



FIGURE 1 BLANCHETTE - PHASE 1-1

fragmented.

abstract.

fragmented. Is the exploration of budding womanhood through the fog of personal tragedy. Separated into three phases, the journey begins at complete desolation and, as clarity increases, the healing process begins. As a sort of Pandora's box, the artist utilizes hand-made pinhole cameras to photograph varying distorted scenes that resonate with her internal struggles.

sarah blanchette

Honors College Thesis – July 2015

Mentor: Holly Schreve Gilbert - Journalism

table of contents

1. [Concept](#)
2. [Context](#)
3. [Process](#)
4. [Aesthetics](#)
5. [Presentation](#)
6. [Conclusion](#)
7. [Bibliography](#)

concept

I had learned of my parents' impending divorce while perched on their bed with my father one evening in the summer of 2013. I had always known of the issues my parents had, or at least thought I did, and knew that at a point some action would be taken. My father explained to me that he had not been happy since my sister and I were little girls and now that we were both in college, and mostly moved out of our childhood home, there was an opportunity to make some changes in his life. The divorce itself did not surprise me. I knew that my parents were not happy. I was surprised, however, to learn that my father, unbeknownst to my mother, had completely given up and had become totally opposed to any further efforts on either of their parts. The night before this life-changing day, I had managed to lead my mom into telling me why she had been so upset during the past couple of days. Seeing the grief on her face broke my heart into a million pieces. I am fully aware that it takes two people to make a marriage work and there is no doubt in my mind that they are both at fault for much of the trouble that they experienced in their relationship, however, the way in which the split transpired completely shattered me.

I had always hoped that if the divorce did happen at some point during my life that it would be completely mutual and I would understand. Learning that much of my childhood perception of my parents' love for one another was a sham on my father's side changed my views of him as a parent and a person. I could not understand how someone would want to give up on a 30 year marriage without any chance to reconcile and make changes. I tried attributing his actions to a mid-life crisis in the beginning, believing that he could not possibly be serious about splitting up our family

and I was comforted by his words about the divorce allowing him to work on himself and our relationship, which had sustained much strain during my teen years. I was able to grasp as best as I could that my dad was doing this solely to help himself and prevent any additional pain to occur within our lives.

As the initial shock wore off, I began analyzing everything from his interactions on social media both past and current, as well as how much time he was spending away from home for business and personal time. My mother stayed in the home for a few months while she saved up money for an apartment in St. Claire Shores and we all, (as in my mother, sister and me) did our best to pretend like the divorce was not really going to happen and my father would come around.

The day that my mother moved out was the closing of my childhood. Walking through our home knowing that she was never coming back to live there was heart wrenching. It was as if she had died. At that point I did everything that I could to not have to move back into that house. My family was gone and my home too. Seeing the poverty that my mother experienced following the divorce also made me feel even more resentful towards my father. I was fully aware of the financial burdens that my father took onto his shoulders, but I could not get the image of endless nights of spaghetti and cheap wine out of my head, while my dad and his new girlfriend went on expensive cruises and attended parties together. I began to lose sight of my dad's initial promises to me and began to become even more fragmented as a young woman. The concept of family for me was completely altered. Did I even have a family? When would I have a home again?

Prior to beginning this project, my plan was to take a solo trip to Ireland to photograph the beautiful landscapes and somehow combine my journalism and photography skills into a published book. I submitted my proposal to the Oakland University Honors College program in November of 2013 and crossed my fingers that I would somehow gain enough funding and courage to go on this trip. The proposal got approved but I felt so distant from the project at that point so I decided to totally change my course of action. My new plan involved my mother and I taking a soul-searching trip to Salem, Massachusetts, a place neither of us had ever been to. Our former family had gone on

a handful of vacations during the previous years, but nothing that was almost completely uncharted.

