

ABSTRACT

LEAVING LEAVES -- BETWEEN SEASONS:

Therapeutic Landscape Painting and Participatory Art

by

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October, 2016

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This thesis is an exhibition of therapeutic art. The therapeutic qualities of the work are based on scientific studies in healthcare design and psychology, and evolutionary psychology. Attributes that have been demonstrated to reduce physical and emotional pain include: 1) references to flourishing, favorable natural environments, 2) regionally familiar references, 3) stylization or abstraction, and 4) a participatory opportunity to share experiences. The thesis exhibition includes a sequence of large landscape paintings (*Between Seasons*) and a participatory installation (*Leaving Leaves*), in a sitting area of a local healthcare facility (the East Carolina Heart Institute). The work facilitates the sharing of experiences of loss, and features visual representations of seasonal change. This thesis document discusses how elements from proven pain-reducing artworks and theories are incorporated into my work.

LEAVING LEAVES -- BETWEEN SEASONS:
Therapeutic Landscape Painting and Participatory Art

A Report of a Creative Thesis
Presented To
The Faculty of the School of Art and Design
East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts in Art

By

Emily Branch

October, 2016

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DEDICATION PAGE

I would like to dedicate this work to my immediate family; Courtney, Leslie, Ben, Daniel, Kate, Byron, Sarah, Lesa, Charlie, Sylvia, Charles Sr., Joyce, and Charles.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the East Carolina Heart Institute and Jerome Fuller for his efforts toward the exhibition of this thesis work in this space. It is an honor to have my art displayed at this facility. I appreciate my thesis committee for their continuous effort and time going through this process with me, and providing guidance and feedback that has been instrumental in the execution of this artwork and document. A big thank you to the ECU Woodshop faculty and Greenville Glass, as well, for help with constructing the boxes for *Leaving Leaves*. Last but not least, thanks to all the mentors, professors, friends near and far, classmates, and immediate and extended family who supported me throughout this journey.

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INTRODUCTION

The work created for this thesis is therapeutic. This claim is based on attributes of the work that include: 1) references to flourishing natural environments that are favorable to human health, pleasure, and sustenance, 2) regionally familiar seasonal and material references, 3) stylization or abstraction, and 4) a participatory opportunity to share experiences. My claim is weakened by the absence of a randomized, scientifically significant trial or survey involving behavioral or emotional responses to the work. However, the aforementioned attributes that are incorporated into my thesis work have, in other instances of scientific randomized trials with art and imagery, correlated with lowering of pain and anxiety in individuals. In this thesis document I will describe such studies, and how such pain and stress reducing elements are incorporated into my work.

Numerous studies, theories, and examples support the claim that art can provide therapeutic benefits or opportunities. To begin with, I considered what is personally soothing or mood lifting, in an effort to creating work based on this idea: being able to explore and immerse myself in outdoor environments with constantly changing features. I created paintings to offer such healing images.

In my first depictions of a healing place, I experimented with colors and paint application. Since these scenes were abstract, with highly saturated colors, some viewers became overwhelmed or anxious in response to them.

A body of research studies, discussed in this document, present instances in which individuals' mood was lifted or pain relieved in response to viewing images of nature. When tested against

other subjects, nature scenes proved to be the most mood-lifting. Certain participatory activities have also been shown to be therapeutic.

I generated a body of work for my thesis exhibition with the intention of providing therapeutic opportunities in a healthcare context, based on the analysis of research studies and theories. The thesis work is exhibited at the East Carolina Heart Institute, a local healthcare facility. The exhibition includes a participatory activity and depictions of nature elements that have been shown to be therapeutic, to create a setting that fosters sharing and reflection for patients, employees, and visitors.

“Nature,” in this thesis, is defined as plants, earth, water, sky, and the effects of sunlight and weather. The term “therapeutic” is used to represent a process “causing someone to feel happier and more relaxed or to be more healthy” (Cambridge). “Therapeutic” also refers to increased comfort or pleasure, or reducing isolation and promoting connectedness. “Reflection” refers to; 1) “consideration of some subject matter, idea, or purpose,” 2) “something that shows the effect, existence, or character of something else,” or 3) “An image that is seen on a mirrored or shiny surface” (Merriam-Webster).

LITERATURE REVIEW

An Introduction to Studies on Therapeutic Art

In 2012, a study was conducted in two emergency department waiting areas in Houston, Texas (Figure 1). The study was meant to test whether having art in these places of particular chaos and stress affected the behavior of visitors. Researchers recorded visitors' behavior with and without artwork at these facilities. The artwork was comprised of nature-themed scenes. When the art was present, the average number of queries made at the front desk—a behavior that is consistent with anxiety—significantly decreased. Social interactions—a behavior correlated with higher comfort levels—significantly increased (Nanda et. al).



Figure 1: Artworks in Houston Emergency Department Waiting Areas

In the early 2000s, the Cleveland Clinic tested the effects of having visual art in the lobby of their Main Campus. Figure 2 demonstrates a visitor's engagement with one of the artworks from

the study. Based on a questionnaire, 826 out of 1,094 respondents qualifying for the study noticed the artwork. This group was made up of visitors and no more than 10% of employees. Of the 826 participants: 73% said that their mood improved; 61% claimed that the presence of the artworks helped to reduce their stress levels; and, 39% claimed that the art helped to improve their comfort or pain level (Karnik, et. al).



Figure 2: Artwork from Cleveland Clinic Collection

Studies on stress reducing images are often conducted in healthcare facilities. Pioneering researcher on the use of art in hospitals, Roger Ulrich, specifically advocates for nature-themed artworks as being “positive distractions.” This term refers to the idea that the artworks temporarily divert viewers’ attention away from personal stresses and worries, and toward more positive and peaceful thoughts such as order, excitement, pleasure, and comfort. Ulrich claims that environments *lacking* positive distractions would cause patients to focus increasingly on their own fears or pain. These negative emotions lead to further increased stress levels, thus inhibiting the healing process and/or further damaging health (Stuckey 498).

Flourishing and Favorable Natural Environments

Behavioral sciences research has pinpointed that certain attributes of natural spaces are stress reducing, holding attention in positive ways across cultures and varying personalities (Vuong). Evolutionary Psychology theories such as the Biophilia Hypothesis claim that humans typically associate positive emotional responses with flourishing natural environments. Furthermore, it states that since healthy natural environments provide the best resources, the ability to recognize them is a survival advantage and is rewarded with positive emotional responses. Natural selection has encouraged this ability, which therefore makes it common for humans to have pleasure responses to such environments (Stuckey 498).

In 2010, a group of researchers at Clemson University created a project to test Appleton's Prospect Refuge Theory on the perception of pain. This evolutionary theory claims that humans are biologically predisposed to desire and have positive emotions towards places that would provide subsistence resources. This group tested sensory pain levels of participants by having the participants put a hand in a bucket of ice while viewing images on a large screen (Figure 3-6).



Figure 3: Refuge Scene during Clemson Study

Participants were instructed to take their hand out of the ice when they felt pain. They were consecutively shown each of the following types of nature scenes: a refuge (a place to hide) shown in Figure 3, a prospect (a place to look out from) shown in Figure 4, a hazard (environmental threat, such as

a storm) shown in Figure 5, and scenes with combinations of two of these attributes. The consistently lowest sensory pain responses—evidenced by hands in ice the longest without feeling pain—occurred while viewing the image of a mixed prospect and refuge (Figure 6).

Roger Ulrich conducted a similar study to measure differences in responses to two distinct types of nature scenes; a dense forest, and a more open scene with trees and a water element. Patient anxiety was measured by the patient's continuance or discontinuance of potent narcotics two days after surgery, with or without an image in the room. The study group involving the scene with water showed significantly less anxiety than the control group. The forest scene, without water, did not meaningfully improve outcomes compared with no picture (Ulrich).



Figure 4: Prospect Image from Clemson Study



Figure 5: Hazard Image from Clemson Study



Figure 6: Mixed Prospect Refuge Image from Clemson Study

Familiarity

Familiarity can also be calming and comforting. A 2005 study at the Mount Sinai Division of Pediatric Hematology/ Oncology, located in New York City, showed that specifically representing the local area can induce comfort. Mount Sinai's murals of New York City landmarks, by the art group "Splashes of Hope," are very popular to visitors. The images chosen—such as the Empire State Building, Guggenheim Museum, Chrysler Building, and Queensboro Bridge—draw attention to the fact patients and staff are part of the same community (Salerni). Although these are not vegetative landscapes, people at this location feel more connected to these subjects than a tropical rainforest or country scene.

Conversely, farm and country scenes are more familiar to patients at Autumn Leaves Alzheimer's and Dementia facility in Flower Mound, Texas. Patients have noted that such scenes remind them of their childhoods. Furthermore, the murals and artworks at Autumn Leaves reduce anxiety by becoming landmarks to help patients stay oriented within the large, complicated building. Each of the facility's four hallways has a different visual theme, such as "Old Western," which helps patients remember where their rooms are. The art also features tactile components, such as fur-like material covering a horse. The director notes that, "It's important for Alzheimer's and dementia patients to have their senses stimulated. It's soothing, and it helps them remember what things feel like" (Kalter).

