

Re: Do you ever get afraid in the woods?

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Introduction

“A sense of place results gradually and unconsciously from inhabiting a landscape over time, becoming familiar with its physical properties, accruing a history within its confines.”¹

—Kent C. Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing, and the Sense of Place*

Through my experience growing up in the American South, I began to notice and fall victim to Southern masculine culture. As a man, I feel that it is requisite to assimilate into this culture not only through one’s physical appearance, demeanor, and behavior, but also through sharing common interests in hobbies such as hunting or fishing. Judgment is the consequence of opposing this prototype in favor of one’s individuality. As Harvey Mansfield writes, “Manly men are given to passing adverse judgment, and not only on women but also on other males who do not meet their exacting standards.”² Mansfield is describing hegemonic masculinity, a concept involving a hierarchical social structure in which an ideal, dominant man exists and to which women and other masculinities are subordinate. How did hegemonic masculinity come about in the South, and how long has it been an established part of Southern society? Who determined the characteristics and codes of behavior that would make one a perfect man? Is a certain standard being enforced by men not because we embody this archetype, but because collectively we feel pressure to conform to the model of hegemonic masculinity? Why are men marginalized for something as human as expressing their emotions? Through my studio practice, I pursue answers to these questions by researching the precedents to contemporary Southern masculinity, gaining an understanding of the social workings of hegemonic masculinity through reading theoretical

¹ Kent C. Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing, and the Sense of Place* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 38.

² Harvey Mansfield, *Manliness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), xii.

frameworks, learning how my relationship to the South has shaped my identity, and attempting to subvert hegemonic masculinity in the South while commemorating other forms of manliness.

From a technical standpoint, I have worked largely within the disciplines of printmaking, papermaking, and book arts over the past decade. When I did not have the skillset to work in another medium, even though that medium may have enhanced or reinforced the content of my work in some way, I would feign that aesthetic utilizing the craft traditions (and innovations) of printmaking and book arts. Recently, I began to reflect on what specifically *these* disciplines contribute to my work. How can I communicate through text and images but also imbue processes and materials with references and metaphors? This query served as the guiding principle for my decisions regarding process and substrate choices that tie in with the subject matter of my thesis work.

Honor and Mastery: Tracing Hegemonic Southern Masculinity Back to the Old South

During the Civil War, Southerners believed that boys needed to follow in their fathers' footsteps in pursuit of liberty, independence, and the right to exercise authority over themselves and their families. Even following the end of the Civil War, Confederate officers continued to be revered by Southerners in the late nineteenth century for their discipline and courage. These values were epitomized by honor which was praised by Confederates and has overshadowed how Southern masculinity has been understood historically. Honor is used by historians to analyze interfamilial relationships such as those between husbands, wives, and children; men to men; and citizens to society.³

Southern white men internalized a sense of manliness through their relationships with their wives, children, and slaves by suppressing challenges to their authority. A few examples of these challenges include the refusal to work, slaves running away, and the construction of gallows by slaves as the presence of the Union army diminished the authority of coercive slave owners.⁴ Sovereignty over a self-sufficient household was requisite for mastery, another “analytical framework for understanding masculinity in the Old South.”⁵ Successful realization of this power partially defined the masculine identity of Antebellum Southern men who had individual approaches toward mastering their households, though their behavior was also shaped by social values.⁶ Significantly, such notions of mastery remain present in Southern households today. Attained by being the head of the household and supervising slaves, mastery prior to the Civil War was personally rewarding though less formulaic than honor. More specifically, from

³ Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2004), vii–ix.

⁴ Eric Foner, “The South’s Inner Civil War,” *American Heritage*, accessed April 22, 2019, <https://www.americanheritage.com/souths-inner-civil-war-0>.

⁵ Friend and Glover, *Southern Manhood*, ix.

⁶ Ibid.

one man to another, mastery was achieved in different ways and was based on the extent of an individual man's control over his wife, children, and slaves. Conversely, honor involved rigid standards which were socially imposed and maintained. Above all, honor was demonstrated on the battlefield, distinguishing men from others in the eyes of the public.⁷

In the South, honor and mastery coincided with land and slave ownership as well as having a family throughout the time period stretching from the American Revolution and the Civil War. However, data reveals that these dominant, idealized masculine traits were unattainable by most Southern white men. "Figures vary by region and time, but often less than half, and seldom more than two-thirds, of white men owned land in the Old South. And while slave ownership may have been slightly more attainable, there was no meeting of the minds between large slaveholders and the more numerous small slaveholders."⁸ Although honor and mastery are significant to Old Southern historiography and are still prevalent in contemporary Southern society, the full range of Southern masculinities is not revealed by these values.⁹

Between 1790 and 1840, Southern white men bolstered masculine identity through participation in the militia. This unified the white male community and excluded others (whether non-white men or women), allowing men to wear uniforms and bear arms which were symbols of the militia's masculine qualities. Many requests were made by captains and leaders of volunteer militias to procure arms from the government, suggesting that it was a priority for citizen-soldiers to be prepared. However, appearances outweighed these concerns as weapons and guns were more often used for ceremonial purposes. "In 1840 a Louisville commander recorded that his men had suffered for months without arms and would be 'sadly disappointed if

⁷ Ibid., x.

⁸ Ibid., xi.

⁹ Ibid., x.

again deferred' in their request for rifles: 'We have a parade in a few days and shall need arms.'"¹⁰ In addition, the guns and uniforms highlighted the distinction between the white male community of the militias and those who could only watch.

In many of the same ways, masculine self-identity is reinforced today through a recreational (as opposed to necessary) hunting culture in the rural South. In the South, hunting is such a prominent activity that apparel and weapons that are used by hunters permeate daily life. To wit, not only is it common to see men wearing camouflage hunting gear and pickup trucks outfitted with gun racks, camouflage seat covers, and decals from hunting brands and organizations, but, for example, the prominence of hunting is even recognized by the Tennessee state government, which issues license plates that preserve the heritage of hunting and fishing in the state through proceeds generated by annual fees collected from those who have that license plate (fig. 1).¹¹ In Southern homes, hunters commonly display their trophies, which are taxidermic animals that were killed during successful hunts. There are systems used by hunters and hunting organizations, such as the Boone and Crockett Club, to score big game animals and maintain world records. In addition to new world-record holders being announced on the Boone and Crockett Club website, they and their record-class animals are listed in the organization's records book. They can further commemorate their accomplishment with custom-made trophy recognition items such as rings, belt buckles, and plaques which are exclusive to record

¹⁰ Harry S. Laver, "Refuge of Manhood: Masculinity and the Militia Experience in Kentucky," in *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South*, ed. Craig Thompson Friend & Lorri Glover (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2004), 2–9.

¹¹ "Wildlife/Animal," Tennessee Department of Revenue, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://www.tn.gov/content/tn/revenue/title-and-registration/license-plates/available-license-plates/wildlife-animal.html>.

holders.¹² Southern men can earn positions of honor, similar to those praised by Confederates, through public acknowledgement of achievements such as this.

