Phobia and Phobic Relationships: A Visual Exploration

Marcia Phillips Sanders

University of Colorado Boulder

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.colorado.edu/print_theses

Recommended Citation

https://scholar.colorado.edu/print_theses/84

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by University Libraries at CU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Libraries Digitized Theses 189x-20xx by an authorized administrator of CU Scholar. For more information, please contact cuscholaradmin@colorado.edu.
PHOBIA AND PHOBIC RELATIONSHIPS:
A VISUAL EXPLORATION

by

MARCIA PHILLIPS SANDERS

Bachelor of Fine Arts, East Carolina University, 1995
Master of Education, K-12 Art, University of South Alabama, 1997

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

2004
This thesis entitled:
Phobia and Phobic Relationships: A Visual Exploration
has been approved for the Department of Art and Art History

Clinton Cline, Committee Chair

Sally Elliott, Committee Member

Kay Miller, Committee Member

Date April 21, 2007

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
Sanders, Marcia Phillips (M. F. A., Art and Art History)

Phobia and Phobic Relationships: A Visual Exploration

Thesis directed by Professor Clinton Cline, Printmaking.

Phobia and Phobic Relationships: A Visual Exploration is an in-depth study through visual media of the fears that exist in everyday life. My own personal view of how phobia takes form is explored through self-portraits filled with dynamic color, composition, value, texture and shape. Composition enforces each particular phobia and interprets it as honestly as possible. All of the works are open for interpretation by the viewer. This written thesis and the artwork encourages the viewer to participate as a helping hand to benefit through care-taking a mentally ill person or in self-care. My own work is rewarded by the fact that I know I have been honest and have used a public exhibition to promote hope for the mentally diseased.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Illustrations</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PART I</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PART II</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Images</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Mistaken Origin and the Indigenous Inquisition</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Green Plants, which give Oxygen to everyone but Asthmatics</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Faith Healers and their Righteous Indignation</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Heights and the Nausea it Causes</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Falling Off of Just About Anything</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Electricity, Conduits, and the Tin Foil Hats</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Painting, Color, Brushes, and Textures</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Never Being on Time and Always Being Late</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Extinction, Genocide, and Annihilation</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Printmaking and the Tools of Printmaking</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Self-Consumption and the Severing of One’s Own Head</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Fear and the Pit in my Stomach</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Mistaken Origin and the Indigenous Inquisition</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Created December through April, 2004, Color Lithograph.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Created December through April, 2004, Color Lithograph.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Green Plants, which give Oxygen to everyone but Asthmatics</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Created December through April, 2004, Color Lithograph.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Created December through April, 2004, Color Lithograph.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Falling Off of Just About Anything</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Created December through April, 2004, Color Lithograph.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Heights and the Nausea it Causes</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Created December through April, 2004, Color Lithograph.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Electricity, Conduits, and the Tin Foil Hats</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Created December through April, 2004, Color Lithograph.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Painting, Color, Brushes, and Textures</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Created December through April, 2004, Color Lithograph.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Never Being on Time and Always Being Late</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Created December through April, 2004, Color Lithograph.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Extinction, Genocide, and Annihilation</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Created December through April, 2004, Color Lithograph.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Printmaking and the Tools of Printmaking</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Created December through April, 2004, Color Lithograph.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Self-Consumption and the Severing of One’s Own Head</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Created December through April, 2004, Color Lithograph.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Phobia: Fear of Fear and the Pit in my Stomach</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Created December through April, 2004, Color Lithograph.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Through this work, I made friends with fear. Fear has been living in my house, riding with me in the car, and sleeping beside me every night. To paraphrase Ernst Kris, I look at phobia with my own eyes until I feel myself in “full possession” of it.1 My obsessive interest in phobia and phobic relationships came about at an early age, and as a high school teacher, it returned to pay me an awakening visit. Since there are so many things in life that are precious, I decided to keep vigil on it through my art. This work is intended as a wake (a time set aside in the deep South to honor and remember the dead) for those who have been lost to fear.

There are always evil presences around. They are always being re-created. Go ahead – look under your bed or in your closet. Have tea with the shadows in your bedroom. Obsession with fear projects beyond our physical existence, and remains in a prominent place in the canons of our own personal history. We loathe fear because it catapults us to a realm beyond our control; but we also adore fear because it catapults us to a realm beyond our control. Fear confirms that we are alive. I have been acquainted with people who cut themselves just to feel alive.

Fear is not bogus or imagined; it is real, strong, overwhelming, searing, and stamps an indelible impression upon our memory – a scar, if you please. Western

---

1Kris, Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art, 51.
thinking would have us to believe these scars have negative connotations, but some cultures wear scars as trophies from victory in life’s battles. Imagine my surprise to learn that phobia is very normal - the author, Rachman, describes it as such:

There is good reason to believe that simple phobias occur quite frequently in the general population and are tolerated by most people unless and until the fear begins to interfere with their normal activities. Phobias tend to become a psychiatric problem only when they are complex and their effects produce some measure of incapacitation.