The goal of this project was to find the most effective way to document my healing process post-divorce using techniques that were unfamiliar to me. The medium that made the most sense to me at the time was pinhole photography. Unlike many students, I had never had the opportunity to fiddle around with the technique and believed that the ability to have little to no control of my product was the best way to create the sort of personal Pandora's box that I was looking to expose. While on my trip, I created multiple cameras out of objects that I came in contact with during the twelve day period. From an oatmeal container to a child's suitcase, I constructed mostly light-tight cameras using window insulation foam tape, metal sheeting, and a ton of duct tape. I then created the images on 4x5 black and white Kodak film, cut in halves.

During each part of the day I would bring my black film changing bag and my selection of handmade cameras on daily excursions with my mom. The trip itself brought up exactly what I thought it would. My mother and I were depressed, slightly frustrated at our talent of getting lost, and wishing that we had my sister and a previous state of my father with us. I would not define the trip as fun by any means, but we did have a chance to see how we stood up on our own in a new location. I struggled for most of the trip with the idea that the images I was taking, mostly dual exposures of contradictory objects (ex. kayaks and a pile of cigarettes), were all for nothing. I wouldn't find out much later on after the exposed film sat in my car for the rest of the summer that the images, or lack of, that I captured represented exactly what I was feeling during that time of my healing.

After the first batch of processing, I felt encouraged to construct more cameras in order to continue documenting my healing at "home." For the next eight months I photographed my mother's changing living situations, the desolation of my childhood home, broken family get-togethers, and any emerging adult situation that I encountered during that time. After gathering enough material to span 30 final images, separated into three phases, I felt compelled enough to create the first, and not intended to be last, book in the project. Although the project is still ongoing and may

be for the rest of my life, this opening statement is the strongest representation of my being to date.

context

The research that I performed prior to the beginning of this project (post proposal) specifically involved pinhole technique. After gaining enough background knowledge about the art, I then began shooting. It was during the end stages that I began really delving into contemporary and historical art spanning from Chris Keeney to the repertoire of Minor White. Below is a brief representation of the research that I performed in preparation for the first book in the *fragmented.* series.

Chris Keeney - Contemporary Photographer and Pinhole Artist

Chris Keeney was an artist that I was made aware of while taking a digital imaging course at Oakland University. I admire Keeney's expertise of the pinhole technique and enjoyed how he bends the rules to create dynamic compositions that seem to be other worldly at times. For this project I referred to Keeney's work as a way to figure out how I wanted my images to look. His



FIGURE 2 CHRIS KEENEY PHOTOGRAPHY - SOURCE: [HTTP://CHRISKEENEY.COM/GALLERY/PINHOLE-PHOTOGRAPHY-GALLERY-1](http://CHRISKEENEY.COM/GALLERY/PINHOLE-PHOTOGRAPHY-GALLERY-1)

pinhole art is calculated, which was something that I was not looking to indulge in. I did, however, fully recognize how important it was to understand that technical process fully before trying to stray away and create my own method. Keeney's use of dual exposure was also an original intent that I had. In order to illustrate the contradictory feelings that I was having of wanting my family to come back together, while also feeling the pain that I experienced while living in a house filled with tension fit well within this technique.

Keeney's book, *Pinhole Cameras: A Do-It-Yourself Guide*, was a strong resource for the beginning stages of my understanding of pinhole construction. Through this book, I was able to begin seeing ways to transform the objects around me into lens-less cameras. This was very important going into my trip because each camera that I experimented with was found on a whim when I was out and about during the day. Spontaneity was definitely very important in this part of my process. Each camera was chosen and created to reflect my fleeting emotions that were occurring at that time.

Minor White - Photo-Based Artist

Minor White (1908-1976) was an American photo-based artist who used photography to explore the dream arena in response to personal inner turmoil. The article, written by Kevin Moore and titled "Cruising and Transcendence in the Photographs of Minor White," was my main reference this portion of my research. The article explored White's life struggle with his sexuality and the ways in which he translated this conflict into his art. The portion of his repertoire that interested me the most was the work that he did about the dream state.

