

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF
Christy Lynn Turner for the degree of Honors Baccalaureate of Fine Arts presented on
May 11, 2012. Title: Ties That Bind: A Study of Interpersonal Relationships Through
Fine Art.

Abstract approved:

Julie Green

This project is a series of handmade books, utilizing various binding methods and artistic mediums, exploring the subject of interpersonal relationships. The project's purpose is twofold: first, to explore the utilitarian side of bookbinding as a craft, as well as the different mediums (including printmaking, drawing, painting, and stitching) that can be incorporated into bookmaking.

The broader aim to the project will be to investigate the nature of human relationships. Each book in the series will have different stories or themes, and each will shed light on a different type of interpersonal relationship, in order to determine what sort of influence these different relationships have on us as human beings.

Key Words: art, book, artist book, interpersonal, relationship
christylynnturner@gmail.com

© Copyright by Christy Lynn Turner
May 11, 2012
All Rights Reserved

Ties That Bind:
A Study of Interpersonal Relationships Through Fine Art

by
Christy Lynn Turner

A PROJECT
submitted to
Oregon State University
University Honors College

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of
Honors Baccalaureate of Fine Arts (Honors Associate)

Presented May 11, 2012
Commencement June 2012

Honors Baccalaureate of Fine Arts project of Christy Lynn Turner, presented on May 11, 2012.

APPROVED:

Mentor, representing Art

Committee Member, representing English

Committee Member, representing Art

Chair, Department of Art

Dean, University Honors College

I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, University Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

Christy Lynn Turner, Author

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*I would like to acknowledge
Professor Julie Green, whose advice and
support has been invaluable to me, not only in
the production of this project but in all
aspects of my collegiate career.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	1
SECTION ONE.....	2
Understanding Artist's Books	
SECTION TWO.....	4
Artist's Statement	
<i>Family Photos</i>	6
<i>Damages</i>	8
<i>Family Photos Series 2</i>	10
<i>Chimeras</i>	12
<i>Maps</i>	14
<i>Homeless</i>	16
<i>Hands</i>	18
<i>One for Sorrow, Two for Joy</i>	20
<i>Dreamstate</i>	23
SECTION THREE.....	25
Conclusion	
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	27

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. <i>Fig. 1: Pages from Family Photos.....</i>	7
2. <i>Fig. 2: Damages, full page spread.....</i>	9
3. <i>Fig. 3: Damages, pp. 4-5 detail.....</i>	9
4. <i>Fig. 4: Family Photos Series 2, full page spread.....</i>	11
5. <i>Fig. 5: Family Photos Series 2, p. 3 detail.....</i>	11
6. <i>Fig. 6: Chimeras, full page spread.....</i>	13
7. <i>Fig. 7: Chimeras, pp. 1-2 detail.....</i>	13
8. <i>Fig. 8: Maps, title page and foldout.....</i>	15
9. <i>Fig. 9: Maps, foldout detail.....</i>	15
10. <i>Fig. 10: Homeless page spread.....</i>	17
11. <i>Fig. 11: Homeless, p. 4 detail. Source image photo credit: John McCabe....</i>	17
12. <i>Fig. 12: Hands p. 8 detail.....</i>	19
13. <i>Fig. 13: Hands, stab stitch cover.....</i>	19
14. <i>Fig. 14: One for Sorrow, Two for Joy page spread.....</i>	22
15. <i>Fig. 15: Dreamstate, p. 3 detail.....</i>	24

PREFACE

This project started out with a collection of vintage photographs, a needle and thread, and a vague and romantic notion as to what constituted an artist's book. Over the past year it has expanded to include collage, printmaking, painting, embroidery, and drawing, as well as bookmaking in various forms. What began as a simple idea regarding the concept of family has blossomed into the core of my artwork as well as the backbone for my thesis.

Family is a nebulous concept—everyone has a different opinion on who or what constitutes a family. But everyone, no matter their opinion on the subject, is influenced to some degree by their family and their relationships with those around them. It's an inescapable fact of human nature, and when you consider the varying nature of the relationships we form throughout our lives, it's fascinating.

