Pavor Nocturnus

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PAVOR NOCTURNUS

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

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August 2013
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The thesis *Pavor Nocturnus*, or night terror in Latin, investigates the ideas of the dream, memory, and the role of the bed. The exhibition consisted of sculptural installations and large artworks suspended from the ceiling on the top floor of a decrepit industrial building, which had once served as an icehouse at the turn of the 20th century. By transforming personal events and actions into physical objects; viewers explored, experienced and interpreted the artworks on a personal level.

The text analyzes each work of art in the exhibition. It includes the artist’s philosophy, psychological and artistic influences as well as internal motivations that inspired the artwork. Specific artists, art movements, and psychologists are examined. The connections of influences to the work in *Pavor Nocturnus* are analyzed.
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Pavor Nocturnus comprises six chapters that explore and analyze motivations, influences, process, and content affecting the work. The first chapter, Internal Motivations will discuss and interpret significant events from my childhood and adolescence that informed and influenced my work.

The second chapter, Artistic Influences investigates the artists who have helped define the aesthetics and content my artwork. The third chapter Surrealism and Psychology As Influences examines psychology, the Surrealist Art movements and specific artists who have influenced the style, methods, and concepts of Pavor Nocturnus.

The fourth chapter, Statement of Philosophy, will explore and explain how the art making approach begins, starting with my personal thought process and how the evolution of an idea results in the creation of a sculpture. The fifth chapter, Analysis of Work, examines both the exhibition as a whole, and, more specifically each individual piece in relation of manipulation of the original object, significance of the materials and viewer interaction, as well as the space and placement in which the work resides (Figs. 1,2).

The Conclusion will summarize my approach to art making and the conceptual process which changed over time, as well as new discoveries made during the installation of the show. Ideas for continuation of future artworks from the concepts of Pavor Nocturnus will be discussed.
Fig. 1. Installation view of *Pavor Nocturnus*.

Fig. 2. Installation view of *Pavor Nocturnus*. 
CHAPTER I.

INTERNAL MOTIVATIONS

My experience as an exchange student in Zagreb, Croatia shaped many of the works in *Pavor Nocturnus*. The small, ill-equipped studio pushed me to use and manipulate found objects instead of constructing new ones. Secondly, the tiny uncomfortable bed in a filthy little dorm room conjured forgotten memories of all of the different places I have slept, and my experiences on various but similar mattresses. Thoughts about connections and similarities to other people sharing this object 5,000 miles from my home developed. My role as a foreigner in a country surrounded by people who could not speak my language sparked the idea of making art that could provide a direct experience for viewers without verbal explanations.

In her book, *Strangers To*, philosopher Julia Kristeva explores what it means to be a foreigner:

> Within the crowd of foreigners who either do not wish or cannot either become integrated here or return where they came from, a new form of individualism develops: I belong to nothing, to no law, I circumvent the law. This stance on the part of the foreigner certainly arouses the conscious commendation of the natives (Kristeva 103).

The feeling of having nothing to lose or to be concerned with surfaced in the artwork made in Croatia and my personal life while abroad. Feeling self-conscious about making honest or too personal work vanished when I realized I was only a temporary fixture far from my real home.

Recreating memories from childhood played a large role in the artwork of *Pavor Nocturnus*. One of my earliest, most vivid memories included being three years old, playing in a neighbor’s sandbox with military action figures, building bases and tunnels. Playing war,
The games were always realistic; the elements of fantastical worlds filled with super powers and monsters did not exist. Seeing childhood friends playing in ways that I found uninteresting, making toys jump and fly seemed strange. Scenarios of war, destruction and death as play in the sandbox seemed natural.

Another vivid memory involved seeing a living snake for the first time at age four. My parents and grandparents were all inside the house or on the porch on the other side of the property. Alone in the alley, playing near a bush, I saw something brightly colored and moving slowly. The small hypnotic reptile was black and yellow, slithering back and forth on the dry dirt under a small bush at the edge of my grandmother's yard. I felt fear and at the same time curiosity. The snake stayed there for a few minutes watching me as I watched it. When I told my family, they didn't believe me. This event was forgotten for fifteen years until I saw the area where the bush had been. This incident has played a major role in my fear of snakes and recurring dreams of them.

