ABSTRACT

Fear & Opportunity

by

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May 2014

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School of Art and Design: Textile Design

This report of Creative Thesis examines the links between childhood memories, the joy of opportunity, the fear of decision-making, and the struggle for identity and belonging. The concept is represented by two opposing installations that focus on the contrast between indulgence and restraint. One represents nostalgia for opportunity and freedom while the other represents the suffocation of fear and indecision. The installations are composed of fabric, paper, wire, Perler Beads®, and natural materials which extend into the space the viewer occupies, encouraging interaction with the work.

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 Textile Design

by

Lori Nicole Ary

May 2014

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"*The love of knowledge is a kind of madness*."

C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent World,* 1938

I would like to thank my parents for encouraging me to always push myself to new levels, my teachers for inspiring me to explore my curiosities, and my friends and family for their endless support. I would not be where I am without them.

I would like to give a special thanks to Sydney Sogol and Alex Methvin for their daily support throughout my graduate studies. They gave me direction in my madness.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES viii

LIST OF PLATES ix

Introduction 1

Part 1: Freedom & Opportunity 3

Honeysuckle 6

Paper Fortune Tellers 8

Canaries 10

Process 11

Freedom & opportunity 21

Part 2: Kudzu & Complacency 25

Kudzu 28

Hens 30

Process 31

Kudzu & complacency 41

Conclusion 44

REFERENCES 47

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Japanese Honeysuckle: Lonicera Japonica 7
2. Japanese Honeysuckle: Lonicera Japonica 7
3. How to operate a Paper Fortune Teller 9
4. Natural material substructure for *Freedom & Opportunity* 11
5. Webbing created by paper-covered wire 12
6. Webbing created by paper-covered wire (detail) 12
7. Honeysuckle vine covering the sub-structure 13
8. Book pages painted with green pigment 14
9. Book pages cut into abstract leaf shapes 14
10. Leaf-shaped paper strung onto natural polished hemp 15
11. Fabricated vines installed on Freedom & Opportunity 15
12. Detail of paper fortune tellers connected to honeysuckle 16
13. Template for five and six inch fortune tellers 17
14. Template for four inch fortune tellers 18
15. Photo of seventeen canaries 19
16. Translation of photo to pixel-pattern 20
17. Detail of cross-stitching on canary 20
18. Canary sitting among honeysuckle 22
19. Japanese Honeysuckle: Lonicera Japonica 23
20. Paper fortune teller attached to honeysuckle vine 23
21. Distribution graph for Japanese Honeysuckle in the Southern U.S 25
22. Kudzu: Pueraria Montana var. lobata 30

23. Kudzu: Pueraria Montana var. lobata 30

24. Low-immersion dye bath 33

25. Dyed fabric 33

26. Dyed fabric 34

27. Printing on dyed fabric, layer one 34

28. Printing on fabric, layer two 35

29. Finished fabric detail 35

30. Cutting fabric into strips 36

31. Kudzu vines separated by value 36

32. Detail of kudzu on door 38

33. Detail of kudzu on ground 38

34. Translation of hen to pixilated pattern 39

35. Hen before cross-stitching 40

36. Finished hen with cross-stitching 40

37. Detail of cross-stitching 41

38. All four finished hens 41

39. Printed images on fabric 43

40. Printed images on fabric 43

41. Hens nested in kudzu 44

LIST OF PLATES

1. *PLATE I: Freedom & Opportunity* 3
2. *PLATE II: Freedom & Opportunity* (detail) 4
3. *PLATE III: Freedom & Opportunity* (detail) 5
4. *PLATE IV: Kudzu & Complacency* 26
5. *PLATE V: Kudzu & Complacency* (detail) 27
6. *PLATE VI: Kudzu & Complacency* (detail) 28

Introduction

"*I could not help it: the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes*."

Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*, 1845

> *In my early years at elementary school, PE (physical education) was typically held in the cafeteria on rainy days. When I was lucky, however, we would go to the school library. The library was my second favorite place to be during that time, after the playground of course. It was a small room made entirely of cinderblocks, half-sunken into the ground, and had no windows. The cinderblock walls and the bookshelves had been painted a rich blue color. The space between the tops of the bookshelves and the ceiling had a hand-painted mural that went around the entire room. It morphed from scene to scene as it went around the room showing a desert, a rainforest, an underwater scene, outer space, and so on. I would get so excited about reading when I entered that library that I would usually sit on the floor at the exact spot where I took a book off of the shelf, not even bothering to sit in a chair or on one of the coveted bean bags. Reading books was my escape and this room was my sanctuary.*

Nostalgia is defined as "pleasure and sadness that is caused by remembering something from the past and wishing that you could experience it again."[1] As a child, all I wanted to do was escape the small town in which I lived. As an adult, I often daydream about my childhood and occasionally wish that I could relive those uneasy days. It seems ironic to feel nostalgia for a time in my life that was filled with fantasies of breaking free. However, the need to escape is not the focus of my reminiscence – even though it is a defining element of my childhood. My nostalgia is for my fearlessness and hunger for adventure.

As a child, anything seemed possible, and I constantly found myself fantasizing about the endless opportunities open to me. Jens Hoffmann is an author, curator, and the current Deputy Director of The Jewish Museum in New York. When he discusses the effect his nomadic

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[1] "Nostalgia," *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online,* accessed March 1, 2014, http://www.merriam- webster.com/dictionary/nostalgia.

childhood had on him, he states, "It created in me an intense curiosity for cultures, countries, narratives outside the sphere in which I grew up."[2] Though my childhood was very stationary, I had the same passions Hoffmann describes. I was never content with the everyday events that filled the lives of those around me: sports, birthday parties, school festivals, etc. I believed that there were better experiences out there, and I wanted to have them. Not quite fitting in with a specific place or group of people, I have never felt strong ties to any location or way of life. I was born to be a nomad.

I have always had an urge to wander from place to place and move on the instant I wanted something new. This restlessness is part of my identity, and it has never wavered. Erin Manns, the Director of Exhibitions at the Victoria Miro Gallery in London, explains that "a focused restlessness and desire for the unknown propelled me to pursue change, difference. There was an intrigue in anonymity, promise in the possibilities of otherness that home would never have offered."[3] My discontent, however, is more than the choice between staying and leaving home. There is also a pull between childhood and adulthood that I frequently experience, even if only for a tiny moment. At times, it is a struggle between freedom and security, and it usually rises from nostalgia or romanticized ideas. This struggle is reflected in the installations *Freedom & Opportunity* and *Kudzu & Complacency*.

[2] Jens Hoffmann, "A Touch of Evil," in *Home Is the Place You Left 2008,* ed. Ingar Dragset and Michael Elmgreen (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2008), 154.

[3] Erin Manns, "Gravity," in *Home Is the Place You Left 2008,* ed. Ingar Dragset and Michael Elmgreen (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2008), 135.

Part 1: Freedom & Opportunity

Freedom & Opportunity (PLATE I, II, and III) is a representation of a honeysuckle vine in bloom. In place of blossoms, the honeysuckle is covered with small paper fortune tellers of various sizes. The fortune tellers are temporarily attached for the viewer to take. A sub-structure made of natural materials is mounted to the wall. This sub-structure supports the vines as they reach out into the gallery space, and it forms an alcove under the honeysuckle. There are renderings of canaries perched on vines and in flight.



PLATE I: *Freedom & Opportunity.* On display at the Wellington B. Gray Gallery at East Carolina University. The piece measures eight feet wide, four feet tall, and four feet deep.



PLATE II: *Freedom & Opportunity.* View from the gallery entrance.



PLATE III: *Freedom & Opportunity* View from the back of the gallery

Honeysuckle

From Kindergarten through Second Grade, our PE classes were held outside on sunny days. Our playground was a large, fenced in area that branched off the side of the school. It was bordered by trees on two sides and a large field lined with more trees on the far end. In the early days I spent on that playground, it held several pieces of gymnastics equipment, one slide, and a set of three swings. For the younger kids, P.E. was a mixture of fitness exercises and recess. The "free-play" period was bedlam, and the teachers were endlessly dealing with the children's playground drama: "She pushed me off the swing," "He put dirt in my hair," "They won't stop chasing me," etc.

Being a shy, clumsy, and withdrawn child, I usually preferred to entertain myself rather than chase or be chased by other kids. Along one side of the playground, there was an enormous honeysuckle vine that had grown up and over the fence into the yard. It had grown so large that where it stretched out over the top of the fence, it sagged down creating an alcove large enough for me to sit in and not be seen by the other kids. I would hide under the honeysuckle canopy by myself, reliving the best scenes from my favorite books, making up my own stories, and daydreaming about all of the adventures I would have when I was old enough. Those were some of the happiest times of my early childhood, and every time I smell honeysuckle it takes me back to sunny days on that playground.

Honeysuckle is common in the area where I grew up (figures 1 and 2). In my experience as a child, there was a general sense of affection for honeysuckle among the people that surrounded me, and they tended to get excited when the vines started to bloom. It was typically found on the edge of the wooded areas that bordered peoples' properties or ran along creek beds. Both were common areas for kids to play. I spent many days with other kids when we had nothing better to do than scour the tree lines and harvest as many honeysuckle blossoms as we could carry. Like the playground days, those were times of adventure and delight, and that is what I associate with honeysuckle. Therefore, it serves as a symbol for happiness and possibility in my work.



