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Tolerance:
Challenge, Perception, and Social Stigmas
Defined through Visual Communications

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Art & Design
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Fine Arts in Graphic Design

by
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May 2007

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Keywords: Graphic Design, Fine Art, Art, Visual Communications,
Typography, Photography, Social Stigmas, Social Awareness, Social Issues

ABSTRACT

Tolerance:
Challenge, Perception, and Social Stigmas
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by
Ursula Moore Bryant

My explorations and journey through life have led me to discover a connection in my work and responsibility as a visual communicator. My objective of communicating challenge, perception, and social stigmas through informed stories of individual lives is to provoke questions and spark moments of awareness in viewers. With this supporting manuscript, I hope to inform about my motivations through time including my personal, artistic, and historical influences. I will define graphic design as a fine art through the evaluation of artistic movements. I also intend to discuss design as a language and build a case for social awareness. Evaluating the process of my work will enlighten the technical aspects of my unique aesthetic and prove the success of my intention.

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CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	2
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	5
2. MOTIVATIONS THROUGH TIME.....	7
3. DESIGN AS A LANGUAGE	16
4. A CASE FOR AWARENESS: SEEING MORE AND THINKING DIFFERENTLY.....	22
5. EVALUATING THE PROCESS.....	27
6. CONCLUSION	34
WORKS CITED.....	35
EXHIBIT	38
VITA.....	49

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I have changed. After a lifetime of measuring the success of my existence and work through the perception of others, I have altered my scope. I have discovered that the success of my work is reinforced through the participation and feedback of others but is not made for the sake of others. I have succeeded.

I view this moment not as the completion of my journey through visual art but as the beginning of a collection and process through visual communications that with time will follow my journey and patterns through life.

I am pleased when I have provided a client with the appropriate collateral to promote business and I feel joy when my graphic design work is clever enough to win awards. I've always been interested in capturing an emotion and creating a visual experience through art. As my memories collect and I walk into the world each day, I tackle the need for awareness and I am challenged by what I cannot see. My work has shaped and sculpted my personal observations and motivations. Surely, my approach does not satisfy "business to business" marketing, but instead enhances and enriches an experience, leaving viewers with indubitable consciousness.

"Toleration and Tolerance are terms used within debates in areas of social, cultural, and religious context to describe attitudes and practices that prohibit discrimination against those whose practices or group memberships may be disapproved of by those in the majority"

(Wikipedia). Through my inspiration and work I have developed a series of posters generated from photography and handwritten typography to expose untold or misrepresented stories of humanity. My theories, perspectives, and aesthetic have been influenced by the discussion of social stigmas, the examination of statistics, and the relevance of visual communications as a role in our environment.

With my desire reinforced by the impact of my work and my art driven by investigation, I have developed a case for consciousness. I explore challenge, perception, and social issues communicated through a visual experience. Tolerance.

CHAPTER 2

MOTIVATIONS THROUGH TIME

Personal influences and inspiration combined with my own maturity and self-awareness drive my artistic vision. I am an artist by nature and a graphic designer by condition and passion. Through success redefined and altered intentions, I refer to my work as visual communications rather than graphic design. My motivations through time have sprouted from strong artistic roots and distinct life events coupled with various historical and artistic influences.

I recall many afternoons throughout my childhood when my mother would declare: “It’s art time”. My older sister and I would sit at a little table made by my father and sculpt creatures out of homemade clay, make wire and paper animals, cut shapes out of construction paper, glue seashells on burlap, and use paints, crayons, and markers to make art. Above other influences my family have been my number one supporters and motivators, calling me an artist long before I realized I was.

Expressing myself through art as a child was enjoyable and fun. My parents fostered creativity, allowing me to explore many mediums and were patient while my messy art process took place. They understood my need to make covers for my school papers before writing them and challenged my understanding of art by taking me to art galleries and shows. My passion for art is deeply embedded in my soul.

My childhood was also full of travel and exposure to humanity. My summer breaks from school consisted of traveling in a Volkswagen bus, a van, or homemade “plywood motor home” as my dad referred to it, and later a 24-foot motor home across country. My aunt and two younger cousins were also road warriors, accompanying many traveling adventures. Learning to live in close quarters, share miniature-clothing compartments, and remain clam on 105-degree days was a true test of patience and love. Entering my senior year of high school, I was proud to say that I had visited and journeyed through all 48 contiguous states and Alaska. Traveling provided an awakening of my senses - the awe of national parks, images of wildlife, and beautiful landscapes are forever embedded in my memory.

Traveling impacted my physical senses and also provided a method of meeting people. I was exposed to social differences, enlightened by cultural awareness, and discovered paths, life journeys, and hardships experienced by others. I was humbled by stories of hardship and inspired by smiles of success. These life experiences are strong motivators in my work and are perhaps references for my infatuation with working directly with humanity and my need to express awareness through visual and written communication.

Entering college I was uncertain about art as a serious career choice. I took my first graphic design course at James Madison University (JMU) in Harrisonburg, Virginia, which awakened my sense of aesthetics. I felt consolation in design and put in the necessary “all-nighters” in the computer lab to grasp the skills to become a competitive professional designer.

College posed challenges that could have made me dislike graphic design. Instead, I pushed the breadth of my work and it is now one of the driving forces behind my graphic design, inspiration and purpose. It was then that I began to discover my artistic vision.

After graduating from JMU, I began a career as a graphic designer working for an agency named Blair Marketing in my hometown of Lynchburg, Virginia. I focused on gaining an industry perspective of the field and provided clients with solutions to design problems. I was challenged daily and was conditioned to absorb clients' needs and to meet pressing deadlines. I was part of a team and thrived on the development of powerful design pieces. Although I was enhancing my design skills, building my portfolio, and gaining experience, my designs lacked the impulse and purpose I began to discover during college. Although the happiness of co-workers and clients, with the added benefit of getting a paycheck, seemed productive, my work was no longer driven by emotion, but by the restraints of a cost effective design and others opinions.

I pride myself on my freelance work, and as a designer know it is pertinent to remain active in the design community and abreast of new technology; these justifications sparked a need to further explore and push the boundaries of my inner influence and embark on making a difference in the design world with my aesthetic sensibilities.

I returned to academia with an open mind. My work and experiences at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) in Johnson City, Tennessee have been a time of personal growth and artistic motivation. Increasingly encouraged by my interest in social awareness, I have begun a new phase in my life and work as an artist. An exploration of inciting consciousness and

awareness in others through personal stories and human involvement has become central in my work. Graduate school has also provided an avenue for me to explore other interests such as creative writing, photography, and the language of communication in our environment.

My background, surroundings, and study of art are significant to my work, but still other moments in time and artistic influences have also shaped my ambition.

Although ultimately stimulation lies within, visual inspiration surrounds me daily. Innovative talent, visual aesthetic awareness, and creative intuition guide my work. Beyond my personal visual communication spans a long list of artists who further drive and inspire my style.

“If the word legend has any meaning in the graphic arts and if the term legendary can be applied with accuracy to the career of any designer, it can certainly be applied to Paul Rand” (Communication Arts). According to Paul Rand, “design is one of the most perplexing pursuits in which to excel” (Hembree 9). Rand, a true pioneer in graphic design known for his successful trademarks and recognizable logo identities such as ABC, IBM, and Yale University, certainly understood design. There are many challenges, acquired theory, and responsibilities associated with becoming a flourishing graphic designer. Although the work of Rand is exuberant, it was his love for design that intrigues me. I am encouraged to work with similar passion through my visual communications.

Through the experimentation of my developing body of work, like most designers, the brilliant works of David Carson has also stimulated me. Carson has a disregard for traditional

design. His pieces are not spelled out for the viewer. His work lacks clarity and draws the viewer in to deal with hidden messages. I am mesmerized by his fragmented and layered compositions that deal with experimental type treatments (Meggs, Type 57). Although the focus of my work is more clearly deciphered through purposeful statements of legible type and imagery, I am compelled by his sense of freedom and exploration.

As a designer and visual communicator it is essential to have both a strong background in the foundations of art and a unique artistic creativity. A large contributor to my path as a designer has been learning the traditional elements of design, defined by designers such as Carson and Rand during the twentieth century with the development of graphic design as a profession. Similar to the importance of form, function, and line in drawing, I have attained the general “rules” as they apply to design. I can follow basic principles such as ensuring typographical clarity, targeting an audience, and balance, but my desire spills into much more responsive ideals.

April Greiman a designer whose practice is truly innovative and deals little with the conventional definition of graphic design (Greiman 9) states: “My personal research is about what in my heart, I feel it is important to explore and discover” (Greiman 8). When I ask myself what is important in my life, I logically root back to my travels and to involvement with community and society. Greiman reveals that, “I’ll always be designing. It’s not what I do, it’s who I am” (Greiman 8). Her practice is influenced by philosophical readings and by analyzing her own dreams. Similarly, my work is inspired by research and emotions of what I feel are necessary elements and streams of communication in today’s environment.

In my work I strive to focus with the energy of Paul Rand and communicate messages with the intention similar to the works of David Carson. I attempt to push the formal boundaries of graphic design like Greiman and use her philosophy of personally exploring what I feel is important.

I pull further inspiration from other artists, who share more commonality to my work in their method and approach and are similarly driven by ambition of opening viewers' eyes to social stigmas and push challenges of society to the surface to provoke consciousness.

Chaz Maviyane-Davies, another captivating designer, and I share the similar belief that in the increasingly consolidated world of media communication, silence is no longer an opinion. I have a voice in the art world that needs to be shared and expressed. Maviyane-Davies states the following as a message on his personal website.

“Over the years I have tried to use images and ideas to cut through complacency and apathy while trying to raise consciousness about an array of social issues from discrimination and human rights, to health and the environment.

Creating an alternate vision as my expression in a pervading regressive body politic has never been easy, but design is my weapon and therein lies the challenge I call Creative Defiance” (Creative Defiance).

