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Godself

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Godself

A thesis presented to the faculty of the Department of Art and Design East Tennessee State University In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Studio Art

by Kyle Darnell May 2013

Ralph Slatton, Chair Patricia Mink Mira Gerard

Keywords: printmaking, art history, childhood, memories, teeth, process
ABSTRACT

Godself

by

Kyle Darnell

This thesis paper supports the Master of Fine Arts exhibition at the Slocumb Galleries, East Tennessee State University, from February 11th through February 15th, 2013. The exhibit is divided into two sections: Reflecting and Remembering. Reflecting is composed of eleven relief woodblock prints depicting a story of the artist as God. Remembering is composed of multi-media pieces that are interpretations of Reflecting. The show Godself explores the influence of memory and self-confidence told through an allegorical tale of the birth and death of Jesus Christ. The discussion of memory and the effect it has on one’s present is told from the perspective of the character Kyle and his transition to a state of being known as the Godself. The following expands on the ideas, influences, techniques, and concepts that helped to create the exhibit.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members Ralph Slatton, Pat Mink, and Mira Gerard for their tireless work in assisting me with this exhibition. I would also like to thank Jennifer Smith for being my assistant in art and in life.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The show is divided up into two parts: Reflecting and Remembering. The first part, Reflecting, represents the narrative in chronological order as I have described it. The second part, Remembering, represents different cultures and approaches to the main narrative in Reflecting.
CHAPTER 2

REFLECTING

When I was ten, my family and I moved from California to Missouri, leaving everything behind. It was an opportunity for my mom to reinvent her life and by proxy, my siblings and me. Everything was left, from heirlooms to photographs. When looking back, it was as if I were born at ten. As the years passed, my actual memories faded. These were replaced by stories told to me by my brother, but what will always remain missing are the pictures, my proof of existence.

My show is rooted around this experience, recapturing those lost photos and memories by creating new ones. Through a series of self-portrait woodcuts, I tried to accomplish this, but as they progressed, they were no longer merely self-portraits. I was exploring my religious history, from United Church of Christ, to my Jewish heritage, to finally landing in Atheism and an admiration for Catholicism. What drew me through all of it, rested in the specificity of religion and the Obsessive Compulsive tendencies that lay within. Regardless of denomination, the Church has historically relied on a set of symbols and practices. In this way, parishioners could not only appease their God with love but also avoid eternal damnation.

My narcissism has taken over my ego to the point of idol worship. I am worshiping a God that lives inside of me. While He looks like me, He is not me. He has the level of confidence in Himself that I could never gain, and I began to worship Him. I do this through my art, the medium of printmaking. Every new print is based on what He desires. I am infatuated with space and Multiverse Theory; He has traveled the cosmos. I am ashamed of my fractured teeth and poor dental work; He embraces the cross he has to bear in His mouth. I try to cover up my stretch marks from years of being an obese teenager; He wears His stretch marks as a Halo laughing at my cowardice. I hunch down so my height isn’t too noticed in public, He stands tall and proud, declaring Himself the “God of Everything.”
As mentioned earlier, my memories of growing up are now indistinguishable from the stories told to me by my brother. At this point, I don't exactly know what is real from what is not. Was I actually born Jewish? Did my brother try to kill me when I was four by pushing me off a wall? Did I really wet the bed until I was thirteen? The answer to all of these is a resounding “I don’t know, but I think so.” Without a sure foot in reality, I took what I remember and interpreted it how I saw fit. In this manner, I have redefined my youth through allegorical stories that combine what I do know (Religion, the Cosmos, my personal struggles of self-identity) and what I think I know (My Jewish heritage and various stories my brother has told me).

The main narrative is broken down into three parts; “The Virgin Mary,” “Bedwetter,” and “The Passion.” I did this to keep the narrative from sprawling too much and to make the story easier to digest for the audience by presenting one story arc at a time. For clarification, a story arc is an extended or continuing storyline. The events in each story arc unfold over three to five images and are not confined to a singular print. I will go over each part of the story, how they relate to me, and the art historical context.
The Virgin Mary

Fuck Date

“Her Most Holy, Ever Blessed Virgin Mary prepares for a night on the town. Staring into the mirror and putting on make-up, Mary knows that this night is special. She is going to her favorite club in Little Bethlehem, hopefully to find herself a man.”

This print inherits my uncomfortable approach to women. I grew up afraid of women and relationships, whether they are social or romantic. I perceived them to be a threat to my masculinity. This misogyny rears its ugly head in how I view the way some women treat themselves, as objects to be won like a trophy or another notch in your bed post. My mother raised my brother, two little sisters, and me on her own and it was awful. Moving from California to Missouri only changed which local welfare provider we were subject to. She had enormous troubles with gambling and in general, horrible money habits. I viewed her as weak and the number one cause of all of our troubles. I blamed her for my growing up without a father who left the picture when I was two.
Through college, my opinion of women has changed. The Virgin Mary is a strong, independent woman, like my mother. Mary carried the burden of a child to which she never knew a man’s touch (Dana 51). This is a lot of weight for anyone to handle. It is hard to raise children, let alone four. My mom worked jobs she hated and groveled before the government for money just to raise us. For that, I am grateful, and the primary reason my opinion has changed.

