

A BRINGING FORTH

by

Sarah Irvin
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Master of Fine Arts
Painting

Committee:

_____ Director

_____ Director of the School of Art

_____ Dean, College of Visual and
Performing Arts

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Sarah Irvin
Bachelor of Fine Arts
University of Georgia, 2008

Director: Paula Crawford, Associate Professor
Department of Painting

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ABSTRACT

A BRINGING FORTH

Sarah Irvin, M.F.A.

George Mason University, 2016

Thesis Director: Paula Crawford

My thesis is a selection of actions, objects, and texts made as a response to my experience of pregnancy, giving birth, and caring for my daughter. The actions themselves were time-based performance pieces derived from every day routines of caretaking. This document contains images of my thesis exhibition, *A Bringing Forth*, depicting the drawings, sculptures, and video made in conjunction with, and as a response to, this lived experience. An annotated prose poem accompanies the images and functions as another descriptive system of the work.

A BRINGING FORTH



Figure 1 *The Measurement Project*, 2014, Cotton yarn, 22 x 17 inches

This is growth.¹
This is rapid unhurried growth.
This is every day.

On and on.

The work was the preparation,²
The pregnancy, work.

I ignored the world.
We read poetry.³
She moved.

I read *Leaves of Grass* and went into labor.

¹ I measured the circumference of my body at navel height with a piece of yarn the day I found out I was pregnant. I tied off the yarn in a loop. I repeated this every day, completing the last while I was in labor.

² While setting up the crib or choosing the nursery rug, I was simultaneously testing and planning how these objects could create drawings. Trial and error and tearing down stacks of paper – studio nesting

³ *October*, by Robert Frost



Figure 2 *The Measurement Project*, 2014, Cotton yarn, 4 ¼ inches diameter

A bringing forth¹

Her – separate and warm

Me – overtaken (instantly)

Her body² shaped my bones.

¹ A hushed October morning

² My husband and I measured the circumference of our daughter's body at navel height hours after she was born with a piece of yarn and tied it off in a loop.



Figure 3 *The Rocking Chair Series*. 2014-2015, Graphite on paper, 56 x 132 inches



Figure 4 *Rocking Chair Series* Detail

You will not get anywhere in a rocking chair.

This is one year¹ of rocking a baby.
Every motion is a mark.² All are here.
Back. Forth.
Each motion the same.
Each motion it's own universe.
Back. Forth. Back. Forth.

Be built a person with that motion.
We formed ourselves as parents with that motion.

And repeat.

I don't hate the repetition.³

¹ Starting when I went into labor and ending at sundown on her first birthday

² I hung pieces of graphite from the underside of our glider rocking chair and attached a piece of paper to the stationary base. The graphite dragged across the paper with each movement of the rocker. I changed the paper when the drawings looked done, or when I remembered to.

³ To enact the role of caretaker is to encounter a mathematical sublime of repeated tasks.



Figure 5 *Carpet Transfer Series*, 2014-2015, Carbon transfer on paper, 60 x 594 inches



Figure 6 *Carpet Transfer Series* Detail

We made these with the nursery rug.¹
They bolstered² me.

This is the stage on which I enacted “mother.”³
At first, I was pretending, now I forget when I am pretending and
when I am not.
I told myself we were just making a drawing,
which I assumed I understood.⁴

We built up the marks using our whole bodies. All of us.⁵
Slowly.
Over time.
Over the course of a year we entered that room and built those pieces.

¹ When I went into labor, I placed a piece of drawing paper under carbon paper and sandwiched the two between the area rug and the floor. I left the paper in place for one month. I repeated this for 12 months.

² I really do mean “propped me up” as much as I mean “strengthened me.”

³ Creating the transfer drawings gave me license to explore how this character I was playing moved and what she said.

⁴ It is possible for me to be at ease in the uncertainty of art making. I am comfortable in the uncertainty of making a drawing. Moments of ease began to transfer, incrementally, from the act of making the drawings to my unsure acts of parenting.

