

MELIORATION

By

Ranae Daigle

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Art

Major Subject: Studio Art

West Texas A&M University

Canyon, Texas

August 2014

Approved:

Chad Holliday, Chairman, Thesis Committee Date

Dr. Amy Von Lintel, Member, Thesis Committee Date

Scott Frish, Member, Thesis Committee Date

Head, Major Department Date

Dean, Graduate School Date

Abstract

Melioration is one word that can explain what my body of work is about to the viewer without seeing the art. According to the dictionary definition, the word describes an act of “relieving ills,” such as rape and other tragedies, and “changing them for the better.” When I produce my works, I envision a process of melioration each time. My works begin in my mind with an innocent or pure structure, then they are subjected to tragedy, and finally, they find relief and renewal. My works are inspired by several specific artists, including the pioneer women artists Georgia O’Keeffe and Louise Bourgeois, and the psychologically troubled but aesthetic visionary Vincent Van Gogh. These artists deal with similar personal struggles and challenges in their works, and they utilize styles that have inspired my own works. For example, two principal motifs for my thesis are the symbolic forms of the iris and the raven. The iris has been a subject for many artists, most famously O’Keeffe and Van Gogh. The raven is a black bird that has appeared in many writings and art works and has a range of meanings, from the purest evil to a portent of hope. Many people struggle with identity issues, women especially. These aspects include: self-acceptance and acceptance of the inevitable. Melioration, in any case, can only lead to acceptance and contentment, which is what I hope my viewers find when they enter, view, and leave my body of work.

Table of contents

Chapter	
I.	INTRODUCTION.....1
II.	HISTORICAL INFLUENCES.....10
	Georgia O’Keefe.....10
	Vincent Van Gogh.....16
	Camille Claudel.....27
	Kathe Kollwitz.....29
	Anselm Kiefer.....31
	Louise Bourgeois.....34
III.	MATERIALS AND PROCESSES.....38
	Relief printing.....38
	Woodblock Sculpture.....40
	Metal Work.....41
	Plaster Casting.....43
	Hand Building.....47
IV.	PROJECTS.....49
	Woodblock Sculpture.....49
	Prints.....50
	Hands Sculpture.....55
	Metal Sculpture.....65
	Ceramic Sculpture.....69
V.	CONCLUSION.....70

VI. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	72
-----------------------	----

List of Illustrations

ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1. Funerary Banner of Lady Dai, 168 B.C	7
Fig. 2. Papyrus of Ani, Book of the Dead, c.1250 B.C	8
Fig. 3. Ranae Daigle, <i>Transformation</i> , woodblock print, 2014.....	13
Fig. 4. Ranae Daigle, <i>Processing</i> , woodblock collage, 2014	14
Fig. 5. Georgia O’Keeffe, <i>Black Iris</i> , oil on canvas, 1926.....	15
Fig. 6. Georgia O’Keeffe, <i>Canyon with Crows</i> , oil on canvas, 1917.....	18
Fig. 7. Georgia O’Keeffe, <i>Lake George with crows</i> , watercolor, 1921.....	18
Fig. 8. Vincent Van Gogh <i>Irises</i> , oil on canvas, 1890.....	23
Fig. 9. Vincent Van Gogh <i>Irises</i> , oil on canvas, 1890.....	24
Fig. 10. Ranae Daigle, <i>Renewal</i> , woodblock print, 2014.....	24
Fig. 11. Ranae Daigle, <i>Restoration</i> , woodblock print, 2014	25
Fig. 12. Vincent Van Gogh, <i>Wheatfield with crows</i> , oil on canvas, 1890.....	25
Fig. 13. Camille Claudel, <i>The Wave</i> , Onyx marble and Bronze, 1900.....	29
Fig. 14. Kathe Kollwitz, <i>Self-Portrait</i> , woodblock, 1923	30
Fig. 15. Anselm Kiefer, <i>Margarethe</i> , oil and straw on canvas, 1981.....	33