Think of the people you interact with on a daily basis: your spouse, parents, children, siblings; your friends, acquaintances, neighbors; your petty enemies; your barista, your mailman, the clerk at the grocery store, the homeless man you passed on your way to work. You have a relationship with every single one of them, and each of those relationships is unique. Think for a moment about the different ways in which you interact with these people. Are there secrets you would tell your friends that you wouldn't tell your spouse, or your parents? Are there distinct boundaries that settle in place when you deal with someone not closely related to you, like your coworkers or casual acquaintances? There are unspoken rules and nuances to every relationship we form. And this project is an exploration of those nuances—how do they affect us as human beings?

Ties That Bind: A Study of Interpersonal Relationships Through Fine Art

SECTION ONE: Understanding Artist's Books

It would be impossible to explain my project without first explaining my medium: the artist's book. A somewhat obscure artform, the artist's book has pushed the boundaries between art and craft since its conception. Today it holds a dubious place as a fine art, though one often relegated to the level of craft art along with textiles and ceramics and other traditional craft mediums.

So what is an artist's book? It can be the product of any number of artist mediums, and can take nearly any shape. Artist's books often incorporate a mixture of text and artwork, though some use text design in lieu of art. Some are straightforward—meant to be read and understood as one would read and understand a conventional book. A common example of this is the collaborative artist book, where a poet and an artist combine their work into a single bookform, which is often published in small editions by independent publishers. Other artist's books are more abstract, requiring the reader to form their own conclusions as to their meaning. Their focus is less on logical arrangement and more on the design of the book as a physical object. In the words of art archivist Lynda Bunting, "...there are those artists who try to meld content and design into a seamless whole. The beauty of artists' books is that they have the potential to manifest themselves however the artist sees fit, bound only by the limits of production."

Possibly the strangest thing about this artistic medium is that it has no working definition. According to renowned book artist and author Johanna Drucker, "Most people

would agree to a common-sense definition of what is or is not a book. But with the work of artists this obvious definition soon loses its clarity.” (Drucker) Some artist’s books are easily defined, bearing close resemblance to what anyone would agree is, in fact, a book. Others are more sculptural, bearing little to no resemblance to books. And there are others still which are made from found books, altered or destroyed in some artistic fashion.

This wide variation within the genre makes it even more difficult to categorize. Critics and artists alike fall into the trap of accepting one kind of artist’s book as art while excluding all others (Bright). It’s a debate that has been raging since the 1960’s, when the bookform really came into its own as a medium in the United States. (Drucker) This kind of rulemaking seems pointless, but the desire behind it is understandable. How do you hang a definition on an artform that could take nearly any shape?

The simple answer: you can’t. Despite many attempts to corral and define the artist’s book, the genre is more diverse today than it ever has been. To look at a collection of artist’s books is to look at a collection of prints, drawings and paintings; sculptures, installations, earthworks, machines; boxes, collections, hidden compartments, and any number of other artistic objects (Wasserman, Drucker and Niffenegger).

SECTION TWO: Artist's Statement

Of all the things that impact and influence our lives, interpersonal relationships are possibly the most important. This series explores these relationships—their subtle similarities and differences, their various nuances, and the ways they shape us as individuals. In creating this series of books, I hoped to touch on different aspects of those relationships—to create art that was easy to relate to, and that readers could understand on a personal level.

But the goal of this project is twofold. In addition to the exploration of human relationships, I also wanted to experiment with the bookform as an artistic medium. Due to the intimate nature of the subject matter, the book seemed like the best medium for this series: by its very nature, the book requires a little more viewer participation than some modes of art. It forces the viewer to come close, to pick it up and turn the pages. The addition of a cover allows me to essentially hide the inner concept of a book behind a blank curtain—it forces readers to draw back the curtain order to experience the book's content.

Though all of these books revolve around the same basic theme of human relationships, each book illustrates a different concept within that theme, be it love, longing, family, or loss, and each is presented in a different method or medium. The following statements will explain the driving concept behind each book, as well as the materials and methods used to create them.

I don't work primarily in any one medium; instead I prefer to combine several, including printmaking, drawing, painting, collage and sewing. My work tends toward

neutral tones and small, series-based pieces (as in my *Family Photos* projects). My concentration isn't as much on the medium as on creating texture and tactility in my art. I want it to be inviting—I want people to come up and touch the art, to experience it on a more intimate level. This is one reason that bookmaking is so appealing—the books are meant to be picked up and handled, rather than placed on a pedestal or hung on a wall, distant and out of reach.