This print is that experience jumbled together. I treat women as an object of lust, but at the same time putting myself into their shoes. I treat Mary as both masculine and feminine, as a single mother who must also be the father. The self-confidence to put on makeup, look into the mirror and tell yourself, ‘I look good.’ That self-confidence is the running theme of this entire show.

Not directly informed in the creation of the image, but rather analyzed later to further represent the intent of the image is Jacques Lacan’s theory of child development, the mirror stage (Lacan 1). The mirror stage, according to Lacan, is a period in a child’s development from 6-18 months, when the infant identifies itself through its reflection in a mirror. It also sees itself as an ego, separate from the other objects in the room (Lacan 4). Lacan had this to say about the mirror stage “The mirror stage is a phenomenon to which I assign a twofold value. In the first place, it has historical value as it marks a decisive turning-point in the mental development of the child. In the second place, it typifies an essential libidinal relationship with the body image.” (Furman 293)

This mirror stage can be objectively inferred to inform not only the print “Fuck Date” but also the rest of the pieces in the exhibition. In this print, I take on the role of the Virgin Mary putting on makeup in the mirror. A sense of self is conveyed through the movements of applying the makeup. I am now identifying myself as the Virgin Mary through my movements. This can also be used to further establish the theme of self-analysis. The first panel of the triptych shows Kyle in the infant stage. Succeeding stages will eventually evolve him into the Godself.
Annunciation

“Mary is overcome with isolation. Her one night stand less than a month ago has resulted in a missed period. The number she has in her phone for God connects to a pizza place down the street. With nowhere to turn, Mary goes to the gynecologist, Gabriel OBGYN, where she hears the news she feared the most.

She is pregnant with the Son of Man.”

I cannot imagine how hard it is to be pregnant and alone. So, when trying to cobble together an annunciation, I didn’t view it as being pregnant, but more a transformation. I have been obese my whole life. I can blame it on the terrible government food bought with food stamps, a lack of will to control myself, or any other reason. In the summer of 2007, I lost a lot of that weight. I slept on my friend’s couch, couldn’t get a job, and didn't have money for food. This was my rock bottom; I didn’t know where my future would lead me. To pass the time, I made it a practice to walk a great deal, and to budget my remaining money effectively, spending $3 a day on food at McDonalds. The result was a version of me that lost over one hundred pounds. That rapid and unhealthy weight loss has manifested itself in flabby loose skin that was covered in stretch marks and was also the beginning of my poor dental health. Both of these deformities, I became very ashamed to display.

Around this time, one of my friends had become pregnant. When people asked to see her belly she would display it with a smile, stretch marks and all. I thought inwardly about my own stretch marks and about how she too would probably have them her whole life. Maybe my troubles with weight were just a transformative process, battle scars to show where I have been and how it shapes the person I am today. I created this print to finally air my own grievances with my body image issues. I am who I think I am. I can be any size that I wish as long as it does not burden others. I have become comfortable in my own skin and I am announcing it to the world.

Another theme in this work is the cosmos, specifically the Nebula, a cluster of gasses and stars. Nebulae are fascinating to me. It is as if all of creation comes from them. They are a constant act of
creation to which that act of referencing them is to reference an almighty power. The Nebula that is represented through this series is the Tarantula Nebula and it serves multiple purposes; here are a couple:

1) I am afraid of spiders, petrified of them to be exact. To bring more of my personality into focus, I place the Tarantula Nebula in the sky to show my fears and to also acknowledge them as a source of power that influences me. 2) A month after I was born, a star in the Tarantula Nebula went supernova, SN 1987A (Gendler). It was the brightest object in the sky for months, almost as though the universe was announcing my arrival.

#1 Mom

“Mary now knows comfort; she will raise Kyle by herself. What was a burden is becoming a blessing. Little Kyle already knows how to count to five and is even speaking words. Most discomforting to Mary is when He says, ‘Where’s Dada?’ she tells him that he is out amongst the stars, waiting to meet him soon.”

I purposefully avoided the nativity scene, which would have come next in the traditional story (Dana 35-41). Due to it being very Christmas orientated, I was concerned that my image would look too much like a holiday scene. Instead, I chose a time about a year after the birth of the child. Here, we can see him happy with a halo made up of stretch marks.

