

Written & designed
by Leslie Tane

CURATION AS GRAPHIC DESIGN

How does curatorial design communicate through object and artifact?

Curation as Graphic Design

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A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Graphic Design in the department of Graphic Design of Vermont College of Fine Arts, Montpelier, Vermont.

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October 2013

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Curation is an ever-changing practice. Traditionally, curatorial work was about selection, conservation, documentation, and exhibition. Today, the contemporary independent curator uses the exhibit as medium, utilizing space, scale, proportion, color, type, and storytelling in support of her concept. Curators who use their work to communicate are, in fact, practicing graphic design. The designer/curator communicates a point of view through a selected group of objects, using the medium of physical artifact to be visually thought provoking. Design processes are used to answer curatorial questions and the voice of the curator shapes the exhibition. I propose that this method of curation be named “curatorial design.” Establishing curatorial design as a unique discipline allows considered discussion and evaluation of this work within the spectrum of curation.

This thesis gives form to an extensive body of research, which includes defining the terms graphic design and curation, provides historical background regarding the curator as artist, and contextualizes my work in this curatorial method, specifically three major and three minor original curatorial projects completed between October 2011 and October 2013.

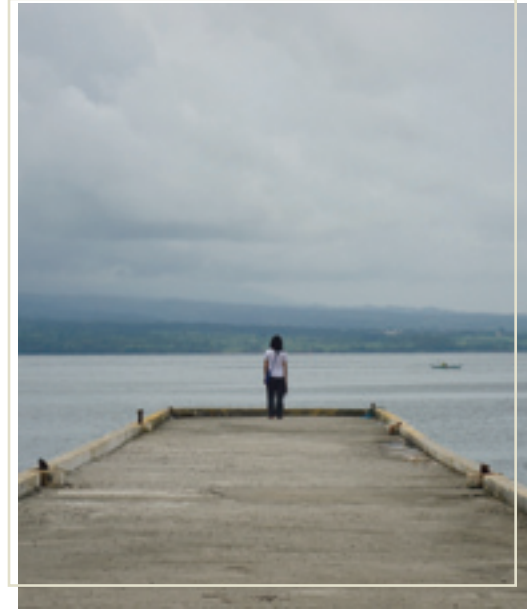
THIS IS WHY- AT I BELIEVE-

chapter one

Since the 1960s, curation has changed from a traditional institutional practice to one that includes what author and museum program studies director Bruce Altshuler calls “the rise of the curator as creator.”¹ The definition of curator that I use in this thesis is specifically referring to independent curators, unaffiliated with a museum. As most institutions have a permanent collection to draw from, the absence of that material is one of the factors that has driven independent curators to take on a more creative role and employ graphic design practices when initiating and developing exhibits.

Graphic designer and curator Jon Sueda writes, “A wide range of cultural practitioners, from architects to writers, directors, and designers, are increasingly encroaching on roles formerly associated with that of the curator as they seek to push the boundaries of their own fields. And in the process, they are expanding the boundaries of the medium of exhibition making.”² Where once the curator’s focus was “associated primarily with the care and selection of works for display, usually in the context of a gallery or museum”³ now it often includes “a wide range of activities, including research, selection, commissioning, collaboration with artists, re-contextualization, presentation, interpretation, and critical writing.”⁴ Like a white cotton tablecloth absorbing a spill of red wine, curatorial work has absorbed ideas and methods from other disciplines, bleeding far beyond its original scope

and losing definition at its edges. It is of this shift in the definition of curation that Kate Fowle, Chair of the MA Program in Curatorial Practice at California College of the Arts, writes “we need to complicate the dialectics and acknowledge the diversity of practices that continue to develop around artists and their ideas. We need to start thinking in terms of an expanded field of curating.”⁵ My theory



of curatorial design encompasses the role of curator as artist, using the medium of exhibition to communicate visually. Starting with collecting and curating objects generated by others, then creating an exhibit which takes into consideration scale, proportion, visual hierarchy, color and typography IS graphic design. Accepting it as such and using the term curatorial design delineates this kind of curatorial practice and allows for a language of critique to emerge, acknowledging the curator as the generator of design content and viewing the resultant exhibitions as neither traditional curatorial exhibit nor art installation but something unique. Speaking of her ancestor, the poet Yvgenii Baratynski, design critic, professor, and author Natalia Ilyin said, “he found the universal in the personal, and made a third thing from both, rather than ‘merely’ describing a personal, intimate scene or feeling which, though it may have resonated, did not go on to point to a ‘third thing.’”⁶ The three major exhibitions I curated at VCFA—*Miniature Worlds*, *Veri*, and *Collective Collection*—embodied this “third thing”: curatorial design.

Miniature Worlds (2012) exhibited three 1:12 scale roomboxes which curated the lives of their fictional occupants, illuminating the tension between how things look and what they mean. These were accompanied by original short stories I wrote about the characters, telling the stories in first-person narrative of the tipping point each had reached in their lives.

Veri (2013) was a curated exhibition of photographs paired with original writings. The content of the images was neutral. The photos were taken by amateurs

and were not intended to be perceived as art. However, by curating the collection and pairing the images with writings about my life, they came to embody something immensely personal. In removing them from their intended contexts, the pieces were redefined through a mindful re-connection of content. There were three components to this project: a printed 62-page magazine, a website, and a participatory exhibit which invited viewers to share my experience through auditory prompts.

My third major curated collection, *Collective Collection* (2013), addressed the question, “What is love?” through a progressive, additive, collection. Contributors became curators by adding items to the Collection box that symbolized their definition of love, then mailing the box to the next recipient/curator. The collection was accumulated in real time as one Collection box was sent to all contributors. Each item was logged into the website by its contributor, who remained anonymous, with a photo of his or her object and a short essay. This exhibit explored unique perceptions of love and the expression of that perception through physical objects. As the collection built, each new contributor saw the objects of previous participants. The exhibition itself displayed the final contributed objects and their stories.

In my curatorial works, the objects which comprise the exhibits are defined by my curatorial view. My voice as curator of these items isn’t objective and the exhibits aren’t neutral. The individual objects in the exhibits are created by others and are re-contextualized by their inclusion. Of course, there are major differences between the kind of objects I am showing in my curated projects and those seen in museums, biennials and galleries. This is partly because, unlike other curatorial

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endeavors which borrow materials for the exhibits, or which work within a permanent collection of art, I was purchasing the items I was curating specifically for my planned exhibitions. Whether these are art objects at all is part of the larger conversation of “what is art?” which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Practically, since the objects I was curating were not considered fine art by their makers, and there was no artist’s directive involved, I had much more freedom to re-contextualize and present these items than a curator would typically have. For the purpose of this thesis, removing the artist from the discussion, and thereby removing the controversy that exists around the curator/artist relationship, clarifies the curation as design link, just as removing the client from discussions of graphic design form and execution streamlines that conversation.

So why make a special definition for this type of curatorial work when “curation” already exists? In order to understand something you must understand its purpose. Curatorial design is conceptual and, like graphic design, its goal is to communicate. Unlike traditional museum curatorial practice, the curatorial designer is not objective and the objects being displayed may not be aesthetically pleasing or historically relevant. In his article “Why We Need a Definition of Art”, Kenneth M. Lansing writes, “I am also compelled to ask how evaluation in art can be carried out in any logical fashion if we don’t know what the subject is or what it requires. To get an idea of how important such a problem is, try applying it to a different discipline. Consider, for example, the fix that teachers of aeronautical engineering would be in if they didn’t know what an airplane was.”⁷ This is also true for evaluation in curation.

In my definition, curatorial design is exhibition AS graphic design, not an exhibition OF graphic design. The Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum does the latter, mounting shows such as 2012’s *Graphic Design—Now in Production*. Curating graphic design is an active discussion; the debate about the

validity of removing a graphic design piece from its context and putting it in an exhibit is ongoing. This is not the issue I address here. Graphic designer Jurgis Griskevicius says, “There’s a thin line between graphic design as an assistant to an object and as being an object itself.”⁸ Curatorial design erases that line.

TOES IN THE CURATORIAL

chapter two

How did I get here?

I come from a family of photography collectors—I’ve been literally surrounded by fine photography for my entire life. My grandparents gifted photography to museums and collections, including MOMA, and auctioned works at Christie’s. My uncle has owned the Laurence Miller Gallery, a fine art photography gallery in New York City, since 1984. Larry “always wanted two things from art: work that taught [him] something, and photos that [he] couldn’t make [him]self, since [he is] a pretty talented photographer.”⁹ My parent’s house is filled with photographs, including the works of Ansel Adams, Mary Ellen Mark, and Edward Weston. My brother collects.

It made sense, then, that I would try to curate a collection of photographs in my first semester at VCFA. I came to the idea through another project: the creation of a timeline of artists influenced by Aubrey Beardsley. As I thought about whom to include and why, it was startling to realize that I was qualified to make the decision on who would make the cut. Though I am not a Beardsley expert, my timeline didn’t profess to be the last word in Beardsley studies. It was my subjective view, based on my research and review of hundreds of artists’ work. The fact that I had a right to that subjective view was liberating.



Leaving Behind What You Have Already Forgotten



The tide will take you, or the lake will accept it all as you sink toward the weedy disarray of the bottom, leaving behind what you have already forgotten, the surface, now overrun with the high travel of clouds.



The poem is haunting and haunted, evocative, and metaphorical. What would visually inspire this feeling in others?

After collecting a few images, I decided on a list of criterion for inclusion in the collection; these included that the images had to have a “reportage” feel, could not be by famous photographers, and could not have people in them. The pictures of abandoned rooms I selected created a narrative of the lives lived there. They asked questions: What is the difference between a place abandoned temporarily and permanently? Is it a matter of chance, of luck? When you walk out the door, are you certain that you’re coming back? What sort of artifacts does a person leave? There is a poignancy to these spaces, a haunted voyeurism, a solemn quality to their emptiness. What lives were being lived here, and why were they interrupted?

These images have a purposeful snapshot quality to them. Many of them were taken by people who do not consider themselves artists at all. I found images on home renovation blogs (the “before” pictures), as well as blogs about crafts and makeup. Some of the images of deserted and decaying places were taken by photojournalists and are more artful than the photographer intended.

I wanted, through curation, to make the effect of the images a cumulative one, in which the final product was more striking and memorable than the discrete images. In the end, this is what I believe makes a strong curated collection of photography.

This is traditional curation. I created a narrative, collected art, selected those that worked contextually, and exhibited them. I even sent the collection to my uncle to get his opinion. (He was enthusiastic.) Ultimately, though, it was unfulfilling as I felt the collection didn’t apply my knowledge of graphic design to my curatorial work. Finding the photographs online, creating my own definition of beauty in the context of the collection, posing questions of the group that the individual pieces did not intend, all felt good and challenging and design-y to me. I felt as if there

was an opportunity to involve the audience in a more active way, though. Curating today, writes Clark Buckner, “provides a platform for artists’ ideas and interests; it should be responsive to the situations in which it occurs; and it should creatively address timely artistic, social, cultural or political issues. The motivation is closer to the experimentation and inquiry of artists’ practices than to the academic or bureaucratic journey of the traditional curator.”¹⁰ As my friend, designer Richard Dixon says, “Graphic design processes do not necessarily need to result in graphic design product.” I had twenty years of graphic design experience waiting to move from the page and the screen into the exhibit space. The idea of compiling objects to communicate in the same way that a designer uses typefaces, paper, color and layout made sense to me. Why couldn’t I work in three dimensions, selecting colors and working with scale and proportion to tell a story?

In order to successfully make the shift from graphic design to curatorial design, I needed to understand curatorial practice. In my photography collections I had intuitively sensed a difference between collection and curation. What was that difference exactly, and how did it affect the future curatorial design projects I envisioned?

Realizations

I learned quite a bit about curating an online photography collection, including:

- Collect everything, weed out later.
- Define my own criterion.
- Allow my focus to change as I look, influenced by the images that I find. The images I select may not be what I originally intended, but they’re better, deeper, more nuanced, less clichéd.
- Include the unexpected. Having to think about why an image is included makes for a more powerful collection.
- Put all images in one place to review them—it becomes evident very quickly what’s working.
- Document, document, document. Try to get back to original sources.
- Decide on a target number of pieces, otherwise there’s no clear end point.

All the Things: Collection or Curation?



A collection of tokens from the Shrine of St. Roch, New Orleans.

Collection is additive. Curation is subtractive. Collecting is for yourself, curating is for others.¹¹

All curation starts with collection, although the impetus for collecting is usually not the same as it is for curating. Collection typically is concerned with quantity and acquisition. Psychoanalyst and art historian Werner Muensterberger notes that for collectors, “The objects they cherish are inanimate substitutes for reassurance and care. Perhaps even more telling, these objects prove, both to the collector and to the world, that he or she is special and worthy of them.”¹² The essence of this psychology—the desire to acquire and possess—is not the same impetus that drives curation. “Curation is about selection, organization, presentation, and evolution... aggregation without curation is just a big pile of stuff that seems related but lacks a qualitative organization.”¹³

I have collected key chains for 30 years. Each key chain has a personal connection—places my parents, friends, and I have visited. The more key chains I have, the better the collection feels—but this is not a curated collection. The same is true of my collection of white vases. Collected from eBay and retail stores, the group looks lovely together, pure and simple. What one white vase says is the same thing that three white vases say which is the same thing that the entire collection says—I like white vases. There’s nothing wrong with that, but it’s collection, not curation. I think my inclination toward curation stemmed from my affinity for collecting,

but whatever its shared root, the thrill of acquisition has ceded to the desire not for more, but for meaning.

This is to say:

- Collection can be public or private. Curation as design must be public. The goal is communication.
- Collection is influenced by outside factors—value, trends, and market. Curation as design aims to make new context and communication.
- Collection implies ownership. Curation as design can borrow objects or purchase representations of the actual object.

Once a collection is assembled, the curator decides which objects remain in the curated collection. The individual pieces are less important than the curated group and the curated collection must communicate a message that the individual pieces cannot. The curator must ask:

- How are these objects connected?
- Is there a purposeful interpretation of these objects?
- Does this collection move from the thematic (collected in response to a set of parameters) to the contextual (clarifying why these objects are important and relevant to each other)?
- Is a story being told with the objects?
- Who is the audience?



These are collections.



Brimfield Antique Show



INVENTORY

- Serving spoon
- Simplicity pattern
- Franconia Notch postcard
- Ledger page
- Best-Test paper cement box
- Shrimp fork
- Navy gloves
- Mah-Jongg tile
- Shurkatch sinkers box
- Bird salt and pepper shakers
- Clock gear
- Key
- Blue glass jar
- Pulley
- Glass with numbers
- Stamps
- Polar bear figurine
- Fishing flasher
- Bug casting mold
- Metal Goat stamp plate
- Camera pencil sharpener
- Waltham razor blades

Two Dollars

On May 16 and 17, 2013 I went to The Brimfield Antique Show in Brimfield, Massachusetts to perform a curatorial experiment. This show began in the 1950's and is one of the largest outdoor antiques shows in the country, with thousands of dealers and over 250,000 visitors from all over the world.