Fig. 16. Bourgeois, <i>Destruction of the Father</i> , mixed media, 1974.....	34
Fig. 17. Ranae Daigle, <i>Healing</i> , woodblock collage, 2014.....	36
Fig. 18. Louise Bourgeois, <i>Maman</i> , bronze, marble, and stainless steel, 1991.....	37
Fig. 19. Ranae Daigle, <i>Change of State</i> , woodblock print, 2014.....	52
Fig. 20. Ranae Daigle, <i>Pursue</i> , woodblock print, 2014.....	53
Fig. 21. Ranae Daigle, <i>Journey</i> , woodblock print, 2014.....	54
Fig. 22. Ranae Daigle, <i>Amend</i> , mixed media, 2014.....	60-65
Fig. 23. Ranae Daigle, <i>Promise</i> , carbon steel sculpture, 2014.....	68
Fig. 24. Ranae Daigle, <i>Desperation</i> , ceramic sculpture, 2014.....	69

Chapter I

Introduction

My body of work deals with issues of identity, especially for women. One of the most traumatic experiences a person can endure is sexual abuse, especially rape. I explore these intimate and invasive traumas in my art as a way to express them and deal with them. My pieces are about acknowledgement, acceptance, and catharsis in response to trauma. A point of interest is how these sorts of highly invasive events can affect a person's confidence, and can damage his or her personal image and self-worth. These negative effects create ongoing victimization and self-infliction of the repeated trauma. The action of encountering rape is involuntary, as is the response. This is the definition of victimization: being forced into something against one's will. According to Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, "Rape is forced sexual intercourse, including vaginal, anal, or oral penetration."¹ When an act goes against one's will, the action turns tragic. My work aims to reach and connect to a larger audience by representing the tragedy of rape and connecting it to other traumas.

¹ "Was I Raped?" | RAINN | Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, last modified September 3, 2014, accessed July 14, 2014, <https://www.rainn.org/get-information/types-of-sexual-assault/was-it-rape>.

My work incorporates multiple media, specifically printmaking and sculpture. I create prints that offer a narrative within each frame, instead of telling a story one print at a time. Each printed design shows the healing process as a whole. Every print contains at least two images and in one case, as many as five different image layers. I chose this approach because I want the viewer to have an all-encompassing image of both trauma and healing in every print. As a result the layered designs are aesthetic puzzles that invite the viewer to deconstruct not only the sequence but also the meaning behind the images.

The designs overlay images of my own hands in many of my pieces. This inclusion of my hands represents my personal struggle and recovery, and offers a commentary on the significance of the “hand of the artist” in its meanings. Two artists from whom I have drawn the most direct inspiration are Georgia O’Keeffe and Vincent Van Gogh. O’Keeffe and Van Gogh have unique painting styles that instantly signify their artistic identity for viewers. They also incorporated a great deal of their personal experiences and emotions into each of their paintings, an approach that has deeply impressed me. They painted what they felt about nature and the world around them as more than literal and simplistic depictions. They added their personal identity into their works, a technique that I hope to follow as well. My hand symbolically stands for my body and my identity—as a woman, as an artist, and as a victim of sexual abuse. I want the viewer to know I have dealt with a tragedy from personal experience and that I am not just giving a generalized or conventional opinion on how to successfully navigate the healing process.

The title of my project—Melioration—perfectly speaks to this theme of hope. The word signifies for me the process of acceptance and coping, facing trauma and healing. The two main motifs in my work are irises and ravens. My work uses irises and ravens not only for their physical characteristics but also, and more importantly, for their metaphorical meanings. My use of these two motifs came from being a victim of rape myself, struggling to find hope again and regain my confidence. The iris is a constant reminder that everything in life has phases of rooting, growing, sprouting, dying, and rebirthing. It also is representative of the vulnerable female regaining her strength and self-worth after trauma.