The stretch mark halo is very important to this story. When the main character Kyle travels the cosmos, it is a helmet, letting him exist in space. For now, it is just halo, expressing his divinity, much as the Church would use the halo to signify important holy characters (Janson 228). I wanted that symbolism to be present throughout the show but used in an unconventional manner. As I mentioned earlier, my weight issues left me scared. In this, I wanted the Christ character to embrace all of my flaws, transforming even my stretch marks as a sign of divinity.

“#1 Mom” visually quotes Leonardo da Vinci’s piece, “The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne” (Cremante). I took some of the same compositional elements, such as the triangular shape of Mary and Jesus and eliminated her sister and St. John. With the focus more on the Christ child and Mary, I could
emphasize the iconographic elements of the composition. Later on in “Godself,” Christ is sitting in this same manner, expressing his divinity, much like the Church would signify important holy characters of the stories together. Mary is also wearing a bandana with the same stretch mark design as Christ’s Halo. This places me into the scene, as I have made a fashion, as well as a utilitarian habit, of wearing bandanas. Because of my weight issues, I sweat a lot. To hide some of the sweat that pours down my face, I wear bandanas. They have become part of how I am identified, and as ashamed as I am, I have decided to let this reflection of myself bear the same burden, but the characters in the story wear it with pride.
The Sleep of Reason

“The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters and Kyle is afraid of the dark. But a growing boy needs his sleep. So He surrounds himself with his toys to protect him, his umbrella to comfort him, and removes his space helmet for the night, to enter a land of dreams.”

Until I was thirteen, I wet the bed. Not every night, but at least five times a week. One time, when I was twelve, I stayed over at my friend Jeff’s house and I had wet his couch. The amount of shame I felt then was great, and the fact that I still haven’t told him about it makes me feel worse. This print acts to acknowledge that shame.

This print is the first of the “Bedwetter” triptych in which our hero become baptized. It starts with Kyle at about the age of nine. He is lying in bed surrounded by toys, with his halo hanging on the wall, and an umbrella firmly grasped in his hands. While I never slept with an umbrella, it represents a continuation from one image to the next. It sets an ominous tone that liquid will soon be appearing. When I was a child, as far as I can remember, I slept with toys. I would play with the same ones over and
over, enacting scenes I had seen earlier in the day. From professional wrestling, to Bible stories, and even Days of our Lives, it was my way of truly digesting the day. I slept with them so that they would come into my dreams and I could play with them there.

The halo, which was first shown in “#1 Mom”, is something that appears throughout this series. To heighten the fictional narrative, I alter or change the circumstances in which the halo can be viewed. It can be flat on the wall, or on my head, or a window to look out of. It is three-dimensional and flat at the same time. Some objects can pass through it and some cannot. I played with the physics of the object so the audience can realize it is inconsistent and therefore fake.

The title of this piece is based off “The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters,” by Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (Murray). It becomes an inside joke between myself and other printmakers, as Goya was one of the most influential printmakers of all time. It shows that I am more than acknowledging my roots; I am actively using the past to inform my present.

**Tripping the Void Fantastic with St. Christopher**

“Dreams are a frightful thing, young Kyle doesn’t know how to traverse this raging river. A man by the name of Christopher approaches Kyle, takes his umbrella and lifts him onto his back. They begin to cross, the river turns gold and picks up its pace. But they make it across, and Kyle wakes up, cold and wet.”

Most stories I can recall come from my brother Chris. He is five years older than me and, as far as I can tell, remembers what life was like when we lived in California. I distinctly remember being a bed wetter, but all other stories come from him. In an attempt to pay homage to him and the stories I know, I have included him in this print as St. Christopher, patron saint of travel. When I asked my mom for pictures of myself as a kid, she had none; I turned to my brother. When he revealed to me that he did not have many, I asked him what we were like growing up. He responded with several stories that I had hardly any recollection, from a time when he almost accidentally killed me, to the horrors of ghetto life
and gang violence. He guided me through figurative troubled waters by recalling these stories, stories that I based this show on.

St. Christopher was also viewed as the saint of printmaking (Heller 129). Due to the travel of parishioners to different pilgrimage sites, a print of him was given as sign of blessing from one church to the other. Because of this, several printmakers in the 16th century fabricated their own interpretation of him, thereby cashing in on the bevy of travelers (Heller 129). This is my interpretation with St. Christopher as my brother, but portrayed as me, carrying myself as a young Christ across a raging river of urine.

To keep in line with the historical printmaking nature of this image, I decided to focus on more traditional aspects of wood relief printmaking. For this triptych, I discarded the nebulous background that appears in the “Virgin Mary” and the “Passion” to pay homage to masterworks of the past. Most distinct of these is the parallel lines that signify the sky. This is directly attributed to Gustave Doré. Doré worked in the 18th century and he is most closely identified to scenes from the Bible. He illustrated some of the most memorable images associated with both the Old and New Testaments (Rose). I associate much of Doré's work with the Bible, especially how his team of engravers used varied parallel lines to make up an image (Roosevelt 488). They had complete mastery of the craft, producing wonderfully illustrated depictions of all sorts of stories. A key attribute was how they could compose an entire image with only parallel lines. My use of the style is relegated to only the sky. Therein lays a clash of styles, from my freer more aggressive marks in the figures and foreground to the precise controlled line work of the sky. Hopefully this duality of styles will help viewers interpret the image more clearly.