In a fear survey, typical animal phobias include snakes, worms, rats and so on. Social fears include being teased, people in authority, looking foolish, and so on. The illness and injury group include open wounds, dead people, injections, etc... The noise stimuli include loud noises, sirens, sudden noises, vacuum cleaners. The classical phobias include heights, darkness, large open spaces, travel, and so on. The miscellaneous items include strange places, failure, strange shapes, etc...

Fear is a defensive mechanism of survival values; unreasoning fear, a perversion of this mechanism emanating from some painful impression or some internal conflict; but phobia, a reversion to the mentality of a savage who walks all his days hedged in between totem and taboo.²

Bringing this theme full circle has been harder than I could have imagined. The imagery has evolved from self-evaluation, conversing with others on the subject of phobia and phobic relationships, diligently pouring through literature and magazines, studying movies and television, evaluating the media as well as reading psychological and medical studies on ways the subject of fear is approached. Results were then turned inward for self-reflection, and after internalizing the presence of that particular phobia, presented from a personal point of view through my art practice. I sometimes even borrowed fears. I emphasized someone else’s fear and visualized it through my art. At other times, I reached deep within me and pulled out my own fears.

²Rachman, Phobias: Their Nature and Control, vii.
I never assume that the memory of anyone’s fear is always compatible with the “objective properties of the actual event,” in other words, did that really happen in the way that it was recounted? Memory is controlled so much by emotion when recounting the origin or cause of a particular phobia, that it takes on a life of its own in many cases. Taking on its own life is a result of the surreal personality of fear. Since fear can become extreme and seem large enough that it cannot be contained, it tends to take on a directed outcome, that which we fear. All of this may have nothing whatsoever to do with reality and truth. After all, we create that which we think is required to build and maintain a healthy fear. During the strengthened existence of that fear, truth seems to be completely absent, so we do not rely upon it for the telling. Horror tales and “fish” stories are our cultural examples of this cognitive breakdown. Both have become acceptable for their purpose, whether it is entertainment or not.

After collecting the image from whatever resource I deemed appropriate, I then rendered it through a combination of digital and hand worked media, turned it into a hand-pulled lithograph, and framed it as a monument to all who suffer from that fear.

My examination of fear itself returned great results. I found fear to be a split-second feeling that sears through you and your body shivers as a hot flash passes through you instantly. It is like the experience when almost killed in an auto accident, a landslide, an avalanche, falling into a crevice or another near-death experience. Writing about fear without losing the spontaneity of the emotion is difficult. For that reason, a digital camera was used for instantaneous self-portrait captures.

---

My purpose in taking the photos was not to recreate representational copies, however. My hope was that, as the artist, I could be that "genius whose eyes can penetrate through the veil of mere appearances and reveal the truth."\(^4\) The visage of my self-portraits are caught rather than constructed.\(^3\) I had to prepare myself not to be prepared for the thought of the phobia, so that I could really believe that the phobia was fresh in my mind. The strangeness in self-portraits that are projected into role-playing is best understood from an account told by Freud:

Freud, in the essay on ‘The Uncanny’, recounts an incident that occurred on a train journey when he caught sight of his face reflected in a swinging glass door and for an instant failed to recognize it as his own. Indeed, he recalls having felt a hearty distaste for the bearded stranger lurching toward him and wonders now if his reaction was not a vestigial trace of archaic reaction, which feels the “double” [the mirror reflection] to be something uncanny.\(^6\)

I endeavored to take the poses the same day the phobia came to me and enveloped my thinking. I obsessed with that fear, bringing it closer and closer to my reality until it seemed to sit right next to me. The idea of phobia comes to me from different sources, some outward, some internal. Outside ideas were gifts from friends and colleagues who were willing to talk to me honestly about their fears. John Locke used the word “ideas” to describe perceptual as well as memory material and individual as well as generic phenomena.\(^7\) The more I studied individual forms of phobia, the more I realized just how global and common they were. Perception is important in that it describes a phobia in a different light than someone else might

\(^4\)Gombrich, The Image and The Eye. 106.

\(^5\)Ibid, 124.

\(^6\)Lomas, “Inscribing Alterity: Transactions of Self and Other in Miro Self-Portraits,” from Portraiture: Facing the Subject, Joanna Woodall, 170.

\(^7\)Arneheim, Visual Thinking. 98.
describe that same phobia. Endearment with phobia is quite common, also. It is not strange to find a phobic who seriously protects the phobia and keeps it in an honored place within his life. Physical evidence of phobia worship might take on a trophy or idol form, such as the fear of a person who surrounds himself with sports posters and paraphernalia, but was always afraid to try out for sports.