A feeling of isolation, of not belonging, pervaded my childhood from kindergarten through high school. The only thing I enjoyed about school was the solitary experience of drawing in art class, and receiving praise for it from adults. Hearing my parents suggest becoming an artist seemed foolish though. How could anyone make a living as an artist? Every adult in my small town worked in a factory or some other type of manual labor job. The famous artists in books were already dead and had been for many years. It wasn't until nearly halfway through art school that the idea of one becoming an artist became a feasible hope. Had I grown up a normal, popular boy, so much time would not have been spent alone in my bedroom drawing, drastically altering my future. Feeling like an outsider continues to affect my views about life and relationship.
CHAPTER II.
ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

The majority of artists who have influenced my work share the common theme of inner turmoil or torment. Their art and personal lives become indistinguishable, making the art honest and authentic. Felix-Gonzales Torres arranged found materials to convey a complex and deep meaning through installations and photographs of mostly singular objects. He created much of his work for viewers to take and consume, by allowing viewers to take away a piece of the candy from the pile, which was the sculpture. His sculptures were experienced on a level very uncommon for a gallery situation. Torres was gifted at finding direct ways to use common universal materials, which he transformed into art works about social issues and human relationships. For example, Gonzales-Torres’s billboard photograph of an empty, unmade bed creates a sense of loss or desertion. This quiet and poetic photograph shows a close up of two pillows and wrinkled sheets and gives the feeling that lovers shared this bed. Felix Gonzales-Torres’s Untitled from 1991 managed to capture a somber relationship by simply showing an empty, unmade bed. The lack of the figures caused viewers to place themselves into the scene.

For Gonzales-Torres, light played a major role in communicating meaning. Light represents warmth and safety:

The light strings -casually strung across a gallery space or allowed to dangle in an office or hallway permit him to play the role of spy, present but not necessarily visible. A light string is a work of art, he explains, that "doesn't really look like artwork, but its there. You have to have a second look. Vision becomes aesthetic and meaning is suggested. The light refers to Gonzalez-Torres's own memories of places, people and ideas (Spector 184).
The next two artists discussed belong to the group known as the Young British Artists who came out of Goldsmiths, University of London in the late 1980s. The sculptor Sarah Lucas addresses the body and sexuality. She arranges simple materials in complex ways to portray notions that normally would not be associated with those objects, allowing the viewer to explore each of the materials (Orr). Early in her career she started to reference male and female sexuality and how they differed. She did not take a positive or negative view on each specific gender, rather she depicted each in its true nature, at least from what she observed. Much of the work dealing with males was more direct and harsh, images depicting masturbation and penetration of other objects, reflecting on the event representing the action, but not the person. Her male sculptures consist of only the necessary parts, focusing on the genitals. Lucas handled female sexuality more delicately, using tables, chairs, pantyhose and clothing to represent them in more vulnerable ways.

Tracy Emin, another sculptor of the Young British Artists group, also explored her identity and sexuality. Emin received more mainstream fame and notoriety than Lucas or most of the other YBA’s in most likely because of the unapologetic way she deals with personal and graphic subject matter. Tracey Emin has made the events of her life into artworks. Her art became a type of therapy to help her get past such painful issues as molestation and rape in her teenage years. Ever since she began working with sculptures in the early 1990s, the work focused on herself and her relationships. In one of her most well known pieces titled *Everyone I have Ever Slept With 1963-1995*, she memorialized over 100 names of everyone she has ever shared a bed with sexually as a child or as platonic friends, as well as her two aborted children, sewing their real names inside a camping tent. Another celebrated work from 1999 titled *My Bed* consisted of her actual bed, piles of wrinkled sheets, used condoms, an ashtray filled with
cigarette butts and blood stained underwear. Exhibited in the Tate Gallery in London, Emin won the coveted Turner Prize in 1999 for *My Bed*, which generated much controversy. Many questioned how something like an unmade, dirty bed could be considered art ("Tracey Emin biography, 'Everyone I Ever Slept With'). Emin allowed the viewer into a very personal place containing more honesty than a stranger would feel comfortable experiencing. Both of these artworks take a simple object that everyone owns and ignores, but giving it meaning by taking it out of the private space and into the public gallery. Her work makes her particularly vulnerable because of its brutal honesty and graphic depiction of private personal experiences.

Bernardi Roig, a contemporary Spanish sculptor, works primarily with the figure and explores the theme of personal identity. He uses cast polyester resin and fluorescent lights, which he simply describes as a “poetic touch of complex meaning.” Most of the life-size figures incorporate florescent light. The work is realistically rendered and the face usually appears to be sad or longing, staring vacantly towards walls or windows. Even when there are multiple figures in a room, each one seems totally isolated from the rest. Ideas of the solitary man and his attempt to question and define his existence is a recurring theme in his current body of work. White resin figures are stuck in time, seemingly created at the last moment that each one was alive. The smoothness of the material and the shift of weight and tension of twisting skin created with the rubber resin create the feeling that a human being is underneath (Bernardi Roig Biography).