As was discussed briefly, I like to interject different aspects of my personality into each self-portrait. Even though St. Christopher is my brother Chris, he also depicts the side of me that is a giant. I am six feet, six inches tall; to say I stand out in a crowd is an understatement. I would often crouch down, so as not be noticed among the masses. I did not want anyone to remember my face, which could in turn
have them focus on my terrible teeth. I was not comfortable in this scenario, so I crouched down. In contrast, the story of St. Christopher depicts him as a very large man who used his size in a miraculous and prominent manner. Because of his height, St. Christopher was able to wade the river, carrying the nearby town folk, to see the newly born Christ. I depict myself as St. Christopher to capture an aspect of this self-confidence, standing tall and being proud of it. Being very tall has its downsides though. Among them are two that affect me greatly from a health standpoint, that is back and knee pain. The back pain is from scoliosis that I developed from growing eight inches in one year. The knee pain is from being a six foot, six inch, three hundred and fifty pound man for years and wearing down my joints. As someone who walks most places, I am afraid of being caught in the rain without an umbrella. When it doesn’t rain however, my umbrella acts as a cane, helping take away some of the pain of everyday life. This is why St. Christopher is depicted with an umbrella instead of a walking stick.

The Baptism of Kyle Darnell

“A woman’s work is never done, especially when the son of God keeps wetting the bed. This time though, the stains won’t come out of the sheets, no matter how hard she washes them. As Kyle stands in front of the hanging bedding, it starts to glow, and His helmet fills with Gold. The Baptism of Kyle Darnell.”

Gold makes its first true appearance in the story in “Tripping the Void Fantastic with St. Christopher,” it appeared as a gold dust over the river. From this point in the narrative and through the remainder, it is gold spray paint. The Catholic Church used Gold Leaf to denote important figures in their paintings (Janson 229). Stretching as far back as Fra Angelica’s “Annunciation” to more modern day examples like Andy Warhol’s “Gold Marilyn” (Scherman 133). The latter used it to pay tribute to the former. Taking something symbolically important such as gold and using it out of context plays a part in the Metanarrative of art history (Pooke 104). With that in mind, I use gold spray paint not only because it is easier, but it also looks deliberately fake. It acts as a shoddy imitation of the original, helping the viewer realize to not take anything I am saying too seriously. These prints are genuine as in they are an
exploration of my personality but at the same time they are meant to be humorous. The audience should walk away questioning the nature of the image, but also with a smile.

When discussing dreams, the presence of Sigmund Freud and his analysis of such becomes paramount. As mentioned previously in “Fuck Date” and mirror stage development by Lacan, information can be inferred from circumstantial evidence that is presented. While I did not study Freud to create the Bedwetter triptych, analysis of the piece does reference some of Freud’s essays, especially “The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming” first published in 1908 (Freud). In this, Freud discusses the creative process to the dreaming experience, a kind of wish fulfillment. Freud associates images in dreams to a camouflaged wish (Freud 518). These are wishes that are not apparent to the dreamer until further evaluation. Emanuel L. Paparella in his essay “Freud's View of Art as Symptom of the Unconscious” says this about Freud’s analysis, “…that the artist’s unconscious is less repressed and hidden than that of others. When the artist feels a need to express an unconscious thought or emotion he creates a work of art which functions like a dream. So the work of art is the fulfillment of a concealed wish.” (Paparella)

While “Tripping the Fantastic with St. Christopher” is a literal dream that I am representing, it could also be surmised that the act of creating an image is itself the creation of a dream. And when artists create, they are only projecting wish fulfillment without the embarrassment of displaying such desires to an audience. Again, Parapalla describes this too, “… as Freud explains it, the artist does two things: he disguises the egotistical nature of the work, and secondly, his aesthetic presentation provides a type of “fore-pleasure” for the viewer” (Paparella).
The Passion

INRI

“Kyle’s health had been deteriorating since the age of eighteen, when he first left Mary’s care. Most prominent were his teeth, which had become broken and abscessed. Kyle endured this pain for some time before saving enough money to go to the dentist. Several teeth were extracted and the pain was overwhelming, before fainting Kyle screamed out, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”

In the Bedwetter triptych, the main character was about six or seven, now we pick up the story with Kyle at the age of twenty-five. In the story of Jesus, there is an enormous gap in his life not represented in the Bible. There is no explanation as to why, except that existing stories were too varied across different sources, that they were omitted from the Cannon. (Dickson 25). Like the Jesus story, I also omitted much of my childhood, leaving behind childhood wonder and entering into the pains of adulthood. In the summer of 2012, my dental health had drastically deteriorated. Teeth were becoming fractured and abscessed, as I didn’t have the money to take care of them. I was barely able to afford housing and food, let alone regular doctor’s visits or much needed root canals. It was a very bad time in my life, leaving me with the scars of a fractured smile. Needless to say I am very self-conscious about this. I refrain from smiling or laughing too hard for fear that my peers would notice my teeth.