Images were then loaded into the software package (Adobe Photoshop), filled with acrid color (as I saw the fear dictated), digitally enhanced, and printed out as a gicleés. I then reacted to the image once more with hand-drawn tools directly upon the gicleés, recaptured it in digital format, and printed separations to lithographic plates. I did not try to copy the gicleés, but let the lithographs become their own personality. Five plates were used in typical CYMK separation, except one image was printed in its own style, using a deferred color palette (Heights). Utilizing this process, little was lost in the translation and the original feeling of the fear as accurately explored as possible. Fixating on and obsessing about that fear made me as honest as I could be, and the lithographs needed to show that same feeling, to have that continuity and unified spirit. They had to hold, within their grasp, the magic of art without losing their communicative function. My own compositional bible has been the fact that all of these works are about one concept. The building of the imagery can best be described through an excerpt from Rudolf Arnheim that I keep posted on my studio wall:

The dynamics of a composition will be successful only when the “movement” of each detail fits logically in the movement of the whole. The work of art is

---

organized around a dominant theme, from which movement radiates throughout the entire area.\textsuperscript{9}

The movement from one image to the next had to create a complete story, while also fulfilling the requirement of being only an introduction. This introduction tool entices the viewer to personally act upon each detail of the work while simultaneously acting upon the whole work. This way, it requires their involvement in the completion of the whole story. The inherent illogicality of phobia made my job difficult, while ironically, the exalted position we give phobia in our society made my job easy.

I realize that this coupling the written thesis with imagery barely gives birth to the study of phobia and does not exhaust it. I would like the imagery as a whole to be considered a single manifest of what I desire to communicate to the world; that is, that phobia and those who suffer from it cannot be discarded, but must coexist with those in the world who consider themselves free or cured of such diseases.

Imagery such as this study of phobia has a fundamental and pedagogical basis in history. In Arnheim's book, \textit{Visual Thinking}, images are separated into three categories, as to their fulfillment and function:

An image serves merely as a \textit{sign} to the extent to which it stands for a particular content without reflecting its characteristics visually. Images are \textit{pictures} to the extent to which they portray things located at a lower level of abstractness than they are themselves. An image acts as a \textit{symbol} to the extent to which it portrays things, which are at a higher level of abstractness than is the symbol itself.\textsuperscript{10}

Upon seeing the works of the thesis, all three of these functions exist, not just within one work, but not limited to one work. The reality of an individual work is

\textsuperscript{9}Arnheim, \textit{Art and Visual Perception}, 432.

\textsuperscript{10}Arnheim, \textit{Visual Thinking}, 136-138.
sometimes abandoned completely, such as in the image about electricity. Thus, the work becomes non-representational and more of a sign. It is more about content than representing truth. The idea of the fear of self-consumption is so abstract that it eliminates any reality at the onset of the idea. Yet I chose a near likeness photographically to represent that idea. By choosing not to visually abstract self-consumption, the idea of swallowing one’s self into demise became the entire basis of the work. It is a picture in that it represents itself in more or less a traditional way, but the idea of this phobia is not traditional at all. The symbol comes into play in the image about the written thesis itself, and an individual letter or punctuation becomes the consuming monster. It almost looks traditionally calm, with the colors supporting that idea, until the face is examined, where a strong burst of flame red and untrusting dark eyes greet the environment - that monster called thesis, and the viewer.

Another idea came to me, as the images were being finished, framed and studied. I began to think about how they should be presented in the gallery. My direction came from the question, “How can they best be heard and seen, how can they best entice reactions?” In a previous psychology course I remembered studying and writing about a certain progression that leads a person to enlightenment on a subject.

That progression can be stated as interest, association, recognition, and redemption. If the images were to be dynamic and make an impression upon the viewer akin to a religious experience, then the work shown as a whole needed to be akin to an altar. Altars are the epitome of personal sacrifice to one’s self, they safe-
keep our being. They are both containers of objects that are important to us and they are used as metaphors for the life-concepts that we deem important and eternal.

The progression of interest, association, recognition, and redemption can best be understood as a walk through life. When we see or hear something that we deem of interest to our lives, we approach that idea to study it. Upon closer study, we might associate ourselves with it in some way. This leads us to want to understand it. At this point, it hasn’t become personal, but it surprises us through diligent study with a sudden recognition. Immediately, we own it by that recognition (that uncanny mirror which reflects our inner selves), and our goal after that is to gain redemption. In the redemption stage, we act upon it. We are no longer visitors, on-lookers, or disassociated viewers. Ownership of that idea has then become our life.

When viewing my imagery, I want the viewer to unsuspectingly become each of the phobias. I seek to entice the viewer’s interest by my use of color, line, value, and composition, a façade for a deeper purpose. Self-portraits help to support the associative properties, creating a web that fluxuates between photographic representation and its alter ego, abstraction. Recognition can only be possible if the reaction of the viewer allows it to exist, so study of human nature is a must throughout the project. Recognition completes my job, and redemption is up to the viewer. The altar of thought I create can be carried out of the gallery and sent to the far corners of the earth in the form of redemption.