Light emphasizes the ghostly white figures, making them a monument to the common man. The flicker of the florescent light acts as a source of life, pulsating similar to a heartbeat. Light brings attention to the important features of the face and the hands, which reveal a person’s identity. Sterile white light hovers around the figures representing the memory or the aura of the person. Roig has an obsession with death and immortality, questioning at what point is a person is no longer with us and when does someone truly cease to exist?
Light in Bernardi Roig's sculptures can also represent the last moment the individual was alive, the last thing they ever experienced. In some of the works, the falling fluorescent light fixtures actually seem to be the cause of the person's demise, creating a feeling of action frozen in time as we witness the moment before life ceases to exist. Light functions as a positive aura, referencing the idea of going towards the light, representing the idea of heaven, of safety. Abstracted light pulls viewers into the work like a fly, and once that happens they must confront the realism of the white figures and question their meaning. The work becomes personal and the viewer can quietly reflect on who this person was (Bernardi Roig Biography).

Dash Snow made autobiographical installations, collages and photographs that shared the same imagery as some of his photography predecessors, such as Larry Clark or Nan Goldin, who also used themselves and friends as subjects for their work. Drugs, sex, filth, danger, excess and unpredictability summed up the aspects of Dash Snow's life and work, which almost always became one and the same (Feuer).

Taking an untraditional route of becoming an artist, he became a homeless drug addict and then stole a Polaroid camera to document his wild nights. He used the instant images created by the Polaroid as a reminder to where and what he had done the previous night during his drug and alcohol blackouts as a teenager. His photos had a sense of reality, freedom and truth. One of the striking factors about these images is that they are autobiographical. Snow wasn't just looking into this bizarre and dangerous world stealing images, he was documenting how he lived. “Photographs covered the unprotected sex, excessive alcohol consumption, nudity, the cocaine, and the filth that Snow had chosen for his life, while many of his poorer acquaintances didn’t have the choice of whether or not to live like that (Feuer)”.

Snow passed away at the age of
27 in July of 2009 of a heroin overdose. He was remarkably young to be an established artist while quite old for a junkie.

In *Hamster Nests*, Snow dabbled in creating installations that would never be seen other than in photographs. The nests were an elaborate mix of drugs, alcohol, nudity, an emptied room, usually a hotel, bed sheets, and a hundred ripped up phone books. To get the desired effect Snow and his friends would spend three to five days in a room partying, not showering and tearing up phone book pages, creating a soft bedding that the group would pass out in (O'Hagen).

Artists that influenced the work in *Pavor Nocturnus* created an emotional connection with the viewer. Their work as well as mine was derived from personal events and experiences. The next Chapter, *Surrealism and Psychology as Influences* will discuss psychological theories and Surrealist influences. The Surrealists' use of dreams and automatism as well as Sigmund Freud's and Dr. Carl J. Jung's interpretation of the dream provided strong inspirations for the thesis exhibition.
CHAPTER III.

SURREALISM AND PSYCHOLOGY AS INFLUENCES

Similarities between the work in *Pavor Nocturnus* and the processes and ideas of the Surrealists became evident early on in the research for the thesis show. The primary aim of this movement was to "resolve the previously contradictory condition of dream and reality into an absolute reality, a super reality (Breton 5)." Dreams played a vital role in the creation process for my sculptures. For instance, the Surrealist Salvador Dali used dreams in a very direct way to inspire his subject matter for paintings. He would fall sleep sitting up with a key in his hand. Once asleep, the key would fall and awaken him. Dali then would sketch and paint whatever dream he was having (Caws 53). It was reassuring that the technique of a widely known artist from the 20th century was similar to my own method of recreating my dream experiences. After a lucid dream I awake and write or draw the content of the dream as accurately as I can before it is forgotten.

Breton discussed the connection to childhood in his First Manifesto:

From childhood memories, and from a few others, there emanates a sentiment of being uninterested, and then later of having gone astray, which I hold to be the most fertile that exists. It is perhaps childhood that comes closest to one's real life; childhood beyond which man has at his disposal, aside from his laissez-passier, only a few complimentary tickets; childhood where everything nevertheless conspires to bring about the effective, risk-free possession of oneself (Breton 13).

The notion that through Surrealism it was possible to look back into the dark parts of childhood and use it as inspiration reinforced my own methods of creation. I could free the
demons from my psyche and turn them into objects that would describe the dramatic events. Sigmund Freud referred to this as *day residue*, which consisted of the memories of events preceding in the day that retain unconscious emotional charge and nocturnal stimuli (Spector 202).