"White was attracted to the ambiguity of the dream because it offered cover and protection but also freedom to maneuver. The dream supported the irrational, maintained a sense of mystery, and beautified frustration. Most importantly, the dream conformed to the needs of the dreamer. For only in the dream could a world be conjured in which earth is sky, water is flame, and the eyes of an ideal lover look directly into one's own," (Moore, p.78, para. 2).



FIGURE 3 WHITE, MINOR - MOON AND WALL, ENCRUSTATIONS, NEW YORK 1964 GELATIN SILVER
PRINT IMAGE: 9 3/8 x 12 1/8 IN. (23.8 x 30.8 CM); MOUNT: 15 1/16 x 18 1/16 IN.
(38.3 x 45.9 CM)

Moore explanation of White's attraction to the dream state was exactly how I wanted to portray my project. As I was travelling through my troubles, I found myself wanting to manipulate the situations around me to suit what I was feeling or trying not to feel.

Having the control over my medium was most important because it allowed the dreamer (me) to decipher what was really happening in my life.

Beyond the article, Minor White's spectral images were a solid influence on the work that I sought to create. Although I had no idea what my results would be, I aspired to create imagery that reflected my dream-state.

Figure 3 is a strong representation of White's dream state. These spectral images are difficult to decipher, but on closer look, the viewer can begin to pull out their own visions of representational forms. Just as dreams are decoded, this image can be seen as cracks in a concrete wall, moss on tree branches, or a damaged soil floor.

Regardless of what the viewer sees, the reflection of the image in their mind will mold to something that has significance to them.

Rorschach Ink-Blot Test

One of the smaller portions of my research that occurred after my first batch of images were developed was of the Rorschach Ink-Blot Test. After sharing the images with my peers, I was finding that not only were my images dream-like, but they also served as a sort of ink-blot test for each viewer. The article, "The Rorschach ink-blot test: historical summary" written by Marguerite R. Hertz, was a solid reference for this portion of my research. Although an older article, I found that the information included was very clear and helped to affirm my thoughts of the images relating to the ink blot test, which is given in many cases to discover personality traits.¹

I also had the opportunity to briefly explore Hermann Rorschach's paper, "The application of the interpretation of form to psychoanalysis," where he discusses his experiments, research and conclusions on the topic. Of course, the scientific reading was difficult to digest, but I was able to learn a modest amount about how the ink blots themselves are read and then applied to the subject.

¹ Hertz: "(...) the Ink-blot Test could probe the total personality, revealing intellectual and non-intellectual traits and the reciprocal influence of the one upon the other. Traits such as emotional stability and instability, adaptability, stereotypy and originality of thinking and of living, and others might be brought to light and studied in terms of the whole personality," (p.35).

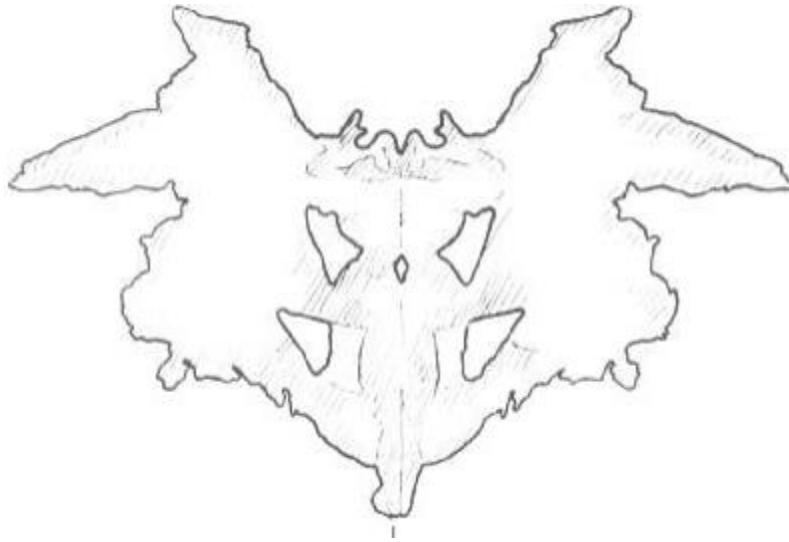


FIGURE 4 "PICTURE 1" FOUND IN RORSHACH'S "THE APPLICATION OF THE INTERPRETATION OF FORM TO PSYCHOANALYSIS" ON PAGE 228.

