

Through Line

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

by

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ABSTRACT

THROUGH LINE

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George Mason University, 2022

Thesis Director: Peter Winant

This thesis explores the graduate exhibition, Through Line, from Fall 2021 by Kerry Hentges. The exhibition focuses on anxiety and how to relieve it through art-making. Both prints and fabric tapestries are showcased. The title of the exhibit, Through Line, references both the literal lines used to create the works of art and the figurative line that connects us all as human beings. The exhibit was displayed at George Mason University in November 2021 at the Gillespie Gallery.

INTRODUCTION

I struggle with anxiety, depression, stress, and obsessive-compulsive tendencies that control my mind, my body, my life. Art is one way I contain my anxieties and find a way to relax. I have to remind myself that it is okay to let thoughts go and be calm. While life has many stressors, it is okay to take a moment for ease. It is necessary. My art acts as this reminder. Thoughts race through my mind, sometimes the same one over and over again. This challenges how I see myself and how I approach life. Overthinking gradually wears down my self-esteem, my self-understanding, and greatly affects my mood. I have trouble remembering that my thoughts don't make up who I am as a person. Safer says that "No matter how compelling our thought, idea, or concept, we come to see that it's just a thought that is not necessarily true." Fear, worry, obsession; these are some of the feelings that plague my mind and body on an average day. I can't let thoughts go, I keep ruminating on the same concern again and again. I use the repetitive nature of worry and obsession in the art that I make. Making the same line with my hand repetitively or sewing small stitches in an obsessive manner mimics the nature of my mind. The process of repetition in art becomes soothing instead of stressful. By repeating the same patterns I make in my mind, I acknowledge the difficulties I face while also healing them. When I make art, the obsessive thoughts tend to fade to the background.

ON FEAR OF DYING

Fear of dying is one recurring obsessive thought that I try to push into the background. My mind gets stuck on the idea that this is all we have, that we have to make it count, because once it's gone, it's gone forever. I can barely wrap my head around the enormity of the concept of death. Lightman states that "(b)etween these two endpoints of the imagination are we human beings, fragile and brief, clutching our thin slice of reality" (5). Our lives are fragile and our deaths guaranteed. Part of my practice confronts my fear of death, approaching it head-on to try and lessen the fear behind it. Lightman goes on to say "...our minds are only collections of atoms, fated to disassemble and dissolve. For each of us, that will be the end of all consciousness and thought. And in that sense, we... are always approaching nothingness" (46). It is this fear of nothingness that my mind cannot grasp. It plagues my thoughts and I start to spiral deeper into despair. I look at my existential dread like a cabinet. When something reminds me of death, the cabinet opens. Inside there is another door, another level of fear. These doors keep opening as I go deeper into my repetitive thinking until the thought of death consumes my mind. Nothingness terrifies me. "It savages the mind and its animating selfhood to consider that everything — including the subset constituting the particular something of us — could dissolve to nothingness" (Popova). Art is my way to try to understand something incomprehensible.

The Ghost Slips Away (figures 1 & 2) is a series of plaster cast explorations of time and the tenuousness of memory. I took an old book and carved away pages until a staircase remained. This effectively destroyed the contents of the book; it became a story you could only read in part. Then I took this book and plaster-cast the inside three times. Each time, more of the story

disappeared and the form became less and less clear. To me, this piece represents the erosion of memory over time. We all gradually forget things and then one day, we pass away, leaving our stories only partially told by those who knew us. Gradually those people begin to forget until what remains of the story of your life has completely vanished.

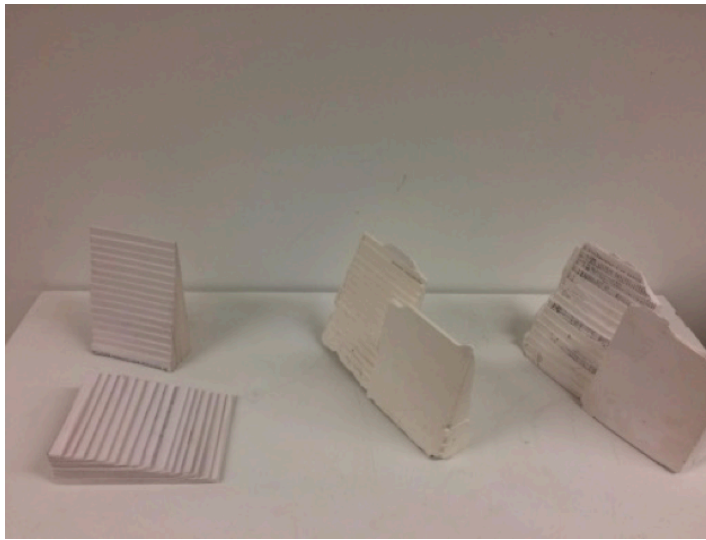


Figure 1: *The Ghost Slips Away*, Plaster and Paper, Dimensions variable



Figure 2: *The Ghost Slips Away*, Plaster and paper, Dimensions variable

Pursuit (figure 3), an altered book, functions in much the same way. I cut into a dictionary, forming two staircases representing the pursuit of knowledge. We spend our lives learning and absorbing so much knowledge only to have it all disappear when we die, much like our life stories. It begs the question of the purpose of life and the purpose of accruing knowledge when we know it will all disappear at the moment of death.



Figure 3: *Pursuit*, Altered book, 10 x 6 inches

ON POETRY

I find relief in comforting words of literature and poetry that acknowledge our passing in an upfront manner. Charles Algernon Swinburne writes about death beautifully in this excerpt of his poem “The Garden of Proserpine”:

From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be
That no life lives for ever;
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

Swinburne takes death and turns it into something that sounds approachable. Instead of fearing death, he looks at it as a safe respite at the end of a long journey. His words remind me that I don’t want eternal life, that death is an inevitability I must accept.

Emily Dickinson writes in her untitled poem:

That it will never come again
Is what makes life so sweet.
Believing what we don’t believe
Does not exhilarate.

That if it be, it be at best
An ablative estate --
This instigates an appetite
Precisely opposite.

In this work, Dickinson shows false belief in an afterlife is not a comfort. Instead it awakens our desire to live forever.

Ernest Becker states that all historical religions have come up with something to stem the fear of death. Faith is something that has ebbed and flowed throughout my life. I no longer find the idea of eternal life in heaven a comfort. In my art, I work through these issues of faith and mortality.