My experience growing up in the South led me to believe that I must possess a certain set of qualities to be considered a man in the context of Southern (masculine) culture. It seems that a man should be risk-taking and effortlessly exhibit strength, pride, self-confidence, and superiority. Just as uniforms and weapons set citizen-soldiers apart from the rest of society, so too did I feel that my physical appearance and how I conduct myself prevent me from successfully assimilating into Southern society. It became apparent to me that men are often treated as an “other” if they do not embody the persona that is essential to be regarded as a man.

Michel Foucault’s theories of discipline, surveillance, and panopticism relate to the concept of mastery and have been essential to me in framing my current body of work.¹³ The panopticon is an architectural model consisting of a central tower from which a watchman can observe workers, prisoners, or the like while remaining unseen, resulting in normalized behavior and actions from those who are being observed. The idea of the panopticon manifests in my work as a deer stand, representing the power and surveillance that the Southern male archetype has over Southern society. Articulated in the context of hegemonic masculinity, Foucault’s criteria for defining power tactics have been fulfilled by Southern men who continue to exert their authority, though the apparatuses have evolved and shifted from legalized slavery to powerful (if not legal) prejudicial hierarchies that exert bias based on gender and class, as well as race. This authority has shifted its focus from corporeal correction to manipulation through

¹² “B&C World’s Records,” Boone and Crockett Club, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://www.boone-crockett.org/bgRecords/WorldRecords.asp?area=bgRecords>.

¹³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

psychological means. In other words, identity is socially constructed by *feeling* like one is constantly being watched and judged.

As a means of collecting source material, I have spent the past year and a half reading through online hunting forums, gathering confessions by hunters who fear the woods and are publicly admitting weakness. I figuratively occupy the panoptical deer stand as I sit behind the screen of the computer, closely observing and undermining the power that has been exerted over me by the same type of hegemonic men who engage in discussions on these forums. The concepts of surveillance and observation have also influenced or are directly a part of works made by several of the artists that I have been analyzing in the making of my thesis work.

The Lasting Influence of Conceptual Art: Conceptualist Case Studies and Strategies

Various artists have been important for me in articulating the techniques, form, and content of my thesis work; moreover, they also provide a historical, theoretical, and formal context for my current body of work. More specifically, artists who use appropriative techniques and whose artwork has been permeated by their relationship with the places they live (or where they have spent a significant amount of time) have been influential as I have developed my current body of work about the American South. Moreover, practitioners who address masculinity as subject matter, use text as primary content, and who work with unconventional substrates, such as human skin, have also contributed to my work's process as well as content. To wit, Richard Prince, Bruce Nauman, Jenny Holzer, and Dario Robleto have all provided models for and ways to address the practical as well as thematic challenges that arise in my practice.

Bruce Nauman (b. 1941) is an American artist whose practice spans a broad range of media including drawing, printmaking, sculpture, neon, video, and performance. Despite the fact that Nauman has worked extensively with printmaking and installation, it is his expressed goals, engagement with others, and the effects that his 1979 move to New Mexico from New York had on his sculpture and performance work that most resonate with me. After his move out west, non-human beings, i.e., animals, became a recurring motif in his work. "He began keeping livestock, learned to ride horses, and tended acres of land, and that daily contact with the natural world soon surfaced in his art."¹⁴ Nauman was focusing on the baser instincts of human beings as evident in our treatment of animals. In *Carousel* (1988), Nauman used taxidermy forms of caribou, deer, and other wild animals, attaching them to a "motorized contraption, modeled on a

¹⁴ Wall text, *Bruce Nauman: Disappearing Acts*, The Museum of Modern Art/PS1, New York, NY.

rancher's device for training horses (fig. 2)."¹⁵ The animals hang from their necks and scrape against the gallery floor as the device circulates, evoking an empathic response. In contrast, I have incorporated taxidermic forms and images of them as a form of self-portraiture in several of my works, including *Ostracized* (2017)(fig. 3).

Nauman emphasizes his activities more than his own identity as he performs various tasks in his film and video works. Additionally, he often makes the viewer the protagonist of his video works that address and embody issues connected to subjectivity. One such example is Nauman's *Live-Taped Video Corridor* (1970)(fig. 4). This piece consists of two monitors installed on the floor at the end of a long, narrow corridor. Near the entrance to the corridor is a surveillance camera. Upon entering the corridor, the viewer comes to realize that he or she is watching their own procession down the corridor on the top monitor while the bottom monitor displays a pre-videotaped loop of the empty corridor.¹⁶ The top monitor functions as the opposite of a mirror on which the viewer observes his or her own actions and watches his or herself proceed further down the corridor as he or she approaches the monitors. By walking into the corridor, the role of the viewer changes to an actively engaged object who also becomes the subject of the work, and perceives his or herself as such, thus activating the work in two essential ways.

Nauman engaged in blue-collar work through building a fence in *Setting a Good Corner (Allegory and Metaphor)*(1999)(fig. 5). This is a video of Nauman constructing a corner fence on his ranch in New Mexico and is just under one hour long. At the conclusion of the video, the

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ First-person singular pronouns are deliberately used to formally describe Nauman's *Live-Taped Video Corridor* because it is constructed in such a way that only one viewer at a time can enter and exit the corridor. If two or more viewers were to enter the corridor at once, the viewers in front would not be able to exit the corridor unless those that were behind them did so first.

epilogue includes comments from Bill Riggins, Nauman's neighbor and partner on the ranch, who was asked to critique Nauman's performance.¹⁷ Although he notes that Nauman tamped the posts in well, he also mentions that he should keep his tools in the same place so that he can find them and that he should sharpen his chainsaw. Riggins acknowledges that Nauman will receive criticism for the work he did due to different techniques and ideas about setting corners, exemplifying the statement made by Harvey Mansfield in the introduction of this paper that "[m]anly men are given to passing adverse judgment, and not only on women but also on other males who do not meet their exacting standards."¹⁸ Nauman interacts with Bill Riggins as a new ranchman, conceding Riggins' superior expertise.

The influence of the ranchman lifestyle is evident in Nauman's recent performances, *Contrapposto Studies, I through VII* (2015/16), in which he dresses himself in a white t-shirt, Wrangler jeans, and cowboy boots (fig. 6).¹⁹ The performances, which consist of seven color projections with sound, took place in Nauman's studio where they were documented through video recordings. The seven projections blatantly make the viewer aware of their own physicality in relation to Nauman's projected image, which is easily more than twice the height of the average human. As the viewer progresses from projection I to VII, the original videos become increasingly manipulated: Nauman's body is deconstructed and colors are inverted throughout, making the casually walking artist appear like a lifeless corpse. The artist is in his 70s in the videos and slightly wavers in his attempt to walk a straight line, unable to sway his hips as he did in a similar performance made almost 50 years earlier, with his hands bracing the back of his

¹⁷ Ariana Musiol, "Setting a Good Corner (Allegory and Metaphor)," *Tate Modern* website, accessed October 28, 2018, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/nauman-setting-a-good-corner-allegory-and-metaphor-ar00576>.

¹⁸ Mansfield, *Manliness*, xii.