Figure 1: Chris Evans. “Japanese Honeysuckle: Lonicera Japonica.”



Figure 2: Charles T. Bryson. “Japanese Honeysuckle: Lonicera Japonica.”

Paper Fortune Tellers

Paper fortune tellers were very popular during my Elementary and Middle School years, and I played with them often. I would rush through assignments so that I could have time to make and play with them. I would tear notebook paper down to squares and add designs with colored pencils and gel pens. Embellishing the fortune tellers was almost as much fun as using them. The girls would show them off to each other, comparing skills and creativity.

No one seemed to believe in the outcome of the game, but it was fun to laugh and speculate, "What if it comes true?!" I, however, put a lot of stock into the answers, much more than I let on, and I would play over and over until I got an answer I could live with. It felt like bad luck to end on an answer I didn't want, as if I were daring fate to make that particular thing happen. By receiving a different outcome, I could dissolve the previous answer and be safe from it. If I ended on a good answer, though, it was as if that outcome was more likely to happen now that a fortune teller had predicted it.

Paper fortune tellers (also known as *cootie catchers*, *salt cellars*, or *whirly birds*) are a form of origami traditionally used as a game for two children to play together (figure 3). Paper fortune tellers are a stress-free way of playing with possibilities because the player can incorporate outrageous options knowing that the outcome, no matter how ludicrous, is not a guarantee. They can also be a way of helping someone to make a decision. As an incurably indecisive person, I am drawn to anything that can help me choose from the options available to me. Though I am sometimes entirely indifferent, most of the time I do not know what I want until I am given the option that I do not want. Occasionally, I know exactly what I want, and I am simply looking for verification.

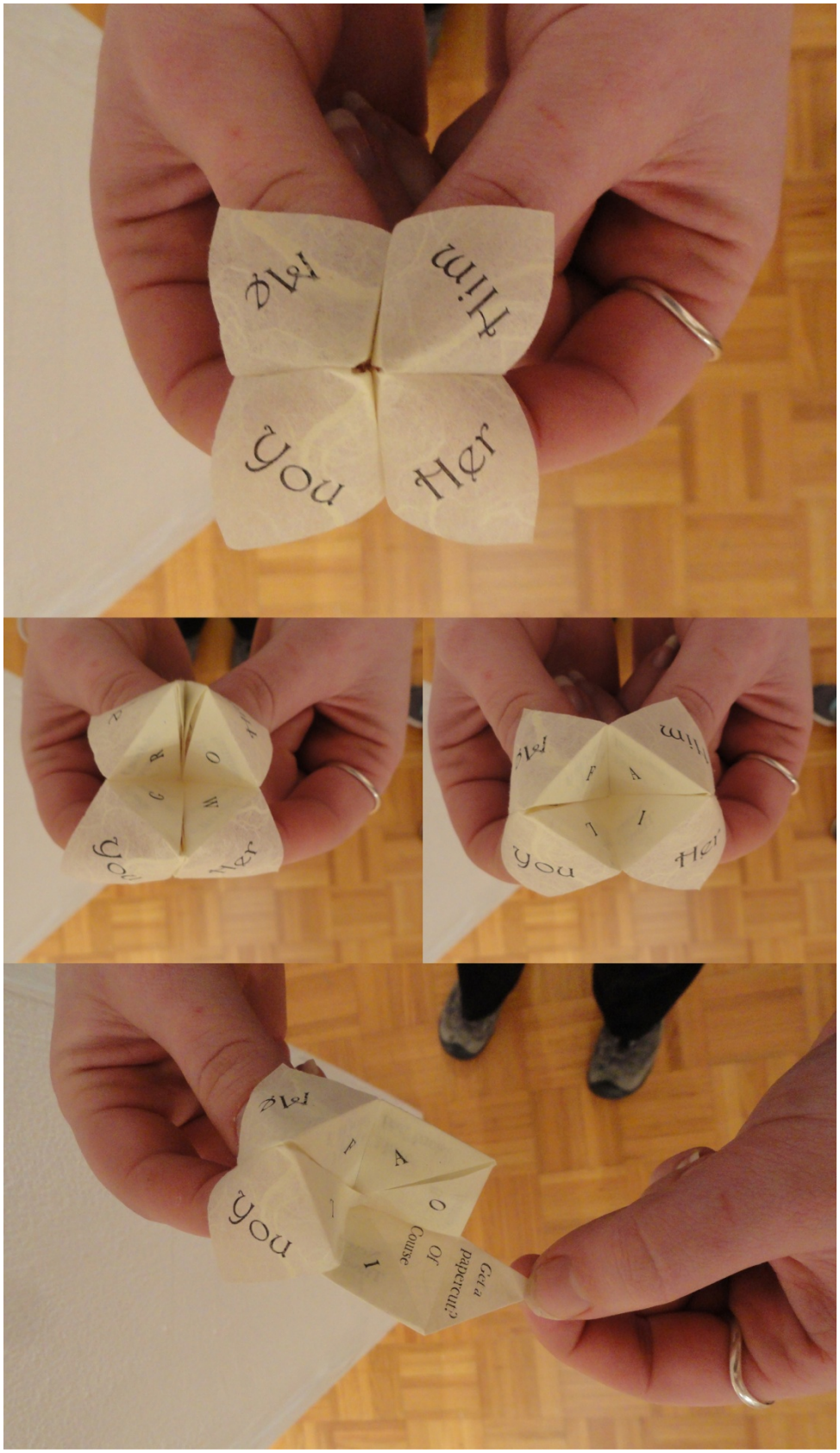

Figure 3: How to operate a Paper Fortune Teller

Canaries

I remember my dad keeping canaries in a structure in our backyard that looked like two phone booths "hugging" each other. It was made so that you could enter an antechamber and shut the door to the outside before going into the area where the canaries were kept. This made sure that none of the canaries could fly out while you were entering. My older sister went in to see the canaries one day and forgot to shut the outer door before opening the inner one. Almost half of the canaries flew out before she realized her mistake.

In the end, it probably didn't matter that she let out so many of the birds because that winter, which was a particularly cold one, the remaining birds froze to death. There were space heaters in the cage so the birds could stay warm, but they perched so high that the heat didn't reach them. My dad was upset, and I remember hearing him say to my mom, "I don't understand why those damn birds won't sit by the heaters!" I'm sure my dad thought they died out of stupidity, but it seemed to me that the birds had committed suicide. I thought the canaries must have been so miserable that they wanted to freeze to death rather than continue living in a cage.

In my work, canaries symbolize my identity. They represent the two sides of me that are always at war. There is always a desire to fly away, and within that desire is a struggle between liberty and security. As a child, I projected my characteristics onto the canaries to help me make sense of their actions. If they fly out into the world they will be free, but there is great potential for danger. If they stay in the cage they will be safe and warm, but they will also be trapped and miserable. I identify with the canaries that escaped, and I empathize with those that stayed. Whether it was out of fear or hesitation, those that did not escape seemed to later regret it, and I can relate to that, as well.

Process

The honeysuckle vine in *Freedom & Opportunity* is composed of paper, wire, and natural materials. The natural materials are installed along the wall and create a sub-structure that supports the other light-weight and delicate materials (figure 4). It also forms an alcove in reference to the one in which I used to hide as a child. The alcove underneath the honeysuckle is big enough for a small child to sit in, and is low enough that viewers may have to bend down in order to look into it (PLATE III). Paper-covered wire forms webbing across the substructure (figures 5 and 6). This supports the other light-weight and delicate materials.



Figure 4: Natural material substructure for Freedom & Opportunity which consists of grapevine and distressed lattice fencing.

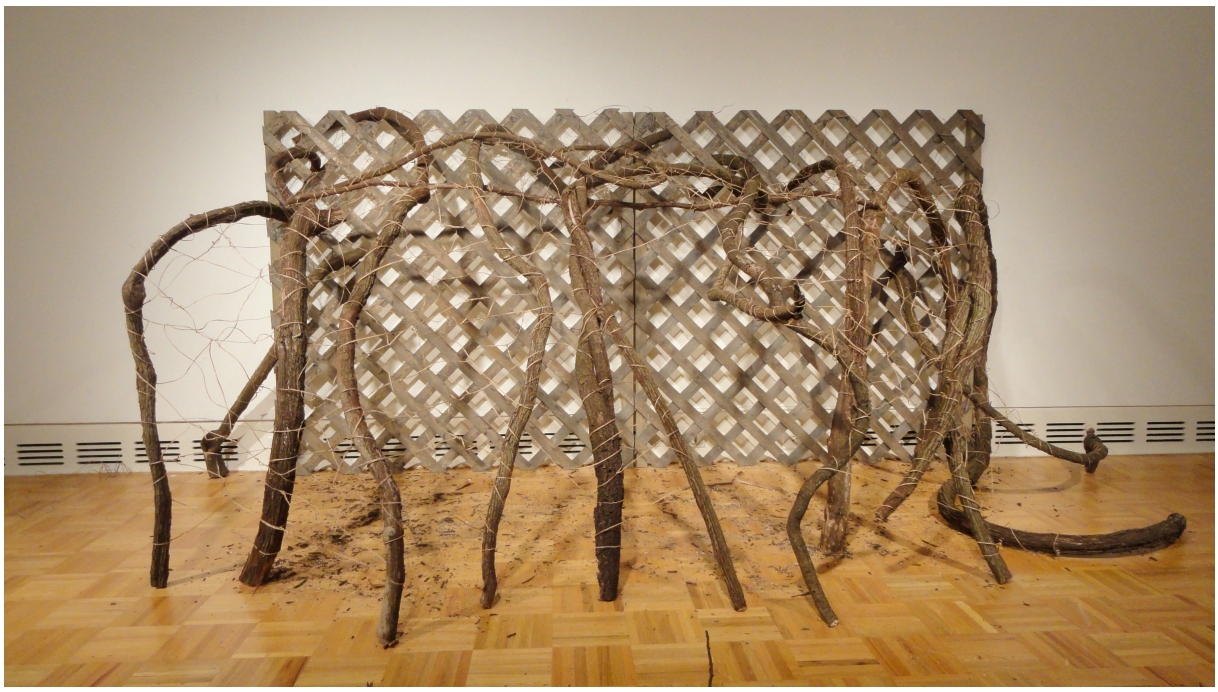

Figure 5: Webbing created by paper-covered wire.