Irises portray a rebirth-like cycle in the actual process a flower goes through. The flower starts out as a seed, grows to a stem with a bud, begins to bloom, and then finally wilts. When the flower wilts the old petals fall off, leaving only the stem to create a new flower. The iris also holds the message of hope, faith and wisdom. According to Riklef Kandeler and Wolfram R. Ullrich, in their article “Symbolism of Plants”:

The iris is a widely appreciated spring flower that has been associated with a range of symbolic meanings since antiquity. The morphologically rich and beautiful flowers have inspired painters and poets and are honoured in heraldic emblems. Richly coloured, the iris continues to incite many aspects of human mentality and mood.²

² Riklef Kandeler and Wolfram R. Ullrich, "Symbolism of Plants: examples from European-Mediterranean culture presented with biology and history of art," *Journal of Experimental Botany* 60, no. 11 (2009): 2955-56.

Specific artists who have found inspiration in irises for their art include both Georgia O’Keeffe and Vincent Van Gogh.

In contrast, I associate the raven with sadness and tragedy because the black color of the raven represents the blackness and bleakness I felt as the victim of the tragedy of rape. The raven finds its sustenance by taking away from other injured creatures or feeding on those whose life has ended. The incorporation of the raven in my work, with its symbolic meaning, was chosen because the Panhandle Texas culture in which I live is mainly Protestant Christian. Christian iconography most often views the raven as an antagonist. The raven represents finding ways to survive regardless of the cost to others. Like the iris, the raven must feed or it will die; the victims of trauma must find a way to live on or they will succumb to sadness, insanity, and even death.

Usually modern viewers will think of these black birds as having ominous overtones, especially in light of works like Van Gogh’s and in Edgar Allen Poe’s poem “The Raven.”³ This poem describes a raven as the pest that leads a man to insanity, as a result of the raven’s annoying sounds, while he is waiting on his lover. Poe’s version has become the most common modern understanding of the bird as a nagging pest that represents the darker side of life and even foretells insanity or death.

Though the modern raven and crow—crows are very similar to the raven, being in the same genus and family—seem to have connotations of death, insanity, and suffering,

³ Edgar Allan Poe, *Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Poetry and Tales*, ed. James M. Hutchisson (Peterborough, Ont: Broadview Press, 2012), 60.

pointing to metaphors of death, historical understandings of these black birds are much more diverse in their meanings. The raven described by Susa Morgan Black covers numerous cultures in many Native American traditions, such as the Northwestern American Indians:

In many northwestern American Indian traditions, Raven is the Trickster, much like the Norse Loki. Observing ravens in nature, we find that they often steal food from under the noses of other animals, often working in pairs to distract the unfortunate beasts.⁴

Here, the raven is less the representative of evil than a figure of trickery, but also an admirable representation of survival and self-protection. The Ancient Chinese saw the raven as a solar symbol, living in the sun. The ancient Funeral Banner of Lady Dai (Fig. 1) was a cloth that symbolized Lady Dai's procession to heaven that also included the middle ground of the earth and the underworld. The crow is at the top of the banner, which represents the "yang" part of the yin yang symbolism as well as being a part of the heaven aspect of the banner. According to Birgitta Augustin, "*Yin* [is] associated with shade, water, west, and the tiger, and *yang* [is] associated with light, fire, east, and the dragon, are the two alternating phases of cosmic energy; their dynamic balance brings cosmic harmony."⁵ The crow translates as a symbol for giving a new life for Lady Dai's soul in heaven. The Chinese did not view the crow as a trickster, but as hope for their

⁴ Susa Morgan Black, "The Raven," *The Order of Barbs Ovates and Druids*, accessed July 9, 2014, <http://www.druidry.org/library/library/animal-lore-raven>.

⁵ Birgitta Augustin, "Daoism and Daoist Art," *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art: http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/daoi/hd_daoi.htm.