When I started out this thesis, I said that I would like this to be a vigil or a wake for those who have been lost to phobia. This work brings full circle the deepest compassion I have for those who are fallen. Some of them have gone; some of them
still live, but barely. Talking about it does not help as much as the doctors would hope, as one can see from the wall of therapists behind the figure in the image about the fear of fear. Action is the only way to recovery, and few want to take action to help a chronically ill phobic. The mental and physical distress one suffers from being a caretaker of the mentally ill is tremendous; and since few take on the task, it overwhelmingly falls upon the few. Helping hands can spread the workload and would be the first step in support of one who takes care of the mentally ill. The whole success of my thesis rests upon the viewer. "It is true that the keen eye of the beholder will also penetrate into the nature of a nation when examining its political life or its scientific achievement, but the most subtle and most characteristic features of a people’s soul can only be recognized in its artistic creations." Because of the nature of the ugliness of phobia and phobic relationships, I sincerely hope that Sontag is in error, in saying that “any repugnancy in values” will “downgrade” the work, and “void the viewer’s embrace of my vision, so that I am undermined.” If it is my responsibility to tell the story (and I have done my best), it remains the viewer’s responsibility to take up hands to the task.

---

11Snaache, quoted by E. H. Gombrich in The Use of Images, 291.

12Fisher, Reflecting on Art, 97.
PART II

THE IMAGES

The first image (figure 1) is probably the birth pod of the group, Phobia: Fear of Mistaken Origin and the Indigenous Inquisition. This work presented itself as a study of origin, a difficult concept for most Americans who make up the melting pot of the world. Issues of our indigenous people are, for the most part, avoided by the general public because of a lack of understanding. On the surface, the imagery appears to be a hard look at how origin is read and written about, researched, and defined. What I call the "trash-talking" scholars to the right of the composition have determined my origin. They have a single source of information: a picture hanging on the wall behind them. But one source is enough, for anyone who diligently studies them knows that one picture is worth a thousand words to them. From the visage on my face, it can be surmised that no one solicited my opinion; no one asked me what I wanted to be or wanted to think, I was lost in an assumed role. Gombrich says about this attitude, "I express through my visage utter contempt for those whose sense of identity is always buttressed by an assumption of superiority over those who do not belong."13

13Gombrich, The Use of Images, 195.
I am concerned for my destiny in this image, suspecting I have been unjustly labeled, defined, and categorized without true representation. I have been signed, sealed and delivered into the canons of history without basis – tagged and archived.

Use of cropping in the image creates a feeling of being trapped and denotes claustrophobia, my eyes following the viewer are depicting a cry for help. I have begun to “morph,” much the way creatures turn colors to avoid predators. My hair weaves itself like a decorative shield. Fear sets in as my morphing skin starts to thin, revealing pictographs that begin to surface. This idea came to me from reading about “primitive organisms, which developed sensitive perceptive structures on the body surface to provide an awareness of their environment in order to seek food and avoid danger.”¹⁴ In this image, I feel exposed, unprotected, raw, and the moment of my demise is upon me, and my exposure does not fall upon understanding minds.

I unwillingly fuel their purpose and their ulterior motive. They really explore themselves, not me. I know they cannot be helped, they cannot think differently. Their fathers thought that way, they think that way, and their sons and daughters will think that way. They write their books, they give their lectures, and the world is still void of knowledge. I have fallen through the cracks, never to be seen again, and have lost my birthright to identity.

Origin and identity as an artist is the root beneath the surface in this image. The indigenous study is the surface and my artistic origin is the root cause. When exploring identity, I remember studying a book by Joanna Woodall in which she said, “The portrayer (of the artistic portrait) proves her/his artistic originality by

consolidating the self of the portrayed. Although the portrait refers to an original self already present, this self needs its portrayal in order to secure its own being.\(^\text{15}\)

During my first years in art school, I was the bride descending the staircase. My bottle of absinthe was filled and emptied and filled again continuously, only to spill at the end. As the Virgin of Guadalupe, I fell into a world that seemed mostly unsupportive, unappreciative and undeserving of virgins in general. Today, I know I defined myself through them, my self-imposed reality at the time. As I approached graduate study, I discovered that definitions come from within a person. Art school began to serve as exposure and education for me, not as definition. From those strengths within, I began defining myself as an artist, building experience from exposure, and critically examining the process of the teaching/learning cooperative within the collegiate setting. During this enlightenment, I began to find my own individual voice. This last three or four years, however, I have begun to realize that my private search for individuality is very global, this discovery due to the fact that I became a professor myself. As for the trash-talking scholars, I finally understand their purpose and their role in my education within the visual arts, and can appreciate their value in my artistic growth. This image is about me, and I have come full circle.