"Picture 1 has very often been interpreted as 'a bat' not only by unintelligent, but also by intelligent normal people. 'Bat' is even a so-called common or 'vulgar' answer, i.e. the answer given by about one out of three normal persons," (Rorshach, p. 229).

I found myself relating the above passage to the way in which I observed peers analyzing the images. Regardless of their experience with art or dream reading, each person had some type of classification to place on each image. I will delve more into this portion of the project while discussing the aesthetics of each image.

process

While speaking on practical matters, the first task, following the change of the project, was to nail down a plan of attack in terms of the shoot locations and logistics in getting to those locations. As I mentioned prior, my mother and I travelled, via airplane, to Boston, Mass and then on to Salem, Mass during the first week of July 2014. The location of Salem was significant to me only because it is a site that bore the tragedies of many innocent women. From what I have learned of divorce over the past couple years, children of divorce will often try to place blame on themselves in regards to the split of their parents. I, of course, did that, but thought that travelling to a place where I could

be innocent would cause the project to reflect my feelings purely. Besides those facts, the location itself and the reasons that I had for choosing it as the starting spot for the project were not very significant. The bottom line that I found when choosing a location was that it must be somewhere where neither my mom nor I had ever been. I required that my father had never been to the area either because it was our time to explore uncharted territory without referencing broken memories. We booked a 12-day-stay at a carriage house, located in the heart of downtown Salem, that was transformed into cottage for tourists. I chose this lodging because I felt that it would serve as a strong, neutral home base for the project. It was, again, a place that neither of us had ever been, which meant that we were free to leave our own impressions.



FIGURE 5 BLANCHETTE - COLLAGE OF CARRIAGE HOUSE

I came to the area, supplies-wise, with only 50 sheets of Black and White Kodak 400 5x7 film, black photographer's tape and a black film changing bag. I had absolutely no idea what I was going to use to create the cameras to actually shoot the film, but was confident that I had chosen the most accurate path for the project by not preparing. I had a very difficult time during the first couple of days because I was feeling the pressure of not having a sound plan to go from. I am always an advocate for planning, but knew that this method would work best for my project because it would allow me to feel all of the uncomfortable emotions that I was trying to suppress back home. I made my first camera two days into the trip. My mother and I were at the local Target for groceries when I found a cardboard child's suitcase. I bought the suitcase and transformed it into a mostly light-tight box with three pinholes to allow for multiple exposures that would tentatively create dynamic, dream like images. Being that the suitcase was not very wide, I cut all of my film in halves in order for each sheet to fit. I utilized foam tape (used for window insulation), my photographer's tape for sealing out the light and foil Tupperware tins cut in pieces for the pinholes themselves. This was my main camera for most of the trip, but I did experiment with two Oatmeal containers, an army stove box and a hard cider can. Being that I did not track what images came from which

camera, I cannot credit specific cameras to specific images. The idea of not understanding the origin of things was important to me because it allowed me to align my unexpected emotions with the precariousness of the project.

I spent much of my shooting time creating dual exposures of contradictory scenes. An example of this would be an image of cigarettes and kayaks, or flowers and cement. Trips to the ocean bore very strong results, as well as adventures around old and decaying architecture. My goal was to illustrate the love I had for my family as well as the anger that I felt towards my father and our situation.