¹⁹ When compared to Nauman's earlier *Walk with Contrapposto* from 1968, the more recent videos also make the effects of aging known. It is evident that Nauman lacks the flexibility and balance that he once had and he puts these signs of weakness on display in the more recent *Contrapposto Studies*.

head. Only upon close inspection of photographs of the projections did I notice that there is something under Nauman's shirt. Perhaps it is a colostomy bag and this, along with the effects of aging on Nauman's body, exposes the mythic persona of the cowboy as having its weaknesses. The southwestern masculine archetype is portrayed again in *Green Horses* (1988) during which Nauman is seen training horses on his ranch (fig. 7). Issues of masculinity and the cowboy motif appear in several artist's works throughout the 1970s and 80s.

American artist Richard Prince (b. 1949) also engages with the issue of masculinity in one of his *Sitings* works, *Untitled (Shelter for a fugitive westcoasting artist)* (1975). Although the work itself and documentation of it have proven difficult to find, Michael Lobel describes it in the catalog *Fugitive Artist: The Early Work of Richard Prince, 1974–77* as including a “black-and-white image of a bearded man in outlaw garb—Western shirt, cowboy hat, and mask, with a revolver cradled in his left hand—seems to be a self-portrait of the artist.”²⁰ In the early 1980s, Prince continued using the cowboy motif in his *Untitled (Cowboy)* photographs which are appropriated from Marlboro cigarette advertisements (fig. 8). The Conceptualist strategy of appropriation, for which Prince is well-known, is one that I utilize in the majority of my works. Aside from online hunting forums, text and images in my work have been appropriated from a variety of sources including novels, stories, folk songs, taxidermy supply catalogs, and YouTube videos.

The Marlboro cigarette ads were intended to make men want to smoke cigarettes because Marlboro was associating the masculine qualities of cowboys with smoking. Lobel states that “One has to consider that Prince began to make his *Untitled (Cowboy)* photographs during the presidency of Ronald Reagan, who was well known for using the mythic image of the cowboy in

²⁰ Michael Lobel, *Fugitive Artist: The Early Work of Richard Prince, 1974–77* (Purchase: Neuberger Museum of Art, 2007), 36.

his own project of self-fashioning.”²¹ As if they were made to deliberately coincide with Reagan’s first term, the initial photographs in this series are dated from 1980–84.²²

In addition to the effects of the federal government on citizens of the country, government on the state level affected militia citizen-soldiers’ identification as masculine by deferring or recalling muskets.²³ However, citizen-soldiers were more concerned with physical appearances than military preparedness.²⁴ “In the South handling a gun was part and parcel of growing up and becoming a man.”²⁵ This socially constructed idea of manliness that is tied to physical appearance and having (or feigning) a particular persona is what Prince was evaluating through his photographs of cowboys. “It gets me angry, some of these representations, the way that media manipulates and doesn’t tell the whole story. Cowboys don’t tell the whole story at all, so it was sort of perfect.”²⁶

Like Richard Prince and Bruce Nauman, I too utilize forms of omission literally and figuratively. I have removed myself from my recent work, using posts from online hunting forums as the primary content, which calls the verifiability of the first-person narrative into question. This “conventionally would be taken as the ‘true,’ authentic voice of the artist,” and can be read as such or as multiple different voices.²⁷

Jenny Holzer (b. 1950) is an American artist best known for her text-based works in the public arena. Following formal training at the Rhode Island School of Design, Holzer moved to New York City to participate in the Whitney Independent Study Program, during which time she

²¹ Ibid., 37.

²² I have come across more recent work in Prince’s *Cowboy* series such as the *Untitled (Cowboy)* photograph cited in this paper which was executed in 2013; Interestingly, Nauman’s *Green Horses* was made in 1988, which falls during that president’s second term.

²³ Laver, *Refuge of Manhood*, 7.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 6.

²⁶ Lobel, *Fugitive Artist*, 37.

²⁷ Ibid., 47.

began to collect diverse and contradictory one-line statements of Western and Eastern thought.²⁸ This series is known as her *Truisms* (1978–87)(fig. 9). One example of the contradiction in the series is apparent in the statement “Awful punishment awaits really bad people” which is immediately followed by the statement “Bad intentions can yield good results.” In the context of Conceptual Art, language served an important role for artists who emphasized ideas over visual forms, so much so that text became a substitute for more traditional materials such as canvas and paint.

Holzer’s *Truisms* started anonymously appearing in the streets of New York in 1977.²⁹ The arena of New York City seems perfectly in line with Holzer’s goal of reaching a larger audience since New Yorkers do a sizeable portion of their reading in the streets. The *Truisms* were arranged in alphabetical order, printed inexpensively, and were initially wheat-pasted around SoHo. Eventually, the series could be found across the entire island of Manhattan as Holzer strived to make her work more accessible.³⁰

This accessibility to the public in tandem with the commercial print media that Holzer used to produce *Truisms* make the series a democratic multiple, a phrase often associated with artist’s books that are created using low-cost methods to be affordable. It would be nearly impossible to make a profit off of *Truisms* since the series was displayed in the public realm with neither the artist nor a gallerist present to market the piece to prospective buyers. The *Truisms* were left to the elements and invited New Yorkers to engage, and even intervene with, the pieces, rather than making them a rare commodity. After they were initially realized, the *Truisms*

²⁸ Jenny Holzer, interview by Bruce Ferguson, “Wordsmith: An Interview with Jenny Holzer,” in *Jenny Holzer: Signs* (Iowa: Des Moines Art Center, 1986), 65–67.

²⁹ Joan Simon, “Foreword,” in *Jenny Holzer: Signs* (Iowa: Des Moines Art Center, 1986), 7.

³⁰ Holzer, “Wordsmith,” 68.

were later commodified and disseminated on other substrates such as stickers, hats, t-shirts, and finally as electronic displays.

I am primarily interested in Holzer's *Lustmord* pieces which are exhibited in a gallery setting. *Lustmord* is a German word for murder motivated by desire. This work addresses the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s in two different parts: the *Lustmord Table* (1994)(fig. 10) and *Lustmord* photographs (1994)(fig. 11).³¹ I am particularly interested in the photographs for their equivocal use of text as well as the substrate on which they have been inscribed. The text comes from three different sources: that of the observer, that of the perpetrator, and that of victims who were raped during these wars. These texts were written on the skin of female volunteers and were documented using photography. Although the perspectives of some of the sources are discernible through first-, second-, and third-person singular pronouns, the majority are not, and they are all anonymous (e.g. "I try to excite myself so I stay crazy" [fig. 12] and "Your awful language is in the air by my head." [fig. 13]). The sources of the texts used in the *Lustmord Table* are similarly unidentified. For this piece, Holzer used bones sourced from a Lower East Side shop. She attached metal bands to some of these bones, which she then inscribed with the same text that appears in the photographs.³² Holzer appropriates text and figuratively brands it on human skin which, in some cases, can be interpreted as her own voice.

Text is the starting point for Texas-based artist Dario Robleto (b. 1972) who writes what he refers to as "liner notes," which include titles, captions, and lengthy lists of materials, prior to creating each piece.³³ While artists such as Richard Prince and Jenny Holzer used Conceptualist

³¹ Matthew McLean, "Jenny Holzer," *Frieze*, accessed October 28, 2018, <https://frieze.com/article/jenny-holzer-0>.