future from their gods. Heaven for the Ancient Chinese represented fertility for crops and the land.⁶ Every image in the banner symbolizes Lady Dai's ownership over the objects that she took to the grave.⁷ Like the early Chinese, Ancient Egyptians also saw the raven as good. In the *Papyrus of Ani* (Fig. 2), the Egyptians believed that Anubis, the raven god of embalming, was the one to weigh the heart of the deceased. Weighing the heart against a feather would determine if the person's fate was being condemned out of existence. The Egyptians entrusted their fate to a raven god to judge them fairly for their decisions.⁸ Some Middle Eastern cultures, moreover, have seen the raven as the father of omens: "The Persian attitude toward the *kalāg* [black crow] as a bird of omen has not been, on the whole, so unfavorable as that of the Arabs, in whose ornithomancy and literary tradition the *gorāb* [raven] was considered 'pre-eminently the bird of ill omen.'"⁹ Like Arabs, both Jews and Christians have traditionally seen the raven as unclean, impure and deceitful: "And these you shall regard as an abomination among the birds; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the buzzard, the kite, the falcon after its kind; every raven after its kind."¹⁰ Western and Central Europeans have

⁶ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Tian | Chinese Religion", accessed January 11, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/595239/tian>.

⁷ "T-Shaped Painting on Silk (206 BC-25 AD)," Hunan Provincial Museum, accessed January 16, 2015, <http://www.hnmuseum.com/hnmuseum/eng/collection/collectionContent.jsp?infoId=012fa0841dc9402884832f7093f210ee>.

⁸ "Papyrus from the Book of the Dead of Ani," British Museum, accessed January 16, 2015, http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/aes/p/book_of_the_dead_of_ani.aspx.

⁹ *Encyclopedia Iranica*, s.v. "Crow," accessed April 14, 2015, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/crow-a-bird-of-the-family-corvidae-represented-in-persia-and-afghanistan-by-six-genera-garrulus-pica-nucifraga-podoces>.

¹⁰ Leviticus 11:13-15 (New King James Version).

the tradition of the color of the raven as being negative, as well as the raven meaning darkness, evil, and destruction. According to the *New World Encyclopedia*, “Crows, and especially ravens, often feature in European legends or mythology as portents or harbingers of doom or death, because of their dark plumage, unnerving calls, and tendency to eat carrion.”¹¹ Overall, this diversity of meanings for the raven made it a good choice for my thesis; the raven has been representative of the cause of traumas as well as the healer of them, making it an ideal symbol of melioration for me.



Fig. 1. Funeral Banner of Lady Dai, painted silk banner, Hunan Provincial Museum, 168 B.C

¹¹*New World Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Crow", accessed January 19, 2015, <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Crow>.



Fig. 2. Papyrus of Ani, Book of the Dead, papyrus manuscript with painted illustrations and hieroglyphs, c.1250 B.C

The motifs of irises and ravens have a special purpose for each different medium that I employ. My pieces are determined by the mediums selected, and then portrayed from a start-to-finish process. The imagery is designed as if the viewer is there to watch step-by-step. All of the pieces depict a healing process. The prints contain a process within each image, but do not synchronize in a sequential order as my pieces depicting sculptural hands do. This series of hand sculptures begins with deformed hands holding a pure innocent iris and ends with the hands being restored and rebirth of the iris. Both the hands and flowers go through a healing process that is linked together. The print and

woodblock collages represent that process within each frame, whereas the hands are healed in succession.

Humans of most global cultures have turned to both plants and animals for symbolic meanings. I believe humans easily relate to plants and animals because they are a part of nature and everyday life. People cannot go outside without seeing a bird in the sky or some kind of foliage on the ground. At the same time, because the natural world is so pervasive and commonplace, humans ascribe profound meanings to it. We see them as spiritual beings, or as signs of good or bad things to come. It is this symbolic resonance that I desire my images of irises and ravens to draw out in my viewers. They are more than simply things we can find in nature; they start there but take on personified meanings and allow us to project our feelings outside of ourselves and onto a living but non-human entity. They are separate from our human problems and thus more innocent, perhaps; but they also seem to embody the very things humans are challenged with, including the struggle for existence, the facing of evil and death, and the ability to fight for survival in the face of these challenges.

Chapter II

Historical Influences

Many artists have inspired my work, including Georgia O’Keeffe, Vincent Van Gogh, Camille Claudel, Kathe Kollwitz, Anselm Kiefer, and Louise Bourgeois. These artists have either gone through a tragedy themselves or expressed tragic ideas in their art. I compare and contrast the artists’ works to my own through the use of similar mediums, metaphors, or materials. All of the artists I draw from have a common goal to express their pain and the process of healing.