The next image (figure 2) is about the requirement for a written thesis. Phobia: Fear of Letters, Words, and Phrases: the Anti-Thesis explores the task of interpretation, when visual form is interpreted into written form. The painted self and the written self can be mutually supportive and instructive. Though, at first, I found that

impossible. The uniting of self portrait and signature is a constant worthy of note. I barely seem to scratch the surface of my subject through visual imagery and yet I am called upon to write about it all. I enjoy story-telling in general, but I fear this subject is much too large for me and that I will not do it justice.

In the image, fear of letters, I face one way, and look the other, the feeling of looking over one's shoulder. My path leads me directly on, but I feel someone following my every footstep, my every movement. I quickly turn about to face the foe. It is then that I see the foe is myself, for no one else is there but me. The letters are not forming words, the words are not forming phrases, and phrases are not forming sentences. There is no thesis, there is only anti-thesis, and the floating world of the written word evades me.

My love-hate relationship with the type began in the early 90's. Several courses in typography made me realize the power of the written word when coupled with visual imagery. That respect developed into awe, and awe into fear of misuse, a "healthy respect," they assured me. The composition in this image reads like a cover for a cheap dime store novel; graphic, colorful and simple, yet projecting direct powerful emotion. There are so many authors, so many words, and so little to say.

During a communication arts course, the professor flashed advertisement after advertisement in a slide show, allowing each image only the few seconds one would have while flipping through a magazine or traveling in a vehicle. He explained the use of the advertisement as imagery and after-imagery. "What do you want to say?" he asked, and "How fast and how much can you say? How much do you leave with

---

the viewer, in just those few seconds?” I began to think about letters, words, and phrases as the tools of communication, written, visual, and audio.

What about the “noise” of letters and words? A scream is heard over a whisper, but a whisper can be more powerful. One example given to me during my collegiate studies was an animated reading of the poet, E. E. Cummings. Later on during an art education practicum, I learned that the teacher who waits for the class to calm is more effective than one who raises the voice, and teaching patience by example yields results every time. I transferred this idea to visual representation of the written word. Some letters could be darker or lighter, opaque, translucent or transparent, larger or smaller, and higher or lower on the picture plane to give them “noise” power. This impressed me to animate letters, words, and phrases. This image is a result of that knowledge and my representation of the written word through art.

**Phobia: Fear of Green Plants, which give Oxygen to everyone but Asthmatics** is a façade of health and beauty but the nightmare of allergies (figure 3). The real issue here is lack of oxygen. It is ironic to physically exist in so much oxygen but not be able to access it – it is just on the other side of your nose and mouth, not that far in inches. The experience of an asthma attack thrusts one into a vortex between mental panic and physical debility. In the right background of this image, pretty little plants hang from planters, and on the left bottom of the image small trees grow up as they reach around to contour my face, but nothing is green, they are fiery yellow and red and burn when they touch you. A small hat is my only protection from pollen and dust – protection in vain, because my transformation has already begun to take place. Clothing has already been overgrown by a vine full of decorative leaves, symbolizing
the erroneous belief that respiratory diseases are always diminished with age. My hair is glowing as the pollen covers it with a fine mist, which cannot be seen or felt, but must be washed out after outdoor events to fend off attacks. My eyes are puffed and bruised to the point of bleeding a tear. Nature's textures have already spread over my face and are polluting my mind. I admire their beauty and at the same time wonder why beautiful, healthy, wonderful plants can kill.

Respiratory disease is a common problem among the people of the world, and yet so little is understood about the emotional impact that respiratory diseases cause. Medication is advanced and doctors know how to treat just about any respiratory disease, and yet the psychological implications that a sufferer might have are rarely discussed, so much so, that family members who support a person with a respiratory disease do not know how to cope with the problem, and are afraid to ask for help for fear of confusing mental with physical diseases.

The physical well being of a patient is foremost and with reason, in the case that a physical deformity might be fatal. Panic, on the other hand, may well be the cause for 9 out of 10 emergency room visits and death-by-asphyxiation unfortunates. Asthmatics are among the most "popular" of the respiratory sufferers, and they fear for their health for the simple reason that doctors, to this day, still have not found a cure for the common cold, which is usually not even close to fatal.

This image has probably been the one that most people will admit to understanding, as asthma is generally not thought of as a phobia-related problem. Only asthmatics can see through the inhalers to the panic, and understand the full implications of fear at its best, or worse.
Figure 3. Phobia: Fear of Green Plants, which give Oxygen to everyone but Asthmatics. Color Lithography, 2004. Size: 15 inches by 20 inches.
The image, *Phobia: Fear of Faith Healers and their Righteous Indignation* is directly taken from my own southern religious background (figure 4). Faith healers form a unified and conformed line. They outstretch their hands, raising them in blessing but pausing to receive an offering. The blessing never comes and is frozen in time as they wait for the monetary gain. They comb their hair the same way and wear the same PTL robes. Their halos have long since deteriorated and they have plucked out their own eyes in order to avoid seeing the suffering masses. They trod a barren and unfruitful ground that is saturated with the blood of those they have down trodden to seem more spiritual. The sun has become red and infested with the blood of the real martyrs and only scorching light remains. I am confused, guilt-ridden, and dejected as my back is turned to the line of faith healers headed for their holy grounds. Wincing, I realize that I am separated from the faith healers by a white noise that has no meaning, symbolized in the fine mist of snow. The faith healers pay me no mind, for they have condemned me for eternity. They have claimed the power of anathema, the prayer that sends me to Hell. I don’t resist because I know these keepers of hope have no hope. I know the real truth of spirituality will have to be sufficient to the evil I suffer, at least for today.