³² Holland Cotter, "Art in Review," *The New York Times* website, accessed October 28, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/05/13/arts/art-in-review-084786.html>.

³³ Ian Berry, "Medicine on the Spoon: A Dialogue with Dario Robleto," in *Alloy of Love: Dario Robleto*, ed. Ian Berry (New York: The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, 2008), 257.

strategies to challenge traditional notions of authorship, Dario Robleto solicits faith from the viewer that the bizarre materials he lists were truly used in the creation of his works. The “liner notes” were the artworks themselves in the series titled *Oh, Those Mirrors with Memory* (1996–97)(fig. 14). This series of action-based works were performed in secret with no accompanying visual documentation proving that the actions were executed. One such example is *Tonight I’m Gonna Party Like It’s 2099* (1996–present)(fig. 15). The liner notes for the piece read as follows:

In an effort to buy us all a little more time, on January 26, 1996, research was begun in the University library, searching for all references to the end of the world. The dates were then whited-out and Armageddon was delayed by writing in an additional 100 years to these predictions; for example, 1999 became 2099. The piece will continue indefinitely or until I am satisfied all references have been changed.³⁴

My current body of work similarly involves significant actions, such as gathering text from online hunting forums, that are unbeknownst to the viewer.

Robleto also engages in the act of collecting; however, he gathers materials that are used in sculptures and assemblages which are created in an effort to “heal the wounds of our collective past.”³⁵ This is evinced in his War Series which is comprised of works made between 2001–10. As part of this series, Robleto created a fictional, anonymous Civil War soldier who traversed historic American battlefields, sustaining physical and psychological wounds along the way.³⁶ Robleto makes it easier to imagine the horrifying experiences this fictional soldier (and the very real soldiers) had in the midst of and in the aftermath of war with pieces in this series. *An Atheist as Described by a Surgeon* (2004)(fig. 16), which presumably emulates a table on which a surgeon would place tools in preparation for field surgery in or near a battlefield, stands

³⁴ Elizabeth Dunbar, *Alloy of Love: Dario Robleto*, ed. Ian Berry (New York: The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, 2008), 7.

³⁵ Elizabeth Dunbar, “The Reconstructionist,” in *Alloy of Love: Dario Robleto*, ed. Ian Berry (New York: The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, 2008), 210.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 223.

out in this regard; specifically, all of the items composing the sculpture seem to have been cleaned, transported, and organized with the exception of the excavated WWI medical bowl. The bowl contains water treated with homemade tincture which appears to have left stains on the bowl as the water evaporated. In addition, there is a pair of antique bullet forceps and casts of Civil War-era “pain bullets” which were used by soldiers during surgery. The pain bullets were made from re-melted bullet lead salvaged from battlefields of every American war (fig. 17). The materials used in Robleto’s sculptures and assemblages, and even the minutiae of how they are manipulated, are imbued with meaning. I look backwards in time to the Civil War, just as Robleto did through the making of the War Series, in an attempt to understand the issues of the present that have affected me.

Although the goals of the artists mentioned above are different from mine in various ways, certain aspects of their work resonate with the themes and concepts that I explore in my own practice and have been significant to the development of my thesis work. In what follows, I will expound my thesis work, addressing specific pieces, the techniques and content used in their making, and the form that they took.

My Rite of Passage to Manhood

My formal education has somehow largely overlooked the origins and history of printmaking and book arts. The majority of the processes and formats that I use in the creation of my work, including papermaking, print media, and the book as an art object, developed from techniques used to preserve images and text of cultural and/or religious significance or the need to spread information in an economic and/or efficient way. Lately, I have been speculating on the purpose of printmaking and book arts in a *fine art* context. If I use processes such as papermaking, relief printing, letterpress printing with movable type, intaglio, lithography, and screen printing without considering their historical value, is it somehow arbitrary to utilize them in my work? If economic accessibility is sacrificed with the work that I produce in the disciplines of printmaking or book arts due to the cost of materials, my labor, etc., would it be more suitable to produce the work in another medium? Am I taking paper, prints, and books as materials and media for granted? Furthermore, is there a point at which too much focus on craft can overshadow an artwork? Artist and critic Luis Camnitzer suggests that there is a position on the figurative spectrum between art and craft where one could find the perfect balance between the two in "Printmaking: A Colony of the Arts."³⁷ Camnitzer states that "[t]oo much hate for the craft kills the work of art and too much love kills the artist."³⁸ For the purposes of this paper, my goal is not to provide direct answers to the questions I am posing, but rather to trace the thoughts, whether curiosities or frustrations, that led to my thesis work.

Throughout my graduate studies, I have begun to adopt the Conceptualist strategy of using language as a medium, much like Jenny Holzer did in her *Truisms* and the *Lustmord*

³⁷ Luis Camnitzer, "Printmaking: A Colony of the Arts (2006)," in *The Graphic Unconscious*, ed. Jennie Hirsh (Philadelphia: Philagrafika, 2011), 106. This article first appeared in the text archive of the Melton Prior Institute for Reportage Drawing.

³⁸ Ibid.

pieces. More specifically, I have been reading discussions on and appropriating text to use as primary content from online hunting forums that focus on experiencing fear in the woods with topics often clustered under rubrics such as “Do you ever get afraid in the woods?” or “Ever get scared while in the woods alone in the dark?” Information that is consistently found on all of the forums that I have been visiting is the handle of the users who made the posts and the date when the posts were made. Users are anonymous on the majority of the forums, although the names and location of users is accessible on one of the forums.³⁹ Other general information that can be found on some of the forums is users’ birthdays, occupations, and gender. There is an element of surveillance to several of the forums on which one can see what a user’s latest activity was including a list of their recent posts, which thread they viewed last, and when. Lastly, the values of trophy hunting subculture mentioned above extends to these forums in a literal and figurative sense. On one of the forums, some users upload trophy photos from successful hunts while another awards trophies to its users that are relative to their level of activity on the forum (e.g. the trophy “I Like It a Lot” indicates that a user’s messages have been liked 25 times and is worth 10 points).

My initial use of text from the online hunting forums occurred in my artist’s book, *I Know the Woods Come Alive at Night* (2018)(fig. 18). The book depicts the forest at dusk using one-color offset lithography to reproduce photographs of a misty woodland edge and the flora leading up to it with an additional graphic image of trees and text screenprinted on top. It is not bound in the strictest sense of the word; rather, each printed sheet was folded and cut in such a way that, when the book is displayed how it was intended to be viewed, it takes the form of a modified accordion structure. A portion of the sculptural book stands while the rest of it lies on

³⁹ This information is accessible on Bowsite Forums which can be found online at <https://www.bowsite.com/bowsite/home1/>.

the surface it is displayed on resulting in a 9” tall x 24” wide small-scale environment that the viewer/reader can walk around. The text in the book reads as follows:

It was a quiet evening, and I could hear something moving in the leaves across the road from camp every once in a while.

My eyes were still useless from looking into the lantern as it died and I couldn’t see a thing, but I was obviously being rushed by several somethings, human or otherwise, who had been lurking in the bushes nearby waiting for the advantage of darkness.