I intended to buy everything that I saw that cost exactly two dollars. The parameters I set for myself were:

- Two dollars had to be the asking price—I couldn't bargain;
- The item had to be used or vintage;
- If there were duplicate items I'd only buy one to serve as a representative.

It did not go as planned. My intention was to collect without curating—I wanted this to be purely accumulative. I couldn't do it. I couldn't make myself buy things I found aesthetically displeasing (plastic dolls, wall plaques about hunting) or irrelevant (puzzles missing pieces, broken tools). Even two dollars felt like too much money to spend on junk that I didn't want. I created additional "rules" for myself, so that I could avoid buying what I didn't like. "I have to buy the first thing I see on the table, and only one thing per booth," "It can't be plastic," "a two dollar discounted table is too easy. I can't buy anything there." Of course, I changed these rules, too, to suit my buying impulses. I was cheating with almost every purchase, and I ended up curating as I collected, which was a different experience than the one I set out to have.

What I found is that a two-dollar collection would depend on the person buying the items, the time of day, the day of the week, and the time the person spent shopping. Brimfield is enormous and each vendor had many items in his stall. I couldn't see everything, and when I saw something I liked, I made an effort to find out the price despite my intention to do the opposite.

My final collection leans towards the typographic with simple shapes and colors and relatively little ornamentation. I like things that are old, and that shows. I also like things that are industrial in feel or material, especially when they have a patina. This collection became much more of a reflection of me, my tastes and interests, than I had intended. I realized through its accumulation that it's virtually impossible to take the curator out of the collection. I couldn't be objective, creating parameters that I thought would be hard to break, but my hand is all over this collection. Although it wasn't the result I thought I'd get, it's interesting to me nonetheless.

Miniature

chapter three
curatorial project 1

I came into my second residency in April 2012 interested in pursuing curation and alternate methods of storytelling. My original statement of intent was:

I plan to create a fictitious character based on reading, and curate that 'life.' I will explore scale, materials, dimensionality, display platforms, and the criterion and filters for curating with the collections.

I am interested in the tension between what things look like and what they really mean. We're conditioned to find small things cute, but in these scenes adult and disturbing events are depicted. Inspired by Ernest Hemingway's apocryphal 6 word story: "For sale: baby shoes, never worn," I wondered if I could depict a story in a small space using only the belongings of the characters I'd created. The result was *Miniature Worlds*, A set of three 11x17" 1:12 scale roomboxes which curate the lives of their fictional occupants through objects.

A second inspiration was Leann Shapton's amazing book *Important Artifacts and Personal Property from the Collection of Lenore Doolan and Harold Morris, Including Books, Street Fashion, and Jewelry*. This book, in the guise of an auction



Worlds

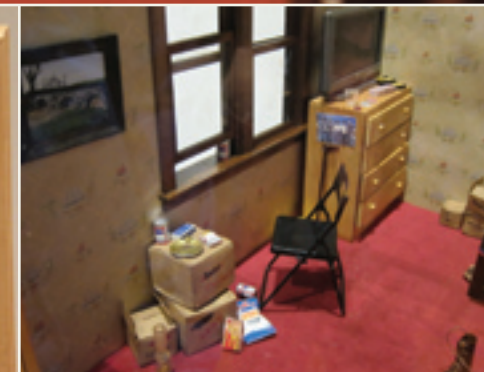
My curatorial work had subverted my plans for objectivity and I found myself present in my project in a way I had not intended.

catalog, tells the story of the arc of a relationship. In an interview with Sharon Steel, Shapton said:

“I really like the idea of objects being haunted and holding more history than they appear to. I also wanted to talk about how we keep these things. What do you take from one relationship and bring into a new one? What can you not throw away? I was interested in the life and the romance of things, of objects that didn't have any value but sentimental value. ... I was much more interested in love occupying things and then disappearing, and what's left afterward, and how we feel about that. It's about looking at it from a different side, and playing with the conceits of how many stories do exist in inanimate objects.”¹⁴

I tasked myself with creating three people and representing each character as a fully-formed person through the intimacy of the objects in his or her bedroom. I began by writing a backstory for each, which then evolved as I worked on the rooms. My intention was to develop three individual characters, but after the stories were completed, I realized that they all shared a common thread: parenthood. Being a mother defines who I am and how I think, and my love for my children has made me appreciate life in a way I wasn't capable of before they were born. Of course my work would subconsciously reflect this truth, even as it grappled with the ramifications of that intense love. Again, as with *Two Dollars*, my curatorial work had subverted my plans for objectivity and I found myself present in my project in a way I had not intended.

The sense of control that working in miniature scale creates is attractive. This is a created world, and I am its director, its God. The craft of miniature things is fascinating, the tiny little cigarettes in packs and the impossibly small underwear



Cliff



amazing. Precision, perfection, details; things that stayed with me from my first semester. Not the sole focus of the making, they were always the underlying thread that carried through all of my work.

Realizations

- It's necessary to try sample layouts/floor plans. I had been in the habit of thinking through my work in my head—that wasn't working for this project. I needed to see the pieces in place to judge their impact.
- Too much is not enough. The miniature spaces absorbed objects. I ended up needing at least three times as many items as I thought I would in order to tell the stories the way I wanted to.
- People like to make their own stories. Although I did provide hand-outs with the background stories alongside the exhibited boxes, many people weren't interested in taking them. They seemed more interested in their own interpretations of the occupants of the rooms.
- Documentation is essential in curation. I wish I had done a better job with this. It's important to know who made what object where, but I didn't record that information in a consistent way.

It was important to me that I not make most of the objects in the display. My definition of curating is specific about working with work generated by others. It is one of the things that differentiates curation from fine art. I spent hundreds of hours researching scale miniatures to determine what would work best in my created worlds. I avoided mass-produced items in favor of unique piece and bought miniatures from all over the world, including Spain, Italy, England, and Singapore. I also commissioned pieces from miniature artisans.

In the narratives, I pushed myself to a place that's not entirely comfortable. For the character named Cliff, I began with the idea that this is the day that the occupant has fallen off the wagon. That seemed too safe somehow, so his room depicts the day he has fallen off the wagon and decided to kill himself. I wanted to express something real and painful, and maybe even a bit shocking.

In Ben's room, the couple's baby has just died at birth. I'd originally planned that it would be the year anniversary of the death, but it's rawer, more emotionally fraught this way.

Linda's room is the day the occupant decides to leave her husband for the man with whom she's been having an affair. She is pregnant with the other man's child. To add layers to her character, she's revealed to have a kinky side that's at odds with her well-appointed room.

Miniature Worlds is diary as diorama, an alternate kind of storytelling. Over the years, I've envisioned scenes in my head and then translated them to written words

Ben





on paper. Many artists tell a story with their works. Artist Leanne Eisen says of her own work: "I am very interested in residential spaces; the artifacts that we accumulate and leave behind, and how they tell our stories in our absence. ... The viewer takes the role of voyeur, and can take the time to analyze the setting at a perhaps more manageable, less intimidating scale."

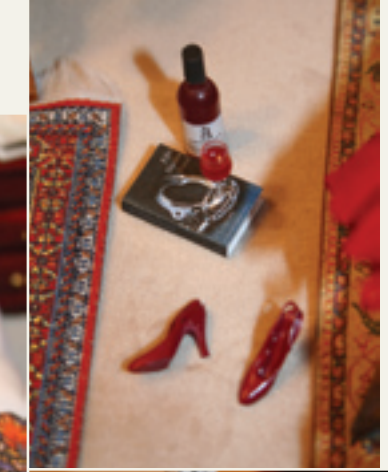
This is graphic design/curatorial design because it involves story-telling, narrative, scale, proportion, color, texture, and translating words visually. I designed these spaces the way I'd design a book, using design principles to approach space and display, considering hierarchy, shape, and pattern.

Miniature Worlds was my first attempt at finding my curatorial design voice. Although my voice was evident in the final exhibition, I decided that moving forward, I would combine curation with a more personal exploration of self.

EXHIBIT DETAILS

The three roomboxes were each placed on a white pedestal, slightly smaller than the base of the box and about four feet high. The pedestals had a hook on the front which held a stack of 5.5 x 8.5" double-sided, black and white, typeset story pages, to take home.

For the complete collection, including stories, please see page 77.



Linda

THE FOUN-DATION

chapter four

An extremely short history of the word “curator” might run as follows:

In Ancient Rome, *curatores* were senior civil servants in charge of various departments of public works, overseeing the Empire’s aqueducts, bathhouses and sewers. Fast forward to the medieval period, and we encounter the *curatus*, a priest devoted to the care (or ‘*cura*’) of souls.

By the end of the 20th century, ‘curator’ came to describe a broad category of exhibition makers.¹⁵

In order to understand my place in curation, I needed to know more about the history of the independent curator. Who shifted what, when? Only once I grasped the evolution of curator-as-artist would I be able to fully articulate my vision of curatorial design. I focused on four figures: Harald Szeemann, Walter Hopps, Andy Warhol, and Fred Wilson.

Szeemann and Hopps redefine the curator

The traditional curator was expected to be objective, inconspicuous, and conservative. He was “entrusted for the care, growth, conservation, study, and exhibition of a group of objects or ideas valued by the museum,” describes Judith Landsman Sliselman.¹⁶ It was not an artistic career, per se, although it did involve

artists and art institutions. Although there are many curators who continue this kind of practice today, beginning in the 1960s Harald Szeemann (1933–2005) and Walter Hopps (1932–2005) changed the face of contemporary curating. The two men are tied together by history, especially since they died within two months of each other. Each began in the traditional role of head/director of an established museum (Szeemann at the Kunsthalle Bern in 1961, Hopps at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1964) but their radical—if ultimately acclaimed—visions of curation led them into conflict with their institutions.



Above: “Live in your Head: When Attitudes Become Form,” curated by Szeemann at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1969.
Right: Walter Hopps, Cornell California, 1954.



Szeemann became the first independent curator, “perhaps the single figure most responsible for the image we have of the curator today: the curator-as-artist, a roaming, freelance designer of exhibitions, or in his own witty formulation, a ‘spiritual guest worker,’” write Hans Ulrich Obrist and Richard Serra.¹⁷ He championed the curatorial voice, and although he worked closely with, and had high regard for, artists, he also allowed that a curatorial exhibition might use an artist’s works in ways that went against the artist’s intent. In his seminal show as curator, *Live In Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*, held at Kunsthalle Bern in 1969, Szeemann introduced conceptual art to a not always accepting Swiss audience. An example of the art displayed is *Art By Telephone* by Walter De Maria. A telephone was placed on the floor next to a note: “If this telephone rings, you may answer

it. Walter De Maria is on the line and would like to talk to you.” This was clearly a departure from the paintings-mounted-on-walls mode of traditional curation, which invited the viewer to look, but not participate.

Hopps also made significant contributions to the curatorial field. Ann Temkin, curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, writes “for Hopps, everything about the so-called job of the curator was an adventure worthy of a detective novel: unearthing early work, solving the puzzle of a patchy provenance, or seducing the recalcitrant lender. In the end, though, it was all about the installation: The most remarkable hours were those spent with his treasured scale models of the galleries, and, finally, with the works of art themselves.”¹⁸

One of the exhibits Hopps is famous for is *36 Hours*, held in 1978 at the Museum of Temporary Art in Washington, D.C. Stretching the definition of curation to the limit, Hopps’ show exhibited every single piece of art brought to the gallery during a specified 36-hour period. Hopps himself hung them immediately upon receipt and the show finally reached a total of over 400 works on display. De-emphasizing the idea of curator as arbiter, selector and taste maker, *36 Hours* forced the viewer to ask “What is art?”

What Szeemann and Hopps brought to curation was a new sense of possibility. They were the first star curators, the first to have their names known outside their world. “Although Szeemann and Hopps were very different in many ways, they shared certain fundamental values: an understanding of the importance of remaining independent of institutional prejudices and arbitrary power arrangements; a keen sense of history; the willingness to continually take risks intellectually, aesthetically and conceptually; and an inexhaustible curiosity about—and respect for—the way artists work,” writes David Levi Strauss.¹⁹ The work of Szeemann and Hopps laid the foundation for the artist-as-curator/curator-as-artist, and their explorations with the authorial voice in their exhibitions inspired the work of future curators.

Andy Warhol: Curator

Say “Andy Warhol” and a number of things come to mind: 15 minutes of fame, Campbell Soup cans, Superstars, the Factory, and Pop Art are just a few. Only infrequently does “curator” make the list. He did guest-curate a museum show in 1969, however, which had far reaching effects in the curatorial world.

In 1969, the RISD Museum invited Andy Warhol to curate an exhibition featuring works he selected from the museum’s permanent collection. The exhibition was eventually named *Raid the Icebox I*. According to Judith Tannenbaum, curator of contemporary art at the RISD Museum, “Warhol was drawn to an eclectic mix of objects. He liked the cabinets of shoes in storage and displayed all of them exactly as they were stored. He also chose baskets, Navajo blankets, paintings, ceramics and costume accessories. He created an alternative museum. *Raid the Icebox I* has become a landmark exhibition, the precursor of ‘artist’s interventions’ of the 1990s that rethink the nature of traditional collecting museums.”²⁰



The exhibit was not well-received at the time. Instead of creating elaborate setups, or spare exhibits highlighting the art in the permanent collection, Warhol (1928–1987) exerted his curatorial voice—loudly. In many ways, *Raid the Icebox* became a show not about RISD Museum’s collection but about Andy Warhol. While the public and the gallery staff at RISD were displeased with his apparent disrespect for the collection, the exhibit opened the door to methods of curation that put the curator center stage. It was also an early instance of curator as graphic designer. Warhol used the objects in the collection to transmit a point of view. By purposeful selection and arrangement, he communicated in three dimensions.

Fred Wilson Makes a Point

In 1992, Fred Wilson (b. 1954), in partnership with The Contemporary in Baltimore, developed an installation at the Maryland Historical Society called *Mining the Museum*. His approach was subtractive instead of additive and served as political and social commentary on the museum and society itself. Wilson, an African-American, created exhibits that were remarkable for the absence of objects, not their inclusion.



For instance, in the first room of the exhibit, the audience was confronted with a silver globe—an advertising industry award given at clubs in the first half of the century—bearing the single word “Truth.” The trophy was flanked by, on the one side, a trio of portrait busts of prominent white men and, on the other side, three empty black pedestals. The busts were of Napoleon, Henry Clay, and Andrew Jackson. None of these worthies had ever lived in Maryland; they exemplified those deemed deserving of sculptural representation and subsequent museum acquisition. The empty busts were labeled Harriet Tubman, Benjamin Banneker, and Frederick Douglass, three important African-American Marylanders who were overlooked by the ostensibly “local” institution.²¹

Though this is another example of a prominent curator’s voice, Wilson doesn’t necessarily view himself as a curator, per se. In fact, all of these men—Szeemann, Hopps, Warhol, and Wilson—struggled with the title of curator. This is where the term curatorial design would be vital, allowing for the creativity, passion, and

strong viewpoint each of the four brought to their work without confining them to the traditional role of caretaker/documenter.