Family Photos

This series is a study of context, exploring the idea of familial relationships by combining portraits and allowing viewers to form their own assumptions about the people portrayed. They have been reduced to simple outlines, removing them from the original context, and placed together. Seeing them side by side, we instinctively create connections where there are none.

The images were taken from old photographs spanning the 1930's-1950's, which were purchased from a thrift shop. The driving idea behind the piece was that these photos are in no way connected--they didn't come from the same source or the same people, and the people they show have no connection to one another whatsoever. Yet there they are, all together in a cardboard box in a thrift store, combined as though they belong that way. If the same photos were arranged in an album we'd automatically assume they were related--but what do we base that assumption on? The fact that they're cataloged together in a single album--which does, in a way, force a connection between the images. The human brain seeks to make connections even when there aren't connections to make.

Embroidery on Arches BFK rag paper. 11 pages, stab stitch binding. App. 6"x8".



Fig. 1: Pages from Family Photos.

Damages

The only book in the series to address the more violent side of interpersonal relationships, *Damages* describes a first person account of a sexual assault--not in graphic detail, but in short, pithy sentences.

There is no imagery in this book. Each page contains one short sentence accompanied by increasingly chaotic ink splatters, which serve to illustrate the story. The text is small on the page, and includes seemingly mundane concrete details--the shoes the girl was wearing, the kind of juice in her drink. These details draw the reader into the victim's point of view, allowing them to feel the mounting fear in the text, even though there are no details of the attack itself.

When I first presented this book in a class critique, several of my classmates described it as "scary" or "disturbing." This was my goal—to capture attention, and to present a story that's not often publicized often in a new and frightening way. Like all of the books in this series, this one is meant to be universal, and to apply to anyone who reads it; whether or not the reader has been a victim of sexual assault, odds are that someone they know has been.

Inkjet and sumi ink on Arches BFK rag paper. 6 pages, accordion binding. 5"x5".



Fig. 2: Damages, full page spread.

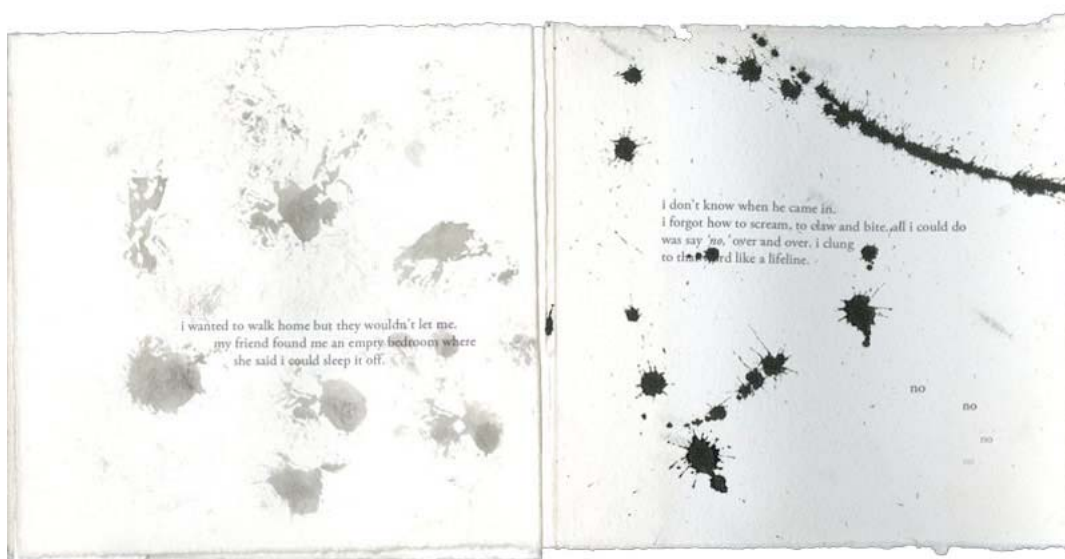


Fig. 3: Damages, pp. 4-5 detail.

