TRANSMUTATION: BODY, MIND, RITUAL, FORM

by

Steven Skowron
A Thesis
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of
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in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Fine Arts
Art and Visual Technology

Committee:

Helen C. Federick
Director

Peter Martin

Peter Lemire

Director of the School of Art
Dean, College of Visual and Performing Arts

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TRANSMUTATION: Body, Mind, Ritual, Form

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at George Mason University

by

Steven Skowron
Bachelor of Arts
Cleveland State University, 2008

Director: Helen Frederick, Professor
Department of Art and Visual Technology

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my loving husband Braulio, for his support and encouragement and to my dog Maxx who is no longer with our family.
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I would like to acknowledge a special thank you to my advisor and Thesis Director, Helen Frederick for her tireless support, encouragement, friendship and mentorship that has helped me to transform into the artist I have become. To my thesis committee members Lynne Constantine, Peggy Feerick and Peter Winant for the encouragement, support they so graciously extended to me. To my extended George Mason family of fellow graduate students, faculty and support staff, for their support and sense of community that I could lean on. To my photogravure mentor Lothar Osterburg, to Ellie Honl who were the first artists to introduce me to the photogravure process. To my fellow instructors both past and present in printmaking at George Mason University, Susan Goldman, Fleming Jeffries, and Amelia Hankin who have been invaluable mentors to me.
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This thesis is a comprehensive roadmap that describes my journey as artist. The paper examines the various influences that represent my work. These influences revolve around my former Catholic background and the personal transformations that occurred in the creative process.
INTRODUCTION

“Self-Criticism, as an introspective, discriminating activity, is indispensable to any attempt to understand one’s own psychology.” C.G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*

The idea of understanding oneself or, as in Jung’s quotation “one’s own psychology”, has been of interest to me since my late teens. To understand the motivations in one’s behavior seemed to hold so many secrets to the blossoming of one’s potential. I was drawn to self-analysis through reading as much as I could about psychology. This level of inquiry took shape by reading about the mind/body connection, contemporary field theory, alchemy, the collective unconscious, and myth as found in the works of James Hillman, Wilhelm Reich, Alexander Lowen, C.G. Jung, Joseph Campbell and other writers. This interest led me in my late thirties to undertake analysis. This is where my dreams, archetypal patterns, synchronistic experiences, and mining my own subconscious, took on a personal meaning and understanding. The lens through which I view the world was being ground, but it remained a flexible optical viewer to later help me to better understand my calling to art over a more stable career. Coming to understand the functioning of the personal unconscious and learning to trust my own intuition has led me to ask many questions, to which I still have no decisive answers. My thesis is a tool to help illuminate my current trajectory; writing it
may provide me with what may be necessary for my life journey to continue to unfold with satisfaction and meaning. (Jung 61)

A Point of Departure

I made a conscious choice in my mid 30's to step away from Catholicism. Catholic dogma represented conditional love along with a rich history of oppression and justification to kill groups of people for failure to believe in monotheistic faith. This separation led me to traverse many transformations. My religious upbringing and ways of thinking about God, myth, ritual, doctrine and the church systematically was being deprogrammed from my consciousness, and I could begin to ask critical questions of what Catholicism really represented to me. With its absence came a longing and feelings of loss, which fueled my journey into how Catholic dogma, rights and rituals, touched the various parts of my life. How could I find ways to refill that space occupied by my Catholic training in specific prayers, behaviors and gestures of respect and reverence, religious art and depictions, and in experiences of the physical and the numinous?

Layers of History

Digging deeper into my Catholic roots allowed me to better understand a connection between the visual and physical nature of Catholic churches, providing me important visual experience as powerful information that has stayed with me, and that
has certainly played a pivotal role in the development of my thesis and the selection of works presented in it. My travels to Europe and Asia, unknowingly at the time, informed my aesthetic awareness as it related to artisanship and to how finite details represent another layer of personal narrative.

I have been asked the question, “When did my thesis begin to take on a very specific line of inquiry and focus?” My answer is: “the end of the Spring 2013 semester.” I began investigating where my first art experiences took place. This led me to research my home in Buffalo, N.Y., where I was raised until 9 years old, and to see if my parish church, Transfiguration, was still there. In that process of investigation I recall that the church and school I attended was within walking distance of my home. I found articles about the church, looked up satellite photos, only to find my childhood home destroyed and my parish church abandoned along with the grade school I attended. Photos of the church left me feeling a pit in my stomach; and my childhood neighborhood has been reduced to a neighborhood made up of more empty lots than homes. I was drawn to discovering more about Transfiguration Church and its history. Before being closed in 1991, it served the Polish immigrants and Polish American communities growing in the Buffalo area where I was raised. The church was built in 1896, and built in the Gothic revival style. I also found photos of the church’s interior along with photos of my aunt, uncle, and grandmother along with my two oldest brother’s grade-school photos in the Transfiguration Church 1968 jubilee publication. My investigation awakened components of memory that helped me have a more cohesive understanding.
of the sculptural prayer kneelers I was creating along with the powerful remnants of Catholicism I needed to better understand. (Ederer 102)
Figure 3 Transfiguration Church Interior View Photo 2006 by Tom Kirsch

Figure 4 Angels Over Door Photo 2006 by Tom Kirsch
Figure 5 Transfiguration Church Facing Back Photo 2006 by Tom Kirsch

Figure 6 Alter Stained Glass Surround (Alter Absent) Photo 2006 by Tom Kirsch
The church that served as the vehicle for my indoctrination into the faith provided such powerful visual grandeur of space, the objects of adoration with their rare metals, statues, stained glass with various depictions with outlines, colorations, and chiaroscuro creating a more realistic reading of three-dimensional figures in space. Marble, lights, and wooden pew benches represented materials that did not seem to exist outside of this house of worship. I remember the exterior of stone, the height and scale of the building adding to a sense of presence and prominence; the heavy thick exterior wooden doors that looked like they could keep out any oppressing force.
Transfiguration Church was the place where I received my art education and the means by which I first learned to experience art. The church icons, statues and images of saints, the depictions of suffering, along with indoctrination of understanding these superhuman, highly idealized characters representing the power of faith over beasts, such as snakes, serpents, and other underworld figures, were a living force for me.

