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Offerings for Jahilia

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Offerings for Jahilia

Stephen V. Martonis

**Masters Thesis submitted to the
College of Creative Arts
at West Virginia University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

**Master of Fine Arts
in
Sculpture**

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Department of Art

**Morgantown, West Virginia
1999**

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Abstract

These words represent the ideas invested in my paintings. They are progressive and fluctuating thoughts occurring at an interval in time. They are given honestly and freely, as ignorance and change are understood.

I. Introduction of Themes

My graduate work is a continuation of themes that began during my undergraduate studies. My current ideas stem from themes such as Catholicism, the Holocaust, and human desires. While making the religious based work (1994), I felt the need to communicate a specific issue or political position. Because I was a straight, white, American, eclectic, male and not victimized or marginalized historically, I chose a personal issue that was oppressive to me – Catholicism. I wasn't necessarily questioning every aspect of the faith. Rather, I attempted to liberate myself by dismantling a power that I considered oppressive. It was about a spiritually open-minded individual being repressed by a specifically defined organization.

During the Holocaust work (1995,1997) I quickly made associations between what happened during the Holocaust and what defined me as any individual. I was wondering what I was capable of doing, what desires I had, and what repressive forces controlled them. I wondered if the Holocaust was an example of truth, a time in history when repression was lifted, and people did as they wished, acting on pure impulses (i.e. the Nazi guards acting out on the Jews in the death camps). I created multiple layers of meaning in the work - one was historical, and one personal. The personal aspect was much more difficult to decipher, with intention. I did not yet feel comfortable talking about the new ideas that were in my head. Rather, I let them lie beneath the surface, masked under an alternate theme. As the ideas developed, they surfaced in the work and became the focus of the next series, the Repression/Desire series.

The Repression/Desire work (1996) focused on the aspects of the Holocaust that intrigued me and related them in general terms to life itself. I studied the work of Sigmund Freud extensively. In particular, his studies on the subconscious, desire, repression, the id, and psychoanalysis. I began psychoanalyzing myself, questioning what comprised me as an individual, and depicting the answers visually.

II. Graduate Studies

My first semester at graduate school in West Virginia yielded little work. The transition affected me greatly and I could not focus mentally on what I was doing. What I did accomplish was the creation of two large chambers. I wanted to continue along the same lines that I left undergraduate school with, but to expand and make them greater, more professional. I had plans for music, performance, and lighting effects; a complete multi-media extravaganza. Fortunately, I only got as far as building the skeletal support for the chambers and then I stopped, realizing that I was headed in the direction of art as entertainment. I decided to go the other way, towards the romanticism captured in a painting, leaving it to Disney to entertain the masses.

The Wall Panel Series, 1998

The *Wall Panels* are a series of eight “paintings”, each one is eight feet tall, four feet wide, and four inches deep. The primary medium was bread dough stained with thinned roofing cement that was applied directly to luan underlay plywood. While making this body of work, my symbolism became increasingly abstract, minimal, and geometric. I also focused on the possible meanings and interpretations of each shape, line, color, and material. Because I was becoming absorbed in art history and theory, certain art-related influences started to become apparent in the work, depending on the books I was reading at the time. In this series, I was reading Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art, 1996, edited by Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, and Art in Theory, 1992, edited by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood. I was mostly interested in writings and theories of artists that came directly from the artists and not from a critic or historian. The reason for this is probably because I felt like I could relate better to artists’ direct thoughts rather than a scholar’s interpretation of them. Because of my interest with many of the Modern geometric abstract painters, I was heavily influenced by their theories on composition and form. The greatest influences being Piet Mondrian and Barnett Newman

for their theories on composition as well as the visual power of their work. I was drawn to the power of minimalism and abstraction.

At this point I had made the decision that I was a painter. Being placed in the sculpture department as a graduate student forced me to deal with the issue. I decided that I had difficulty with sculpture because I couldn't see its completeness. No matter where I stood, I could not see the totality of the artist's idea. This point may seem trivial but it's what dissuades me from sculpture, as well as the intrusive, invasive effect it has on society - it gets in the way. I'm also not intrigued by the traditional processes of sculpture, such as welding, wood working, stone carving, etc. These processes are time-consuming and energy draining. I was more interested in the intellect stereotypical of the painter's mind and the social and philosophical issues that had been addressed by painters throughout art history, rather than popular issues addressed by sculptors.