Wilson has said that, although he studied art, he no longer has a strong desire to make things with his hands: 'I get everything that satisfies my soul from bringing together objects that are in the world, manipulating them, working with spatial arrangements, and having things presented in the way I want to see them.' Thus, Wilson creates new exhibition contexts for the display of art and artifacts found in museum collections—including wall labels, sound, lighting, and non-traditional pairings of objects.²²

Noted curator Fred Wilson, in discussing what he loves about his work, is describing graphic design.

BUT WHAT IS GRAPHIC-

chapter five

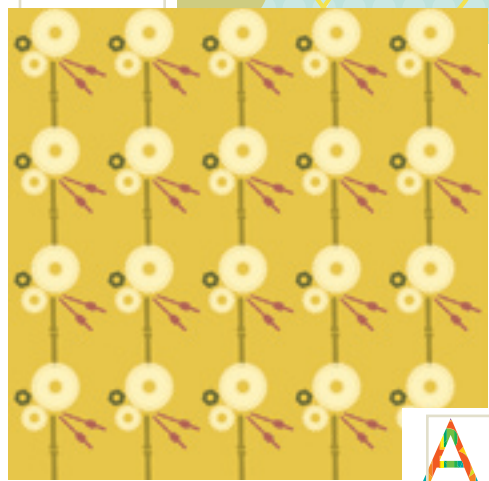
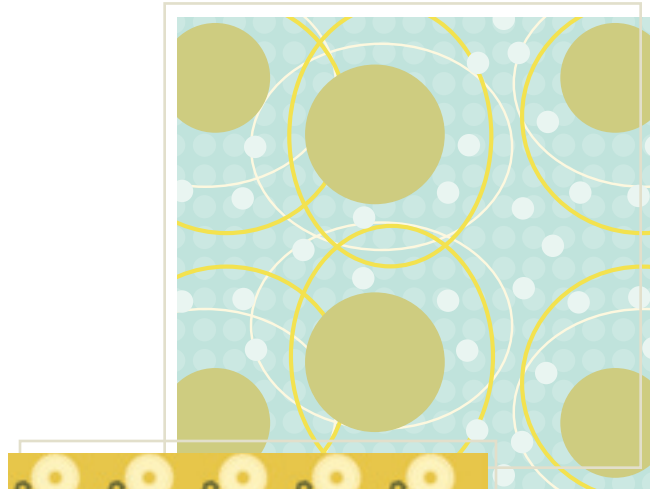
Sometimes it seems that the answer is: anything you want it to be.

In 1969, Charles Eames defined design as “a plan for arranging elements in such a way as to best accomplish a particular purpose.”²³ Designer and curator Peter Bil’ak writes:

“Graphic design has for a long time been defined as a service of a designer for a client, rooted in external impulses rather than internal ones. Design work done without a client hangs in a limbo between art and design. Graphic design is a fairly young profession, and as such still in a state of development. It is expanding to encompass various activities: writing, organizing, conceptualizing, reflecting. This is no longer design which is only defined by business cards and logos.”²⁴

And French designers M/M Paris assert that “Graphic design could embody a lot of activities, and the definition is not fixed, but continually evolving. Because it is still a new profession, the best graphic designers are the ones who reinvent their field and surprise.”²⁵

DESIGN?



A selection of my work from semester one exploring the history of graphic design through design exercises.

So design really can be ... anything. But not quite. I believe that graphic design must communicate through a visual medium. Though contrary to popular perception, I agree with graphic designer Ian Lynam when he says:

“I am of the belief that Fine Art is, in fact, a subset of Design. It is something that most folks don’t question because collectively, we as denizens of First World nations have continually been told that Design is a subset of Art.

All Art is in fact *designed*. Parameters have been drawn up for projects that exist as Fine Art, and the underlying nature of this parameter-building is Design.”²⁶

Design, not fine art, is the umbrella discipline in the arts. Some of the decisions that a graphic designer needs to make include: size, proportion, visual hierarchy, spacial arrangement, color, contrast, value, pattern, repetition, typography, branding, composition and balance. Graphic designers work on the screen, in print, and multi-dimensionally, with light and sound and intangibles. Graphic designers are an inextricable part of the culture, continually making incursions into territory occupied by other arts.

Audience participation and engagement is an important element in both curation and graphic design. “Critics are now considering the exhibition an utterance in its own right. This has given the curator the means to agitate, speak and to be listened to,” write Elise Morland Gerd and Heidi Bale Amundsen.²⁷ Curatorial design is communicating through object and artifact, telling a story, and engaging the viewer.

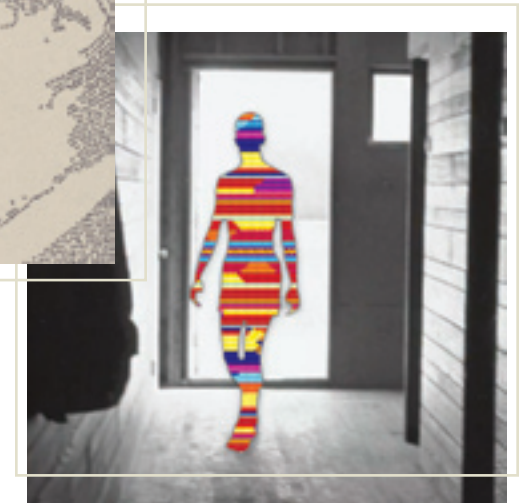
In an interview with Israeli graphic designer Yotam Hadar, researcher Maddalena Dalla Mura asked about this:

Dalla Mura: Graphic designers seem to show growing interest in participating in exhibitions, or in initiating them. What aims do you read behind these forms, this phenomenon?

Hadar: [One] reason for this need to share one’s work is the rise of what is usually referred to as the “Designer as Author” issue—i.e. designers being responsible for the content of their work, not just the shape of it...

There is [also] the eternal debate of “Design as Art, Design vs. Art”. Is graphic design art? Are graphic designers artists? Design exhibitions are fertile grounds for continuing this debate.²⁸

My second major curatorial project exemplified the link between curation and graphic design and served as an example of curatorial design. A project in three parts, it exerted my curatorial voice in a profoundly personal way.



Veri

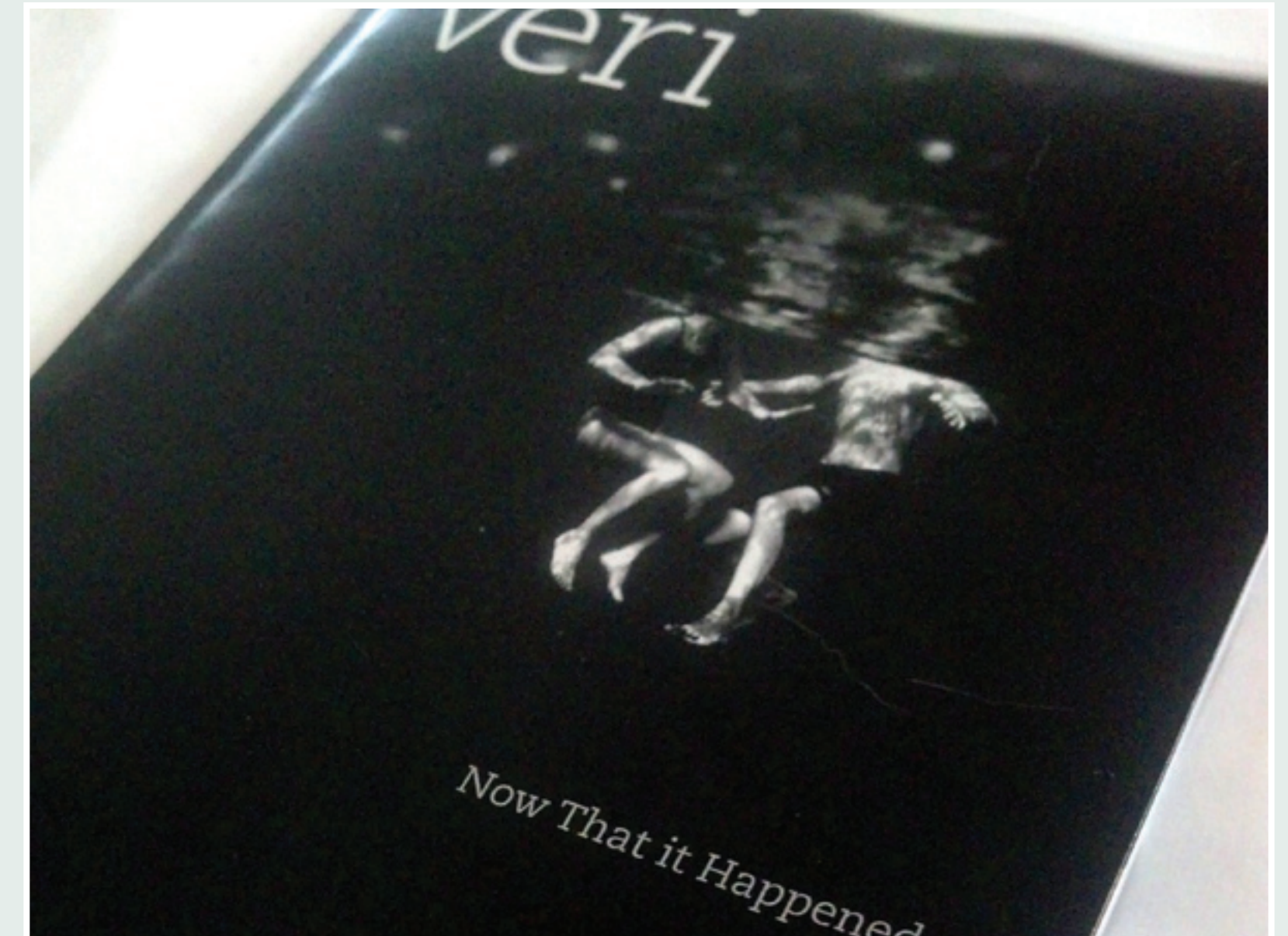
chapter six

curatorial project 2

“Mental illness is one of the leading causes of disability in the United States. Among adults aged 18 or older, the rate of serious mental illness (SMI) in the past year was 4.6 percent, which equates to 10.4 million Americans with SMI.”²⁹

Veri documents my experience with bipolar II disorder through writing and a curated collection of photography. *Miniature Worlds* was curated to be impersonal, although the reality was that I could be found in all of the stories and rooms I created. *Veri* was purposefully intimate and intentionally revealing. My whole life has been an attempt to reconcile myself to myself. Bipolar—two poles, two extremes. How could I tell that story through design and curation?

Assembling *Veri* led me to a new way to look at curation. Instead of being variations on a specific theme, these were images that answered a personal question: what does it mean to me to have bipolar illness? This is a contemporary view of the curatorial role in an exhibition. Where once the curator was expected to be objective and invisible, many are moving toward a more creative approach to their



work. This is not to confuse curators with artists. Art theorist and author Terry Smith makes the argument that:

“Curators think in and through the making of exhibitions: they look at works of art in terms of their potential exhibition value, they visualize exhibitions beforehand, imagine pathways through them, change things during the installation, and learn from the finalized exhibition. ... Artists do not necessarily envisage their works in exhibitions, although they may, but if so, it will be *after* having worked through mediums, situations, and contexts. Curators begin at this point: they are the first to really make artworks public.”³⁰

METHODOLOGY

To create the curated collection, I did Google image searches with search parameters in place. Over the course of six months, I reviewed over 20,000 images. Once I found an interesting image, I visited the web page where it was found to learn more about the photographer and the intent of the photograph. The photographs I chose were taken by people who do not necessarily have bipolar disorder and were not created to comment on or reflect mental illness—the inference in all cases was mine. While collecting the photographs, I also wrote a narrative of my life as a series of short essays. The writings and the image searches were kept separate—only when the writing was completed and the images compiled did I match them.

In removing the images from their intended contexts, the pieces were redefined through a mindful re-connection of content. Finding ambiguous

The magazine and the website



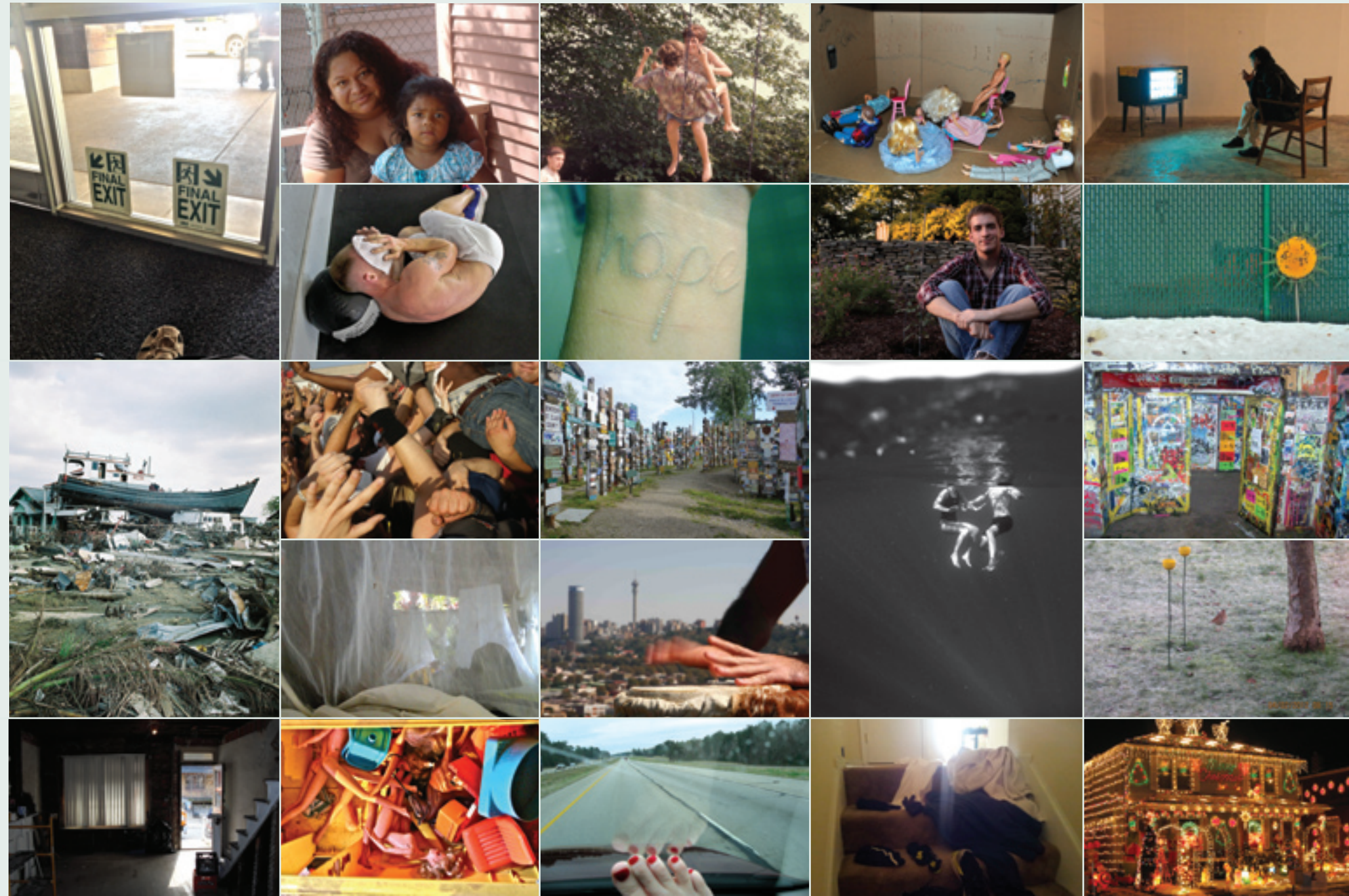
images that resonated with me, pairing them with text that was immensely personal, then designing the pages to best integrate the image and text is curatorial design.