Georgia O’Keeffe’s most familiar works depict oversized flowers, many of which were irises. O’Keeffe enlarged these flowers so the viewer sees their formal, organic, and abstracted beauty, and often that meant cropping the flower’s edges to see more of the center. I was able to translate O’Keeffe’s technique of cropped edges into my prints without directly copying her individual style of big flowers. My works become more like O’Keeffe’s when I emulate her cropped and enlarged irises. The irises in my work have a subtle raven on them that is perched on a petal; this differentiates my work in a unique and reflective way. O’Keeffe’s gift for capturing nature’s emotional resonance rather than only its literal resemblance influenced my approach as well. O’Keeffe related natural forms and objects to human emotions, stating: “To every natural form, rock, fruit or flower, Even the loose stones that cover the highway, I gave a moral life, I saw them feel,

Or link'd them to some feeling.”¹² Similarly, using nature as a way to express my struggles and emotions was a fitting approach for my art.

O’Keeffe also famously depicted irises in a style that blends naturalism and abstraction. As O’Keeffe stated, “I’ll paint what I see - what the flower is to me but I’ll paint it big and they will be surprised into taking time to look at it.”¹³ She was exposed to irises most often during her years at Lake George in the 1920s, when she was living there with Alfred Stieglitz. However, O’Keeffe had long gardened and even wrote about the flowers she found beautiful when she was a child and when she was teaching at West Texas State Normal College between 1916 and 1918.

O’Keeffe explained, “When you take a flower in your hand and really look at it, it’s your world for the moment. I want to give that world to someone else. Most people in the city rush around so, they have no time to look at a flower. I want them to see it whether they want to or not.”¹⁴ O’Keeffe wanted people to view the irises as she saw them, but O’Keeffe’s art was not simply about translating reality onto her canvases; it was also about her state of mind and her feelings when she stood in the presence of a flower, a mountain, or a canyon. This approach has been an inspiration to me, as I also make the flowers and birds comprehensible and identifiable for viewers but add abstraction and expressionistic styles to my designs. Viewers and critics also famously added their own interpretations to O’Keeffe’s flower pictures, reading them in sensual

¹² Britta Benke, “Flowers and Skyscrapers,” in *Georgia O’Keeffe 1887-1986: Flowers in the Desert*, (Koln: Taschen, 2000), 37.

¹³ Benke, 31.

¹⁴ Roxana Robinson, *Georgia O’Keeffe: A Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 279.

and even sexual terms. Though O’Keeffe never explicitly mentioned how her flowers resembled female genitalia, this reading has become part of her work and viewers today still see her flowers in highly sexual terms. This layering of sexuality is something I also draw upon in my work, as I deal with themes of sexual abuse and rape. O’Keeffe did not necessarily intend for people to connect her work to such themes, but my own experiences have brought me to see both the sexual ideas and the natural beauty together in her irises, which I respond to in my own use of the flower.

I have created an image for my prints that shows a close-up of an iris that focuses on its center (Figs. 3 and 4). The iris displays a hidden raven lying on its petal. I wanted my iris to suggest a sense of sexuality without looking like female genitalia. Since my images for my print narratives are first carved on single woodblocks then later combined for printing on paper, it is harder to show shading. Instead, I carve small, medium, and large lines to create the value with the black ink. These lines take away from the idea of viewing the center as female genitalia. These lines define the iris petals, which give a rough look. O’Keeffe used oil paint for her flowers; her iris did not have the harsh lines to show details but instead smooth colors to show value. She also created her *Black Iris* (Fig. 5) with a center of black that gives the illusion of depth that ends up looking like female genitalia. O’Keeffe denied the connection of female genitalia to her work, but her husband Alfred Stieglitz did not, stating, “I had a terrific erection-----fluffy looked

like the big Black Iris which next to Blue Lines is closest to my heart.”¹⁵ Stieglitz referred to O’Keeffe’s genitalia as fluffy in one of his letters to her. He described her genitalia as looking like her painting and how he was aroused by it, since they were separated by miles. O’Keeffe’s intentions might not have been to create these sexual innuendos, but the idea is a common theme that still occurs for her viewers. I have tried to make my references to female anatomy even more subtle, envisioning my iris as being free from trauma.



