

## Everything Fades

Memory as the ephemeral, this is my conclusion, and yet also my beginning. I will start with a statement I received at the end of my graduate travels, a teaching from my last instructor. Everything fades, politics fades, religion fades, tradition fades, histories fade, memories fade, all that remains is art. After three years of investigation, inquiry, experimentation this is all that is left, and all that will remain. Ironically, memory is the basis of the body of work I have created during my graduate studies. A beginning that started with the emerging of traumatic memory, relative perceived memory, organizing memory and finally the ephemeral memory.

The impetus of my research began with a professor's request to investigate my response to a particular color in my abstract expressionist paintings (Fig 1). I was asked to inspect my reaction to the implementation of green in my work. I began writing about how it made me feel. The words I used: ugly, dirty, shameful. I then recalled the color of the carpet in a house I once lived. It was a repulsive mustardy green Berber carpet. Once that connection was made, I began to reconnect with memories of the home. Upon sharing this verbally, I decided to write in a stream of consciousness. Using the typewriter, I continued to explore my childhood memories. In my awareness of fleeting and ethereal moments, I allowed myself the space to be open to my past, to allow it to become part of my present. For so long it has been a story I told not a truth I held. I wrote using an old typewriter. This action provided a tangible link to a child long since abandoned and ignored.

I have always been attracted to the antiquated. These are remnants of a past, memory, art. Of course, then I am lured by the manual typewriter, the simple mechanical nature lures me, as does the history they must have pressed out onto long forgotten pages. I took to my Underwood. We sat together, challenging both input and output. I feared acknowledging the stories within. For years, I kept them stored as someone else's history. My hands on this machine and the words

we would put on paper together would inevitably make it real, tangible events that happened to a young girl, acknowledged fully by no one. Both the typewriter and I were functioning at less than full capacity. She needed to be nurtured along, as did I. The machine and heart kept the tempo; we struggled to make a comprehensible memory on a page together. In the end, there were the first three stories that unfolded readily onto the page, unfolding with it all the broken pieces that belonged to me, and only me (Fig 2).

The words sat until I took a screen-printing course. At which time I felt the need to work with them. The need to share my words, my history, and my scars, it became a call that was not mine. The paper that I typed on was rice paper or a version of it. I had been using it in recent encaustic work. I enjoy its nature as a material to dissolve into the wax. With the memories typed upon it, the only copy in existence, it lent an even larger sense of fragility.

I began printing (Fig. 3). I printed in red ink, dark red, blood red, an intended color to represent a tangible element. Me. The act of putting these memories to paper was akin to bleeding. It felt like a freshly opened wound, from which pain would inevitably spill. I printed many sheets of it. I printed on the same rice paper. I began using the printed pages as I had been in previous works. I was drawn to the delicate nature, its translucency and the implications it brought to my concept. I began layering the text, much like Lisa Kokin's mandalas (Figure 4). I chose to layer because our histories and our memories are layers. They are layers of fact, fiction, and imagination. Somewhere in the masses of it, one hopes to find the truth. In the wax, one cannot see the conveyor of the message, how the story was told, who told it, or what they used to tell it. You cannot see the whole of the text, the whole of the memory. It exists only in the pieces one can encapsulate in legibility.

I moved into representing the memories that began it all. Most memories begin with home, if not the specific place then the people that represent home. Home is where most

pedophiles commit their crime. Usually in a space that is comfortable and safe. For me, this was no different. The first memory I have, of a sexual nature, occurred in my home when I was six. My father, amongst others, made his imprint here, by forcing me to watch him have sex with another woman. It was a memory that occurred as a flashback when I was 17. I believe at that point; many other broken pieces began to pool together in small tragedies, all of which embodied the home or people near the home. Therefore, I began to sculpt the text into small representations of home (Fig 5-7). I continued to use wax, which imparts a certain translucency to the idea of sanctity and sanctuary that is often applied to the home. These small representations are many in number, and in so, impart a sense of numerical value to the countless histories to be told, be it mine or the many of whom have not even begun to share.