Abstracted or Stylized Nature Imagery

From 1992 to 2002, the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital's maternity ward in the United Kingdom conducted a study using abstract paintings of landscapes to help decrease anxiety for women in labor. A screen was designed to block the view of the medical equipment in labor and delivery rooms, shown in Figures 7 & 8. It was also designed to act as a focal point of attention during labor to reduce the women's' anxiety level. During pregnancy, anxiety and stress have potentially dangerous repercussions, such as inducing dangerous hormonal levels, inducing fetal distress, and initiating pre-term labor (Staricoff). To accommodate differing preferences among expectant mothers, earthy warm colors (reds and oranges) were on one side of the screen (Image 7), and aquatic related colors (cool blues and greens) on the other (Image 8).

The patients with the abstract landscape painting blocking the equipment had a scientifically significant average of 2.1 hours less time in labor and a scientifically insignificant 7% lower frequency of requests for epidural pain medicine than the group without the artwork. The trial demonstrated correlations between the artwork screen, and reduced anxieties and increased pain tolerance (Staricoff, Duncan 25). Whether the screening of the equipment, or the nature image or colors was more beneficial, the art that blocked the complex machinery in the room proved helpful to women in labor.



Figure 7: Medical Equipment and Partial Convex Side of Maternity Landscape Screen



Figure 8: Full Concave Side of Maternity Landscape Screen Blocking Medical Equipment

A vague meaning or lack of detail in an image allows for too much open interpretation, claims Roger Ulrich (Ulrich, Kalter). An already stressed or hurting viewer would likely project a negative meaning on the work and become more upset. Therefore, abstract art can challenge viewers too much to be therapeutic.

In some cases, however, a stylized image of nature could provide more relief than an unaltered, photographically detailed one. Abstracting an image—by making it less specific, simplifying or eliminating excess details—can describe a greater variety of subjects. By creating more opportunities to relate to the situation the artwork is depicting, potentially more individuals would engage with the work (McCloud). Based on this theory, more individuals could have familiar associations to an abstracted nature scene as opposed to a highly representational rendering of a specific place.

In 1986, NASA conducted a study investigating the physiological effects of observing three types of images: a photograph of a forest (Figure 9), an impressionist-style savannah landscape (Figure 10), and a non-representational pattern of lines (Figure 11). Participants' skin conductance was monitored while performing a sequence of mentally strenuous tasks with each image present. The photograph was expected to be the most calming, in accordance with environmental psychology studies supporting physiological health benefits of window views of natural environments, but the results demonstrated otherwise (Ulrich, View). The artificial pattern *increased* the physiological response to stress, the nature photograph reduced stress by 3%, and the impressionist landscape reduced stress by 44% (Wise & Rosenberg) (Wise & Taylor). The results of this study suggest that stylized imagery in particular could be therapeutic.



Figure 9: Photographic Image in NASA Study (© Richard Taylor)



Figure 10: Impressionistic Image in NASA Study (© Richard Taylor)

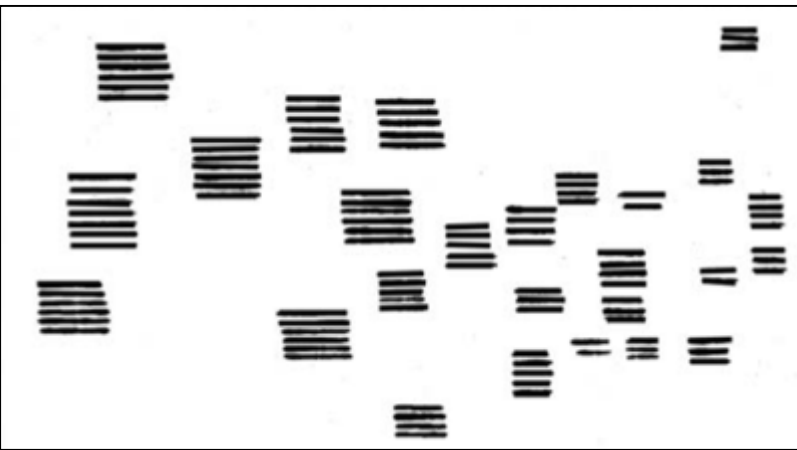


Figure 11: Abstract Image in NASA Study (© Richard Taylor)

Public Expression

Another way that art has been employed to promote healing or offer therapeutic effect has been to use the creation of art or visual images to provide testimony of challenging events. In

“Secondary Traumatic Stress,” Clinical Psychologist and East Carolina University Professor, Dr.

Susan L. McCammon writes about the benefits of self-disclosure.

“(a) It serves the role of providing testimony, which has been found to be of therapeutic value to trauma survivors (Agger & Jenson, 1990). Private pain can be put into a political and social context. The trauma can be reframed so that it has meaning. Those who hear or read the account become witnesses. (b) The act of speaking about one’s trauma can help one turn from passivity to activity. Wolfenstein (in Janoff-Bulman) observed that ‘from being the helpless victim one becomes the effective storyteller, and it is the others, the audience, who are made to undergo the experience’ (p.109). (c) Disclosure breaks the secrecy conspiracy and voices the unmentionable. Those who have had similar experiences will discover they are not alone.” (McCammon, 110)

Opportunities for testimony have been created by projects such as *The Clothesline Project/Silent Witness Exhibit*, *The Names Project: Aids Memorial Quilt*, and *PostSecret*. *The Clothesline Project*, consisting of shirts bearing witness to violence against women, has evidenced success by its twenty-five years of public display around the world. Each shirt in the project represents a particular woman's experience via writing, pictures, or color. The piece contributes to the healing process of those who have been hurt by such violence by educating, documenting, and raising awareness of the issue (The Clothesline Project).



Figure 12: The Clothesline Project at Villanova University

The NAMES Project: AIDS Memorial Quilt fosters healing by showcasing testimonies of individuals affected by AIDS, heightening awareness and inspiring action in the age of AIDS. The 54-ton quilt, composed of more than 48,000 panels dedicated to more than 94,000



Figure 13: Block 5623 of the AIDS Quilt

individuals, has been displayed in nearly 1,000 public venues for over 25 years (The Names Project).

Some efforts to employ art for therapeutic purposes use a combination of creating visual images and written words. *PostSecret* is an ongoing community art project in which participants mail in their secrets anonymously on one side of a postcard to the creator of the project. Over 500,000 secrets have been posted on the *PostSecret* website (<http://postsecret.com/>). *PostSecret* has also published five books and held nine exhibitions with selected postcards.

At a PostSecret event, a participant spoke about the sharing of secrets, “I feel like its very relatable, even in situations that I wouldn't imagine I'd relate to.”

One postcard on the website reads, “The fact that you are even reading this gives me FAITH in

humanity” Another card posted on the website reads, “Every week, I read a new secret I never knew I HAD!” One individual sent Frank Warren, the creator of PostSecret, a note that read,

“Dear Frank,
Do you know that I left my boyfriend of a year and a half because of the postcard that read, "His temper is so scary, I've lost all my opinions." It hadn't even occurred to me what was happening and it took a total stranger writing it down to make me realize what the hell was

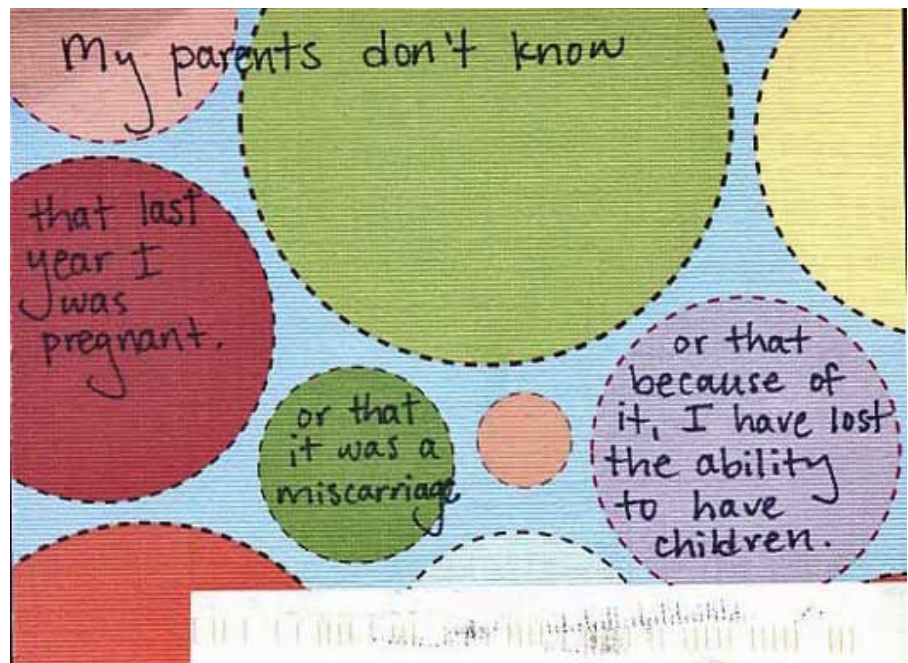


Figure 14: Example of Anonymous Postcard published on Postsecret.com

going on in my life. I can not thank you enough for making things so much clearer. It was the smartest thing I have done in a long time!“ (PostSecret.com).