Fig. 3. Ranae Daigle, *Transformation*, woodblock print, 2014

¹⁵ Alfred Stieglitz to Georgia O’Keeffe, July 6, 1929, in *My Faraway One: Selected Letters of Georgia O’Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz*, ed. Sarah Greenough (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 457.



Fig. 4. Ranae Daigle, *Processing*, Woodblock Collage, 2014



Fig. 5. Georgie O’Keeffe, *Black Iris*, oil on canvas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1926

O’Keeffe also painted animal skulls, a motif that I have used in my own work as well. These bones that O’Keeffe collected came about through death, but for her it was a part of finding beauty in the least likely of places. O’Keeffe began painting the images of these bones when she moved to New Mexico during the late 1920s.¹⁶ There was not enough rain to allow flowers to grow there, so she started collecting bones. O’Keeffe combined a cow, horse, and ram skulls with flowers. O’Keeffe contrasted life and death by having skulls and flowers together. My metaphor of contrasting a raven skull with an iris conveys the balance between life and death, hope and tragedy, joy and pain. I depicted an enlarged raven skull, as O’Keeffe treated her flowers. The enlargement of the

¹⁶ Georgia O’Keeffe, *Georgia O’Keeffe* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 58.

skull embodies the enormity of the impact of a traumatic event, and the skull itself portrays death of the trauma and thus victory over the trauma.

The only two crow paintings of O'Keeffe's that I focused on were *Canyon with Crows* and *Lake George with Crows* (Fig. 6 and 7). She painted *Canyon with Crows* first in 1917; the watercolor shows Palo Duro Canyon with crows flying above it. O'Keeffe presented the crows flying in their natural ecosystem, while painting the surroundings of West Texas that brought O'Keeffe such joy.¹⁷ *Lake George with Crows* was painted in 1921; it displays the lake view from the top of the hill while the crows appear to be circling over the water. Both of O'Keeffe's crow paintings leave the viewer questioning whether or not the flying crows represent pain or hope, but overall these two images depict a serene view. I interpret the crows as representing hope for O'Keeffe due to her non-violent portrayal of the crows. The crows seem to be placed high over a landscape scene. O'Keeffe's color choices invoked feelings of peace and hope within me, which is then reflected in my interpretation of her work.

Another artist that influenced my work is Vincent Van Gogh. In contrast to O'Keeffe, Van Gogh's crows give an ominous and sorrowful feeling through the use of vivid thick brush strokes and the portrayal of the sky with dark night colors (Fig.12). Van Gogh also used more cool and dark tones. This impressed upon me the aura of a dark depressing night. I have created woodblocks that combine O'Keeffe's, Van Gogh's, and my own style regarding the use of bird imagery. In *Processing* (Fig.4) at the bottom of the woodblock collage, I have the ravens flying over a field of irises. This parallels both

¹⁷ Robinson, 92.

O'Keeffe's and Van Gogh's crow imagery and usage of crows and irises. This image combines the symbolism of the iris as a sign of hope while also evoking the ominous presence of the ravens through my employment of dark strokes and wavy lines. Thus, in combining the individual image and message of the ravens and the irises, a complete meaning and message is portrayed. This combined image raises questions and shows an ambiguous mood.

The purpose is to have the viewer ask if there is conflict between the irises and ravens, why there are ravens flying over a field of irises, and why the ravens are not interacting with the irises. I want my viewers to see the image just as they would view one of O'Keeffe's with crows: that even though crows' natural habits include scavenging, good can still come from them scavenging in that they are a part of the greater ecosystem. Like both artists, the intent of my images is to create a visual environment in which the viewers connect to the pieces on a deeper level rather than just viewing a natural landscape. My pieces use natural imagery to frame the healing process as the main idea.