Figure 6: Webbing created by paper-covered wire (detail).

Live honeysuckle vines were cut and brought in to act as a layer of undergrowth which covers the sub-structure (figure 7). This undergrowth fills in the voids between the other natural materials and wire. Since undergrowth is comprised of dead vines from previous years, the honeysuckle was allowed to wilt after it had been installed so that it resembles natural undergrowth.



Figure 7: Honeysuckle vine covering the sub-structure.

Honeysuckle vines were fabricated to act as a layer of new growth over the withered honeysuckle. To create leaves for the honeysuckle, pages were cut from books I have read. The pages were painted with watered-down, green pigment to mimic the color of the honeysuckle leaves (figure 8). Once dry, the paper was cut into abstract leaf shapes (figure 9). The cut book pages were threaded onto natural polished hemp so they would stick out in varying directions (figure 10). This imitates the erratic pattern of real honeysuckle, and it helps the fabricated vine in this piece appear more full and abundant. The constructed vines were then woven into the materials already on the installation (figure 11).



Figure 8: Book pages painted with green pigment.

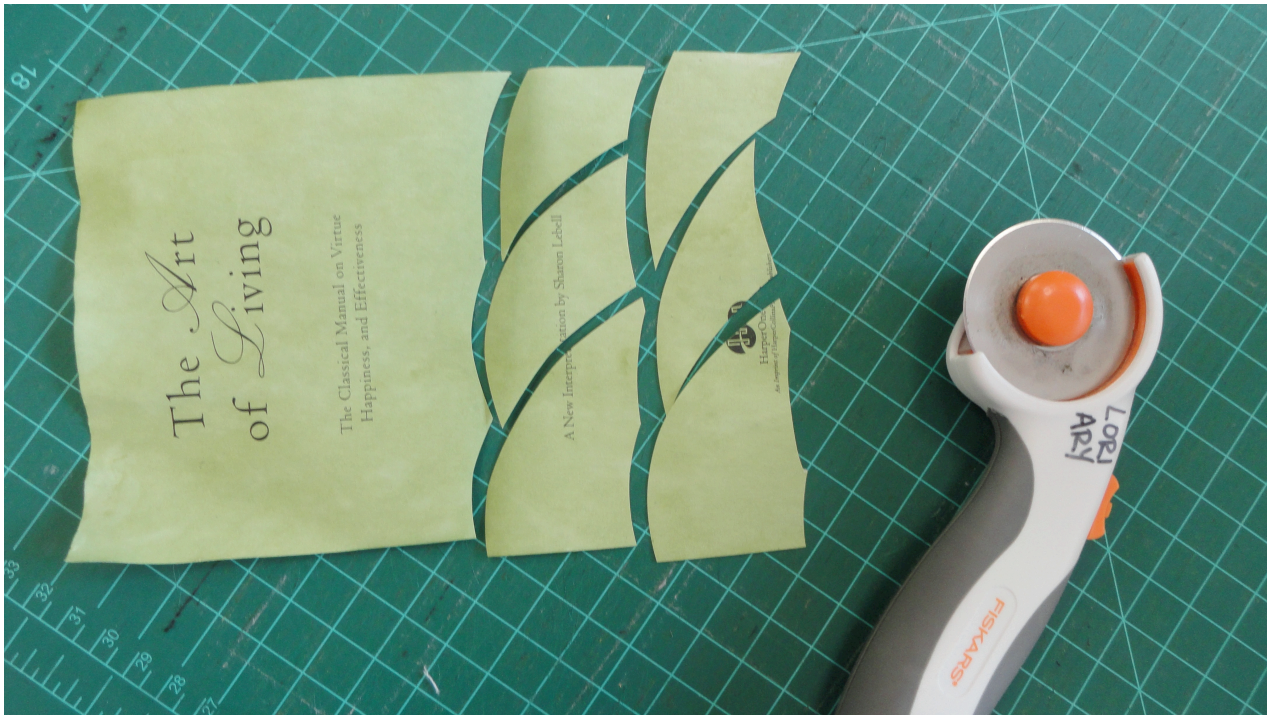

Figure 9: Book pages cut into abstract leaf shapes.



Figure 10: Leaf-shaped paper strung onto natural polished hemp.



Figure 11: Fabricated vines installed on *Freedom & Opportunity*.

The honeysuckle vines have paper fortune tellers mounted to them in place of the honeysuckle blossoms (figure 12). The paper fortune tellers are constructed out of yellow Thai Unryu, which is a type of Mulberry paper. The paper was coated with a mixture of methyl cellulose and white acrylic paint. The methyl cellulose allows the paper to be printed on without the ink bleeding. The paint softens the brightness of the yellow fibers so that it is closer to the color I associate with honeysuckle. Various templates were then printed on the paper using an inkjet printer. The templates were created as 4, 5, and 6 inch squares.



Figure 12: Detail of paper fortune tellers connected to honeysuckle.

The five and six inch templates (figure 13) give the options *Today*, *Tomorrow*, *Soon*, and *Eventually* when closed. There are two different formats for the options displayed when the fortune tellers are open. The letters to choose from spell the words with relevance to the concept of the exhibition. One format spells the options *Here* or *Gone* depending on how the fortune teller is opened. The other spells *Stay* or *Bolt*. The fortunes given on the inside have the potential to apply to anyone who might use these, and are not explicitly about the show. They are not all good fortunes either. They range from “You will make a new friend” to “You will lose something special.”

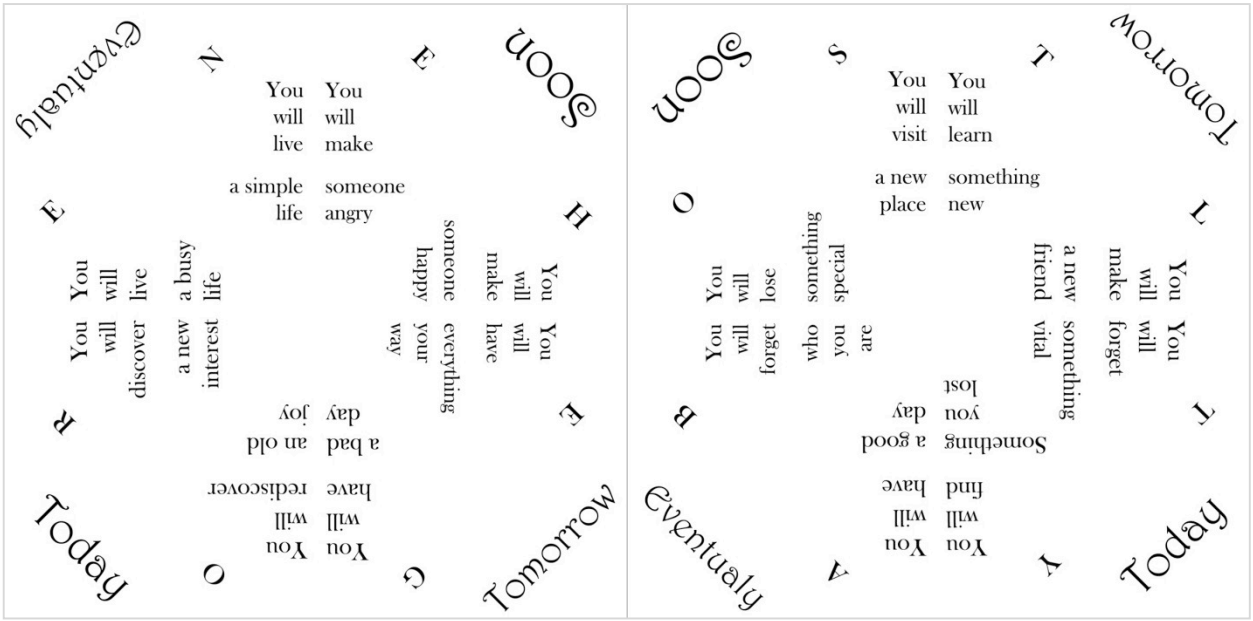

Figure 13: Template for five and six inch fortune tellers.

The four inch templates (figure 14) give the options *You*, *Me*, *Him*, and *Her* when closed which gives the opportunity for the person playing to learn the fortune of someone other than him or herself. As with the larger templates, there are two different formats for the letters displayed on the interior which spell words with relevance to the concept of the exhibition. One format spells the words *Grow* and *Fail*, and the other spells the words *Love* and *Fear*. Unlike the larger templates, these fortunes are in a question and answer format. The options range from "Get a sunburn? Duh" to "Never Travel? Yeah Right."