As I worked on curating the art for *Veri*, I examined the difference between curation and art direction in this context. I was collecting artwork for a magazine and a website, something I would ordinarily identify that as art direction, or at least as the responsibility of an art director. Here, however, I had put myself in the role of art director and as such I was curating the works of art for the project. The difference was the authorial voice.

The initial name of the project was *BP2*, but two months into it I changed the name to *Veri*. *BP2*, for bipolar II, defined me and my work by my illness. *Ver* or *veri* is the root of the Latin word *verus* which means true or genuine. Since this project became a vehicle of truth for me, both about myself and to myself, I wanted a name that reflected that. I also liked that its homophone is “very” which most people with bipolar illness can relate to. Very happy. Very sad. Very emotional. Very crazy. We are not people who do things halfway.

In order to share this work, I designed, produced, and had printed *Veri*, a 62 page 7 x 10” magazine which incorporates curated collections of photography, poems and writings by others, statistics and a glossary, and my own writings. I also created a companion website and installed a participatory exhibit. The magazine, website, and exhibit present the same content in different forms, an attempt for me to understand how exhibition and design affect curation.

Veri was purposefully intimate and intentionally revealing. My whole life has been an attempt to reconcile myself to myself. Bipolar—two poles, two extremes. How could I tell that story through design and curation?



Realizations

- Presentation means everything. Although the content in the magazine and the website was largely the same, the experience was very different. Most people told me that they far preferred the printed version. I designed the website so that there were multiple entry points into the stories and images; the magazine was intended to be read from front cover to back cover. That control over the order in which content was consumed made a huge difference.
- Personal is powerful. When I started, I believed that this was an intimate, maybe even self-indulgent, project. As I grew closer to finishing, I began to realize that it was something quite different. The more I revealed through writing and image choice, the more relatable the project became.
- Some projects need more time. It took me four and a half months to figure out exactly what I wanted to say and how I wanted to say it. Some ideas need to be nurtured, explored, taken down wrong alleys, righted, revised, revisited, and expanded. Repeat ad infinitum.
- Participation changes perspectives. Author Nina Simon writes that participatory exhibits create a space where “visitors can create, share, and connect with each other around content.”³¹ Taking part in the exhibit made the experience immediate for the participants and sharing their experiences became a part of the extended exhibition.

EXHIBIT DETAILS

Copies of the printed magazine were available to be taken home. The website contained all of the magazine content as well as over 70 supplementary photos. In the gallery, visitors were invited to share the experiences of having bipolar II and the curatorial aspect of creating *Veri* through the participatory exhibition.

The exhibit consisted of a desk and chair in a screened in area. On the desk was a pair of headphones, a variety of pens, and a white dish holding pins. There was also a sign instructing the participant to take a paper bag and pen and turn on the headphones. On an adjacent shelf there was a basket containing 5 x 8" kraft paper envelopes, sealed with a *Veri* logo sticker. A basket of *Veri* magazines rested on the bottom shelf. Against an opposite wall was a 72 x 48" corkboard and an exhibit sign. The sign explained the project and advised that participating in the exhibit may not be appropriate for children.

One at a time, people sat at a desk in the screened in area. They put on the headphones to listen to the following instructions, spoken over the background of “Horn” by Nick Drake:

- Open your paper bag.
- Take out the picture inside. [4 x 6" photo from a curated collection, similar to the images that were in *Veri*]
- On the back of the picture, write down five things you like about yourself. You have 60 seconds.
- Cross out everything you’ve written
- Write “I hate myself. I wish I was dead.”

- Flip your picture over so you can see the image.
- Write somewhere on the side with the image what you’re feeling right now.
- Pin your picture, image side facing out, to the corkboard.

There was information about the exhibit printed on the bags which enclosed the pictures. It read:

For me, the hardest part of having bipolar II disorder is that my sense of self is always in flux.

I am wonderful.

I am horrible.

I should die.

When I’m depressed, I can’t trust myself—what I believe to be real often isn’t. I have to live through the lies my brain tells me.

Like the image on which you wrote, my surface doesn’t always reflect my inner self. I am constantly navigating who I think I am vs. the things I do; the way the world sees me vs. the way I see myself; the ups vs. the downs. What I’ve found, though, is that everyone suffers, everyone feels joy, everyone struggles and triumphs and gives up and holds on.

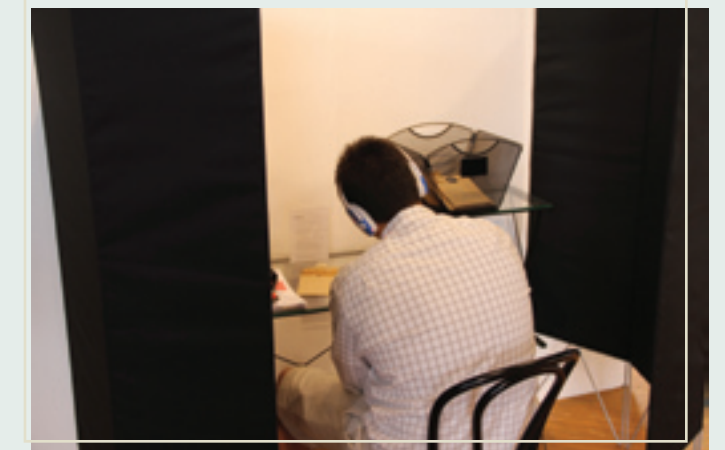
This is about being human.

The exhibit was well received and emotional. Sharing this work was a revelation. Many of the people who participated seemed compelled to tell me their stories. Most thanked me for showing them that they were not alone, or for explaining a loved one’s pain in a way they hadn’t understood before. My authorial voice as curator made my personal experience universal. It was a life-changing experience for me.

For the complete collection, including stories, please see page 81.



The exhibit



one + one = three

chapter seven

Curation as Graphic Design

Contemporary curation which uses graphic design principles to tell a story and communicate a point of view is curatorial design. Mary Anne Staniszewski says, “An exhibition can deal with anything. It is one way of communicating. ... And an exhibition, like a book or newspaper, is a form of very visible cultural production.”³² The designer/curator communicates a point of view through a selected group of objects and is visually thought-provoking. Jens Hoffmann says, “[Curators] are aware that they are not just showing or displaying an object or idea, but that they themselves are operating within a dynamic that actively creates new understandings of what is being shown, seen, or represented.”³³

Discerning meaning and finding the correct visuals are graphic design practices used by curators. One of my smaller projects illustrated this link for me.



Kindness Curation

Kindness Curation

As of this writing, this curatorial project is being prepared and will be shown in the MFA thesis exhibition in October 2013.

The impetus for *Kindness Curation* was to try to bring some lightness to my curatorial design work without being flippant or irrelevant. All of the major curatorial projects completed so far have had been heavy, dealing with difficult subject matter and intense emotion. This is an accurate but incomplete reflection of my personality. I think of myself as fairly light-hearted and easy-going, and I wanted at least some of my work to reflect that.

Using Facebook and online question-and-answer forums I asked “If kindness was a color, what would it be?” I received 99 answers ranging from “black” to “bright green with sprinkles on top.” Using those results, I have planned a gallery exhibit with 99 helium balloons, one color for each answer. At the end of each balloon string will be an origami mockingbird (symbolizing kindness from a quote in *To Kill a Mockingbird*: “Mockingbirds don’t do anything but make music for us to enjoy. They don’t eat people’s gardens, don’t nest in the corncrib, they don’t do one thing but just sing their hearts out for us.” Atticus Finch). I will make these from dictionary pages in many languages, all of which include the word “kindness.”

The issues I had to resolve in this project :

- Statement. What was I trying to say about kindness with this project, other than that it is a good thing?
- Repetition. One of my initial ideas was to collect objects of harm (knives, razors, saws, etc.) and paint them in the kindness colors. There are two reasons why this wouldn’t work for me. One, painting the collected objects took it from curation into an art piece, in my definition. The objects would be altered too much. Two, this

idea of juxtaposition and contrast has been a theme through all of my work (which I'm sure stems from my bipolar disorder) and it's become a fall-back position for me. I wanted to push myself out of that comfort zone and try something new.

- The inherent contradiction. This collection was intended to be more upbeat, but when I think of kindness that's been shown to me, it was because I needed help. I'd inadvertently circled back to pain and sadness.

Thinking about what I was trying to say in this exhibit helped the pieces fall into place. Kindness is universally understood. By using the dictionary pages, the different languages and the nationalities they represent abut each other, kindnesses touching, so unlike the world in which we actually live. The origami birds are a gift from me to the exhibit-goers, a small kindness to serve as reminder.

The balloons are representative as well. I wanted to try a non-traditional display, and origami at the end of balloon strings certainly is that. The balloons will be translucent, so that light from above should shine through them, and cast a colored shadow onto everything below. I love this idea of stepping in and out of pools of kindness.

This project encompassed four elements: one collection, the color of kindness; one curated collection, the dictionary pages; an element of making, the origami; and a more lighthearted, positive curatorial project which is still meaningful. The graphic design elements are interwoven with the curatorial methodology.

METHODOLOGY

I collected 63 dictionaries and individual dictionary pages from Ebay, Etsy, paperbackswap.com, online bookstores and my local Salvation Army. The dictionaries were in languages from all over the world, including English, Russian, Arabic, Hebrew, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Greek, Czech, Latin, Polish, and even a shorthand dictionary. I researched



In Your Absence The Frames Project

balloons, finding the longest lasting helium balloons that would be translucent and also have a large variety of color choices. I had to learn how to fold an origami bird, and then I had to work with the thesis show planners to figure out where the balloon display would fit in to the exhibition.

Kindness Curation re-contextualizes the pieces on display. For my next smaller curatorial project I wanted to try to consciously reassign meaning to objects.

For a listing of "Kindness Colors" please see page 87.

In Your Absence: The Frames Project

This project will also be shown in the MFA thesis exhibition, October 2013.

In Your Absence is a meditation on permanence and impermanence, the transitory nature of our lives and the longevity of the items we collect. How do we live, knowing that someday we will die? More, how do we live as parents knowing someday our children will die? Like the artifacts of the frames, our children are left behind to survive us, but they, too, will be outlived by their possessions.

I curated two related but separate collections for *In Your Absence*: photos of children from the 1960s and earlier as well as a series of used and vintage picture frames in all shapes and sizes. In the exhibit, the picture frames and photos are purposefully random—the relationship between photo and frame has been severed.

I find the photos to be so poignant. Each cost between 10¢ and \$4—what value would they have for someone who knew and loved the children pictured? Who are these people, and why are their photos orphaned? How unsettling to realize that even though these artifacts are paper ephemera, they will outlive the people pictured. Our lives are so brief.

Even the glass in all of the frames is original and intact. They are wood, metal, plastic and glass, purchased to hold special images and sold or given away, fragile but enduring. The pictures and frames serve as memory and metaphor.

None of the art displayed in this project is my creation. It is the combination of photos taken by others and the used picture frames, no longer containing the images they were bought to hold, that make a visual statement. *In Your Absence* in my attempt to curate a collection of everyday items and, in their display, elevate their meaning to become universal.

When planning this exhibit, I first imagined the images on the wall, but that seemed to obvious—of course photos and frames would be on a wall. After much thought, I decided to construct a large box on which the photos and frames would be applied. Once I conceived of the box idea, I needed to decide what would go inside. Drawing on my knowledge of scale and proportion, I decided that the inside needed to be visually calming to balance the outer chaos of the pictures and frames. Adding small elements to the interior of the box would become visually overwhelming and detract from the impact of its exterior. I came to curation with these design skills, and they are necessary in curatorial design. Planning creative exhibits led Robert Storr to say, "Installing shows has clarified the way I see enormously... my sense of composition, scale

It is the combination
of photos taken by
others and the used
picture frames, no longer
containing the images
they were bought
to hold, that make a
visual statement.

and proportion have definitely been influenced by moving shapes around the room and across the walls.”³⁴

METHODOLOGY

I collected over 2700 images of children from the 1960s and earlier. I started my collection at Brimfield and continued to collect pictures online through Ebay and Goodwill and at local thrift stores and flea markets. I also collected 47 vintage frames of various sizes and designs, all with glass.

EXHIBITION DETAILS

I will construct a 6.5' high by 2' wide box with an open top. The exterior of the box will be wallpapered with the images of the children. The empty frames will be hung over the pictures, but randomly, not framing any of the photos in particular. One frame on each side of the box will actually frame an empty space—a hole in the box. Looking into this hole, the viewer will see the empty space in the box. The box interior will be mirrored, reflecting back the empty space inside endlessly.

There will also be an audio component to the exhibit. I recorded an elementary school lunchroom one afternoon, and I plan to play the recorded voices quietly, creating an ambient sound audible only as viewers approach the box. The sound will be elusive, barely present, like a memory.

Kindness Curation and *In Your Absence: The Frames Project* are clearly curatorial design. My authorial voice is clear, the objects and artifacts serve the curatorial purpose, and graphic design principles are integrated into the exhibition.

As curatorial design has raised the profile of the curator it has also changed the perception of curation. “One of the crucial moments in this transformation of the

status of curator is the emergence of an authorial position. ... This is clearly in contradiction with the traditional role of curatorship, which has been seen as secondary to that of artistic production—this is, as a form of the non-creative postproduction of art; one unable to generate original values and which therefore cannot claim the aura of authorship.”³⁵ This idea of curator as mere assembler of other people’s art is also found in graphic design. Perceived as selectors and manipulators, modern graphic designers, like curators practicing curatorial design, actually use form as an medium for their ideas.

A major shared area of focus between graphic design and curation is audience participation and engagement. The curator/designer engages with the public openly, often through the presentation of thought-provoking or controversial work. Nina Simon writes about this in her book *The Participatory Museum*. She calls these Provocative Objects and says that an object need not physically insert itself into a social environment to become a topic of discussion if it is a spectacle in its own right. While attractive and functional presentation of objects is still important, it is secondary to promoting opportunities for visitors to discuss and share them. Designing exhibitions with provocative presentation techniques that display objects in juxtaposition, conflict, or conversation with each other³⁶ ties graphic design to curation and it is a technique I used in *Collective Collection*.