The trip itself was not something that I could describe as being very fun. Being that we were missing my sister, another very important part of the healing process, it was difficult to get a complete grasp on ourselves. Also, I was completely unsure for the entire trip if anything that I was doing was correct, image wise. It was a huge risk taking a foreign medium into foreign territory. This being said, however, I do believe that the trip transpired exactly how I wanted it to. My mother and I were able to stretch our legs, at least a little bit, in order for me to imprint ourselves into my images.

Upon coming home from the trip I decided that keeping the film with me as much as possible would be beneficial to the process because it correlated with the metaphorical 'baggage' that followed me wherever I went during that phase in my life. The film sat in my hot car for three months before I decided to develop it. From this batch of images, 15 ended up in the book. I was very excited to find that almost every piece of film fit somewhere within the past, current and future portions of my healing 'timeline'. Although I had material that spanned my proposed three stages of healing to appear in the book, I still needed 15 more images.

From here, I began constructing cameras, still not to any sort of exact measurement, but more to match the progressing stages. I carried this portion of the project with me everywhere. During arguments with family members, awkward family gatherings and to wherever my mom was living at the time, a box with film went with me.

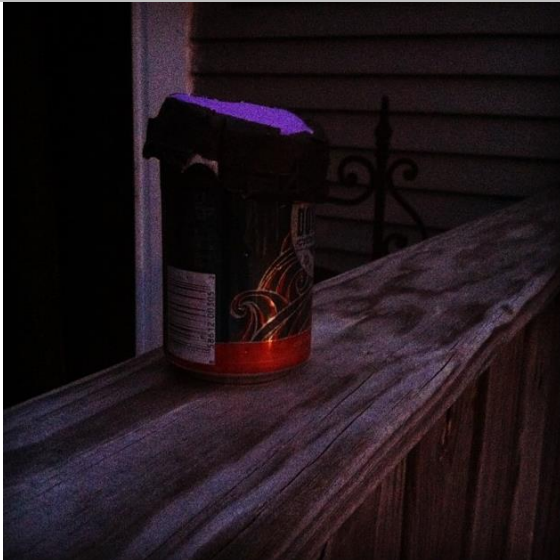
I finally felt satisfied with my images by mid-January 2015. It was then, after scanning the film in and doing typical level manipulations, that I had my final 30 images. After

creating the book, I will go more into detail about this portion of the project in the presentation section, I sent it to print at the Oakland University Print Shop.

aesthetics

Thus far, I have spoken quite a bit about creating the images, as well as the process behind it all. In this section, I will first introduce some of the cameras that I used while on the trip and then back home, and then I will go into a brief analysis of select images that appear in the book.

cameras



This camera was created from a hard cider can. The top was removed and a foam cap was created and placed on top of the can to block out the light. The can had many pinholes that were poked haphazardly around the it. I shot with this camera only at night, due to the large amount of pinholes involved. This camera was created during the second day of the trip.



This camera, seen as the black rectangle being supported by a flower pot, was created from a small army stove of which I bought from an Army supply and vintage store in downtown Salem during my first night there. The camera had three pinholes and was made light-tight by wrapping photographer's tape around the outside during each exposure. The film for this specific camera was cut into a square shape in order for it to fit.



This composite exhibits the three cameras that I created during the at-home portion of this project. The outside of each box was hand stained and embellished with various objects. The outsides were created to look beautiful and strong, while the insides and bottoms ugly and poorly constructed. The duct taped used to seal off light on the inside of the boxes referenced the emotions that I experienced, while the beautiful outsides exhibited my exterior as I tried to compartmentalize my pain. The top box had a total of six pinholes and one film stand on the inside. The second box had two pinholes and required the film to lay flat on the inside. The third box had three pinholes and also required the film to lay flat under the domed top. Each box was fastened shut with a latch.

images

Below are select images from the series accompanied by brief analyses.



FIGURE 6 BLANCHETTE - PHASE 1-1

This image was one of the first Salem pieces that I developed. In my eyes, "Phase 1-1" is the strongest representation of phase one of healing for me. The deep scratches and the fading boundaries replicates my scarred insides and detached sense of self. As discussed previously, it is impossible for me to tell what most of the images are of and what camera they were taken with. None of that matters to me because I am simply looking for the resonation of the images. I chose this image as the opening to the project because, to me, it represents the very moment that my mother told me about the divorce.