Frank Warren claims that the postcards promote acceptance, and are healing for those who write them and those who identify with a stranger's secret (Warren). He claims, “If you keep a secret inside, it feels like a wall. It separates us from others. But if we can find the courage, the vulnerability to share our secrets, those walls become bridges” (Postsecret.com).

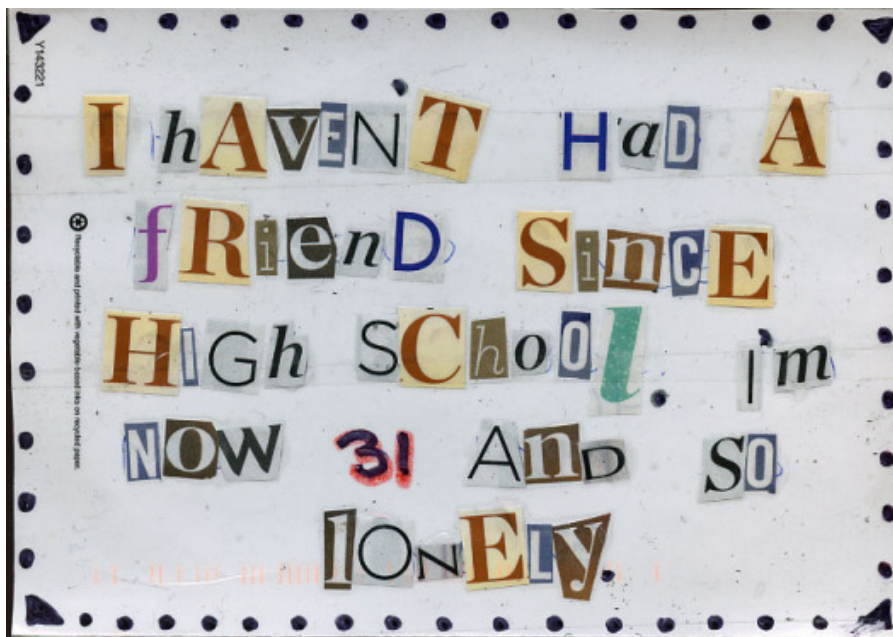


Figure 15: Example of Anonymous Postcard published on Postsecret.com

WORK

This thesis body of work, *Leaving Leaves—Between Seasons*, demonstrates the therapeutic attributes in the previously described literature:

- 1) *references to flourishing natural environments that are favorable to human health, pleasure, and sustenance*
- 2) *regionally familiar seasonal and material references*
- 3) *stylization or abstraction*
- 4) *a participatory opportunity to share experiences*

Between Seasons

Between Seasons (Plate 1) is a landscape painting comprised of eight canvases. Aspects of the land, water, and plant illustrations in the work align with the Biophilia Hypothesis, which claims that humans derive pleasure and comfort from viewing flourishing natural environments.

Many of the attributes of *Between Seasons* imagery are based on my exploration of nature areas across the East Coast region (Appalachia to the Atlantic coast of the United States of America) and discussions with others. Familiar scenery similarly evoked positive emotional responses in the cases of Mount Sinai Hospital's Skyscraper murals and Autumn Leaves Alzheimer's and Dementia Facility's country scenes. *Between Seasons* references American East Coast forests, mountains, plains, wetlands, coast, greenery, and waterways. Additionally, seasonal attributes typical to this region are exemplified in the painting, such as colorful changes to deciduous leaves in autumn and snow in the winter. The variety of seasons and terrain types in *Between Seasons* is also an opportunity for any viewer to focus on a single season or portion of the work that is most pleasant to that individual, accounting for a variety of personal preferences.



Plate 1: *Between Seasons* - all eight canvases

Between Seasons also represents a waterway. One of Roger Ulrich's studies demonstrated an image including a body of flowing water to be more pleasure producing than one without water. The combination of prospect and refuge (open sky and forested) imagery in *Between Seasons* aligns with the pleasure producing effects stated in Appleton's Prospect Refuge Theory. Sheltered areas are represented in *Between Seasons's* trees and forests. The open fields, large body of water, and beach in *Between Seasons* are prospects.

Rain or mist, as symbols for cleansing and refreshment and a beneficiary to growth of plants and food, is alluded to in the background of the "spring" portion of *Between Seasons* (Plate 4). Because of its associations with these positive ideas, this image of rain can encourage a calming emotional response.



Plate 2: *Between Seasons (Fall)*

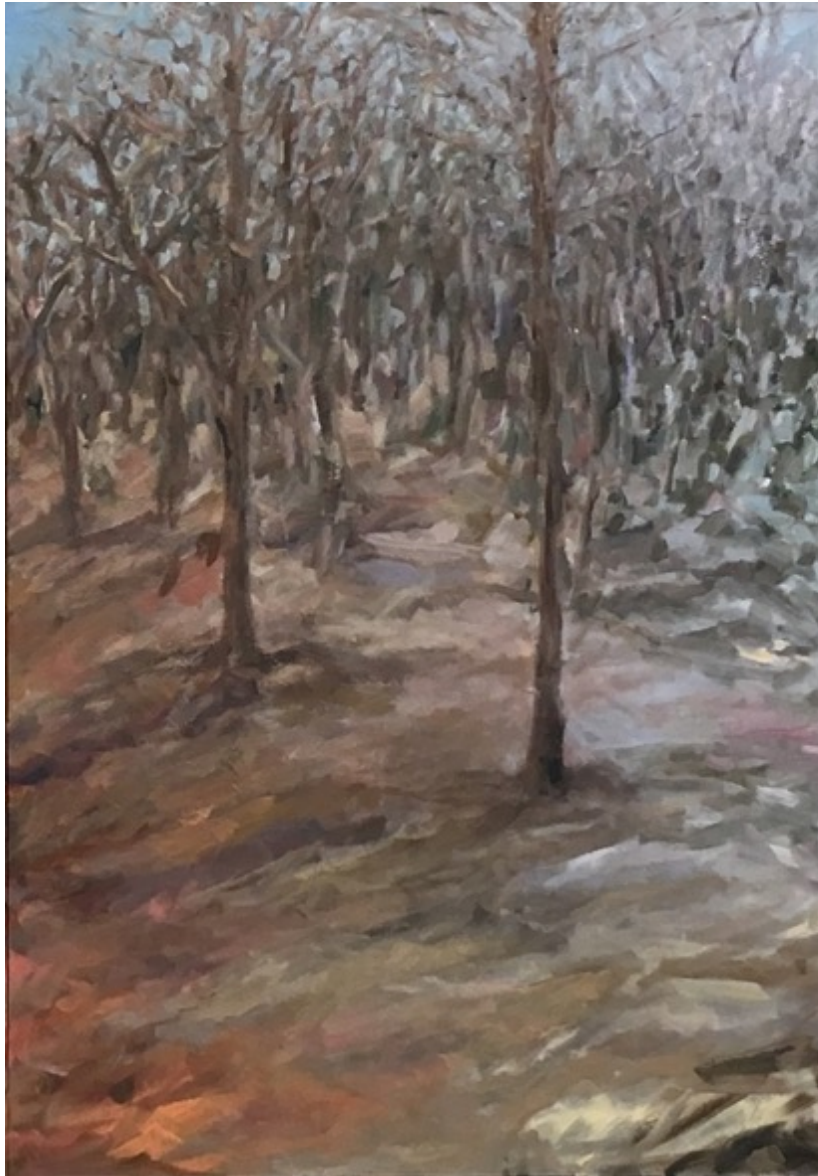


Plate 3: *Between Seasons (Winter)*



Plate 4: *Between Seasons* (Spring)



Plate 5: *Between Seasons* (Summer)

In the NASA study, R.P. Taylor indicated the impressionist styled nature image was preferable compared to the photographic nature image. The abstraction of the nature imagery in *Between Seasons* stylistically references Impressionism.

The Impressionist artistic movement emphasizes atmospheric experiences of nature. The colorful seasonal and lighting elements characterized in Claude Monet's paintings suggest specific moments of weather and time of day. My emphasis on seasonal phenomena and time of day in *Between Seasons* play a key role in communicating one of the core concepts of the piece—movement through such moments in time. That temporal, experiential reference is an important aspect of the artwork.