Fig. 6. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Canyon with Crows*, watercolor, Estate of Georgia O'Keeffe, 1917

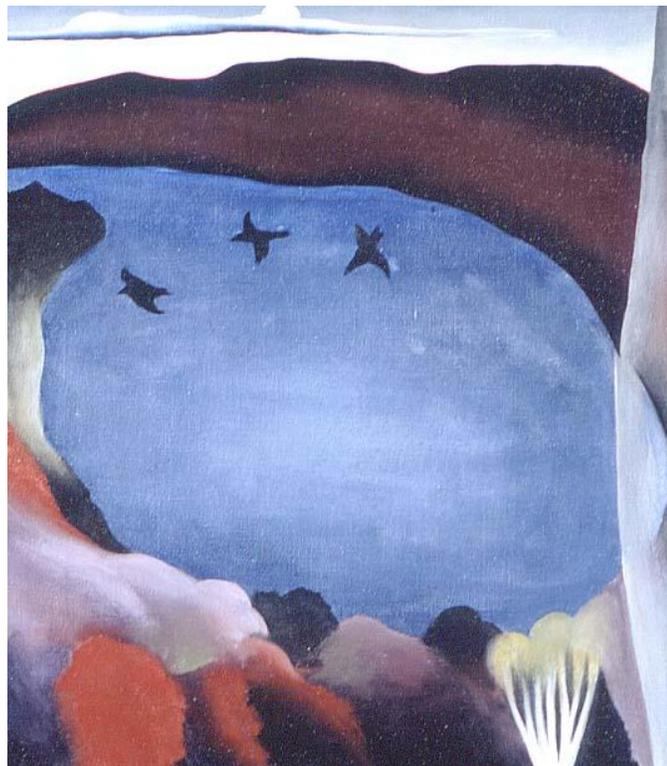


Fig. 7. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Lake George with Crows*, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Canada, 1921

While neither O’Keeffe nor Van Gogh utilized ravens rather than crows like I did, both artists chose to portray crows flying over natural scenes. Neither artist had human figures present in their paintings. However, as viewers, people connect to the black birds on a symbolic level. The viewer struggles to interpret whether the paintings are hopeful or depressing. People are drawn to meaningful metaphors in objects, especially in animals, that connect with their own lives. According to the article “Zoomorphy: Animal Metaphors for Human Personality”:

[T]he human need for metaphoric expression finds its greatest fulfillment through reference to the animal kingdom. “No other realm affords such vivid expression of symbolic concepts; symbolizing through use of animals is preeminent, widespread, and enduring” (p. 301). Over the millennia, humans acquired the understanding that animals are meaningful “as elaborate metaphors and symbols, as spiritual beings, and as themselves.”¹⁸

I interpret this to mean that our experiences that include animals are incorporated into our subconscious minds and then are manifested in our responses to animal metaphors and stories.

Many of my pieces that reference O’Keeffe and Van Gogh are combined with other images as well. All six of my prints hold reference images within each print. *Renewal* (Fig. 10) has two images that relate to O’Keeffe and two that also relate to Van Gogh. The center of the iris and enlarged skull associate with O’Keeffe’s works, while

¹⁸Robert Sommer and Barbara A. Sommer, " ZooMorph: Animal Metaphors for Human Personality," *Anthrozoos* 24, no. 3 (2001): 237-248.

the fields of irises resemble Van Gogh's works. In *Processing* (Fig. 4), I have two images that portray O'Keeffe's influence as well as one referring to Van Gogh. I have two enlarged irises that emphasize O'Keeffe's style in their centers, while I have a field of irises with ravens flying above that responds to Van Gogh.

Van Gogh's style drew my interest because of his post-impressionist brushmarks which are thick, heavy, and childlike. Drawing upon Van Gogh's impasto marks, I am able to get a similar effect in my own woodblocks. Wide, rough, wavy strokes help create patterns in the background of my pieces. The depth is lessened in my marks as the surface quality is enhanced and becomes more expressive than a traditional linear perspective painting, creating emotion for the viewer, whether a depressing tone or a joyful enlightening mood prevails.