Family Photos Series 2

Much like the first *Family Photos* series, this book addresses preconceived notions of what constitutes a family. This time the figures are presented in sharp detail--but without faces or bodies. We see only their empty clothes, which are intended to serve as archetypal family members: here is the grandfather holding a child, here is the newlywed couple. By reducing these figures to nothing but empty clothing, I hoped to illustrate the universal nature of their relationships. Though they lack details, these people are still recognizable to us--we can identify the newlywed couple by their tuxedo and dress, the daughter by her short dress and puffy sleeves. Their very appearance is so familiar to us that they don't need faces to be recognizable, because these archetypal family members are ingrained into the modern day psyche. As with the first *Family Photos* series, they also draw comparison to one another due to their proximity, though none of the images are related in any way.

The imagery was drawn from several the same photos used in the original *Family Photos* series. Instead of embroidery, they've been rendered in intaglio etchings. They still lack surroundings or context, floating figures on an empty background.

Intaglio on kozo paper; chine colle on Arches BFK rag paper. 5 pages, accordion binding. 3"x4".



Fig. 4: Family Photos Series 2, full page spread.



Fig. 5: Family Photos Series 2, p. 3 detail.

Chimeras

The idea for this book came from a short story called “Chimera.” (Gutkind) The story was that of an old man mourning his late wife, and it told of the theory that people are connected through the viruses they carry in their lymph nodes. Essentially, if you catch a virus from another person (which everyone does at some point in their life) you carry a little piece of their genetic code with you, because your lymph nodes store away every virus you’re ever infected with in order to better defend against them later in life. I was struck by the concept of this microbial connection—a relationship that had nothing to do with emotion or mental connection, but with actual, physical bonds between human beings.

In order to illustrate the concept, I cut illustrations from an old children’s book (*Tracie Belden and the Mystery in Arizona*, by Julie Campbell) and collaged them together to create a series of mutants. I combined images of cowboys with images of young women, of young boys with grown men, and of adolescents with the elderly. Some of the resulting mutants are subtle—it takes the viewer a moment to notice that something is out of place. Others are more obviously altered.

The intention was to create a visual representation of that unseen connection between infector and infectee. I’ve made the bond literal by physically combining the different body parts of the people illustrated. The first page includes a short introduction that explains the premise behind the book.

Found illustrations collaged on Arches BFK rag paper. 10 pages, accordion binding. 7”x9”.



Fig. 6: Chimeras, full page spread.