Although Maviyane-Davies uses the Internet as a platform of opening up a gateway to intervention and truth, I find solace in designing for purposes of a smaller viewing audience. In harmony with his intentions, a parallel can be drawn between our works of taking on issues such as social responsibility to raise awareness, to call to action, to enlighten, to promote, and to inform spectators.

I would not fairly represent my artistic influences without the mention of the works of Barbara Kruger. The first time I saw her designs, I was drawn to the minimal use of color and bold use of reds and text. It is strange to me now, but I recall reviewing her works many years ago and being engaged by her bold approach but scared to branch into such a direction with intense and personal motives. Kruger's background in design is evident in the work for which she is now internationally renowned. "She layers found photographs from existing sources with pithy and aggressive text that involves the viewer in the struggle for power and control that her captions speak to" (Kruger). Kruger targets the viewer with issues such as: "feminism, Classicism, consumerism, and individual autonomy and desire" (Meggs, Type 117). She is also known for her found objects and altered images from popular culture. Using media types such as photo archives, newspapers, and television, allows her to challenge the notion that photographs tell an objective truth. I value Kruger's work and focus as it inspires my efforts of creating works that stimulate public awareness.

In an attempt to challenge the viewer, like Kruger's, my pieces began to speak for themselves. According to Kruger, "art creates a kind of commentary" (Meggs, Type 117). In her piece, "Get Out" she uses strong altered photographic images and bold type to present a message that takes an activist approach on the issue of abuse. While much of her work is politically charged, it is also produced to prompt emotion. The force of her work strikes me and although my pieces do not challenge political morals as much, they are comments of that which is not seen or ignored and are intended to promote a force of their own.

While many artists inspire my work, it is also necessary to reflect on some of the historical references in graphic design that drive my vision. Previous historical elements in the field of graphic design are concurrently present in my intentions. According to Philip Meggs, “Graphic design is a vital component of each culture and period in human history, and in this account, an extraordinary panorama of people and events unfolds” (Meggs, History I). The development of visual communications affected artistic styles and equally the artistic movements in graphic design during the twentieth century. In Meggs’ statement he is suggesting that graphic design in and of itself plays a dominant role in the world around us. Graphic design is, in fact, everywhere and is used for promotion and as a means of communicating particular messages to viewers. The history of graphic design dates back far beyond 1922, when William Dwiggins coined the term “graphic design” to describe his activities as bringing structural order and visual form to printed communications. Throughout history other people including scribes, printers, and artists fulfilled the role of graphic designers (Meggs, History xiii). They were attempting to communicate through visual design.

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of generations of design, I have been looking at developments in advertising, information design, print, dimensional design, and posters. I am captivated by the attempts of craft, skill, and communication that were happening back into the mid-1900s. Modernism began in the twentieth century as an art movement, which was guided by the ideology that artists should push boundaries and deal more with political and social issues (Bailey 51). As more designers are encouraged to do, they were designing based on concerns they believed needed to be dealt with.

Parallels can be drawn to my current artistic style and objectives and those of American artists in the early twentieth century. They introduced interesting forms, which were often intended to shock and surprise viewers. Modern art such as Pop Art and Abstract Expressionism, which emerged in the early 1950s, still have an impact on advertising and design today. Many of the pieces began to look almost like posters and expressions to convey visual messages (Remington and Bodenstedt 59). Similar to these popular art movements, my process is focused on using elements such as hand-drawn type and photography to create pieces that communicate significant social issues. Much like my current work, a large portion of artists during the mid to late 1900s used art as a way to express themselves.

My artistic ambitions are influenced by my background, childhood travels, life events, people I have met, and stories I have heard, artistic and historical influences, and personal endeavors. But, more my soul and work are stirred by a sleeping society, unaware of social cultures and oblivious to inequalities and challenges.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN AS A LANGUAGE

My first encounter with graphic design as a means of communication was in college. I had never thought about who developed packaging on products, store signs, or logos for businesses and was energized by the profession. When I discovered my talent for design, I began designing my own Christmas and Valentines Day cards and was encouraged by the consistent need for design work. Like most student designers I was thrilled to take on small freelance jobs for family and friends. I approached each design project in my classes as a competition. I wanted my design to be “the best” and “work” for whatever fictitious client we were assigned.

I became obsessed with learning the discipline and knew I had found my career path. In my three years working as a graphic designer I loved that my job was unique and felt successful when I got a sample printed piece and a pleased client. “Just like an addict creates a lust for drugs or alcohol, the designer develops a craving for the new, the visually compelling, and the beautiful (Drenttel et al. 183). I was intoxicated by the craft of graphic design but soon discovered that measuring success on others contentment was not fulfilling my happiness and that my perspectives on self-achievements were skewed. Graphic design is so much more than a “impressive” web site to promote a business or a “fancy” brochure that won an Addy award. Success is so much more than a climbing salary and others’ happiness.

My moment of awakening happened in graduate school when I stopped worrying about who the client or target audience was and I took a leap into challenging my personal motives. I

branched into a visual communications drastically different from anything I had done in the past. I was suddenly driven by what pleased me and what I felt communicated messages of necessity to outside viewers. I reached a turning point where I was forced to decide if I wanted my work to communicate a message and make a difference or become another brochure or logo design measured by consumers and business growth. I now revel through my thesis work that design is a language and is an outlet for my research and examinations of the outside world.

“Graphic design serves as a method for improving society through effective communication that makes complicated things easier to understand and use. Design persuades and influences public opinion, as is the case with propaganda or political design” (Hembree, 11). The power of visual language is underestimated. The role that design and communications have within our society is potent although according to writer John Bielenberg, “the graphic languages sometimes take a dominant role over the message being communicated” (Drenttel et al. 183). He also states that, “the profession of graphic design is principally about engineering a connection between a message and an audience” (Drenttel et al. 184). Through work that communicates knowledge of personal stories of inspiration and struggle I force that connection and impel my messages to viewers.

“The energy and motivation of the designer to explore new solutions is required to propel the process of an evolving visual vocabulary forward. It is this very conflict that forces the core to widen and move. Without conflicting agendas, it is possible that the tendency of a system to maintain a state of minimum energy would result in a stagnation or cessation of visual exploration in the field of graphic design” (Drenttel et al. 185). This urgent reminder should be stamped

inside of every graphic designer's desk drawer. The statement in essence captures what I maintain is important in my work. While I see validation and benefit of working for clients and developing solutions to graphic design problems, I am driven by my role in society and the impact that I can make with my work. Without challenging my motives and forcing my approach, my work would become stale and unimportant.

“With the tools of his trade, a graphic designer has all the necessary ingredients to turn something into printed matter. To design is to execute power”. (Bierut et al. 262). Designing takes a fluid role in a world with certain conventions and expectations. Items that are dull can suddenly become visually compelling and, not surprisingly, design work can be the driving force behind the increase of product sales and marketing campaigns. “Graphic Design is the most visible of all forms of design. In what we buy and read, on our screens, shelves and streets, it surrounds our everyday lives” (Cole 6). Because of this, I know I have a means of impact through visual connections and my work as an artist.

The role of graphic design and the power of design in our daily lives are defined. Without design we would not have newspapers, highway signs, or money (someone designs the currency). Life would be difficult and dull without the presence of design. After further investigation and promoting my work as visual communications rather than graphic design, I comprehend the necessity and impact. Knowing the power of visual design leads me to conclude that through displaying stories of social issues visually, I provoke a human responsiveness in those that see my work.

We, as a people, are visual thinkers. This stems back to the evolutionary process of people's ability to compare a past situation with the situation at hand. This ability enables people to examine situations other than the present one and thus provides greater choices for creative decisions (Faruque 33). Visual cognition or the apparatus of speech is a manifestation of people's creative ability in recalling the absent and comparing it with the current. Such a process is complex and passes through layers of abstraction. The principal level of processing information occurs through the senses, with the visual sense playing the leading role. As we try to remember past situations, we in essence see it through the mind's eye. Our mind looks through a catalog of pictures and images on the visual level on a search and identification attempt. Recalling the absent condition is seeing through the mind's eye and recognizing it (Frauque 33).

Knowing how we think is a tool and aids in the production of design. Visual communication combines speech, written language, and imagery into messages that are aesthetically pleasing, connect with the audience on intellectual and emotional levels, and provide them with pertinent information. When properly executed, graphic design identifies, informs, instructs, interprets, and even persuades viewers to do something. It seems necessary and logical that the sender and receiver speak the same visual language. In most cases the designer plays the role of interpreter or translator of the message. Often it is important in visual communications to reduce the amount of information provided down to only what is necessary (Hembree 14).

“Messages must connect with viewers at many levels beyond mere aesthetics in order to resonate and be remembered by viewers” (Hembree 20). In my research, I have found that the more spectators view messages that speaks to them on an emotional level, the more likely they are

to comprehend and remember the work. Evidence of this notion is represented in my social image pieces. I have discovered that the more my work connects emotionally and intellectually with a viewer, the more compelling and memorable it seems. “In some instances, levels of information are not included because their content is essential, but rather to introduce ambient subject matter in order to set the scene or create mood” (Knight and Glaser 5). For example, in my pieces I provide a story, hand written on a body to provoke the viewer and portray a sense of drama and personal space.

I have been struck by the amount of viewer responsiveness to my work. A few months ago, a woman whom I know by association poured her heart out to me about her hardships and abuse after seeing my poster on abuse. She was a battered woman who found strength and gratitude in seeing my poster and was emotionally charged by reading a story similar to hers. The intent with all of my posters of social stigmas or secret stories of emotion is to create wakefulness in viewers. The impact of my work on outside audiences is profound. The number of people who silently relate to the stories or perhaps are touched by or connect to specific piece shocks me.

The validation for design and communication in society is clear and is charged with necessity and function. Design is expected and the need is core to our visual culture. Although there is no question, suggesting that graphics is independent of society and language, if it were not for the existence of different classes and cultural groups there would be little need for graphics (Barnard 58). “The idea of ‘graphics for graphics’ sake’ movement, along the lines of the nineteenth-century ‘art for art’s sake’ movement, makes no sense at all. And, if pushed on the

matter, most people would probably agree on the nature of the relation between graphic design, society and culture” (Barnard 58).

