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Metamorphosis: An Original Theatrical, Virtual, and Psychological Experience.

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METAMORPHOSIS: An Original Theatrical, Virtual, and Psychological Experience.

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of Honors

By

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Abstract
"Reality as you know it."

Everyday we find ourselves making hundreds of decisions, often without noticing the relevance of even the most miniscule choice that can grow and form into a life altering state of mind. The human brain is the most elaborately complex structure in existence, enabling us to be able to function and comprehend our surroundings. With complexity, also comes malfunctions, which will inevitably occur occasionally ranging in a wide variety of defects from mental illnesses, to super genius abilities. What a certain individual may see as reality, may be completely opposite of the reality you or I see. This poses the question, who decides which reality is true?

This paper contains documentation of my research and process through writing and performing an original short film confronting observations that we all experience in our daily lives in the form of a very extreme circumstance that will attempt to force a new way of thinking about what ties us all together as a species, despite our many unique and diverse perceptions. **"Metamorphosis" was shown November 30th, 2012 as a short film. To coincide with the film, a promotional website was made to accompany the piece, as well as graphics**.

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Introduction
"Life is what you make it."

If you were to pull up your browser and navigate to www.google.com and type in the words "definition of artist" into the provided search bar, two definitions would be listed at the top, along with a short list of possible synonyms for the word "artist". The first definition defines this noun as "A person who produces paintings or drawings as a profession or hobby." and the second says "A person who practices any of the various creative arts, such as a sculptor, novelist, poet, or filmmaker.". The synonyms provided simply are painter, performer, or craftsmen. In our society, the term "artist" is something most all people are familiar with. We're practically programmed at an early age to see an artist as someone who enjoys to partake in any form of creating visual or performance art. Generally, these people are thought to be the more creative side of society and are set apart as thinking differently from the rest of the world. This is a concept that I never have quite been able to buy into.

From the time I was introduced to other children my own age in a group setting, I knew I was going to be seen as different. I noticed that every kid I saw was a lot smaller than I was. I had never thought of myself as overweight, let alone even considered what it meant to be overweight. In the same way that I took notice to the differences between myself and every other child in my class, the other children also noticed me as different. It was as if I was the rotten apple in the bag of perfectly ripened group that someone had picked up by mistake at the store. From this point on, a quality about myself that had gone unnoticed in my eyes until that moment, was the only thing that I could see. I let a door fly open to my self esteem that allowed me to begin to see all of the physical qualities underneath the veil I had been hiding under for years that I despised about myself. This prompted my life obsession with being able to form my own

reality where I could be anyone I wanted to be and experience what it feels like to be told I'm beautiful by someone other than a family member.

Reality. What is it? And why is it something that we are pushed into, like a bounding box with no hope of escape? Could our imagination and creativity be something more harmful to us than what is considered reality? Life is full of unanswered questions and I have found that no matter how extensive the research, or how convincing the teaching, I still don't **know** anything. In my world, it's all about change and not fearing it. You make mistakes and then you figure out how to make the best of them. You get knocked down, but you get back up again. All you can know, is what you experience through your own eyes. How can someone tell you what you experience and feel is not real?

My Inspiration
"Alice in Wonderland"
Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.
– Lewis Carroll

I've always loved *Alice in Wonderland* for as long as I can remember. The books, the movies, the images; everything about it has sort of been the fuel to my fire. I love things that are obscure and mystical, yet a little odd. But to me, more enticing than the story itself was the writer himself, Lewis Carroll.

Reading over Lewis Carroll's biography struck an interesting nerve with me. He was a very shy person with a stammer, but was very clear when speaking with children. He was fascinated by their faith in imagination as compared to adults who thought such things were silly. His passion and interest in the imagination and belief in being different has always inspired me to create things outside of the box and believe what is true to you.

"Alice at the Tea Party" by John Tenniel

The Idea
"Life of an artist."

There isn't a mathematician genius in this world that can count how many thoughts a single person has in one day. Sometimes I feel like I have too many, and sometimes it feels like I haven't thought enough. Being creative, I have found, comes most of the time as a great task for me. Sure, I've had a few ideas come easy to me in life, but it gets harder the older I get, the more polluted my mind gets, as if experiencing and seeing everyone else's ideas cloud my creative process to discover something that no one has ever seen before. If you turn on the radio, most

songs start to sound the same, and the rest are just using recycled parts from previous songs, merging into something they call "new" as it climbs its way to the top. But, it's not really "new".

The most common advice is "Write what you know." or "Do what you know.". Well, this is what I know. Life is full of unanswered questions. It's a constant process of learning and doing, finding where you can fit in best, wedging yourself into society and hoping that somehow what you have accomplished will make some sort of difference. Exploring the arts has been an interest of mine for as long as I can remember. For me it always went deeper than coloring outside the lines of a coloring book. I wanted to create something meaningful, something that others could look at and not know all the answers, but somehow connect.

