

ABSTRACT

Reflect

By

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This document is written in conjunction with a series of work titled, *Reflect*. Through historical research, personal narrative, interviews, and the making process, I examine the differences between loneliness and solitude, and address the stigma of being alone. The physical body of work emphasizes the importance of solitude and its benefits.

r e f l e c t

A Thesis
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Masters of Fine Arts

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April, 2015

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reflect

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
ABSTRACTION AND MINIMALISM	3
THE WORK	6
THEMATIC ELEMENTS AND VISUAL LANGUAGE	8
THE PAINTINGS	10
Where No Dust Gathers	12
Sixth Grade Siberia	15
Evening Escape	18
Not A Pumpkin, But Not Crowded	21
Clopen	24
Sundays	27
MIXED-MEDIA SCULPTURES	30
Mowing Meditation	31
15 Minutes	32
A Quiet Morning	33
A Kitchen of One's Own	35
In Good Company	37
CONCLUSION	38
REFERENCES	39

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: <i>Rooms by the Sea</i> , Edward Hopper, 1951	4
Figure 2: <i>Interior with Book</i> , Richard Diebenkorn, 1959	5
Figure 3: Gallery installation, East Carolina University Gray Gallery, 2015	6
Figure 4: <i>A Little Room by the Sea</i> , Chris Van Allsburg, 2014	8
Figure 5: <i>Where No Dust Gathers</i> , 2015	10
Figure 6: <i>Sixth Grade Siberia</i>	13
Figure 7: <i>Evening Escape</i>	16
Figure 8: <i>Not a Pumpkin, but Not Crowded</i>	19
Figure 9: <i>Clopen</i>	22
Figure 10: <i>Sundays</i>	25
Figure 11: <i>Mowing Meditation</i>	30
Figure 12: <i>15 Minutes</i>	31
Figure 13: <i>A Quiet Morning</i>	32
Figure 14: <i>A Kitchen of One's Own</i>	34
Figure 15: <i>In Good Company</i> (Gallery shot)	35
Figures 16--27: <i>In Good Company</i> (quotes)	36

“Language has created the word ‘loneliness’ to express the pain of being alone. And it has created the word ‘solitude’ to express the glory of being alone.”
-Paul Tillich

INTRODUCTION

Six weeks into my semester abroad in Italy I had reached a breaking point. Overcome with feelings of loneliness, I struggled to hold back tears as I waited with 23 other students on the platform for the train to Florence. Prior to that day I’d had no choice about spending nearly every waking hour around the other students and faculty. This day was no different. I felt anxious as everyone around me smiled and chatted. I felt lonely in the midst of this large group and I knew that if I could just be alone, truly in solitude, that I would feel better. As Henry David Thoreau said, “I never found a companion that was so companionable as solitude.”

I am a person who likes to be alone and requires it often. I need it to restore my energy. I need it to clear my mind. And I need it to feel happy. Finding myself in a group of people with whom I have very little in common often triggers loneliness. I can feel misunderstood, annoyed or uninterested in the conversations, or overwhelmed by the energy of others. This is when I need solitude the most. And I am not alone in this; whether it is found in a physical place or in a state of mind, the majority of people need it.

Despite the overwhelming praise for solitude from creative thinkers throughout history, the concept of choosing to be alone still bears a stigma in today’s exceedingly social world. It’s a choice that I believe few people value, and those who choose it are often misunderstood in this need. Novelist Wendell Berry writes about the benefits of solitude in his collection of essays, *What Are People For?* “And by it we enter solitude, in which we also lose loneliness. Only discord can come of the attempt

to share solitude. True solitude is found in the wild places, where one is without human obligation. One's inner voices become audible.”¹

Berry's thoughts about human obligation are supported in a 2003 article, “Solitude: An Exploration of the Benefits of Being Alone”² by researchers Christopher R. Long and James R. Averill who write about its multiple benefits, including how it facilitates creativity and how it is important for mental well-being. They state that creativity is a result of freedom, and freedom is a result of solitude. When one is alone they are no longer burdened by the energy, obligations, or judgments of others. During this state self-consciousness is minimal and one is allowed the freedom to act or think in ways that they may not around others. Long and Averill state that creativity comes, “first by stimulating imaginative involvement in multiple realities and, second, by ‘trying on’ alternative identities, leading, perhaps, to self-transformation.” These multiple realities manifest in daydreaming, fantasy, or self-reflection and allow a person to process and reorganize his or her thoughts and emotions.

In this body of work I have made representations of my own and others' notions of solitude using paintings, mixed media sculpture, and text. As Balzac has been quoted, “Solitude is fine, but you need someone to tell you that solitude is fine.” My work demonstrates the importance of solitude and offers viewers respite from chaos and an opportunity to consciously acknowledge a moment of quietude.