I know the woods come alive at night.⁴⁰

The text is positioned low on the pages, causing the viewer/reader to crouch down to read it as if they are looking for something in the thicket. I experience a vicarious fear from the act of reading posts such as this on the online hunting forums.

Text from these forums was also used in *Astray* (2018), a print created for a themed portfolio entitled *Surface Tension: The Barren, the Despondent and the Void*, which was inspired by the 2018 SGCI printmaking conference theme of “Altered Landscapes” (fig. 19). The print portrays a deer stand, carved and printed from a woodblock, in a wooded area that is backlit by light pollution for which I utilized pigmented, handmade paper to introduce color to the black-and-white image that was then inkjet printed on it. In the text excerpted for this piece, the hunter feels uncomfortable in the woods at night: “I dont [*sic*] care for walking to my stand in the dark. I feel safe usually once I reach my stand and am off the ground.”⁴¹ While a deer stand is similar to Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon in that it allows a hunter to surveil his or her surroundings while remaining undetected, it is also dissimilar in that it and the hunter’s presence are not meant to affect the behavior and actions of animals and other hunters. Instead, deer stands and tree

⁴⁰ “Do you ever get afraid in the woods?,” Bowsite.com, accessed September 12, 2018, <https://forums.bowsite.com/TF/bgforums/thread.cfm?forum=36&threadid=337601&MESSAGES=253&FF=CMT>.

⁴¹ “Does anybody else get scared walking out of the woods at dark by theirselves?...” Field & Stream, accessed September 12, 2018, <https://answers.fieldandstream.com/forum/hunting/deer-hunting/7423-does-anybody-else-get-scared-walking-out-of-the-woods-at-dark-by-theirself-my-mind-cant-help-but-to-think-someone-or-something>.

stands are beacons which guide hunters to a place where they feel safe, a place to seek asylum when in the woods at night. In *Astray* and *I Know the Woods Come Alive at Night*, the protagonist has been omitted, positing the viewer in the landscapes, and making them the force that haunt and shape the viewer, just as they do to me. These pieces were instrumental to me in that through them I was able to refine the way that I work with text from the online hunting forums. However, I felt that I could supplement my use of this text by stepping out of the bounds of traditional printmaking and book arts to consider other materials and processes that could work in tandem with the text.

The majority of my research and time in the studio has been devoted to the creation of *Liminal Personae* (2018/19) which is central to my thesis exhibition. *Liminal Personae* is an installation that consists of a series of six animal hides that have been laser-engraved with text that is culled from the online hunting forums, as mentioned above, as well as a screen recording of the process of reading through the hunting forums (fig. 20). The hides lack a grain side and therefore seem to have been split from thicker hides. In other words, the hides look and feel like suede. Although the hides vary to a certain extent in size and shape, they each measure approximately six square feet. The animals whence they come were skinned poorly as evinced by the holes, gashes, and scars that are present on the surface of each of the hides. The shapes of the hides, which presumably have not been altered since the animals were skinned, are raw and organic. For the most part, one can easily discern where the head and extremities of each animal were. The colors of the hides range from a pale yellowish-brown reminiscent of sand to a cream-like color.

The text that I have chosen is composed of confessions of fear and public admittance of weakness. Although these confessions will remain publicly archived unless the forum staff

deletes the topic along with all of its accompanying posts, a complete list of the posts that were used to make *Liminal Personae* is included below:⁴²

1. Heck yes, I've been scared. To top it all off it's the fall season, leaves are falling and you swear you're hearing footsteps all around.
2. I got to my second stand location and I was just about ready to start climbing my tree steps when I noticed FRESH BOOT TRACKS in the snow leading away from my stand into thick timber!!! I was completely freaked out!!! However, I did manage to climb the tree, more out of fear of being on the ground, and got the stand down.
3. I was camping by myself for the night, heard lots of noise, then had multiple noses against the tent wall. I grabbed my 30.06 and this went on for about 10 minutes. I did not sleep a wink the rest of the night.
4. Two days ago I was hiking to my spot and a huge black object ran across the trail and through the creek crashing through everything. Scared the living crap out of me, too dark to even shoot at whatever it was if it came after me.
5. It was so dark in there that I could not see my own feet on the ground. While stumbling down the trail I hear some movement on top of the bluff to my right probably only 15–20' high. I grab my gun and then a bunch of rocks break loose and I screamed, like a man as I recall.
6. Sure I've been scared in the woods. I agree that it's best to follow your instincts. But sometimes my mind can create things to be afraid of.

The decision to conceal the provenance of the confessions and to limit what I culled to those that used first-person singular pronouns was a deliberate one. By culling posts that utilize first-person narration and omitting the handles of the users who posted them, the source of the text is obscure, the authorship is disputable. My intention is to enable the viewer/reader to simultaneously presume that I authored the text while it can also be interpreted as the voice of another individual. The process of reading discussions on these online hunting forums has allowed me to enter a liminal, virtual space from which I emerge along with these other men,

⁴² “Do you ever get afraid in the woods?,” Bowsite.com; “Does anybody else get scared walking out of the woods at dark by theirselves?...,” Field & Stream; “Ever get scared while in the woods alone in the dark?,” SaddleHunter.com, accessed September 12, 2018, <https://saddlehunter.com/community/index.php?threads/ever-get-scared-while-in-the-woods-alone-in-the-dark.4065/>.

with whom I sympathize, as an aggregate, ambiguous identity; as a result, the mediated text in the work embodies this quality, that is, information on the original hunting forums has been omitted to the extent that the source and authors of the text are indiscernible.

Ultimately, it was not my intention to single these individuals out by revealing their identities, but rather to commemorate the courage it took to share their anecdotes with an online community that is undoubtedly trolled by judgmental men. Elizabeth Dunbar states that the philosophical approach that Dario Robleto has toward art making encompasses what is referred to as “sentimental collaboration,” which involves voluntary communal exchange of sympathy and support through creative production.⁴³ The idea of sentimental collaboration resonates with me and, although there is no direct exchange of objects through the online hunting forums, I feel that I have found a small group of men with whom I can connect on an emotional level.

Through “branding” these texts on animal hides, I am simultaneously depicting the mental blemishes and scars that I am left with from my rejected efforts to be regarded as a man in Southern masculine culture while questioning the ideology that leads many Southern men to believe that revealing any vulnerability will diminish their masculinity, like a sin that cannot be absolved. With these reflections in mind, in addition to my speculation on the significance of traditional printmaking and book arts to my work, it was important to burn these texts into animal hides, which are further imbued with meaning, and for the resulting objects to appear branded (fig. 21). Themselves a byproduct, these animal hides reference the act of hunting, but, more importantly, the hides lack fur and therefore a camouflage mechanism, which functions as a metaphor for these men revealing their vulnerabilities on online hunting forums. By confessing their fears and weaknesses, these men are resisting the belief held by hunters who embody the

⁴³ Dunbar, “The Reconstructionist,” 212-13.

dominant, idealized archetype that hegemonic masculinity proposes, which is that the woods at night are safer than an urban area and those who express unease about this proposition are judged unfavorably as “chickens” or “sissies.” Consequently, exposing oneself in such a way makes these users stand out in the online communities that they would otherwise blend into.