The same issues that dissuaded me from sculpture are the same ones that drew me towards painting. I was creating ideographic illusions rather than perceptually real objects. I enjoyed the idea and theory of the grid as being a human construct in which we logically attempt to define illogical space. I wanted to take a chaotic idea and place it in a rectangle, thereby placing it within the realm of human cognition. The work hangs on a wall, allowing one to view it at a distance and contemplate the totality of the idea, the same way in which a painting operates.

Even when I was creating the chambers, that were considered "sculptures", I personally saw them as paintings. It could relate to the theory of many High Modernists who made their paintings larger than human scale to immerse or consume the viewer. I took this literally and was actually forcing the viewer to become consumed, in the belly of the painting.

The composition of the wall panels evolved from a variety of sources. Many of the symbols are centered within the borders of the rectangle so that I don't have to worry about composition. To many minimalist painters, symmetry was a way in which one could diminish the problems of composition - I adapted this theory. Also, to many feminists, a centered shape, especially a circle, represented the vulva. This theory also intrigued me.

The imagery in each painting is representative of a repressed thought. I'm working in a paradox because they are representations of ideas that are non-representational in our perceptual world of vision. Imagine a thought, occurring as a molecule within your brain. Then take a cross-section of that molecule, magnify it, square it off, and hang it on the wall. Now assign a label to the type of thought, for example, lust. Imagine what the cross-section of lust would look like and re-create it as art. This was the thought process behind these works.

Rapeture, 1998

This next piece is a continuation of the *Wall Panel Series*. I'm separating it because it symbolizes a great crossover in my work. It also envelops almost all of the issues I was dealing with at the time, operating on many different levels. It's over-loaded with a plethora of theories that subside and resurface, connect, overlap, then wander from each other. The physical size of the piece reflects the intellectual size of the thought behind it. It stands twelve feet tall, sixteen feet wide, and one foot deep. For practical reasons of transportation and weight, it is divided into five panels, each weighing over two hundred pounds.

The title of the piece is a paradox combining the act of rape with the idea of being in rapture. I was playing off the popular idea that "in paradox truth lies" (with the belief that truth is unattainable). I intentionally set up a paradox with two contrasting ideas that don't belong together. Rapture is a state of complete and total euphoria, ecstasy and passion. Choosing the idea of rape was partly in reaction to feminism. As a twenty-five year old male, I'm aware that I do not have a complete understanding of what feminism is. I'm also aware that the label "feminism" can imply many different things and be defined multiple ways. When I refer to it in my writing, I am using it in the way *I* understand it to be, an understanding that has been passed on to me through the filter of society and one that continues to develop over time.

The main aspect of feminism that I responded to is "extreme feminism" because of the backlash effect it has on men. I have spoken with many women who regard

themselves as feminists and who also recognize the danger of extremism, specifically, when men are associated with something that is evil, unnatural, or filthy by the nature of their thoughts. Common symbols associated with men are beasts and creatures, like the wolf, lion or devil, that symbolize being wild, dangerous, dominant, evil and out of control. The acts of men throughout history have definitely supported the use of these symbols. However, I draw a distinction between carrying out an act and having a thought.

In regards to this piece, I chose the thought of rape because it is a thought that a lot of men have, and most men repress. It is also an act that everyone knows to be wrong, even the person doing it. In no way am I trying to validate the act of rape. What I am trying to address is that instead of repressing the fact that one has the thought, one should rather release the thought and recognize its existence. Once recognized, we can begin to understand why the thought exists. Maybe it was brought about by a change in hormone levels or a psychological event. I believe that people must come to terms with their own psyche and understand what it is capable of. By exploring repressed thoughts that people are generally afraid to admit they have, we can begin to understand them, and subsequently, progress as a people and a culture. This same logic also applies to my interest in the Holocaust. Once we know that humans are capable of carrying out genocide and mass-destruction, we are able to address it and begin to better understand our psyche.