**Tracing my artistic visual language**

In the present day I enjoy analyzing my quest to understand the fundamental underpinnings of my work. I have come to understand that the emphasis of my work is to explore myself in ways that can depict the loss of Catholic rituals as an early placeholder, or more accurately as vehicles to experience the numinous. I believe today what has replaced my formalized religious-based experiences is the making of art. Making is a means for me to investigate and observe the world in which my spiritual practice becomes an extension of my art form. This brings to mind a quotation from artist Judy Hall: “My goal is to create a catalyst for viewers that draws them to a new level of experience, a deeper connection with their own inner being.” I want further this common thread of thought by highlighting a quotation from artist Meredith Monk “It is really trying in some ways to follow and delineate a mystery” when she was discussing her art making in an interview with Bonnie Marranca. (Osmond 6) (Knowles 23)
So the method of creating becomes the ritual act. Research and inquiry replaces liturgy to understand the narrative that wishes to unfold. Jungian thought seems also to run a parallel line that helps to stabilize what can seem like uncertainty, when we do not consciously understand our direction within our art making. So just like a ladder, one side rail can be imagined as Jungian thought that points to individuation, and the other rail can be used as my art practice, the active direction to create works with greater awareness. The rungs that are created to climb the structure can be thought of as the discovery of a less formidable ego consciousness and a self actualization of understanding of who we are and living in a less ego dominated state of mind.

While conducting research for this thesis paper I came across a dissertation paper by Linda Quinn, titled *The Poetics of Soul: Mythic Narrative as Creative Elegy* that I will reference regarding the ego, which helps to describe a framework that functions within my art practice. Edward Hirsch writes in *How to Read a Poem*, “Awe is an emotion mingled with reverence, dread, and wonder inspired by something majestic or sublime...both rapturous and terrifying because it puts one in the space of the transcendental...and thus also in the presence of death.” When ego dies to its position of sovereignty, the epic sensibility of the soul can provide spiritual transport in the depths of an inner world filled with death and imagination.” I believe that as artist part of my journey is to understand myself, but in order to do that I must reckon with my past, where James Hillman best describes, “The imagination mobilizes multiple metaphorical images from the unconscious waters of *memoria* that have the generative capacity to
reconfigure or recontextualize memory of the narrative self. To reconfigure painful memories is to engage the imaginative soul through the remembering and mourning of what is forgotten and buried in one’s heart.” I would assert based on my life experiences that the majority of us carry emotion or physical wounds from early childhood or from our adult life. Whether love lost, physical trauma, illness or any other, these traumas continue to affect us on some level. Like roots of a tree, I do not believe our art making and what we create within our visual narrative, is exempt from these influences. I also imagine that art making holds an opportunity to process the depths of our life experiences in a manner that might be universally understood and profoundly healing to the artist and potentially awakening to the viewer’s subconscious or conscious awareness, when placed within a public/private space, such as a gallery. (Quinn 132-33)

The words of art critic Sister Wendy are poignant within the context of this conversation, when she was discussing the work of painter Albert Herbert: “One may define an artist as a human being who is forced to be truthful. An artist's conscious intentions are always at the mercy of inner necessity. A work of art is not what an artist necessarily wants to do, but what is forced into visibility from within.” My own life trajectory, as I will describe, fits into the way my art emerges as a witness and through the various mediums I work with. (Osmond 3)
I attended Lorain Community College to complete an Associates Degree. My objective was to complete prerequisites to be able to apply to Cleveland State where my intention was to pursue a degree in physical therapy. In my last semester at community college I was enrolled in a ceramics class where I learned slab building. I created vessels. I manipulated material and shaped them into form, transforming them through heat and silica into something that is durable. The process can lead to variable outcomes, and the ability to control material also became part of my process. Reflecting on these transformations through manipulation of materials provides a strong association to alchemy and how material takes on new properties, all symbolic metaphors of change within our individual selves.

After completing classes at Lorain Community College I began my undergraduate degree at Cleveland State University, I decided to follow my intuition to pursue art. Printmaking became the medium I was drawn to. I believe a strong part of that attraction was a professor who encouraged developing content in one’s work; in
other words, work that had meaning from form, place in history and a defined content. I had been exposed to ceramics, sculpture, drawing, printmaking and museum studies. What intrigued me most was printmaking and the medium’s ability to transform material into an object that was aesthetically beautiful in itself and also a medium to manipulate with colored ink, wiping and reworking of the plate. It seemed that the intaglio process offered a strong alchemical metaphor of content, material, and the direct hand of the artist, a triad that I found very exciting and challenging. With the use of zinc plates and nitric acid, hard ground, and drawn line on the plate, I discovered these materials and tools became an extension for self-expression of imagery from my own subconscious. My work explores metaphor, but I was also interested in examining myself as subject; this is evidenced by several early self-portraits I created in my drawing classes.

I was also influenced heavily in my sculpture classes to manipulate material with emotionally driven personal content. During a sculptural project I did research on British artist Antony Gormley, whom I admire and respect. Gormleys’ work resonates with me because it is influenced by his background as a former Catholic, using his body as form within his work, and through his acknowledging “…The fact that I grew up within a Christian tradition: those things are part not only of my intellectual make-up but images of self that were given to me as a child.” I admire Gormleys’ self-awareness and understanding of the influences that come to bear in his art making, which validates my own journey as artist. (Howes 139)
His installation *Another Place*, I found profoundly moving. His use of casting his own body out of steel and then displaying the full-size castings of himself facing toward the sea was such a reductive and powerful symbolic representation, conveying our humanness and sense of place within the world. The sculptures facing away from the viewer toward the water is a powerful and open metaphor for the viewer to explore space and placement of oneself in an epic scale.

Figure 9 Anthony Gormley: Another Place (Web Image)
An early installation work I composed in figure 10, was a representation of transformation using a casting of my hands coming out of a phallic-like form, holding a sphere with what I would call a surrealist-looking hand with bird wings swooping down. Whether the hands caught the sphere or the bird was coming to remove it is an open question for the viewer. This was one of many early explorations that influenced me in understanding figurative narrative, manipulation of material and incorporation of elements that related directly to the artist, in this case the plaster casting of my own hands. The bird was challenging to portray with its head as a hand, and feathers made out of individual pieces of hand-cut steel, hand-hammered and welded onto a wing armature.
Critiques along with my personal inquiries into what the final images became was the fuel for the fire of deeper investigation into what this work was trying to convey and what I wanted to share with the viewer. With narrative content being so strongly emphasized in my studio practice, it fed a desire to also understand my own work that seemed to emerge from my mental recesses, symbols that I was drawn to, yearned expression and manifestation in the prints being created. I believe that my inquiries were driven by my journey of entering analysis, where my dreams and my unconscious material was being discussed and focused on weekly. Because my art practice used much of these emerging subconscious ideas I also had a strong connection to Dada and Surrealist art movements in which collage construction was appealing to me and automatic drawing and the use of less conscious modes of creating were approached.