This imagery does not answer questions – it only asks them. It does not have a beginning or an end – it is eternal. It does not suppose that religion is true or false – it challenges all to examine their own souls. It explores the minority and the majority – the right or wrong by popular demand. It explores values – both bad and good.

---

This image and subject matter is as uncomfortable as a newly painted prostitute in a newly painted church house where a brand new brass bell sounds loudly.

**Phobia: Fear of Heights and the Nausea it Causes, and Phobia: Fear of Falling Off of Just About Anything** are both about climbing, high areas, cliffs, ladders, and anything that produces a position that is far above the horizon. I have had this fear since a child. Most of my childhood was spent at sea level, tropical areas, where the ground meets the ocean. Both works explore visual weight and direction in a prone position. **Falling** (figure 5) is about the fear of the actual movement of falling, while **Heights** (figure 6) is more about the nausea of vertigo.

The colors in **Heights** create a pink Pepto-Bismol environment. My eyes look one direction, while my body falls in the other direction. There is no control over my falling body, as up and down, right and left have been obliterated for me.

The colors in **Falling** are greenish-yellow, and my eyes are rimmed with red, that flash of color that rises in the skin at the moment of realization. Vertical shapes begin to fall from their upright positions in waves of tones. Though very different, these two works interpret the act, feeling and result of falling and fear of heights.

The fear of heights is a result of falling, as the fear of falling is a result of heights. Suffice it to say, people are sometimes so afraid of something that they actually make it happen. The fear and the action are inevitably conjoined as much as cause and effect.
Figure 6: Phobia of Heights and the Nausea it Causes.

Phobia: Fear of Electricity, Conduits, and the Tin Foil Hats is an attempt at humor when exploring a non-humorous subject (figure 7). Everyone has electricity in their homes, their cars, and at work. Only until a construction project is in the works can one appreciate how electricity is used, wired, and made safe. This image is partly about that respect electricity deserves. I have told it so visually decorative, so exaggerated, so extreme; so much so that it’s “all the more telling for that.”

For the past few years, I have lived in the foothills of Colorado. An electrical storm is quite a show, the sky can be as dark and black as night, but in the next second, fill up with a white light that makes everything in it look reactive in a nuclear way. This image is about the beautiful viciousness of that white light and the awe I feel from it.

In Electricity, I am glaring at the electrical storm of my life as dark clouds mix with yellow and black to show their anger. Their lightening fingers reach to destroy me, and the only protection I have is the chain mail covering my body and the war paint I have placed upon my face. My ground connection has been severed and is protruding out of my head, loose wires that need to be reconnected. Small creatures run up the hill to escape the storm, creatures that might have once been human. They wear tin foil hats with rods to keep them safe, which only quickens their demise. They should have known, for the ground is full of past creatures and their burned out holes. One hole awaits me at the bottom right of the image. I wonder if it will be death or transformation into something yet unknown. I cannot run, so I wait.

Phobia: Fear of Painting, Color, Brushes, and Textures is about my education as a painter (figure 8). It has been a goal of mine to understand painting ever since my

\textsuperscript{18}Gombrich, \textit{The Use of Images}, 210.
first painting class back in the mid 80s. Since that class, I have probably had ten or so
courses, both formal and informal, both stateside and foreign.

In all of that time, I still feel quite inadequate to be called a painter of any
type, although I do keep trying. One conclusion has come from all of this, however,
that it must be very difficult to teach, critique, and grade a painting course. So much
seems left up to intuition and evaluation at a personal level. In every course in
printmaking, sculpture, and ceramics, I have learned exactly what is expected in
critique, technical effort, and content. It allows me to mature in the subject or
technique. In painting it seems to change with the professor, his or her own
experience level, education (sometimes even geographic location plays a part in this),
and style of that particular professor.

Here is my personal idea on painting and its value in education. Education
has, as its goal to educate, that is a given. Painting adds the dimension that explores
deep into an area that education cannot touch, no matter how it tries. Art experience
has been noted to bring about results that academics cannot reach. Educational
journals speak constantly about this, and one such author worth reading is John
Dewey.\textsuperscript{19} Painting and drawing has traditionally been the viaduct to research those
hidden places of student expression. Historically, painting and drawing is a staple for
discovering our past, starting with the cave drawings and paintings from prehistoric
art. We first communicated our stories to future beings by drawing and painting on
walls. These associative properties with painting became the driving force of every
class I took in painting and/or drawing.