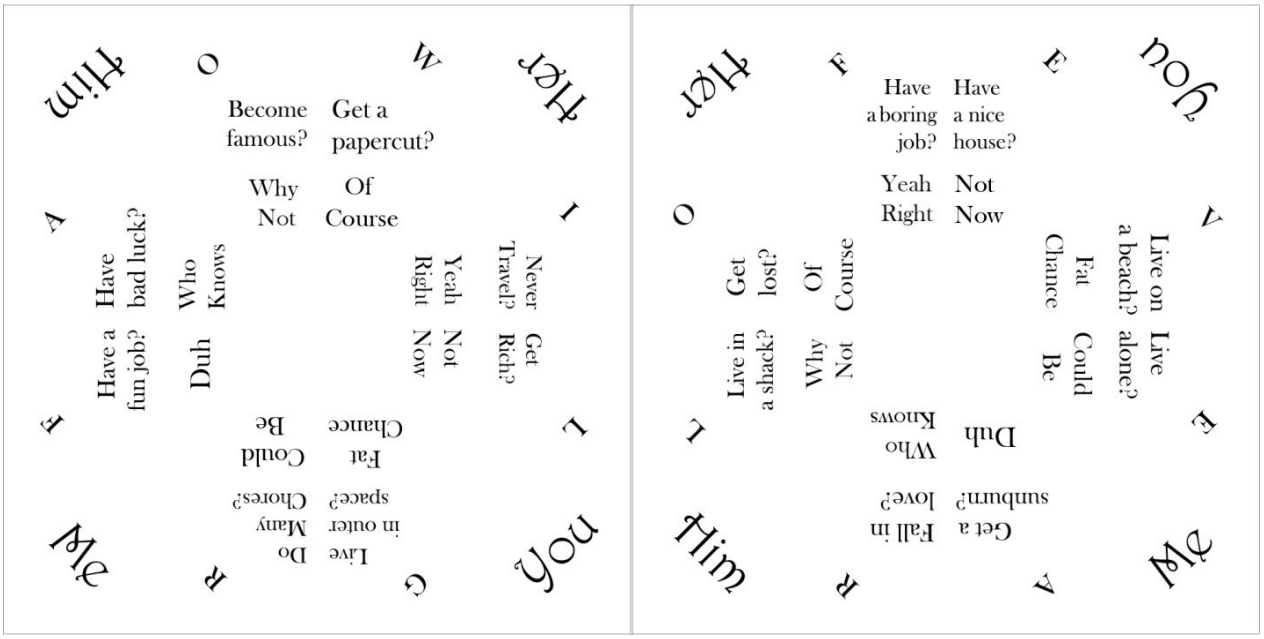

Figure 14: Template for four inch fortune tellers.

The paper was cut down into individual squares and folded. Once folded, the fortune tellers are half the size of the original template. Therefore, the 4, 5 and 6 inch templates result in 2, 2 ½, and 3 inch fortune tellers. There are three-hundred fortune tellers which have been secured to the vine, and there are three-hundred set aside to be taken by viewers.

Of the seventeen canaries in this piece, fifteen are perched among the vines of the honeysuckle, and two are in flight, going to and from the piece (figure 15). The canaries are constructed out of Perler Beads®, which are small plastic cylinders that can be arranged on a special peg board and then ironed so that they melt enough to stick to one another. Perler Beads® are a craft media typically used by children and hobbyists. I started with photographs of canaries in various positions and converted them into pixilated formats, which helped me arrange the beads into representations of canaries (figures 16). Once the beads were melted together, I cross-stitched over them with embroidery floss. The cross-stitching adds visual texture and dimension to the flat, matte plastic objects, and it helps to optically blend the colors of the beads (figure 17). The stitching also takes the Perler Beads® outside of the format they are usually displayed in and places them in context with needlework, a much older form of pixilated art.



Figure 15: Photo of seventeen canaries.

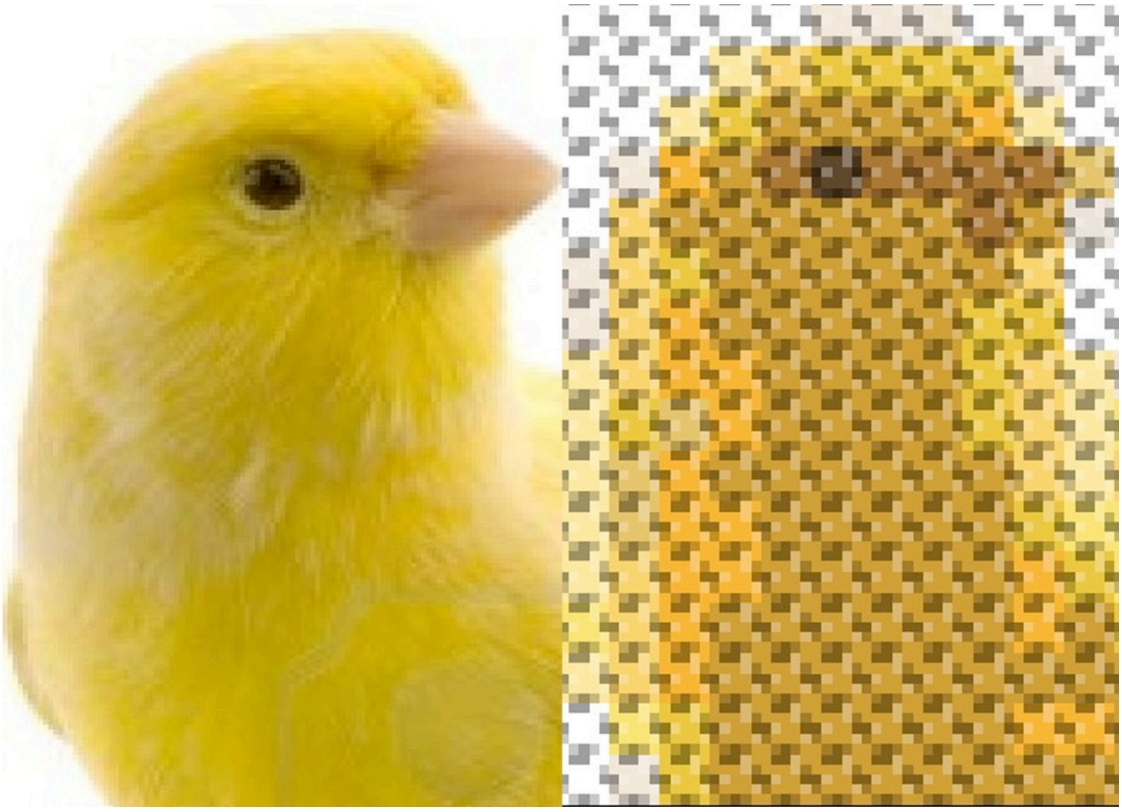

Figure 16: Translation of photo to pixel-pattern.

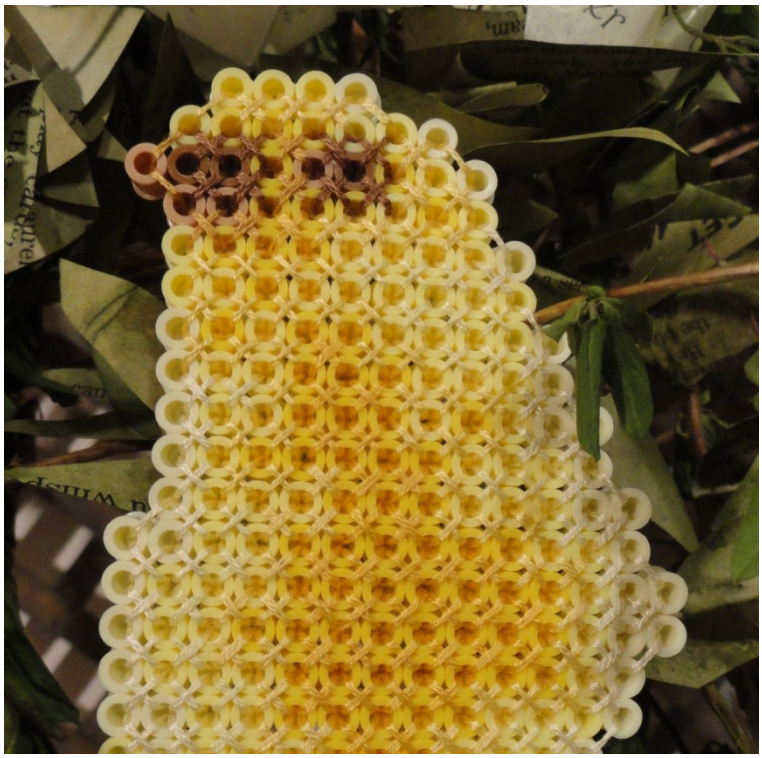

Figure17: Detail of cross-stitching on canary.

Freedom & Opportunity

"Above all, be the heroine of your life, not the victim."