A more automatic form of drawing started with my etchings alongside objects that I was making during ceramic’s class. In ceramics I pursued objects and shapes within my use of clay to manifest ideas that were coming to my consciousness. I produced forms that took the shape of chalices, a coffin with wings, boxes with decorative container lids, vessels and the like. I would credit these developmental years and the support of my printmaking instructor as a period where I was encouraged to explore this developing language within my art. In printmaking, I was drawn to phallic shapes, breasts, urinals, Catholicism and amorphous shapes and environments. The following images reflect my undergraduate work to provide context to this discussion.
Figure 11 A Symbiotic Landscape (stone lithograph)

Figure 12 Male Eccentricities (etching)
Figure 13 A Land Inside Oneself (etching)

Figure 14 Female Rage (stone lithograph)
Figure 15 A Metamorphosis of Self (stone lithograph)

Figure 16 Meus Cruor Sanctuarium (stone lithograph)
Figure 17 Reshaping One's Mind (etching)

Figure 18 Revealing My Complexes (etching)
Figure 19 Spiritual Hunger (etching)

Figure 20 Opportunity Awaits (stone lithograph)
Figure 21 Untitled (Charcoal Drawing)

Figure 22 Untitled (Pastel Drawing)
Upon graduating from Cleveland State I applied and was accepted to Kent State University where the cutting and assembling of elements with my work took a more complete direction. I have always admired and have been influenced by work of Robert Rauschenberg. His collaged images, such as For Ferraro, have captivated me, from the scale and use of primary colors in his work. All his visual components seem to speak so harmoniously. Rauschenberg’s work gave me permission to explore the idea of collage, or using various images to create a story or narrative. It was at Kent State that I began to develop and explore greater narrative within my work. Some key elements from my time at Kent revealed the development of photography through the use of photo intaglio plates with work that constellated around the use of black, specifically printing white ink onto a black paper, creating a strong composition of either text or images to
contemplate. My interest focused around issues of transformation, spirituality and sexual identity. I found the breaking of conventions, and the assertion that no subject is taboo, a help to my explorations.

Figure 24 Robert Rauschenberg: For Ferraro, 1992 (Web image)

Figure 25 Mother Where Art Thou? (woodcut)
Figure 26 Untitled (etching)

Figure 27 A Survivor’s Thoughts (intaglio photo plate)
Figure 28 Untitled (intaglio photo plate)

Figure 29 Untitled (intaglio photo plate)
I moved from the Cleveland area to Virginia prior to finishing my degree. I applied and was accepted to the Corcoran School of Art Masters of Book Arts program where I completed a semester. It was at the Corcoran when I began to reexamine the three dimensional object. I became interested in several feminist artists such as Kiki Smith, Barbara Kruger, Frida Kahlo, Cindy Sherman, and Susan Grabel to name a few. Some of these artists have worked in sculptural objects, and their bodies of work helped me to explore masculinity in a way that I could critique it. These artists’ use of the body as form and symbolic representation provided me with an opportunity to more closely examine the male form and stereotypes portrayed within a culture that limits the male potential by creating false walls in which the male gender operates.
The book serves as a container, an intimate place, a pause, and an opportunity to engage the viewer. As the holder of the book as object, you are the one in possession or control of the physical object. I learned basic letter type setting and portfolio housing, along with design programs to create a book for outsourced printing. The first book I created was a book of photographs taken at Mt. Vernon. These pictures were paired up with poetry that had a relationship to the photo. A second book dealt with the more personal subject of body dysmorphia; and a third tapped into my humorous side that looked at the etymology of the word *penis*. I also created a letterpress portfolio book. This book was my critique of the male identity as being more than just a sexual object. It was after a semester that I decided that I wanted the option to teach, and a terminal degree was what I needed to achieve in order to reach that goal.

Figure 31 Artist Portfolio Book Pages 1-4 displayed (Lino block/Letterpress)
The Corcoran School of Art Library contains various artists’ books, and during my semester I had the benefit of studying several of them. One in particular caught my attention because of the title *14 Stations*, by Jeffrey Morin. Morin references his Catholic upbringing and notes how, “The 14 Stations of the Cross are among my earliest memories of going to church because they were set at the outer aisles and my family always sat in the same outer pew across from a station and across from a particular stained glass window...”. The book *14 Stations* comments on the AIDS pandemic locally and abroad. Morin goes on to describe his thematic interests and influences: “I wanted to create a story that was both new and familiar so took some references directly from the New Testament and then began to deconstruct the story – looking for a way to deal with confession, accusation, and reconciliation. These are fairly basic interactions that most people can relate to. I was also intrigued by the changing nature of the name, Jesus. In the Latino culture it is common today. In the non-Latino community it seems to be a sacrilege to name someone after Christ. The relationship between the sacred and profane has always been compelling to me.”

Morin’s work is an inspiration to me because we both are using our Catholic upbringings and symbolic influences to our work. I have included an image of the book box, an example of one of the reduction lino block images printed throughout the book and a photo of a text page. (Morin)
My desire to learn more about the book as object went beyond my studies at the Corcoran. I went on to independently learn Japanese stab binding, traditional French Bookbinding, ¾ and full leather binding, took a class on paper conservation at the American Academy of Bookbinding in Telluride, Colorado. Additionally, during this time period I worked as a conservation technician. I handled over 4,000 + books, including artist books, Illuminated manuscripts and books from the early 1600’s to
more current 21st century first edition signed copies. The handling and evaluation, which encompassed opening each book and visually evaluating stitching, spine, leather and paper condition, also provided a sensory experience of the touch, smell and sound of the physical books. I experienced how books age over time, the variety of sizes, shapes, sewing structures, and how all the material decisions affect not only the way the book ages, but also the palette of possibilities a book makes available to an artist.