I find the rhythm of the poetry entrancing and it helps to soothe my anxiety. I also write poetry myself as a way to lessen anxiety. The poems that follow are two companion pieces entitled *Isn't it Frightening* (figure 4). They are copied onto plaster casts of the remains of a carved book. I carve into books to remove their story and render them incomprehensible. This serves as a reminder that when we die, our stories go with us. A precious few will remember our story, and when they die we are forgotten completely, our story unreadable.

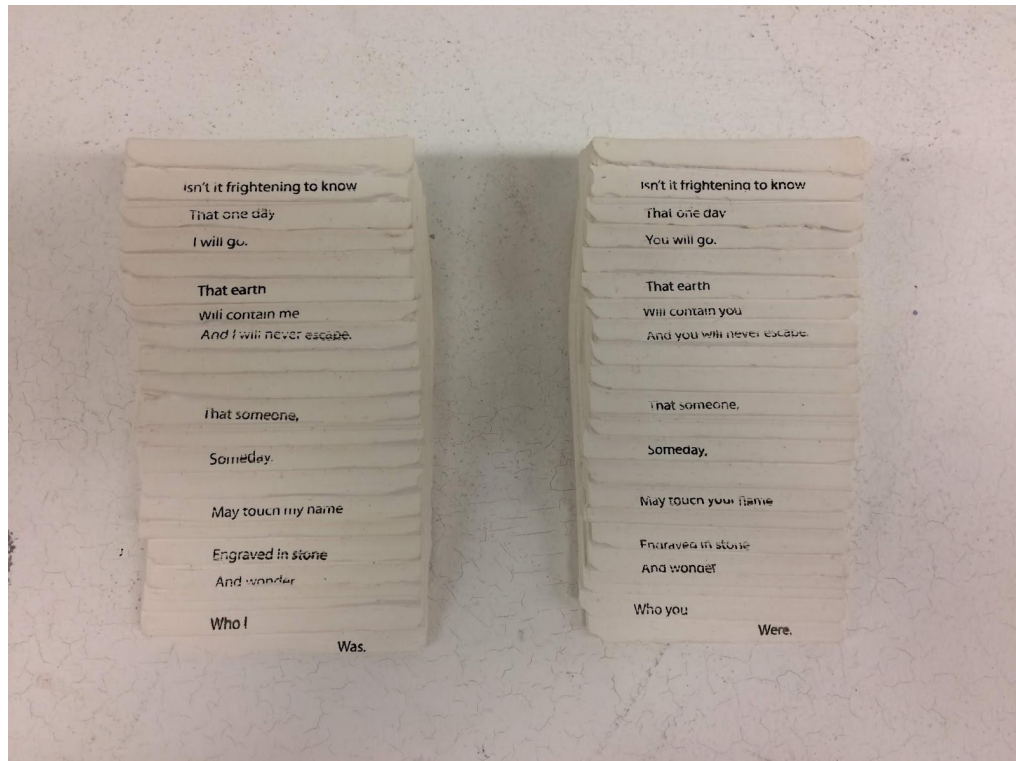


Figure 4: Pursuit, Altered Book, 7 x 5 x 3 inches

[POEM 1]

ISN'T IT FRIGHTENING

1

Isn't it frightening to know
That one day
I will go?

That earth
Will contain me
And I will never escape?

That someone,
Someday,
May touch my name
Engraved in stone,

And wonder
Who I
Was?

2

Isn't it frightening to know
That one day
You will go?

That earth
Will contain you
And you will never escape?

That someone,
Someday,
May touch your name
Engraved in stone,

And wonder
Who you?
Were.

These poems explore my fear at its most basic: that one day we will die. All the people we know and will ever know will die. One day we will all be forgotten. In Cognitive Behavior Therapy, or CBT, one way patients manage fear is to approach it. For example, if you are afraid of spiders, you gradually work your way from looking at spiders to holding a spider. CBT works to “understand how thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are related” (Gillihan 20). To overcome a fear of death, I remind myself of my own mortality, being honest with myself about what I believe is next: nothingness.

The poem that follows explores in depth the Emily Dickinson work from above. I took the original poem and translated it 5 times until nothing remained but the syllable count. Through the poem I explore my own fears and rejection of religion. The poem begins as an interpretation of the original and slowly dissolves into its own meaning. This retelling represents how, when we die, our story is left in the hands of those we loved. They might remember things differently than we did, altering our stories. Our stories gradually dissolve as we become faded memories.

[POEM 2]

EMILY TRANSLATED

1

Life will not come again
Is that what makes it precious?
There is no need for falsehood here
Pretending does not solve.

Belief is false, Belief is fake.
A meaningless comfort -
That just makes us hunger more,
Hunger for eternal.

2

I don't want to die, I don't want to leave,
Eternity sounds okay.
Would I truly tire
Of living every day?

I tried religion
But it lied, made claims it could not prove.
Nevertheless, I
Wished it to be true.

3

Should one live
As if every day is the last?
What is important enough
To dedicate all time?

Is it better to hunger
Than to be full?
Is it better to wish
Than to obtain?

4

Speaking with a rhythm, too, is
meaningless comfort, yes.
Winding the words together tight
Swallowing is easy.

Swallow the white and orange tablets
Of what will never be.
The mystery we cannot know
Until we cease to be.

5

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
1 2 3 4 5 6
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
1 2 3 4 5 6

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
1 2 3 4 5 6
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
1 2 3 4 5 6

ON TIME

My anxiety and fear of death lead into another dimension of artistic practice: time. How do we make the most of the time we have? How do we document it, preserve it, appreciate it while it's here? Mindful meditation, which is awareness of the current moment, is an essential part of my practice. I use meditation and mindfulness practice to keep centered in my body and be aware of the moment. For over two years I have taught a mindfulness class where I lead students through a body awareness scan and loving-kindness meditation. I am able to facilitate this in the lives of others yet I struggle using these tips in my own life. Art is one way that I practice mindfulness and stay in my body instead of wrapped up in my thoughts.

When I go through the process of creating, I am fully immersed in that current moment, appreciating it. I am able to enter the present moment by switching my focus from my mind to my body. As I create the work, I focus on the motions my hands make, the rhythm of creation. Baker poses the question "So how is it that meditation helps us come into the now?" and answers "The bridge for coming into the now is the body. The body exists in the radical present. Paying attention to it has the power to draw us into this present moment and to show us how to settle into the vividness of our own experience as it is unfolding." By making gestures with my body I am connecting with the radical present.

The painting series *Flow* (figures 5 & 6) is one example of this mindful art practice. In this case, the act of producing the art is the most significant part of the work, the work itself simply a product of this recorded moment in time. When I go through the process of creating, I am fully immersed in that current moment, appreciating it. Some of my pieces are time-based and

I have a limit on how long I work on them; others explore the preciousness of particular times in my life.