The theoretical aspects of this painting are reactionary to these thoughts and represent one of the levels upon which it operates. I symbolized these ideas in many different ways, one being the manipulation of materials and scale. I viewed feminism as the major component of Postmodernism, and Postmodernism as being largely deconstructive. Feminism dismantled many ideals of the High Modernists, mostly machismo and romanticism, and attacked high art with politicized life issues. One way in which this was done was through materials. The grand-scale paintings of Frank Stella were being transformed into watercolors and crochet while large quilts mimicked the qualities of geometric abstraction. I chose to reverse this approach and turn it back on itself. I used domestic materials, generally considered as feminine, in a grand scale, Modernist painting. The dominant material was bread dough, accompanied by wax, latex, fabric and sewing, all filtered through the male lens.

The symbolism can also be interpreted as being commonly used by women. It was a centered circle representing, through geometric abstraction, a vulva. Then a realistic vagina was created in the center of the circle. I read a quote somewhere, I believe it was Freudian in nature, that related a vagina to a wound that never heals. This is because it is an opening in the body that never closes and consistently bleeds. In this way, it becomes the perfect metaphor for Postmodernism. Not only does it reference feminism and symbolize sexual desire and a repressed thought, but it also symbolizes the scar left behind by the Postmodernist movement. Postmodernism was a time in which art was cut open, inspected, deconstructed and then left like an open wound for today's Post-Postmodern artists. Contemporary artists must create in the shadow of these wounds. Many of us are living in the Age of "Re", in which everything must be *re*-constructed. Many Postmodernists have attempted suicide and failed, trying to kill art, or maybe just aesthetics and the notion of beauty - now we're responding to these actions.

In this piece, I took on the role of the shaman, not to heal culture through the medium of art, but to heal art itself. I created a Postmodernist wound in a High Modernist romanticized painting, then engaged myself in a foolish attempt to heal it. I symbolized the healing process by dipping burlap bandages in hot wax and layering them over the wound. I also added maggots in the center to clean out the infection. Maggots are known to eat bacteria and are still used in certain surgical practices in contemporary western society.

The maggots are a good example of an ideograph that references multiple ideas present in the work. Not only do they operate as a paradox between cleanliness and filth, but they also symbolize a rebirth or new beginning. They emerge from a nest that is centered within the vagina. They are the larvae, the new artists coming forth from the entanglements of art history, covered in its slime while feeding off its mold.

Time and art history are represented by a timeline, or pulse, made out of rust that horizontally bisects the painting, crossing through the center of the wound. Three modes of human visual perception are portrayed through the use of the circle, the grid, and the random chaos caused by the drying of the bread. The cracks also symbolize decay - the decay of time, art, culture, the subconscious, and myself.

The Nature Series, 1998

All of the paintings in this series are four feet tall by three feet wide with varying depths. Found objects operate as the detail of the paintings. Some of the detail is so small that one can barely even see it, such as tiny larvae casings. The found objects are either symbolic of rebirth (larvae and seeds) or death (bones and carcasses). Much like *Rapeture*, death is symbolic of Postmodernism, and rebirth is symbolic of contemporary artists.

I use the word “nature” in the title because the paintings contain objects that I found in the woods. As I used these objects, I contemplated the many different interpretations of nature and how I perceived it in my work. I used “natural” objects because nature offered me solace. At a time when I was becoming increasingly disheartened with western values and Capitalism, an escape into the woods became a healing mechanism for the mind. In this way it parallels the healing mechanisms of wax and stitching that were becoming the mainstay in each painting, if not the focus. One way in which I contrasted nature was with the use of geometry, mostly circles and squares. I’m still not sure why I was doing this. Perhaps I was still influenced by the geometric abstractionists, maybe the theories revolving around minimalist strategies intrigued me, or maybe I was trying to control the chaos of nature through analytical processes, a method that is all too human. All we need to do is look towards the layout of a city, the structure of a building, the plotting of a garden, or the squaring off of a painting to realize how we attempt to control our perceptions in order to better understand our environment. Logic and analytical thinking became the focus of my next series.