Nora Ephron, *1996 Commencement*, Wellesley College

Freedom & Opportunity is my interpretation of indulgence and aspiration without the burden of anxiety or limitation. This installation represents the place where I felt safe enough to let my daydreams carry me entirely into new worlds. I think of honeysuckle as a sanctuary; it is a safe place to return to, like home. Some view it as a force that cannot be kept down, a plant that will grow and flourish where others will not. As representations of my identity, the canaries are occupying the honeysuckle as a temporary harbor where they can relax until they are ready to take flight (figure 18). Just as there was nothing to restrict the freedom of my imagination while I hid in the honeysuckle vines of my childhood, there is nothing to restrict the free will of the canaries in this piece.



Figure 18: Canary sitting among honeysuckle

There are seventeen canaries because I was seventeen when I moved out of my parents' house. Moving out can be a big decision for a teenager. My choice to move out, however, was not a difficult one. I knew I was ready, and I saw no point in staying with my parents. It was not a matter of teenage rebellion and not wanting to be around my parents; it was a matter of independence and freedom. Lise Gundersen suggests that "Some of us … start traveling, geographically or otherwise. We start drifting. When parents, loved ones, family, never gives us direction and belonging…We don't want to leave forever, we want to travel. We seek the need to come back."[4] My Mom tells me that I was very independent, even as a small child, and she was not surprised by my decision to leave at such a young age. As much as I always needed to leave home, I did not realize how much I would always choose to go back.

[4] Lise Gundersen, "The Palace You Left, the Latitude of Home, Music as a Home and the Coordinates of Here," in *Home Is the Place You Left 2008.* ed. Ingar Dragset and Michael Elmgreen (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2008), 26.

Reading has always been an essential part of my identity. When I escape into books, I feel at ease. I feel like I belong. As a child, I would get absorbed into the fictional worlds of the books I read. At times, I was so unwilling to return to reality that I would immediately re-start a book the instant I finished it. In order to express the significance of reading during my childhood, I chose to craft the leaves of the "live" honeysuckle from books I have read. I used to hide in books to feel passionate and alive. Now, the books I used to hide in form a literal shelter which represents the two elements of my youth in which I would always take refuge: books and honeysuckle.

The honeysuckle flowers found in my hometown are small, sweet, delicate treats that can be plucked off the vines and savored for a fleeting moment. The children I grew up with, however, rarely treated them as dainty objects. Once we learned that the nectar could be sucked out of them, we would pillage the newly bloomed vines with such fervor that they would quickly be decimated. Though the honeysuckle looked forlorn after being ravaged by school children, we were always left with a sense of calmness and satisfaction after devouring so many blossoms.

The blossoms that cover the vines in this installation are meant to be small presents for the viewers to take and savor for a brief period just as a person might indulge in a honeysuckle flower. Instead of a refreshment, though, these objects are paper fortune tellers. Paper fortune tellers are used in place of honeysuckle blossoms because when secured to the vines, the paper pieces look similar to flowers (figures 19 and 20), but they also bring the implications of possibility, opportunity, and decision-making into the honeysuckle. Paper fortune tellers are commonly used with two or more people. By removing the fortune tellers from the installation, the viewer has an opportunity to share them with others.



Figure 19: James H. Miller. “Japanese Honeysuckle: Lonicera Japonica.”



Figure 20: Paper fortune teller attached to honeysuckle vine.

Unlike many other flowering plants, the strand of honeysuckle most commonly found in Madison County, Alabama – Lonicera Japonica or Japanese Honeysuckle (figure 21) – is not overly populated with flowers when it blooms in the summer. It is often the subtle, sweet smell that attracts people's attention. Growing up, I would often hear comments about the scent of honeysuckle the way that people comment on the smell of freshly cut grass or the smell of rain before an approaching storm. Scent can often be a potent memory trigger. Writer Ariane Beyn expresses the idea that "sensual memories operate like glimpses of a larger home scene, like the smell of moss and wet slate stone… [and they] can easily be reactivated by sensual input, for example a taste or a song."[5] Honeysuckle is part of my idea of home, and for me, the aroma of honeysuckle evokes more memories than any image or representation. Therefore, the fragrance of honeysuckle is included in this installation.

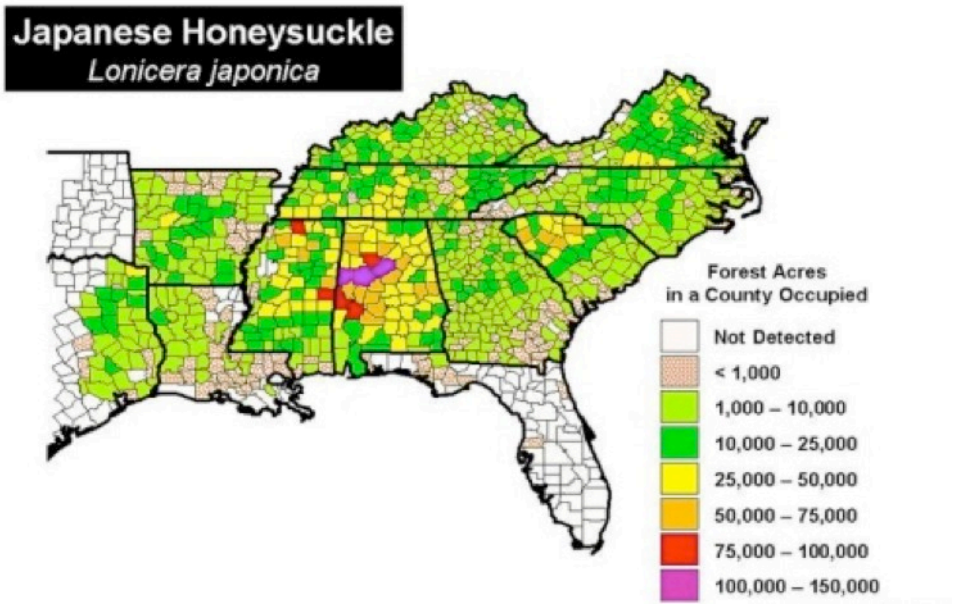

Figure 21: James H. Miller. "Japanese Honeysuckle: Lonicera Japonica." Distribution graph for Japanese Honeysuckle in the Southern U.S.

[5] Ariane Beyn, "West Coast Calamities," in *Home Is the Place You Left 2008,* ed. Ingar Dragset and Michael Elmgreen (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2008), 146.

Part 2: Kudzu & Complacency

Kudzu & Complacency (PLATE IV, V, and VI) is an installation piece displayed directly opposite of *Freedom & Opportunity*. This piece is a representation of a house covered in kudzu. The vines are hand-dyed and hand-printed fabrics that have been cut into strips, crocheted, and secured to a fabric which hangs from the wall. The curtains of kudzu are installed on two movable walls which act as a substructure to create the impression of a house-form protruding into the gallery space. There is also an old window and an old door attached to these walls to further the suggestion of a house. The vines spread over the window and door, and they extend into the gallery space along the floor. Renderings of hens are positioned among the vines on the ground.



PLATE IV: *Kudzu & Complacency.* On display at the Wellington B. Gray Gallery at East Carolina University, this piece measures eight feet wide, eight feet tall, and one foot deep.



PLATE V: *Kudzu & Complacency* (detail). View from the gallery entrance.



PLATE VI: *Kudzu & Complacency* (detail). View from the back of the gallery.

Kudzu

In the area of North Alabama where I grew up, kudzu is prevalent. Any land or structure that is idle for too long gets consumed by it. I remember riding in the car with my mom, seeing fields and valleys blanketed by kudzu. It grew over old barns, abandoned houses and cars, entire thickets and tree lines. It seemed intimidating and impressive at the same time. My mom and I would point out kudzu-covered objects that resembled other things the same way that people look for shapes in clouds. My mom's favorite one was a small tree next to an electrical pole that looked like a woman perched on a stool. Whenever I think of kudzu, I always see that area in my mind, and I can hear my mom saying "Look! Doesn't that look just like a woman sitting on a chair or something? I just think that is so cool, don't you?"

I did think the ability of kudzu to resemble something else was "cool", but at the same time, I was scared of it because I had nightmares about being smothered by kudzu. As terrifying as kudzu can seem, it also sometimes seems beautiful to me when I see it hanging in dense, lush green curtains. It used to make me think of exotic, enchanted fairytale forests that characters have to travel through, fighting against the forest itself as much as the creatures that live in it. The kind of forest that makes you confront and conquer your inner fears in order to make it out alive, and I always picture a woman perched at the entrance to the forest like a guardian, waiting to warn any who might enter of the dangers ahead.

In my work, kudzu represents the consequence of letting the fear of making a wrong decision, or any decision at all, control my life. For me, it represents the effect of time and complacency on things that, literally and figuratively, do not keep moving (figures 22 and 23). I do not want the fear of what could happen if I make the wrong choice to lead me to become indifferent or incurious about life. I do not want to settle for a safe but stagnant lifestyle in order to avoid taking risks. There are concerns embedded in every opportunity. If those concerns control my decisions, I will never achieve the experiences I dreamed of as a child, and I will be left with nothing but regrets, smothering underneath a mountain of fears and responsibilities.



Figure 22: Kerry Britton. “Kudzu: Pueraria Montana var. lobata.” Kudzu covering the landscape.



Figure 23: Johnny Randall. “Kudzu: Pueraria Montana var. lobata.”Kudzu covering the landscape.

Hens

My Grandmother's name is Dorothy Lou Ary, though everyone knew her as Dot. She was forgiving, patient, and she had a quirky, unique sense of humor. She was also very restless, a trait she inherited from her mother and I inherited from her. As a child, she and her sisters did all of the housework: cooking, cleaning, sewing, etc. Dot, the oldest sibling, was always doing something and rarely sat still for long. Even in her old age when movement became difficult, she was continuously active.