Figure 5: *Flow*, Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 60 inches



Figure 6: *Flow*, Detail, Acrylic on canvas

Through my work I explore the preciousness of life. One series of my work that memorializes time is *Strings of Fate* (figures 7 & 8). I created four wooden boxes with simple graphic representations of my family and the time we have known each other. Each box has a starting point with a small spool of thread that represents birth, and an end point with another spool that represents present day or death. A string stretches between these two extremes, taut between the two spools. The boxes draw inspiration from the three Fates of Greek mythology: Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos. According to mythology, the three Fates determine your destiny and the length of time you will live, using a piece of spun thread. The thread represents your lifeline. Clotho spins the thread, Lachesis dispenses the thread, and Atropos cuts the thread, thus ending your life (Fate). To honor the time I have known each of my family members, I showed our life lines with gold thread and the period of time in which we have known each other with golden paint.

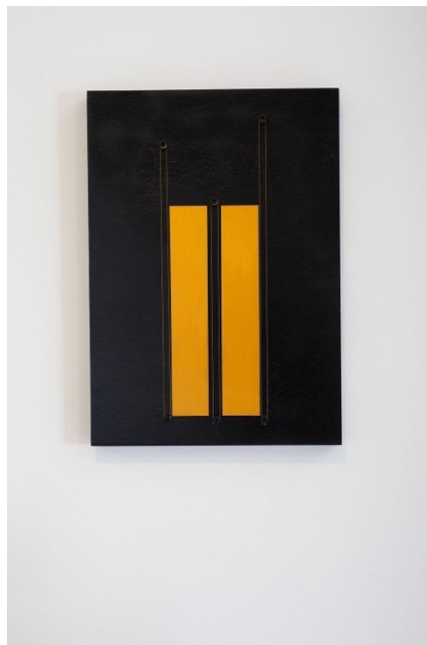


Figure 7: *Strings of Fate: Kim, Kelly, and me*, Acrylic on wood with thread, 17 x 24 inches

In “The Three Sisters: Kim, Kelly, and Me,” (figure 7) the viewer sees my sisters with their starting points towards the top of the box and my starting point closer to the middle. My sisters have known me for my whole life which creates a large golden rectangle of shared time. In “Papa and Me,” (figure 8) the golden area is much smaller, showing the precious time I spent with my father before he passed away in 2003. His string is cut, his life ending too soon. The essence of these pieces is a memorial to time spent with loved ones.



Figure 8: *Strings of Fate: Papa and me*, Acrylic on wood with thread, 12.25 x 22 inches

[POEM 3]

TILT/CRACK

Tilt
Crack

Slipping into a moment
Warm and inviting
Pure understanding

Tilt
Crack

Jolting forward
Gazing inward
Cover it up,
hide from what's real

Tilt
Crack

Repeating
And wondering
Obsession at the pulse point
The rhythmic sensation

Tilt
Crack

Yearning for something
Forgetting in an instant
There could never be enough time

Another way I capture time is by focusing on the precious and fleeting nature of the present moment. This moment is a significant part of my work. I try to capture it, record it, and by doing so memorialize and honor the present. “If there’s any possibility for enlightenment, it’s right now, not at some future time. Now is the time. Now is the only time. How we relate to it creates the future... What we do accumulates; the future is the result of what we do right now.” (Chodron 144) Many of my works are accumulations of the present. When I draw repeated lines, I am embodying the present moment with my mark making. The drawing serves as a recording of my mental states and my thoughts. The act of drawing in the present moment is a significant part of the piece.

Alan Lightman looks at this impending nothingness and approaches it with understanding:

Even though I understand that someday my atoms will be scattered in soil and in air, that I will no longer exist, I am alive now. I am feeling this moment. I can see my hand on my writing desk. I can feel the warmth of the Sun through the window. And looking out, I can see a pine-needled path that goes down to the sea. (48)

What Lightman shows, with his poignant description, is an appreciation for the current moment. My work is about savoring that moment and fully experiencing what is all around us.

I explore the present moment in *Captured Time* (figures 9 & 10), a series of four time-based drawings. I blocked off sheets of drawing paper with rectangles of allotted time. In one of the series, I record four hours in five-minute blocks. First I blocked off four rectangles for each hour and then I split the rectangles into twelve smaller rectangles. I spent five minutes in each small box recording my emotions with a ballpoint pen. The work captures the essence of that time, enclosing five minutes within each box, encapsulating the present moment.



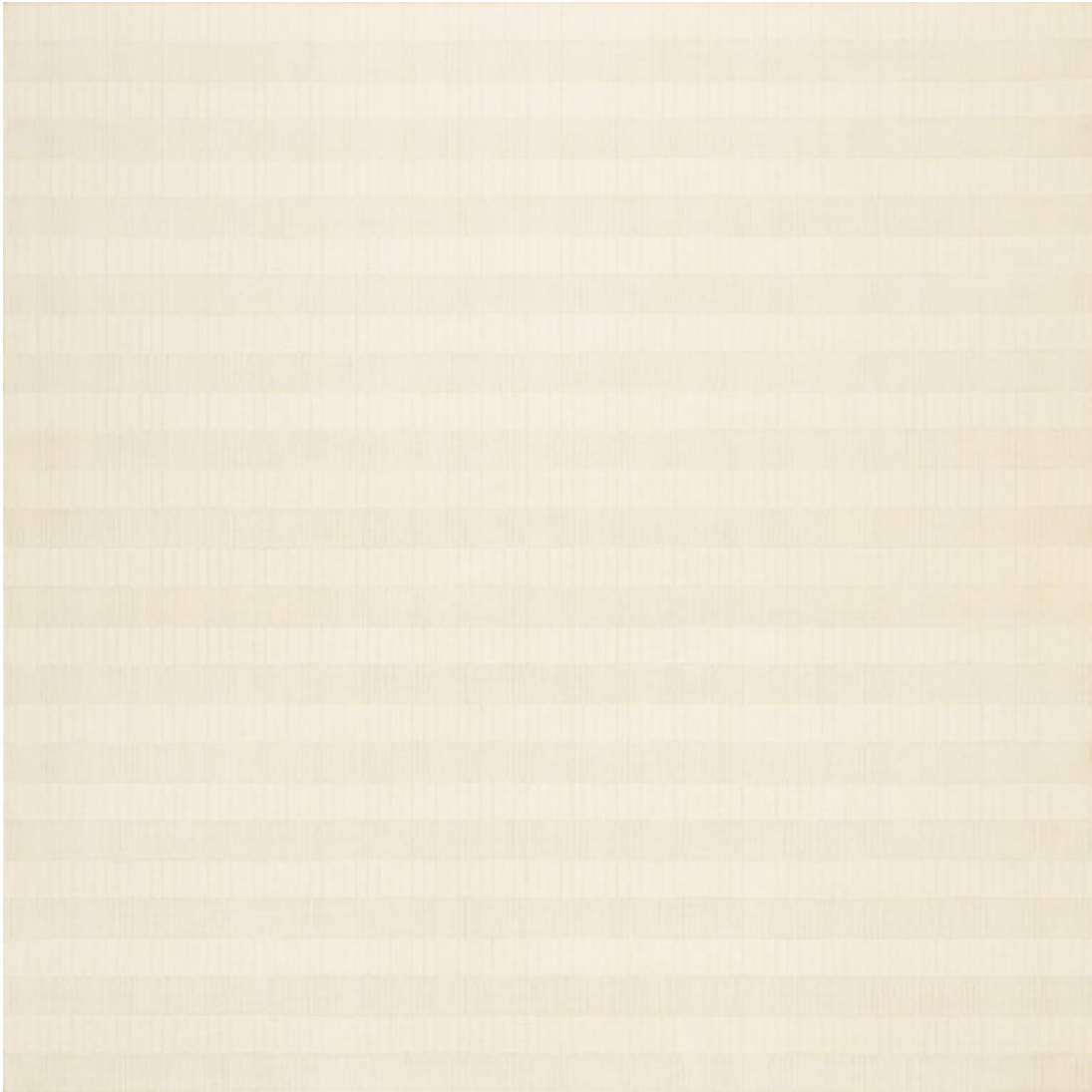
Figure 9: *Captured Time*, Ink on paper, 22 inches by 17 inches.