Collective

chapter eight

curatorial project 3

My third and final major curatorial project at VCFA was designed to push my limits. There is always an element of the unknown in curatorial work, since the objects are made by others, but within that constraint the previous exhibits had been very much within my control as the conceptualizer, collector, curator, exhibitor, and designer. *Collective Collection* was a purposeful step away from that, in essence ceding the role of curator to the participants of that project.

Collective Collection answers the question “What is love?” through a progressive, additive, collection. Tasked with curating “love” through the mail, each contributor became a curator by literally adding a physical item to the collection box, then sending the box on to the next recipient/curator. The final collection was sent back to me, logged, tagged and displayed.

The idea of physical objects having layers of collected meaning informs all of my major curated collections and is a fundamental idea behind my theory of curatorial design. If objects can communicate, what do they say? As curator, how can I shape those stories? In allowing each individual to contribute his or her own subjective object of love, can I connect those objects through a re-contextualization of meaning?



What is love? Ask 100 people, get 100 answers. Some talk about romantic love, passion, lust, sweetness, adoration, compatibility. Some see the underside of love: heartbreak, pain, loss. Still others speak of familial love, love from parent to child, and back again, love of pets, or objects, or ideas, or ideals. There are endless answers. What would a collection about love look like if it was curated by individuals, if each person chose his or her included item independently.



Three of the contributed items



There was a twist, though. As the collection built, each new person who added an object could see the collected objects of the previous participants. When Participant 9 saw the eight objects comprising the collection to that point, what did she decide to include? Was that a different experience for participant 37, looking at 36 objects? Participant 101? 1,000? Did the progressive nature of the collection shape the intention of the participants?

Collective Collection used a participatory model to assemble the collection, which is an emerging and progressive exhibition method that allows for the exchange of ideas. The collection is literally in the hands of the contributors, opening a dialogue for both participant and viewer about the relationship between their perceptions of love and the objects that embody it. “Being successful with a participatory model means

finding ways to design participatory platforms so the content that amateurs create and share is communicated and displayed attractively. This is a fundamental shift; in addition to producing consistent content, participatory institutions must also design opportunities for visitors to share their own content in meaningful and appealing ways. Supporting participation means trusting visitors’ abilities as creators, remixers, and redistributors of content,” writes Nina Simon.³⁷

METHODOLOGY

- Volunteers filled out the participation form on the *Collective Collection* website.
- Participant #1 selected an object as representation of “What is love?” and entered the object into the database on the website, including the story of the object and a photo. This database was viewable in real time while the collection was growing, although the names of the participants were not revealed. She then filled out a tag, supplied in the box, and affixed it to the physical object.
- After repacking the shipping box, making sure to include her object, Participant #1 sent the package to the next person on the list.
- Participant #2 added her own item to Participant #1’s and sent both items to Participant #3, who added an item and sent all three items to Participant #4, etc.
- Eventually, the box returned to me so I could assemble the display.

An important difference in the methodology of *Collective Collection*, compared to my other projects, is that this project lived before the exhibit in a way that the other collections did not. It is an exhibit in multiple parts: the individual reveals as the box is received and opened; the website updates as each object is added; and the final exhibit of the physical objects. The element of allowing people to witness the collection being made was both stressful, since it was mostly out of my control, and fascinating, as people forged a personal relationship to the project that I don’t think they would if they only saw the final exhibition.

I am pleased with the quality of the submissions and the writing, as well as the way it was received by the participants. It was exciting to these the collection grow and to hear heard from people that they could not wait to receive the box. A comment on the project follow-up survey said, “It’s pretty interesting to see how most of the

The collection is literally in the hands of the contributors, opening a dialogue for both participant and viewer about the relationship between their perceptions of love and the objects that embody it.



people who have posted so far have had quite a lot to say, like they were waiting for this opportunity to express themselves.” Another participant wrote on his blog:

When a friend told me about a colleague’s art thesis project, I was slightly skeptical. I don’t know what constitutes art, unless a museum curator specifically tells me it’s art. ... But, being as how I am trying to branch out and try new things, I decided to participate. And I am really glad that I did. The project is a collective of how we, as human beings, however flawed, understand and define love. And after looking through the box of other people’s memories, I was able to glean not only that all of us have a different definition of what love is, that there are some central themes: connectedness, nostalgia, and family.

EXHIBIT DETAILS

An essential element to this collection being successful was the design of the shipping box and materials. It needed to be fully considered so that the experience of receiving the package, unpacking it, and repacking it were a part of the curatorial experience. I knew that getting the box together would be difficult, but it was harder and took longer than I anticipated. For the box itself, I tried a few different options before settling on a corrugated plastic box. I wanted something with a separate top because it felt more like a gift. I wanted the plainest box I could get, without manufacturer’s marks or branding. Finally, I wanted it to be large, but not so large that it would be cost-prohibitive to send it. To continue to brand the experience, I had a vinyl version of the logo made for the two long sides of the box.

I designed, printed, and cut to size the materials for the box: object labels and hangtags, an insert about the project, and an identification label for the packing and shipping materials. I wanted the inside of the box to feel bespoke without having to actually have the components made. I found a white photo box that was the exact width to fit into the box. I affixed it to the bottom of the larger box using Velcro tabs so that it wouldn’t slide around but would still be removable. Inside the photo box fit another stock size square box, exactly the height of the photo box. The smaller box held the labels and tags and some pens; the larger box held packing supplies: bags, scissors, and tape. The aim was to make the experience of receiving and opening the box special, setting the tone for the participant’s choosing an object and writing about it.

I updated the website each time the box changed location and created a Facebook page and a Twitter . I also created an online follow up survey to gather some information about the participants and give them a chance to leave feedback on the project.

Realizations

- People want to share. I thought that it would be important to preserve the contributors’ anonymity. It turned out that most people really didn’t care — they were happy to have a chance to express themselves.
- I can’t let go. Not easily, anyway. I didn’t know what would happen when the box left my house, and it was both thrilling and nerve-racking. It would have been easier if I’d done this alone, but then I wouldn’t have known how much...
- Smart, interesting, people bring a project to life. Each person who contributed moved me. Some with their happiness, some with their sorrow and loss, some with their introspection. I didn’t know what to expect, and I was surprised and touched over and over again.
- It’s very difficult to keep the momentum going. When people are volunteering their time and effort, it’s difficult to put pressure on them to move things along quickly.
- A project like this needs a lot of time to complete. I anticipate that there’s at least a year of collecting still to do.

THE BIG FI-NISH

chapter nine

In *Cautionary Tales*: *Critical Curating*, Steve Rand writes:

In discussions with curatorial students around the world, I have been surprised at the disconnect between what really interests them and what they do as curators, Why do they want to be curators, what excites them and why? What do they see themselves doing in five years? The level of confusion is surprisingly and appropriately high. While in the institution, the direction seems clear, but after leaving there is a kind of free fall. Many of these young curators tend to work with a relatively small group of artists and influences and within a narrow range of defined issues. They don't venture outside of the expected models of exhibition or relationships, or consider alternatives. ... [I]n many programs they aren't being properly prepared, adequately challenged, or particularly well-educated. Often the readings tend to be superficial and disconnected, while discussions of practical issues such as fundraising and promotion take precedent over conceptual and ideological concerns.³⁸

In Steven Rand's view, new-to-the-field curators are too reluctant to take risks with their work. I believe that this stems from confusion over what the term curation means. There are too many possible interpretations of curation, covering too much ground and encompassing essentially opposite ideas. A curator is an objective complier. A curator is an artist. A curator's job is primarily institutional. A curator's job is primarily conceptual. By introducing the term curatorial design into the conversation, the difference between curatorial ideologies becomes instantly clear. If a curator can say, "I work as curatorial designer, and therefore this is the kind of work you can expect from me..." the onus of encompassing all varieties of curatorial practice is lifted. An artist who declares himself an abstractionist is immediately relieved of the expectation that he will produce realistic portraits. Likewise, a curatorial designer would not be expected to curate a historical, educational show but instead one with a clear point of view, in which objects are used to visually communicate a story. The traditional perception of curator as objective middleman does not acknowledge creative curatorial input and it does not allow for a clear method of criticism of curatorial design.

In coining the term curatorial design, I have acknowledged curation as graphic design while at the same time giving myself a context in which to work as a curator with an authorial voice and a framework for critique of my work. My curatorial work is informed by my graphic design experience. There are many roads to take to come to curation as an avocation and as a profession. I believe that having a strong foundation in graphic design is advantageous when choosing that road. The skills that I've used as a graphic designer—interpretation, visual connection, conceptualization, scale, spacial arrangement, and pacing—are all curatorially relevant. As with graphic design, I have used objects (in these cases physical objects) that others have constructed to be thought provoking and express my point of view. I am a better curator because I have spent the last twenty years as a professional graphic designer.

My curatorial work of the past two years has dealt with love and loss, mental illness and hope, desire and fear. Through the conception, collection, and exhibition of my curatorial projects I have redefined myself and my work.

Miniature Worlds

Ben

There are always things to worry about. I remember being a kid, maybe 7 or 8, and standing at the window watching the light bleed out of the day, waiting for my parents to come home, worrying if they were even five minutes late. I worried about getting a zit before a date. I lay awake at night reviewing my last math test. When I met Sarah, I spent hours worrying whether she liked me as much as I liked her, and when it turned out that she did, whether she would stop. After we'd gotten married, Sarah and I, and the casual "It'll happen if it happens" baby making turned into "Why isn't it happening?" I worried that we would never have a family. So when she got pregnant and passed that 12 week mark, when a miscarriage seemed unlikely and we could share our news and our joy, we took a break from worrying. We were having a baby! The respite didn't last. What if we weren't good parents? What if he, and we knew the baby was a boy, what if he had health problems? Was premature? Came with less than the anticipated ten fingers and toes?

We never thought he'd die.

In the aftermath of the craziness that was Isaac's birth, in that first flush of happiness, Sarah and I cried together.

"We did it", we said, just like we had after our wedding ceremony, after our anniversary skydive, after finding out that finally, finally, Sarah was pregnant. "I love you, Ben," Sarah said, willing to share her enormous pain and effort, as if I had been more than a spectator. Our son slept in the plastic walled bassinet next to Sarah's bed and we planned to take him home the next day. Sarah's parents were coming down to stay with us, to help around the house and make sure we ate, and slept, and took care of Isaac. On the second day the doctor examined him. "I'm just going to run some tests," she said. We thought it was routine. "Sure," we said and napped while the baby was out of the room.

Isaac wasn't breathing right—too fast and shallow. His skin looked grey. We hadn't been worried. What did we know? Hadn't they said he was OK?

He never came home. A heart transplant might have saved him, and how terrible was that? Hoping that some other baby, someone else's child, might die so that Isaac could live. He got sicker and sicker, and finally he slipped away among the beeping, screaming machines. All those years of worrying. I hadn't known what I should be worrying about.

"It's no one's fault," the doctors said. "We don't know what causes this." Is that supposed to be reassuring? Tell us what we did wrong, let us fix it, give us another chance. How can we hope?

Our bodies are turned inside out. Sarah cries at night when she thinks I'm asleep. I'm not, I'm crying, too. I reach over and hold her hand and we cry in the dim glow of the nightlight we'd bought for midnight feedings.



Collection: *Miniature Worlds*

Date: 2012

Items Collected: 97

Photo by: Anthony Pagani



Collection: *Miniature Worlds*

Date: 2012

Items Collected: 118

Photo by: Bill Kaminski

Cliff

I saw my VA doctor today. She's big on Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome and emotions and I play along because I want the pills. I need the pills. But I know it's all horseshit. I was fucked up long before I got to Grenada, I just hid it better before I got the injury and the memories. I take the prescriptions she offers and leave the absolution behind.

It all turned to shit. A wife, a marriage, a family. At least Jimmy still sees me, once in a while. Brenda is long remarried, but Jimmy still thinks of me as Dad. I think he's mostly making sure that I'm alive, hoping that maybe this time, I'll change. Things will change. I'd get another job, one that didn't need references. I'd save up, move out of the rooming house, start again. I'm only 50, after all. That's not too late. Right?

Forgiveness. When you're doing the steps, counting each sober day—hour, minute, eternity—you're supposed to do them in order. Well, fuck that. Step nine is the big one for me. Amends So I called Jimmy and left a message, asked him to meet me at the bar. Not at the SRO, never here. My world got smaller and smaller, from house and family to trailer, from trailer to single room. Brenda packed my boxes when she

kicked me out and I've brought them with me, move after move. I haven't looked inside them yet. They don't have what I need.

Jimmy wants to believe in me. I see it in his eyes when we first meet. Fading away as we order the second, fifth, who the hell knows I've lost count, round. He keeps up with me, my boy. I used to be proud of that, now I worry. He leaves the table for a "bathroom break", coming back ten minutes later glassy eyed and dazed. I want to give him advice, steer him back on the right path, but really, who am I kidding? I hand him another drink. He's lost his latest job, the third this year?, and he asks for a loan, except I don't have anything for him. I never do.

This was the last chance. The last fuck up, the last redemption. I can't remember what I did last night. Usually, probably, I sat by the window and drank until I was numb and smoked a pack or two and took some pills and maybe made some phone calls. I doubt anyone would have answered.

My AA sponsor was a vet, too. Vietnam. He held his coffee with shaking hands and listened to my litany of all I'd lost and ruined and pissed away. I threw away my pills, emptied

my bottles down the toilet, went to meetings, sometimes three in a day. This time I'd try as hard as I could. This time it would work.

I'm never going to get better. This will be my life until it gets even worse. It always gets worse. I wish things were different. I wish I was different. God, God, please make things different for Jimmy. Please save my boy.

I'm sorry.

Linda

When I was 18 I planned a life with John because he made me laugh, gave me gifts, wanted lots of sex. It's easy to look back, 22 years later, and see it clearly. When I found out I was pregnant I was a little scared, sure, but I was excited, too. It would be so much fun to be a mom! I'd get married and be happy forever!

What did I know? Standing there, dirty diaper in my hand, three days out from my last shower, while my husband asked me what was for dinner and could I get the baby to stop crying, I knew I'd made a mistake. Gone down the wrong path, somehow.

We tried, John and I. He did the nose-to-the-grindstone thing and surprise! he turned out to be good at it. Money helped, a bit. A nanny for John Jr. and later when Alexandra and Matthew came along, a second one. Some time to myself. A cook and a gardener. Trips, clothes, nice cars, gifts. But we hardly laughed anymore, and we almost never had sex, certainly not with the lights on.

I took up hobbies. I read cookbooks but I never made anything. I tried photography, sculpture, painting classes, so sure that there was something in me, something artistic that needed to be released. Flower arranging, tennis and golf lessons, calligraphy. I decorated the house, got it

perfect, redecorated. Exercise classes, yoga, hours at the gym, lunches with friends. It sounds like I should have been happy, doesn't it?

The kids got older. Soccer, swimming, lacrosse. Teams and private coaches. Karate for Matt, he always wanted to do things a little differently. Violin, piano, voice, guitar. There was always music in our house, fumbling and off key. Academic tutors, language lessons, ballet. I lived in my car, shuttling, carpooling, handing out bagged lunches and dinners, bottles of water. The kids did their homework between lessons and I checked it on the kitchen table while they watched TV.