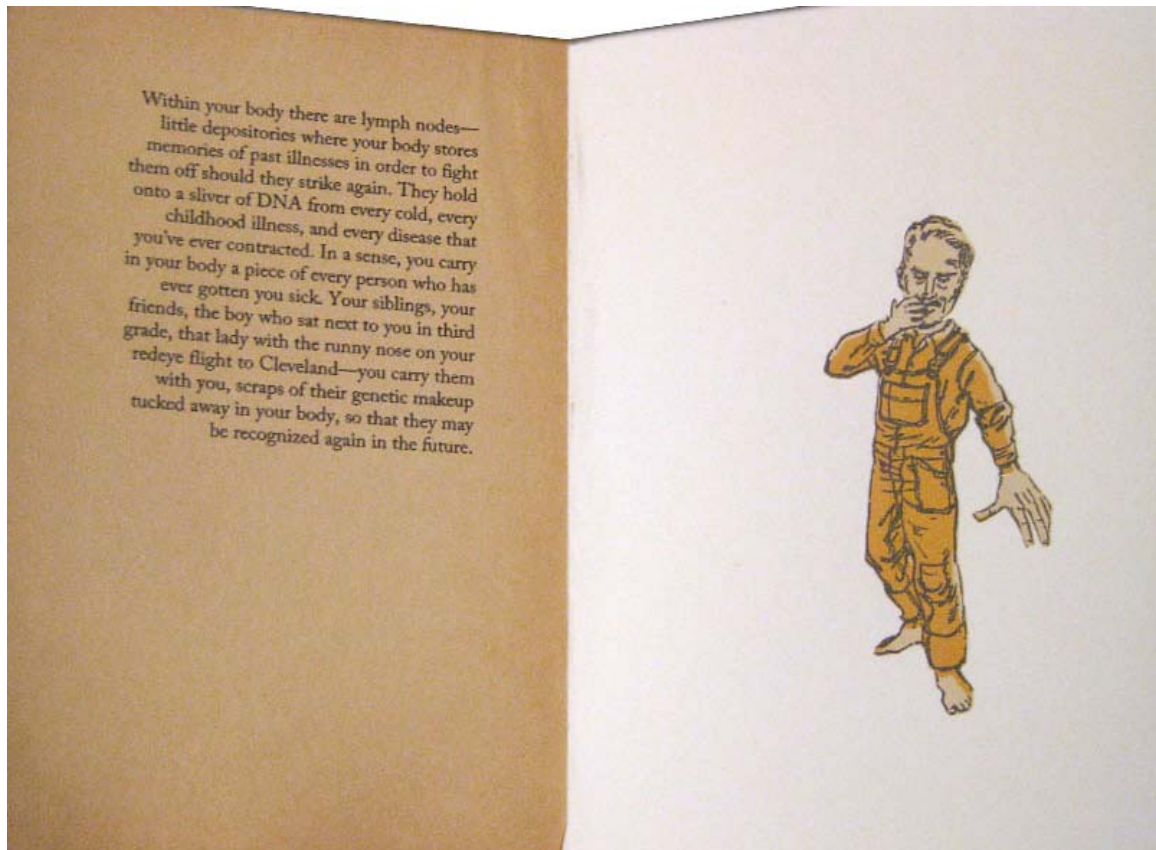


Fig. 7: Chimeras, pp. 1-2 detail.

Maps

Of all the books in this series, this one is perhaps the most abstract. It consists of a short introductory page followed by ten pages of embroidered French knots. There is no other imagery or text, just knots connected by thread. Still: the message is clear. The knots look like family trees, but are in fact maps of various social relationships--some actually depict families, while others represent more distant human relationships, like those between co-workers or acquaintances. The maps vary in complexity as well as depth. Some depict simple two person relationships; others, complete social hierarchies.

The one common theme between these maps is that they all trace back to me-- in each of them I have depicted myself as a red knot while all the rest are blue. These are literal maps of my relationships to my family, my friends, my co-workers, and every other social circle to which I belong. I have arranged them by social hierarchy, which should be self evident within the book. For instance: a map depicting myself and my parents would show my parents connected horizontally, to represent their equal status, with a vertical line connecting me to them both, representing my status below them as their child. A map depicting my workplace would show my boss at the top, with various staff members below him, then with me and my student co-workers at the bottom. The implied social statuses should be easily inferred from the placement of the various knots.

Embroidery on Arches Rives paper. 11 pages, coptic binding. 3"x4".