Moving into the physicality of memory, I became aware of the moment of memory. At what point in my life as a victim did I put into context the wrong? When does a moment shift from normalcy to abuse? One day touching a man's genitals is just another day. One day, the malevolent rage of one man is just another day. One day the screams of a beaten wife are just another day. Later, who knows how much later, the memory reveals itself in a new context. Then I became all too aware of the implications of my memories. Due to this newfound awareness, I began to experiment with lemon juice.

Time-based art became a new language for me. I began experimenting in an effort to convey the importance of memory appearing and my need to contain and categorize it. The work needed to go unnoticed at first only to draw attention to it later. I had made many attempts at revealing the message using flame and heat with lemon juice, while these first few attempts were unsuccessful; I began to take a closer look at the burnt, marred result that came from applying heat. While the message did, in fact, appear during my process, the text appeared in a scarred state of being, much like the implication of the acts and the memories on the psyche. I then

allowed this treatment of the text to remain as part of the articulation in working with traumatic memory.

During this experimental process, I discovered the interaction that occurred with the flame and the carbon material that is lemon juice. Upon burning the entire printed piece, the last of the embers from the flame dance across the page, confined within the letters of the text, leaving in the ash recognizable elements that are remains of the text (Fig 8). Conceptually, this spoke to many implications. The memories can bring me to nothing, burn me for a lifetime, and leave me with nothing. Alternatively, the ash is something to leave behind, the art that remains. I cultivated this into four pieces *All That Remains* (Fig 9).

Further exploration led to tessellation origami. This art form extends the conversation of the impact of traumatic memory and allows for a dialogue that impedes a physical space. Memories are stored and discovered in the peaks and valleys of our mind. Tessellations are created by collapsing and folding these valleys and mountains onto themselves. Once the page has been folded, it creates a permanent memory in the paper. The folds become an enduring manipulation of the form and surface, an act that will not be subverted. Once the tessellation is unfolded, the scars of folding are still evident. This becomes a physical manifestation of an emotional consequence to a violent memory. Although these creations seem to have hard edges, there is an ability to create a very soft and organic environment from such harsh manipulation.

Jetske Visser is a Dutch designer that is a current influence. She is a designer that experiments with natural material. Jetske pushes material to its breaking point, seeming to force it into a new existence altogether. Recent work I find of particular interest is her environment that addresses memory and the loss of it, as it pertains to dementia. While her concepts are slightly different, her use of material to represent the loss is similar in language. Via cast wax, she created an environment incomplete and not as it seems, to challenge how we, without

memory loss, might perceive the world of someone who has broken or misinterpreted memories (Figure 10).

As my studies and investigations continued, I encountered new elements of memory, perception, and organization. The lines created by the origami shifted in meaning and nature as the individual piece began to grow and fill space. The nature of memory became organic. It has a need, through experience and redefinition, to shift and reorganize based on new information. People have a need to organize all information. The need extends in a linear fashion to anything associated with the passage of time. As the art of memory grew into these new shapes, there had to be a discussion about perception and organization. I had to find a way to best represent this organization, this need to make something linear that was, in fact, organic, something that would represent time as a passage (Fig 11).

After doing my first installation piece for ArtPrize 2016, I knew there was more for me in this process. Installation brought with it a greater need to problem solve, anticipate, calculate and coordinate. Installation could bring experience to a viewer on a grander scale. It would push and pull, something I had been trying to obtain in my work, an experience. Finally, my memory work would grow into a room; it would fill a gallery. After submitting and winning a proposal from The Arts Council of Kalamazoo, I was given the opportunity to see an iteration of this work come to a much larger scale. The KADI Grant began the creation of *Indiscriminate V2* (Fig. 12-14).

Jen Mills, an installation artist working mostly with ceramics and other natural materials such as salt, is also discussing memory. Some of her work is time-based, engaging another element of water (Fig. 15). As water passes through the ceramic offering so does some of the salt, which begins to create on the surface of the floor a different visual from that of the offering. While the offerings are all visually the same, the time passing and the water filtering, the images

left on the ground seem to create something altogether new. This activity implies that even the slightest variation in a moment creates a new path of interpretation.