FIGURE 7 BLANCHETTE - PHASE 1-9

This image was taken during the at home sector of the project. I have gotten the most feedback about this image from peers, both art educated and non, about multiple representational figures that appear throughout the composition. For example, many viewers saw a running squirrel in the bottom right. My grandmother specifically saw a woman kneeling in front of her bed if the image were flipped one turn counter clockwise. For me, while I see both of those observations, the smudging speaks to my tarnished childhood and the numbing pain that comes along with learning about what my father felt about my mother throughout that time.

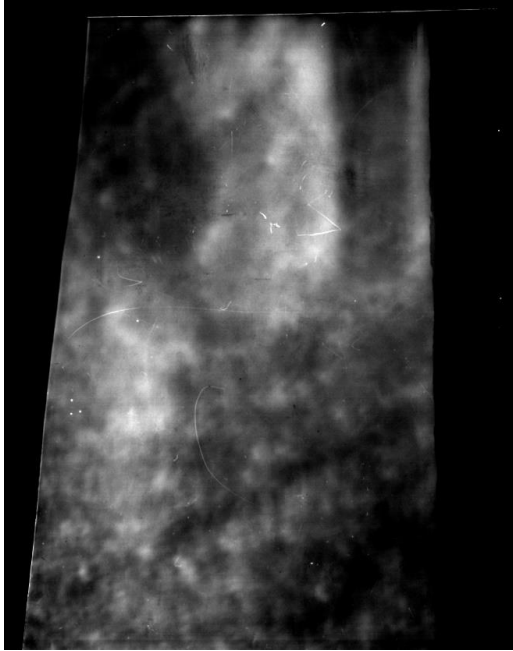


FIGURE 8 BLANCHETTE - PHASE 2-4

For this image, although I am unsure of which camera it was taken with, I have a strong feeling that it is an image of one of the grave stones that can be found in the Burying Point Cemetery in Salem. This image is particularly eerie for me, as well as many of my viewers. I have a difficult time of seeing past the gravestone form in the top center of the image but, after viewing the image for quite some time, I do begin to see a cloaked form. The paranormal qualities of this image resonate with me because I was dealing with the ghosts of my past that I was unaware of as a child. When my father told me that he felt unhappy since we were little kids brought up a lot of anger for me. The façade that I saw growing up that loved and cherished my mother was a ghost that I could not understand.

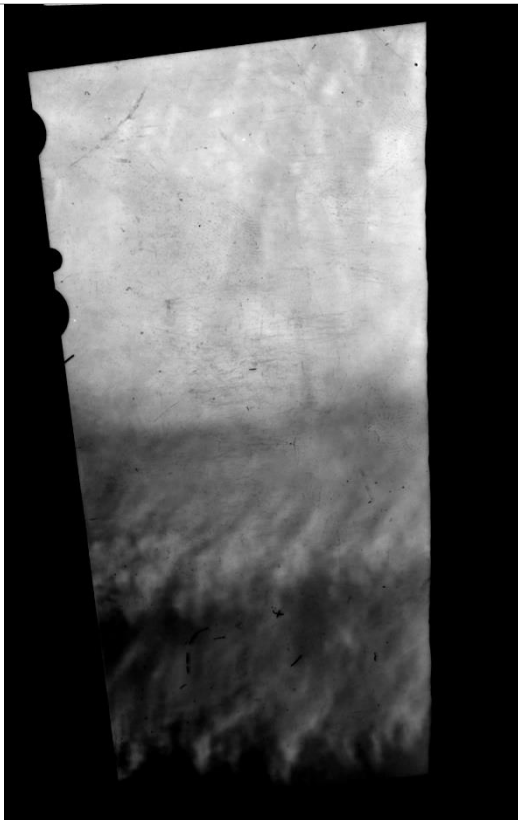


FIGURE 9 BLANCHETTE - PHASE 2-5

As mentioned previously, I spent some time near the ocean while on my trip. I found these day trips to be most enjoyable because I had the opportunity to see the ocean as a wild and un-tamed animal, which is how I had always hoped to see it. This image, I am almost completely sure of, is from one of these day trips. I had never seen water so beautiful and wild before. It was extremely empowering. The image itself make me feel at one with my struggles in response to the divorce. I also feel empowered and respect that progress that I continue to make.