Evident in my pieces is my desire to bridge the gap between fine art and graphic design using digital photography to produce my work. There is a need for visual communications in our culture and I work to use my knowledge of visual cognition and viewer consciousness as power in my aesthetic ideals. Using design as a language, in my case for awareness, I provoke individuals to see more and think differently.

CHAPTER 4

A CASE FOR AWARENESS: SEEING MORE AND THINKING DIFFERENTLY

Think about 800,000 children's smiling faces. Then imagine all 800,000 of them being forced to have sex for money. What if this happened every 14 minutes? The public outcry would be deafening and there would be public awareness efforts to help these children – right? I heard this statistic on a special news report 2 years ago and have been haunted by it ever since. Shocking statistics such as this are useless without public awareness.

Millions of Americans, including myself, are uninformed and have little grasp on social issues surrounding them. Ironically, even with the age of technology and public awareness efforts, citizens are seemingly unaware and uninvolved in social issues that surround them daily.

“One out of four of all occupant deaths among children ages 0 to 14 years involve a drinking driver. More than two-thirds of these fatally injured children were riding with a drinking driver” (Dyer and Thompson). Astonishing statistics such as this one, which I found while browsing the Internet, are not common public knowledge. Most citizens are oblivious to information such as: “The World Health Organization projects that depression will likely be the second leading cause of mortality and disability by the year 2020, and the leading cause for women in developing countries” (Dyer and Thompson).

Concerns with bodily appearance today go beyond weight anxiety. History shows that, for centuries, people in most places have caused themselves serious pain and injury in their

attempts to conform their bodies to cultural definitions of attractiveness. Women even go so far as to wear tight, suffocating corsets to achieve a desirable “hourglass” figure (Newman 203). “Some people take even more extreme measures to alter their appearance. According to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, an estimated 8.3 million Americans had cosmetic surgeries in 2004” (Newman 204). Even more staggering statistics such as “81% of 10-year-olds are afraid of being fat.” and “90% of college women attempt to control their weight through dieting” (Newman 201) are shocking. With information such as this, the issue of appearance is screaming to be brought to the surface.

Other issues such as socioeconomic inequalities in health and health care exist worldwide.

“As with other forms of inequality, it’s difficult if not impossible to separate the effects of race from the effects of class. Nevertheless, a substantial body of research points to the fact that people of color have historically received poorer health care than Whites in this society and are less likely than Whites to have access to health insurance. Almost 33% of Latino and 19.4% of African Americans lack any kind of health insurance, compared to 11% of non-Hispanic Whites” (Newman 210-211).

Racial profiling is another major issue often disregarded or ignored by citizens. The ideal of equal protection and equal treatment is an illusion. In numerous cases police have argued that, like it or not, race in some cases constitutes reasonable suspicion (Newman 242). Such cases are what I think reveals a dramatic imbalance in our culture.

These social stigmas to mention a specific few along with others such as age, gender, physical and/or mental disabilities, sex, depression, child abuse, and the list continues are often overlooked and hidden behind fear, anxiety, and discomfort. Each of these issues hosts millions of

personal stories and journeys that are shocking, unexpected, and often more eye opening than statistics.

Consciousness and alertness of inequalities and social stifles is challenged and graphic design according to writer and designer Michael Bierut, “is a way to make a statement” (Bierut et al. 181). Social art is not a new concept. Artists such as Kathy Kollwitz who was developing prints and posters that responded to the disastrous social conditions of the 1920s, attempted to create social change by inspiring and influencing public understanding (Merriman).

Other movements in art such as the “Thinkism Art Movement” attempts to use art to make the world a better place (Kam).

“The Thinkism Art Movement seeks to use art to strengthen our civil liberties and civil rights. Greater understanding of and respect for these basic rights will enhance the ability of individuals and groups to realize their full potential. The Thinkism Art Movement uses art to fund programs that address issues involving free speech, censorship, freedom of information, equal opportunity, privacy, due process, equal protection, equal justice and racism.

The Thinkism Art Movement seeks to use art to help break the cycle of urban poverty and hopelessness by expanding economic opportunity. The Thinkism Art Movement supports programs that assist young mothers and fathers to become more self-sufficient, responsible and effective parents” (Kam).

Thinkism Art founder, David Kam states, “If you want to decorate walls, don’t call me. You better find an interior designer. I create art that makes you think” (Kam). This movement, clearly in line with my personal perspectives on social art, is probably one of the most successful yet controversial activist art groups today.

“One of the most popular excuses given by mainstream artist for rejecting social art is that “the masses” and the middle class and the corporate rich are all uneducated, insensitive, crass, vulgar, blind – leaving artists with a safe, specialized audience consisting primarily of themselves. Sometimes the frustration inherent in such limited communication leads to the international encouragement and provocation of a fear of art” (Lippard 141).

To this opinion, I say “Let my work affect just one person or leave viewers with more knowledgeable understandings and indubitable consciousness and I will have succeeded.”

Although we call attention to our social identities in greater or lesser degrees, all of us have a race, a sexual orientation, an ethnic heritage, a gender, and a class status. All of these and others including religion, family membership, age, intellect, sense of humor, physical attractiveness, etc. determine our identities. In today’s society dramatically different values are placed on the various components that make up who we are; while things such as race, gender, and social class construct our identities, they also determine our place in society or the inequalities and social stigmas that affect us (Newman xiv). These identifiers offer both challenges and opportunities, and although society knows they exist, many people are still faced with imbalances, injustices, and disadvantages.

I am human and although the process of my work has enlightened my soul, by nature I do bring beliefs, assumptions, biases, and values into every situation I encounter, but through my visual communications and commitment to inform I hope to force outside viewers to also become more alert and think differently about today’s critical society.

Renowned designer Milton Glaser often says, “Good design is good citizenship” (Heller, “Citizen”). This poses the question and examination of graphic designers having an obligation to the society and culture in which they are citizens. Does the statement suggest that design has responsibilities that should contribute to the well being of people’s lives? Although the answer is not vivid, upon finding further startling research and unsettling statistics I do feel an obligation for my work to have good intentions. My role and responsibility as a visual communicator is confirmed and after my own moments of wakefulness, my personal motives are revealed in my attempts to contribute bits of knowledge and purpose through design.

The case for awareness is profound. As a designer, conscious of the impact visual language has in our culture, I am compelled to promote awareness. “The design arts are public arts, and as such are major vehicles for forming our consciousness” (Bierut et al. 238). My attempts are not politically driven or an obsession to inform the entire nation about every social topic. Perhaps my work should be viewed as a self-expression with the intent to help or engage others. I am overwhelmed by the need to inform and sometimes feel extreme pressure when I am jaded by a story, to take it further and enlighten the world. The success of my work is no longer measured on others opinion, but now reflects a twist of my own perspectives and observations and embodies powerful impressions on outside viewers.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATING THE PROCESS

Extreme designer Stefan Sagmeister once said, “Receiving a piece of graphic design is like going on a date. If my date turns out to be dressed very well (= has style) I am most certainly happy. And if she is beautiful (= great form) well, all the better. But if it turns out she has nothing to say (= bad content, no concept) or has a mean heart, it is going to be a very short relationship anyway” (Hall 116). Visual communicators have a job to do and they must do it with style, form, and concept.

Probably one of the most notorious designs that Sagmeister created was a poster for a talk hosted by the Detroit chapter of the AIGA in 1999. Sagmeister in an attempt to reflect the ordeals of the design profession and to portray anxious and painful periods of design, had a person physically cut text into his body for 8 hours and then documented it with a photograph for the poster (Hall 191). Although, my works are clearly not as drastic or painful, I do find fascination and can draw parallels in his attempt of hand lettering and using the body as a form.

I approach my work with zealous and purposeful intent and direction. My exercise of using graphic design for social awareness is stimulated by my research and connections with events and exposure to humanity. I develop values in my work and the method in which I work to ensure my passion and acquired responsibility to express stories and evoke feeling of emotion and response dealing with social stigmas.

I choose to live and work with passion. I embrace the richness of type and image and stay focused on progressive expression. I challenge my concepts and look to the society in which I am trying to make a difference for inspiration and response. I take responsibility for my work and the awareness and discomfort it might provoke. I read stories and talk to communities so that I can fully capture the feelings and expression of social topics. Lastly, I stay true to myself and let inner desires and my own moments of wakefulness drive my vision.

We live in a visual culture. We also live in a world of jealousy, skepticism, and cynical opposition. An oblivious society is unaware of the millions of citizens who would depict the world as cruel, unjust, and hard. Life challenges are always evident, but the lack of involvement or disinterest common among people who communicate daily is unfortunate and sad.

My work is purely representational of some of the inequalities and emotions that float around individuals, but are rarely discussed or perhaps silenced by a harsh society. My work has gone through a series of forms from beginning with more abstracted expressions of comments on the environment to writing down list of words such as abortion, aggression, and fear to react to.

The generation of my work began with a combination of illustrative and photographic manipulation and my thought process stretched across into ideas of video commentaries and 3-dimensional pieces that would force the viewer to question my intent. I hoped my work would provide an environment for spectators to receive information at different levels and produce pieces although handled differently in approach and production that would all fit together into a space and capture my aim of social awareness.

After a sketchbook full of thumbnails and list of words and expressions I discovered my broad attempt to encapsulate all of my ideas became overwhelming. I then altered my approach and decided to continue to research more specific social stigmas such as obesity, rape, and homelessness. I was humbled by the individual stories that began to collect in my memory and haunt my thoughts at night.

My obligation to these issues and my need to alert others became stronger and I began to discover a pattern on all of my sketchbook pages. All of the visual images that I was collecting from the stories of distress and attitude began to come across through written words and text. Images of children and adults in our society started to engage my visual sensibilities. My body of work began to take on its own form and identity.