The format of *Between Seasons*, each canvas being 5-feet high and 3 ½ feet wide induce a spatial experience reminiscent of a nature-filled environment. This idea is demonstrated in the installation of Claude Monet's *Nymphéas* paintings at the l'Orangerie (Fig 14 & 15). *Nymphéas* (Water Lilies) consists of eight paintings covering almost the entire walls of two oval rooms at Musee de l'Orangerie in Paris (Figure 14). These art-filled rooms create an opportunity similar to being surrounded by a water lily garden. By installing the large *Between Seasons* canvases on all sides of the East Carolina Heart Institute sitting area, individuals in the space are likewise surrounded by the nature imagery and can experience that pseudo-nature environment.



Figure 16: Monet's *Nymphéas* Paintings at Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris



Plate 6: *Between Seasons* in the Heart Institute



Plate 7: *Between Seasons* in the Heart Institute 2

Leaving Leaves

While *Between Seasons* is intended to provide the comforting, safe place, *Leaving Leaves* (Plates 8-11) is an opportunity for sharing experiences of loss. *Leaving Leaves* brings people together through participatory moments involving expression and acknowledgement of painful experiences.

Plate 8 depicts some of the leaves with which individuals were invited to participate in the work. As written by McCammon on page 11, therapeutic opportunities can arise from giving testimony. The act of sharing difficult experiences of loss on these leaves creates an opportunity to take action towards healing from a painful experience, as opposed to passively or privately experiencing pain.

An inspiration for *Leaving Leaves* was Felix Gonzalez-Torres's

artwork, "*Untitled*" (*Portrait of Ross in L.A.*). One-hundred-and-seventy-five pounds of candy, corresponding to the ideal body weight of the artist's partner who was dying from an AIDS-



Plate 8: Writing on Paper Leaf

related illness, comprises this artwork. Viewers are encouraged to take a piece of candy, and the diminishing amount parallels Ross's weight loss and suffering prior to his death. Gonzalez-Torres stipulated that the pile should be continuously replenished, however, metaphorically giving Ross perpetual life.

Like the way Gonzalez Torrez juxtaposes the playfulness of colorful candy and the seriousness of his dying friend, *Leaving Leaves* integrates bright paper leaves and peaceful escape with difficult realities. Both *Untitled* and *Leaving Leaves* deal



Figure 17: Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.) © The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation

with the issue of loss. Conversely to *Untitled* participants taking and leaving with a piece of the artwork, *Leaving Leaves* is an opportunity for participants to leave an expression of their own that becomes a part of the collective whole.

In the first phase of *Leaving Leaves*, four wooden boxes (Plates 9-11) were constructed. The boxes were designed in terms of usability, durability, and attractiveness. Each box was made up of two bins, one for withdrawing blank leaves and one to collect altered leaves in. The *withdraw* bin was filled with a variety of colorful paper leaves. Each *withdraw* bin was uncovered, with a

corner shelf of pencils available for participants' use. The *collection* bins were covered, to suggest safety of the altered leaves (from blowing away or whatnot). The covers, however, were transparent Plexiglas to reveal the colorful leaves inside and to attract participants. The transparent covers were also removable, so that passersby could view and touch the leaves of others' testimonies (Plate 9). In the case of the vertical bins (Plate 10) the *withdraw* bin on top was open, and the *collection* bin underneath was in the form of a drawer. The webpage "emilybranchart.com/leaving" was referenced on the bins. This webpage provided more information about the project, including related research studies and articles.



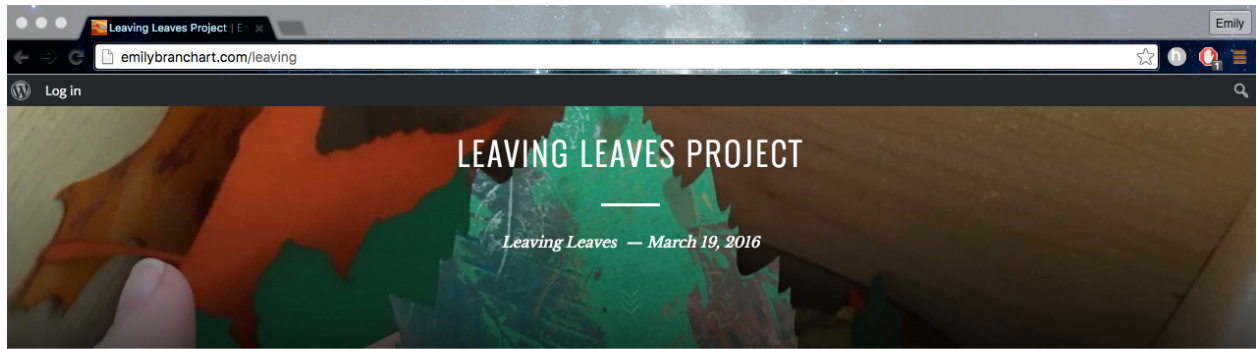
Plate 9: Interior of Leaf Collection Bins



Plate 10: Vertical box at Dowdy Store Entrance, ECU



Plate 11: Close up of horizontal box at Joyner Library, ECU



Welcome to the Leaving Leaves Project!

This is a participatory artwork that provides an opportunity to give a testimony of losses you and I have experienced. The act of sharing difficult experiences can allow for a possibility of private pain to be put into a political or social context, or the discovery that we aren't alone. Leaves, specifically in the phenomenon of deciduous foliage changing color and shedding leaves in Autumn, serve as visual metaphors change and a releasing of our experiences into a broader context.

In addition to being symbols for what we have lost or left behind during our lifetime, the leaves in this project are also meant to be a source of comfort. Scientific studies occurring over the past twenty years have shown that viewing representations of the natural world can help ease pain and stress (articles: [Emergency Waiting Rooms](#), [Clemson Study](#))

Plate 12: Beginning of *Leaving Leaves* Webpage

Rotating Sites

The boxes circulated to fourteen locations in Pitt County, NC from February to April 2016. Boxes stayed at each site for one to three weeks. The sites were chosen based on variety, approval of the person in charge of the facility, visibility, easily accessible public space, and adequate space for box. Several of the sites were part of East Carolina University:

Jenkins Fine Art Center (Side Entrance)	Jenkins Fine Art Center (Student Lounge)
Jenkins Fine Art Center (Main Entrance Lobby)	Wright Building (Dowdy Student Store Entrance)
Laupus Library	Mendenhall Student Center
Joyner Library	Fletcher Music Building

Other public sites included:

Cypress Glen Retirement Community	Coffee Shack
Jaycee Park Center for Arts and Crafts	Pitt Community College Library
Art Avenue (an art gallery)	Pitt County Arts Council at Emerge (an art gallery)

Since lot of reading, writing, learning, and thinking occurs in libraries, I chose to install the collection bins in those sites most often. I would have liked to have the boxes rotate to more coffee shops, for the similar environment they provide. Unfortunately, only one shop, of the multiple I asked, approved the installation of a box.

Because the boxes mainly rotated through ECU locations plus Pitt Community College, many responses on the leaves were probably made by young and middle aged college students and

employees. However, installing the boxes at Cypress Glen and Jaycee Park broadened the age range to children and seniors as well. The prevalence of art-related locations is because *Leaving Leaves* was easily approved in such locations.



Plate 13: Leaf Boxes at Local Facilities (Laupus Library (Upper Left), Pitt Community College Library (Upper Right), Jaycee Park (Lower Left) and Emerge Gallery (Lower Right))

Exhibition

After circulating through the public sites, I gathered together all of the leaves from the collection bins. These leaves with responses on them were displayed with *Between Seasons* in the Heart Institute (Plate 14). Like the prompts on the collections bins, visual and textual cues in the installation at ECHI invite viewers to participate by reading and giving testimonies about loss. My arrangement of the leaves was designed to emphasize both the collective whole of the leaves, as well as the singular expressions on the leaves.

In his “Notes on Sculpture,” Minimalist artist Robert Morris argues that scale affects the intimacy or publicness of a viewer’s experience. Any object whose size is comparable to or larger than its viewer creates a shared experience because it implies the space around it in a way that a smaller object does not. To create a publicly shared experience, the leaves are hung in a group that creates a large form. When viewed up close (read, and even touched or picked up), the individual leaves can be intimately considered.

About one hundred inscribed leaves are hung in an 8-foot-high, 5-foot diameter funnel or whirlwind shape. The leaves are hung to highlight the bright light coming in from the windows and ceiling, and to give the illusion of falling down. These leaves can turn or move in response to the movement of the air in the space, as generated by the movements of viewers. This arrangement of the leaves is meant to imitate deciduous leaves in autumn. In terms of therapy, this phenomenon of leaves falling could be interpreted as referencing regeneration and interconnectedness.

The hanging arrangement of leaves is designed to conform to the limitations yet function in the

healthcare facility, where obstructing objects cannot be hung throughout the room. By limiting the hanging area to a small circumference directly over a table, the leaves do not obstruct the healthcare facility's use of the space. Furthermore, the readability of the hanging leaves from multiple viewing heights makes it easier for viewers, who do not wish to touch the leaves, to engage with the work.