The Text/Graph Series, 1998

As the title implies, the images that dominated this series were text and graphs. Whenever I read an art theory book I usually develop a graph in my mind that explains whatever theory is being put forth, but in a logical, analytical or mathematical way. Sometimes it’s a pictograph; sometimes I can fit it all snugly into a precise equation. I

always had an easy time at math. In high school I rarely paid attention and never honestly did my homework but I would always ace the exams without much effort. I was more interested in the theory of math than doing math itself, yet it still has a strong impact on how I perceive things today. I was slowly becoming confused by involuntarily creating graphs for broad philosophical and spatial ideas about art theory – philosophies that can't be contained by a graph. The more I read, the less I felt I knew because the theories all contradicted each other and I could not find a common truth to any of them. During critiques and discussions about art I was finding it impossible to talk. As soon as somebody made a statement, I immediately would think of the counter-theory or an anti-narrative to disprove any notion of truth that was put forth.

Eventually I was able to develop a graph that serves as the totality of all theory. It is a graph that I have based a new religion around, complete with a God, a symbol, and a book (still in process). I have adapted the religion as my own and have taken on the role of the Prophet, the Messenger and the Shaman. The religion is based on Ignorance, meaning *not knowing*, and finding comfort in the realization that certain things can't be understood. It thrives off of paradoxes, and is hypercritical of itself. It does not recognize ideas such as real, is, nature, and truth. I admit that it comes off as being somewhat sarcastic by the fact that I'm intentionally setting up paradoxes and always contradicting myself.

The God's name, Jahilia Godot, is a combination of Islamic and Germanic words translating to "God of Ignorance". Contrary to most religions, this God has an image, in which his senses are symbolically sacrificed. His eyes, nose, mouth and ears are sewn shut and he has chopped off his fingers. He has rid himself of his senses (perception) as not to be fooled by them. He has gone internal, left only with Ignorance and The Self.

Jahilia only recognizes three things to exist. These three things are the basis for the graph and the symbol. It appears as an elongated kite-shape with convex borders connecting its points. At the bottom-most point is an orb that is symbolic of Existence. Stemming from the orb, and making up the top three points are from left to right, The Self, Ignorance, and Perception. Ignorance is at the top-most point because it is the most important aspect of Jahiliaism. The Self and Perception are merely tools that we are given

in order to recognize Ignorance. Perception is also a means by which we entertain ourselves until our death.

This outlook on life and art may seem depressing or pessimistic but I do not view it in those terms. It has given me freedom to live and create without getting hung up on legitimizing and defining. I have come to recognize that truth is fallacy, reality is artificial, and in paradox Ignorance lies. All of these statements please me because they contradict each other. The process of defining the un-definable and representing the non-representational is a way in which this religion is able to laugh at itself and the world, and find comfort in that laughter.

III. Present Body/Thesis Exhibition, 1999

My thesis exhibition consists of eighteen paintings, including two diptychs and a triptych, as well as some aspects of installation. I began the series by adhering to the 3x4' format of my most recent work. Four paintings are from the *Nature Series*, one is from the *Text/Graph Series*, and the painting entitled "The Wound That Never Heals" relates directly to the "Rapeture" piece. Towards the end of the series I looked at all of the paintings together and began deciding on how to group them in the gallery. It was at this point that the standard size format began to bother me and I started creating some larger and smaller works as well as making diptychs and triptychs.

I find it difficult to discuss the themes of these paintings as a group, as they individually have their own unique thoughts behind them. For this reason, I took my titles very seriously. The statement included drawings, graphs and random thoughts that probably served to complicate rather than simplify and define for the viewer. Some of the thoughts and graphs pertained to Jahiliaism, others to nature, the subconscious, or to the statement itself. In this way, I felt that it was honest to the thought processes behind the work. One of my favorite aspects of the statement are the tallying marks, counting by fives and running off the edges of the page, with the accompanying statement, "Knowledge is like counting to infinity... You never get anywhere". As far as this text-

summation is concerned, I'll discuss some specific paintings that best encompass particular thoughts and ideas.

The lobby area of the gallery contains three paintings. *Nature's Balm* is from the *Nature Series* and consists of a stitched circle with a centered locust. The title relates to the idea that I discussed earlier, that of escaping society into the woods for mental relaxation. The locust is the symbol of rebirth and the stitched circle is another aspect of healing (with the circle being symbolic of infinity). In other words, I'm forever attempting to heal a wound that will perpetually be infected.