Cooking was one of the many ways in which she kept herself busy. Food was a means to care for people, and it seemed like she always had a spoon in her hand, in the process of making something for someone. Her cooking was the standard to which everyone in the family compared all other food. Our conversations often revolved around how to make this dish or for whom she was making that dish. I loved to watch her cook because she always seemed so happy and alive while she was doing it. Much of my respect for food and its preparation stems from my Grandmother's appreciation of it, and it has become an integral part of my identity.

It is the nurturing character of hens that has lead to the phrase "mother hen," which refers to someone who is maternal or mothering often in a fussy or obsessive way.[6] My grandmother was extremely maternal and protective, but in my experience, the only thing she fussed over was making sure there was "enough" for everyone. This applied to food, clothes, toys, gifts, or whatever was needed at the time. In her concern to make sure that everyone was taken care of, she was constantly looking to busy herself. Admittedly, this may have been due to her restless nature more than anything. The way she would go to something, fiddle with it for a moment, and then move on to another thing reminded me of a hen pecking around in brief, sporadic patterns. Within my work, I use hens as references to my grandmother as a result of her nurturing and energetic characteristics.

[6] "Mother Hen," *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online,* accessed March 28, 2014, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mother%20hen.

Process

To create the kudzu vines, I assembled a variety of fabrics consisting of commercial yardage and unbleached cotton muslin. The commercial fabric I accumulated had domestic or floral patterns already printed on them. For example, one of the fabrics is light green with tiny flowers printed in a darker green color. Though most of the fabrics are cotton, there are also rayon and polyester fabrics.

I dyed the cotton fabric using MX fiber-reactive dyes and a low-immersion technique which results in an uneven dye pattern. This created a range of green hues that mimic the color of kudzu as well as a visual texture through value changes (figures 24, 25 and 26). Using water-based pigments, I screen-printed images such as doilies and recipes on the solid fabrics in shades of dark green and brown to give them more visual variation (figures 27, 28 and 29). Once the fabrics were dyed, I cut them into strips and knotted the ends together to create long strips (figure 30). The knots left two tails that were later trimmed into leaf-like shapes. I crocheted the long strips into chains to represent kudzu vines (figure 31). The vines are secured in layers to a light brown denim fabric which hangs from the wall.



Figure 24: Low-immersion dye bath.



Figure 25: Dyed fabric.

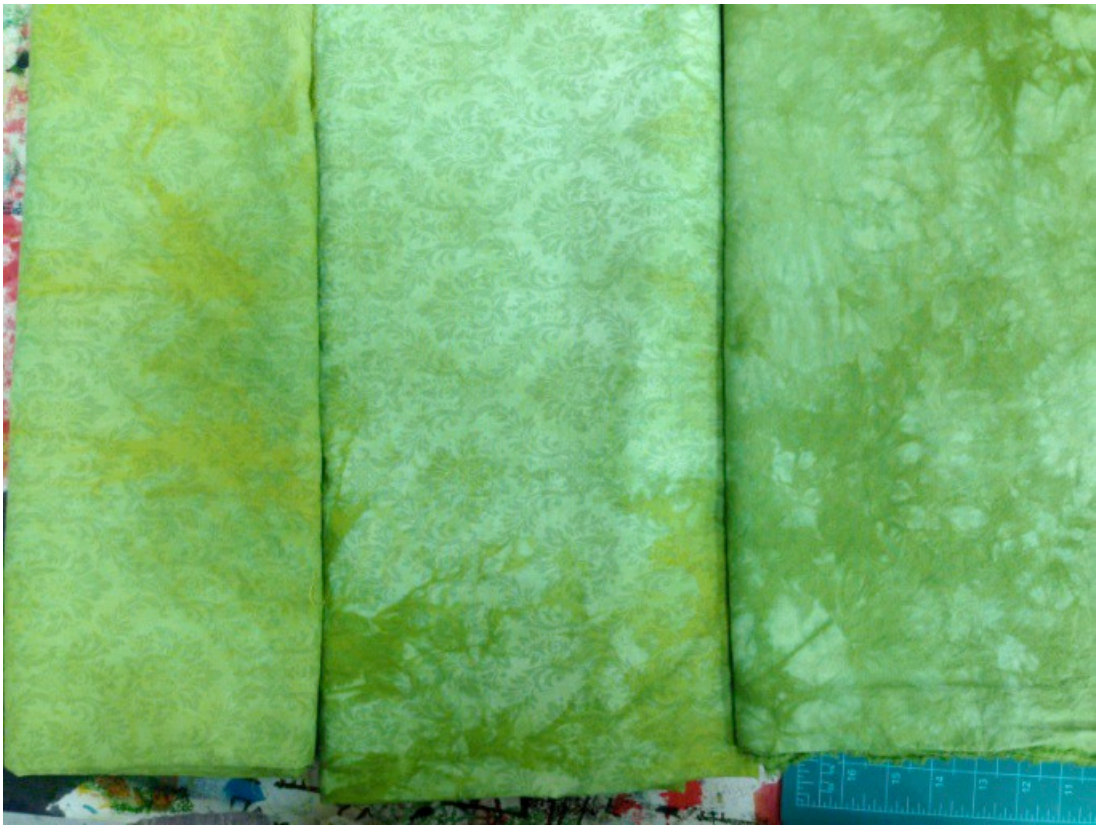

Figure 26: Dyed fabric.



Figure 27: Printing on dyed fabric, layer one.



Figure 28: Printing on fabric, layer two.



Figure 29: Finished fabric detail



Figure 30: Cutting fabric into strips.



Figure 31: Kudzu vines separated by value.

Two movable walls measuring 8 feet high, 4 feet wide, and 1 foot deep are positioned side-by-side against the gallery wall. This protrusion is covered with the denim fabric. There are two gaps in the vines where an old window and door are hung. This creates the impression of a house engulfed by kudzu. The vines are positioned so that they creep over the door, the window, along the floor, and out into the space the audience occupies. This display makes the threat of being trapped more real for the viewer (figures 32 and 33).



Figure 32: Detail of kudzu on door.



Figure 33: Detail of kudzu on ground.

There are four hens in this piece which are placed among the kudzu vines around the house structure. Just as the canaries were made, I translated photographs of hens into pixilated charts to help me accurately depict them with Perler Beads® (figure 34). Once the bead forms were created and ironed together, the hens were cross-stitched with embroidery floss to smooth the transition between different color beads (figures 35, 36, 37 and 38).

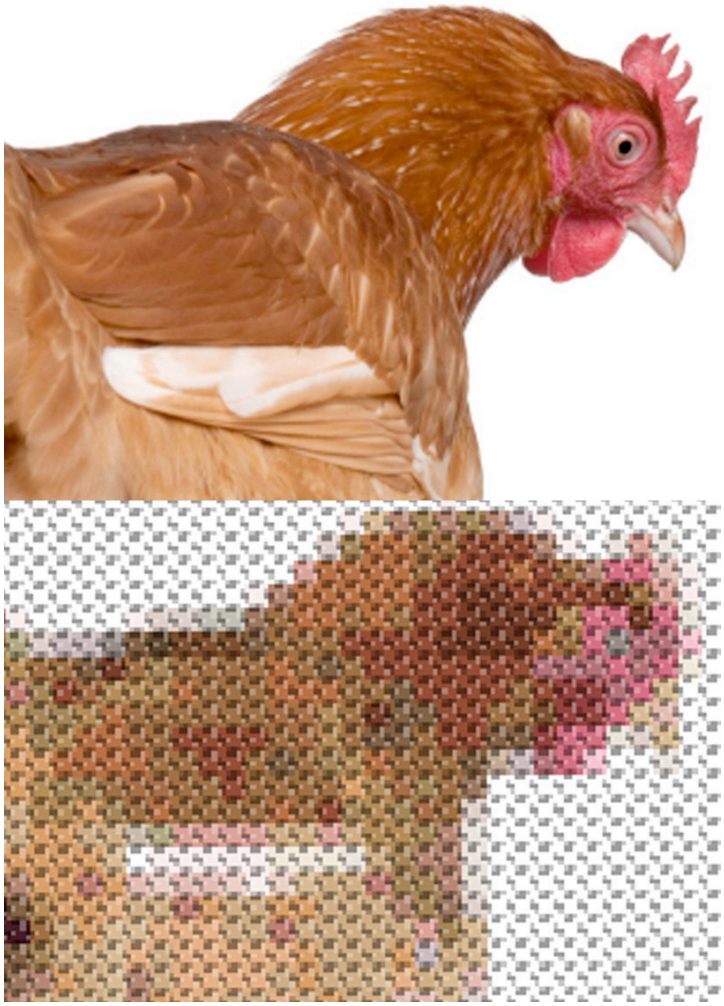

Figure 34: Translation of hen to pixilated pattern.