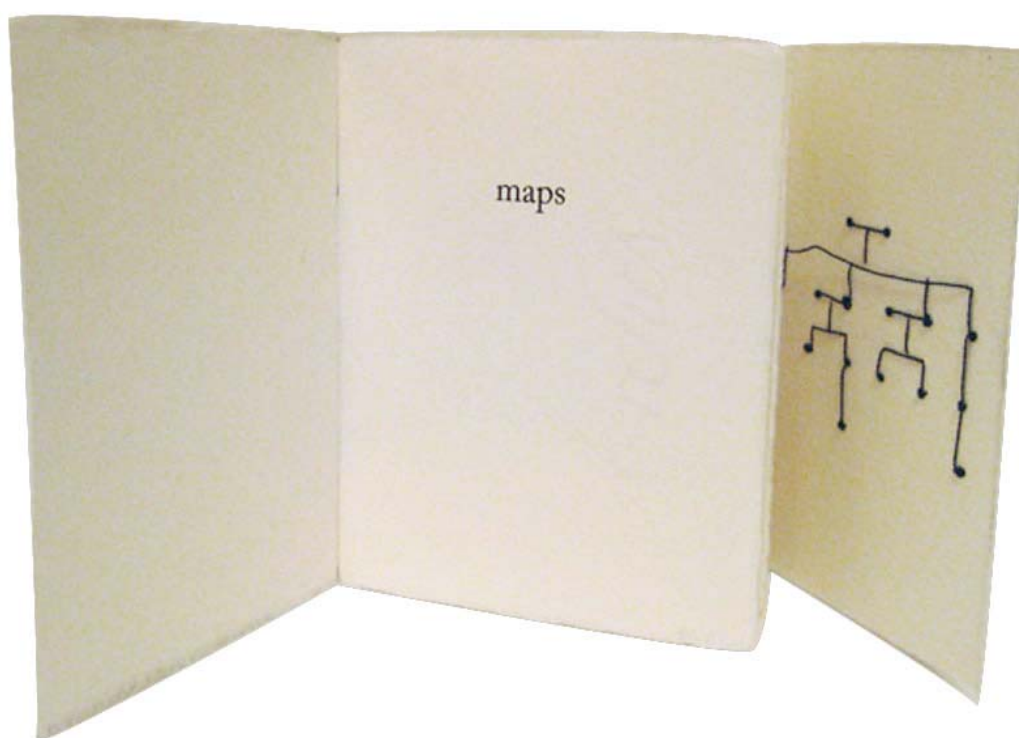


Fig. 8: Maps, title page and foldout.

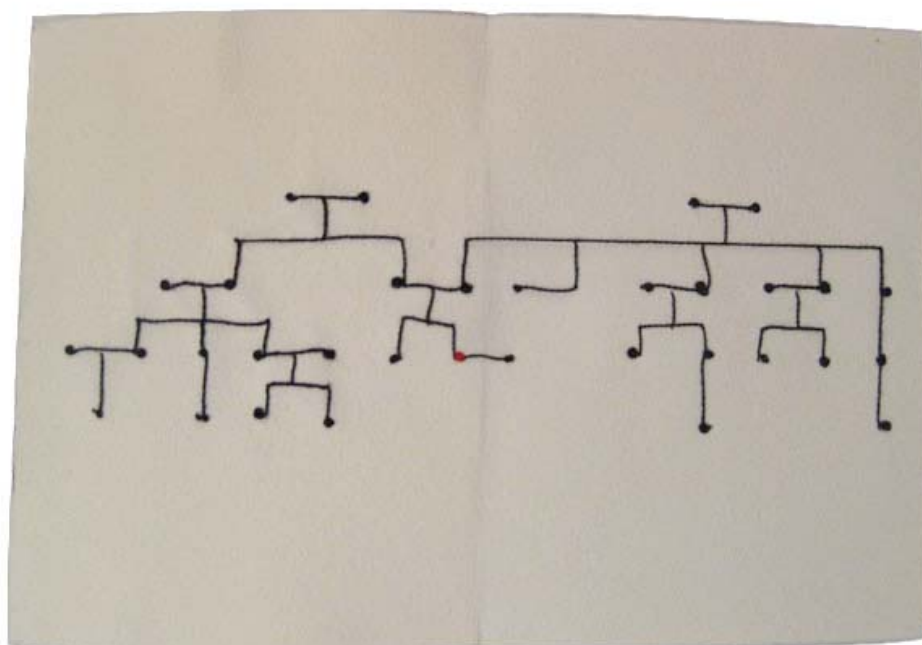


Fig. 9: Maps, foldout detail.

Homeless

This book is a simple series of portraits of the homeless. Different ages, ethnicities and genders are pictured, in an attempt to humanize the people that society often overlooks or deliberately ignores. Most of us look away when we see a homeless person on the sidewalk. But when you put that person's image in a piece of art, something obviously meant to be looked at, it alters your perception of them.

The images themselves are grayscale linoblock color reductions. The cover is rag paper covered with plastic grocery bags--another common sight in urban streets, and another sight that most people ignore. The symbolism of the grocery bag is obvious, but it lends a little more weight to the images inside, while providing a visually and texturally interesting exterior for the book.

Image credit: The imagery used in the prints was a combination of internet stock photos and the work of photographer John McCabe.

Color Reduction print on Arches BFK rag paper, bound in Arches BFK rag paper and plastic grocery bags. 6 pages, perfect binding. 5"x7".



Fig. 10: Homeless page spread.



Fig. 11: Homeless, p. 4 detail. Source image photo credit: John McCabe.

Hands

This book is the result of my own inability to accurately render the human hand. It's an area of my drawing that has always been weak, and so I took it upon myself to do a series on hands, if only for the purpose of learning to draw them better.