John worked. Always. Meeting us for the last two days of a two-week vacation. Coming in late to school plays, sometimes only making it for the curtain call. He left notes for the kids. "Play great today, Alex!" "I'll be thinking of you, Matt." He balded, and got a little padded, and was never around. We hardly ever saw each other, rarely spoke. 18 year-olds don't know anything about life, about marriage, about growing up and growing apart, and making promises that can't last.

It was easy for me to start the affair. No one asked me what I did all day, who I saw, where I went. We'd known Max and Susan for so long.

When cancer snuck in and took her so quickly, shocking us all, I brought Max a deli platter. He'd call every few weeks, first to talk about Susan and how he missed her and what it felt like to be left behind. Later we talked about ourselves, our dreams and disappointments. We spoke every day.

I didn't mean to fall in love. I knew I couldn't go on in that airless life and that loveless marriage, but I didn't intend, not really, to upend my life. I just wanted someone who could make me smile and want me. Max and I had crazy, kinky, breathless sex. We did things I'd only ever heard of, and it was fun and exciting and I felt like the world was full of things I should try.

I never planned to have a baby at 40. 18 year old me, with her smooth skin and limitless energy would have wrinkled her nose at me. "Who even has sex when they're that old?" she would have asked John, and he would have squeezed her and said "We will."

I can take the snide comments, the pained silences, the sideways looks. I'll explain it, somehow, to my kids. I'll make promises to Max, but small ones that I can keep. I was disillusioned, disappointed, but it turns out that there was a little light left after all. Enough.



Collection: *Miniature Worlds*

Date: 2012

Items Collected: 71

Photo by: Anthony Pagani

Veri

Collection: *Veri*

Search term: **Crazy**

Image Context: **Road trip to Dallas**

Photographer: **Katherine Center**

Date: **2013**

I am not bipolar

I am not crazy. I am not sick.

I have bipolar disorder, I am not bipolar. It does not define me. I am not my illness

For a long time I did not want to accept my diagnosis. It made my world a strange place: "I was fine," but I wanted to die. "There was nothing wrong with me," but I felt like I was living underwater. "I could maintain a regular life," but I was cutting my arms, hurting myself, leaving marks. After two locked ward hospitalizations and a suicide attempt, I had no choice. Deal with it, or die. So it was therapy and medication and trying to find the will to live.

What I don't want, more than anything, is for all this soul searching and exploration and excavation to make anyone feel sorry for me. I am not being brave. Don't pity me. *Veri* is about my journey, not from sickness to health, but from agony to euthymia. I dug for a microscopic bit of hope and clung to it to stay alive. I found compassion for myself. I am coming through, learning to see myself not as defective and broken, but as a warrior.



a:81

Collection: *Veri*

Search term: **White tattoo**

Image Context: **Tattoo, mostly healed**

Photographer: **Anna**

Date: **2013**

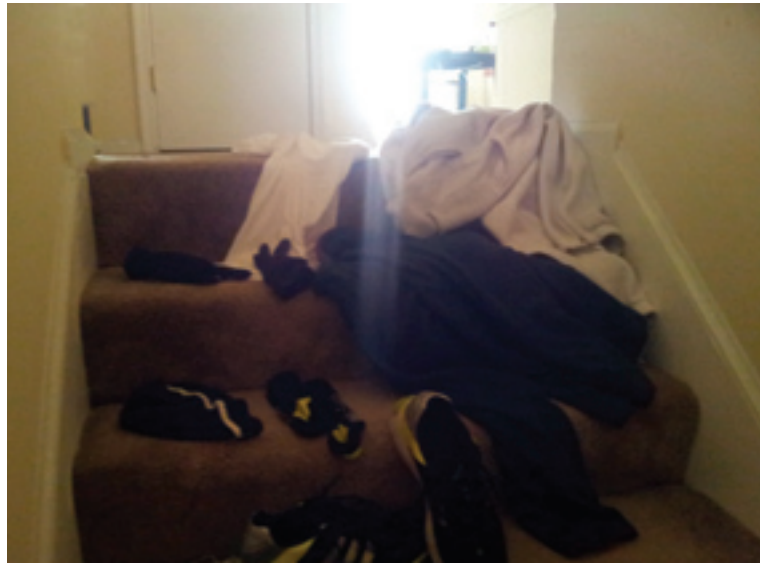
Marked

Sometimes depression comes with self-harming. When I'm not well I get very focused on my wrists. I don't hurt myself anymore, but when I did I would scratch at my wrists until they bled.

White ink tattoos are a socially-acceptable way of mimicking the sensation and result of self-harming. People who self-harm often say that they're trying to get the hurt out. That they want their outer body to more accurately reflect the chaos that's going on inside.

I don't have any tattoos.





Cracked

Looking back, I realize that my bipolar disorder started when I was about twelve years old. I went through phases: rubbing my wrists until they were raw, biting the heel of my hand, obsessing about death. I was called dramatic and too sensitive, and my silences and withdrawals and sadness were chalked up to teen angst and puberty.

Along with that, though, I was popular and smart and musical and involved and high functioning. I tried my hardest to hide my craziness, to only show the side of me that was normal. And I succeeded—I convinced almost everyone that I was OK.

Time went by and the cracks started to show. I was unable to work, but my boss kept me on the payroll even after I tried to quit, telling me that now more than ever I needed health insurance and that my job would be waiting for me. I've been so unworthy and so blessed. I have been loved, and I never believed in it because I was ashamed. I always worked so hard to keep myself hidden, to pace and struggle and walk the stairs all night away from the caring eyes. I couldn't ask for help because I thought I didn't deserve it.

Collection: *Veri*

Search term: **Stripped**

Image Context: **Stripped out of drenched clothes**

Photographer: **Jacob**

Date: **2013**



Shame

I'm a good person, mother, daughter, sister, friend. How can I reconcile that with the memory of wandering the winter streets in a short-sleeve t-shirt, arms covered in scabs? I walked for miles that night as cars slowed down next to me and the people inside tried to find out if I was alright. I knew I wasn't but I also knew that there wasn't any way to help me. I was doing the only (crazy) thing I could think of to stop me from hurting myself more, or permanently.

I always circle back. There are pictures in my mind filed under Identity: Shameful. Police car rides to the hospital, handcuffs locking me to the bed. Crazy risks, withdrawing, missed parties, weddings, showers. Not talking to my friends for months at a time. The court order requiring my parents to be in residence with my kids and me. It's hard to picture, right? This weird other self—dramatic, disturbed, wrong—can't live inside of me.

Collection: *Veri*

Search term: **Cower**

Image Context: **Waking up under a bug net. Mindo, Ecuador**

Photographer: **Rachel Tavel**

Date: **2013**

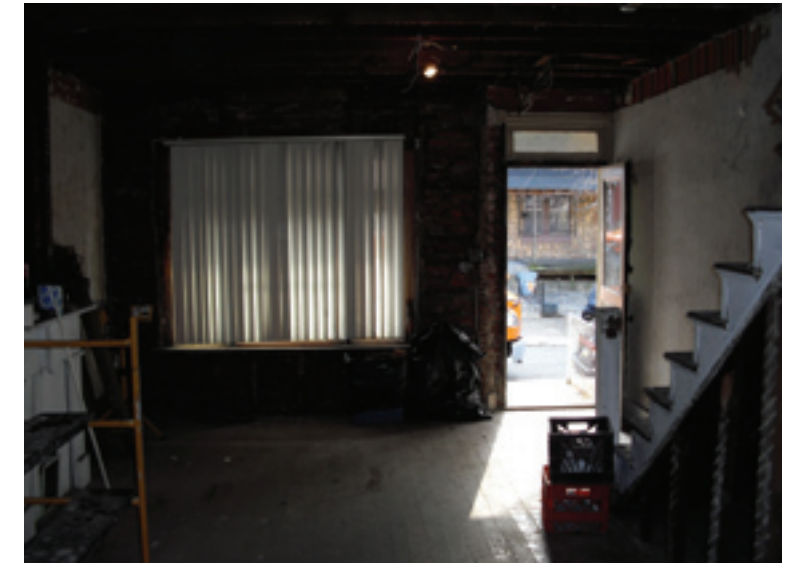
Collection: *Veri*

Search term: **Open door**

Image Context: **Hugh Wattles House Carpentry gut job**

Photographer: **Hugh Wattles**

Date: **2013**



Self exam

I've become an expert in studying myself—I would do anything to stay healthy, to keep the depression away. Every deep depression is like dying a little. The manic periods are actually welcome, at least in the beginning when the extra energy helps me get the dishes done and the bills paid and the yard raked and the lunches packed and the towels washed and the clothes folded and put away. The online shopping with money I don't have, the inability to sit still, the racing thoughts and words—those are annoying byproducts of the mania. But I never get scarily up and it's always so, so, so much better than the downs.

When I am depressed, my brain stops working. I can't make plans, decisions, sentences. All of the light seeps out of my life. Breathing gets hard, my facial muscles feel frozen, my voice flattens and loses its affect. It scares everyone around me. It scares me.

Visible

Most days I feel like no one sees me at all. Not the people who know me—they do—but when strangers look my way, right before their eyes skip past me, I see them register me, barely. Old and fat, they think (and boring, notes the ex-husband who lives in my head. This was his mantra for me.)

It's upsetting and reassuring. Degrading and safe. I am not sure I want to be seen because I don't know what shows. Sometimes the effort of being present, of being normal, are too much for me. Sometimes I'm glad that I've disappeared into averageness. Average is normal. I always, always only ever want to be normal.

Collection: *Veri*

Search term: **Mannequin**

Image Context: **Mood Fabrics in New York City**

Photographer: **Ellen Linder**

Date: **2013**





The third state

When you take any medication you get side effects. Since I take a lot of medication I get a lot of them. They range from the annoying but benign, like aphasia (difficulty remembering words) and the inability to cry, to maddening, like hair loss and weight gain, to serious, like high blood sugar which led to diabetes. And yet, it's worth it, even the diabetes, if it keeps me in the middle.

Euthymic is a weird word. Whenever I hear it I think of euphoric and that's not at all what it means. Euthymic is regular, moderated, normal. It's not manic and it's not depressed. It's the me I recognize the most, the me I think I am. Before I went on medication I was afraid that taking meds would change me in some fundamental way. Even though I was desperate, I was afraid to be different. What I couldn't understand was this idea of euthymia, that treating myself would bring me back to myself. That underneath the sadness and madness and desperation, it was possible to be normal again.

Collection: *Veri*

Search term: **Emerge**

Image Context: **The people emerge from the infrastructure at Universidad Distrital, Bogotá**

Photographer: **Crowd of Clouds**

Date: **2013**



Breathe

I used to think in terms of “when I get better” or “when I’m cured.” My family still thinks that way, but I don’t anymore. My father often asks me when I think I’ll be done with therapy (thereby necessitating more therapy) or when I can stop taking my medicine. It’s been hard for me to accept that the answer is “probably never,” that I’ll be dealing with this in some way for the rest of my life. But accepting that I’ll never “get better” means that I am better than I used to be.

You know when you get a head cold, and your nose is so stuffed you can’t smell or taste or breathe through it? The first day that your nose is clear, when you’re better, you swear that you’ll always be appreciative of your health. You take big breaths of air, so grateful to be well. That’s where I am right now: breathing in, waiting for the moment to come when I take my good health for granted because it’s been so long since I didn’t recognize myself.

Collection: *Veri*

Search term: **Found**

Image Context: **More found stuff from various flea markets, thrift stores, and antique shops**

Photographer: **Unknown**

Date: **2013**

Collection: *Veri*

Search term: **Happy**

Image Context: **Ordinary things**

Photographer: **Randall Talbot**

Date: **2013**

Everything

I can never give up. I can never stop trying. After a lifetime of waiting to die, now I have to live.

It’s astounding how much I love my children. And in caring for them, in seeing them for who they are—wonderful and flawed and smart and funny and kind and exasperating and so much more dear to me than I could have ever imagined—I am learning how to nurture myself.



The lies my brain tells me

I’m repeating myself. No matter how many times people have read what I’ve written and told me that they’re proud of me, that they’re sorry for what I’ve gone through, that they love me, I keep on pushing. Maybe this next story is the one that will make you see how damaged I am. Maybe this memory will make you see that I’m broken.

I am not broken.

That is the past. I was ill, misdiagnosed and unmedicated for most of it. I need to let go. It’s time to move forward. I did things that embarrass and humiliate me today. Always to myself—I rarely hurt anyone else—and always because I was trying to deal with my brain and reality and the fact that I was struggling to stay alive.

No more apologies. No more showing people “who I really am.” The person that I am today is who I really am. Forged, strong, surviving. When people like me, it’s OK. I am not my illness. I am not my past. I am not a collection of horrifying stories. I am not the trail of friends who disappeared when the extent of my illness became clear. I am stronger and better than I have ever given myself credit for.





Being human

I started veri as a way of coming to terms. I needed to reconcile who I am with who I was, the person I presented to the world with the person who lived inside my head. This was about my pain, my suffering, my perseverance and my progress. For four and a half months I looked into myself and exhumed what I found there.

Then I realized that it wasn't only about me.

Everyone suffers, everyone feels joy, everyone struggles and triumphs and holds on and gives up. It's the human condition. It ties us to each other. In reading veri you recognize me. This is about being human.

Collection: *Veri*

Search term: **Anticipation**

Image Context: **Helicopter rescue pics and the rolling of the credits**

Photographer: **Kimberlie Dame**

Date: **2013**



The last word

Veri is the root of the Latin word verus which means true or genuine. I chose it because this magazine has become a vehicle of truth for me, both to and about myself. I also like that its homophone is "very" which most people with bipolar can relate to. Very happy, very sad, very emotional. Very crazy. We are not people who do things halfway.

Collection: *Veri*

Search term: **Ferris wheel**

Image Context: **Chattanooga ferris wheel**

Photographer: **Chattanooga Convention & Visitors Bureau**

Date: **2013**

baby blue	yellow	purple	light baby blue	pale blue
baby blue	orange	rainbow	rich buttery yellow	milk-colored
green	cadmium yellow medium	black	pink!	golden
green	bright green	chrome !!!	white	sky blue with a bit of pink
light green	mocha	light green!	yellow	everything except black
purple	aubergine	yellow	rainbow	purple
pink	the rainbow!	sky blue	light yellow	
bluish-violet	pink!	deep red	light rosy pink	
buttery yellow	skyblue	yellow	warm orange	
aubergine	sunlight yellow	pink	bright green with sprinkles on top	
pink	earthy green	blue:)	black	
pink	yellow!!	black	black	
sunflower yellow	soft peach	blue	blood orange	
white	calming blue	rose pink	azure	
black	rainbow :)	chartreuse	pure white	
the color of honey	purple!	cyan	lavender blanket	
red	white	green	mid-tone blue	
violet	yellow	orange	golden	
		peach	rose pink	
		light pink	pink	
		purple	chartreuse	
		purple	soft white	
		soft pink	cerulean blue	
		soft yellow	white	
		peach	cyan	
		ecru	orange	
		golden gold	light blues	
		sky blue	periwinkle with a buttery yellow edge	
		rainbow of pastel	pale yellow	

Kindness Curation Colors

If kindness was a color, what would it be?