⁵ Me, my husband, my mother, my father, his mother, his father, my sisters, his sisters, my friends, his friends, our friends, our dog



Figure 7 *Silver Spoon*, 2016, Sterling Silver, 3 ½ x 1 x 1 ½ inches, pedestal - 7 x 7 x 7 inches



Figure 8 *Silver Spoon* Detail

Here is a silver spoon.¹
Measure our lives with it.

¹ I had the plastic measuring scoop that comes with Similac powdered baby formula cast out of silver baby spoons.



Figure 9 *Breastfeeding Drawings*, 2014 – 2015, Graphite on paper handmade by the artist, 18 x 320 inches;
Similac Paintings, 2015-2016, Similac on paper, 18 x 320 inches

These are our bed sheets.¹

The first set of sheets, from when there was only one set.

These sheets became soft like no other set of sheets over the course of many washings.

The tender, early years.

Breastfeeding is here transcribed.²

Each loop goes up with a suck and rounds down with a swallow.

Suck. Swallow.

On and on.

She tells our story.

This is a sampling of the unreadable language of a baby at the breast. Slowly these loops increased in size and danced across the page in uneven lines. Slowly it became impossible to make the drawings.³

Suck. Swallow.

On and on

and suddenly over.⁴

¹ I made this paper from our old sheets while I was pregnant.

² I wanted to make drawings that had meaning because they were made while breastfeeding. It took me a week or so to figure out what they would be. We took the printout from the hospital monitor of the baby's heartbeat during labor and my contractions. I realized I wanted to provide a similar readout of the actions of breastfeeding. Loops.

³ My body had its own plans.

⁴ I had paper that I did not use.