The leaf funnel shape is situated in the center of the room to draw attention, and thereby invite viewers to look more closely. The leaves “pour” down into a mirrored inverted pyramid on the top side of a 12x12-inch mirrored cube. The inverted pyramid holds about 150 loosely piled leaves that extend out over the edges of the cube. This format is intended to further attract viewers from across the room.

The small mirrored cube sits on a table, which the leaves inside symbolically “spill” out onto. Colorful, *blank* paper leaves on the table are reflected in mirrored sides of the cube. These reflections, along with written cues (on black matte board leaves to stand out from the brightly colored, thinner paper leaves) and pencils on the table, invite viewers to participate (Plate 14).

The mirrored inverted pyramid creates a possibility for seeing one's own reflection while interacting with the leaves. I designed this as a way of encouraging the viewer to reflect on his or her connection to the experiences written on the leaves (Plate 20).



Plate 14: Mirrored Structure in ECHI



Plate 15: Leaves hung in the Heart Institute



Plate 16: Leaves hung in the Heart Institute

The mirrored cube in *Leaving Leaves* could be compared to minimalist emphasis on the viewer's placement in a public space. Robert Morris's *Untitled* mirrored cubes (Figure 18) force the viewers to confront themselves in the act of looking rather than simply and placidly admiring the work of art. The reflectivity of Morris's mirrors creates a situation that implicates the viewer's space—suggesting that space on the surface of the object—as well as the viewers' experience of the immediate situation (Tate). The reflection in *Leaving Leaves* reinforces the comforting context designed to support my intentions to create opportunities for self-reflection and sharing.



Figure 18: Morris's *Untitled (Four Mirrored Cubes)*, 1965 © ARS, NY and DACS, London 2016

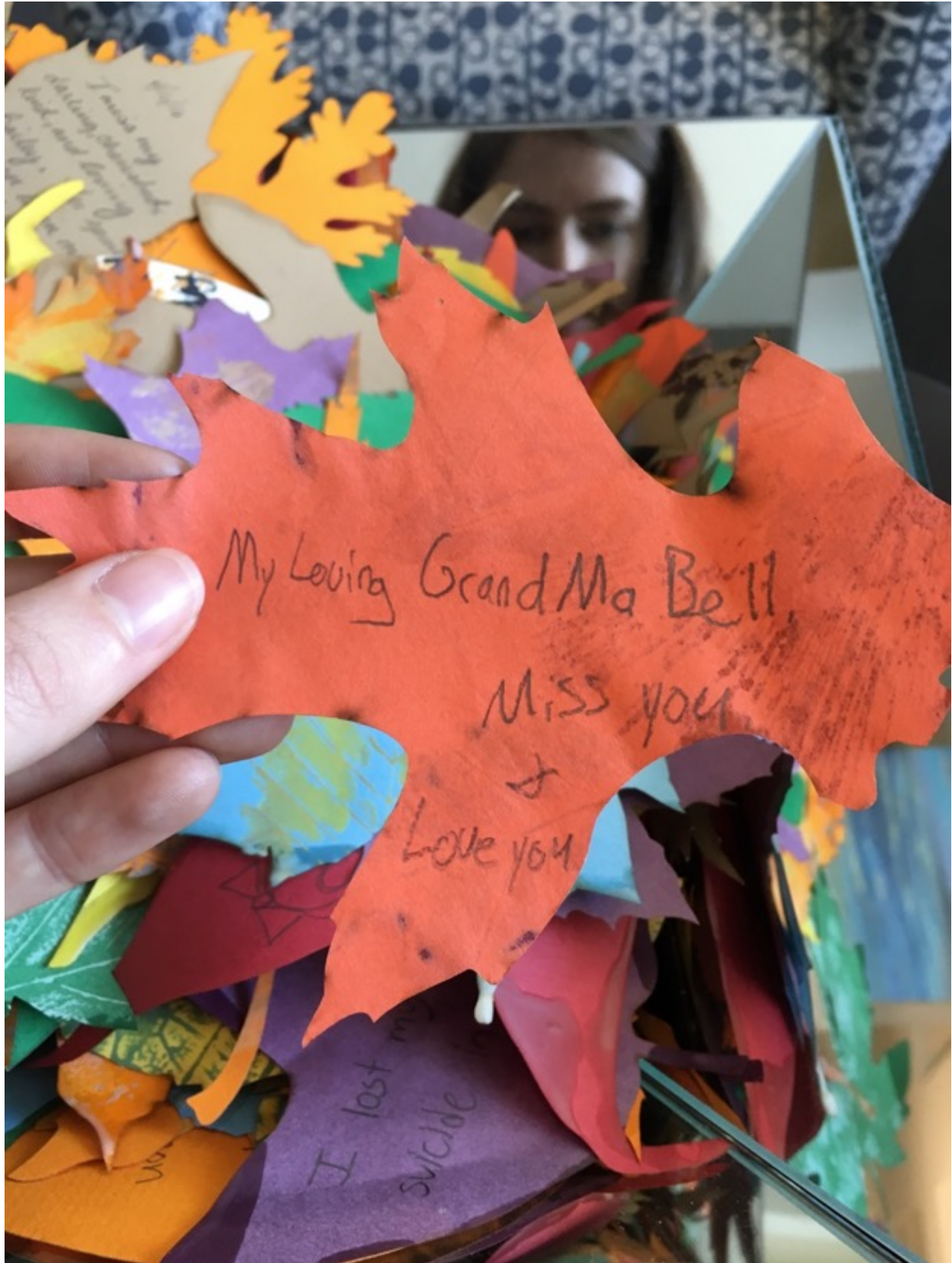


Plate 17: Picking up Leaves in Inverted Pyramid, with Reflection



Plate 18: Black Instruction and Information Leaves

Responses on the Leaves

The following three pages contains responses that were written from the February to April. Leaves with drawings rather than text are included in the exhibition, but are left out of the below tables. Responses that did not answer the prompt to share an experience of loss, such as “I hate interactive art [...],” or “Hi”, are not included in the exhibition at the Heart Institute or the table below. Additionally, responses with pictures of penises were left out of the thesis exhibit. Many responses give a testimony to the loss of a loved one. Many of those responses also include the significance of that person to the responder’s life, and there are at least twelve leaves describing the loss of a pet.

Many were family members:

My Grandmother, Dee, the matriarch	Grandma Even and Grandma Cayton
Lost my grandmother to cancer	My grandma negative energy
Grandma	Grandma Beaver
My Loving GrandMa Bell. Miss you + Love you	Great Grandma & Oma Many Friendships
Grandma Mel Thinking about you every day Please continue to watch over, guard me and protect me. Miss you fergie	I lost my grandparents, and along with them many stories of the past I should have listened to more...
About 3 years ago, I lost my grandmother on my dads side. At first I didn't care because she never liked me or any of my siblings and treated us like dirt. When I saw her in her coffin in the funeral home I lost it. Looking back I just hope that she’s in a better place now and I’m sorry for what went down between us. ☺ AY	BNS 1-3-19/12-1-15 Loss my Grandmother 12-1-15 She was 96 yrs young miss her dearly
	Lost my great grandmother while traveling abroad
	Mom Grandparents New Opportunities My Sense of Self
I was a baby but I still miss my grandmother, she died when I was 3 and I have slight memories of her and I miss her and wish I could truly remember her memory.	Recently lost my granddaddy to a massive hemorrhagic stroke. This stroke happened on a Friday and he passed on the following Sunday. I am thankful he did not suffer and went peacefully! <3

Lost my Aunt. She's with my Grandma. I love them Dearly. RIP Aunt Layp	My Aunt + my grandmother who both meant the world to me
I lost my Aunt in 2015, I think about her everyday	My aunt Key who was like a mother to me to a horrible INVASIVE Rare, Rancer
I have lost my Dad, Uncle, Brother ☹ I miss you very much RIP	My Uncle

Family (Continued...):

Daddy Ed mama	Mother / Father
Lost my mom in 1957 when I was 12 years old. Lost my dad when I was 30 yrs old. 1974 Lost my brother when I was 68	Lost my dad to lymphoma when I was ten. I think about him all the time and hope that he would be proud of the person I am today.
My Mother. Ohh how I miss her so.	My Poppa Bear!
The Loss of my mother Joyce Rollinson	My Dad
Our mother was our bond, glue, and rock with lots of love for everyone that met her, it has been 16 yrs. And I still miss her Bobby Ree Foskey-Tyson 9-19-28 3-6-00	I have lost more of my family than can be listed. but one stands out. I lost my father My father. Not the man himself, but actually having one.
I lost my Dad to Pulmonary Fibrosis in Nov 2015	My father to Alcohol-ism + in finality to cancer
The loss of my SISTER + BEST FRIEND JT	I lost my dad February to Cancer Rest in Peace Daddy -Your Pumpkin
Theresa my sister	A sister with Terminal Cancer
My sister is lost. She had a meltdown and left her husband and her toddler son. She left town with a drug addict. She may or may not be a drug addict now. She is pregnant. So many people suffer loss because of her actions. I hope that she will come home some day.	Da'juan was a college student who loved people. He was shot down saving his first cousin's life by pushing him out of the way and in the process he was shot dead. He was my oldest grandchild. Yes he was born again, so I will see him when Christ RETURN. Roy A Wills
My brother- law Tyrell Barnhill his loss was such a big upset to many leaving behind 5 boys and a great wife. Please continue praying for the Burnhill Family	Those who raised me Those who supported me Those who made me who I am! Love U! my parents my friends me my family
Holding my first child as he left this world because of Liver Disease. Transplants did not work.	Ex husband liver Trans Plant James
	The loss of my cousin, Frances to suicide