After making my decision not to resume studies at the Corcoran, I applied and was accepted to George Mason University as a printmaking major. My first semester after a series of life interruptions, moving, switching two graduate schools, and attending graduate school full time was a stressful period and my sense of focus in my first two semesters were difficult. Finding my sense of place in a new school for a third time produced doubt about completing a graduate degree. I was asked to participate in the annual Call and Response artist book project and exhibition, and the project required collaboration with a graduate English major. I want to highlight my second collaboration that I am most proud of. The book title is Just Below, and it was purchased by Fenwick Library and is available at Mason’s permanent Artist Book collection. What I found rewarding was my interactions with my collaborator writer Sarah Winn as we devised a means to understand each other’s aesthetics. I started by providing Sarah with photographs that inspired me and from there she wrote poems that I then created single sheet book pages for, accompanied by a leather covered box that I made for the work.
As I continued to struggle with teasing out my visual language with prints, I was strongly compelled using my sculptural background to work out my content with the physicality of metal and wood materials to make prayer kneelers. After building several based on drawing I found online, I began to ask critical questions after they were built, “Now what?” It was through this intensive questioning that I began to get in touch with why they were being built and how I could make these objects with a focus on creating a different context for someone who may be familiar with them. Part of the solution was using metal wire and rebar, and emphasizing the material to create an outline of the object. The other method I employed was changing the scale and proportion as well as employing distortion. The distortion was created in a metal wire kneeler, by wrapping rope around the center as tightly as possible. The form looked constricted, and I found
those same emotive qualities looking at myself as a former Catholic. Those early kneelers solidified the necessity to create an experience for the viewer with the ritual object. Feeling a sense of isolation and loss from the Catholic Church, I was motivated to create and share those feelings of loss, separation, and isolation with my viewers. The kneeler series was born.

![Figure 35 Kneeler Variations, steel wire, cardboard, rebar, rope, plywood platform, white cotton sheet](image)

I found the physicality of my first kneeler to feel highly charged as an object, not unlike the way religious objects are charged with meaning. I needed to find a way to remove the immediate association with the object. I experimented covering them with
fabric and rope, which created immediate references to artists such as Christo, and Man Ray. Then I tried changing fabric color, type of rope and even created a platform with steel wire to suspend a metal kneeler off the floor. The experiment was photographed and was used in a photogravure image titled Suspended II. It was the first integration of photography and sculpture translated to print.

Figure 36 Suspended II (Photogravure)
My progression of creating these physical objects also caused me to think about a person’s body in relation to them. How do they deny access? Directly? Indirectly? This questioning later in my process focused around my body in relation to the object. The kneeler was an object of interaction, to kneel on; it can be an intermediary device for prayer, confession, and receiving of the Eucharist. The act of kneeling is an action of subjugation. The kneeler forms were denying these actions and creating a tension between what the kneeler references and what it is unable to provide an adherent of Catholicism.

As the kneeler series started to develop, I wrestled with discovering the medium to use to explore the emerging concepts revolving around transformation, loss, Catholicism, and now the idea of what I was able to label as the numinous. I experimented with various mediums of printmaking, from screen-printing, to collage, digital prints, solar plates and photogravure. The absence of color asserted itself in my work. My primary palette was grey, black, and white. Early prints included a human form and its shadow; the question of how that form would be realized was still in its infancy.
Figure 39 Untitled (serigraphy, collage)

Figure 40 Untitled (serigraphy)
I had experimented with form and scale for an installation in Gallery 123, located in the Johnson Center. The work was a large-scale screen print, along with a sculptural kneeler, covered with a white sheet and wrapped with rope. The print was my first breakthrough using myself as subject. The repetition of my own image was both confrontational and iconic. It seemed to enter a new realm of visual experience mostly due to its multiplicity. My thesis show would reflect a resolution of the use of multiplicity, confrontation, scale, and sculptural interaction with prints. The second experience that proved to be a pivotal point in my artistic development was the work selected by the curator for the 2013 George Mason University 1st Annual Artifex Graduate Show. Two of my abstracted sculptural kneelers were chosen along with a hanging artist book. The book was inspired from the print produced for the Gallery 123 exhibition. What proved pivotal was the rawness of emotion displayed in the use of re-appropriated text cut out of magazines and newspaper headlines that covered my eyes and mouth. Again, I employed multiplicity, confrontation and iconic reference with the inclusion of text to convey loss and vulnerability.

The gallery experiences offered invaluable feedback to observe how my installations conveyed meaning, occupied space, and whether the collection of works together made sense.
Figure 41 Gallery 123: Wrapped Kneeler with Sectioned Prints

Figure 42 Artifex Show 2013: Hanging Book w/ Kneelers
My direction started to congeal with my experiences when working with various artists who specialized in creating digital prints and the photogravure process. After several limited successes with the photogravure process, I sought out and found artist Lothar Osterburg in Brooklyn, N.Y., and inquired about working out issues I was having with the process. Lothar’s working methodology presented itself in a simplified manner and his explanations of the process along with gaining an understanding of a much wider threshold of working tolerances with materials, boosted my confidence.

After completing a few days of training with Lothar, I experimented more with the technique and my successes with the process fueled my desire to focus on this medium that produced rich blacks and beautiful grey tones. I made the decision to focus on this print medium for my show.

**Transmutation: body, mind, ritual, form**

When I was asked to provide a title for my show I was still in the middle of shooting photos and creating images for my work. My mind went blank for a moment. I wanted the title to represent what I felt the overall show embodied. The definition of *transmutation*, according the Merriam Webster online dictionary, is “an act or instance of transmuting or being transmuted”; and then looking at the definition of the word *transmuted*, “to change or alter in form, appearance, or nature and especially to a higher form.” The exhibition closely examined my separation from Catholicism, which is metaphorical on a psychic level and also in a literal way. What I would consider the
“transmuted” is my understanding and transformation of the way I experience and see what I refer to as the numinous. This new understanding allowed a part of my psyche to emerge, which was not fully realized until I began a serious inquiry into myself. (Merriam Webster Dictionary)

I see my art practice as an extension to the many facets of my life, being male, having a sexual identity, journeying into middle age, being married, family, faith, joy, pain, disease, friendships, relationships, politics, work, career, and the list can go on. The points I raise go beyond the scope of this paper. I will discuss a narrower window of this concept, but feel that it is relevant to expand the multi-faceted areas that influence my work. I raise the issues to reaffirm that artist, as an identity is a label that can narrowly define someone. My art practice reflects a personal transformative experience and by placing it into the public realm provides an opportunity for the viewer to be a witness or hopefully to be touched in a deeper and profound way. I value Suzi Gablik’s book titled Has Modernism Failed? In which she quotes Theodore Roszak, “The Old Gnosis’, a visionary style of knowledge as distinct from a theological or a factual one, that is able to ‘see’ the divine in the human, the infinite in the finite, the spiritual in the material.” I appreciate this discussion about the loss of spiritual value of art versus a capitalist perspective of art within postmodern culture. I am furthering ideas that come from within, and seek to resolve their complexities by way of transpersonal representations. This can only happen by delving head on into the deep recesses of who I am as artist and what has shaped my life. It is only through this
honest dialogue that I can then engage the community, which shares or denies the various aspects of the human condition I chose to emphasize or refer to. (Gablik 93)