Some of the Surrealists admired Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* due to its "tendency to scientifically confirm their belief in the significance and reality of their dreams (Spector 42). Freud believed the major purpose of dreaming was to suppress or contain the various impulses and wishes that we consciously or unconsciously harbor (Glucksman 6). My most often reoccurring dream is of a long-term girlfriend from my early twenties. In the dream the relationship is fixed and there is a sense of the time that has passed to present day. This dream is a wish from my subconscious that will never be fulfilled. A certain level of contentment now comes after I awake, whereas before it brought on much sadness.

Inspiration was also derived from Carl J. Jung's exploration of the dream. Jung's analysis differed from Freud's even though he was initially a student of Freud. Jung explained in more positive terms why we have certain types of dreams. Jung wrote in *Retrospect*, the last chapter of his autobiography:

> It is important to have a secret, a premonition of things unknown. It fills life with impersonal numinous. A man who has never experienced that has missed something important. He must sense that that he lives in a world, which in some respects is mysterious, that things happen and can be experienced which remains inexplicable, that not everything, which happens, can be anticipated. The unexpected and the incredible belong in this world (Jung 36).
Jung goes into deeper detail about the content of dreams and how we have no control over our subconscious.

Since the meaning of most dreams is not in accord with the tendencies of the conscious mind but shows peculiar deviations, we must assume that the unconscious, the matrix of dreams, has an independent function. This is what I call the autonomy of unconscious. The dream not only fails to obey our will but very often stands in flagrant opposition to our intentions (Jung 545).

Both Jung and Freud agreed on the importance of dreaming for the individual's healthy psyche. (Levine 164). Being able to dream in vivid detail has proved to be enjoyable while also terrifying and disappointing at times. I feel as though the ability to explore my unconscious mind is beneficial as an artist. No longer do I wake up in the middle of the night crying, but now I feel inspired to create new pieces of art.
CHAPTER IV.
STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

Dreams, memories and traumatic events informed the work in *Pavor Nocturnus*. Physical objects were created from the psyche, to recreate powerful and traumatic memories of past places and events. Sculptural installations and singular pieces emerged from a creative process that in certain cases started twenty or more years ago. Dissecting the psychology, exploring memories and feelings that were hidden, added deeper layers to the meaning of the work.

Themes of the forgotten kept coming up, actions from my childhood, an event or memory, returned subconsciously and took shape as a sculpture. Dreams and nightmares, often about past lovers or friendships that ended abruptly, filled my head. Art became the vehicle for ridding myself of these memories and dreams. Without giving away too much specific information, the viewer must search for answers and meanings, which may never become clear.

A year before *Pavor Nocturnus*, the work had changed aesthetic directions and had become more about wrapping and containing objects, creating interest by limiting the information given to the viewer. This transformation was a natural evolution, but it wasn’t clear where the inspiration came from until one day at my parents’ home while working on a car in their backyard. I noticed a blue plastic tarp, tied around a pile of wood. Ropes tied tightly around tarps seemed very similar to my sculpture from the past year or so. At that moment, memories of events and places in my childhood returned. My father would wrap objects such as old cars, broken motorcycles, bicycles, toys, large tools and lawnmowers in tarps and then secure with either white rope or bungee cords. Both interested and frustrated, the mystery prompted me to try and untie the complicated fastening system to glimpse at what was hidden under the folds of plastic. I felt shame towards the trapped objects in my yard; in my mind they signified white
trash or bad taste. I was relieved when my father cleaned up and replaced them with vegetable gardens and landscaping. Now, those objects have become fond memories as they played a major part in my inspiration for creating art. What my father had done out of necessity for protection became a way to create tension and interest in my sculpture.

The Surrealist artist Man Ray’s sculpture titled *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse*, created in 1920, provided another source of inspiration for *Pavor Nocturnus*. Consisting of a sewing machine wrapped in a felt blanket bound with rope, *The Enigma* existed primarily as a photograph. Ray did not reveal the contents under the wrapped fabric but left it as a riddle for the viewers to attempt to solve (Schwarz 161). This piece was made as a tribute to French poet Isidore Ducasse’s famous statement “as beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table” (Lautréamont 263).” The Surrealists expanded this idea by juxtaposing objects and images that don’t normally occur together. In Andre Breton’s view, this combination created “the marvelous.” He said, “Only the marvelous is beautiful” (Breton 3). Aesthetic similarities as well as philosophical themes, such as playing a game with the viewer from *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse*, are present in *Pavor Nocturnus*.