A son with mental illness – Long Time!	My Wife – she cheated on me
Daughter was stillborn 5-7-15 miss her dearly I love you Ma’Khiyah Ky’ren	I LOST MY WIFE OF 50 YEARS I MISS HER SO!
Loss of daughter Krissy	My 59 yr old son
Losing Daughter to pain meds + alcohol	Baby Charlie February 2015

Friends or Loved Ones:

The Love of my Life ☺	My best friend, at least the presence of him.
CANADA <3 USA JE T’AIME TOUTOURS LOSING MY FIANCÉE DUE TO MY DEPRESSION. I MISS HER SINCERELY. DEPRESSION IS A DRUG. SML	At 20 I lost my best friend to A Heroine overdose. Not like the female version of a Hero either. He was witty and wonderful and he left me a letter. It remains the most valuable think I own
My fiancé died unexpectedly one week after we got engaged. He was at a party and his friends convinced him to try heroin. Smart kid- full scholarship student. Drunken decision. Told the people at the party he needed to go to a hospital. They left him. He died alone in a strange place. A drug overdose is a stigmatized death, a ‘bad death.’ It takes an enormous amount of time and grit to come through the grief of unexpected death.	Iv loss My bestfriend To cancer, But I fight my battle every single day. -T Shoder
	Me and my best friend decided to live together this yr. Then I got a boyfriend He became my new partner in crime I MISS HER
	I lost a dear friend to cancer at far too young an age. A beautiful spirit to be remembered. <3
IN 3 rd Grade, I lost a fellow Class mate to a Bran tumor, But now he is my Guardian angel <3 you always Tavis Hall RIP	a good friend of mine battled cancer for 3 years (off and on). Finally beat it and died of a heart attach @ 16.
My close friend Eric committed suicide	A Friend who was to young. Died at 26.
Loss of a Loved One	A Special Friend
Have lost dozens + dozens of friends here. UMH #707 Hymn of Promise	Sverre Andnesen still Loving & Missing you every day
Bahamian Volleyball Coach.	My friend died
Coach Vicks 2013 <3	Loss of my dear friend Caitlyn 1992-2013
Francis you are still remembered	Lost Sam – Death
Sara	In Memory of Rhonda Watkins
Carole	Brieda

For my Friend's brother, Mikey. I didn't know you but you meant so much to Nikki. I'm sorry she lost you. She misses you so much.	Regrets over how I handled the loss of a loved one. I could have been more present and I will always miss her presence in my life.
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Pets:

My dog 5 yrs ago. still hurts	Pet bird had for 8 yrs Sammie
My dog	Pet lizard died
I miss my 2 dogs...	We miss you Pepper!
Lost my dog once	Ammachy + Appachen

Objects:

Lost my money to ECU	Lost Money
My money	I lost a ring my boyfriend gave me
My Ipad	Many a good reed has been lost to late night practice sessions

Concepts:

my youth	confidence & emotional stability
I lost half my childhood but I guess it makes me a stronger adult	Loss of self, Loss of self trust, Loss of self confidence
My innocence...I was 12 years old when I finally came to understand that nature of humanity and the purpose of society... Not to accept me as I am rather to exploit me and mold me to fit their definition of "normal"	A loss of self confidence. Be*you*tiful -me
	I'm a theatre major at ECU and I recently lost the drive to do it as a career anymore. I just don't feel like I'll ever be good enough to make it.
I lost the ability to ever let my guard down no one and nowhere will ever feel 100% safe again	myself to being a music major
	LOST MY SENSE OF WHAT GOD IS.
Friendship & Trust	My Will to Live

Other:

The loss of Sleep to Homework and Practice	having an abortion
my calculus grade	Lost my Virginity
my calculus grade	☹
Losing Graduate Assistantship	A LOSS OF HOPE I HOPE I FIND IT AGAIN FOUND IT
I hava lost my rights	I'm sorry I wasn't there.
the Superbowl	Lost my kindness
Memory Loss for my grandparents	My Fathers love
Loss of time to Cancer	

Positive Losses:

Loss of Self-doubt If you don't love yourself Who will? <3 -MR	At 93 yrs of age My Faith gives me HOPE for the FUTURE!
I lost myself, once, I was in love. When it was over, I suddenly realized I had lost myself too. It has been five years and I am still figuring out things about myself and learning who I really am. I will always mourn parts that were lost, but I have to say, I like who I am becoming!	Matt 28:20 John 10:10
	Loss is sometimes a good thing, when what youre losing was never good for you. It pained me because of the change but I was able to see later that I grew tremendously through it.
I loved him But that's okay, because I learned to love me too	I lost my ROSE COLORED Glasses... But now I see more clearly.
Walls to my true self	The bitter dregs of resentment