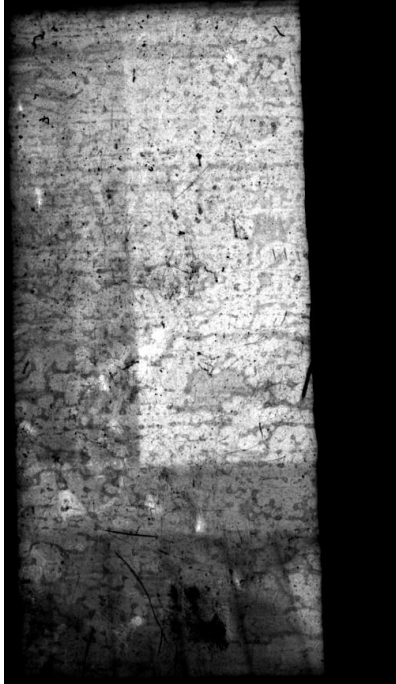


FIGURE 10 BLANCHETTE - PHASE 3-2

This particular image continuously fascinates me. As discussed previously, my original intent was to create dual exposures exhibiting contradictory images. I believe that this image, although unrecognizable, is a prime example of this method. To me, I feel as if the world is upside-down when I view this photograph. From conversations that I have heard, this image is very eerie to viewers because it is confusing. The bottom portion seems to hold some type of pattern that looks like window blinds or outdoor house siding, while the majority of the photo looks like an obscured window or open door. This image resonates with me because it pulls in familiar forms but distorts them, which is exactly what my mind does now when thinking of my childhood.

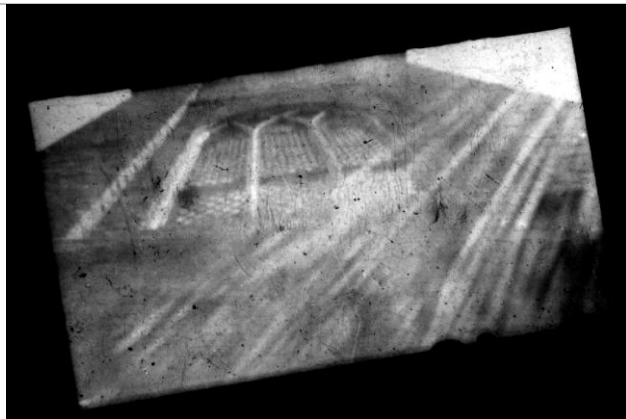


Figure 11 Blanchette - Phase 3-5

This image is by far the strongest of the third phase. This is the only image of the entire series that I specifically remember taking. My mother and I had heard of a secret garden behind one of the old churches. On our way to the back of the church grounds, I stopped and perched my suitcase camera on the steps so that the shutters were facing upward and pulled back the photo tape. I thought that the exposure might have been too long, but it was perfect. Just like the image of the ocean, this photo serves as a great sense of empowerment for me. I am not interested in the church as a religious symbol, but more as a bodily representation. Remembering to take care of the architecture of myself both mentally and physically has been difficult since the divorce. The ray of light in combination with the solid construction of the church is a strong example of where I want my healing to go.

presentation

I chose to display these images in book form because I believe that they needed to be as intimate as possible in order for my viewers to get the most out of their experience. The smaller size of 9.25x9.25 assists in the intimacy of the project because it causes the viewer to concentrate when looking through each image. In addition to this, I chose to leave the left side of each page set blank and in black in order to give the viewer a break from reading the previous image before delving into the image on the right page.