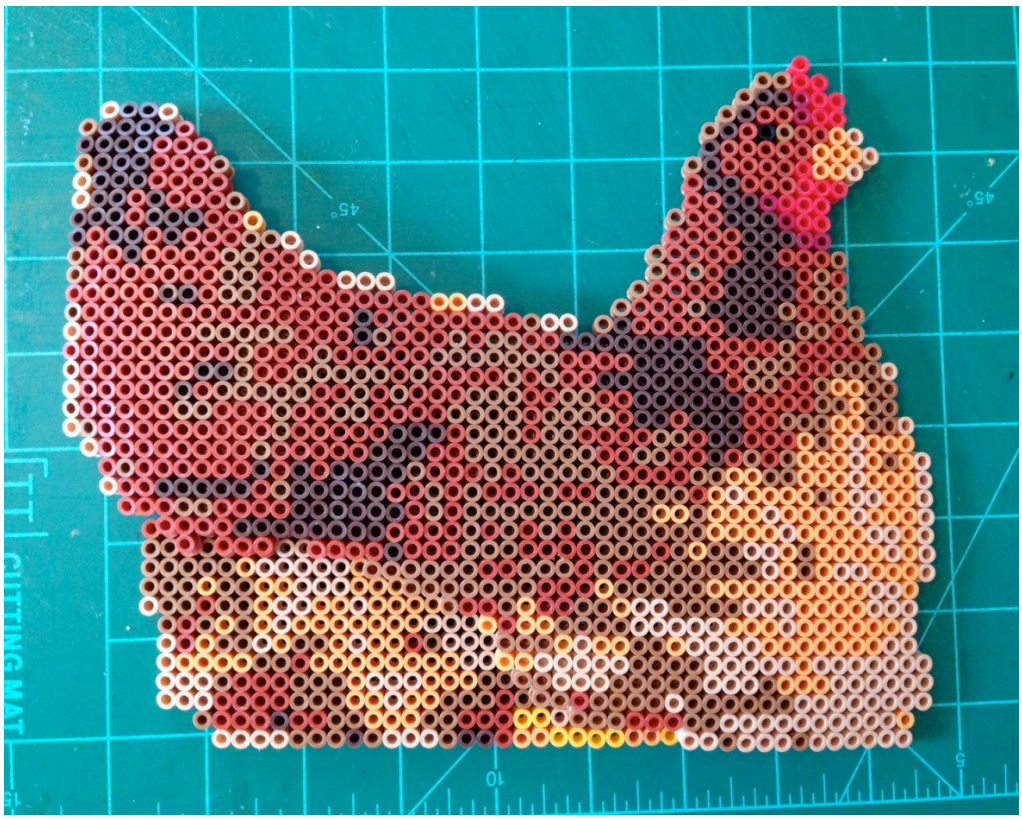

Figure 35: Hen before cross-stitching.

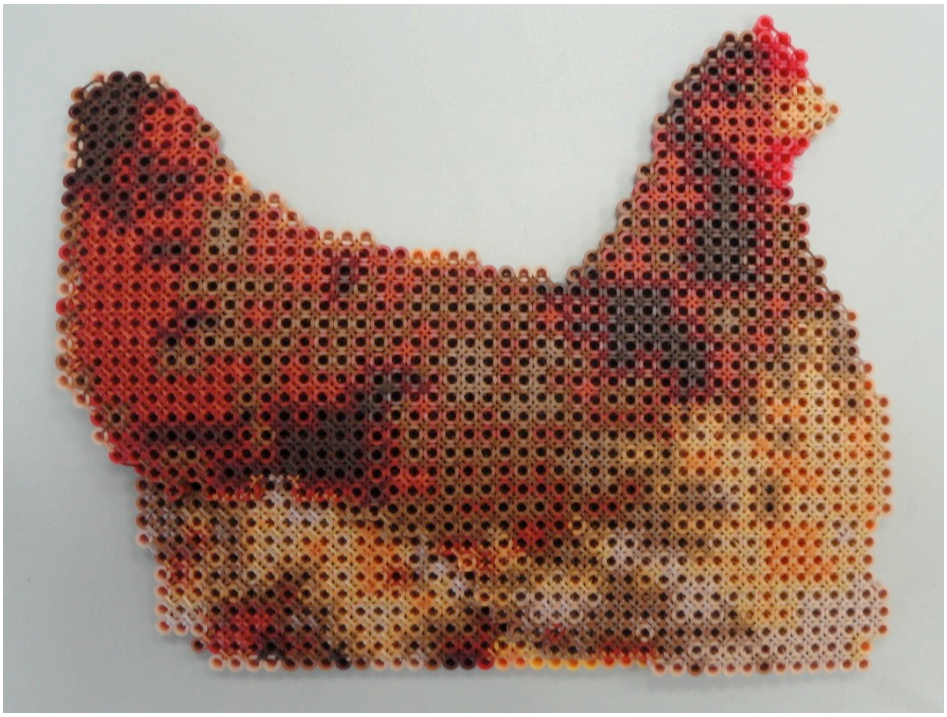

Figure 36: Finished hen with cross-stitching.

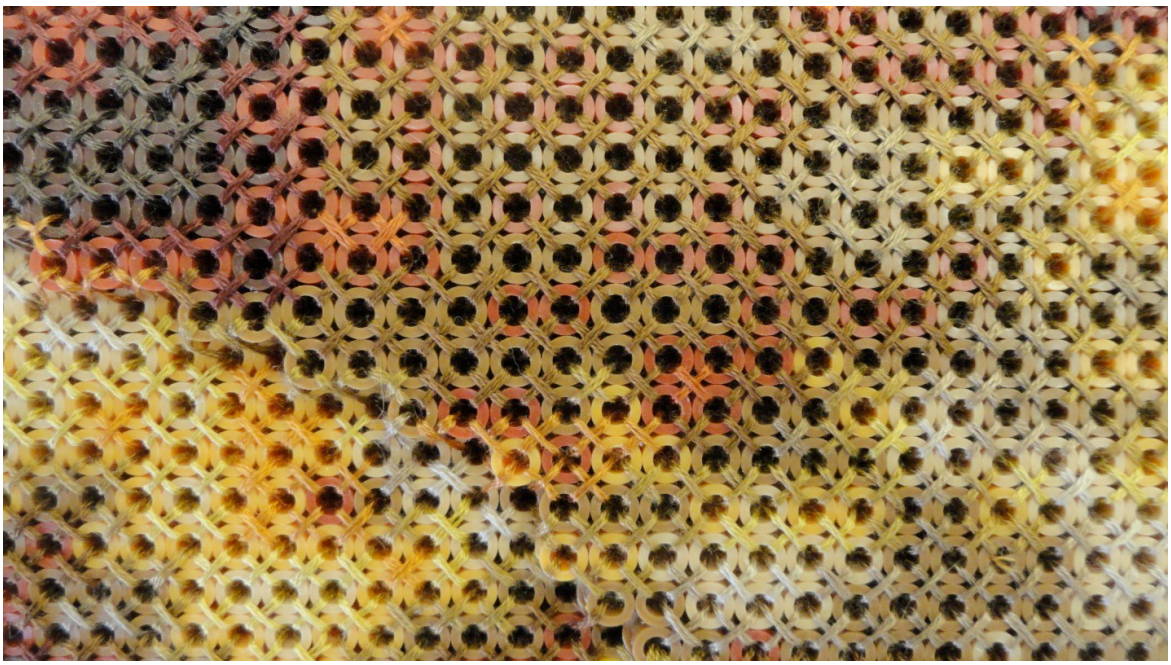

Figure 37: Detail of cross-stitching.

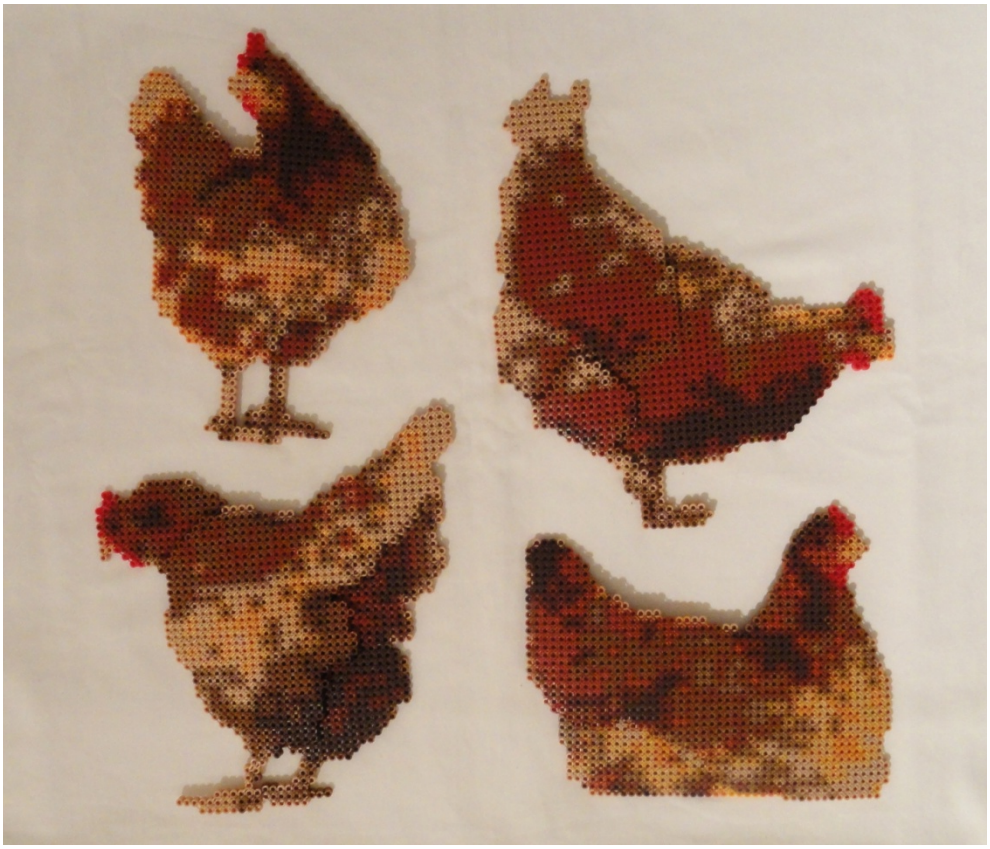

Figure 38: All four finished hens.