¹ “Healing” p. 5

² Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior 2003

ABSTRACTION AND MINIMALISM

In the book *Solitude: A Return to Self*, psychologist Anthony Storr references Wilhelm Worringer's book *Abstraction and Empathy*, saying, "Worringer regarded abstraction as originating from anxiety; an attempt by man to create order and regularity in the face of a world in which he felt himself to be at the mercy of the unpredictable forces of Nature." Abstraction as a means of creating order is one reason I am so attracted to it. I am constantly in search of ways to unclutter my mind. Within abstraction, minimalism is the most effective for me. When I was regularly practicing yoga, during savasana³ the instructor would tell us to soften our gaze as we attempted to lie there completely still. For me, this open-eye meditation parallels what I feel when I look at abstract art. In both of these experiences I am no longer focused on the object in front of me; instead I feel a moment of mental peace. My physical surroundings affect my level of mental clutter. I am drawn to objects or spaces that are aesthetically simple or sparse. I prefer solid colors, minimal texture, and if there is pattern I am partial to geometric designs.

These preferences are strongly reflected in this body of work, as well as in the work of artists by whom I am influenced. American artist Edward Hopper has been an important influence in my work. Hopper was always reluctant to speak about the ideas behind his work but solitude is clearly a predominant theme. Although Hopper's work is not abstract, I see his paintings as minimalist in spirit. In a rare statement printed in the journal *Reality*, he comments on abstraction, "One of the weaknesses of much abstract painting is the attempt to substitute the inventions of the human intellect for a private imaginative conception (Spring 1953)." Despite his opinions of abstract painting, I think his work verges on the precipice of abstraction. His paintings, though representational, are minimal in the details. He painted only what was needed to convey a feeling

³ A pose where you lie on your back with your arms to your side, fingers out and toes relaxed inward.

about a space or a narrative for his figures. He spared the viewer the minutiae. When I look at his work through a softened gaze it becomes more abstract because of the strong geometric shapes he creates through light and shadow.



Figure 1: *Rooms by the Sea*, Edward Hopper, 1951 This relationship to abstraction is evident in paintings by

Richard Diebenkorn who was strongly influenced by Hopper. Diebenkorn's early work starts in representation and throughout his career transitions to abstraction such as in his *Ocean Park Series*, for which he is best known. In addition, many of his landscapes use a similar color palette to Hopper's. Their palettes share a balance between warm and cool hues, and between neutral and saturated colors.



Figure 2: *Interior with Book*, Richard Diebenkorn, 1959

THE WORK

This body of work is comprised of three series. The first is six paintings representing places of solitude that I have found or created throughout my life. For the second series I investigated others' notions of solitude through interview. Based on the responses of several participants, the mixed-media sculptures show my interpretation of their places on a miniature scale. I chose four spaces that are each depicted in a 12-inch cube with an opening to allow the viewer to have a solitary experience with the space. The final series features a single quote from each person laser etched on paper. For the exhibition I physically divided the room in to three spaces using temporary walls to create space for each series.



Figure 3: Gallery Installation, East Carolina University Gray Gallery, 2015



Figure 4: Gallery Installation, East Carolina University Gray Gallery, 2015



Figure 5: Gallery Installation, East Carolina University Gray Gallery, 2015

THEMATIC ELEMENTS AND VISUAL LANGUAGE

In this body of work it is important that the spaces I make convey a feeling of solitude through order using minimalism, abstraction, and geometric shapes. In addition to the theme of solitude, the visual elements I use that connect them are architecture, pattern, and a relationship between interiors and exteriors.

The paintings are not reproductions or visual studies of my places of solitude—they are symbolic representations of these places. I have edited out anything unnecessary and chosen only what I feel is important to express a feeling about the space. By omitting elements such as cast shadows and value gradient I allow the viewer to read it as abstract, representational, or somewhere in-between.

I start each painting by mapping out the composition in graphite using straight edges and precise measurements. As I build up the layers of paint, I continue to refine the edges with the graphite.

These carefully crafted lines give the paintings an illustrative quality. One of my favorite illustrators is Chris Van Allsburg who is well known for his children's books such as *Jumanji* and *The Polar Express*. There is a quiet precision in his surreal drawings and he often defines the edges with hard lines. Additionally, he invites the viewer into the narratives through the spaces he creates in his drawings.