\textsuperscript{19}Dewey, \textit{Art as Experience}. 
For me, the secondary gift of learning painting and drawing is self-
exploration, self-discovery and self-expression. My work explores that more than ever at the present time. It has been my gift from the painting department during my graduate years that I have been encouraged to study this as a medium. I am still not a painter, but I am at least going that direction, with the help of the experienced.

Fear of Painting uses two primary colors (red and yellow) and one secondary color (green) with black. The red and green are purposeful complements, perfect opposites for my dilemma. Yellow and red play in the background, creating oranges, while the face is green with envy of all successful painters everywhere. All that I see in painting courses is gathered in my eyes and pink arrows dart out of my eye and point to the tools, demanding their use immediately. The brushes dance neatly in rows, sizes and shapes. They appear organized, yet they do not convince me, they do not calm my fears. I know the minute I touch them, I am in control, and I fear that moment. They laugh at me, their hard-edged repetitive shapes daring me to pick them up. They have painted a path both top and bottom of the composition to lead the way to painting righteousness, but they do not come any closer than that. Conté crayons swim across the top of the image in movements much like animated calligraphy or town criers who chatter like computer analogs or unknown language. They know exactly what they want to say, and are saying it loudly, but they are not talking to me. I wait for the clicking in my brain, but it doesn’t come. I do not feel comfortable in my painted skin.
Phobia: Fear of Never Being on Time and Always Being Late (figure 9) has a composition that enforces the idea of trying to be in more than one place at once. My "to do" list is overlapping and cannot possibly be satisfied at this point of my life, so this is definitely one of my own fears. The cords that hang from multiple clocks entangle me. They spit out tick tock sounds that embed themselves on the wall behind me. There is a bright yellow world somewhere, very close and reachable, but I am forever facing the other direction. My eyes are glazed over from lack of rest, staring into space and not seeing anything. Time hangs in the air and floats around me. The composition in this image is attempting to go from bottom to top, right to left, counter-clockwise. Fragments of clocks and numbers fly in and through the image, never resting and completing a task. I think, "that's okay, tomorrow is another day," and I glance at my watch, which has no hands, then I stare ahead into empty space.

Phobia: Fear of Extinction, Genocide, and Annihilation (figure 10) is about humanity's dominance, hatred, intolerance, and fear of each other. The idea of the representation of hostility through pictorial satire is not new. Kris was especially interested in the late medieval institution of defamatory images.20 Exact political situations are not meant to be addressed in this image, but a generalization and deconstruction of symbolism is used in order to cover a much more vast arena of issues. Red, white, and blackish-blue seemed the appropriate main colors. History dictates black and red as colors of power, and the blue comes in as an American statement, since I am an American. Red, white, and blue symbolize the colors used in

---

20Gombrich, The Use of Images, 190.
this imagery. Our flag colors are symbols of something very pure, and yet this work is about destruction and death. In the foreground, I look to the left, barely making out the small non-descriptive figures in the background. They are just slightly darker than their environment, almost blending in entirely. Their fate has been decided. They must be burned alive, and their ashes must be added to the sky as they vanish. White smoke rises from their bodies, the smoke more visible than the bodies. It is then that I realize I am both perpetrator and victim. The food chain has taught me that everything eats and everything is eaten. I may be the next to die: it is hard for me to determine. I brood over my future or lack of future. The freedom mark stamped on my neck has already begun to betray me. I have already started blowing smoke out of my own mouth in preparation for my predestined end.

Phobia: Fear of Printmaking and the Tools of Printmaking (figure 11) was created in honor of the students from the Printmaking Survey course I taught this academic year. Printmaking seems to be an evasive subject at best - most students enter the course with little or no idea of what printmaking can do for them. I have exercised a great deal of tolerance and patience for their hesitation, uneasiness, and lack of direction (because of lack of information), and it has paid off. It is easy to assume students know something when, as an artist, it is in your everyday life. Exposure is everything, especially to first and second year undergraduates.

Describing and explaining everything repetitively, demonstrating one concept more than once, coaxing and ensuring are the secrets to being a good printmaking instructor. Some still fall through the cracks, but I can be assured that there are fewer
because of my attention to learning styles, methods and implementation of teaching concepts, and ability to build lesson plans that enhance learning. My students this academic year have turned out some decent printmaking, and best of all, they are proud of their work. Most of them have a positive attitude about their prints and the course. They might even sign up for printmaking again.

Tools has, at its core, a highly abstracted composition (at least, compared to the rest of the works). The abstraction came about as a result of intense concentration to details followed by minimalization. When I began to think about traditional representation for the image, no concept came to mind. It was only when I generalized and minimized the information and the whole concept of printmaking as a concept that I began to form a concrete idea of what I wanted to say. "Abstractness is a means by which the picture interprets what it portrays. The functionality of the image relies upon the interpretation of symbols."\(^{21}\) A great deal about understanding this concept lies in the strength of the viewer’s interpretive abilities. Sometimes, though, a pipe is just a pipe.