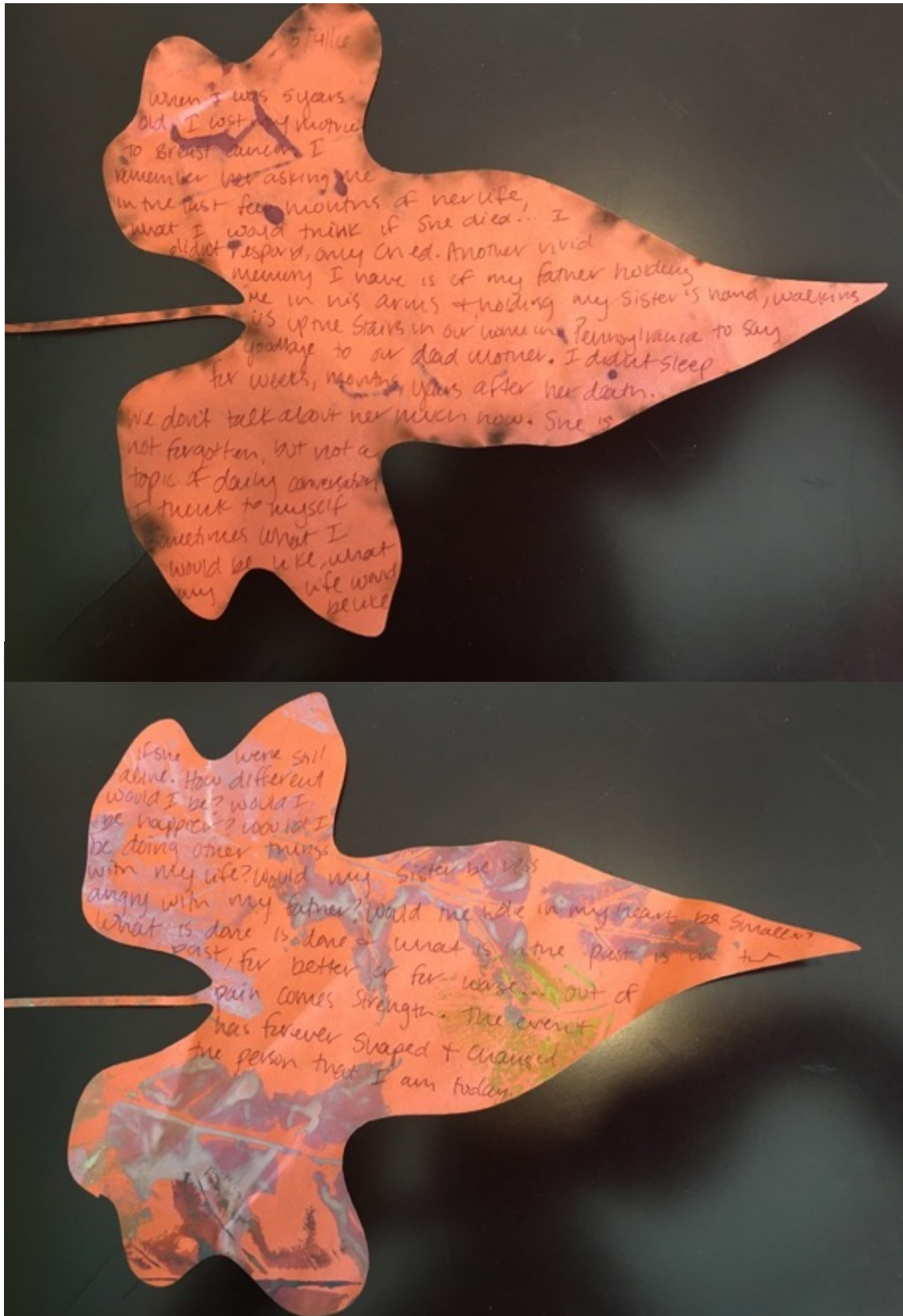
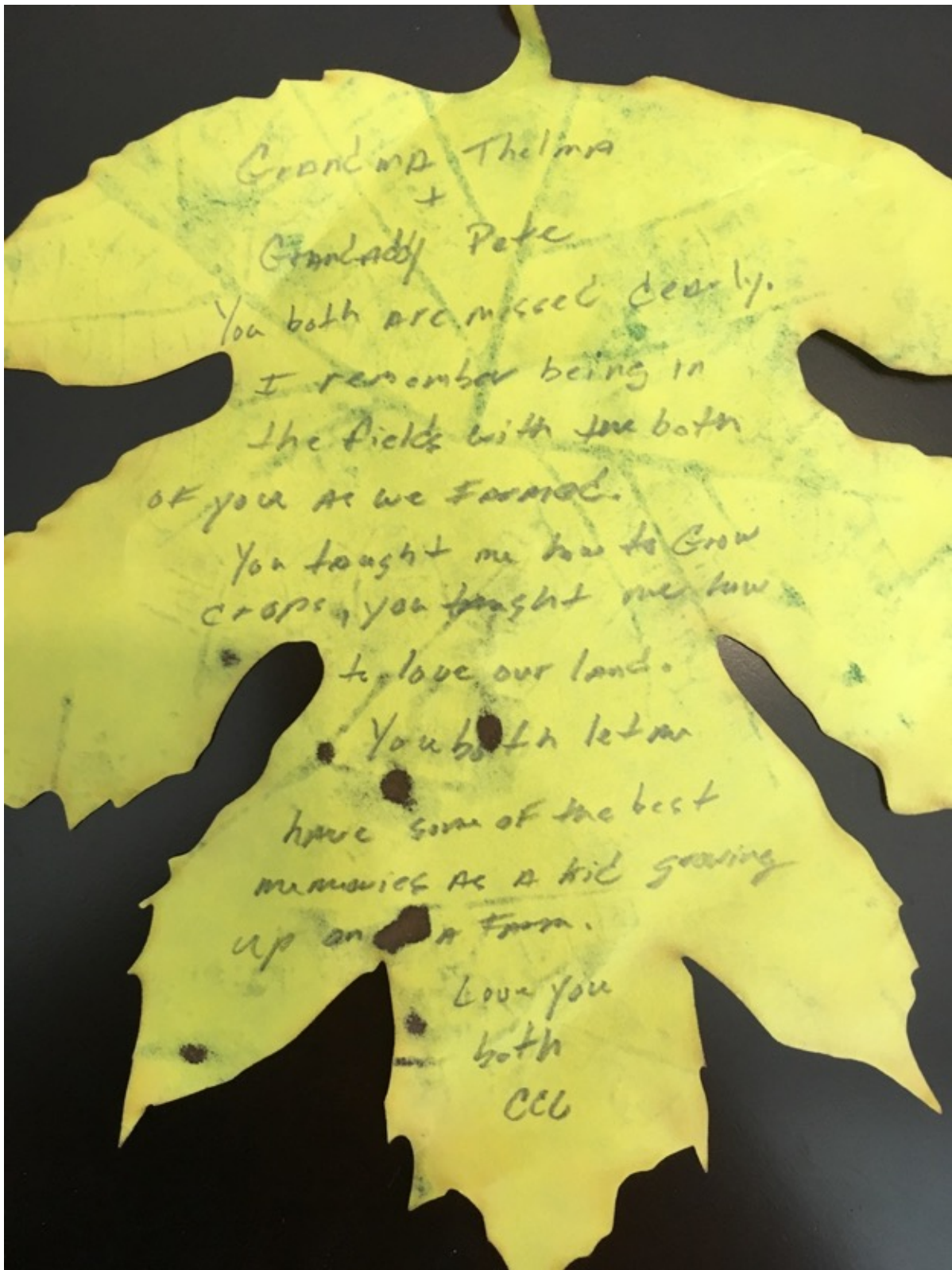


Plate 19: Leaf with Written Response (Front and Back)



Grandma Thelma
+

Grandaddy Pete

You both are missed dearly.

I remember being in
the fields with you both
of you as we farmed.

You taught me how to grow
crops, you taught me how
to love our land.

You both let me
have some of the best
memories as a kid growing
up on a farm.

Love you
both

CEL

Plate 20: Leaf with Written Response



Plate 21: Leaves with Written Responses

Personal Response to *Leaving Leaves*

While viewing the expressions of loss on the leaves, I have experienced a sense of empathy, wonder, and respect. It was like listening to a grieving friend, and it is an honor to be a witness to the intimate memories or attitudes being shared. Certain leaves describe losses that were ultimately beneficial to lose, such as the loss of an unhealthy attitude. Such responses are inspiring, because loss isn't typically described in such positive ways.

Several leaves describe the loss of beliefs, faith, or trust. Some responses include how the writer coped with loss, what they learned from the experience, or words of encouragement to readers dealing with a similar loss. Such evidence of people giving time and thought to encourage others through this project was therapeutic.

Expressions of loss involving sadness, emptiness, or pain to are also expressions of care and value. That which (or whom) was lost was, a cherished, loved, or important part of the writers' life. Dozens of leaves referenced people who had made positive impacts in other individuals, which shifts the surface level theme of loss, to a concurrent theme of hope.

Though viewing expressions of loss that involve pain can be sad, this activity also allows for greater understanding among individuals. My desire to relate to the intimate losses of others expressed in this exhibition, fosters emotion and reflection. Viewing the expressions of others' have been more stress-relieving than giving my own testimonies on leaves, because they allowed me to put my own experiences in perspective.

Reading experiences that I can relate to, imagine, or seek to understand has been personally beneficial by encouraging a heightened sense of awareness of others' emotions and my own. The

vulnerability and sincerity evidenced by the responses in *Leaving Leaves* provide opportunities for emotional or experiential connectedness to others. Since reading the leaves was therapeutic to me, this leads me to believe that it can also be so for others.

CONCLUSION

After gathering and analyzing studies and theories, making a body of work, and analyzing the work's therapeutic qualities, feedback from others show that I gained some success in this activity. I speculate that these pieces can be emotionally beneficial aides by providing a comforting context for both positive distraction and self-reflection.

Ultimately, findings of research studies and theories involving therapeutic activities can be implemented into artwork. As I move beyond this specific work, I hope to continue exploring the implementation of art into healthcare practices.

As an artist who is wanting to promote healing, I believe this project is a step in that direction. The absence of scientifically significant data (i.e. randomized, with a control, etc) involving responses to the work, weakens my claim about the beneficial qualities of the artwork. There were mixed responses written about the artwork in the exhibit response book. Based on a) the exhibition's shared qualities with other therapeutic artwork, b) the hundreds of responses that my audience took the time to write on the leaves, and c) the positive feedback from the East Carolina Heart Institute about the project, I conclude that the artwork I have put forward is therapeutic.

For future installations and similar projects, I might measure its success by: 1) setting out measuring tools beforehand, 2) creating an optional questionnaire, and 3) making the website component more integrated with the material work, and track the amount of traffic to and time spent on the site.

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Figures

- Figure 1: Art installations in Emergency Department (ED)1 and ED2; images for canvas art and window film (ED1) by Monte Nagler; video art provided by Monte Nagler, Bill Robertson, Ann Parks, and David Burt. Upali Nanda, Cheryl Chanaud, Michael Nelson, Xi Zhu, Robyn Bajema, and Ben H. Jansen, “Impact of Visual Art on Patient Behavior in the Emergency Department Waiting Room”. *Humanities and Medicine. The Journal of Emergency Medicine*, Vol. 43, No. 1, pp. 172–181, 2012 2012 Elsevier Inc.
- Figure 2: Jennifer Steinkamp, *Mike Kelley 1*, 2007, video installation. Meghana Karnik, BA; Bellamy Printz, MFA; and Jennifer Finkel, PhD. *A Hospital’s Contemporary Art Collection: Effects on Patient Mood, Stress, Comfort, and Expectations*. Vol. 7 No. 3, Pp. 60–77. www.herdjournal.com . 2014 Vendome Group Llc
- Figure 3: Duncan, Jane. “The effect of colour and design in labour and delivery: A scientific approach.” Public Art & Design Consultancy. 18-20 Headfort Place, London SW, UK
- Figure 4: Duncan, Jane. “The effect of colour and design in labour and delivery: A scientific approach.” Public Art & Design Consultancy. 18-20 Headfort Place, London SW, UK
- Figure 5: Michael Busselle/Forest & Trees Collection/Getty Images. Ellen Vincent, PhD; Dina Battisto, PhD; Larry Grimes, PhD; and James McCubbin, PhD. *The Effects of Nature Images on Pain in a Simulated Hospital Patient Room*. HERD Vol. 3, No. 3 Spring 2010. *Health Environments Research & Design Journal*
- Figure 6: Michael Busselle/Countryside Collection/Getty Images. Ellen Vincent, PhD; Dina Battisto, PhD; Larry Grimes, PhD; and James McCubbin, PhD. *The Effects of Nature Images on Pain in a Simulated Hospital Patient Room*. HERD Vol. 3, No. 3 Spring 2010. *Health Environments Research & Design Journal*
- Figure 7: NatPhotos and Tony Sweet/Forest & Trees Collection/Getty Images. Ellen Vincent, PhD; Dina Battisto, PhD; Larry Grimes, PhD; and James McCubbin, PhD. *The Effects of Nature Images on Pain in a Simulated Hospital Patient Room*. HERD Vol. 3, No. 3 Spring 2010. *Health Environments Research & Design Journal*
- Figure 8: Mixed prospect and refuge. Ellen Vincent, PhD; Dina Battisto, PhD; Larry Grimes, PhD; and James McCubbin, PhD. *The Effects of Nature Images on Pain in a Simulated Hospital Patient Room*. HERD Vol. 3, No. 3 Spring 2010. *Health Environments Research & Design Journal*
- Figure 9: Taylor, R. P. *Reduction of Physiological Stress Using Fractal Art and Architecture Leonardo*. Volume 39, Number 3, June 2006 pp. 245-251. The MIT Press, Physics Department, University of Oregon. Project MUSE