This idea relates directly to another piece in the lobby entitled, *The Wound That Never Heals*. This piece is basically a smaller version of *Rapeture*, involving a lot of the same theories such as the vagina being the eternal Freudian wound. It also uses wax and maggots as healing mechanisms. I am acknowledging it here because it involves a new idea, that of prophecy.

Towards the completion of this series I had an accident in the studio. My hand grazed a bandsaw and was grabbed by its gaping jaws. The laceration started at the bottom thumb joint and proceeded about a third of the way through my hand, almost completely severing the thumb and cutting into the tendons of my index and middle fingers. When I look at my hand, I see my paintings. It is the same imagery of wound, scar, and stitching that I have been obsessed with. But accidents are bound to happen and wounds are fairly common in the studio. What makes it seemingly prophetic is the painting entitled *Discovering Jahilia - A Creation by the Prophet, the Shaman* that I completed about a month before the accident. In this piece I depicted the hand of Jahilia repeatedly running down the length of the painting. Jahilia's hand is rid of the sense of touch, with the fingers chopped off. Perhaps the accident was prophetic or perhaps it was an act controlled by the subconscious mind, fulfilling a desire. As Freud would say, "There are no accidents".

When the incident occurred I had a small painting nearby that I had been working on. During the aftermath some blood squirted across it, creating a quite remarkable and spontaneous composition. The painting was rather simple, consisting of burn marks and deer teeth sewn on with sinew. The blood overlapped the teeth and trickled across the length of the piece. I made this into a diptych entitled, *Yesterday's Scar/Tomorrow's*

Palette. The latter is a painting similar to the first but lacks an object and a focus, anxiously awaiting an accident to spill across its framework.

Near the diptych, in the same corner of the gallery, I used the culpable bandsaw blade in an installation-type piece. I scored a six-foot groove into the wall and tapped the blade in, creating the illusion that it was part of, or emerging from the wall. I then drilled holes down the entire length of the blade and stitched it back and forth with sinew. The piece bore the title, *The Teeth of God Have Bitten – The Consumption Begins*. A small portion of the blade was left exposed and the sinew trailed down to the floor, continuing to sew a heart together. The heart was obtained at a nearby slaughter house and is symbolic of desire, passion, and love. The blade is symbolic of danger and chaos. The sinew is the healing mechanism that runs between the two. It attempts to heal both but there is only enough to completely heal one.

The other diptych consists of the two largest paintings in the exhibition, each one is eight feet tall by eight feet wide with the title *Repression/Release – Assisted Suicide*. The left-most piece, *Repression*, consists of a centered orb attempting to push its way out of the painting, giving the appearance of a large lump or mound. The surface texture is bread dough with a ring of wax around the orb, causing the dough to separate and giving the illusion that the orb is beginning to tear away. The depth of the piece is accentuated by color, with dark black around the edges fading to a light honey brown in the center. The idea of the piece is based upon the development of thoughts within the mind. Quantum physicists have discovered that thoughts emerge as molecules in our brain. The orb in this piece, and many others in the show, are symbolic of thought molecules, usually a specific desire within my own psyche. The cracked, decayed texture is symbolic of the subconscious membrane from which the thoughts emerge. Sometimes there is tension or pressure holding the thought back, thus repressing it. Other times the thought is released from the painting, becoming conscious and resting on the floor as an expelled orb. This is what the right side of the diptych, *Release*, depicts. The painting is left with a large centered pit or depression from where the thought broke free. The hollow of the depression as well as the orb on the floor are painted silver, implying that the thought is accepted and treasured by the conscious mind. “*Assisted Suicide*” implies that the thought was released with the help of an outside force.

There are a total of three orbs that rest on the floor of the gallery. Each one belongs to a specific painting on the wall from which it developed and emerged. I made the obvious connection between orb and painting in the piece entitled, *Purging the Mind – A Forced Release*. The painting contains the depression, or scar, that the expulsion left behind. The title implies that the thought needed to be released in order to maintain sanity or offer clarity in the mind. Because the thought did not want to be released, I decided to add blood spilling down from the orifice as if left behind by the discharged orb. The visual connection between painting and orb occurs by the application of blood to the orb as well as a smeared trail behind it. The blood is actually a cow's heart pureed in a kitchen blender, offering very nice coagulation.