I can lean on artists like Joseph Beuys, whose work is characterized as “...a deep belief in the power of intuition as expressed in the parallel between the artist and the shaman: both invest simple materials with intense and potentially healing power.” His work titled *I Like America and America Likes Me*, resonates with its strong metaphorical references of power and helplessness. Beuys uses the “wound motif” in his work according to an article by Jim Watkins. He is quoted in an interview with Louwrien Wijers as saying, “If you come in a space with a big flame of fire you will get burnt, and you cannot say: ‘This is the symbol of a flame’, because you will die of the heat of this flame. So is Christ not a symbol for something. It is the substance in itself. It means life. It means power, the power of life... Without this substance of Christ the earth would already have died.” Beuys too, draws on his Catholic roots to create work that juxtaposes power within different frameworks. (Watkins)
Another artist that I have a deep respect for is Anne Hamilton. Her recent work examines our need for community and our desire to be alone. In an interview with Hamilton regarding her work titled *Making, and the Spaces We Share*, she discusses with interviewer Krista Tippett her religious roots. Here I want to highlight is how Hamilton’s work questions our human connection with one another, yet our desire to be separate. Her explorations of space and how we experience it is something I thought important to incorporate in my thesis show. I find that Hamilton’s work seeks to emphasize our human fragility by focusing on our senses, allowing us to enter a shared experience. (Tippett)

Artist Onslow Ford also came to understand the mysterious in art. Ford stated “Art is the language of the Spirit” and that one must “have faith in the mysterious functioning of the universe.” Fariba Bogzaran describes Ford as an artist who “believed strongly in the spirit of nature and the transpersonal qualities in human nature. He
considered painting his spiritual practice, and in most of his writings, he shows a reverence and dedication to ‘the creative force of the universe’. I appreciate Ford’s declaration of his art making as spiritual practice; it helps me as artist to feel firmly planted on a foundation that is held together by similar philosophies, religious upbringings and the wrestling with similar ideas of identity, community and spirituality. These artists that I choose to highlight here help bring into context my art making philosophy and the manner in which my ideas seem to germinate. (Bogzaran 12)

**Body**

The body and more specifically my body played a prominent role in my work and explorations. In searching through notes, while writing this paper, I came across an article on artist Louise Bourgeois. This article discussed her exhibition in 2008 at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, France. What captured my attention was how her work was described as “Based on memory, emotion and the reactivation of childhood souvenirs, Louise Bourgeois follows a subjective approach, using all types of material and all manner of shapes. Her personal and totally autobiographical vocabulary is consistent with the most contemporary of practices, ...” I could not help but be reminded of how I find similar connections within my own work. Many of Bourgeois’ works examine the male and female body and body parts. Her highly personal work is an inspiration for and validation of my own process of art making. The example I included is titled *Cell*
XIV, “... houses a metal table on which a red fabric sculpture sits on a small pedestal. The fabric sculpture is a trio of screaming heads, which are fused together. The three fused heads are reminiscent of Cerberus in Greek mythology where each head often represent birth, youth, and old age; the cycle of life which preoccupied Bourgeois. ... Bourgeois revisits themes of confinement, anguish and fear.” I am inspired and encouraged on my personal artistic journey to connect with artists that have spent a lifetime working with their personal histories. By using my autobiographical history with the Catholic Church, by using my physical body in positions or poses as subject, and by choosing sculptural elements that reference and enhance the meaning of my work, I align my work with her insistent connections. (Centre Pompidou 3)(Tate Gallery 12)
Mind

I have spent equal if not more time thinking about my work during my time at George Mason University. What does it try to say? What form does it want to take? Where does the narrative come from? I researched articles that examined questions related to belief and why many people like myself engaged in organized religion. According to a study by Sasaki and Kim, “Religion helps people maintain a sense of control, particularly secondary control-acceptance of and adjustment to difficult situations-and contributes to strengthening social relationships in a religious community.” I find satisfaction in coming to understand the motivations and desires that draw others and me to explore a human drive or desire that is wired in our behavior. As stated earlier, my art practice is a form of spiritual practice and the art community replaces any desire to return to any religious congregation. (Sasaki 401)

I would like to elaborate here the use of the term *spiritual*. According to Dictionary.com, *spiritual* is defined as “having a mind or emotions of a high and delicately refined quality,” and this best describes my understanding of the term. It is my understanding that a variety of secular traditions look to define and label this term differently through various types of ritual practice such as Buddhism, yoga, and others. My definition embraces a framework to understand it, but not seek to contain it. When I refer to my art practice as being a spiritual practice, I am referring to the experience of
bridging what wants to emerge through my work by the activity of aesthetic awareness and visual media. All the activity and directed energy through explorations constitute what I term spiritual practice. (Collins English Dictionary)

**Ritual**

When I chose the term *ritual* I had many thoughts about the way I am accustomed to understanding this word. *Ritual* is a religious act or rite, but also repetitive behavior. This refers to the act of kneeling, standing and genuflecting as a sign of respect. However, on a fundamental level it is a prescribed repeated behavior, similar to preparing a copper plate in photogravure. There is a sequencing of steps that need to happen however, within these activities of cleaning and polishing, a reverence or respect for the time spent in that preparation changes the way I look at the material and the process. I find myself doing things very consciously at first; then the activity becomes meditative, especially when inking and wiping the plates to print.

**Form**

What is the significance of form? I reflected on this notion, I can clearly see form as my body and its physical qualities conforming to shapes in a limited degree. The covered face or head takes on or has the capacity to take on the universal face—mine, yours, your neighbor. The use of my body as a naked form is the unveiling of
various truths. I decided to reveal myself in a literal and metaphorical way, physically
naked with only a cloth or kneeler structure as a barrier. The idea of form is both the
physical shape and space occupied by my work, and also the metaphorical “form” of
revealing oneself, i.e. my nakedness.

The kneeler structures stained black emphasizes thickness of material, scale, and
proportion. Its blackness hides my construction methods and use of specific material
gets de-emphasized. My use of black frames and raised matting reflects a very formal
presentation. The images themselves retain a relatively stable consistency and I can’t
help but see the geometric shapes in consistent sizes of the frames used, the repetition
of the prayer kneeler forms, along with the video monitor mounted vertically created
meta-information for the viewer to perceive as a stable environment of predictability,
possibly allowing for the uneasy nature of the narrative to be considered within the
work.