Figure 10: Taylor, R. P. Reduction of Physiological Stress Using Fractal Art and Architecture *Leonardo*. Volume 39, Number 3, June 2006 pp. 245-251. The MIT Press, Physics Department, University of Oregon. Project MUSE

Figure 11: Taylor, R. P. Reduction of Physiological Stress Using Fractal Art and Architecture *Leonardo*. Volume 39, Number 3, June 2006 pp. 245-251. The MIT Press, Physics Department, University of Oregon. Project MUSE

Figure 12: The Clothesline Project. Villanova University, 2016.
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Figure 13: AIDS Quilt Touch. <http://aidsquilttouch.org/node/618222>

Figure 14: PostSecret. Sunday Secrets, April 23, 2016. <http://postsecret.com/2016/04/23/sunday-secrets-121/>

Figure 15: PostSecret. Sunday Secrets, April 23, 2016. <http://postsecret.com/2016/04/23/sunday-secrets-121/>

Figure 16: Claude Monet. Nymphéas. Musée de l'Orangerie, Monet's "Water Lilies," Paris. MAY 29, 2013. *Photograph by Clearview/Alamy*. <http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/>

Figure 17: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.), 1991© The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation. Art Institute of Chicago. Promised gift of Donna and Howard Stone, 1.1999 <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/152961>

Figure 18: Robert Morris. Untitled (Mirrored Cubes or Mirrored Wooden Boxes) 1965/71. Tate. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/morris-untitled-t01532>

Plates

Plate 1: Branch, Emily. 2015/2016

Plate 2: Branch, Emily. 2015/2016

Plate 3: Branch, Emily. 2015/2016

Plate 4: Branch, Emily. 2015/2016

Plate 5: Branch, Emily. 2015/2016

Plate 6: Branch, Emily. 2015/2016

Plate 7: Branch, Emily. 2015/2016

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Plate 15: Branch, Emily. 2015/2016

Plate 16: Branch, Emily. 2015/2016

Plate 17: Branch, Emily. 2015/2016

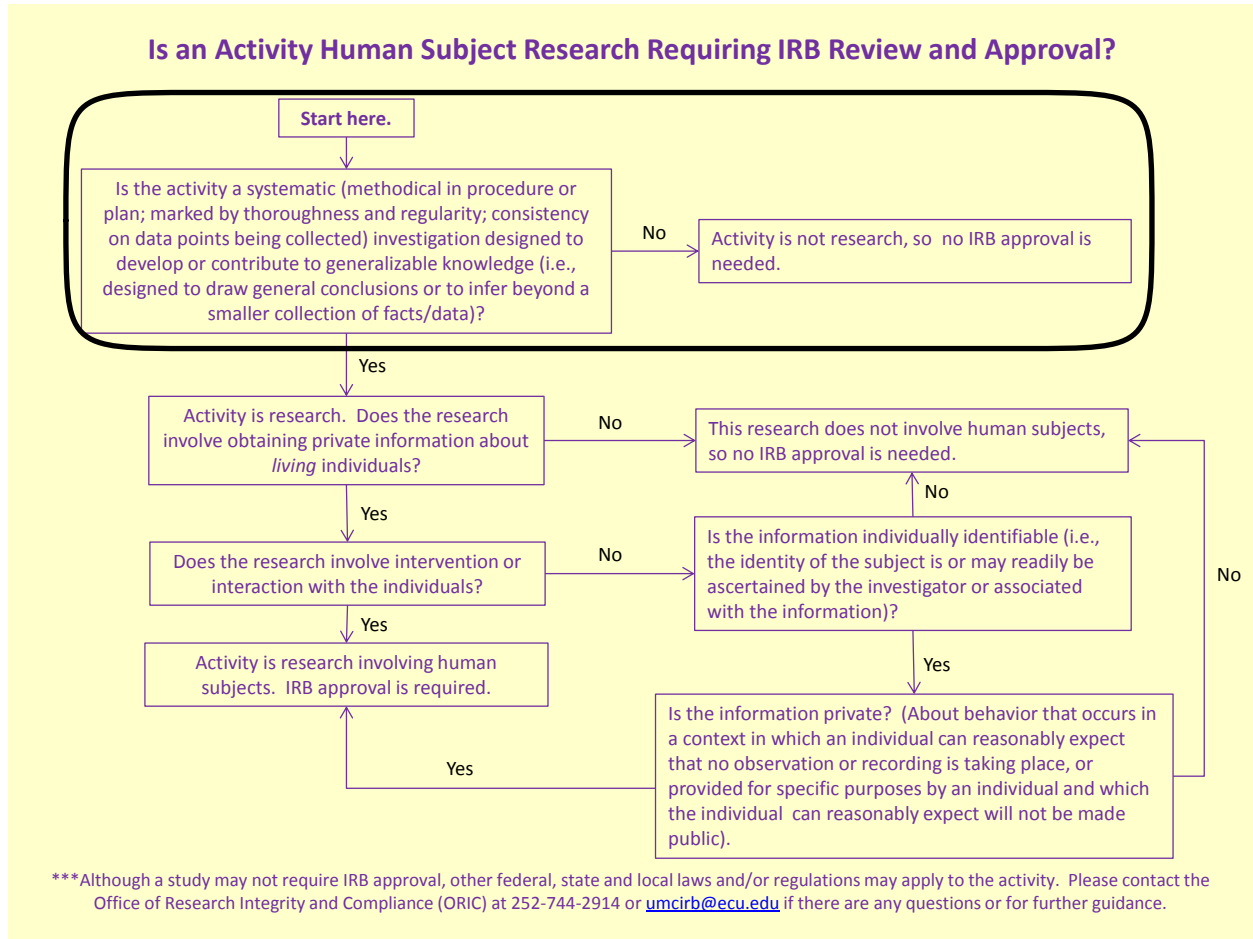
Plate 18: Branch, Emily. 2015/2016

Plate 19: Branch, Emily. 2015/2016

Plate 20: Branch, Emily. 2015/2016

Plate 21: Branch, Emily. 2015/2016

APPENDIX I: EXPLANATION FOR ABSENCE OF IRB



My consultation with the ECU Office of Research Integrity & Compliance concluded that my creative activities as a part of this thesis (particularly collecting the comments of the “Leaf Project”) are not human subjects’ research. The first question in the above diagram is answered “no,” because the activity will not be “thorough, regular or consistent” nor “designed to draw general conclusions.” Therefore, I did not fill out an IRB form. This appendix evidences that I did consider the IRB.

APPENDIX II: RESPONSES TO THE EXHIBITION OF THESIS

In a book designated for responses to the work, the following are responses by individuals who were not associated with artist or the making of the work.

“While the artwork itself is quite beautiful [...], I found the testimonies depressing. I understand that the expression of pain can be beneficial to the one expressing it. However, the individual reading the ‘leaves’ (if they were an empathetic person) would place themselves in the person’s shoes. And since the majority of the testimonies I read only focused on the pain/loss and not on the healing/lesson learned, I walked away from the ‘leaves’ feeling quite sad. As a result, I didn’t find that it generated a ‘comforting environment.’ If I ignored the leaves on only focused on the leaves with positive resolutions (overcoming failures, learning lessons, etc), then it was comforting and inspiring [...]”

“You have captures the spirit of the seasons in a very soothing way”

“Lovely Exhibit! I enjoyed reading the ‘leaves.’ ”

“Absolutely beautiful – love the use of space and light to compliment the colors.”

“What a wonderful expression of Life! Not only was the Artwork beautiful it really reminding me of all the seasons! Thank you”