross, xv). Entrancing one to witness the developing text, the viewer becomes disengaged and withdraws, like *Scroll*, as they wait for the conclusion of the phrase. As one continues to sit with the piece, they become increasingly transfixed to the text forming and denigrating into one another. Consequently, absorption of the self, “a key feature of depressive disorders”, occurs as the viewer falls deeper and deeper into the slowly morphing imagery (Ross, xxi). This symptom can cause the afflicted to “observe a slower rate of talking, slowed movements, or under-responsivity / in body movements” (Crary, 473).

Continuing on the center wall of my exhibit, the word imagery resumes in the series *Digest*. Creating through the process of photolithography, the text becomes degraded when printed onto the paper – developing transparencies and new forms that were not present at first. In this series, words are intentionally repeated or stand alone on the pages to amplify their meaning and develop a sense of gravity to the phrase. Unique
to my experience is the proliferation of obsession that occurs within my mind. As the repetitive text imagery shows, it becomes an obsessive process for me when I work. However, this obsession transcends to other factors in my life that can sometimes become crippling. These pangs of obsession usually occur when I cannot function other than thinking of one self-deprecating thought that rings through my mind – leaving me in an “immense and aching solitude” typically encountered with the illness (Styron). The constant battle in ones mind “can result in a distant heightened consciousness of the self, a self that no longer feels familiar or grounded” (Simeon, 18).

When dealing with a mental illness, it is extremely disparaging when others do not understand your torment. Depression is not a mood or feeling, it is a disease. Having dealt with the disease for most of my life, it is very discrediting when, even though people are aware of the illness, doubt still circles around the pain experienced (Charmez, 183). “When someone claims pain, fatigue or other disabling symptoms, he or she may be countered with” the concept that they are using the illness as an excuse for being “emotional” (Charmex, 183). As a means of reaching out to the audience, I prints hang in white boxes holding heartfelt phrases to take with them from the show. Acting as a relief from the darkness of the surrounding images, the small lithography prints encourage the audience that “you are not alone”, “I’m here for you”, and “you’re okay”. As a consequence, I become a part of their story too, as a supporter and friend – something that is hard to maintain when encountering the disease. As one is consumed by illness, they are less capable of maintaining relationships with their own “crumbling self-images” (Charmex, 191).
IV. Print

Exposing myself through the digital prints in *Memories*, the viewer is able to experience my account of dealing with the loss of self. A fundamental symptom of psychological distress, the degradation of self occurs when one observes “their former self-images crumbling away without the development” of the soul (Charmaz, 168). Like the sense of loss, the photographs overlap one another causing an unnerving reaction from the viewer. Prohibiting the eye from focusing on the subject, the mind wanders in search for some respite to what it is viewing. Thus, they become a portrait of trauma – distorted images of a lost soul. No longer is the person visible, but only a sense of what is absent remains. An expansion and release for myself, *Memories* directly relate to my inner turmoil. These faces, although obscured and vapid, reach out with agony, pain, and despair. Looking directly out at the viewer, the photographs develop a “construction of the self through the gaze” of the viewer (Alphen, 15). Do you find yourself in the distorted imagery? How do you relate?

Hanging on the same wall with *Memories*, the *Ghost Series* acts as a continued manifestation of the distorted reality of depressed individuals. Direct reflections of myself, these prints distort the portrait further by only comprising of tonality – granting them a sense of eeriness and mystery. Each print is made with the process of monotype printmaking by slowly building the tonality of the print through transparencies on the paper. Using this method, I developed a shadowy figure, which quietly lingers in the print. As William Styron writes in his novel *Darkness Visible: Memoir of Madness*, depression appears as “formless shapes of doom” blowing through the mind (Styron). Only about one shade darker than the plate tone, it is foreboding and eerie. Is it a self-
portrait? A human form? Shadow? According to many, “the horror of depression is so overwhelming as to be quite beyond expression”, thus the ghostly quality of the image (Stern, 97). Is the figure screaming? Mourning? Has it lost all signs of life? When pulling these out of the press, I was incredibly shocked how their ghostly appearances reflected my mind. This furthermore speaks to the “multiplicity of possible selves” as one boards the rollercoaster that is the disease (Ross, xxi). Not only depictions of faces, they become distorted images withholding a geometric-like form. In turn, the audience is invited to gain their own interpretation.

V. Conclusion

An artist interested in the loss of self, Francis Bacon states that he wanted his work to “hit the nervous system” of the viewer – leaving them feeling connected and at peace with their own self-image (Alphen, 11). It is through this idea that I reach out to my audience in order to make them feel comfortable with their own tribulations and illnesses. Placing the audience face to face with the effects of depression on the psyche, my work reflects the inner turmoil that one encounters with the illness. A fearful and dark experience, it is one that grips you tightly as you succumb to its hold. Hurtful phrases, spiteful comments, and painful reminders repeat in your head as the mind becomes lost in self-obliteration. Dissipated and waning, my images furthermore bare the feeling of the suffocating loss of self. Depicted solely in black and white, the prints become confined to darkness like the afflicted (Smith, 496). It is a battle for sanity – finding oneself Here / Not Here. Leaving one feeling exposed, the experience of the installation leaves one to “preclude upon one’s emotional state” (Alphen, 9). However, rather than alienated the
viewer, my work acts as a dialogue with whomever enters – allowing one to become lost in the message. “Depression is a disorder of mood, so mysteriously painful and elusive in the way it becomes known to the self – to the mediating intellect – as to verge close to being beyond description” (Sytron).
VI. Works Cited


Here / Not Here

Masters of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition
Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art
1 Hawk Drive, New Paltz, NY 12561

Opening Reception
Friday, May 8th, 2015
5pm - 7pm

Exhibition Dates
May 8th - May 12th
11am - 5pm

Taylor Bisanzio
Detail of *Through Me*, drypoint on Plexiglas, 5’ x 3’

Detail of *Here / Not Here* cards
Scroll, ink, calligraphy roll, 60 yd.
Detail of *Scroll*, ink, calligraphy roll, 60 yd.

Detail of *Scroll*, ink, calligraphy roll, 60 yd.
Black Boxes, silkscreen, lithography, wooden boxes, 24 9” x 5”

Black Boxes, silkscreen, lithography, wooden boxes, 24 9” x 5”
Detail from *Black Boxes*, silkscreen, lithograph wooden box,
Detail of text from *Black Boxes*, silkscreen, lithograph
Untitled from series Memories, digital archival print, 18” x 24”
Detail from series *Memories*, digital archival prints, 18” x 24”, 15” x 9”

Detail from series *Ghost*, monotype on BFK, 8” x 10”
3 from series *Ghost*, monotype on BFK, 8” x 10”