Jen Mills' influence had more to do with encouraging the use of alternate materials. This use of alternate material returns to the home form. My graduate work seemed to cause continued disruptions with the people that were home for so long. There was continued conversation of perception and histories. These memories existed for each of us in a different version from one another. The memories that made us a whole were the memories that tore us apart, almost meaning to break. I had created glass house structures earlier in the program, but they did not reach their full potential. I returned to them after looking at Mills' work. I returned to the glass and began to push it to its limits, much like memories were doing to my home. Then I created: *What Builds Us Holds Us* (Fig. 16). This work is an example of a need and an ability to look beyond simple material and usage. It continues the theme of memory existing inside the home. Some will stand and hold together; some will crumble beneath the stress and fractures.

The last piece I have created *Everything Ephemeral* (Fig. 17) is a marriage of everything I have done. It continues to challenge materials and expectations. It continues to address what memory essentially is, ephemeral and fleeting. Moments, all of which are transitory become memories. Memories will be recalled and with every recall a new version, with every experience a new organization. However, in the end, all of it fades, and the only thing that remains is the art.



Fig 1:

*Untitled*

Oil on paper

30" x 48"

2014

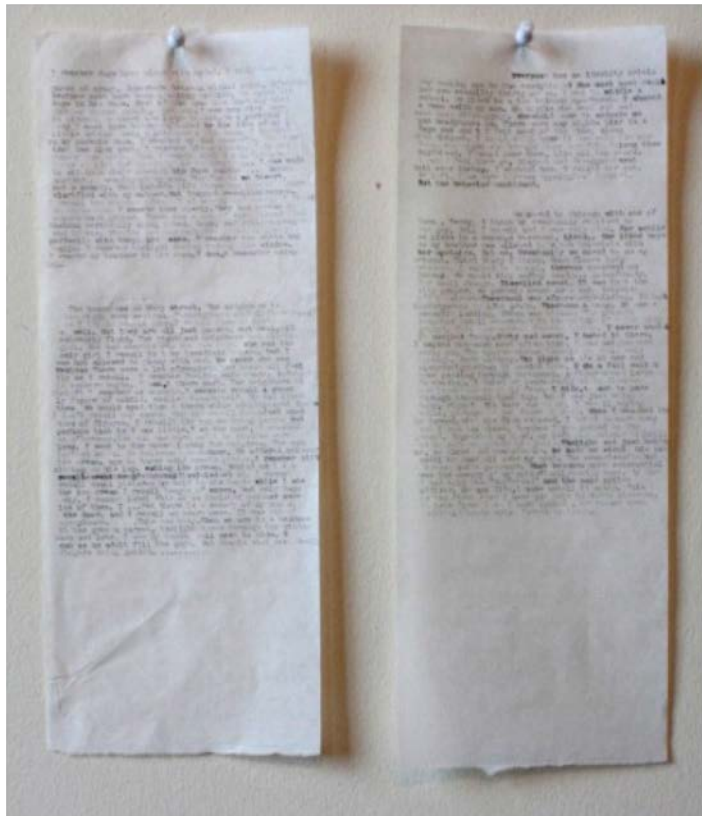


Fig. 2:

*Typed Memories*

Manual type writer, rice paper

4" x 12"

2014



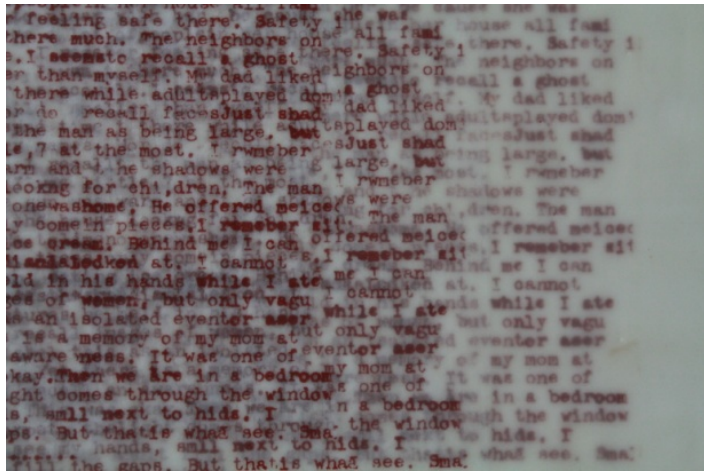


Fig. 3

*Untitled*

Screen print, paper, wax

8" x 10"