Another aspect of my art making process directly connected to Surrealism was their notion of Automatism, which Breton defines in his first Manifesto of Surrealism as "We are going to sleep. As the image becomes more intense so it becomes more absorbing and independent. We are no longer actors but spectators; its transformations are spontaneous and automatic (Spector 470.)" When creating a series of wrapped elements for an installation, I can never plan the outcome. Ways in which the fabric will lay over the contours of the forms after being tied cannot be predicted. A rhythm begins during the action of manipulating and stretching the wet fabric onto the bare sculptures. Lines and layers begin to take shape as irreversible choices are made. My hands are in sync with the contours as my body interacts with the multi
faceted objects being covered. Though the process can be physically grueling, the decision-making becomes automatic. Andre Breton briefly defines the process:

Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express -- verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner -- the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by the thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern (Breton 12)

A Surrealist artist who became a later influence on my work was Max Ernst. Ernst’s subject matter of combining organic with mechanical forms that could only exist in a dream world spoke to me. In the painting Celebes, an ominous abstract elephant shaped object stands and waits as a figure in the foreground moves out of frame. At first view, the elephant appeared to be a large tank with a hose extending from its top. My first impression was of a bomb on the verge of exploding. It my own work I incorporate a variety of possible meanings for the viewer to discern.

Eventually, the bed became important as an object in my work. Exploring its many functions revealed the duality of pleasure and horror, as well as its central role over our entire life span. From conception, to birth, throughout life and finally death, so much of our existence happens in the bed. It serves as the place of relaxation, safety, study and comfort. It can also serve as the location for negative emotional events such as depression, nightmares and insomnia.

The bed first became a source of pleasure for me with my first wet dream. Its clean white sheets became tainted. Sexuality became associated with lying in bed, first with masturbation and then eventually with the act of sex. My bed became associated with notions of something dirty and exciting. Sex erased my feelings of being a weird outsider. Sexual desire drove me, similar to the desire that burns now for art, a passion without restraint.
Though the bed was a source of great pleasure and comfort for me growing up, it also became a place of dread many nights as well. Vivid, terrifying dreams began during childhood. For example, in one dream that recurred over many years, I am surrounded by groups of snakes on all sides. Fear of snakes started after the dreams. C. G. Jung also writes about the residue of the day being the source for dreams as well as past events, dating back to even our childhoods (Jung 133). Dreams of getting the toy desperately needed as a child are replaced by having sex with the girls from the past, only to wake up alone and disappointed.

My work often included fluorescent lights that represent a person or memory from my past (Fig 3). Originally designed for a utilitarian purpose, artists such as Dan Flavin began using fluorescent lights in symbolic ways. Flavin directly summed up his connection:

A common industrial material that has until recently stood for the most common aspects of a flashy advertising culture—may now realize a different potential in its symbolic capacity to arouse emotional response, and, in the hands of the artists, transcend its materiality. It retains, after all, a hint of the age magic and attraction of fire or the sun— or of brightness in any form, signifying warmth, mystery, life (Flavin, Art News 52).
Flavin's description fits my use for it as well; however, my work incorporates the light with other common materials, such as steel, fabric and sand. By creating less specific scenarios with the lights, Flavin was more abstract and neutral with his meanings. Flavin's ideas about light allowed me to consider how it could function in my own art, symbolizing the people in dreams and memories who existed only in the past. Using the irregularity of the light to represent the aura or soul of the subject created a dynamic pulse in the sculptures.

The autobiographical nature of my sculptures allow the viewer into my complicated world of emotions and dreams, but also allow room for the viewer's own interpretations. Referencing memories by recreating some of the forms from childhood, the work uses found bed
sheets as the covering material due to their individual characteristics and intimate history with the previous owner. Tightly tied sheets and white lights represented my dreams and memories.

Work is created with the intentions of taking something ordinary and common then altering and improving sections until it becomes beautiful and poetic. A majority of the work in *Pavor Nocturnus* began as a hard, linear piece of furniture that was then given a sense of beauty and importance with drapery. Sheets are manipulated by hand while wet as they flow and break the lines of the structures they cover. I am drawn to the repetition of highlights and shadows created in the intricate folds of the hardened fabric and how they vary depending on the time of day affecting natural light.

Another element present in *Pavor Nocturnus* is the balanced hanging of soft sculptures at above eye level with intricate systems of ropes. The height of floating structures allows the viewer to explore the underside and follow the lines created in the folds and ropes. The act of tying and retying knots is more than just a means of suspending the art, it is crucial to the safety and security of those viewing them. The connections become automatic and spontaneous as I struggle to find balance within the connection points.

*Pavour Nocturnus* was able to create an imaginary and surreal place frozen in time. Ordinary objects intertwined with their surroundings and became an intimate experience for the viewer to become part of. Rough textures of flaking clay and stiff torn bed sheets induced a visceral reaction that could be felt without ever touching any of the sculptures.
CHAPTER V.