Kudzu & Complacency

"*To put meaning in one's life may end in madness,*

But life without meaning is the torture

Of restlessness and vague desire-

It is a boat longing for the sea and yet afraid."

Edgar Lee Masters, "George Gray," *Spoon River Anthology*

Kudzu & Complacency is my representation of being overcome and immobilized by doubts and fears. From under the honeysuckle vines in my childhood, there was a slightly better view into the trees that bordered the playground, and it was possible to see an old house that had been abandoned for many years. I used to make up stories with other children about the events that led the house to be in the dilapidated state in which we found it. I was secretly afraid that, if I made the wrong choices in life, I would end up like that house, desolate and withered. I realize now that, as Beyne states, "these feelings are a result of the imaginary world of a child where thought and reality get confused."[7] Whether real or imagined, those fears have stuck with me to this day.

The house covered by kudzu also represents my fears of domesticity. Like kudzu, I view domesticity as a force that can consume with frightening ease and swiftness. I worry that my fear of making bad life decisions will cause me to slip into a domestic routine, which can be less risky than other options I might choose for myself. Although I have great respect for women who passionately run their domestic lives, I believe my restless nature would lead me to become bored and unsatisfied very quickly, and that lifestyle would suffocate me the way kudzu

[7] Beyn, "West Coast Calamities," *146.*

suffocates the landscape. The images printed on the fabric used to create the vines – houses, doilies, spoons, my grandmother's recipes, and hens – are all images that I associate with domesticity (figures 38 and 39). This underlines the connection between domesticity and kudzu as both being forces of slow, subtle suffocation.



Figure 38: Printed images on fabric.

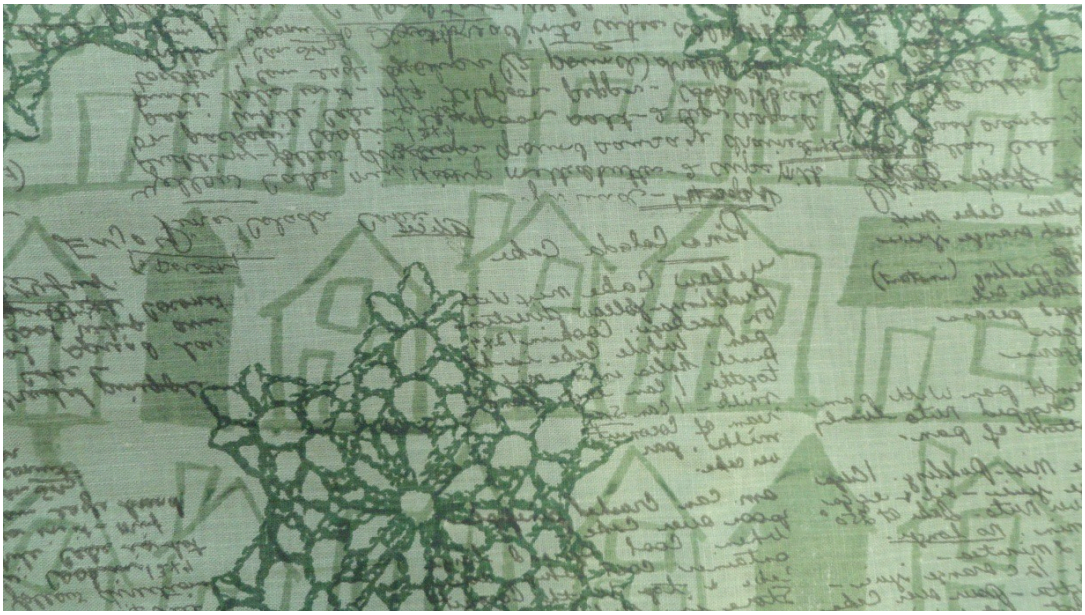

Figure 39: Printed images on fabric.

As symbols for my grandmother, hens are also representations of domestic life, but they represent the elements of domesticity that draw me in, such as love and protection. I looked up to my grandmother as a role model, and I have always struggled with a desire to be like her against a suspicion that I would never be happy living that way. As a child, my daydreams were filled with adventure. As an adult, my daydreams have grown to encompass the adventures I want to have, the family I want to create, and how I can successfully blend the two together. The small hens nested in front of the large house represent the small pull towards domesticity nested inside my larger fear of it (figure 40).



Figure 40: Hens nested in kudzu.

Conclusion

"*My soul is impatient with itself, as with a bothersome child; its restlessness keeps growing and is forever the same. Everything interests me, but nothing holds me. I attend to everything, dreaming all the while…. I'm two, and both keep their distance — Siamese twins that aren't attached*."

Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*

When I was in 3rd grade there was a fire caused by old electrical systems, and our tiny, old gym burned down. After that, they built a new and much larger gymnasium with better facilities. From then on, the majority of our P.E. classes were spent inside learning how to play basketball, volleyball, touch football, and running physical fitness drills. We rarely got to spend time on the playground after that, and when the playground was renovated with new, plastic playground equipment, only the kindergarten and first grade students spent P.E. on the playground. By the time I was in high school, the woods on either side of the playground had been cleared to make room for more classrooms and a parking lot, and the field was turned into a subdivision. I was upset when I saw the changes that had been made. It's hard to explain why, but I felt like someone had crushed my childhood dreams and now they would never come true.

Freedom & Opportunity and *Kudzu & Complacency* are installed opposite of the each other to emphasize the strong pull between the two sides of who I am and what I want. There is the side of me longing for the past and adventure. This part of me wishes I was still brave enough to pursue exactly what I wanted with no reservations – even though what I want is constantly changing. There is also the side of me filled with worries about the future, the side that wants to play it safe and enjoy the simple things. Once I start to follow one path, I immediately regret not having taken the other one. Though my identity is rooted in both sides, neither is entirely accurate, and the two are constantly pulling me in opposite directions.

The two installations depict habitats equally overcome with vines. Kudzu and honeysuckle are both considered to be invasive species in certain areas of the world,[8] and they are noted for their aggressive determination to grow and thrive. Where I grew up, however, kudzu was a nuisance that was more destructive than beneficial, and honeysuckle was a decorative plant that was enjoyable and desired. The contrasting implications conveyed by the vines and the manner in which they interact with the structures create two very different interpretations of how I view "home". The house covered in kudzu is a cage that gets harder to escape from the longer I stay in it, and the shelter created by the honeysuckle is a protective umbrella to hide under until I am prepared to leave it.

These opposing structures, however, are not neatly separated into good and bad constructs of home. There is a struggle to find balance between the two, and it is dependent on obtaining fulfillment without sacrificing freedom. Gundersen discusses a struggle with which I am very familiar:

> *Belonging, staying, and stuckness.*
> *And the art of separation*.
>
> Leaving and traveling has nothing to do with movement and restlessness, with traces, paths, roads or with the machine-gun sounds of your heels clicking as you move quickly along a corridor towards another destination. It's not about kinetics at all. It's about stillness. Stillness, belonging and tradition.
>
> We are supposed to belong, right? But some mix belonging with staying put. A select few believe staying put equals belonging. They are the stuck ones. Being stuck is not the same as staying put, no matter what you may think. Belonging is by no means the same as being stuck.[9]

[8] "Invasive and Exotic Vines." *Invasive.org: Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health*, last modified July 25, 2013, http://www.invasive.org/species/vines.cfm.

[9] Gundersen, "The Place You Left…," 26.

It comes down to choice. Choosing to stay is separate from not being able to leave. Though it may seem obvious to some, it can be hard to tell the difference for a person who has difficulty making decisions. My restlessness makes me feel like I cannot stay put, and my fear makes me feel like I cannot leave. As Gundersen pointed out previously, however, the real struggle is to find a sense of belonging. I never felt a connection to the home I grew up in, and I was always searching for a way to break free from it. Tim Etchells is an artist, writer, and the artistic director of Forced Entertainment. In relation to his desire to leave home, Etchells explains, "I must have thought I could escape the place, shed it, leave it behind. And now…I [have] the opposite impression…that I could never escape this place…for better or worse, this was the landscape I came from, the landscape that wrapped itself around me, that no amount of travel or forgetting or re-inventing or whatever could ever change that."[10] The place that I grew up will always be a type of home for me, a place of powerful memories from my youth. However, it will never be where I belong, and that is the core of my struggle. I love my childhood home, my family, and my memories, and I am sad when I leave them behind. Like a bird that flies away for the winter and returns in the summer, I will always periodically return to this place that is almost home. However, my restlessness and the struggle depicted in my work will not subside until I find the place that I truly belong.

[10] Tim Etchelss, "Home is…Where the Hatred Is," in *Home Is the Place You Left 2008,* ed. Ingar Dragset and Michael Elmgreen (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2008), 19.

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