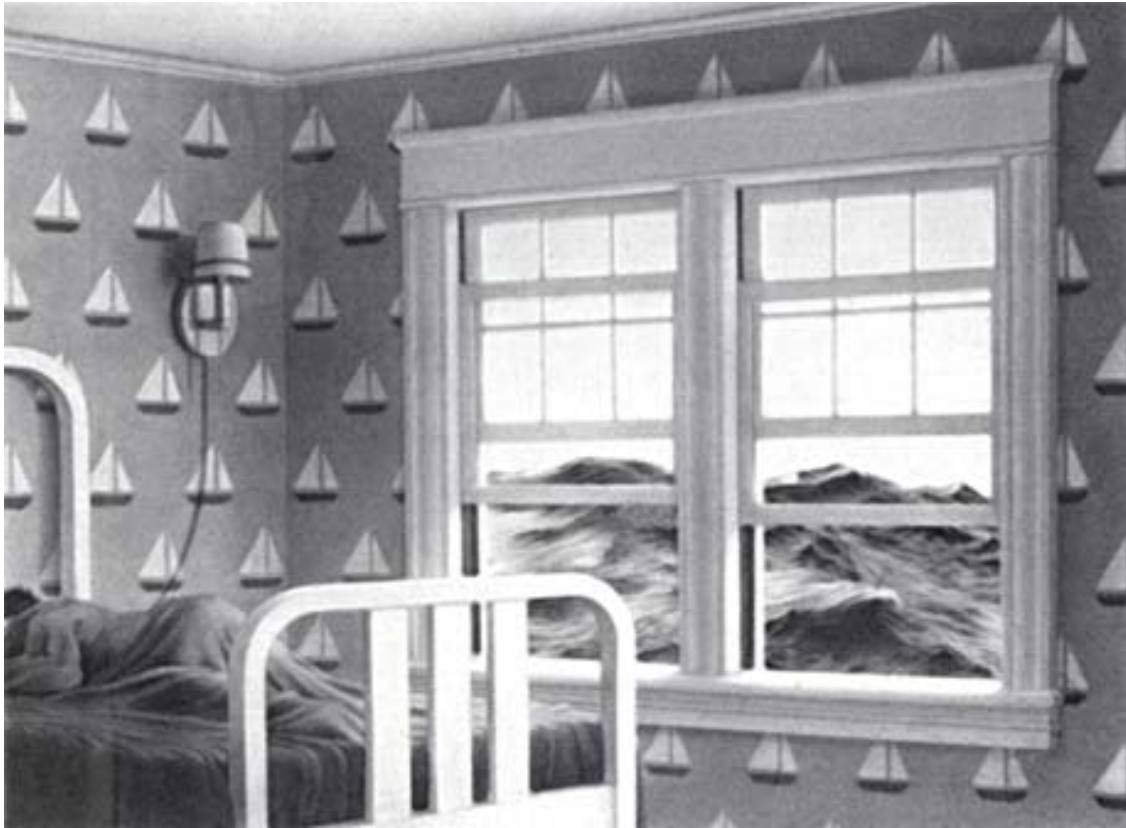


Figure 6: *A Little Place by the Sea*, Chris Van Allsburg, 2014

This same aesthetic and emphasis on minimalism continues within the three-dimensional spaces of the wall sculptures. Like Hopper's paintings, I have omitted what I believe is unnecessary. The boxes are illuminated using single light sources to reference Hopper's affinity for natural light and cast shadows in his paintings. The architectural elements I use are similar to those in Van Allsburg's illustrations.