This Fivetych (as I like to call a group of five images relating to a narrative) begins at what should be the end of my teeth troubles. It represents me visiting the dentist to get my teeth removed and
fixed. This became a major transition in my life. After the procedure, I could now sleep without pain or infection, or worrying from the possibility of dying from it (Gann). This also meant that I no longer needed to be self-conscious when speaking to others. It was a relief to be sure, but it still felt like a traumatic experience due to the nature of having teeth pulled out, hence the darker tone of the image.

I viewed my teeth as my metaphorical “cross to bear” just as the crucifixion was to Jesus (Dickson 129). Keeping with that theme, I made my trips to the dentist an allegory of the Passion of the Christ (Dickson 130), just as Jesus died to absolve humanity of sin and to sit at the right hand of God (Bramly 122). This is a significant point made by the print, showing Kyle in a Christ-like pose, as he lies in the dentist chair. Kyle stares out of the image, to actively interact with the audience. This was done as homage to Edouard Manet’s “Olympia” (Gardner) where the figure is lying on the bed and stares out of the painting at the viewer. INRI above Kyle’s head should quickly make it evident that this is a crucifixion scene. This sign was also hung above Jesus’s head proclaiming him “King of the Jews” (Bramly 169). The darker tone of the image is also caused in part by the background, which has replaced the fantastical nebulae with x-rays of my teeth. The presence of the background creates a slightly grizzly tone which reflects the severity of the situation.

Pieta

“Mary held Kyle in her arms. Silence fell as even the cosmos wept. No amount of ice cream could undo what had just been done.”

After a dentist’s visit, I really like to eat ice cream. It was something that my mom gave me when I was a child, and I found it comforting through my most recent experiences. When you have multiple teeth pulled at a visit, you can’t eat anything solid. I never liked soup, so ice cream, especially Rainbow Sherbet, became a familiar sight in my household. There is no ice cream represented in this image, but it is supporting information presented to better explain the intent of the image.
After Jesus had died, he was taken down from the cross and immediately into the arms of his mother, Mary. This scene, known as the Pieta, is depicted numerous times through art history; this image is specifically in reference to “Pieta” by Michelangelo (Hupka 34). The poses are very similar, but in my version, Mary’s face is staring in anguish at Kyle. My main source for referencing historical artwork comes from printmaker, Tom Huck. Huck is known for drawing heavily on his influences from Albrecht Durer to R. Crumb. Sometimes taking the compositional elements of the work and directly referencing them in prints (Baran). I do the same because my work is deeply rooted in art history. My intention is not to copy but to pay homage.

The Nebula and halo return in this print, the nebula to signify the presence of an almighty, and the halo a symbol of divinity. The halos were created using the French printmaking method of chine collé. Chine collé was used historically to add color to a print in the means of printing another piece of paper through the press at the same time. This transparent paper would adhere to the print by means of wheat paste glue. Instead of transparent colored paper, I use mulberry paper that is spray painted gold. The halo is removed and placed underneath his arm to further manipulate the dimensionality of the space. As mentioned previously, the halo acts not only as a religious symbol but to help the viewer realize the inconsistency of such an object and to not take such an intense situation too seriously. The figures are rendered in a much freer and ragged manner to signify the emotion being felt by Mary.

Tear the Veil

“Three days had passed since the dentist. Kyle ripped through his former self and the heavens cackled with lightning. The resurrection of Kyle Darnell was at hand.”

Three days after Jesus had died he was resurrected with life eternal in Heaven (Bramly123). My story parallels this narrative. After Kyle went to the dentist (was crucified), he was reborn as the Godself (life in heaven). Issues with my teeth have been brought up several times and were a very important transformation for me. In a way, I went from a man to an all-powerful being. Before I couldn’t even
smile without becoming self-conscious, now I am beaming from ear to ear. Who is to say that there isn’t anything more valuable than confidence and a nice smile? After years of not having those things, they really feel like the most important things in the world. In this, Kyle is tearing himself in half to get out of his former shell, a rebirth metaphorically speaking.

Godself

“Kyle was born anew and traveled the cosmos in awe of his new found reverence. Floating above Earth he showed his teeth, and then spoke, ‘Know me, trust me, and above all else TRUST GOD!’ He zoomed down, with one last stop before his ultimate departure.”