Figure 10: *Captured Time*, Ink on paper, 22 inches by 17 inches

ON INSPIRATION

I draw inspiration from different artists, including Agnes Martin, Louise Bourgeois, and Lee Bontecou. Martin's work is minimalist with repetitive lines. I find myself drawn to the structured patterns she creates, especially in the work *Pilgrimage* (1966) (figure 11), an abstract work done with graphite on acrylic. This large-scale square painting contains repetitive structured lines that draw the viewer into the painting. The repetitive nature of her work inspires my own accumulated line stitches; while hers are structured, my lines take a free-form journey across the fabric. I also begin my tapestries with a sketch, a guided line to follow. There is structure underneath the chaos of my anxiety as I try to control my winding thoughts. Martin also writes poetry in addition to her studio practice. I find inspiration in the words of her poems in addition to her works.



**Figure 11: Martin, Agnes. *Pilgrimage*. 1996. Glenstone, Potomac Maryland.
<https://www.glenstone.org/artist/agnes-martin/>. Graphite and acrylic on canvas.**

Louise Bourgeois creates work exploring her personal history. I find this an inspiration to explore my own history and base my work on my fears and anxiety. Her exhibition at Glenstone *To Unravel a Torment* contained work spanning decades of the artist's life. Bourgeois' father sold tapestries and she later incorporated tapestry into her artistic practice. In *The Destruction of Father* (1974) (figure 12) Bourgeois created a dinner table scene with amorphous blobs representing her relationship with her father. This telling of a personal history through art influences my own practice and approach to artmaking.

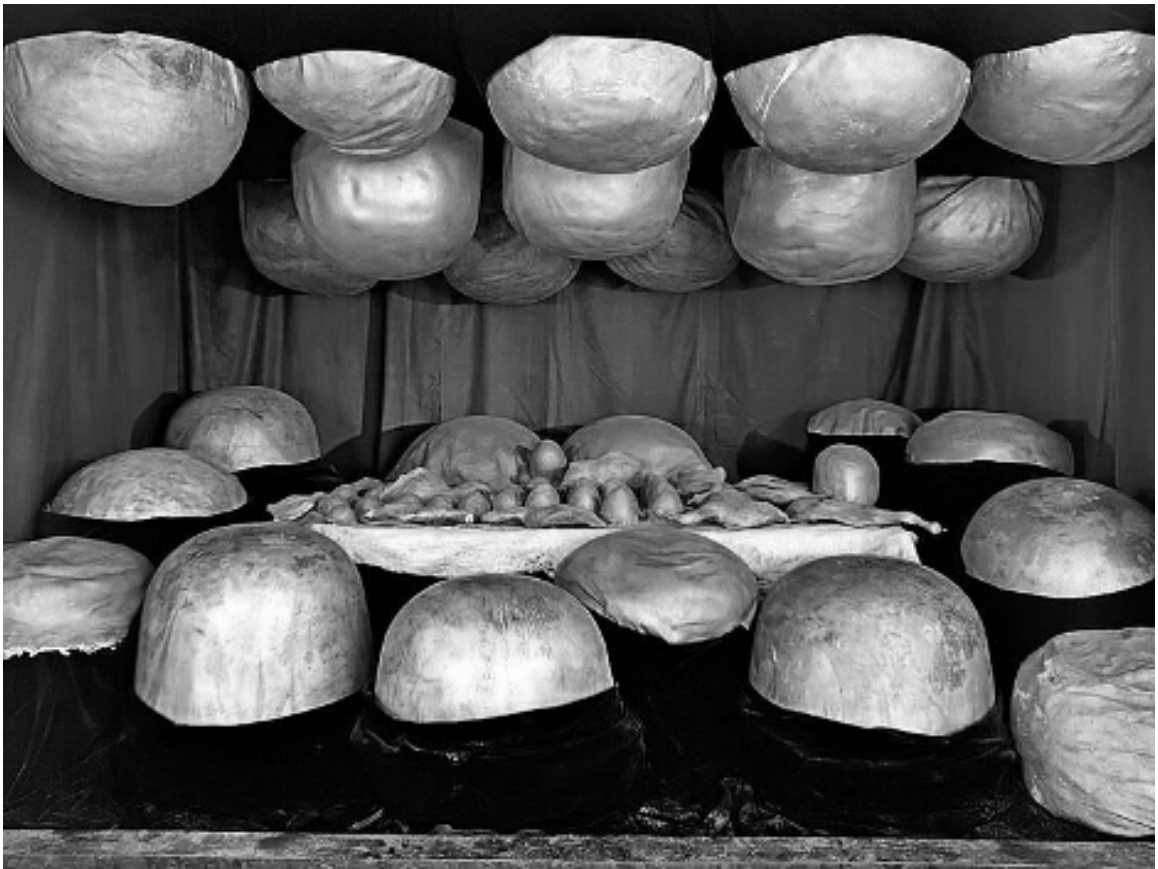


Figure 12: Bourgeois, Louise. *The Destruction of Father*. 1974. The London List.
<https://www.thelondonlist.com/culture/louise-bourgeois>. Latex rubber.