THE PAINTINGS

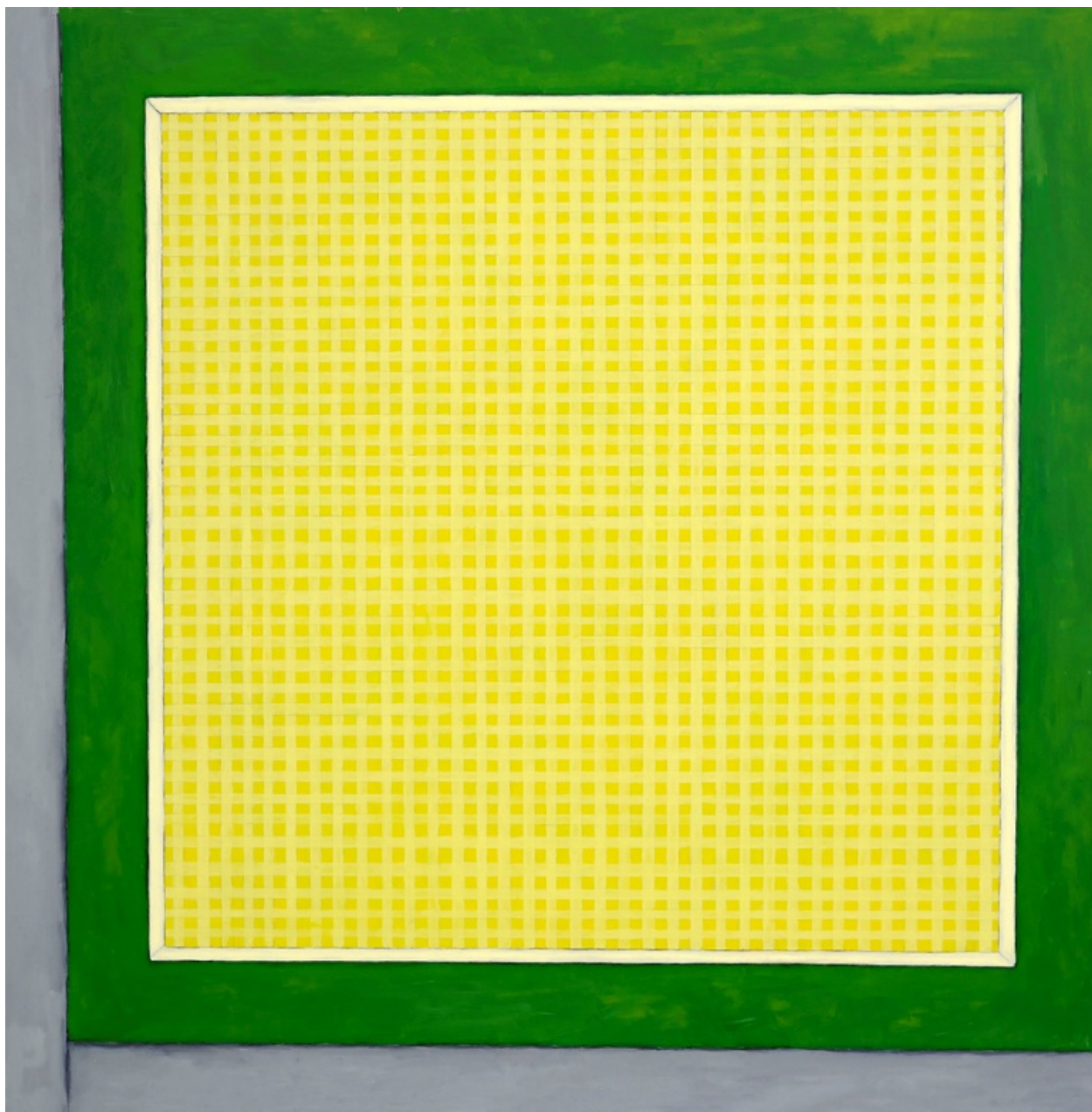


Figure 7: *Where No Dust Gathers*, acrylic and graphite on panel, 36" x 36", 2015

“I would rather sit in the open air, for no dust gathers on the grass,
unless where man has broken ground.”
-Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Where No Dust Gathers

Sneaking around was essential for survival as child in my family. If you were seen by a parental unit you were given a chore or asked about homework. If you were seen by a sibling you would most likely have to endure some kind of physical pain or verbal mockery. And should you retaliate, you would more than likely have to deal with one or more parents and then receive a punishment in the form of a chore, spanking, or the surprisingly powerful statement, “I’m very disappointed in you.” Any of which would be followed by tears.

Like most children, I was not interested in doing housework all the time, nor did I care to experience the torment of my brothers and sister. So when I really needed to hide I would leave the house. Sneaking out during the day was pretty easy; my bedroom was on the second floor at the back of the house next to the set of “servant” stairs that led to the back door. This allowed me to avoid the main community rooms and leave without detection. Sometimes I would dig up some change and walk to the local convenience store and buy a candy bar. There was grocery store that was closer but going there required crossing a busy street that I was not allowed to do at that age. However, this walk suited my needs better as it allowed me to be gone for a longer period of time.

My favorite place in the neighborhood was out in the open and yet strategically chosen. There was a curbside patch of grass about four blocks away from our house. In the summertime when I needed to get away, I would pack my cotton gingham blanket into my backpack with a book and a deck of cards. I could sit in that warm, sunny spot for a couple hours at a time reading, playing solitaire, or resting without anyone noticing my absence. It was unclear to me whether it was part of someone’s yard or if it was just another grassy park strip like those throughout the neighborhood. I didn’t know

these neighbors but since this particular patch was not on the same elevation as the rest of their yard I figured it was okay for me to occupy the spot. It was perfect for hiding because I could plausibly deny it. I was not in view of any neighbors who actually knew my parents or me. I was not on a street that my parents normally drove down. This spot was only a few blocks from my house but it was located at the bottom of a hill, so if you walked to the end of the block and looked down the street, you wouldn't see me. It was far enough that if you yelled for me, I could say I didn't hear you. But it wouldn't take long to find me if someone put a little effort into the search; and thus "I wasn't hiding."