In this print the Godself, Kyle’s reborn confidence announces himself to the world. Another famous work of art is referenced, Michelangelo’s “Last Judgment” fresco from the Sistine chapel. In it, Jesus is coming back to judge all of mankind. He announces himself as the Lord by pointing to his spear wound and raising his hand as if he were to smack the whole world. Kyle announces himself by presenting his teeth to prove he is the Godself.

When deciding the direction of this show a level of absurdity became present. Kyle wears the same clothes from the time he is born until the end of the narrative. This is an allusion to super hero comic books, especially Marvel’s Thor. In it Dr. Donald Blake cracks his staff on the ground and transforms into Thor, the Norse God of Thunder and protector of mankind (Arnold 125). When he transforms, no matter the situation, he ends up wearing the exact same clothes. In a way it becomes a trademark of the character. When you see Thor, you expect him to have a winged helmet on his head and his hammer, Mjolnir, in his hand. While creating the Godself character, I wanted him to be recognizable from print to print. He will wear the same pants, shoes, and my favorite jacket. It is said that when the creators of Superman decided on his alter ego, Clark Kent, they cast themselves into that role. They used a frail man, going through the doldrums of everyday life, glasses and all (Brod 7), and Superman was the opposite of them. He could leap buildings faster than a speeding bullet, melt steal with his heat vision,
and see through walls. This was everything the writers wanted to be but couldn’t. The Godself is everything I am not. He is proud of his flaws as they help define him. I am Clark Kent, and Godself is my Superman.

I am not alone in this. Artists throughout history have created alter egos to satisfy a need that is expressed in their artwork. Speaking in a contemporary sense, the two that have influenced me the most are Trenton Doyle Hancock and Jayson Musson. Hancock like myself explores a narrative of his own creation with an emphasis placed on a character named Torpedo Boy. Torpedo Boy is a super hero whose travels further narrate the story of the Mounds that he must protect (Ferraro). Jayson Musson is an artist who uses the alter ego, Hennessy Youngman (Boucher), to critique the art world from a status the he does not possess. Musson uses Youngman in the video series “Art Thoughtz” to expound upon problems that he sees in the art world through the guise of a man that would appear more affluent in hip-hop culture rather than art (Boucher). He uses this to help ease some of the harsh criticism he sends out the art world way but at the same time make it a thoroughly entertaining for the audience.

Doubting Kyle

“Before Godself could sit at the right hand of His father, He knew of one person He had not convinced, that person was Kyle. Godself sat at a bar as Kyle came in, proclaiming His right as the Godself. Kyle did not believe him. With that, Godself took Kyle’s hand with pointed finger and directed it in His mouth. Kyle held no more doubt. Godself smiled and said, ‘Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.’”

“Doubting Kyle” is a play off of the Incredulity of St. Thomas by Caravaggio (Gash 3). Caravaggio was a very important influence during my undergraduate years, and while most of my compositions do not take directly after his works, they are informed by them. The Baroque dramatic dark to light, known as tenebrism, shows up quite frequently and I like to think I have adopted his ego. Caravaggio was a pompous artist who thought he was the very best in the world (Gash 45). While I do not
acknowledge myself as such, I recognize that much pride must be taken in one’s career path. That is another layer to the Godself image portrayed in the previous print. Who should say I am not important enough to be the son of God or that God is inside of me? Kyle is saying through the story that no one is as important as me. This was an exercise I was taught in therapy as I was working through self-esteem issues. I had to repeat to myself each morning, "There is no one more important to me than me."

This print is the summation for my entire series. Through it, I have fought my personal demons, which befuddled me through the making of the prints. This was an airing of grievances, so to speak, as I worked through issues of body image, my childhood, self-confidence, and my chauvinist tendencies. After exploring all of these troubles, I have to remind myself of who I am. An analyzed past should only inform the present, not dictate it.
CHAPTER 3
REMEMBERING

This chapter is an overview of portion of the show entitled, Remembering. Remembering can also be broken down into “Re-membering,” or how I collapse my fragmented memories and piece them back together in a newer context. Everything that I remember from my youth, I treat as a treasured item since they are so few. As mentioned previously, my brother Chris helped me fill in some of the gaps and with no other way of measuring the validity of the stories; I take them to be true. This creates more treasured items for me to hold dear, and sometimes, it seems, I associate related circumstances that surround these stories to also be true. This is called Confabulation.