This social structure and the interactions between users of online hunting forums is perceptible in the screen recording element of the installation that supplements the animal hides. Through the screen recording, I documented my own activity from the initial query of “Is anyone else afraid of the woods at night?” to reading through an entire thread on Bowsite.com. By way of the computer screen, the persona of a hunter is channeled to the viewer through the desktop picture which is a wallpaper that is branded by Browning, a company that designs and sells firearms and outdoor products, in addition to the time stamp in the screen recording which ends at 3:00 AM, implying that the hunter stayed awake prior to the day’s hunt motivated by fear of the woods at night (fig. 22).⁴⁴ The screen recording is played on a desktop computer which is placed on a wooden sawhorse table, a common motif in men’s workspaces (fig. 23). This posits the viewer as the hunter and brings elements of the panopticon, namely the advantageous position of the watchman where, in this case, one is able to observe the activity of other users on the forums while those users remain unaware of it.

It is important to me to discuss *Liminal Personae* and how it relates to printmaking and book arts using the canons of these disciplines. Although laser cutters have been utilized to expand possibilities of analog plate and press transfer techniques in printmaking, I have been using them much like I would use a digital printer in my practice. This is a departure from

⁴⁴ According to another thread on Bowsite.com, some hunters who prefer to hunt in the early morning will wake up as early as 3:00 AM depending on the season; “What time do you start a morning hunt?,” Bowsite.com, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://forums.bowsite.com/tf/regional/thread.cfm?threadid=173567&state=WJ>.

traditional printmaking in several ways: (1) the resulting object differs in material qualities and (2) the work is produced outside of a printmaking workshop paradigm. However, I would argue that this technique of utilizing a laser cutter falls within the methodology of printmaking in the sense that virtual data is developed, manipulated, and translated from a digital space to a tangible surface, much like how a traditional print evolves from an idea to ink on paper. Additionally, output generated through the use of a laser cutter is reproducible which is a quality that is fundamental to the majority of printmaking processes, though *Liminal Personae* was produced as a one-of-a-kind work due to financial constraints related to acquiring the animal hides. Lastly, the series of six hides that constitute *Liminal Personae* are draped over tree branches that extend out into the gallery perpendicular from the wall.

Draping animal hides over tree branches was a primitive method used to dry out hides after animals were skinned, but, more importantly, this posits the wall that the branches are extending from as the threshold between the liminal, virtual space mentioned above and re-incorporation into the real world, which corresponds to the gallery space. The series is presented in a constructed order from which the reader can construe a narrative, which is a quality that I deem necessary for an artist's book to have, if the text is read from left to right. The piece is, secondarily, a collection, or personal archive, of texts that I have gathered from my own virtual hunting practice within the confines of these hunting forums. The practice of archiving (and the dissemination of artist's books to institutional collections) is important to many professional book artists, and archiving also serves the purpose of preserving valuable records and objects. *Liminal Personae* marks the first time that the concept of the archive has been part of my practice and it is through this and the quality of narrative that this piece exists in the margins of the umbrella of book arts.

Conclusion

As I move forward, I feel that it is important to define the concept of the archive for myself in order to understand how it will continue to be part of my practice. Should a principle or philosophy govern what is collected to form an archive? In keeping with the theme of cultures that I have a deep sense of that have influenced and shaped my identity, what would my ever-growing archive look like? How much information is important to document and incorporate in my artwork to make the experience of it a deeper, richer one for viewers? How does the organization and compartmentalization of information (or conversely, its disorganization) affect what a viewer construes from an artwork? What are the possibilities inherent in evoking an identity other than my own?

In order to test if I have truly found a group of men that I can connect with through the hunting forums, I intend to create my own user profile which will enable me to interact with the men who inhabit these online communities. The next question to answer is whether or not to reveal my true identity. Would my purposes be better served if I operate under a pseudonym, such as how Richard Prince collaboratively invented the East Village artist known as John Dogg with New York gallerist Colin de Land?⁴⁵

The narrative quality that distinguishes an artist's book from other media and the relatively cost-effective means that print media provides are among the primary reasons why I have produced the majority of my work within these disciplines. However, it seems that my love for the craft traditions of these disciplines *has* "killed the artist" in me, in a sense. The consequence of my obsession with craftsmanship can result in me, as the artist, being too far removed from my work. I have identified several solutions to this such as thinking of my work in

⁴⁵ John Dogg [Richard Prince], "In Propria Persona," in *Richard Prince*, organized by Nancy Spector (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2007), 333.

broader terms and doing more intuitive, physical experiments, rather than approaching my work with thorough planning and careful thought. Through the research I have conducted on Conceptual Art, one among many things that I realized is that art can be constituted from everyday activities, exemplified by Bruce Nauman's pacing around his studio in *Contrapposto Studies*. Lastly, the hardest, and seemingly most profound, piece of practical wisdom to swallow is to allow myself to fail, thereby making myself vulnerable as an artist. The fear of failure is a difficult one for me to overcome, but now that I have admitted my weakness, only the future will tell what failure will add to my work and what I will learn from it.

Images of Artwork Cited



Figure 1. Tennessee Sportsmen's Wildlife Foundation license plate.



Figure 2. Bruce Nauman, *Carousel*, 1988; Steel, aluminum, polyurethane, electric motor.



Figure 3. Kyle Holland, *Ostracized*, 2017; Etching, aquatint, and surface roll with chine collé; 18" x 25".

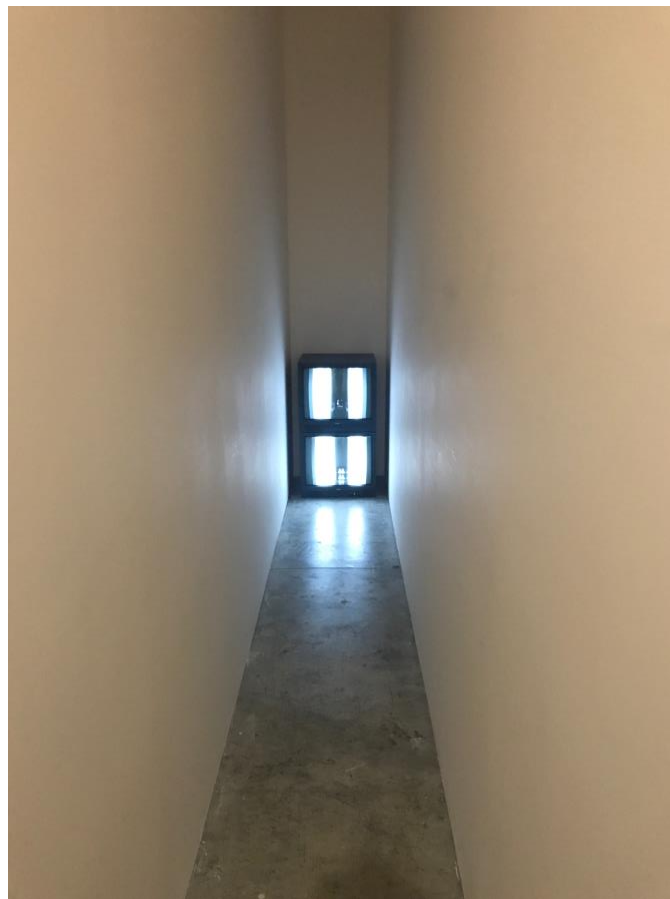


Figure 4. Bruce Nauman, *Live-Taped Video Corridor*, 1970; Wallboard, video camera, two video monitors, videotape player, and videotape.