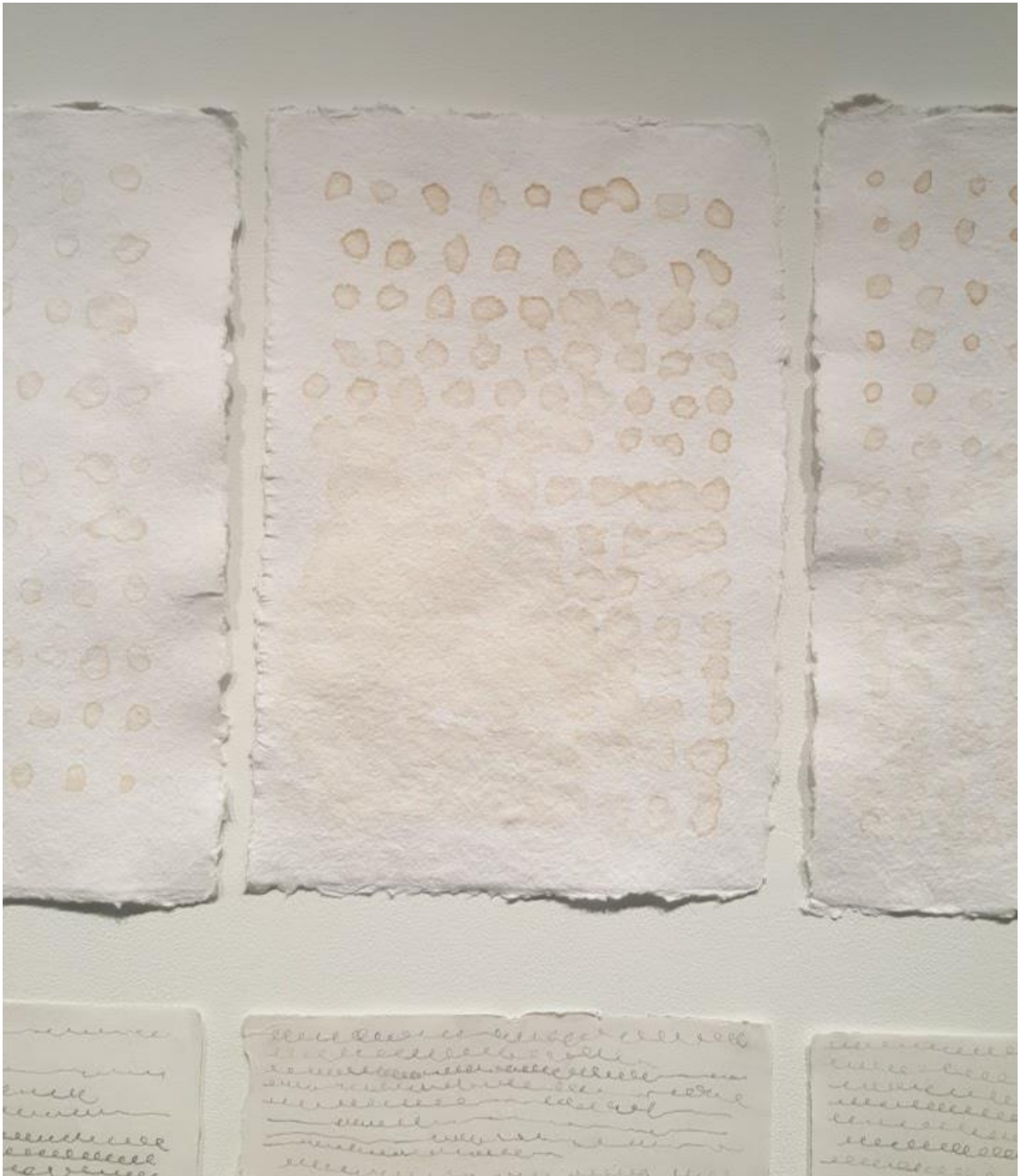


Figure 10 *Breastfeeding Drawings and Similac Paintings Detail*

This is a step away from each other.
Or, a step together toward a new something.

Input. Output.¹

Medium: Similac² on paper

Organized in rows like the words she will learn.

¹ I realized I could use a bottle to create paintings when I was squeezing water into my daughter's mouth with a bottle nipple when she was sick and very dehydrated.

² I have never been so thankful for something I disliked so much.



Figure 11 *A Bringing Forth*, 2016, Video, Running time: 23 min 22 seconds, exhibited on loop

A tiny body moves with the rhythm of breath,
grows and grows older.

For now though, the repetition.
Just the two notes of in and out.

A bundle of opposites
Repeating, reoccurring opposites.



Figure 12 *Crib Drawing*, 2015, Carbon transfer on paper and metal frame, 24 x 48 x 14 ½ inches

She sleeps through the night.¹
She jumps on her bed.

She made this one on her own.²

¹ Mostly

² I placed a piece of paper and carbon transfer paper under her mattress. Over the course of a month, her actions created this drawing.



Figure 13 Installation view

Time got trapped in a tiny ribcage.

Time wove itself into itself.

One year.¹

Slowly we began to tell each other stories about a past that included our daughter.

Continual development became routine.

Routine became everything.

The work goes on.² It is satisfying. It is exhausting. It reaches so far I cannot see its edges.

It is heavy and swift as a monstrous planet, quietly spinning.

¹ October 2014 – October 2015

² I am not enough. I continue.

BIOGRAPHY

Sarah Irvin received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Painting and Drawing from the University of Georgia in 2008. After graduating, Irvin attended the Summer Studio Program at Virginia Commonwealth University. For three years, she worked for the Capital One Corporate Art Program, organizing rotating exhibits and acquiring works for the permanent collection in corporate offices across the US and in Canada. She guest curated exhibitions at the Page Bond Gallery, Linda Matney Gallery, Olly Olly and at Northern Virginia Community College. She was the Art Editor for *So to Speak: A Feminist Journal of Language and Art* and the Graduate Professional Assistant for the Fenwick Gallery at George Mason University.

She has participated in numerous group exhibitions including the New Waves Exhibit at the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art. Her work has been exhibited in solo exhibitions in spaces such as the Atlanta Botanical Garden and the Page Bond Gallery. She is included in collections such as the Federal Reserve Bank, Capital One, The University of Richmond, Try-Me Urban Restoration Project, Center for Gifted Studies at Western Kentucky University and Quirk Hotel. Upon graduating, she will be featured in a solo exhibit at the Kathryn Markel Fine Arts in New York.