From that goal came the concept for this book, a series of images of hands, each illustrating a different kind of interpersonal relationship—a baby holding a parent's finger, a handshake, lovers holding hands, etc. The project is an exploration of complex social structures through highly simplified means.

Human relationships are many-faceted, taking many different forms; this series reduces some of the most universal of those relationships (parent-child, friend-friend, lover-lover, etc.) to a simple visual language easily recognizable to anyone, regardless of their native language.

Pencil and watercolor on kitkato paper, bound in mulberry paper. 10 pages, stab stitch binding. 6" x 9".



Fig. 12: Hands p. 8 detail.



Fig. 13: Hands, stab stitch cover.

One for Sorrow, Two for Joy

Perhaps the simplest book in the series, *One for Sorrow, Two for Joy* is an illustrated version of an old English nursery rhyme. Recorded in Britain as early as the 1600's, the rhyme is based on a superstition regarding magpies, a bird generally considered as an ill omen. According to the superstition, the rhyme tells what kind of luck you'll have based on the number of magpies you see. Though there are countless different versions of the rhyme in existence, the one featured in the book is as follows:

One for sorrow

Two for joy

Three for a girl

Four for a boy

Five for silver

Six for gold

Seven for a secret

Never to be told

The book itself consist of three images: on the left sits a girl with three magpies, a literal interpretation of the third line of the rhyme; in the middle is a magpie along with the text of the rhyme, as above; and on the right sits a boy with four magpies, representing the fourth line. Both figures face away from the viewer and somewhat towards each other; because of the separation imposed by the middle image, one can imagine that they're thinking of one another.

Though the rhyme provides the basis for the book, it's really more of a vehicle for the emotion between the two figures—longing. The rhyme itself has a bit of a mournful air to it, so it predicts the tone for the imagery.

Intaglio prints on mulberry paper, mounted on Arches BFK rag paper. 3 pages, accordion binding. 3"x4"



Fig. 14: One for Sorrow, Two for Joy page spread.

Dreamstate

This book stands out as both the smallest and the most storybook-like of the series. The pages, text and images are uncomfortably small, forcing the reader in close if they wish to discern the meaning behind the words and pictures.

The story itself is of a dream, told in first person. True to the dreaming state, it makes very little sense--the narrator tells of a childhood friend, a secret room, and leaving that friend, only to come back later and discover that he's grown up and has no interest in their secrets anymore. The message is one of growing up, of childhood loss, and of the things and people we leave behind as we age. Though the story itself is presented in a somewhat confusing, dreamlike way, the message is universal enough that it should be readily recognized.

The images illustrate the story for the most part, though some might be considered a little more abstract than illustration. Again, this is to promote the dreamlike quality of the story.

Small as it is, this book is something of an oddity. It can't be conveniently read, and the words and images are often difficult to make out. But even if viewers don't get the full story, they still take in the playful cover design, the diminutive size, and they get a sense of childishness. It's meant to be uncomfortable—as a story as well as a reading experience—because the whole message of the book is ultimately one of discomfort.

Intaglio prints on kozo paper, mounted on Arches BFK rag paper; cover made from recycled silk. 6 pages, perfect bound. 1.5" x 2".