Lee Bontecou creates large-scale metal and fabric pieces about WWII. Lee Bontecou's sculpture *Untitled* (1962) (figure 13) draws me into the dark center space, constructed from canvas and steel, knitted together with wire. Her hand is directly in the work, where you can see punctures of wire, pushing through canvas, seams where metal is welded together. It is visceral and tactile, encouraging the viewer to survey the rough edges and admire the contrast between constructed space and the central voids. The viscosity of the piece inspires my own frantic linework in my stitching. I too want viewers to survey rough edges and taut constructed space. Bontecou made this piece and others like it in the 1950s and '60s (Haus Der Kunst, n.d.).

Another aspect of Bontecou's work that inspires me is her title choice. She chooses to leave the works untitled to allow the viewer to have their own reaction to the work. Bontecou stated (qtd. in Tone 7):

It was sort of a memorial to my feelings. I never titled any of these. Once I started to, and it seemed to limit people to a certain response, so I didn't continue. I hate the feeling of being put in a pigeonhole.

By not titling the work, Bontecou creates another opportunity for people to be drawn together. As she said, titles limit the response that viewers develop. Bontecou wants the viewer to have their own freedom to explore and discover without preconceived notions.

This helped inform my choice to leave titles off my tapestry pieces when I displayed them in the gallery. I wanted people to have their own interaction with the work and discover meaning on their own.

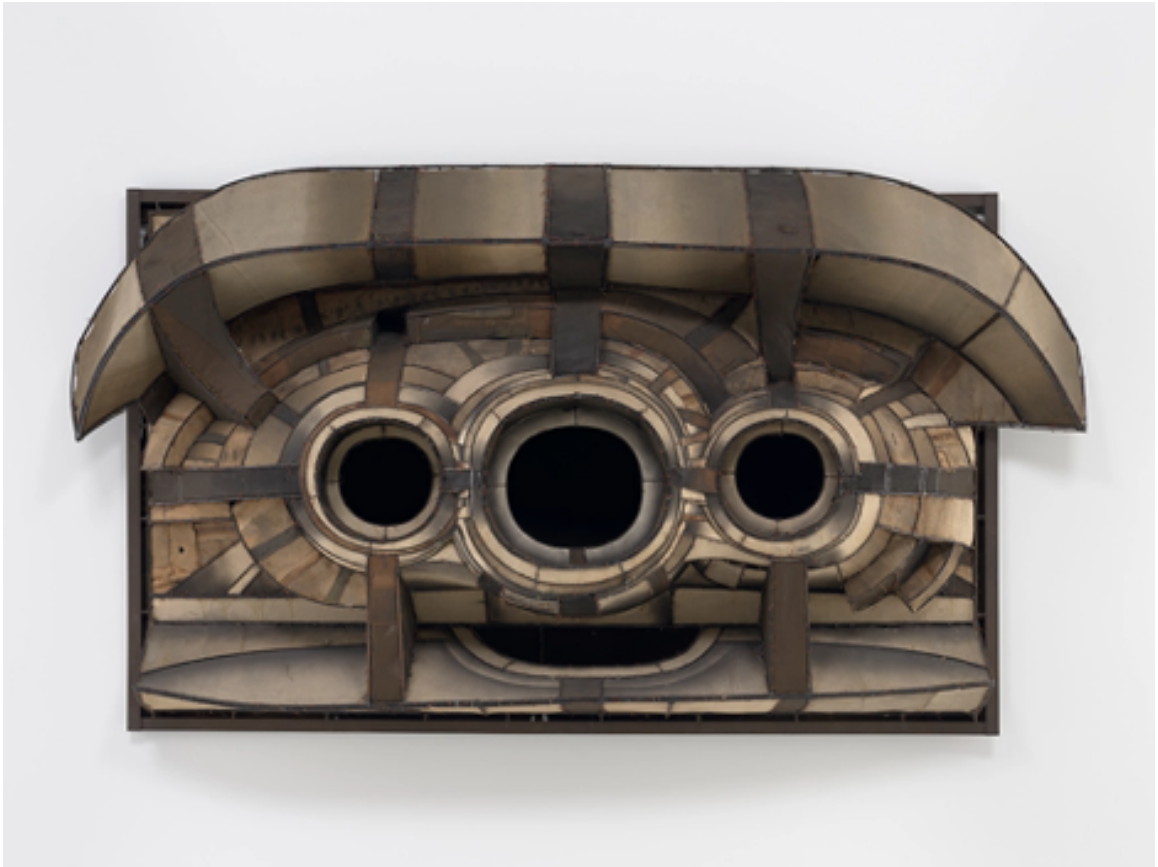


Figure 13: Bontecou, Lee. *Untitled*. 1962. Glenstone, Potomac Maryland.
<https://www.glenstone.org/artist/lee-bontecou/>. Welded steel, canvas, wire, and soot.

[POEM 4]

I am coming apart at the seams.

I have to keep tightening the band.
Tighter, tighter.
Can I still breathe?
Have I been breathing?

Magic is found in every branch of every tree.

In that look you get from him.

In every fiber of every living thing.

The essence that makes us work; that makes these wondrous bodies
move and think and dance and play.

And someday die,
yes,

slip away.

Magic:

essence of our souls
what fills us up and feeds us.

; it's the question without answers
; it's the exploration of the world.

Our thinking, our minds, our bodies;
all magic
, capable of changing.
Changing everything.

The world. The skies.
Our hearts. Our minds.

Interwoven into the threads of humanity, nature,
the stitches that bind the universe.

Yet, I come undone.

Is my magic fading?

Am I burning low, about to hit the wax?

Starting to sputter?

What if my magic is obsessive attention to detail?

What if this isn't a malfunctioning part of myself but rather the essence of who I am?

That I tamp down with medication.

That I control with measured breaths.

What if instead

, I let out my obsessiveness

, I let it shine.

I use it as a strength

instead of an

embarrassing weakness?

I give myself permission to be myself

; I stop trying to be perfect.

I want to be perfectly imperfect.

Myself.

I want to feel comfortable being

myself.

Maybe the medication never was about changing me?

Maybe it was to help me be me?

Maybe the negative connotations can change?