It was during the summer of 2013 that I decided to create photogravures for my
thesis show. With the medium determined, I came to realize that what was missing
from my work were my authentic references. My physical body needed to interact with
these prayer kneeler objects in order for them to possess a strong emotional meaning.
In retrospect, I believe that I was inspired by an interview I read in June of 2013 with
Eleanor Heartney discussing her Catholic background “…the importance of the physical
body, which runs through all of the big mysteries of Catholicism on up through the
Mass...” This interview excerpt amongst my other researched artist’s helped with validating my conceptual development of my work, with the reasons why I was making certain aesthetic decisions. (Knowles 21)

I had several conversations with Stephanie Booth, a recent MFA photo graduate student and discussed my project and objectives. She agreed to work with me, and after several weeks and many hours of her photographing me, I started to see a visual language for my work. The work produced for my thesis show was time intensive and represented a breakthrough of wanting to be authentic about my visual dialogue with the viewer. The next chapter is devoted to explaining the works and their meanings for my thesis show.
THE THESIS SHOW

My thesis show, which took place in November 2013, represented a culmination of my experiences in graduate studies at George Mason University that included printmaking, sculpture and photography. Although to state my thesis show represented an academic milestone, which it did, I also do not want to understate the personal transformations that needed to take place not only within my personal aesthetic, but also a profound transpersonal perspective that emerged. The graduate student critiques encouraged me to have a voice in discussing not only my own work but also the work of other artists in a direct and supporting environment. Further out in those rings I would designate the theoretical understanding of my own growing narrative and aesthetic judgments, through critical art theory classes. I continued to find myself struggling with content, personal narrative and a cohesive vision for my thesis show. I felt that my kneeler series was an anchor in my body of work, because they have been there since my first semester of graduate school at Mason and I could not ignore that significance. Two events took place that pushed me to create the work that was in my thesis show. The first was work that was selected to be exhibited in a highly visible show in DC, Connersmith Academy exhibition that features BFA, MFA up-and-coming young artists. When I looked at my work selected and on exhibit, I
realized in my gut that I was not pushing my content far enough. At that moment, I had to make a decision to either be completely authentic with what I was trying to convey, or else leave graduate school. I chose to stay in graduate school, and this decision prompted me to write a letter to my thesis committee and share a detailed and personal account of what was influencing my work. The letter and its contents are not relevant other than to point out that my disclosure and honesty was a way for me to bear myself to my committee, allowing me to create and edit my work in a manner that allows room for viewers to create their own interpretation and understanding within the content of the thesis show. This was a watershed moment that began several focused and labor-intensive months of work.

As stated earlier, I worked with photographer Stephanie Booth, who I hired during photographic sessions over the summer. I discussed what I was exploring in my work and this would be an experimental exploration. After our first photo shoot I felt that the images held significant visual potential. It felt risky, but the authenticity I was bringing to the work made me continue this process for several weeks. I also decided during this time to create a video, not being fully aware of its importance in my show. What I have not mentioned to this point is that the images and positions for the photo shoot demanded that I was naked in these shots and required me to interact with the photographer through each phase of shooting and while changing positions. I felt that I could not be more authentic and honest with my work, by virtue of my nakedness but also that the work demanded this authenticity and vulnerability. To pay homage to the
vulnerability that I allowed to come through my photo shots I made an aesthetic
decision to leave off the Plexiglas on all my prints in the thesis exhibition. I did this to
allow the viewer to appreciate the texture and intensity of the black within the prints
and also removing this barrier served as a symbolic attempt to allow my work to be
vulnerable, with no barrier to the prints’ surface.

Figure 45: Memory, Memories (Photogravure grouping)
The decision to feature photo-based imagery in the exhibition allowed me to make use of personal snapshots of me as a young boy. The first series as you entered the exhibit, titled *Memory, Memories*, presented a remembrance of me at 7 years of age. These 8 prints are printed on Japanese paper, each printed with successive increases of transparent base to the black ink, so that the image became more faded with each printing. There is a symbolic gesture to this arrangement. As I mentioned earlier, I discussed during my research about my childhood home where I was raised that my home was demolished, the church of my youth was abandoned and in disrepair. Although the home in which I was raised is gone, memories of that space remain. The church of my youth cannot be replaced, but it too can be seen as a metaphor for my abandonment and neglect of memory, only to serve as a means to reconstitute the numinous in a different context.

The constellation of prints in *Memory, Memories* examines the idea of time and maturity; they are representations of self-discovery into one’s truer self, which in many ways I believe is a journey that will take a lifetime, if at all possible. It is valuable to acknowledge that we continually change, and it is through that journey of change that I can feel more comfortable in my own skin and in the art I make. According to Linda Quinn, a psychoanalyst, “…one’s personal history carries the ghostly stories of ancestors and cultural history that, when deeply explored, impart life and meaning to one’s journey, moving it forward in remembrance.” My thesis show is about remembering, memorializing and finding meaning. Deploying my talents in this
endeavor symbolically casts a net into the proverbial ocean of my psyche, and by doing so I risk knowing parts of myself that have been hidden. But not doing so would certainly ensure that what is hidden remains that way. (Quinn 10)

Figure 46 Reflections of Former Selves (photogravure)
The work titled, *Reflections of Former Selves*, represents a multiplicity of our change in our perception and ideas of who we are and holds multiple representations and possibilities. The image titled *What I was, What I am, What I am Becoming*, reflects what could be an emergence from the forest floor or the cycle of death and life that occurs within nature. This death and rebirth cycle also reflects our personal deaths and rebirths as we navigate our changing perceptions of the world and ourselves as we age.
Figure 48 Kneeler with Rope  (Sculpture)  (Image of grouping)
Figure 49 Contemplation II (C-Print) (Co-authored with photographer Stephanie Booth)

Figure 50 Self Study (Photogravure)
In the thesis exhibition I created a grouping of work (figure 48), which included a C-print, photogravure and one of my original sculptural kneelers, which was also used in both images. I believed this relationship helped to complete a thought of the physical object the viewer could navigate around. The viewer could see and perceive the distortions of scale and proportion in relation to what was depicted in the two prints installed on a wall nearby. A rope was laid on the kneeler as a sign of inactivity but also as a signifier that it still exists to bind, control and restrict, or remove.
I decided to hang a series together that represented the concealed or the obscured. These prints also were displayed within line sight of entering the gallery, with the large tallest kneeler of my series separating the two images. Again a repeated grouping of images and a sculptural object completed a visual composition to convey a relationship that represents an impeded view as well as a framed one. The Vertical Kneeler is a structure that commands attention. I chose to stain it black, and in part the blackness gives it a presence and association with its solidness and prominence. Imago I and Transfiguration were hung from left to right of the kneeler. Imago I represents a rebirth; the Transfiguration image represents the suffering one must go through to grow, the shedding of the old ways or patterns of being, into new ways. Transformation comes at the price of allowing parts of one's psyche to die in order for rebirth of new patterns to emerge, as represented in Imago I. I certainly believe that this is a path of individuation, and that this path does not have a terminal point. Rather, it continues until we die and transition into something else.