Collective Collection

Illustrations by Angela McKay

Engagement Ring, denuded

This is my engagement ring from my ex-husband. My grandmother wanted me to have her engagement ring, and when my ex proposed he had the stones from her ring reset for me. I loved it, and it was incredibly meaningful.

About two years after we were married, my grandmother passed away. I saw her in hospice the night before she died and I held her hand and told her that I loved her and that I would see my ring every day and think of her. I'm sure that she heard me. I felt her.

A year and a half later, I was divorced. And I didn't know what to do.

The diamond in the ring meant so much to me, but the ring was not something I wanted to see every day, or ever again. So I had the stone reset again, this time into a necklace, and I wear it and think of my grandmother, who I miss very much.

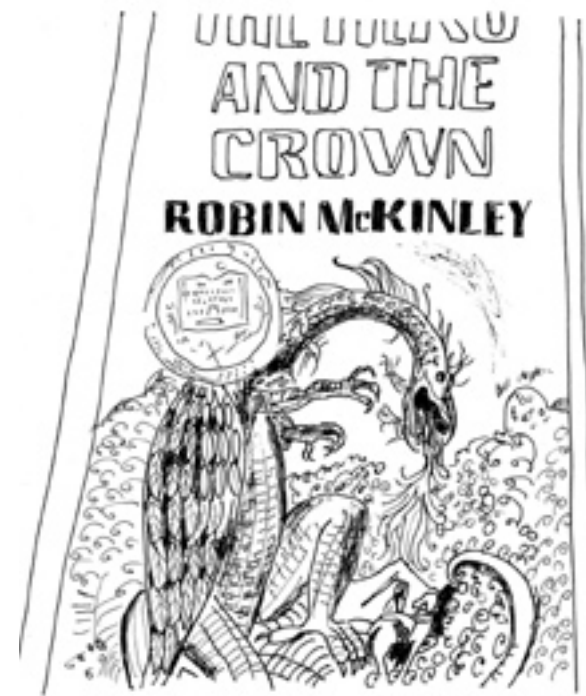
This denuded ring represents my idea of romantic love. I don't like it, I don't want it. It's been nothing but heartache and pain and sadness for me. I have love in my heart, but I love elsewhere—my kids, my family, my friends. Romantic love is as useless and ugly to me as this ring is without the central stone.



Collection: *Collective Collection*

Added on: 6.6.2013

Contributed from: Easthampton, MA



Collection: *Collective Collection*

Added on: 6.22.2013

Contributed from: Holyoke, MA

Cover of *The Hero and the Crown*

The Hero and the Crown is not the first book I read by Robin McKinley, but it's the one I fell in love with. Aerin made me want to be worthy of reading her story.

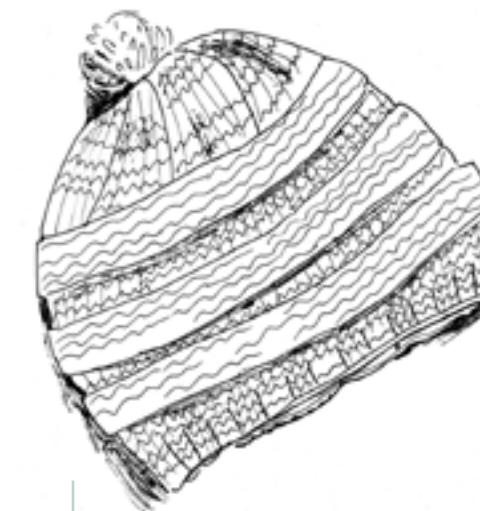
I fall in love with art (meaning visual, performing, written, etc.) all the time, and that's what I call it because that's how it feels. I find the perfect song and I know I'll spend the next few weeks gorging on everything about that song, the way a voice scrapes meaning from a couplet or the way a rhythm underlines the narrative arc. I get stupidly enamored of single guitar notes.

I bask in the presence of what the artists I love have made. I travel to New York City to sit in the Met and stare at El Greco paintings for an hour and creep out the guard by mouth-breathing all over the walls of the Gubbio Studiolo because holy shit how perfect is that thing.

I watch terrible, terrible movies because an actor, or a film composer, or someone else whose work I love, deigned to be involved in the project, and now I am committed to catching whatever fleeting moment of brilliance might be on offer. The actors I love make movies that can be downright scarring (Nazi vampire zombie horse on fire, anyone?) but also emotionally devastating and beautiful.

It is not a coincidence that my husband is equally helpless in the face of his passions. We spent the first year of our marriage besotted with each other and our favorite band, our travels cross-country and internationally forming the itinerary of a fandom and a growing relationship. I still find him most attractive when he is being passionate about something, even when I can't stand the thing he is flailing about. Now that we have two kids, we are both very consciously cultivating this propensity to geek out over stuff they love in both girls. I'm pleased to say it's going well.

But to bring it back to Aerin—her story was the first. That book contains so many things that I eventually grew to recognize as my kryptonite, the tall dark and handsome of my creative soul. That's why the cover's going in the box, because it represents every single book, painting, song, movie, play, that I've fallen in love with, and every fandom I've clasped to my heart, and every kindred spirit I've found.



Collection: *Collective Collection*

Added on: 6.28.2013

Contributed from: Easthampton, MA

Infant Hat

This is the hat that my third baby wore home from the hospital. I have managed to hang on to it, plus a few other tiny items, in his upper right dresser drawer. It tugs on all the obvious heartstrings: was he ever once so small, was that really 5½ years ago, did we really almost decide our family was complete without him?

It took five more years after baby #2 to decide if we were going to have another child. I had gone back to work, we were finally a two income family again, we didn't have any more bedrooms...and yet I still really wanted one more baby. So, we decided to have our son. And while we are back to being a one income family, with shared bedrooms and no fancy vacations, we are full to the rafter with joy, comedy, and LOVE.



Collection: *Collective Collection*
Added on: 6.29.2013
Contributed from: Florence, MA

Chipped Mug

This is the most ordinary of ordinary objects in my home. It's a mug from a local run/walk that my family participates in every year, and every year we fill our cabinet with a half-dozen free mugs we've brought home.

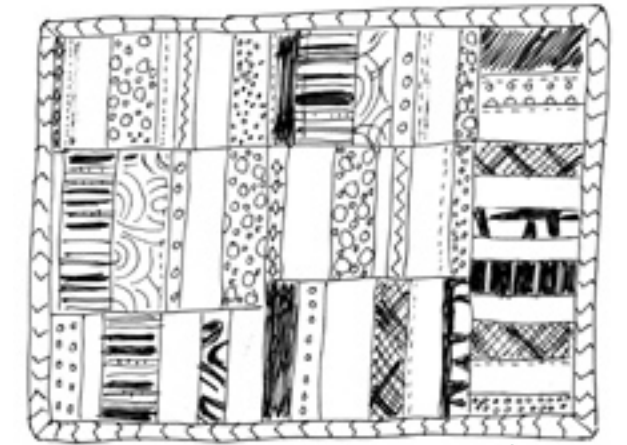
This mug, or one of its look-alikes, regularly appears by my workspace, as if by magic, filled with coffee, green tea, cold water, or a homemade smoothie. Sometimes, when I'm concentrating, I don't even notice its arrival—I just look over and it's there, its contents giving me a boost to get through whatever I'm reading or writing or whatever bills I'm paying.

My spouse is not the surprise-weekend-in-exotic-locale kind. He's the quietly-delivering-cold-beverage kind. I chose to submit this mug with a chip because love is imperfect and unglamorous, and it shows wear and tear sometimes. But even a little banged up, it works just fine.

Small Quilt

I am a maker. Making quilts is what I do and what I love. What this little quilt represents is the love of the process: coming up with the concept, picking out fabrics, problem solving while standing in a hot shower, sewing by machine and hand, and seeing something through from beginning to end. At this point in my life it is a practice.

Once a piece is complete I am emotionally ready to move on. The end product is almost irrelevant. It is always about the process.



Collection: *Collective Collection*
Added on: 6.30.2013
Contributed from: South Hadley, MA



Collection: *Collective Collection*

Added on: 7.6.2013

Contributed from: Southampton, MA

A Series of E-Mails, 1996–2001

A selection of what I have left of my dad:

A nearly new pair of Wallabee suede shoes that he wore to work only a few times. My dad was a creature of habit, so he bought the style again and again, replacing the shoes only when they were so worn that Mama told him they had to go. The perpetual newness of this pair reminds me how quickly Daddy's life changed.

His Weather Channel fleece, which I gave him for his birthday the year he got sick. Daddy watched the channel every day, often for multiple hours, so much so that it was a family joke for years. The fleece was perfect for keeping him warm once he was constantly at home. Also, since it was a pullover, his gnarled hands didn't have to struggle with a zipper.

A plethora of family photos, though Daddy often didn't appear in them since he was the main photographer. One of my favorites, which sits on my desk at work, is a picture of him with Mama and my sister. I asked them all to just "be themselves." Dad, of course, is committing fully to a goofball pose.

And then there are these e-mails. I didn't have an e-mail account before I left for college, and I swore I'd never use electronic mail for anything other than quick messages. But two weeks before I left for college, I became homesick. Achingly homesick for what I was leaving: my home, my boyfriend, my family. As my parents dropped me off at school, none of us were sure I'd stay. But stay I did, and part of what sustained me through that year were messages from home. Daddy had already latched on to the Internet thing, and since I had to use it for school anyway, we fell into a pattern of e-mailing back and forth. He'd tell me tales of our dorky dogs and the fate of his beloved Ohio State football team, and I'd relate my plans to transfer to another school closer to home as soon as humanly possible. Even after a change of schools landed me a whopping eight miles from home, we kept writing. When I graduated and moved away again, we kept writing. We only stopped once I moved close to home once again and talking over the phone replaced our e-mails.

My memories of my dad are kept alive by so many things, but the love that he left behind may be best represented by these e-mails. I love these notes because they're just so ordinary. I can't imagine that Daddy ever meant for me to keep them for any length of time, but they made me smile so I stuck them in a folder and there they've stayed. I love these letters because they're so chock full of personal jokes, nicknames, and references that I'm one of only a handful of people who can actually read and understand them. I love these e-mails because they show my real dad. They're the words of a man who never stopped moving, whistling, talking, or just plain going until he got sick. His illness just stopped... everything. My real dad left years before he finally passed away. When I read these letters, I get Daddy back, and I'm able to laugh out loud, both about him and with him, all over again.

Harriet the Spy and The Daughter of Time

These two books represent my twin loves, reading and history.

Harriet The Spy made me fall in love with reading (and New York City). I wanted to be like Harriet, unafraid to observe the world around me, no matter what I had to do to do that. It also taught me that sometimes you have to step away from the paper or computer and be in the moment in order to really appreciate it. It also made me want to try an egg cream.

The Daughter of Time is even more formative. When I was 12 and 13, I lived in England for a year. When I was first there, we stayed with a family in the small village of Kirby Muxloe and I found this book in the family's library. I read about Richard III and was intensely curious about did he or didn't he kill his nephews. As it turned out, we lived quite close to Bosworth Field, where Richard III was killed in battle and the Tudors assumed the throne. Learning about this period in history has led me to owning a ridiculous amount of books on British history – mainly Plantagenets and Tudors.



Collection: *Collective Collection*

Added on: 7.7.2013

Contributed from: Easthampton, MA



Collection: *Collective Collection*

Added on: 7.9.2013

Contributed from: Northampton, MA

Fake Mouse, Missing Nose

While living in Washington, DC I came upon a trio of feral kittens and their mother, who made camp in the alley behind my house. The neighborhood was rough, and animal abuse was not uncommon. On Wednesday, May 16, 2001, a friend and I rescued all of the kittens, took them to the vet, and found them homes. I kept the tiniest, a tortoiseshell, and named her Wednesday. The process of “de-feralizing” a cat involves a lot of holding, handling, and spoon-feeding in order to establish a bond between cat and human. Until that time, I hadn’t known I could feel such a strong sense of love, care, obligation, and wonder towards another creature. Wednesday passed away too soon in February 2011, and I keep a lock of her fur and a paw-print nearby. Her collar and some toys are also sweet reminders of my feline charge. This mouse was a well-used plaything when we lived in Easthampton; the feel of the fur still fills me with love—both for her and for all the creatures (human and animal) that may come along.

My Mother’s Teddy Bear

My mother grew up on a small farmhouse, outside a rural town in the middle of Missouri, in absolute poverty. She was the youngest daughter of a poor farming couple, Everett and Hildred. Her older and only sibling, a sister, Vernie, was already 17 years old when my mom was born, and my mom was often by herself as a child.

My mom used to tell me stories of her childhood. How she would hide in the fields with stacks of books and read for an entire afternoon... or how she loved playing with the farm animals, as they felt like her only companions. She told me of how hard it was growing up never having nothing but old hand me downs and never getting anything store bought, and how she remembered her parents being very frugal, buying flour in bulk, 25 pounds at a time, and how it would always mold before they could use it all, but how they’d continue to eat it anyway, because they couldn’t afford to do otherwise. And how she had to help her mother with canning, and how incredibly hot that kitchen got sometimes...

She also told me of how she felt less than, mocked and bullied... the kids from town would taunt her and make fun of her for not having two nickels to rub together... for being a poor farmer’s daughter... for drinking water from a cistern and not having town water... for having an outhouse and not a flush toilet... for having homemade dresses for school instead of one from a shop.

The one object that she did own, purchased from a store, her only prized possession, was a simple teddy bear. It had been a gift from her sister. And she loved it. It was her beloved friend and playmate. It joined her in the fields, sat with her at mealtimes. She slept with it. She read to it. She told it her secrets, her hopes, her fears. It got her through the tough times and took away some of her loneliness. It was her constant companion. It completed her.

She loved patches of its fur off. All of its appendages, both arms and both legs, required reattachment surgery... some multiple times. It’s even been decapitated and repaired. It’s been split down the middle and stitched back together with some very thick red thread. It’s taken a beating... But through it all, it’s both given and received an enormous amount of love...

My mother committed suicide November 13, 2011 after a lifelong battle with major depression. It was a crushing and devastating loss. Cleaning up my mother’s home and preparing for her memorial, my brother and I gathered up personal items to display at the funeral. We chose pictures, newspaper clippings, cards and crayon drawings. It was often overwhelmingly hard. But it was when I laid eyes on her shabby, worn out teddy bear, one whose body looked ravaged and raw and was held together by inadequate measures (much of how *I* was feeling emotionally)... that my heart broke open and I felt a tremendous wave of grief.