Jumping into my thesis process, I discovered that something simple wasn't going to be my path. I couldn't let or make myself produce something just because I had to. After all, I have never had one narrow path in life and with art, I have found that it was the same concept. I love Theater, drawing, singing, editing, and graphic design. How could I use the majority of these elements to create something bigger, something worthy of acknowledgment? How could I take my thoughts and put them into a project that not only would display my ideas, but also allow people to interpret it into their own interpretation?

Metamorphosis. This word kept popping up in my mind. I had no idea what I was doing yet or how to even approach this, but for some reason I could not wipe this word from my thoughts. It has a single meaning and yet, it can apply to so many things. But, most of all, it reminded me of myself and my art, always morphing and changing into something new. I knew I couldn't go easy on this project. I wanted something more complex and something that could involve all of my passions, acting, graphic design, and writing.

Art, to me, is created by the artist's interpretation, but ultimately brought to life by the viewer's interpretation. Knowing all of the answers, doesn't make something any more enjoyable or desirable. Having questions is what keeps someone intrigued. It's the same concept as life. Knowing in your heart what you believe to just *be*.

The Poem.
"Metamorphosis"

My mind is gone.
My speech is heard.
This world I'm in, will take my word.
I'm fast asleep, yet wide awake.
My heart exposed,
my soul to take.
No dream of mine as clear as this...
My world of change;
my metamorphosis.

I'm not normally a poetry writer, but this came to me so easily after seeing an image that inspired me. I knew right away that this project was going to be something really big for me, something really abstract, yet personal. Change hasn't always been easy for me, but it's a necessity. We all have to change and every little decision we make or thought we have morphs us into who we are. It's easy for us to regurgitate things that we have learned or what we hear other people say, but why is it so hard sometimes to really speak your mind; to tell maybe your darkest secret, or how you really feel about someone. Your mind starts to feel lost, like you can't escape a certain mold of society. It's easier to really live through dreams. Although strange and abstract, sometimes dreams are your clearest thoughts.

Coming to life on paper.
"sketching it out."

After deciding on this to be a short film, I began to sketch and write out ideas of what I wanted. Everything I was coming up with was coming out with a dark undertone, something not lighthearted. I realized that in a way, our minds don't always settle on something happy with that fairytale ending. It's easier to focus on the bad, rather than the good, because we as humans are born with a sinful nature. My old interests in Psychology kept popping up as I began to dwell and study on mental disorders and defects that make some people different. I wondered, what happens in us, what makes us tick that we could "go crazy".

The more I researched, the more I realized that almost everything we can suffer with, or sometimes even just think about, is considered a mental disorder. Panicking, alcoholism, mathematics disorder, ect. I wasn't expecting a list so long and once at the bottom I thought "What is normal?" Are we actually all slightly mental? I wanted to play with this idea while using the human imagination and individual perception of reality.

My characters needed to be distant from identifiers. No names, no lines, nothing modern. The costumes seem old, but not specific to a certain time period. I wanted plenty of room for guessing, but enough information to put together a story. Two characters, one allegedly real and the other, not. The interesting part is pondering upon which one is the creator and which one is the created.

The girl:

I didn't give the characters names. It didn't seem effective or fitting. To give my characters concrete identities, gave everything a more concrete meaning or story. She is a loner. Using her sketchbook as a creative outlet, she draws quick and almost angry type sketches of her thoughts. Deep down she wants to be accepted, but can only find comfort in her close and only friend. Even to her only friend she tends to be distant. She pushes him away in an effort almost to guard herself or remind herself she's alone. In her mind, no one could ever love her.

The boy:

He is very possessive. He keeps to himself not really showing what may live within him, only showing kindness to the ones or things he wants to control. He's a much darker character, almost angry at the world for the way it is. He loves his close friend, but is also cautious, making sure he is always close to her, rendering it impossible for her to ever feel like she is alone.

Possessive.

Protective.

Cold.

The Film
"Capturing the concept"