Artist Robbie Conal, who puts art and social concerns together and with his work reacts to politics, power, and the abuses of both, has an ideal philosophy. On his website he states, “If I can make a surprise one-liner for people on their way to work in the morning—provide them with a little “infotainment” – and get them to think along with me about issues I think are important, I’m happy” (Conal).

Conal creates detailed illustrative posters with direct messages and humor to captivate his audience. I began to further evaluate how viewers receive information and, like him, wanted to have a consistent style and an equal aggressive impact on viewers.

“Graphic design is a hybrid discipline” (Meggs, Type viii). We live in a world of information and communication, constantly sending and receiving messages, gathering and disseminating information (Meggs, Type 3). With this knowledge and my formal training in graphic design, I knew the communication of my message would need to be unique and memorable. The stories and journeys of people’s lives are what drive me so I decided to use a minimalist approach of raw type and pure dramatic imagery to formulate posters.

The power of poster design is never underestimated. Posters – they’re big and make a statement. Not only does the poster size afford the latitude I need to convey my message, but they are also popular. It is interesting to note that after displaying some of my “posters” I had very specific request for purchasing them. The feedback I received from strangers whose day had been altered after seeing my work was touching and fulfilling, but having someone purchase my pieces further confirmed my purpose.

To elaborate further on my process, I began with a social topic. I find inspiration for my topics through research and self-discovery. One of my topics includes organ donation and insurance concerns, a subject that holds significance in my life through personal experiences as my mom received a kidney transplant 2 years ago. Others topics that I have experienced through helping friends cope include dealing with eating disorders and old age. Other issues, while I have not been directly affected by them but are ever present in homes and communities, include religion and language barriers, autism and down syndrome, homosexuality, abuse, child neglect, teen pregnancy, alcoholism, and depression among others.

After selecting an issue I find the necessity to discuss my topic with others for indirect feedback and to have them communicate personal experiences or stories relevant to the specific subject. Later I find doing my own research and readings stories of victims or those whose lives have been impacted, provides knowledge and sparks sensitivity in me, which helps me more easily write about that topic.

Almost as an actor has to get into character for a role, I then focus all of my collected understandings and information about a specific social stigma and in essence get into character. I put myself into an emotional state of mind where the words that make up the story I am writing are portrayed from a first person perspective as if the person who was battered or homeless for example would have written it.

“Effective and complete graphic communications can be created by type without images or by images without type” (Meggs, Type 67). This may be true, but I have discovered that when type and image coexist, each remains a distinguishable entity and occupies its own space but does continuously interact in distinct ways (Skolos and Wedell 14).

“As containers for meanings and expressions of human experience, type and image have different properties – but they also operate on different levels of cognition.

Images open the door to multiple interpretations through varied experiences and memories. These connections make photography a more complex, and more visceral form of communications. Unlike images, words are essentially shapes that have learned, recognized meanings” (Skolos and Wedell 13).

My method involves writing a story that is personal in content and related directly to a social stigma and then physically applying it to skin on a portion of a persons body as hand drawn type. I then digitally photograph the model using harsh lighting and high ISO for texture and

subtle dramatic impact. Image cropping as I photograph my subjects is a highly important part of my process. My cropping is intentionally, often uncomfortably tight, and only projects the area of the body that contains text. Providing viewers with only the amount of information necessary focuses their attention on what is vital. The audience depends only on what type and images are available to give form and meaning to their understanding and perception.

It is often said that a picture is worth a thousand words. Although, I refer to my works as social awareness posters because that seems logical to me as a formal graphic designer and reinvented visual communicator, I have also heard spectators refer them as photography. In effect, they are photography, but dealing with manipulated typography and imagery I find myself more often referring to my works as posters rather than photos.

Long before the age of the computer, artists used a very complex tool for making letterforms. They used their hands as digital lettering tools, drawing, carving, and engraving letterforms to communicate messages. The hand has long been the tool of choice and is still used for effective typographic style. While hand lettering might not always be the fastest or most precise approach, it is the most emotive (Ilic and Heller 6). I have always been fascinated by compositions in design that include hand drawn type.

For my intention of provoking response and gaining attention, hand drawn type only seems appropriate and natural. I find a comfort and passion for the quirks and imperfections that happen with hand lettering. The stimulation and impact that hand written stories provide to my work do add to the sensitivity and personality of each story. Capturing the handwriting on

skin removes the rigid and restraint that computer generated type can have. The creativity of hand lettering fosters the sense of person and evokes a freedom and energy that radiates from each story. I like to refer to hand drawn typography as the architecture of the printed word because it makes my thoughts visible and understood.

After minimal photo retouching my images are complete. My layering of meaning and influence are what makes my work so powerful. I challenge those who come in contact with my work to walk away with an altered perspective and a new discovered tolerance. Although I place heavy emphasis on viewer reactions, I do expect spectators to perhaps reflect and think about their visual experience with my work and possibly promote bits of conversation to generate further awareness.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Somewhere along my passage through life and the art world I discovered a fresh beginning and embarked on a new happiness. I challenge my image of success and after coming full circle, now question my daily achievements and impressions on society and the art world? Rather than ending my journey here, I know my observations, wakefulness, and responsiveness to the world around me will only strengthen through my patterns of aesthetic awareness and visual communications.

Driven by social consciousness, I am increasingly stunned by the practice of tolerance related to inequalities, social discrimination, cultural mishaps, and the strange division between what is visible but not communicated and what is not seen yet concealed. Perceptions are skewed and perhaps my conscious efforts to reveal moments and stories of individual lives may spark responsiveness and leave an impression of indubitable consciousness.

Influenced by my personal encounters and events, exposure to humanity, artistic mentors, and passion to make a distinction of alertness, I will propel forward – this is only the beginning.