ANALYSIS OF PAVOR NOCTURNUS

The sculptures and installations exhibited in *Pavor Nocturnus*, while not completely site specific, were intended for the top floor of the Lennox building in Indiana, Pennsylvania. After searching various locations for this exhibition, this building became the clear choice as soon as I saw the large, dusty and pungent room. Its walls, ceiling and floor looked as though they were frozen in time from fifty years ago. Large open windows provided ever changing natural light that created a different ambiance depending on the time of day. Climbing several flights of steep, winding stairs created a sense of suspense as viewers finally arrived in the antique warehouse space, with its quiet presence of light and shadow. *Pavor Nocturnus* resembled an old, long forgotten attic full of covered furniture and fixtures. Structures consisting of found objects combined with fabricated forms hung from the ceiling and rested on the dusty, stained floor. A bizarre mixture of the common place and the surreal took viewers out of their comfort zone usually associated with art galleries. A sense of nostalgia loomed in the stale air of the warehouse. Rooms contained memories from the past; detritus broke away and fell to the floor from sculptures encrusted in mud, suspended from the exposed wooden rafters. Shadows and silhouettes added more movement and intensified the dream-like qualities of the exhibition.

Upon entering, viewers first encountered *If I Should Explode*, which consisted of two elements connected by a stained rubber hose: a nightstand with a small dresser stacked on top, a covered alarm clock highlighted by a single spotlight, all draped in stiffened fabric flowing through the crevices and openings down to the floor, and an eight-foot tall hanging membrane. Inflated air sacs and bare, clear light bulbs were also draped in stiffened white fabric. Hanging structures were tied tight with white rope and electrical cords. These lines of the rope carried the eye of the viewer into and out of the intricacy of the large hanging bulbous sac. Clear round light
bulbs drew the viewer in and around the piece, emitting warmth that simultaneously comforted and unnerved the viewer (Fig. 4).

*If I Should Explode*

![Image of If I Should Explode installation](image)

*Fig. 4. If I Should Explode.*
Inspired by the brief moment before we wake up, *If I Should Explode* depicted the moment in the morning when the alarm clock rings, a bizarre yet logical transition between dreams and consciousness, when we don't realize if we're dreaming or awake. A filthy rubber hose penetrated into propane tanks inside of the nightstand, connected to the base of the floating air sacs (Fig. 5). A covered alarm clock appeared to flow down and over the stand and onto the tanks below to create tension and movement, alluding to Salvador Dali’s *Persistence of Memory* (Fig. 6). White drapery flowed as if it were liquid candle wax. The open-ended sculpture allowed viewers to bring in their own fears and interpretations.

In the base of the nightstand two propane gas tanks, similar to the style used in many homemade bombs, were concealed under flowing fabric. Fear of terrorism and war has been part of my entire adulthood, since The World Trade Center bombings occurred only days into my
first semester of art school. I never could have guessed how much of an impact that event would have on life after that. Using a playful yet dark humor to satirize our modern daily concerns about terrorism and, more specifically, explosions, can help us cope with tragedy. Building a device that would reference the common conceptions about a big, deadly bomb in a public place set the mood for the rest of the exhibition.

Fig 6. If I Should Explode, detail.
Consisting of a found twin size mattress lying atop a folded bed frame, *Always Lonely/ Never Alone* sat on a frame with welded spikes attached, which scraped into the wood floor below (Fig. 7). The mattress had a found, portable folding cot perched above with a metal bar from the support extended upwards. A long bar latch coming out of the cot rose straight up and was draped in stiffened white sheets, mimicking an erection pushing forward, trying to break free (Fig. 8). A vertical bar has a stiffened white sheet draped over, extending down and spreading out onto the lager mattress. A single spotlight focused onto the tip of the hidden appendage. Light fell down and followed the contours on the sheet where it made contact with the top mattress. Light caused the hollow structure to glow when viewed from the back.
Fig. 8. *Always Lonely/ Never Alone*, detail.

Fig. 9. *Always Lonely/ Never Alone*, detail.
At its core, this sculpture focused on sexuality and human interaction (Fig. 9). The reclaimed sheets had a natural dingy yellow tint referencing body fluid. Experiences with failed relationships and one-night stands underlay its meaning. Something so basic yet complicated became a physical representation in this sculpture. *Always Lonely/ Never Alone* is not just about physical penetration, but also the emotional connection and the emptiness of desires. *Always Lonely/Never Alone* explores the unspoken feelings of shame, pride and awkwardness to the viewer.

4-06-2011, 11:20 A.M.