The exhibition contained three prints titled Veiled Silence 1, 2, 3, with slight variation in printing as denoted by the numbered sequencing. Referring to multiplicity within the printmaking medium, this series highlights how this medium has the potential power to promote and spread ideas by being able to create many multiples of the original work. The replication of three prints is symbolic of the Holy Trinity; the image below is of myself with a veil-like material covering my head. It is a gesture to obscure; yet I am still present in it and I cannot deny the history within my former
Catholic consciousness. The veil is a powerful signifier of marriage, death, a shroud, a confession, and secrets. These are all representative of my Catholic background and all elements I feel removed from; yet as artist these associations reside in my psyche and I rely on these references to compose my metaphoric images.

Figure S3 Veiled Silence 1, 2, 3 (Photogravure grouping)
Figure 54 Veiled Silence (close up)
The sequence of prints to follow depicts an altered perspective of a kneeler in proportion and scale to my body in the image. The image of the kneeler contrasted against my bare chest, gives reference to prayer card hand positioning that I remember receiving after church services and funerals. These prayer cards reflect the sacred heart of Jesus and Mary respectively. The scale represents a shift in power; the object is the smallest in shape and scale, with the actual sculptural model on display. The mini kneeler sculpture modeled from my earlier metal wire kneelers, holds many interpretations ranging from obscurity, powerlessness, and a lack of significance.

The objects’ proportion and scale can also be viewed as created and subject to the authority of one holding it. Unlike the prayer cards that depicts rich symbolic references to blood, suffering, the cross, Mary, and Christ, the images created for my
exhibition represent a power that is reclaimed metaphorically into the hand of the one holding it and also the one who created it. The relationship of the kneeler against the bare chest, as depicted in Behold and Perspective, serves to reveal a shift in perspective of object to body relationship, without the psychological weight of Catholic dogma. Behold and Perspective visually convey a sense of power back to the holder, to honor or destroy; the images provide a middle ground that holds the opportunity to learn from these objects.

I see the Mini Kneeler sculpture as an object of fragility. It is constructed of balsa wood; it needs to be handled with care. The object was constructed to delineate linear aspects of the structure; it functions as a successful sculpture employing metaphor that is amplified through the use of miniature scale, size, and quality of construction material. It is a construct of ideas, by its reference to an object of ritual. The manner in which I hold it in relation to my body signifies, a visual and psychological shift in my perception and understanding of the object and its references to Catholic ritual practice. In other words, the psychological and ethereal prominence has been reduced to a perspective that respects the object’s perceived reverential roots. However, the material of which it is constructed can be completely discarded, destroyed, or read as flimsy, unlike the larger and more prominent sculptural prayer kneelers in the exhibition that feels dominantly assertive in the space. As the holder of the small kneeler sculpture, I become its caretaker.
Figure 56 Perspective (Photogravure)

Figure 57 Behold (Photogravure)
Following this series of prints was a wall-mounted shelf that held the *Mini Kneeler* sculpture used in the photogravure prints above. I wanted the actual object to provide contextual information in relation to the person holding it in the prints. Just as the other physical prayer kneelers in the exhibition reflected a disproportionate feel of scale and proportion, this small and deliberately altered object reflected the same range of physical and emotive properties. It held equal meaning and juxtaposition with the other sculptural objects.

![Figure 58 Mini Kneeler (Sculpture)](image)
In three more prints remaining along this wall, another triad grouping provided an important context of meaning. *Suspended* and *Suspended II* followed the *Mini Kneeler*. These two photogravure prints depicted a suspended kneeler with cable supports against two varied backgrounds. The two prints represented a transformation of the form into an ethereal world or environment, dream-like place where elements could take on new form. I believe that symbolically these prints represented something other than reality, a constructed world where formal physical elements could enter and exit as something transformed. I would draw upon my Catholic background and call this ethereal place purgatory; a place for awaiting transition or in Jungian terms, a rising of greater consciousness. These two prints are juxtaposed against the third in the triad titled *Wrestling with my Demons*. A dramatic isolation of my hands intermingled with rope that I appear to be wrestling with. The print continues my dialogue about the vulnerability and challenges I face in letting go of a formal and familiar framework of childhood indoctrination into the Catholic faith.
Figure 59 Suspended II (Photogravure)

Figure 60 Suspended (Photogravure)
The inclusion of my fourth and final sculptural kneeler titled *Elongated Kneeler* was incorporated into an installation. The kneeler faces the digital print titled *Self Portrait*. I titled the sculpture *Elongated Kneeler* due to its 9'8” length, which serves to deny access to its use. With the digital print *Self Portrait* facing the *Elongated Kneeler* they seem to serve each other by juxtaposition of meaning. The digital print is a photo of my face with Christ’s image in the background. But you are only able to see one or the other image clearly. The image represents the idea that one does not exist without the other and yet separateness prevails. I began to believe that, with my abandonment of Catholic religious doctrine, I could begin a journey to reconstitute powerful symbols into a more personal meaning.
Figure 62 Self-Portrait and Elongated Kneeler (Installation image)

Figure 63 Self-Portrait (Digital Print)
I wanted to explore the isolation of form in print to further my ongoing investigation in a way that does not include myself directly in the image. The print titled *You Decide* is in the form of the Eucharist used during mass; the print titled *Memory, Movement, Form*, is paired with it. Together they serve as a touchstone on this subject. These images are printed on black paper with white ink. I found these prints referenced my prior explorations at Kent State University, with a refined understanding of how these material choices could add to my work. The Eucharist in the print is situated in the lower quadrant of the image, conveying the idea of downward movement. The word power is on the host, disclosing a construct within Catholic dogma where the Catholic participant becomes subservient to the ritual and to the priest officiating the ritual being conducted. The position and isolation of the image against the black background signifies a
disharmony that requires closer examination and questioning of the object within the picture plane.

The print *Memory, Movement, Form* is depicted in multiple overlapping outlines, highlighting the simplicity of form and conveying movement or shaking of the structure, a metaphor for deconstruction of symbols that no longer function, while at the same time they can elicit iconic adorations to their past and memories that they once held for me. This print represents the reduction of line within my sculptural explorations, expanding my ideas that this kneeler form within my memory no longer has substance within new constructs and understanding within my psyche.