“Confabulation is the falsification of memory in which gaps in recall are filled by fabrications that the generating individual accepts as fact.” (Wiseman). This is only a problem if I decide it is a problem. I am not now, nor have I even been Jewish. When talking to my brother I mentioned to him going to temple when we were younger. He was confused and said that never happened. He went on to tell me that our dad was partially Jewish because his grandparents were, but we in fact never lived a Jewish lifestyle. This came as a shock to me, for years I had very vivid memories of going to temple and even talking to our Rabbi about how I was going to progress into manhood through my bar mitzvah and the preparations I needed to take. This never happened, yet I recall it so lucidly. I can, in fact, remember it much more clearly than anything else that happened from my childhood.

The process of remembering also becomes the act of “re-membering”. Most of the images in this exhibit were created while I was sitting at Mass at St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Johnson City, Tennessee. While not being Catholic myself, my girlfriend Jennifer Smith, is. I have accompanied her to church for over a year. In doing so, I have come to appreciate the ceremony that lies within. Almost two-thousand years of ritual were repeated, with only slight changes to adapt to the time. Throughout its evolution, this ritual embraces much art and printmaking history, from Albrecht Durer and Rembrandt
van Rijn to Michelangelo Caravaggio and Rubens. Many of my ideas for prints occur while sitting at mass and observing the various ceremonial presentations. One such ritual is called the Homily, where the priest relates the Gospel to the congregation in a more understandable manner. The Homily made it possible for me to combine my own history with art and religious history. Being raised in a church community, I associate personal memories to images of Christianity. The various depictions of the story of Christ surrounded me through my formative years. I recall vague memories of my youth, attending the church at United Church of Christ, and even teaching Sunday school. This changed for me in my late teens; I don’t recall the exact moment I lost my faith, but what remained was its influences on my childhood and how it intertwined into all my activities.

**Printmaking**

At this point, I would like to discuss several prints that are informative to the overall show but not a part of the narrative in *Reflecting*. They were created to inform the overall history of the story but exist outside of it. Every large print from the main narrative was first created on woodblocks that are 8x10”. This was done to work out the kinks and experiment with different ideas and compositions. There are thirty of these in all and they help to depict the story in a longer form, moving from one story to the next by way of one large wall installation.

Another work that could be considered a little different from those images in the main narrative is the Virgin Mary Triptych. It was printed onto thin sandle-plywood then braced and attached to form an altar that goes with a ceramic piece. The print “The Bread and the Body” depicts me as a pastor blessing the Eucharist before communion. I decided to paint this scene, in which I developed a background using oil, acrylic, and spray paints, and then printed the woodblock directly on it. I then cut away the print using a Dremel then rubbed in ink to the exposed wood. To finish it off I coated it in polyurethane.
Ceramics

As part of my exhibit, I have created a series of ceramic urns. These were important because I was honoring the tradition of utilitarian ceramics but incorporating my own personal aesthetics, and as a symbol of religious reliquary. Each ceramic piece is hand thrown on an electric wheel then modified. To reinforce the idea of tribute the stretch mark pattern from the halo is carved in a band around each piece then either Raku or Wood Salt fired in a kiln.

The urns were Raku fired with an edition of prints to act as the combustible in the post reduction aspect of the firing. That way, the prints carbonize and reduce the clay body, imparting their last mark before turning to ash. The ash is then poured into the urn, which also contain my teeth, which I had pulled in the past year. In this manner, the urn now functions as a reliquary. Reliquaries are used by the Catholic Church to contain various body parts of saint’s. They do this to heighten the level of worship that a parishioner will encounter in front of the altar. For this purpose, one of the urns is placed with an altar to finalize the place of prayer.

Fibers

I have included fibers work in this exhibition due to its natural tendency to evoke tradition. Quilts and blankets are objects passed down through generations, even with older members of the family teaching the younger ones the finer aspects of quilt making. Personally, I did not have that tradition in my family. In fact we made nothing with our hands. I wanted to change that with this exhibition, to create my own new traditions that could be passed down through the generations.

Each quilt went through a process of developing a base image, then extrapolation on the foundation using a sewing machine to affix line. It would take several hours of going over the same piece implementing layer upon layer of line, each one affecting the overall outcome of the piece. This repetitive nature developed with the core narrative of Reflecting. The act of repetition creates a fonder attachment to the piece, elevating it beyond the utilitarian and to the level of admiration and even worship.
The exhibition “Godself” would not be possible without the raised cord bound book titled “Summah Wood Tests.” During the summer of 2011 I had taken on a new challenge of working in the media of relief woodblock printing. This book acts as documentation of the process of learning a new media. These were important to the development of style and the surfacing of a deep narcissism mentioned at the beginning of the paper. The other is a Coptic bound book that hangs from the ceiling. Into the covers, the stretch mark pattern is sewn to give a sense of continuity with the rest of the show. This book dives deeper into my interpretation of the show. The grandiosity of the large art object explores my desire to create relative to my size. While this book isn’t very large in terms of scale compared to other images in this series, it does, however, represent a great deal of work. Cutting paper, measuring, and sewing together this book became a task of great effort that makes something small feel much larger.