I hugged that bear to me and I cried. I cried for my mother’s shitty little life. I cried for her pain and despair... I cried for her sadness and loneliness... I cried for her unfulfilled hopes and dreams... I cried that she had been widowed so young, and been cheated out of a loving relationship and never sought love again... I cried for her spirit... I cried for her love, her gentle, kind, and generous ways... I cried for her amazing empathy and compassionate manner... I cried for her mental illness robbing her of so much joy... I cried for her brokenness... I cried for all the regrets she had... I cried for her grandchildren... I cried for my brother and myself and mourned that we’d never again get to talk on the phone or laugh or hug...

And when I had released a great deal of my pain... I focused on the teddy bear... And breathed in his love and comfort and I didn’t feel so terribly alone or broken.

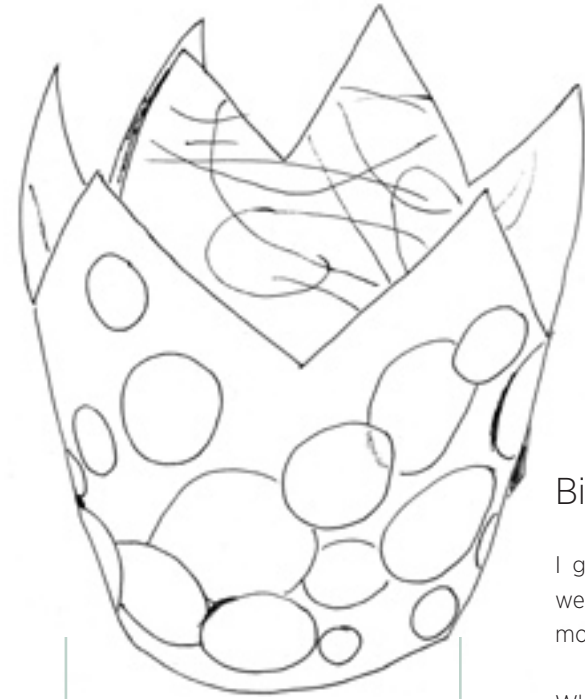
Love that bear.



Collection: *Collective Collection*

Added on: 7.26.2013

Contributed from: Easthampton, MA



Collection: *Collective Collection*
Added on: 7.27.2013
Contributed from: Seekonk, MA

Birthday Crown

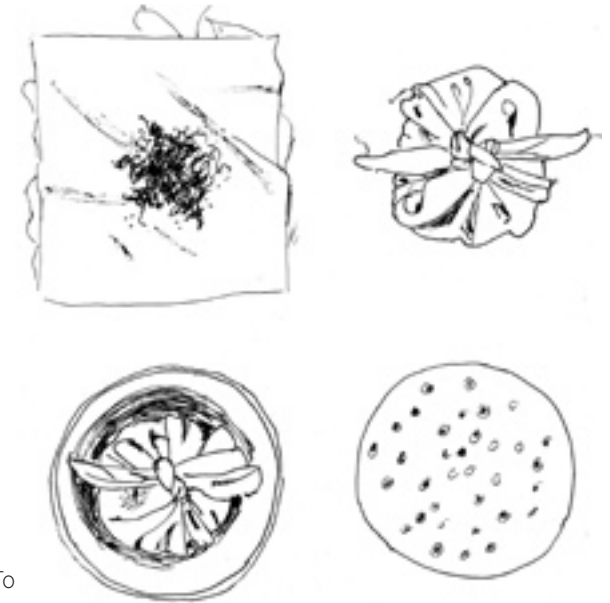
I grew up in a house that didn't celebrate birthdays exuberantly. They were quiet events, that were acknowledged, embraced and then we moved on.

When I met my partner, I was 35 years into this habit. Unlike me, she grew up in a household that celebrated birthdays enthusiastically. When we finally decided to have a child, we adopted the birthday culture of my partner's childhood.

This object was a present I received two years ago on my birthday. It was enclosed in a gift wrapped box that was weighted with another object. Until I opened the box, I had no idea what to expect. There was a very elaborate ritual my four year old explained on its use, that he dictated to his mother. "This was an object with magical powers to be used when I wanted to feel happy".

For me, the crown represents everything that I love about being a father and husband. A simple, mindful gift made with love and celebration.

I've kept it by my desk in my work space at home. I look at it every day as a reminder of how incredibly fortunate I am. At any time during the day I can wear a crown with a rainbow of polkadots and feel fabulous. At any time of the day I am reminded that the crown of fatherhood, of being a good husband, is worn with great responsibility and joy.



Collection: *Collective Collection*
Added on: 7.29.2013
Contributed from: Seekonk, MA

Dirt. Earth. Soil. Mud

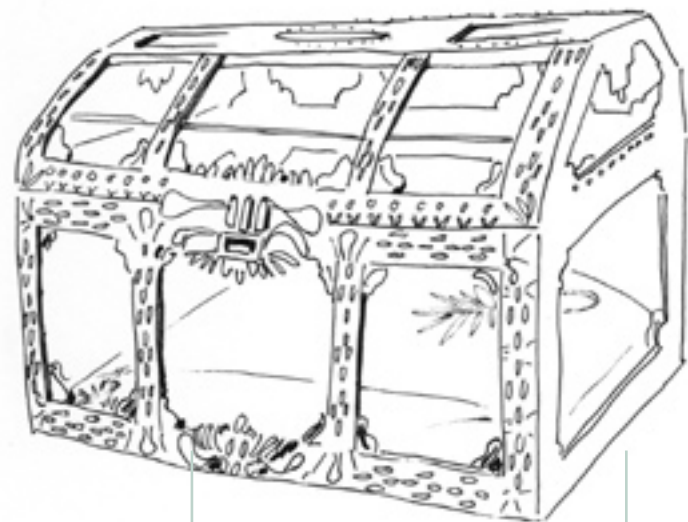
So many names for a single thing. Dirt. To some it looks like potting soil. To others it is something to clean off and wash.

Love is very much like dirt. Earth. It gives life, it promotes growth, it embraces death.

Invisible and frequently misunderstood as something sparkly and euphoric, love is alive, and it needs to breathe. It needs to exchange goods with other living beings. Love, like earth, is messy and it is also forgiving.

The smell of raindrops on a dusty sidewalk has always made me happy. Wet earth soon to become mud. Perhaps I have always longed for love yet mistook messiness with pain.

Now that the pain has ebbed, I can embrace the messiness. Love, like earth, is committed. To being what it is. Life inspiring.



Plastic Chest

This is an empty plastic chest my mother bought me for \$1 when I was a kid in one of our trips to El Paso, Texas, across the US-Mexican border. Love right now for me is a willingness to fill and be filled, but also an awareness and willingness to experience loss and emptiness, an openness to vulnerability. I feel it is a back and forth between connection and isolation. I'm experiencing the loss of the partner I hoped to share the rest of my life with, living the hurt of the distance between me and my sister, and becoming everyday more conscious about my aging parents.

Collection: *Collective Collection*

Added on: 8.15.2013

Contributed from: Salt Lake City, UT

Betty Crocker Boxtops

My parents have been together for over 40 years. They grew up poor, in western Massachusetts, in a small manufacturing town that eventually lost a lot of its businesses when outsourcing became commonplace. My extended family has never gotten along, and as a result, my parents faced an uphill battle in changing their lives and providing for my family.

Growing up, my mother always wore a pair of braided gold hoop earrings (which she still wears daily). In my early teens, I asked her why she would wear such boring earrings, every single day of the year, when the family was beginning its slow ascent to the middle class. She responded by telling me that, after her father-in-law whispered to her, "I give you one year" at her wedding reception that she was determined to make our lives growing up better than her own. And when she and my father were working multiple jobs, she clipped off every box top of every Betty Crocker item she purchased, finally amassing enough of them to get her first real jewelry: the gold hoops.

To me, love is about sticking it out over the long haul. Through extended family pressure and disdain, poverty, and hard work, my parents' marriage is one of the strongest I know of. Love is about working hard, scrimping, saving, and trusting that if you are truly committed, you'll clip those box tops as long as it takes to make sure that your family is taken care of.

Love is about hoping you can be a positive impact on the lives of those you touch.



Collection: *Collective Collection*

Added on: 8.18.2013

Contributed from: Salt Lake City, UT



Collection: *Collective Collection*

Added on: 9.2.2013

Contributed from: West Valley City, UT

Sands of Lebanon

What is love? It is a link that is built blindly, little step-by-step. Fumbling, reaching out for each other in sharp shadows. To love is a decision of making echo from the silver and jade sea that forged inside of oneself. To love is to teach the jaguar how to swim in river made of quetzal's feathers. To love is to drink the fertile soil of Lebanon.

My mother Alicia's love prolonged my past, it kept for me an inception.

My Umi 's love draw me a destiny marked by scimitars and laurels.

It gave me a name, a vine.

I am a Yapur.

¿Qué es el amor? Un vínculo que se va construyendo a ciegas, poquito a poco. A tientas buscando al otro entre sombras nítidas. Amar es la decisión de hacer eco al mar de plata y jade que se fraguó dentro de uno. Amar es enseñarle al jaguar a nadar en un río de plumas de quetzal. Amar es beber la tierra fecunda del Líbano.

El amor de mi madre Alicia, me prolongó el pasado, me guardó un origen.

El amor de mi Umi me trazó un destino marcado de cimitarras y laurel.

Me dio un nombre, una vid.

Soy un Yapur.

By Balam Yapur

Images

Page 4 Melancholy Regaladys

Page 10 Left to right, top to bottom: Column 1: "Peek a boo baby" Steven Housden (left); "Untitled" Thomas Scott (right); "New York, ca 1939" Helen Levitt; "Untitled #44" Nicholas Prior; "Sigrid Agren" Paolo Roversi

Column 2: "In Japan a geisha takes a break during her long makeup session" Jodi Cobb; "Masked Woman in a wheelchair, PA (1970)" Diane Arbus; "Untitled" Vee Spears; "Mara gang member 'Psycho 23—prison portrait in Chimaltenango" Guatemala Photo AP / Rodrigo Abd

Column 3: "The New Antiquarians" Michael Weschler; Title and Artist Unknown; "Moth Girl" Julie Chase

Column 4: "Powerpuff Girls" Amy Stein; "Mask, Hollywood, 1989" Herb Ritts; "Lady Gaga" Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin

Column 5: "Steinberg in Nose Mask, New York, Sept 30, 1966" Irving Penn (l); "Vintage Photo" Ku Klux Klan (r); "Little red riding hood III" Pamela Klaffke; "Edward Simmons in a Halloween Mask Carries His Pike, South Bronx, Help Shelter, New York City, 1963" Mary Ellen Mark; "Drag" Frank Melchior (l); "New York, ca 1939" Helen Levitt (r); "Penelope Tree, Mask by Ungaro, Paris studio, January 1968" Richard Avedon (l); "A plaster cast of the face and hands of theologian and religious reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546), made shortly after his death" Artist Unknown (r)

Page 12 Top to bottom, left to right: Row 1: Jessica Bahuaud; ZUMA Press; Mary-Jane Maybury; Neshachan; Kora

Row 2: Stranger to the World; Unknown; Zoe; Jeff Soto; Jared Chamberlain

Row 3: Vluchtig; Rebecca Mielke

Page 13 Top to bottom, left to right: Row 1: Andrea; Emily

Row 2: Engimonkey; Chinook2002; Melina Paez

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Page 27 Clockwise from top left: Anthony Pagani; Loran Saito; Donald Suthard; Anthony Pagani; Loran Saito; Bill Kaminski

Page 29 Clockwise from top left: Bill Kaminski; Anthony Pagani; Loran Saito; Bill Kaminski; Loran Saito

Page 30 Top: Rachael Hatley; Bottom: Frossene King

Page 31 Clockwise from top left: Leslie Tane (3); Anthony Pagani; Leslie Tane (3)

Page 35 Top: Shunk Kender/Roy Lichtenstein Foundation; Bottom: Edmund Teske

Page 36 Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

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Page 46 Anthony Pagani

Page 48 Top to bottom, left to right: Row 1: Kimberlie Dame; Jose Borrero; Hugh Wattles

Row 2: Unity of Greater New Orleans; Wade; Robert A. Mitchell; Rachel Tavel; Mariclare Lawson

Row 3: Unknown; Anna; Pipe Adams; Paulo Palinhos; Katherine Center

Row 4: Summer Embee; Pete Wayner; Heather Perry; Jacob

Row 5: Saira Ansari; Randall Talbot; Diana Edelman; Daisy Doty; The Misplaced Yinzer

Page 49 Top to bottom, left to right: Row 1: Stephen Cochrane; Jennifer Divine; Annickrh; FEMA

Row 2: Ellen Linder; Ken Hawkins; Kelly McIlvenny; Delectably Deviant; David "Rev" Ciancio

Row 3: Kartik Ramanathan; Paul Hitz; Crowd of Clouds; Leigh Anna Thompson

Row 4: Tomostyle; Greig Lamont; Children's Radio Foundation; Lauren Farrow

Row 5: The Squeaky Robot; Ashley Young; Chattanoogaoga Convention & Visitors Bureau

Page 51 Top to bottom: Bill Kaminski; Julie Sittler; Bill Kaminski

Pages 54, 57 Leslie Tane

Page 63 Thomas Hawk

Pages 64–69 Leslie Tane

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Acknowledgements

At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us. —*Albert Schweitzer*

This thesis is the culmination of the most extraordinary two years of my life. I have been inspired, humbled, excited, stressed, exuberant, shattered, scared, and triumphant and I am so grateful to those who shared my journey.

WITH GRATITUDE TO: Anna-Maria Goossens, editor extraordinaire; Daniel Kelm, bookbinder and artist; Troy Patterson letterpress hero; and Brian Bednarski, meticulous box builder and teller of jokes; the contributors to *Collective Collection*, and the participants in the *Veri* exhibit.

TO MY ADVISORS: Natalia Ilyin, who changed my life before we even met. Thank you for writing about the unspeakable and, by example, allowing me to do the same. Bethany Koby, who, in the most lovely way, pushed me to be more careful, more thoughtful, and more precise, and in doing so changed my practice for the better. Yoon Soo Lee, who never let go during the most intense times, and who helped me make my most revealing work my most beautiful. And Ziddi Msgani, who showed true generosity of spirit and supported me to the end. The four of you have made all the difference.

TO ALL OF MY CLASSMATES: I am better for knowing you. Thank you especially to those at the other end of the phone, email, Skype, and text message: Kerri, Loran, Rachael, Brian, Gerrit, Margaret, Christine, Richard, Jess, Sonja, Diane, Bill, and Alex.

TO MY FAMILY: Mikayla and Tucker, for your patience, support, snuggles, and belief in me. I love you infinity times infinity.

Dedicated to my parents, Jill and Stuart Tane, with much love and admiration. I am so blessed to have your loving support—I quite literally could not have done this without you.

Colophon

Curation as Graphic Design was designed and printed in an edition of four copies by Book1One, Rochester, New York on 80-pound matte paper. The text is set in Archer and Gotham Narrow, typefaces designed by Hoefler & Frere-Jones. The title face is History, designed by Peter Bil'ak. The book case was designed and fabricated by Daniel Kelm, Easthampton, Massachusetts.