Fig. 10. 4-06-2011, 11:20 A.M.
is an homage to my grandfather, George B. Whitaker. It was constructed from a repurposed grandfather clock that resided in my parent’s living room for over twenty years. The hands of the clock stopped moving around the time my grandfather passed away, fixed at 11:20, when he took his last breath (Fig. 11). Resting horizontally on a hollow wood structure, draped with stiffened white used bed sheet, the clock was wrapped in a green wool military blanket, partly draped with another sheet, emphasizing the contours and hard edges of the piece (Fig. 10). Sections of the rope that bound the blanket to the clock have been cut, allowing sections to fall away. A packing crate stands along the wall insinuating that the clock has arrived at its destination. Looking at an empty open shipping crate sparked the idea of a coffins acting as a shipping vessel into the afterlife. Representing the passage from Earth into the Heavens, extended the definition of a bed to include a coffin, the last place of rest.

Fig. 11. 4-06-2011, 11:20 A.M., detail.
A transformation occurs at the moment of death, a living, breathing person turns into a thing, an object (Fig. 12). While the objects represented the idea of the person, it was still just a shell connected to memories and emotions. A funeral ceremony and burial is a common event that occurs over and over containing the same parts and actions each time. While it is difficult for the families attending, the process is just repetition for the workers of the funeral home. Andre Breton described this last journey in his first Surrealist Manifesto:

*Against death*

Surrealism will usher you into death, which is a secret society. It will glove your hand, burying therein the profound M with which the word Memory begins. Do not forget to make proper arrangements for your last will and testament: speaking personally, I ask that I am taken to the cemetery in a moving van. May my friends destroy every last copy of printing of the Speech concerning the Modicum of Reality (Breton 32).
A Moments Rest

Fig. 13. A Moments Rest.

*A Moments Rest* was a twenty-foot long by six foot tall hanging site-specific sculptural installation consisting of found lumber, rope, clay slip and repurposed bed sheets from a nursing home. The piece was suspended from the thirteen-foot tall ceiling with the aid of large steel hooks. Its height ranged from eye level to overhead, spanning a length of twenty feet (Fig. 13). As the unfired clay slip moved and began to break away from the surface of the fabric, debris started to accumulate on the floor (Fig. 14). Thus, the piece engaged the floor when the viewer passed through the open spaces in the piece.
Memories came rushing back during the tying and wrapping, creating some of the same uneasy feelings experienced in my childhood. In following the contours and lines with my hand and searching for the connection points of the elaborate system of rope and knots, the connection to the covered objects in my backyard from childhood became clear. It was a mixture of nostalgia and anxiety while imagining my father going through the exact same movements. Draping large objects with cheap blue tarps and then making a series of knots, using various types of available ropes and cords, my father did this act for physical protection and security. My purpose was synthetic and aesthetic.

Fig. 14. *A Moments Rest.*

*A Moments Rest* represents what becomes of our minds when we lose consciousness and enter the dream world. For me, sleep became a gamble as to whether positive interactions or negative events would occur. Sprawling wood structures covered with gritty clay slip and old
bed sheets represent clinging mental baggage from the day (Fig. 15). Freud's idea of the residue of the day remaining in our subconscious was influential in the concept of this piece.

Dusty, tightly pulled fabric covering the structures below echoed what might have been left behind in a house after the inhabitants left. After years of providing the protection for the original objects, the outer forms created by the covers became the only identifiable part. Memory became distorted and forgotten: similar to the way our imaginations can distort and alter past events. A lack of internal structure now defined the form and completely blocked the audience from seeing what was below, representing relationships and memories that were bottled up and hid away. The truth was under layers in an effort to protect against pain. They sagged sadly and hung lifelessly waiting to eventually disappear completely. Stained and torn sheets came from a nursing home. They covered elderly dying folks and provided comfort in their last days. These blankets were wrapped around people near death, sick, so close to the end.

Not being a person who can easily open up emotionally with people, I tend to internalize feelings as a way to protect myself from being hurt. Clutching precious memories keeps them safe inside my mind. Over time those thoughts disintegrate and become tainted. Distorted and altered, what was once the reality is now just a deterioration of beautiful memories crumbling away.
Fig. 15. *A Moments Rest, detail.*
Fig. 16. *Underneath the Covers.*
Sharing some of the same elements as *A Moments Rest*, the work titled *Underneath the Covers* consisted of a dirt cloud hanging above a child’s bed. A crumbling cloud structure made of bed sheets covered in clay slip and wood was suspended from the ceiling with a system of ropes and steel hooks, illuminated by a single small clear bulb coming from one of the rafters. Detritus falls onto the bed and floor but only becomes visible upon closer inspection. A child’s bed was draped in a found bed sheet, then infused with a glue and rubber substance to freeze the drapery in time. Sheets were toned with dark grey and blue pigments that disappear into the shadows at a distance. The bed was suspended over the floor slightly and hangs from the dirt cloud. The entire structure was free to sway and cast moving shadows on the nearby wall depending on the time of day. Abstract shadows created by the irregular forms danced along the walls and floor and caused the viewer to interpret them in individual ways (Fig. 17).