Maybe the medication is an aid and not a self-alteration?

The more I learn, the less I understand.

ON ANXIETY AND FEAR

Anxiety is a part of my life; art is one way I recognize and soothe that anxiety. “Existential philosophers claim that anxiety is unavoidable. They say that our knowledge that we are mortal, along with the energy and will that we employ to ignore that knowledge, makes anxiety a quintessentially human condition. The more questioning or rejecting we are of unprovable notions, such as heaven and reincarnation, the more anxious we may be” (Blackstone 160). Although there is no way to completely eliminate it, I can try and release it through the art-making process. In *Finding Relief* (figure 14), a series of 4” x 6” drawings, I frantically sketch, leaving my fears behind on the page. These small works represent my fear and my search for calm. As the ink bleeds from my pen, my fear drains from my body.



Figure 14: *Finding Relief*, Detail, Ink on paper, 4 by 6 inches

[POEM 5]

I feel
flooded with a need
, my mind
, my mouth
, my lungs are drowning in the words
and I have to get them OUT.

I feel
pressure on the roof of my mouth
and I think it must
be a fountain of words
threatening to explode
and drown me.

I realize
I am clenching
my tongue
up to the roof of my mouth
, I am hurting myself
, making it difficult to
breathe.

Fear and anxiety are often thought of as the same thing, but they represent different feelings. Castano et al., quotes existential therapist Roll May as saying anxiety is ontological: it “is the experience of the threat of imminent nonbeing” whereas fear “...can be objectivated, and the person can stand outside and look at it” (110). Fear disappears when the object of our fear is out of sight but anxiety persists. In my own experience, I have general anxiety about dying, which is present every day, but occasionally there are bouts of fear of dying where I feel intense dread. Sketching helps me to refocus my mind and leave fear behind. Even if anxiety remains, the intense feeling is gone and I am able to go about my day. The end result is not as significant as the actual process of moving the pen across the page with frantic motions. As I calm down, the fear ebbs and my motions become slower and more methodical.

Terror Management Theory is a theory of human behavior that postulates that “in order to buffer the anxiety that derives from the awareness of the inevitability of one’s death, individuals will imbue their universe with meaning and strive to place themselves in the center of that universe.” (Castano et al. 603). I agree that people with strong belief systems are able to overcome the fear of death much more easily. One reason I struggle with fear of death is that I lack a religious focus in my life. I was raised Episcopalian, but as I grew older, I stopped believing in religion. This left me with a fear of what comes after we die. I use art to explore this question, and through my work I encourage the viewer to confront their own mortality or anxiety. My goal is for viewers to contemplate their own fears and hopefully come away with an understanding of their personal anxieties. By sharing my fears, I open the door for others to explore this uncomfortable topic. Zilboorg states that “(i)f this fear were as constantly conscious, we should be unable to function normally. It must be properly repressed to keep us living with any modicum of comfort” (qtd. in Becker 17). Through my work, I repress fear that otherwise would bind me motionless.

ON PRINTMAKING

My thesis exhibition, *Through Line*, focuses on two types of art-making: printmaking and tapestries. My exploration into abstract printmaking deals with the concept of time and honoring the present moment. I created gelatin prints with string and thread. Gelatin prints are monoprints meaning there is only one print that can be made of each configuration. Each print is an individual moment in time, precious and unrepeatable. I dropped thread across the surface of the ink and let it fall in intentionally random ways. The print becomes a log of the moment, a unique imprint of that section of time. I ward off the fear of nothingness by embracing the current moment. The print is my way of appreciating time and noting its passing. In *Catching a Moment* (figure 15), I captured a series of three moments in time. The thread mimics the patterns of my drawings.



Figure 15: *Catching a Moment*, Ink on paper, 8.5 x 37 inches

The chance nature of the printmaking process mimics the role chance plays in life and death. As the thread is laid down, I cannot control where it lies. I can try to manipulate it, but ultimately it is a process of chance. This echoes life and how we are not in control. Though we may think we hold sway over life and death, we ultimately are just along for the ride.

I repeated the printmaking process on rice paper which better captured each turn of the thread. I was able to take two prints of each set-up, on where the absence of thread is what is printed and the other where an afterimage of the thread becomes the positive space of the composition (figure 16). This led to a wider range of prints and more chance opportunities. I also introduced gold into my printmaking process (figure 17) layering gold with black. The gold resonates with the *Strings of Fate* (figures 7 & 8). It added an element of preciousness to each piece, another layer of appreciation for the current moment.

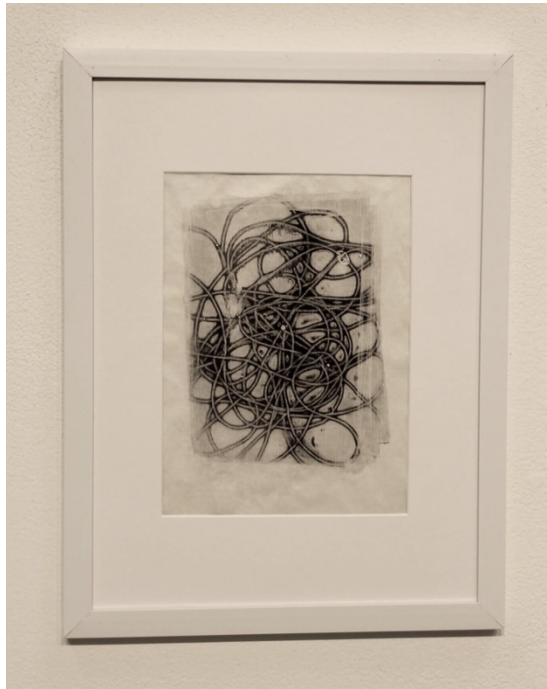


Figure 16: *Untitled*, Ink on paper, 8 x 10 inches



Figure 17: *Untitled*, Ink on paper, Dimensions variable

Throughout the printmaking process I experimented with different kinds of paper. The following series (figures 18 & 19) uses a stiff black paper with white ink. The ink leaves a ghostly, dreamlike impression that ensnares the viewer.



Figure 18: *Untitled*, Ink on paper, Dimensions variable



Figure 19: *Untitled*, Ink on paper, 11 x 14 inches

I also printed with thin rice paper. The fragility of the paper echoes life and its tenuous hold. This small-scale series (figure 20) shows a relationship of delicate lines that weave through each print. The texture of the rice paper gives the viewer another layer to explore. Its tissue paper-like appearance is fragile and precious.