The dark red color of the blood reflects the color used in *Healing Mechanisms – The Power of Insidious Creep*. Color was one of the issues on the forefront during the creation of this series but most predominately in this particular painting. Almost all of the paintings are different shades of brown, most likely because it is a natural, organic color and it is one that I have an easy time seeing (due to my colorblindness). Insidious creep is a term used in engineering that's defined as a slow powerful force over a long period of time, having a greater impact than a strong jolt. This force is represented in the painting by the drying of the bread dough. As the dough dried, it grabbed the fibers of the canvas, ripped it, popped out staples, and pulled screws from the stretchers. Metaphorically, it is the power of art on culture and the power of chaos on logic. When the dough had completely dried, I proceeded to heal the painting through the use of sinew and paint.

The installation aspects of the show were surprisingly fulfilling. I enjoy entering a space and manipulating the environment. The orbs on the floor activated the space in the gallery and helped to set a psychological atmosphere for the viewer. The heart and blood fulfilled the desire I have to shock people but did not go too far over the edge, taking away the importance of the paintings. Since I plan to make a living by selling my work, it's difficult to completely indulge in installation work. At this point, I can see myself continuing to combine painting and installation and ideally separating them in the future.

IV. Motivations/Influences

During the first few years of undergraduate study, I intentionally rejected any type of art-like influence for the reason of remaining true to my self and my own creations. But through studying art in my history and theory courses, I couldn't help but be fascinated by other artists and their work, mostly because I made direct associations between their thoughts and mine. It has been a long process of finding artists, theorists, historians, critics, writers, poets, musicians, and philosophers that inspire me. A *simple* list would include: Anselm Kiefer, Sigmund Freud, Marilyn Manson, Joseph Beuys, Leonardo Drew, Jean DuBuffet, Trent Reznor, Chris Burdon, Jacques Derrida, Willie Nelson, Eva Hesse, Leonard Cohen, Mozart, Alberto Burri, Jean-Micheal Basquiat, Andres Serrano, Robert Maplethorpe, and Wendy Stienner.

My original intent was to cite references and quotes from these people, but as I began this process I felt very detached from the words and started to think honestly of who and what my influences and motivations really are. My fellow studio mates, friends and faculty probably stimulate and intrigue me more on a daily basis than anyone from that list. A walk in the woods inspires me just as well as a walk through a museum. I have had stimulating conversations under the Decker's Creek Bridge, just as I do in my seminar courses – they operate on different levels, being relative to the context they stem from, and intriguing me in different ways. I try not to place one on a pedestal and disregard the other. I respect all my influences and am not trying to insult one by equating it with another.

I appreciate Christo's non-verbal reply of the wrapped art history book when answering the question of who his influences are. I think he said it even better when he wrapped an entire museum and library. With the same question posed to me, I would have to either wrap everything or nothing. Everything is an influence or nothing is an influence, everything is original or nothing is original, everything is natural or nothing is natural, everything exists or nothing exists, etc. and both sides of each paradox can be proved and disproved.

My work is contemporary because *I* am contemporary and it fits into the contemporary scene for that reason. Even if I was doing something that's viewed as being

traditional, such as a landscape or still life, it would still be contemporary by the fact that I'm making it in the here and now. A landscape created on April 12th, 1999 has different connotations associated with it than the same landscape created on April 12th, 1774, and so on. An artist is contemporary by the nature of living in contemporary society and their work is a product of their times no matter what the final object is. It is impossible to deny the impact of my environment and my predecessors, but it is also somewhat foolish to try to make logical associations. The things that I don't know and have not seen have the same amount of impact and influence on me as the things that I do know and have seen. This is because *not* being exposed to something affects the way in which a mind processes information, just as much as being exposed to it.

I feel contemporary because my thoughts are similar to the thoughts of my peers. We have all received similar information that has been filtered through education, media, and life experiences and that has given us a similar perception of the world and world issues. The difficult thing for most artists to do is pinpoint exactly where our ideas stem from, especially in the wake of deconstruction, where everything serves as allusions to something else, an intertextuality of ideas with multiple layers of definition. Obviously, my thoughts on this subject are possible because of people like Derrida and Heddiger, whose works I've read extensively. In fact, most of my theories have a deconstructionist flavor to them.