![Image](image.jpg)

Fig. 17. *Underneath the Covers*, detail.
Fig. 18. *Underneath the Covers.*
Childhood nightmares and the fear of falling asleep inspired *Underneath the Covers*, which re-created the visceral reactions during and right after a nightmare. When the story is told to grown-ups, we're not to be believed. A looming light coming from under the bed referenced the monster in the closet that only I could see as a small child. Light peeked out from the bed suspended a few inches above the floor illuminating the boards and dust in an eerily green tone (Fig. 18). The impact of this piece lies in the intricate connection of ropes that connect the two parts and their suspension to the ceiling. As the cloud sways forward it juts out and breaks the plane of the small room it is to be contained in, from a distance shadows blend with the structure and scale becomes distorted.
Dirty Fingernails

Fig. 19. Dirty Fingernails.
Though tucked away into the back section of the space, *Dirty Fingernails* drew viewers into the exhibit, in the same manner as flies are attracted to light. A sculpture consisting of two separate elements: a mattress and a bent, steel set of box springs sitting on a six foot tall frame that could be walked under, encouraging interaction with the bottom of the mattress. An eight-foot long fluorescent light fixture penetrated through the torn mattress and springs, reaching nearly to the thirteen-foot tall ceiling (Fig. 19). The soft light could be seen extending toward the ceiling from any part of the gallery space.

The second element of *Dirty Fingernails* was a twin mattress sitting atop a bent frame on small rolling casters (Fig. 20). Soiled sheets and a stained pillow were tightly pulled into the contours of the mattress with a white rope. A fluorescent light, producing a magenta color was attached under the frame. Only the light is visible and spills out from under a sheet and onto the floor. A bent bed sat slightly under the tall, unstable legs and frame. Bright fluorescent light from the tall bed illuminated the pillow and fell onto the sheets, causing harsh dramatic shadows when the natural light was low.
Dirty Fingernails was a violent snapshot of time, the monsters were revealed, both penetrating and deforming their separate spaces (Fig. 21). The two elements of the piece could be interpreted as a before and after of a bizarre and violent event captured in time. Light fell over the soft folds of fabric creating intense areas of contrast within the deep shadows. A section of illuminated sheet touched the dust-covered floor bringing attention to the illuminated underside of the mattress. This sculpture challenged the notion of the bed being a safe place. The work emphasized our vulnerability while we sleep.
Fig. 21. Dirty Fingernails. detail.
When entering the space and walking around the sculptures, I could still find something new that I hadn’t noticed before, such as details and nuances of the folds of fabric. Instead of starting with a clean gallery, I started with an idea of what a space should look like for this type of artwork. It was necessary to rely on teams of people who were more knowledgeable about electrical wiring, structural reinforcements and even working with hazardous materials. Installing lights, organizing the opening, and advertising for a show that was not connected to the university was a huge learning experience. The show has been taken down and now the building sits empty, waiting for its next resurrection. Plans are being made for a new series but the methods and approaches used in creating *Pavor Nocturnus* will remain relevant, in terms of art making as well as curating an exhibition in an alternative space.

I will continue my exploration with dream related subjects with a narrower focus on topics such as how to control the lucid dream while asleep. The next series will incorporate some of the same techniques of stiffened fabric over wood structures, but will include video projections and more techniques from film making to create surreal environments and individual sculptures. I will locate an alternative space to transform again, creating an exhibition that places the viewer into a new perspective that will trigger an emotional reaction based on previous experiences from their past.

In the past three years my work has changed profoundly. I have learned that art encompasses the idea just as much as the final product. Before graduate school, I had thought museums or galleries were the only places artwork was to be seen. My narrow mind has been broadened to the point where I knew my own art would not be appropriate in a traditional setting.
An evident history that is embedded into the walls, the floor and the ceiling could never be recreated in a gallery setting. I have also found that making the art within an alternate or non-gallery setting allows for a refined sense of scale and tone as the works interact with the surroundings.

My art making process walks a fine line between the pre-planned and the instinctual. I have learned to loosen up on the sketched out idea and to accept the changes I could never have predicted when it comes to executing sculptures and installations. By trusting my instincts, I allow myself to make changes without over analyzing them. These spontaneous acts prevent the fear of failure from having a detrimental effect on the pieces. The art begins as an idea, and then grows into something more than I could ever have dreamed.
Works Cited