Figure 20: *Untitled*, Ink on paper, Dimensions variable

ON FABRIC

This brings me to another focus of *Through Line*, a series of thread tapestries created with the sewing machine. I let the sewing machine run at full speed and draw the thread across the surface of the fabric. The tapestries range from small scale to large body-sized works that crawl up the wall. They are created by tapping into my anxiety loop and recreating it on the fabric. When I mimic this repetitive loop in my work, it becomes a soothing process instead of an anxiety-provoking one; I am able to reclaim my mind. I jam the pedal to the floor and reverse the fabric, letting thread build up and creating a textured surface. As I stitch, the fabric pulls in an uncontrollable way, mimicking life's unpredictable path. The whirl of the sewing machine becomes hypnotic and I can only focus on the direction of the fabric, fully immersing myself in the moment. My work unravels the anxiety loop and restructures it into something else entirely.

In *Untitled* (figures 21 & 22) I explore the anxiety of racing thoughts, cataloging each thought, each moment, with the press of my foot against the sewing machine pedal. The work embodies the current moment, recording it with frenetic stitches that loop together in an attempt at control.

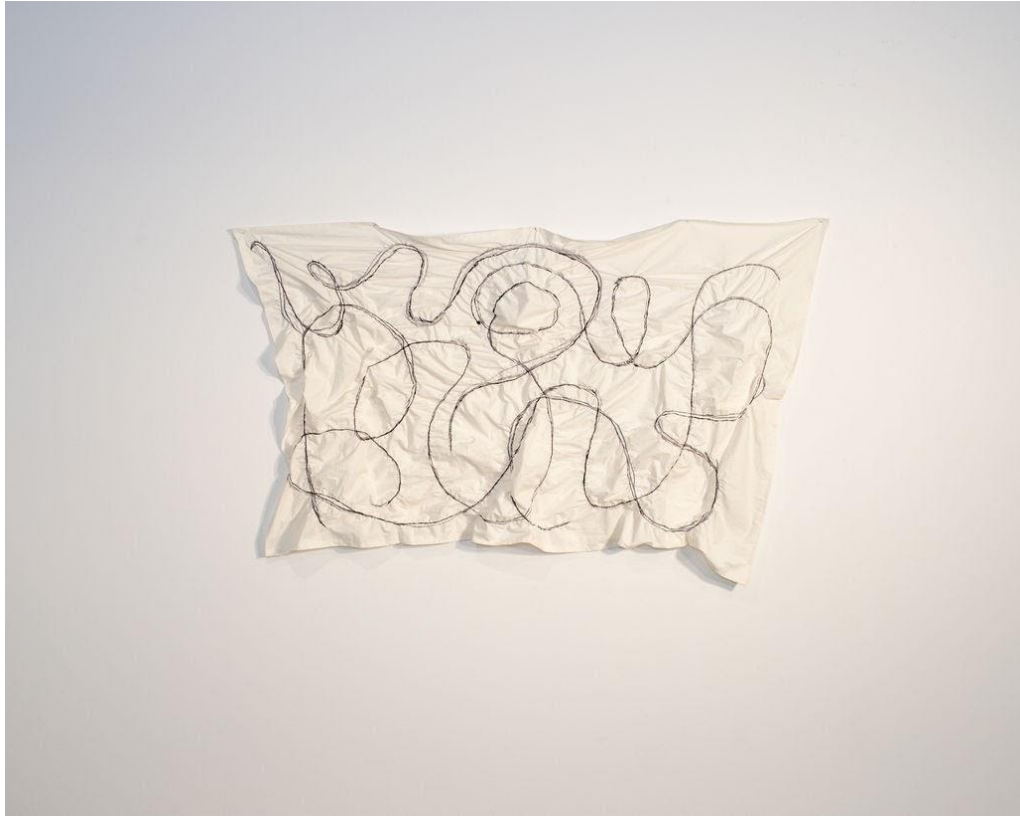


Figure 21: *Untitled*, Thread on fabric, 37 x 65 inches



Figure 22: *Untitled*, Detail, Thread on fabric

In *Untitled* (figure 23), I play with the duality of calmness versus anxiety with black and white fabric. The thread travels evenly across both black and white fabric, representing how anxiety seeps into every part of life. It renders the duality useless as the threads travel up and down the fabric. Though we might try to categorize and simplify our lives, ultimately there is so much gray area that we must wade through.



Figure 23: *Untitled*, Thread on fabric, Dimensions variable

Untitled (figure 24 & 25) is a white tapestry with black thread. The thread repeats and grows into an amorphous pattern that overtakes the tapestry. The stitches mimic my style of drawing and create the same frenetic energy. The repetition and build-up of the stitches causes the machine to slow, the needle to bend, the thread to snap. I often have to reset the machine, pulling out tangled threads and replacing broken needles. This parallels a life of anxiety where you often have to stop and clear your mind before you can proceed with the task at hand. The repeated thread loops also represent obsessive thinking. Thoughts cycle through my head again and again without stopping, just as the fabric passes through the machine in a forward and backward rhythm, with thread building up and hardly moving across the fabric expanse. My thoughts get clogged in my head and repeat themselves until I take notice and try to steer my thinking back into a more linear pattern. Instead of obsessing about the past or future, I take a breath and try to be in the present moment, with what I am doing and how I am feeling right now.