Figure 5. Bruce Nauman, *Setting a Good Corner (Allegory and Metaphor)*, 1999; Video, monitor, color, and sound (stereo); duration: 59 min., 18 sec.



Figure 6. Bruce Nauman, *Contrapposto Studies, I through VII*, 2015/16; Seven video projections with sound; continuous duration.



Figure 7. Bruce Nauman, *Green Horses*, 1988; Video installation (color, sound) with two color video monitors, two DVD players, video projector, and chair; duration: 59 min., 40 sec., looped.



Figure 8. Richard Prince, *Untitled (Cowboy)*, 2013; Chromogenic print; 82 3/8" x 70 1/8".

ABUSE OF POWER COMES AS NO SURPRISE
ALIENATION PRODUCES ECCENTRICS OR REVOLUTIONARIES
AN ELITE IS INEVITABLE
ANGER OR HATE CAN BE A USEFUL MOTIVATING FORCE
ANY SURPLUS IS IMMORAL
DISGUST IS THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO MOST SITUATIONS
EVERYONE'S WORK IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT
EXCEPTIONAL PEOPLE DESERVE SPECIAL CONCESSIONS
FAITHFULNESS IS A SOCIAL NOT A BIOLOGICAL LAW
FREEDOM IS A LUXURY NOT A NECESSITY
GOVERNMENT IS A BURDEN ON THE PEOPLE
HUMANISM IS OBSOLETE
HUMOR IS A RELEASE
INHERITANCE MUST BE ABOLISHED
KILLING IS UNAVOIDABLE BUT IS NOTHING TO BE PROUD OF
LABOR IS A LIFE-DESTROYING ACTIVITY
MONEY CREATES TASTE
MORALS ARE FOR LITTLE PEOPLE
MOST PEOPLE ARE NOT FIT TO RULE THEMSELVES
MOSTLY YOU SHOULD MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS
MUCH WAS DECIDED BEFORE YOU WERE BORN
MURDER HAS ITS SEXUAL SIDE
PAIN CAN BE A VERY POSITIVE THING
PEOPLE ARE NUTS IF THEY THINK THEY CONTROL THEIR LIVES
PEOPLE WHO DON'T WORK WITH THEIR HANDS ARE PARASITES
PEOPLE WON'T BEHAVE IF THEY HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE
PRIVATE PROPERTY CREATED CRIME
ROMANTIC LOVE WAS INVENTED TO MANIPULATE WOMEN
SELFISHNESS IS THE MOST BASIC MOTIVATION
SEX DIFFERENCES ARE HERE TO STAY
STARVATION IS NATURE'S WAY
STUPID PEOPLE SHOULDN'T BREED
TECHNOLOGY WILL MAKE OR BREAK US
THE FAMILY IS LIVING ON BORROWED TIME
THE LAND BELONGS TO NO ONE
TIMIDITY IS LAUGHABLE
TORTURE IS BARBARIC
YOU ARE GUILLESS IN YOUR DREAMS
YOU MUST REMEMBER YOU HAVE FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Figure 9. Jenny Holzer, *Truisms*, 1978–87; Printed using various processes including photostat and offset printing; varying sizes.



Figure 10. Jenny Holzer, *Lustmord Table*, 1994; Human bones, engraved silver bands, wooden table.



Figure 11. Jenny Holzer, *Lustmord*, 1994; Cibachrome prints; 13" x 20" each.



Figure 12. Jenny Holzer, selection from *Lustmord*, 1994; Cibachrome print; 13" x 20".

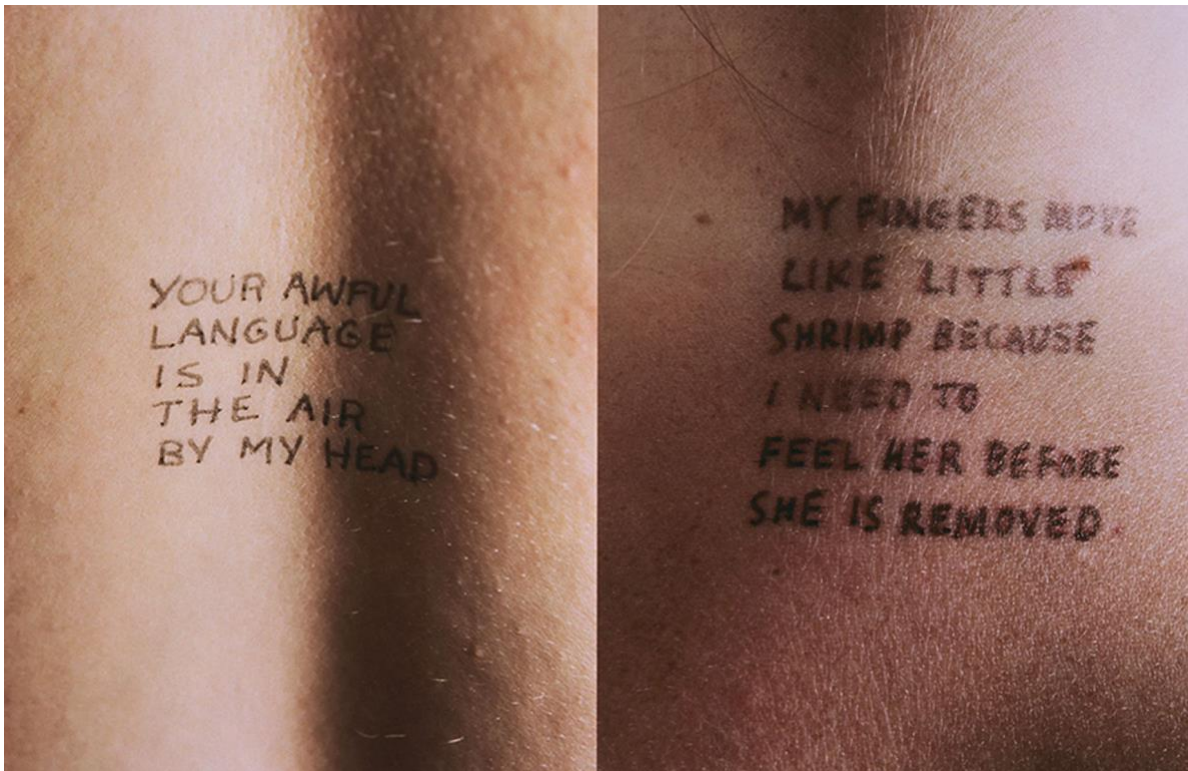


Figure 13. Jenny Holzer, selection from *Lustmord*, 1994; Cibachrome print; 13" x 20".