My goal for the look of this film was something dark yet whimsical, something that is obviously happening, but at the same time seems unreal. I played with the focus of my lens and caught some really good blurs on my male character, covering any details of his face and avoiding any sharp lines on his figure creating an almost ghost-like form.
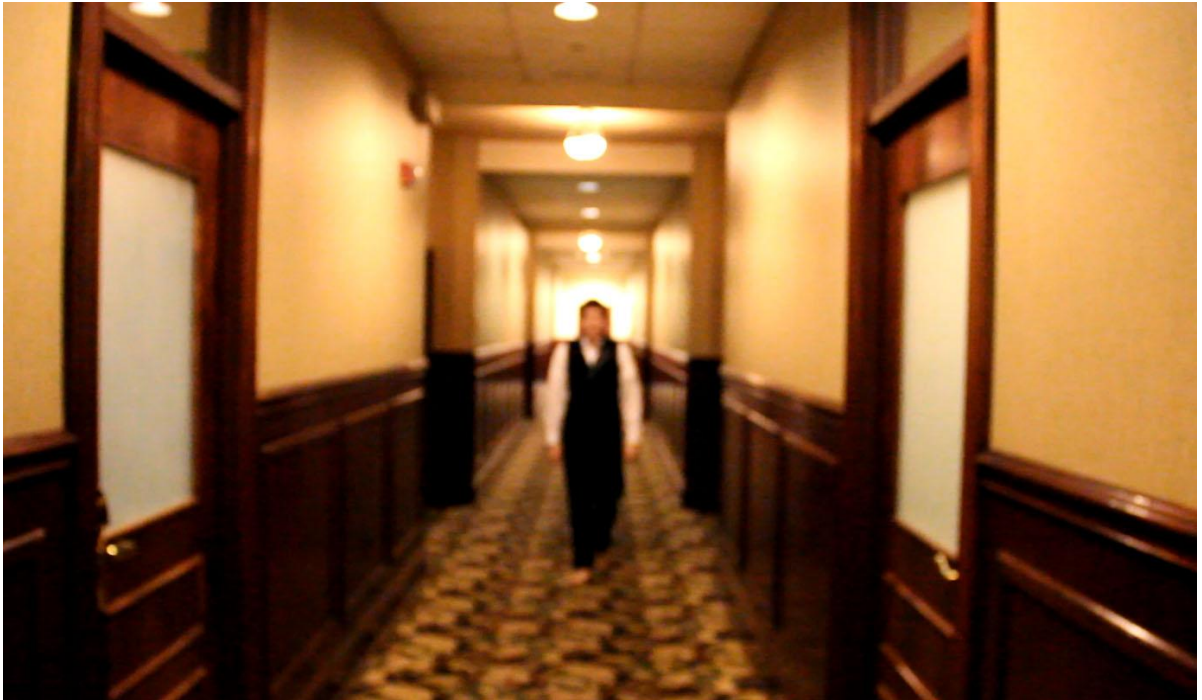
I was privileged to be able to use The Carnegie Hotel to shoot this film. The amazing scenery and furniture provided the perfect old world look to fit my character's costuming. I used a lot of harsh lighting and muted colors creating a very heavy mood, framing the subject so that all of your attention falls on whoever is in the scene at the time, while other shots like the one above, I wanted the surroundings to be just as much a part of the scene/story as the character.

This is an example of a more harshly lit scene. The reflection that I was able to catch here really shows some concepts of two identities, possibly a good side and a bad side, good choices bad choices, and possibly even two personalities. The figure being harshly lit on one side and shadows on the others also plays on the idea.

All of us have two different sides to us. We hide certain parts of who we are or how we are depends on who we are around. The big question to me when shooting this film and writing about it, was "Who would we be if we were alone with our thoughts?". What would be reality or real to us? It would be easier to make up our own mind about things, without any influence of the outside world and could form our own opinions. I want to test those things with this film. Force people to write their own story and interpret everything how they want. I predict that people who have been more influenced by other opinions and sort of "trained" to think a certain way will find it harder to find what they want in this film. Others, maybe will find it easier.

Posters and graphics:
"Drowning in My Own Fantasy"

This was a graphic that I made at the very beginning of my process. I needed something to show what was in my head, a visual of what I was trying to create with this process. The idea that what you are seeing, thinking, or believing seems real, but the closer you look or think about it, the more it seems like a dream or a fantasy. This one was very highly inspired by my fascination of "Alice in Wonderland" and the obscurity of your own perceptions.