Figure 24: *Untitled*, Detail, Thread on fabric

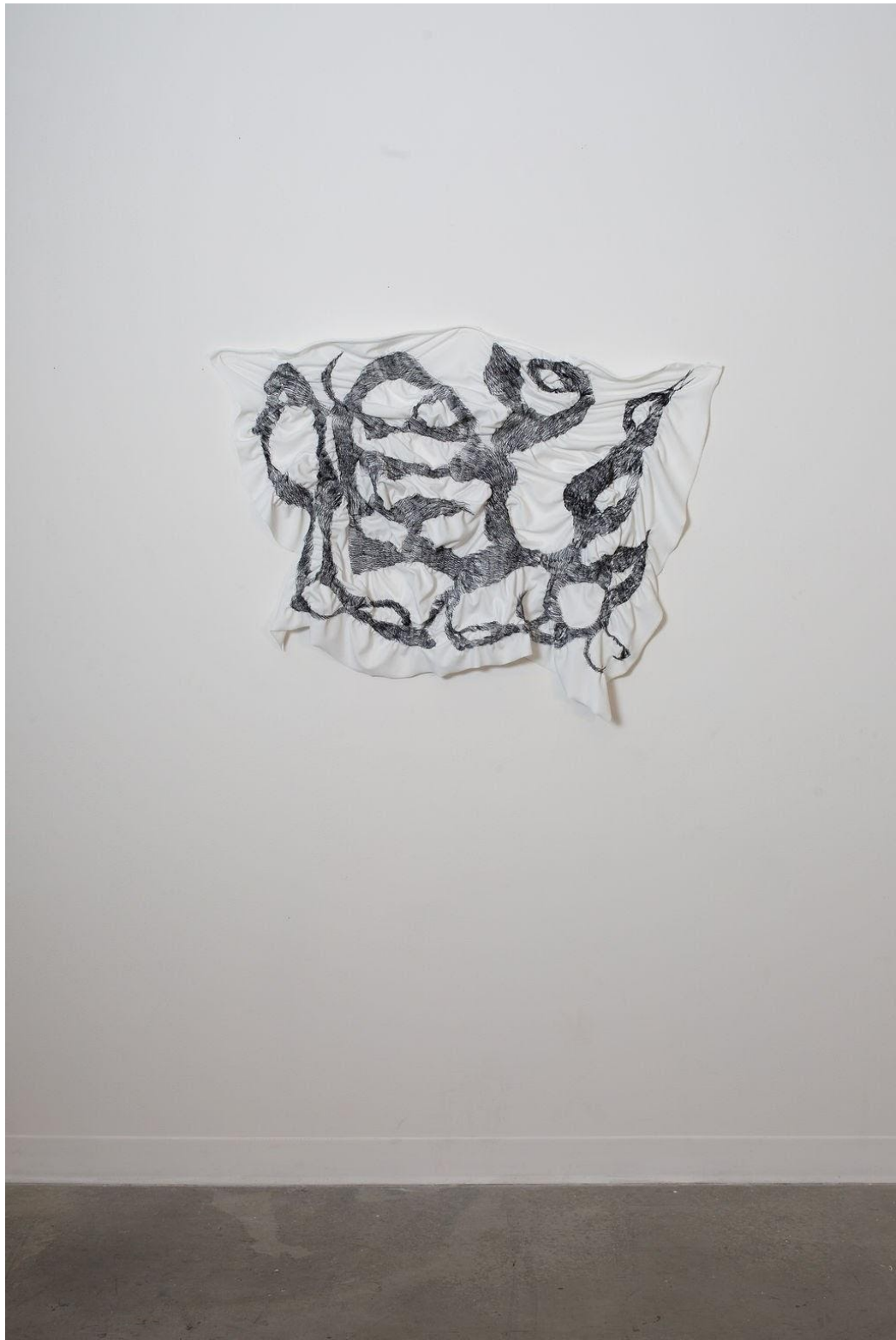


Figure 25: *Untitled*, Thread on fabric, 37 x 65 inches

I explored a similar technique in the following untitled piece (figure 25), a gray expanse of fabric with gray and white stitching. The piece shows how my mind ruminates on certain thoughts and becomes stuck. The racing stitch shows an attempt at moving past that rumination, all the while circling back to the same place on the fabric. The texture of the fabric builds as I stitch and creates a bumpy surface with bunches and snares. It adds an emotional quality to the piece.



Figure 26: *Untitled*, Thread on fabric, 37 x 38 inches

In the gallery, the prints and fabric have the opportunity for a dialogue with each other. This is especially present in figure #, a series of black and white works. The tightly woven line work is present in both the prints and the fabric piece. By displaying them together, the viewer is able to see the relationship between the different materials and how line truly unifies them.



Figure 27: *Untitled*, Thread on fabric and ink on paper, Dimensions variable

Untitled (figures 28 & 29) is made of three fabric rectangles joined together. It represents how I try to separate my worries and thoughts into different categories; a failed attempt at compartmentalization. Compartmentalization sounds good in theory but in practice leaves you feeling segmented. The fabric pulls taut, representing the tension of life itself as one gets pulled in multiple directions. My process for creating these thread sketches mimics life as I try and fail to manipulate the fabric.



Figure 28: *Untitled*, Thread on fabric, 28 x 38 inches



Figure 29: *Untitled*, Detail, Thread on fabric

In *Untitled* (figure #) I frantically drew on the fabric with charcoal and pen before I started the sewing process. Because of the size of the piece, I used large sweeping gestures to create the spirals. These sweeping gestures took me out of my mind full of anxiety and brought me into the present moment in my body. After sketching, I used the accumulation of black and gold thread to represent my anxious thoughts. Again, the use of gold represents life's preciousness and loops back to its use both in my prints and in my sculpture.



Figure 30: *Untitled*, Thread on fabric, 94 x 44 inches



Figure 31: *Untitled*, Thread on fabric and ink on tea-stained paper, Dimensions variable

Figure # represents another key communication between fabric and print. In this series, both the paper and the fabric are tea-stained. This intentional staining of the fabric creates a notion of history and age. The quality of the fabric and paper is unique and it adds a layer of preciousness. The fabric work in this series was stitched and then cut-up and rearranged before being stitched back together. This element of destruction and healing brings a new element to the work.

Overall, the goal of my artistic practice is to bring my mind into the present and let go of obsessive thoughts. Through printmaking and fabric work, I am able to take the energy of my

anxiety and put it to use for something productive. The prints and tapestries have a shared language of accumulated thread. While printmaking is an impression of one moment, the tapestries are an accumulation of many moments; each is a record of time. In both cases there is a lack of control, an element of chance. Each practice forces me into my body and out of my head. Repetitive motions make up the process behind the works and relate to my obsessive-compulsive disorder. With OCD, sometimes the body gets stuck doing the same thing over and over again to get rid of obsessive thoughts. My art is a healthier compulsion with an end result of a thought-provoking abstract work. When I step back and look at the process the work has brought forth, I am able to see the transformation. Energy and chaos have blended to create something that communicates meaning back to others. My fears are allayed and I emerge in the present moment.

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BIOGRAPHY

Kerry Hentges is from Alexandria, Virginia, and has lived in Northern Virginia for the better part of thirty years. She graduated from Virginia Tech with dual degrees in Fine Arts and Spanish.

Hentges has participated in many group shows and several solo shows. She was featured in the *Recalibrate* exhibit online with the Cade Art Gallery in 2020. Hentges had two solo shows at the Workhouse Arts Center in Lorton, VA in 2017 and 2018. She also worked at the Torpedo Factory for a solo show in 2019. Hentges interned at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in 2010, working in the lighting department.

Hentges will receive her MFA from George Mason University in May 2022. She works at George Mason University's SciTech Campus in University Life events. She will pursue arts licensure in January 2022 and plans to teach elementary school art upon completion.