The blanket “Bedwetter Blankey” emphasized scale over effort. It was designed in Adobe Photoshop then was taken to be printed by Wal-Mart. This disconnect was important to this piece as it removed me from the craftsman’s point of view and into the level of commercial availability. I view it this way; a king may have a magnificent rug in his parlor. Was it important that the king made it himself or that he used the available resources to produce it for him? Sure, he may have been able to make it himself, but the quality would have been negligible compared to what would be expected of such a fantastic rug. I am not familiar with the processes of making a fleece blanket like this, so I used someone who would be able to do it at a much higher level than me. The attainability of such an object was very important to these pieces.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

This exhibition acts as a document to the process of self-discovery. While the process of using the aforementioned religious and historical aspects of creating these works of art is important to this show, the most important features, to me, is the personal journey I went through to create them. I hope these pieces give the audience the sense of having been lost and then found. Just as the journey to re-create these lost memories helped me discover who I am as a person, a God, and an artist.


Installation of Reflecting
Installation of *Reflecting*
“The Virgin Mary: Fuck Date”
Relief (2012)
“The Virgin Mary: Annunciation”

Relief (2012)
“The Virgin Mary: #1 Mom”

Relief (2012)
“Bedwetter: The Sleep of Reason”

Relief (2012)
“Bedwetter: Tripping the Void Fantastic with St. Christopher”

Relief (2012)
“Bedwetter: The Baptism of Kyle Darnell”

Relief (2012)
“The Passion: INRI”
Relief (2012)
“The Passion: Pieta”
Relief and Chine Collé (2012)
“The Passion: Tear the Veil”
Relief and Chine Collé (2012)
“The Passion: Godself”
Relief and Chine Collé (2012)
“The Passion: Doubting Kyle”

Relief and Chine Collé (2012)
Installation of *Remembering*
Installation of *Remembering*
“Fear the 5IVECLOPS”

Relief (2012)
“As the Antichrist”

Relief (2012)
“The Bread and the Body”
Relief, Oil, Acrylic, and Spray Paints (2011)
“Lucid Intervals”

Digital print on fabric and quilting (2011)
“Bedwetter Blankey”

Digital print on Fleece (2013)
“Summah Wood Tests Book”
Relief and monotype bound in Raised Cord book (2012)
“Godself: Retrovertigo”

30 relief prints in cheap frames (2013)
“Hanging Book”
Coptic bound book and fishing wire (2012)
“The Virgin Mary Altar”

Relief printed on wood. Stain, polyurethane, spray painted action figures, gold glitter, candles. Raku fired ceramic urn, paint, ashes from the firing. (2013)
“Wood-Salt Fired Urn”

Filled with the ashes from previous raku firing containing an edition of prints (2012)
“Raku Fired Urn”

Filled with the ashes from previous raku firing containing an edition of prints (2012)
“Raku Fired Urn”

Filled with the ashes from previous raku firing containing an edition of prints (2012)
“Wood-Salt Fired Urn”

Filled with the ashes from previous raku firing containing an edition of prints (2012)
“Wood Fired Urn”

Filled with the ashes from previous raku firing containing an edition of prints (2012)
VITA

KYLE S. DARNELL

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Minor in Creative Writing

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Teaching Assistant (Instructor of Record), East Tennessee State University, Two Dimensional Design, Spring 2013
Graduate Assistant, East Tennessee State University, Printmaking, 2011-2012
Tuition Scholarship, East Tennessee State University, Printmaking, 2010-2011

Recent Exhibitions:
“Ascension: Graduate Student Art Show” Tipton Gallery, Johnson City, TN 2013
“GODSELF: MFA Exhibition” Slocumb Galleries, Johnson City, TN 2013
"Humor; Analog Humor" Tipton Gallery, Johnson City, TN 2013
“Listen: Graduate Student Art Show” Johnson City, TN 2012
“El Minia University Student International Print Show” El Minia, Egypt 2012
“Quincy River Art Festival,” River Front, Quincy, IL 2009
“Original II”, Hannibal Arts Council, 1221 Market Street, Hannibal, MO 2009
Honors and Awards:

“Student Honors Exhibition,” Culver-Stockton College, Canton, MO 2009
- 2nd Place Overall

“Quincy River Art Festival,” Quincy IL 2008
- Best of Show/ Best Artists with Caleb Bourn

“Student Honors Exhibition,” Culver-Stockton College, Canton, MO 2008
- Best of Show
- Georgia O’Keefe Memorial Award
- Artistic Excellence
- Honorable Mention

“16th Mary S. Oakley Art Exhibition,” Quincy Art Center, Quincy, IL 2008
- Honorable Mention

“24th John Wood Community College Art Exhibition,” John Wood Community College, Quincy, IL 2008
- 2nd Place Printmaking and Drawing