2015



Fig. 4

Lisa Kokin

*Cacophony*

2011



Fig. 5-7

*Perceived Memories*

Screen print

2015



Fig. 8

*The Process of Remembering*

Burnt paper

2015



Fig. 9

*All that Remains I, II, III, IV*

Ash

18 x 24 (each)

2015



Fig. 10

Jetske Visser

*Forgotten Memory*

Wax

2010



Fig. 11

*Untitled*

Folded paper, screen print, illuminated

2016



Fig. 12-14

*Indiscriminate V2*

Wax, paper, screen print, illuminated

2017





Fig. 15

Jen Mills

*Offering*

Ceramic, salt, water, time

2005



Fig. 16

*What Builds Us, Holds Us*

Glass, wood



Fig. 17

*Everything Ephemeral*

Paper, ink, copper wire, copper nails

2017

36" x 96"

## Works Cited

- Kokin, Lisa. *Cacophony*. 2011.
- Mills, Jen. *Offering*. 2005.
- Riley, Nichole. *Untitled*. 2014.
- Riley, Nichole. *Untitled*. 2015.
- Riley, Nichole. *Perceived Memories*. 2015.
- Riley, Nichole. *The Process of Remembering*. 2015.
- Riley, Nichole. *All That Remains*. 2015.
- Riley, Nichole. *Untitled*. 2016.
- Riley, Nichole. *Indiscriminate V2*. 2017.
- Riley, Nichole. *What Builds Us, Holds Us*.
- Riley, Nichole. *Everything Ephemeral*. 2017.
- Riley, Nichole. *Typed Memories*. 2014.
- Visser, Jetske. *Forgotten Memory*. 2010.

Image 1:

The Process of Remembering

Ash

2015

Image 11:

What Builds Us, Holds Us II

2017

Glass, wood

Image 2:

Untitled

Paper, lemon juice, ash

2015

Image 12 – 14:

Everything Ephemeral

Paper, Ink, Copper wire and nails

Image 3 and 4:

Perceived Memories

Screen print, paper

2015

Image 15:

All That Remains

Ash

2016

Image 5:

Untitled

Lemon Juice, paper, wood

2016

Image 6 – 9

Indiscriminate V2

Wax, paper. Lemon juice, illuminated

2017

Image 10:

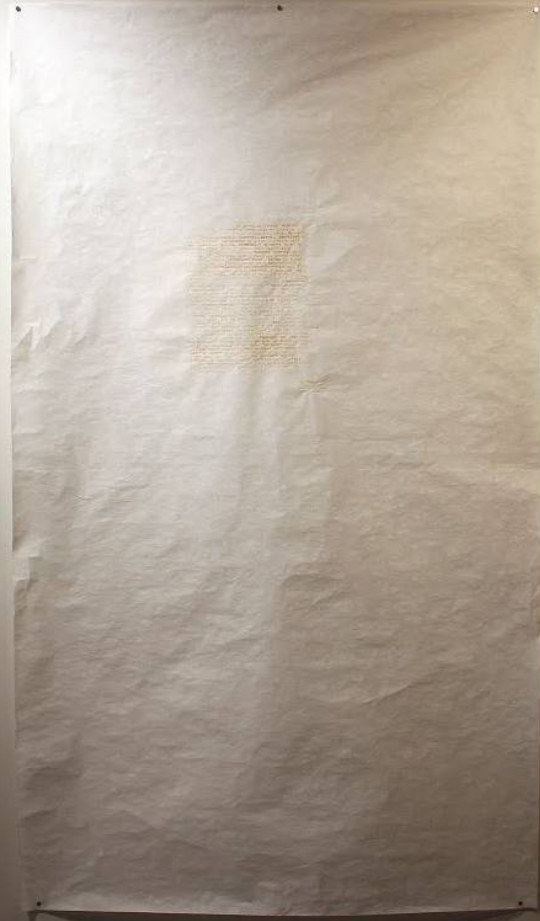
What Builds Us, Holds Us I

2017

Glass, wood







Small informational card with illegible text.



