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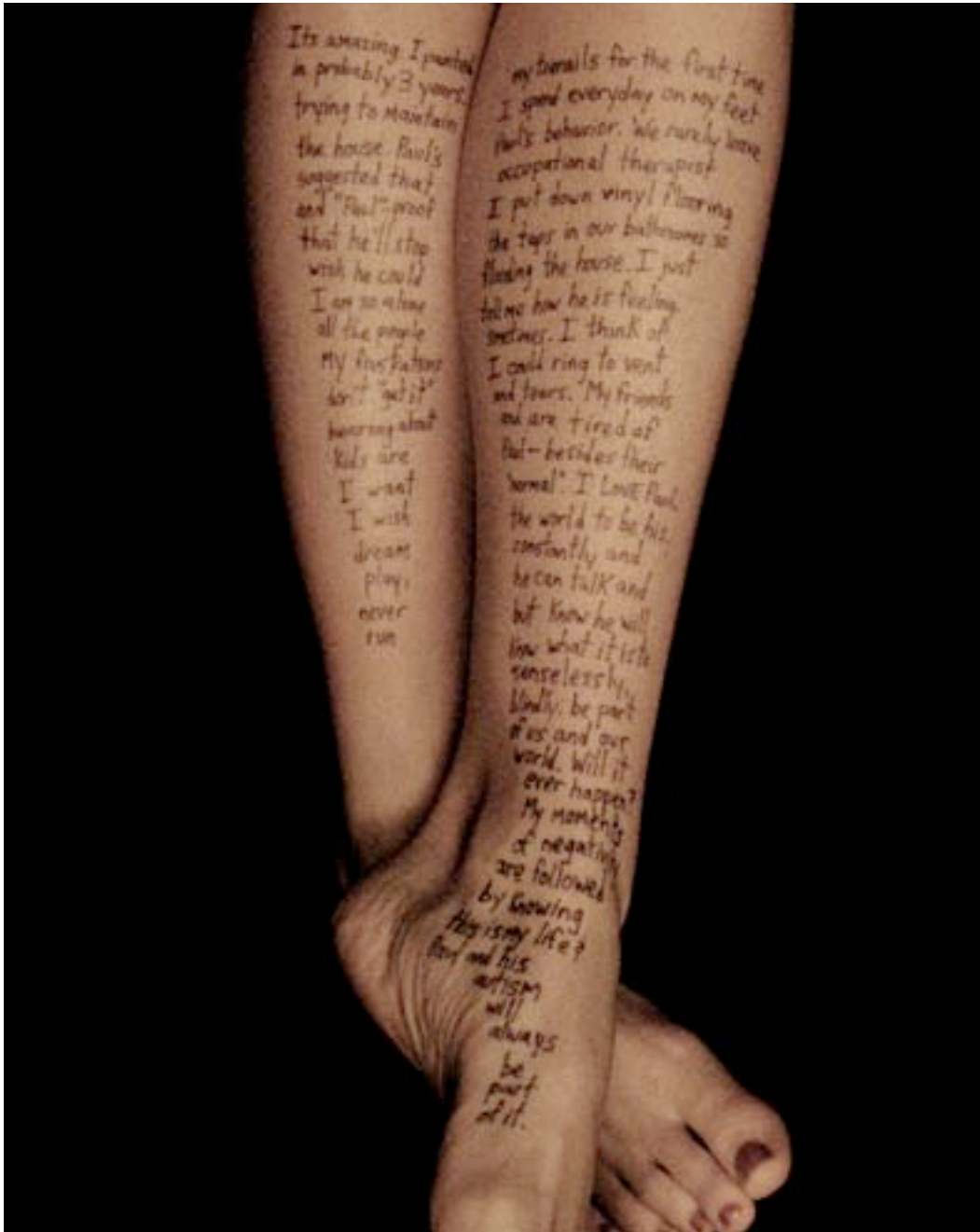
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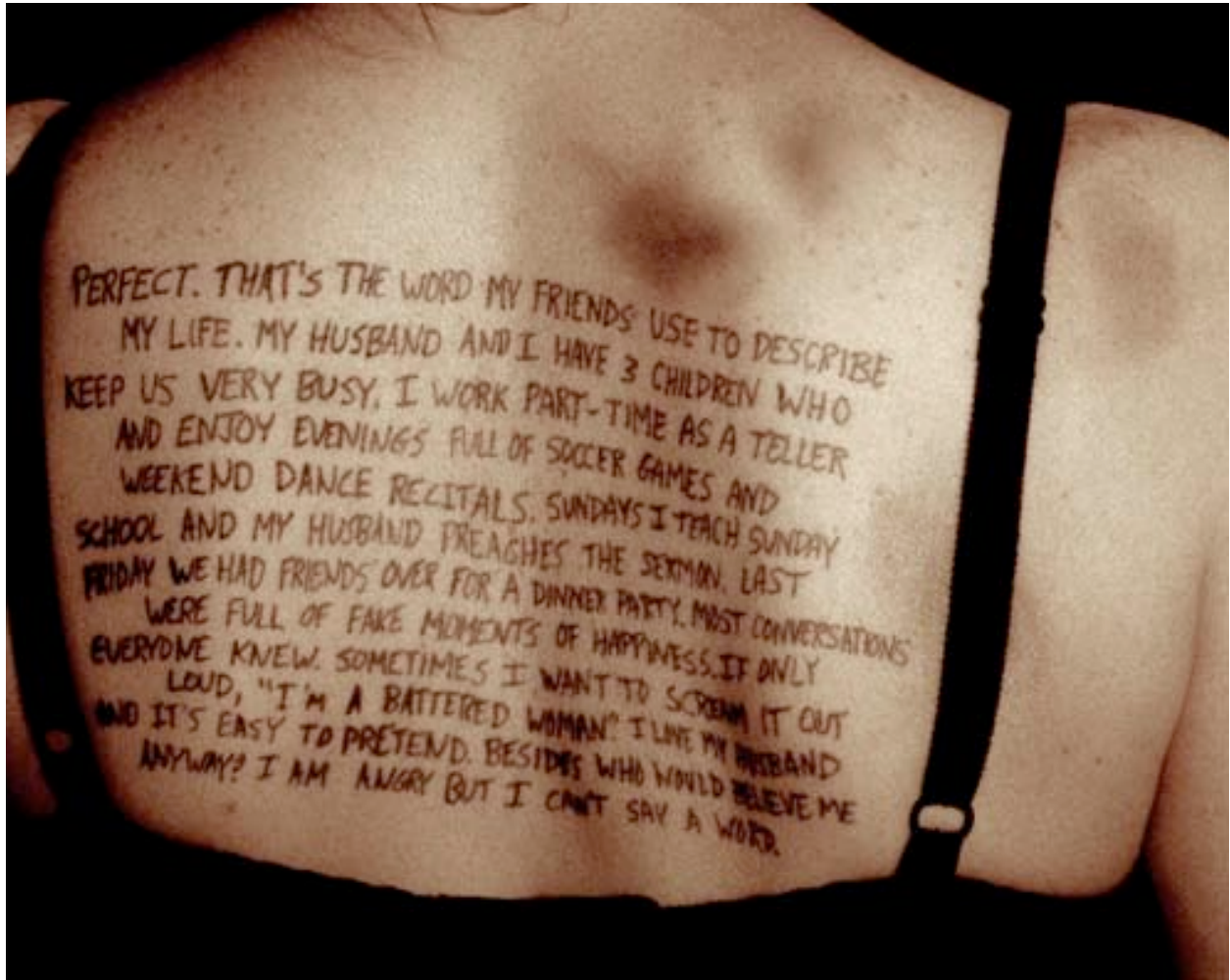
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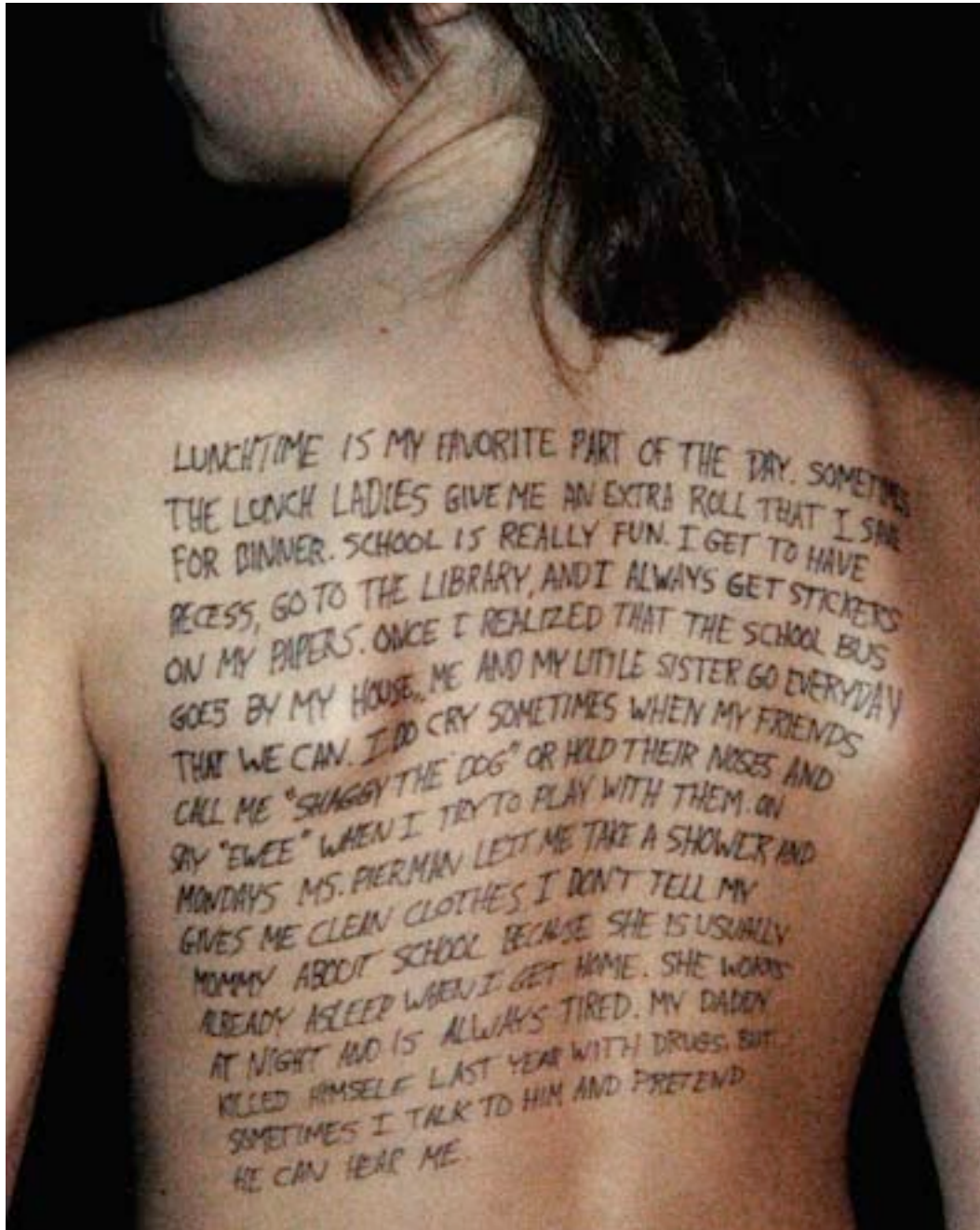
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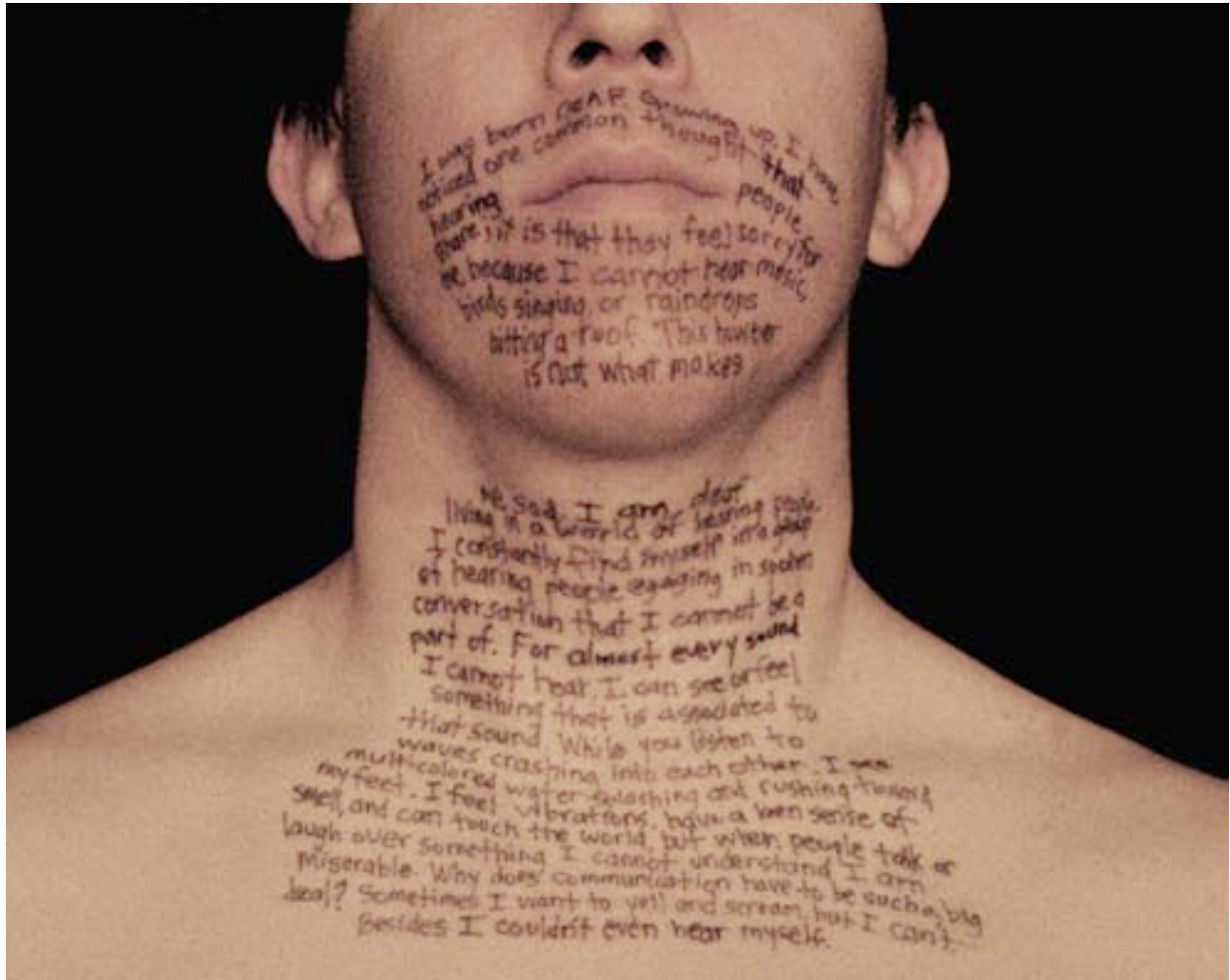