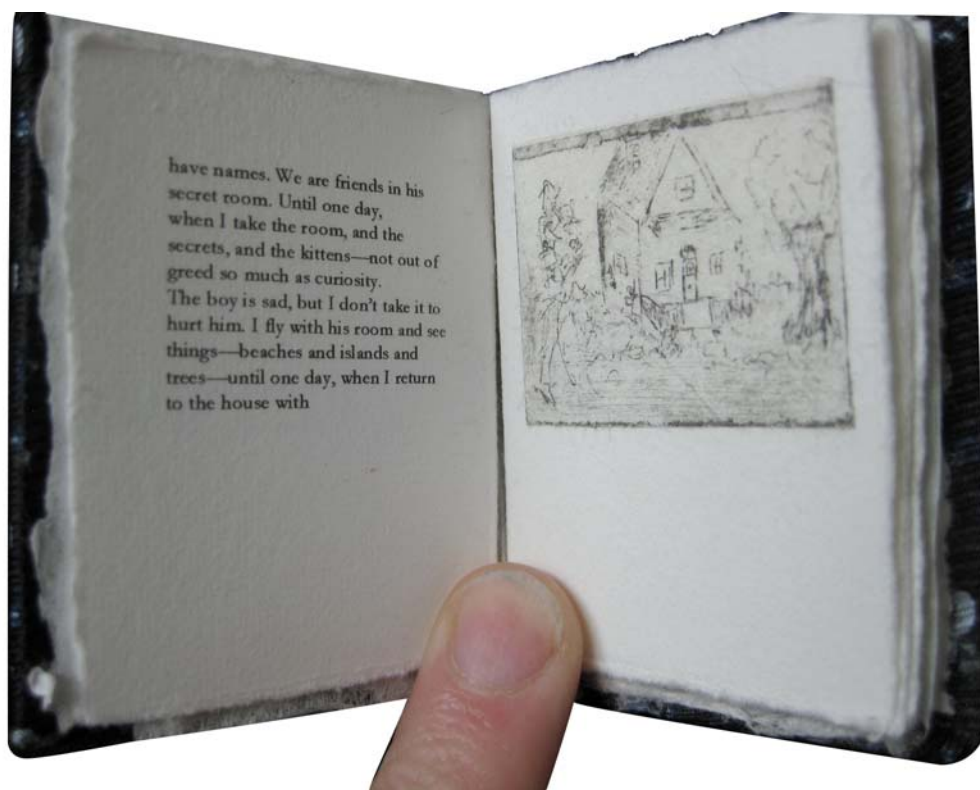


Fig. 15: Dreamstate, p. 3 detail.

SECTION THREE: Conclusion

Humans are social animals by nature—we instinctively seek out the company of others, and it's been proven that the lack of that company can seriously and irrevocably damage us. But our interactions come in so many varied forms, intensities, and levels that it can be difficult to categorize them. This project wasn't meant to categorize, but to illuminate—to create images of archetypal concepts, readily recognizable to viewers because of the universal nature of the relationships being pictured. In this I think it was successful.

In the beginning, I asked myself the following question: In what ways can interpersonal relationships shape and influence lives? And the answer is both simple and unendingly complex. Interpersonal relationships influence *every* facet of our lives—think of the ways that the opinions or the actions of another person have affected you throughout your life, or even just today. Whether we realize it or not, we base our judgments, our actions, our day-to-day decisions on the influence of the people around us. Consider the way a passing remark from a family member can make or break your mood. Or the way a negative interaction with someone, even a complete stranger, can ruin an entire day—just as a positive interaction can brighten it. These examples are just little things, but they have a tremendous affect on our emotions. And they scarcely begin to compare to some of the types of interactions that I've illustrated in my books—longing between lovers, loss of a shared childhood, and the experience of sexual assault.

In the end, this project brought me to the conclusion that every interaction, no matter how insignificant, has an influence. Most of the interactions I've dealt with in my book

are more lasting—several of the books deal with familial ties, for instance. But as I’ve created these books, I’ve given a great deal of thought to the kind of relationships and interactions that prompted them and I’ve come to realize that they’re almost all equally important, just in different ways. Every relationship informs some aspect of our life—some in a permanent or lasting way, some only fleetingly, but every interaction has an impact.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bright, Betty. *No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America 1960-1980*. New York City: Granary Books, 2005. Print.

Bunting, Lynda. "'What An Artist's Book Is'." MOCA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, n.d. Web. 1 May 2012. <<http://www.moca.org/openbook/essay2.php>>.

Drucker, Johanna. *The Century of Artists' Books*. 2. New York: Granary, 2004. Print.
Gutkind, Lee. In *Fact, The Best Of Creative Nonfiction*. 1st ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005.

Krause, Dorothy Simpson. *Book Art, Handcrafting Artists' Books*. Cincinnati: North Light Books, 2009. Print.

Smith, Esther K. *How to Make Books: Fold, Cut & Stitch Your Way to a One-of-a-Kind Book*. Potter Craft, 2007. Print.

Wasserman, Krystyna, Johanna Drucker, and Audrey Niffenegger. *The Book As Art: Artists' Books from the National Museum of Women in the Arts*. 2. Princeton Architectural Press, 2011. Print.

Watson, Aldren A. *Hand Bookbinding: A Manual of Instruction*. Dover Publications, 2006. Print.