There are some other people who I can make easy associations with. Anselm Kiefer has got to be my biggest aesthetic influence. I'm enamored by the visual power of his paintings while standing before them. The grand scale of the work absorbs the viewer and demands attention. The texture is rich, thick, and luscious and I'm impressed by his ability to use heavy materials on such a large surface. I definitely had Kiefer in mind while working on *Rapeture*.

Many of these same aspects are found in the work of Leonardo Drew. I also enjoy the color palette of Drew's work (browns) and the attention given to detail through the use of small objects. The use of rust also appeals to me and is something that I've used in my paintings. Rust was used for the timeline in *Rapeture* and was used for a background in *Ignorance is Truth*. I like the theoretical aspects that rust can imply as well as its ability to absorb moisture from the air and change color over time.

The origins of my materials are found in the work of Joseph Beuys, Eva Hesse, Leonardo Drew, Alberto Burri, and Jean DuBuffet. Wax and latex from Beuys and Hesse, fabric and stitching from Drew, Burri and Hesse, and rust, sand and ash from DuBuffet and Drew. I used fabric, wax and latex much in the way Beuys did, as healing mechanisms, although the things that I am healing are much different than Beuys'.

Although I'm not interested in pursuing performance art, I respect the work of Chris Burdon. He had a great way of shocking people and bringing issues to the forefront. For this same reason, I admire the work of Robert Maplethorpe, Marilyn Manson and Andres Serrano. I try to walk the edge of shock value. I want to grab people's attention but also be taken seriously as an artist and thinker.

V. Conclusion

My artwork explores the nature of my psyche, and subsequently the words that describe it end up being a psychoanalysis of myself. It is not a complete description of my character because it only describes the thoughts invested in my work. Since the nature of my work is often times dark and disturbing, one may get a false impression of my personality. For this reason, I enjoy making objects rather than writing because it is a way in which I can present ideas subtly, making them accessible for others.

The *Religion Series* was the start of considering myself as an outcast from society. I wanted nothing to do with any form of organization, labels, lists, charts, equations, names, and definitions. In other words, I despised many aspects of human nature. That's not to imply that I do not value life, rather, I'm unsatisfied by the way we have chosen to live, especially in western society. I admire aspects of certain cultures and enjoy learning multiple ways to view similar things. I also strive off of chaos and hunt for the bizarre. I'm in constant search of something shocking and rarely find anything.

These are the main reasons I became so engrossed in the Holocaust. I was obsessed with looking at the images and hearing about the atrocities, especially when the stories were personal. I respect the survivors of the death camps for the situations they

went through. I'm interested in the things that happen to the mind when placed in these situations. I believe it expands the mind by making it aware of its capability.

I've been discovering that chaos and depression often fuel the creation of my work. I don't consider myself a wolf in sheep's clothing nor am I an actor strutting and fretting my hour upon the stage. I do not play a role - I live it. My life is my art and the objects that I create are the byproducts. In order to create work that revolves around a theme, I actively engage myself in that theme thereby creating a lifestyle that sacrifices itself to the art.

It is a powerful force that has been snowballing with each new series. I am becoming increasingly absorbed in my work. Carefully constructed reckless behavior most often proceeds the month before an exhibition. I intentionally create chaos to fuel the process of creation, sometimes finding happiness in depression and comfort in insanity.

The concluding paragraph is intentionally poetic through the use of metaphors. I believe that metaphors are a wonderful tool for artists to use because they operate in a similar fashion as paintings. They are things that stand for other things, offering reader interpretation while maintaining the writers personal intention.

My life is my art, my art is my god, my god is Jahilia, Jahilia is ignorance, and I have given my self to him. He has bitten me and the Consumption has begun. Jahilia demands full ownership over my soul. He has chosen me as his prophet and shaman. Each new creation becomes a sacrifice in which he possesses another part of my being and in turn, his power becomes a greater part of me. I am slowly being enraptured and consumed by my art – it's killing and becoming me. Each new creation is an offering for Jahilia.