**Phobia: Fear of Self-Consumption and the Severing of One’s Own Head**

(figure 12) developed strangely. Being “full of yourself” usually means that someone is self-possessed, self-absorbed, and self-obsessed. The self-aware image used here is shown as the masked author:

The contextual self-projection is threefold: The textualized author, the masked author, and the author in a transposed self-portrait. The masked author was the most prevalent method of self-thematization in the art of the early

\(^{21}\)Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, 137.
Middle Ages and Renaissance. It is based upon role-playing. The artist casts himself in the role of one of his characters.

A year ago, an instructor mentioned that I had never done any self-portraits. I began to contemplate the possible reasons for this, and immediately set out to do a triptych self-portrait entitled, Me, Me, Me. In it I am served, serve myself, and worship myself. I wanted to show how absurd I felt self-portraits were, but I started thinking about the usefulness of self-portraits and their role in art history, and decided to study the idea further, to figure out what I deemed a useful way to use them.

That work led the way to begin my thesis, in which a group of self-portraits represent different phobias. Throughout my education, one thing that I have noticed is that some colleges hire their own graduates as instructors after their graduation. This is not usually productive and begins at some point to be intellectual incest. I am not saying it never works, but there is usually freshness about a “creature from another planet.” Outside hybrids seem to strengthen the whole plant. Grafting begins with a destructive cut but ends with a constructive growth.

The composition regurgitates itself out onto the picture plane, and an aftertaste is left in the mouth in visual form. Pupils are replaced by self-absorbent reflections. Pain is registered in the eyes as something has been eaten that is too large to consume. Even as self-appointed consumption takes place, the skin on the face begins to deteriorate, peeling away and revealing the bloody tissues beneath. This image is all self-consuming and the head that leads the body has been severed. Without the head, direction has become lost.

In reflection, I am not sure whether this image takes an inward or outward look. When a person looks inward for all the answers and never looks outward, he or she starts to notice that everything that was once strong is beginning to weaken. Hybridism, on the other hand, in its purist form, is the procreator of growth.

Phobia: Fear of Fear and The Pit in my Stomach (figure 14) is the epitome of all of the works, and I consider it the last to be said on the subject of phobia, at least for today. A mask does not protect the victim, as it did the "Ancient Greeks who honored Phobos as a deity to provoke panic in their enemies by wearing his fear-masks as weapons." My bloody lips reveal that the ultimate suffering is at hand. The inspiration for this work came from the idea of impulsion:

Every experience, of slight or tremendous import, begins with an impulsion, rather as an impulsion. I say 'impulsion' rather than 'impulse.' An impulse is specialized and particular; it is, even when instinctive, simply a part of the mechanism involved in a more complete adaptation with the environment. 'Impulsion' designates a movement outward and forward of the whole organism to which special impulses are auxiliary. It is the craving of the living creature for food as distinct from the reactions of the tongue and lips that are involved in swallowing; the turning toward light of the body as a whole, like the heliotropism of plants, as distinct from the following of a particular light by the eyes. Impulsions are the beginnings of complete experience because they proceed from need...the epidermis is only in the most superficial way an indication of where an organism ends and its environment begins. There are things inside the body that are foreign to it, and there are things outside of it that ...must be taken possession of if life is to continue.

In conclusion, the idea of phobia and phobic relationships has been the most enlightening study I have ever embarked upon during my education of about thirteen years. I feel lucky to be the one representing this idea to those who would hesitate to approach it. I hesitated myself in deciding to use this subject as my thesis. I never

---

23Rachman, Phobias: Their Nature and Control, viii.

entertained fear that the idea would be weak, but that I might be too weak for the idea. Little did I know, in the birthing of the study, the large numbers of “mentally diseased people” who are not clinically diagnosed, who came out of the closet of fear to let me know about their personal fear. Even now, in reflection, and after finishing the imagery and seeing it in the gallery, I am still approached by those who want to “share a fear.” I think they are hoping that I will visualize it, but this study has taken its toll on me and my family (who I wish to thank personally for their part in helping me to complete this thesis: Paul, Mom, and Sandra), and I desire to move on to other ideas, not just for their sakes, but my own.

In the presentation of these images for the gallery, thirteen is the number of bad luck, and that seemed appropriate for the hanging thereof. Unfortunately, I was afraid to choose, for I asked myself, “which one of the fourteen should be taken out of the group?” I brought my students into the gallery and let them make that decision, my way of avoiding the decision for fear of choosing the wrong one, which is undoubtedly my destiny. It seemed harmless to transfer the responsibility to another, as phobics generally do transfer fears, and inevitably no matter what I do, it will happen, and no matter where I go, I will be there. The End.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


REFERENCES