Figure 8: *Sixth Grade Siberia*, acrylic and graphite on panel, 36" x 36", 2015

“Even in Siberia there is happiness.”
-Anton Chekov

Sixth Grade Siberia

Although corporal punishment was never practiced in the Catholic schools I attended, many of my teachers found their own special ways of punishing children through discomfort and humiliation. In third grade my best friend, Corinna, was told to sit on her hands for several hours because she was fidgeting too much. One day at lunchtime the principal, Sr. Janice, saw a boy throw away half of his lunch, so she made him dig through the trash to retrieve it and then forced him to eat it. There was a rumor that our seventh grade teacher, Mr. Cunningham, locked a girl in a closet for half the day because she had been defiant. One time during recess a student discovered that someone had defecated outside the door to the gymnasium and our teacher threatened us all with cleaning it up if anyone got in trouble that day. Most of the time I thought the punishments given were unwarranted and unjust. It seemed like there was often a better approach to correcting a person's behavior than the methods my teachers employed, but a child's opinion was usually unappreciated.

The most memorable punishment I received was in 6th grade—the day Mrs. Neuville banished me to “Siberia.” Our desks were arranged in groups of four and one of my desk mates, Julia, wouldn't stop talking to me while our teacher was lecturing. This was a difficult situation for me to navigate socially; I wanted to listen to the teacher, but if I told Julia to be quiet, not only would I risk hurting her feelings (because “I didn't want to talk to her”), but other students would probably overhear me saying I wanted to listen, and that was “not cool.” So I tried to act like I was listening to both of them. Soon enough Mrs. Neuville grew tired of the disruption—she stopped class and told us we were going to Siberia. Then she dragged each of our desks to opposite corners of the room where we had to stay for the rest of the day.

In addition to humiliation, my teacher was using isolation as a tactic. After all, we are social creatures and like being around people, so forcing a student to be alone for the rest of the day will certainly make her think twice before she disrupts the class again. Or at least this is what I believe her reasoning was. But this part of her punishment failed. I loved being in the corner alone! I was so productive that day. After recovering from the initial embarrassment of getting in trouble, I was able to embrace my new situation. I didn't have to worry about someone tapping me on the shoulder or stealing my pencils or having to watch Johnny Miles draw black circles around his warts with a pen and make drool puddles on his desk. I could just sit and actually concentrate on my schoolwork. The next day I asked Mrs. Neuville if I could keep my desk in the corner. At first she was taken aback but then agreed to let me stay in Siberia for one more day.



Figure 9: *Evening Escape*, acrylic and graphite on panel, 36" x 36", 2015

“When from our better selves we have too long
Been parted by the hurrying world, and droop,
Sick of its business, its pleasures tired,
How gracious, how benign, is Solitude.”
-William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*

Evening Escape

Despite the classic Victorian architecture of my childhood home, for the first eight years of my life, my bedroom was stuck in the ‘70s. The doors and wood trim were painted gloss-yellow, the shag carpeting was avocado green, and the wallpaper pattern consisted of stylized orange, pink, and yellow flowers. When I was five years old I decided that those flowers needed some grass so they weren’t just floating there on the wall; I took a spring-green Crayola crayon and carefully drew a zigzag line of grass along one wall. My parents were not too happy about that, which was unfortunate for my posterior. A few years later my mom decided to redecorate. She ripped up the carpet and painted all the wood (including the floor) white. She chose a light blue and white-striped wallpaper pattern with a floral border and she bought matching bedding from JC Penny’s. My room’s new look was peaceful and clean, but it didn’t stay that way for long. My parents had invited a foreign exchange student to come live with us. My sister gave up her room to our temporary “family member” and she and I shared my new room for the next three months. Long after the exchange student left and my sister had moved back to her own room, she continued to claim partial ownership over my bedroom until I left for college. Her “claim” entitled her to come into my room whenever she felt like it, borrow my things without asking, and read my diary and then quote it later at the dinner table. Even though I had my own bedroom I struggled to find privacy. In addition to my sister taking over my room, my parents exercised their rights to enter whenever they pleased. They also would remove the hinge pins from my door if I didn’t clean my room when asked. My dad would lean the solid wood door against the wall next to my closet. I would then lift the heavy door back over in front of the jamb leaning it slightly against the top molding. I had to move it every

time I left my room but it was better than cleaning for the sake of *their* “sanity.” Furthermore, it made it nearly impossible for someone to enter without knocking over the door. As a result of these intrusions I spent many hours inside my walk-in closet or on the small ledge outside my bedroom window; and I often imagined that I had secret hiding places in my walls.

The ledge was my favorite spot but I could only go out there at night. If I sat there during the day I would risk being spotted by our next-door neighbor or a family member in the yard. The times I could sit out there were rare as it was often too cold or rainy. I cherished those peaceful times when the air was warm and there was only a slight breeze. Although my family no longer owns the house this painting brings me back to that place.



Figure 10: *Not A Pumpkin, But Not Crowded*, acrylic and graphite on panel, 36" x 36", 2015

“I would rather sit on a pumpkin, and have it all to myself, than be crowded on a velvet cushion.”

-Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Not A Pumpkin, But Not Crowded

Aside from secret hiding places, one of the things I wished for in my childhood bedroom was a window seat. I often imagined having a large bay window in my room with a comfortable cushion on a bench and lots of pretty pillows. This would be an ideal place to sit and read and enjoy the view outside. Our house did have a bay window but it was in the kitchen. The top of it conveniently provided the aforementioned ledge outside my bedroom window. We also had a built-in bench but that was in the foyer. I have fond memories of this room. Our entry way could be closed off from the living room by beveled glass French doors. The woodwork in that room was the only part of the house that had not been painted and maintained its original dark stain, which I thought gave the house a sense of history. There was a large window next to the staircase through which you could see camellia bushes that fortunately blocked the view of the neighbor's house. As children, my siblings and I would put on our footed onesie pajamas and sit on pillows sliding our butts down the wooden stairs.

This was another room that my mom redecorated—she switched out the green-flocked damask wall paper for an elegant indigo and white-striped pattern. She had a custom velvet cushion made for the bench and even splurged to buy an original painting from an artist she knew. I especially appreciated this choice for the room since my parents had very little disposable income and were unlikely to spend it on art.

In my opinion the entry way to a home should feel special. Although it is not generally a place where people linger, it is a room that should feel welcoming. Because this was not a high-traffic area, our foyer was usually clean and uncluttered, unlike my messy bedroom. I did not sit there often since I

was very protective of my personal space but on the rare days when there were few people in the house absorbed in their activities, I would sit on that soft velvet cushion and read.



Figure 11: *Clopen*, acrylic and graphite on panel, 36" x 36", 2015

“Home is not where you live, but where they understand you.”
-Christian Morgenstern

Clopen

When I tell people I am divorced I often say it was the second best decision I ever made. The *best* decision I ever made was deciding to get my BFA from Oregon College of Art & Craft. If I had not gone back to school I fear that I would still be in that marriage.

My husband, who was initially “supportive” of my decision to go to school, slowly tried to undermine my plans as my first semester was approaching. He found reasons to be unhappy with his job and decided to start his own business. But that didn’t stop me. I started school as planned and within months the fragile façade of our happy marriage crumbled and the loneliness I felt in that relationship began to fade.

The word “clopen” is a portmanteau of closed and open. I first saw this word carved into a wooden sign that hung from the roof of the designated smoking area on the OCAC campus. This word represents my experience there for a myriad of reasons. The smoking shack, as we called it, was modest—framed with 2 x 4s and capped with a corrugated plastic roof. There were no walls attached to the frame, but there were built-in benches on two sides and a swing that hung from the third side. Soon after it was built, someone added an industrial wooden spool to function as a table and a plastic patio chair for extra seating. This area was one of the many places on campus for students to gather while taking a break. There were never more than a few people there at a time and often you could sit there alone. Also, it was not exclusively for smokers and was open enough that you were hardly affected by the smoke.

Additionally, clopen represents the general culture of that school. It’s a beautiful five-acre campus nestled in the west hills of Portland, Oregon. For years it was called one of Portland’s best-kept

secrets. The student body of roughly 150 people felt more like a family than an institution. I had never been in a community of people with whom I could so freely express myself. At 25 years old, it was the first time in my life that I felt like I belonged somewhere. I was protected from the rest of world and enjoyed the comfort I had been seeking in this group of open-minded people. This place was my “home” for the four years I was in school and through a few part-time jobs on campus, I managed to stay around for another three years.

The place on campus where I spent the most time was the metals studio. It was a single story cedar shingled structure that looked much more like a Craftsmen bungalow than a school building. In the main room of the metals studio there were two walls with a large span of windows. From my bench I could not see any buildings or the parking lot; my view was of hills and trees in the distance and because I worked there most evenings until around 11:00, I had a prime view of the sunset.

During these years I was less conscious of my need for solitude; but I also didn’t have to work hard to find it. There were plenty of quiet places to be, including an orchard that took up a significant part of campus as well as a small courtyard with picnic benches outside of the metals studio. I didn’t have to work hard for this need because I believe many of schoolmates felt the same. Many of us could sit in these places on campus and enjoy silence together. For the most part we were respectful of each other’s need for space. And when the administration decided to get rid of the orchard to build a new painting and drawing building, many of the students protested the removal of this quiet space.

Most significantly, my experience there supported me in closing a toxic chapter of my life and opened my eyes to the possibilities for a richer, healthier life.



Figure 12: *Sundays*, acrylic and graphite on panel, 36" x 36", 2015

“Set wide the window. Let me drink the day.”