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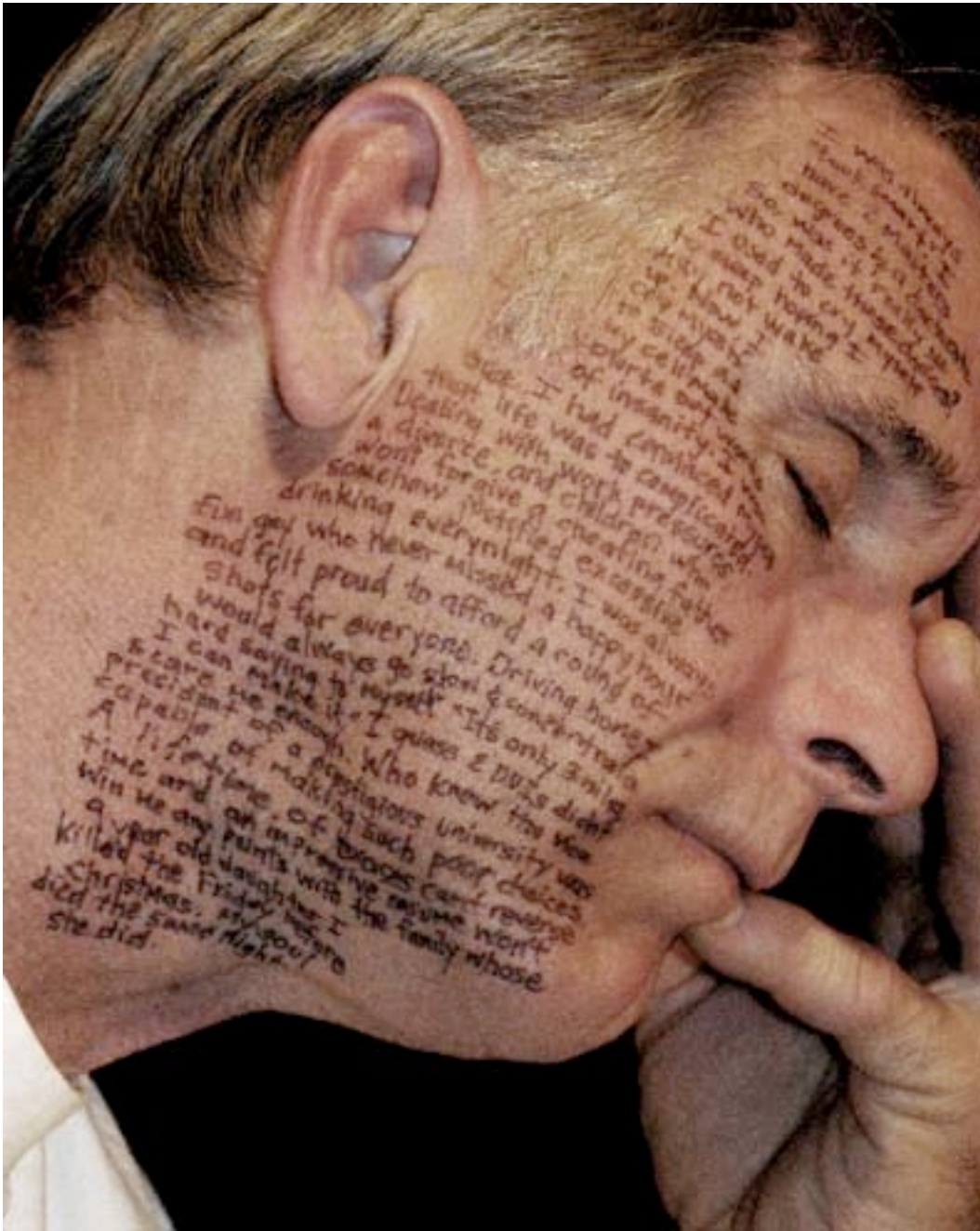
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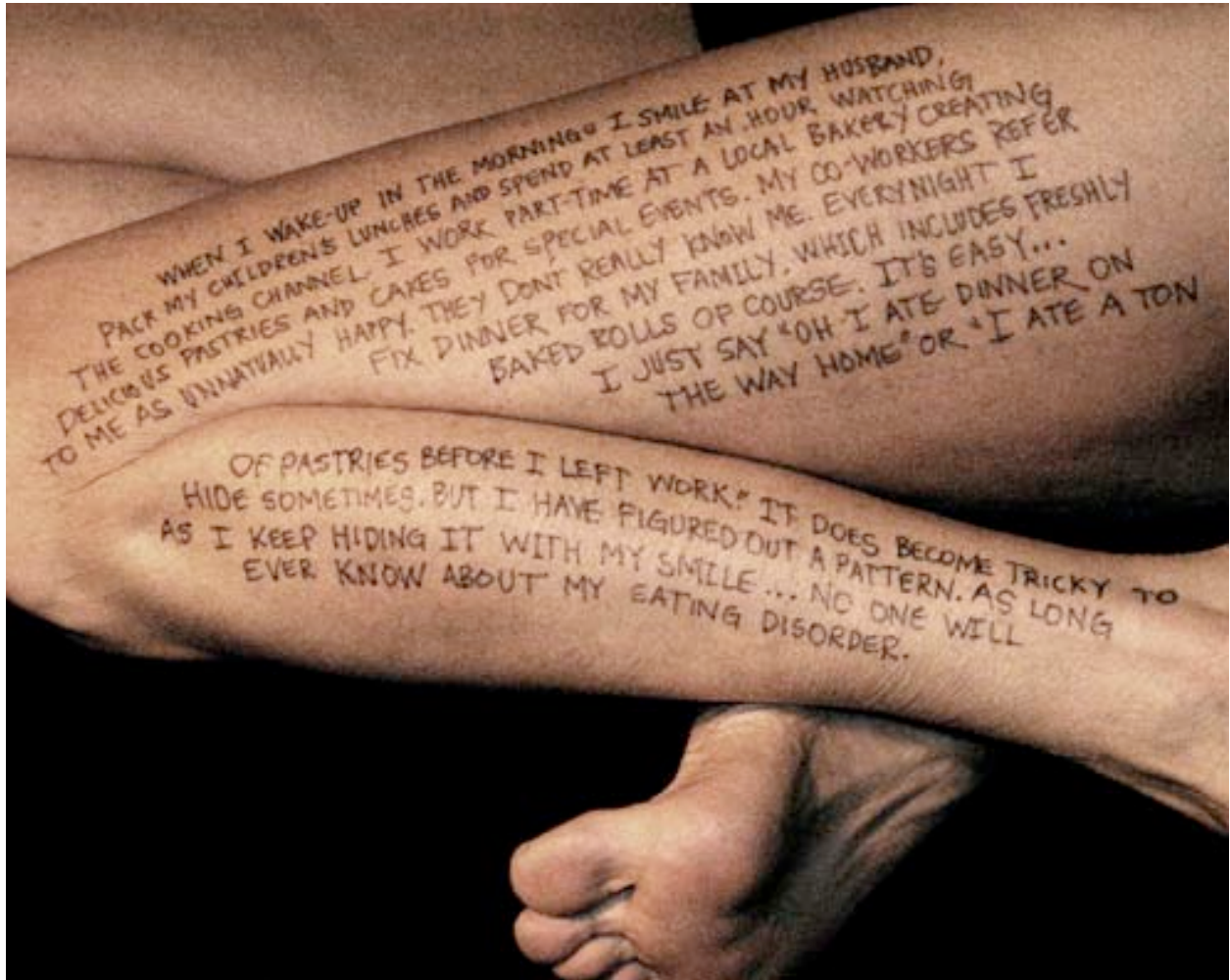
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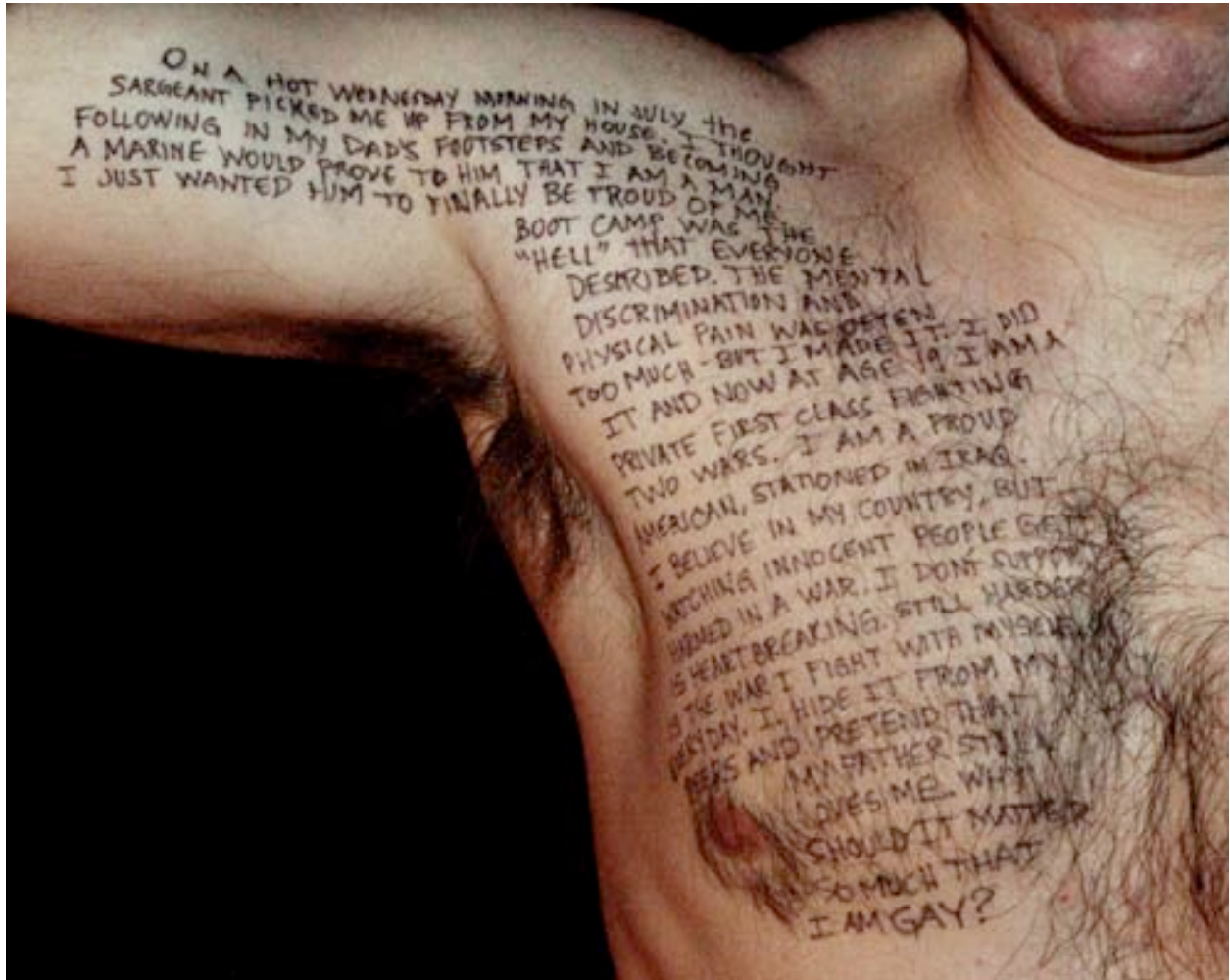
Tolerance – Deaf