As far as keeping with the fragmented theme of the book, I chose to utilize a spiral-like binding because a typical perfect bind did not make sense for the project. It was also imperative that the pages have the ability to lay flat during viewing because I did not want the viewer to have any sort of trouble handling the book. The spiral binding also serves as a break between each page, which further asserts the theme.

When I began this project, I kept its original intent a complete secret from my family. I was not ready to share my pain in anger with them. In order to distract from the true intent of the project I chose to utilize black and dark grey in the actual design of the book because I wanted the text to be completely overlooked. The text itself is very difficult to read unless in bright lighting.

One of the most important aspect of the book itself is the lack of linear narrative within each phase. The three phases themselves are linear, as in they read from the highest form of fragmentation to a lower form of fragmentation, but the phases internally have dips and plateaus in the levels of fragmentation seen from image to image. This organization is completely intentional because the healing process has its high points, low points and plateaus.

Overall, the design of the book was meant to be very simple with a cover, cover page, opening poem, phase title pages, image pages, acknowledgment page, and then blank back cover. I chose to leave all interpretation up to the viewer. Even the poem, which I will discuss in the next section, was vague to my specific situation.

conclusion

I have never been one to indulge in therapeutic art, but this project was necessary for my growth as a person because the tragic occurrence of my parents' divorce shattered the self that I knew from my day of birth to my 20th year. I believe that the fragmented. project was necessary for my growth as a person, woman and artist because it was a turning point in my being. As I continue on this path into budding adulthood, I can proudly say that I have finally communicated my pain in a constructive way that actually alleviates some of my turmoil.

The poem that I included in the beginning of the book is a sound representation of the project in word form. It reads:

I have seen through broken eyes, a broken heart and a broken mind.
I have lived deep within myself
where the light becomes foggy and unrecognizable.
I have crawled up from beneath the rubble of my old,
broken life and into the vastness of my future.
I have conquered, yet I am still somewhat defeated.
I am the fragmented woman.

This poem is cryptic and can be molded into many situations. As a brief overview of womanhood and becoming one with yourself to specifically speaking about the divorce, I believed that this message stood up to what I truly felt after experiencing such a difficult life blow. Understanding for myself that my healing may take one book or 50 has been difficult to come to terms with. I would like to say that this project is finished, but I know that it is not. I am still that fragmented woman, and could be for the rest of my life.

bibliography

Blanchette, Sarah C. *fragmented*. Self-Published. 2015

Hertz, M. R. "The Rorschach Ink-blot Test: Historical Summary." *Psychological Bulletin* 32.1 (1935): 33-66. Web.

Keeney, Chris. *Pinhole Cameras: A Do-It-Yourself Guide*. New York City: Princeton Architectural, 2011. Print.

Keeney, Chris. Pinhole Image of Man. Digital image. www.chriskeeney.com. Chris Keeney, n.d. Web. 30 June 2015. <<http://chriskeeney.com/sites/default/files/pinhole-photography-gallery-1/inspirational-san-diego-fine-art-portrait-photographer-chris-keeney.jpg?1351007226>>.

Keeney, Chris. "Pinhole Photography Gallery 1." Chris Keeney Photography. Chris Keeney, n.d. Web. 30 June 2015.

Moore, Kevin. "Cruising and Transcendence in the Photographs of Minor White." *Record of the Art Museum* 67 (2008): 66-79. JSTOR [JSTOR]. Web. 30 June 2015.

Rorshach, Hermann. "The Application of the Interpretation of Form to Psychoanalysis." *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 60.3 (1924): 225-48. Full Text Online. Web. 30 June 2015.

Rorshach, Hermann. Picture 1. Digital image. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, n.d. Web. 30 June 2015.

White, Minor. *Moon and Wall*. Digital image. Artstor.org. Artstor, n.d. Web. 30 June 2015.