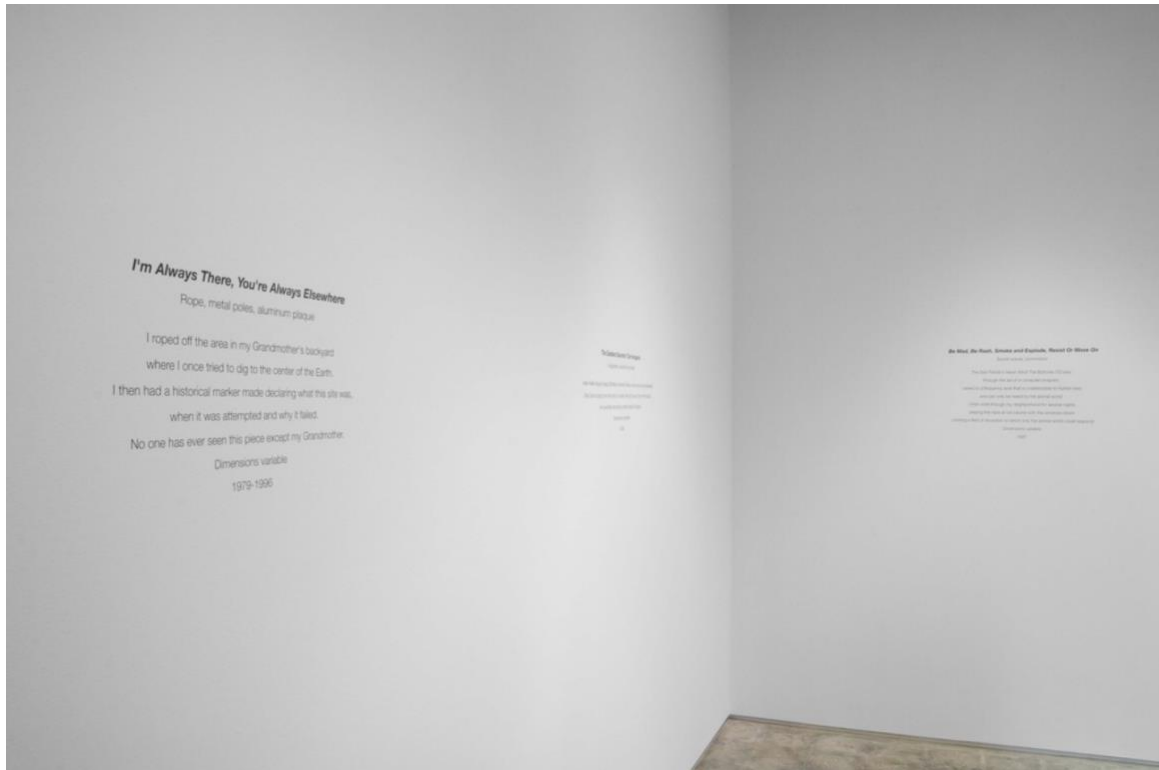


Figure 14. Dario Robleto, *Oh, Those Mirrors With Memory* (installation view), 1996–97.



Figure 15. Dario Robleto, *Tonight I'm Gonna Party Like It's 2099*, 1996–Present; A library, whiteout, ink; Dimensions variable.



Figure 16. Dario Robleto, *An Atheist As Described By A Surgeon*, 2004; Cast of a Civil War era “pain bullet” (bullets used by soldiers to bite on during surgery) made from re-melted bullet lead salvaged from battlefields of every American war, cast bone calcium, antique bullet probe with carved finger bone handle, antique iron surgical extractor, antique bullet forceps, amputation saw, excavated WWI medical bowl, surgical silk, water treated with homemade tincture (aged holy water, blood root, arnica, dead sea salt, hellebore, butcher’s broom, angelica root, myrrh resin, blessed thistle, Jacob’s staff, Solomon’s Seal, belladonna), ash, silver, rust, velvet; 38” x 40” x 18”.



Figure 17. Dario Robleto, *An Atheist As Described By A Surgeon* (detail shot of cast Civil War era “pain bullets”), 2004.



Figure 18. Kyle Holland, *I Know the Woods Come Alive at Night*, 2018; Offset lithograph and screenprinting; 24" x 9".



Figure 19. Kyle Holland, *Astray*, 2018; Inkjet and letterpress on handmade paper; 24" x 10".



Figure 20. Kyle Holland, *Liminal Personae*, 2018/19; Laser-engraved animal hides, tree branches, screen recording, plywood, and saw horses; 16' x 9' x 6'.



Figure 21. Kyle Holland, *Liminal Personae*, 2018/19; Laser-engraved animal hides, tree branches, screen recording, plywood, and saw horses; 16' x 9' x 6'.

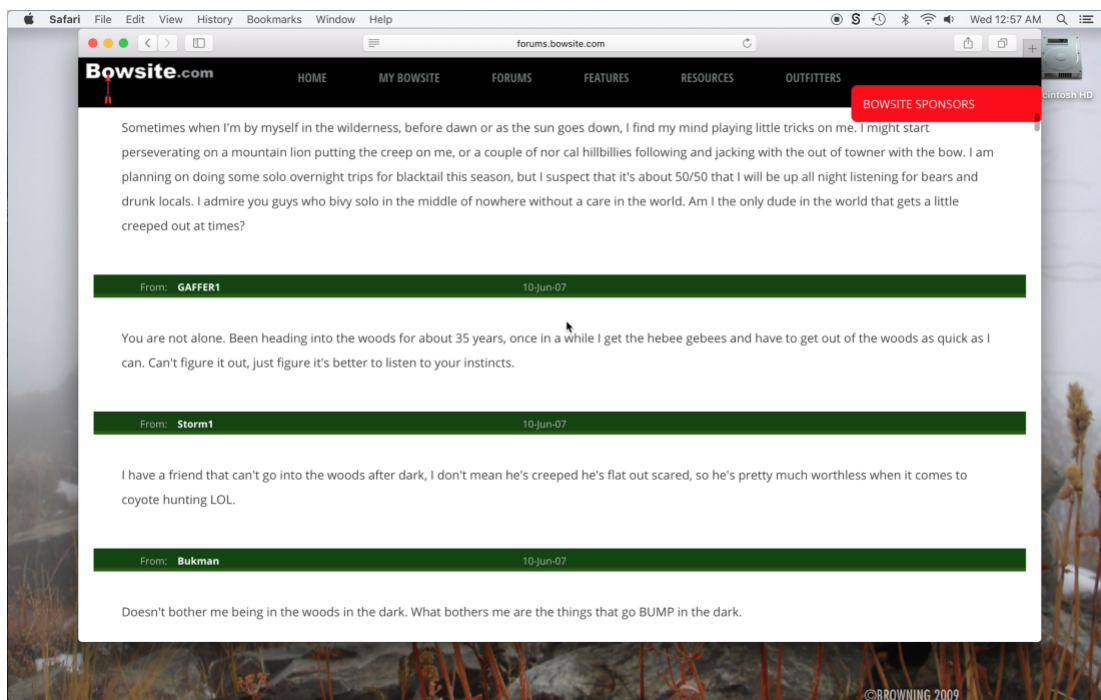


Figure 22. Kyle Holland, *Liminal Personae*, 2018/19; Screenshot of the screen recording; duration: 2 hrs., 5 mins., looped.



Figure 23. Kyle Holland, *Liminal Personae*, 2018/19; Detail shot of the screen recording and sawhorse table.

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