-Edith Wharton

Sundays

The only time I ever cried during an art school critique was last year in my painting class. I had recently begun making work about my need for solitude and safe spaces. A few weeks before that, in a session with my therapist I told her that I had not lived anywhere that felt like home for over four years. This was because during the three years before moving to Greenville, North Carolina I had been fairly transient. I did a lot of housesitting, lived on and off in the basement of my boss's house, rented a room in my sister's house, and I even tried living in a low-income artist community that I not so lovingly referred to as “the group home.”

When I arrived in Greenville, I was so excited about my new apartment—it was one of three in a huge old house with a spacious front porch down the street from school. It felt like exactly the right place. However that feeling didn't last long. My roommate, who I knew only through our email correspondence was not who I had hoped for. It quickly became obvious that he did not think that it was his responsibility to clean up after himself. After some gentle nudging without results, which led to some unpleasant confrontations it was clear this was not my home, let alone a safe space. The following year I moved into the upstairs apartment with some friends who had already been living there for a couple years. Although it was a much better situation, it still wasn't ideal. With three people living in a house, plus all their visitors, and a frequent squatter (A.K.A my roommate's girlfriend), solitude was not easy to find.

Prior to my cross-country move my fail-safe place of solitude was my Volvo. No matter what my crappy living situation was, I always had a car that allowed me to be alone. I could go wherever I wanted to be. It had everything I needed to feel safe: heat, a comfy seat, windows, locking doors, and it was surrounded with 2000 pounds of steel. It was a space that I owned and controlled and it

was portable. To simplify things for my move I sold my beloved station wagon. My intent was to buy another car once I had settled into my new life, but finding what I wanted was not easy. Unlike the west coast where old Volvos are abundant, eastern North Carolina's used-car market did not reflect the same enthusiasm for these cars. Furthermore, most Craigslist users in this area lacked the savvy and common protocol that I was used to in Oregon. My frustration with the multitude of ads for cars no longer available, without images, or sellers refusing to give out their addresses quickly snuffed out my motivation to find my next Volvo.

So when I cried during my critique fall semester of last year it was because I realized that I had been without a safe space for almost a year and a half. For someone like me who needs a lot of alone time on a regular basis, being without a car and a good living situation had taken its toll. During that semester the painting studio had slowly started to fill that void for me. Even though I shared that studio space with three other students, there was a healthy energy and social dynamic that I had not felt in other studios. I could work amongst my studio mates and not feel obligated to converse or constantly be interrupted. There was a mutual respect and support for each other in all aspects of our interactions. And because of our varied schedules there was plenty of time for each of us to be alone in that space.

Sundays became my favorite studio day. It was the only day of the week when I was not obligated to my classes or assistantship duties, and usually I was the only one who worked that day which meant I had total control over the music choices. The "modern" architecture of the art building featured several protruding trapezoidal walls of windows which met the floor and ceiling at an incline. As unusual as the architecture was in the painting studio, I always enjoyed the high ceilings and the light that came through the enormous set of windows. When you don't have windows you forget how important they are until you have them. A window (especially a large one) allows you to be mentally

outside and still protected from the elements. I relished watching the sky change throughout the day. Sometimes I would come in at 6:00 a.m. and get to see the pinks and reds of the sunrise as I walked through the parking lot—which shortly after would turn to a deep blue, and finally the lasting light blue on a sunny day. Conversely, I also loved the days when there was heavy rain or a thunderstorm. On those days I chose to listen to the soulful music of Miles Davis or Nina Simone. After a year I had finally found the space for which I'd been searching.

“The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak.”

-Hans Hofmann

MIXED-MEDIA SCULPTURES

The second series of work features four 12-inch cubes containing miniature representations of others' places of solitude. When I asked the participants to write about solitude, some wrote about their experiences and others described a place. I chose to create interpretations of a few of those spaces within the cubes. These wall-mounted sculptures have a three-inch hole on the front for the viewer to have a solitary experience with the space.

No. 1: *Mowing Meditation*

This sculpture depicts a field of cut and uncut grass in the early morning with a scythe laying in the foreground. The participant, Don S., wrote about moving from the city to a slower-paced life in the country and starting a farm. Before he owned a tractor he learned the practice of scything to cut the grass. He says many farmers refer to this as “mowing meditation.” It is best done in the early morning when there is still dew on the grass that makes it easier to cut. For Don, this repetitive solitary activity allows for a meditative state of mind. When one runs a small farm as he does the chores require fewer hands and enable one to enjoy the peace of the early morning.



Figure 13: *Mowing Meditation* (interior), mixed media, 12” x 12” x 12”, 2015

No. 2: *15 Minutes*

Amber W. who describes herself as “a busy college student and a mom,” wrote about her reliable place of solitude: the bathroom. As a single person with no children, the bathroom was a place that I overlooked; but for her, moments of solitude are rare. The bathroom is a widely accepted place for privacy even for those with a full household. I believe a good one will be clean, well equipped, and have a functioning lock to insure privacy. I created this piece for Amber and others who might only find five or ten minutes of alone time in their day for a shower or a small moment to read.