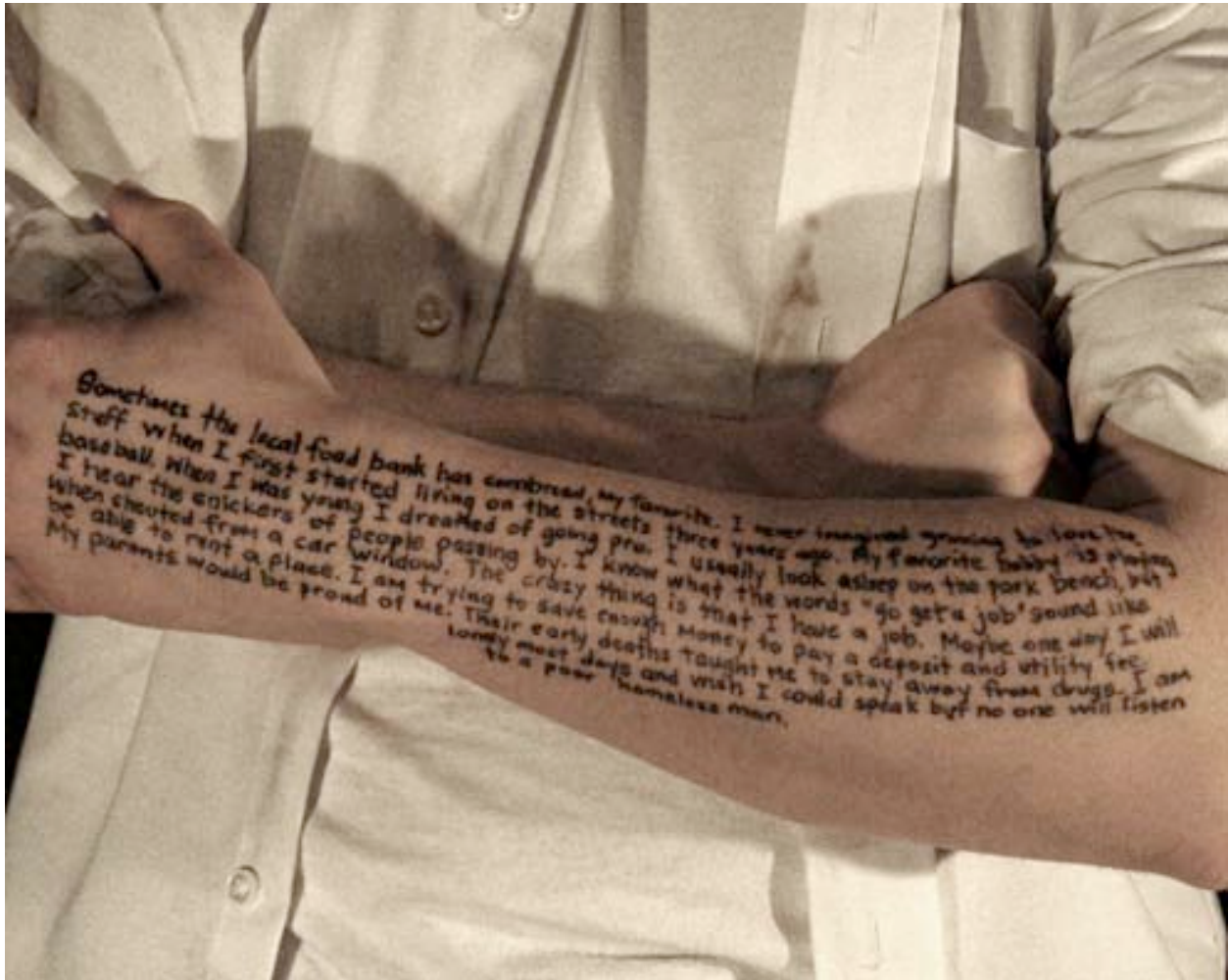
Tolerance – Depression



Tolerance – Eating Disorder



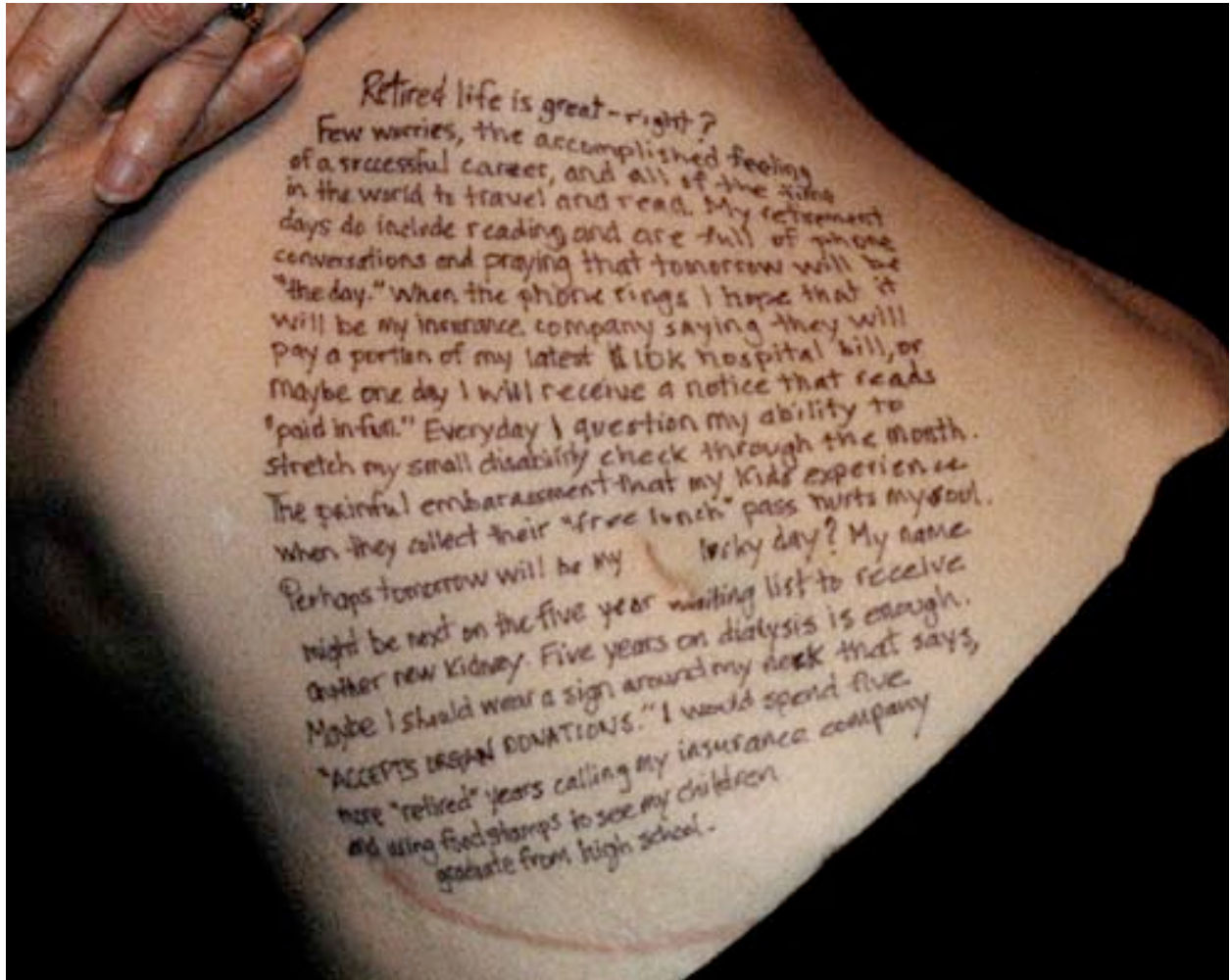
Tolerance – Gay



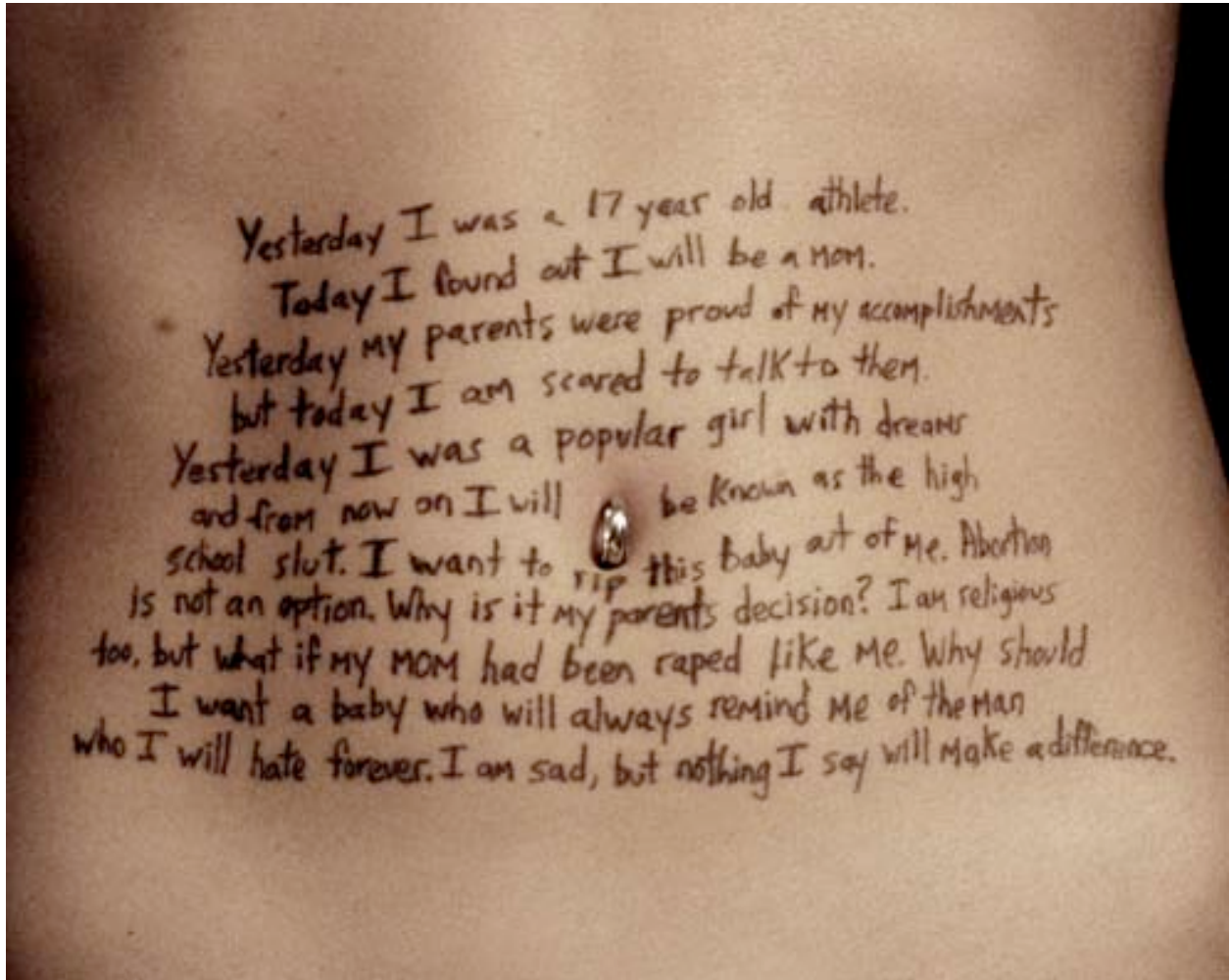
Tolerance – Homeless



Tolerance – Old Age



Tolerance – Organ Donation



Yesterday I was a 17 year old athlete.
Today I found out I will be a mom.
Yesterday my parents were proud of my accomplishments
but today I am scared to talk to them.
Yesterday I was a popular girl with dreams
and from now on I will be known as the high
school slut. I want to rip this baby out of me. Abortion
is not an option. Why is it my parents decision? I am religious
too, but what if my MOM had been raped like me. Why should
I want a baby who will always remind me of the man
who I will hate forever. I am sad, but nothing I say will make a difference.

Tolerance – Teen Pregnancy

VITA

URSULA M. BRYANT

Education: Master of Fine Arts, May 2007
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee
Major: Graphic Design

Bachelor of Fine Arts, May 2001
James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia
Major: Graphic Design

Employment: Assistant Professor of Graphic Design
School of Communication and Arts, Lynchburg College:
Lynchburg, Virginia (August 2006 – current)

Freelance Graphic Designer
Austin and Company: Jonesborough, Tennessee
(March 2006 – August 2006)
Ursula Design: Lynchburg, Virginia (August 2004 – current)
Blair Marketing: Lynchburg, Virginia

Graphic Designer
Blair Marketing: Lynchburg, Virginia (May 2002 – August 2004)
Provided clients with innovative marketing materials. Worked with clients to understand their needs and develop design solutions that satisfied those needs. Assisted with vision and planning, distilled strategy into tactics, then executed marketing programs, sales collateral, and advertising projects. Made client changes and met pressing deadlines. Enjoyed the satisfaction of developing creative marketing campaigns to assist clients. Sought and incorporated constructive criticism on design work to advance design skills in web, brochure, logo and interactive media.

Graphic Designer
Pip Printing: Lynchburg, Virginia (July 2001 – May 2002)
Along with a team of three other graphic artists, crafted design solutions balancing both the need for cost effective printing as well as the clients expectations. Used creative elements designing brochures, flyers, business cards, newsletters, and posters. Gained experience in the printing and production process of designing.

Teaching Experience: Introduction to Photoshop: Instructor
East Tennessee State University, Department of Art and Design
Summer Arts for High School Students: Johnson City, Tennessee
(Summer 2006)

Introduction to Web Design: Instructor
East Tennessee State University, Department of Art and Design
Summer Arts for High School Students: Johnson City, Tennessee
(Summer 2006)

Graduate Assistant: Instructor
East Tennessee State University, Department of Art and Design:
Johnson City, Tennessee
Course: ARTA 4002 – Graphic Design Workshop (Spring
Semester 2006)

History of Graphic Design: Course Development
East Tennessee State University, Department of Art and Design:
Johnson City, Tennessee (2005 – 2006)

Graduate Assistant: Instructor