The next to last work is a video installation, titled *Releasing, Letting*, runs 5 minutes, in a continuous loop. The video depicts my hands crushing Eucharist hosts. Displayed from the perspective of looking down onto my hands and seeing the floor below. This perspective invites the viewer in an enactment of a time-based activity, which was otherwise previously manifested through my artist books. It is a shared opportunity that poses challenging nuances and points of view.
The actual action of my hands interacting with the hosts symbolized my gesture of separation and releasing of a dogma that promoted judgment over unconditional acceptance. The video serves to symbolically break the illusion or training that was part of my indoctrination into Catholicism at such an early age. To deny the efficacy of dogma and ritual training is also to cast oneself out of the
community. The video symbolically represented through the action of crushing the Eucharistic hosts in my hands an abandoned belief in the mystery of transubstantiation of the body of Christ manifesting into the Eucharist, a major component of Catholic teaching. The performance of isolating my hands became the memorializing of a new capacity of standing in uncertainty, to discover the numinous experience without the framework that Catholicism offered. The placeholder of certainty was made bare, and in its place was a reconfiguration to honor my artistic practice as a ritual practice that allows me to function in a space of uncertainty. My art practice took on new set of rituals; functioning as a foundation that allows me to question, receive information back, and for me to filter important revelations and information through the making of my work. The result is imperfect and uncertain, yet conveys a harmony with what feels honest and authentic.

The sound piece included in my exhibition was installed outside the gallery space; it was a cut of recorded church bells ringing along the countryside of Lake Como, Italy, where I visited in the previous year. I wanted the bells to symbolize a call to mass. The lighting was significantly reduced to less than 50 percent to create a church-like or somber ambiance within the gallery. My numerous travel experiences to churches abroad and my experiences with attending Sunday church services influenced my decisions. The culmination of church bell sounds and lighting ambiance solidified the experience. I also took into consideration the entrance of the gallery and considered ways to control the flow of people in and out of the gallery. The restricting of the flow of people in and out of
the gallery was achieved in two ways: one, I placed a black panel above the entrance which not only lowered the entrance height to 7 feet and narrowed the entrance to approximately 48 inches wide, slowing the flow of visitors entering the gallery; and two, I placed a clear acrylic pedestal that housed the sculpture *Kneeler with Lid*, directly inside and in front of the entrance. This method slowed the entering visitor down similarly to what I recalled seeing in church entrances, where an artifact or a donation box is placed.

The *Kneeler with Lid* sculpture established a pause, a change in awareness, preparing the viewer to enter the space, not unlike taking off one’s shoes or dipping one’s hand in holy water before entering a church or temple.
The final print of the exhibition is titled *Finding the Numinous*, which developed from an exploration I completed a couple of semesters ago, examining shadows and the temporal nature of the shadow, causing me to question the impermanence of the shadow and my own physical impermanence. *Finding the Numinous* includes my hand in the image, disclosing and revealing how the image was made. I wanted to capture and memorialize my new awareness by sharing the temporal nature of things, and within that exploration I was able to experience the numinous. The print image was a fitting shift of emphasis from all the other work in the show. In my mind, *Finding the Numinous* represented certainty within uncertainty, physical within the ephemeral, and the consciousness of something new and emerging. According to Jung, “there is no clear distinction between a transcendent divinity, and what he denotes as the Self, an innate image of the divine.” Quinn also asserts, “…at the depth of our being is the absolute source of a sacred or numinous experience.” My explorations into shadow and light makes the numinous accessible to me in a manner that was lost. The numinous did not require specialized props to reveal what I was looking for. The discovery was not based on any profession of faith. What it did require was a sense of being present and having an inquiring mind. The numinous is all around us; it requires only to be noticed. (Quinn 9)
Figure 67 Finding the Numinous (photogravure)
I have included three interior gallery photos that represent a global perspective of the interior gallery space from my thesis show. This will assist the reader better to visualize how the gallery was laid out and how to see the works within the gallery space. The sequencing is moving left to right upon entering the gallery.
Figure 69 Gallery Interior 2

Figure 70 Gallery Interior 3
I took the time to read all the written comments by students and visitors to the exhibition space; a few commented they did not necessarily understand some of the poses or knew what exactly the work was about. Upon reflection, as a way of framing of the audiences’ responses, I recalled a curatorial statement written by photographer Sean Justice for an Exhibition titled *Pictures are Words-not-Known*. He writes, “...the picture we are looking at is not the work. The picture is the residue of the work...What we call the “work” is not really the work at all, but rather the result of the work. The actual work is the question that the artist asks. The picture (sculpture...), is the attempt to articulate the question, and perhaps to suggest an answer.... What we see is left over. At that point, as viewers, our job is to see through the art and imagine the work, the questions, behind it.” I was taken at how well Justice articulated the artist and viewer relationship. It also helped me to frame the questions and comments left for me during the exhibition. Similarly, Robert Irwin is quoted, “The art is what has happened to the viewer.” Both Justice and Irwin’s words help to reinforce where my work needs to remain focused and whether the audience “gets it”, is secondary to the work itself. (Justice 2)(Weschler 95)

I want to conclude this discussion by stating that what I have endeavored to present within this document is a history, trajectory, and insight into the underpinnings of my work within my thesis exhibition. I also expanded upon my motivations and deliberate decisions for the exhibition show, highlighting my insights before and after the experience of the exhibition. My title and its subheading summed
up a precisely refined narrative that challenged me in its production, and presentation, and that challenged viewers who visited the exhibition space. This was no small task to achieve what has been described in writing and documented in pictures. I believe what was accomplished was based on a strong level of perseverance and dedication to creating and producing this body of work.
WORKS CITED


Artist Book titled Just Below, Gallery 123, Johnson Center, George Mason University. Personal photograph by author. 2013.


Prayer Cards. 2014. Ebay, n.p. Images were found online from Ebay.com


OTHER REFERENCES


Steven Skowron, (b.1966 Buffalo, N.Y.) is a working artist in the Washington D.C. area. He attended Cleveland State University and graduated with honors in 2008 with a B.A. in Studio Art. He has worked as a conservation technician for Johns Hopkins Library and for the Folger Shakespeare Library. He is current President of the George Mason University Printmakers Guild and teaches Digital Printmaking at Mason.

Steven has shown extensively both in and out of the Washington metropolitan area. His work represents a multi-disciplined art practice of printmaking, photography and sculpture. He has also participated in several successful collaborative projects.