Figure 14: *15 Minutes* (interior), mixed media, 12” x 12” x 12”, 2015

No. 3: *A Quiet Morning*

When Kitty S. and her husband built their house several years ago they made sure to have plenty of porch space. The main porch is the full length of the front of their house. There is a second porch outside of the doors to their bedroom; and a third on the side of the house which is screened-in. They use that porch for family gatherings in the summer and often as an additional “refrigerator” during the colder months of the year. Kitty finds her private time in this space in the early morning. She says, “There, I listen to the birds, the creek, the trees, and sometimes the fog horns on the river...As the light grows, I watch and feel the world awaken. The hummingbirds fly around enjoying the flowers on the tree just outside the porch. I smell the fragrances of the lilies, the styrax japonica, the roses. I planted flowers that have beautiful fragrances and a whiff of nature in the early morning is divine!” She adds that a cup of coffee completes this morning ritual. When I imagine this space I am reminded of Richard Diebenkorn’s painting *Interior with Book*. The interior space he depicts could be a porch or a sunroom. There is an expanse of windows that shows a clear blue sky and an abstracted colorful landscape outside. In the foreground there is a single chair at a table with a book and a cup.



Figure 15: *A Quiet Morning* (interior), mixed media, 12" x 12" x 12", 2015

No. 4: *A Kitchen of One's Own*

Growing up with a dad who is a chef tends to instill a love of food in his children. I developed an interest in cooking and baking at an early age. My parents “employed” my siblings and me to work at their catering business as young adults (you don’t have to pay employment taxes if you hire your children). As soon as we were old enough to have a food handler’s card we would help out in the kitchen making pizzas or assembling hors d’oeuvres. Some little girls fantasize about what their wedding will be like; I have always fantasized about what my *own* kitchen will be like. In my dream kitchen there will be a La Cornue range. The first time I saw this quintessential French stove was in an interior design magazine while I waited in the pediatrician’s office with my mother. This, in terms of kitchen appliances, was a work of art. Over the years I’ve learned to adapt in the various kitchens with which I’ve had to live; and during this time I’ve continued to refine my preferences in regard to functionality as well as aesthetics. Until this year I have never lived alone. However the cramped kitchen in my apartment is far from ideal. I love to cook for other people, but when I am preparing a meal I prefer to be alone. In my painting series I recreated my past places of solitude but in this sculpture I created one to which I look forward.



Figure 16: *A Kitchen of One's Own* (interior), mixed media, 12" x 12" x 12", 2015

“Many a sage has learned that solitude is the antidote to loneliness.
In solitude I find myself in good company.”
--Don S.

IN GOOD COMPANY

The final component in my thesis body of work is a series of 12 quotes from the participants who wrote to me. Each person's response to my survey was personal and thoughtfully written. I thought it would be appropriate to honor each contributor with a single quote that exemplifies his or her experiences. The impetus behind this series is to show my audience that they are not alone in their need to be alone.

The quotes have been laser-etched on 8" x 8" heavy-stock paper and are contained in simple white square frames. The result of the laser etching leaves the text a golden brown color, which provides enough contrast on the white paper without being harsh. They have been hung in the space created by the three temporary walls in the gallery room. Unlike the more intimate spaces where the paintings and sculptures have been placed, the space with the framed quotes is more open to allow several people to be in there at the same time. As the viewers spend time in this space reading the quotes they will not only find themselves in solidarity with the authors, but perhaps also with those who are present.

CONCLUSION

Breaking down a stigma requires people to have conversations about it in a safe and constructive environment. It was important to me to keep the idea of solitude at the forefront of my thoughts so I could open up a discussion of this issue with peers and people I met. While making this body of work I chose to live my life in congruence with this topic. I rented my own apartment without roommates. I finally bought another Volvo. And I spent as much alone time in the studio as I could. This was not an attempt to isolate myself; it was an opportunity to explore all aspects of this subject. During this time I reflected on my life and assessed many parts of it. I examined my relationships with my family and peers, my lifestyle, and even my finances.

My need for solitude impacted my choice of studio processes and materials. Painting allowed me to have ample quiet time to hear my thoughts. I was able to fabricate and alter many of the components in the sculptures with few tools at my kitchen table. Working alone afforded me fewer interruptions and enabled me to be more productive.

Making solitude a priority in my life meant taking care of myself first. If you're not used to doing this it can be a challenge. You find yourself saying "no" a lot. By doing this you create more time for yourself and the things you say, "yes" to become more meaningful. I haven't missed any of the things I eliminated from my life this past year. Making these conscious choices has been transformative in all facets of my life.

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