East Tennessee State University, Department of Art and Design:
Johnson City, Tennessee
Course: ART 3402 – Commercial Art (Fall Semester 2005)

Photoshop Workshop: Instructor
East Tennessee State University, Computer Camp:
Johnson City, Tennessee (Summer 2005)

Graduate Assistant: Graphic Designer
Adult, Commuter and Transfer Services Office
(August 2004 – August 2005)

Graphic Design Workshop: Instructor
Monelison Middle School: Madison Heights, Virginia
(November 2003)

Related Experience: Internship
The Design Group: Lynchburg, Virginia (Summer 2000)
In conjunction with a team of professional designers, broadened
experience and skills through use of Photoshop, Illustrator, and
Quark Xpress. Worked with clients to understand their needs and

developed creative layouts, logos, and direct mailers to satisfy those needs.

Internship

High Peak Sportswear: Lynchburg, Virginia (Summer 2000)

Incorporated innovative ideas into customized advertisements and tee shirts. Managed multiple client jobs simultaneously and prioritized work for efficient execution. Assisted other designers in proofing and evaluating design solutions.

Advertising Designer

The Breeze: Harrisonburg, Virginia (February 2000 – 2001)

Partnered with clients and a sales executive to design advertisements for James Madison University's on-campus newspaper issued twice-weekly. Created eye-catching black and white design solutions. Managed many assignments under tight deadlines.

Technical Experience:

Creative Suite 2: Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator,
Adobe InDesign, Adobe Pagemaker

iMovie

Macromedia Software: Macromedia Dreamweaver, Macromedia
Flash, Macromedia Freehand

Microsoft Office

Quark Xpress

Awards & Publications:

Work published in the Mockingbird Art and Literary Magazine:
Second Place Art Award (2006)

Silver Addy (2006)

Work published: Department of Art and Design E-letter (2005)

Chancellor's List (2004 – 2007)

Full Tuition Scholarship: East Tennessee State University,
Johnson City, Tennessee (2004–2007)

Graduate Assistantship: East Tennessee State University,
Johnson City, Tennessee (2004-2007)

Dean's List

Central Virginia Community College Best in Art Show Winner,
Lynchburg, Virginia

Work exhibited in the Real Show hosted by the ADCMW,
Georgetown, Washington, D.C.

Recent Exhibitions: “(Re)Connect” Faculty/Student Show, CJMW Architects:
Lynchburg, Virginia (2006)
Student High School Summer Arts, Slocumb Gallery:
Johnson City, Tennessee (2006)
Graduate Show, Carroll Reece Museum:
Johnson City, Tennessee (2006)
Student Animation Exhibit, Slocumb Gallery:
Johnson City, Tennessee (2006)
“Mute” Graduate Show, Carroll Reece Museum:
Johnson City, Tennessee (2005)
“Options” (juror: Mel Chin), Slocumb Gallery:
Johnson City, Tennessee (2004)
Art Exhibit, Central Virginia Community College:
Lynchburg, Virginia (1997)

Associations and Activities: College Art Association
Graduate and Professional Student Association
Macintosh Lab Assistant
University Graphics Club
Zeta Tau Alpha Sorority: Design Chair
Hall Council
Women’s Club Soccer
Habitat for Humanity: Lynchburg, Virginia
Christmas in April: Lynchburg, Virginia
Adopt a Highway: Lynchburg and Harrisonburg, Virginia
Breast Cancer Awareness