"No Dream of Mine As Clear As This"
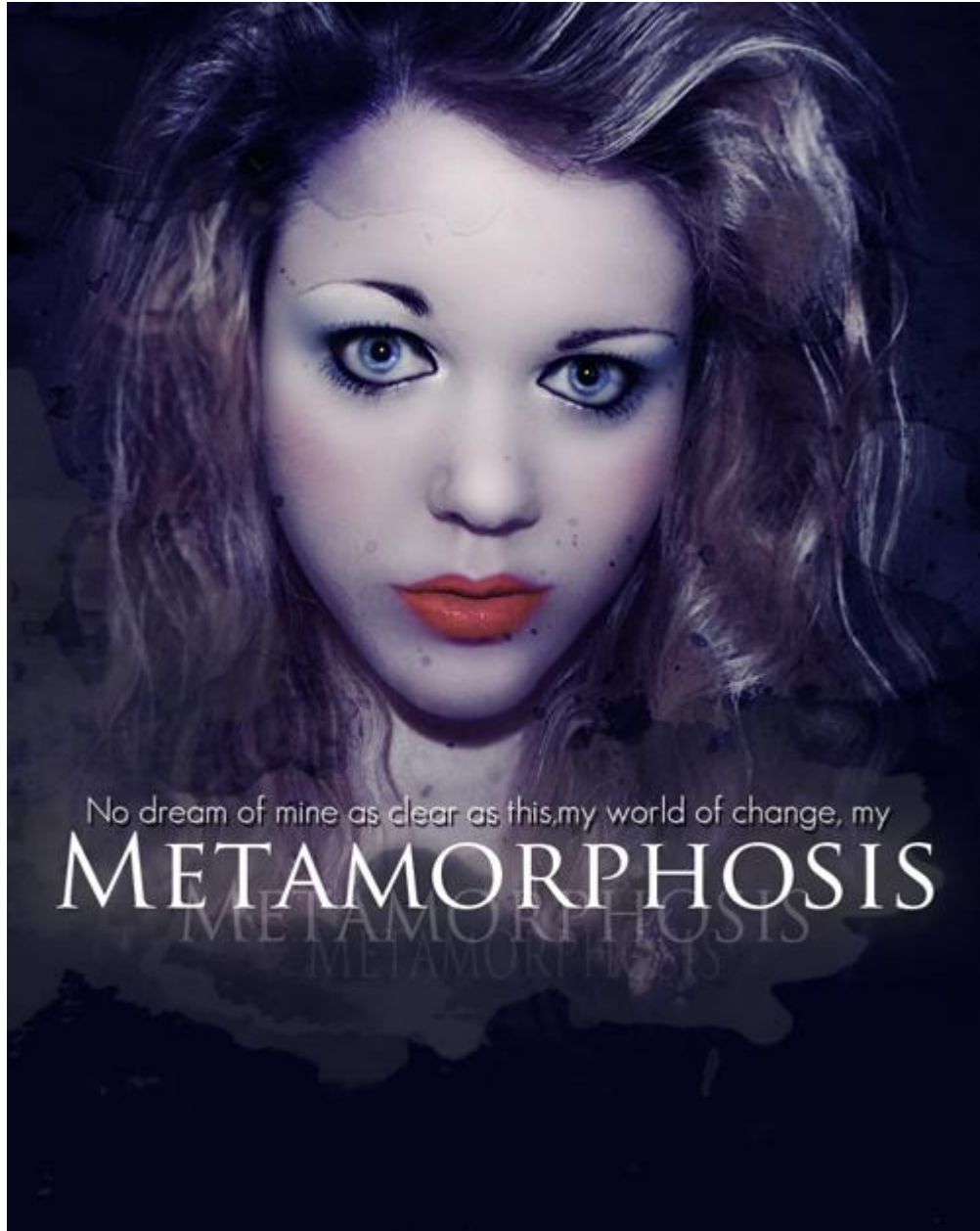
This was the very first poster I made for my film. I wanted something mystical and beautiful, but still a hint of spookiness. My decision to rework my face was a decision that I believe proved to be successful. It looks real, but unreal at the same time. I softened the features a lot and drained most of the photo of saturation, making it instead a really pale and cool color.

The text is a combination of the main poem that I wrote for the film and the title morphing into

different distortions to really show "Metamorphosis".

"My World of Change"

This image, "Imaginary World" by Ingrid Balabanova is really what has inspired my process for

Metamorphosis. I purchased it awhile back as soon as I saw it. It has such an enchanted look to it

and it inspired me to write my thesis poem "Metamorphosis".

"Always Watching" **Black and white version**

"Always Watching" Color version

The posters above are the most recent ones that I've made. It took me a little while to composite all of the images together. It's made up of about 5 photographs and comes together to create a very hauntingly beautiful scene. I played with the shades, tints, and hues of the colors, looking for a faded out warm, but cold scene. I was looking for something vintage in appearance, but modern at the same time. The main focus brings your eye to the left corner, creating an asymmetrical design, but looking closer you can see the male figure in the doorway. No matter where the girl goes, he's always sure to follow.

Conclusion

Overall, this process has been more for me than anything else, discovering my deep thoughts on very serious subjects, and being able to put those concepts into something visual. I don't know for sure if anyone will understand or fully grasp everything that I have worked to show, but honestly, it's just been a self discovery. I find it hard sometimes to realize where I have come from or even where I'm going, but all I can really know is today. I have to be willing to embrace everything that I am, every part of me, and learn to love it all.

I am me and this is my world how I see it, through my eyes. No one else can tell me if what I feel or see is wrong, they can only share their interpretation. After all, how could everyone in the world agree with a universal truth? Accepting who you are and what you believe to be true, is the ultimate truth. Our world is filled with unanswered questions and things that science cannot explain. Art is our way of creating something of our own, a way of displaying our thoughts, emotions, and beliefs to the world. Only few will understand it.

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