Van Gogh spent some of his life in an asylum. Van Gogh's decision to check into an asylum was a response to his brother Theo's suggestion. While Van Gogh was in the asylum he painted most of his iris images. I was drawn to his irises because Van Gogh was expressing his feelings about being in an asylum through the irises. They expressed for him aspects of his pain but also, perhaps, hope. The most common one, *Irises* (Fig. 8), shows a bed of blue-purple irises with one lone white iris. Critics say the white iris represents the artist feeling alone, but it also represents the idea of his last source of hope.¹⁹ Most irises symbolize positive attributes like courage, hope, faith, and victory. My thought is that Van Gogh painted the idea of hope in general. Referencing the single white iris, I believe he was using a metaphor for how entrapped he might have felt but

¹⁹ Ingrid Schaffner, *The Essential Vincent Van Gogh* (New York, NY: Wonderland Press, 1998), 88

still had hope for one day being free from the asylum. I believe Van Gogh's use of the iris as a metaphor helped him to remain connected to a sense of sanity. In his other *Iris*s (Fig. 9), he personified the flowers by giving some of them a sense of drooping or depression, while others stand tall. I portray my irises with personifications as fighting to stay alive.

Van Gogh's irises inspired me to represent the same kinds of flowers to portray the idea of hope. I wanted my irises to communicate the sense of conquering a potentially overwhelming sadness. I created two images in the style of Van Gogh's field of irises for my prints, which also contain iris fields to demonstrate melioration and healing. *Renewal* (Fig. 10) is a single print composed of four images that evoke the works of Van Gogh. It is of a field of irises that are all buds, with one blooming iris in the center of the field. The field has dead ravens lying on the ground beneath them. The ravens are starting to decompose, withering into the ground. I portrayed myself as this iris in full bloom, feeling accomplished for having moved past my struggle as it withered away beneath me. The other iris buds represent other victims who are slowly starting to move past their own tragedy. These buds are slowly catching up to the healing process I have completed, leaving their pain behind and finding a true healing process for themselves. Another one of the images in my print *Renewal* also compares to Van Gogh. It shows the field of blooming irises with an enlarged raven skull lying on top of them. I wanted to show how all the irises blend together, signifying an acceptance that the tragedy is past or symbolically dead. As a celebration of melioration, the irises appear to be swaying the skull on top of them for a kind of victory chant.

According to the curators at the Getty Museum, “Each one of Van Gogh's irises is unique. He carefully studied their movements and shapes to create a variety of curved silhouettes bounded by wavy, twisting, and curling lines.”²⁰ This description reminds us how Van Gogh found the irises in his external environment—namely at the mental institution in the South of France where he lived in his final years—but how he also added expressive and abstract styles to the flowers to resemble his own tortured and passionate moods. Van Gogh portrayed through his paintings his struggles with loneliness and his ongoing sadness. Van Gogh stated, “They depict vast, distended wheatfields (*sic*) under angry skies, and I deliberately tried to express sadness and extreme loneliness in them.”²¹ Van Gogh was referring to his wheat fields, but his *Iris*es (Fig. 8) also shows the same concept. There were purple irises that appear to be swaying towards the lone white iris. I believe the purple irises were the other people confined in the asylum with him. The lone white iris is not moving in any direction but standing straight up which can relay his feeling of standing out in the world and not blending in. His color choice was bright and alive for the flowers around him. I believe that the other background flowers represented the free people outside the asylum. Van Gogh’s white iris is a light color, but the shade of green in the stem presents the darker tone from the rest of the flowers, which reinforces his differences that enabled him to stand out. Van Gogh made a few flowers different to represent his feelings of isolation. His white color choice represents that his mind feels free but is confined along with the rest of the people

²⁰ "Iris," from the J. Paul Getty Museum website, <http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/826/vincent-van-gogh-irises-dutch-1889/>.

²¹ Ibid.

in asylum. In Van Gogh's other *Iris*s (Fig. 9), this time a still life of the flowers in a vase on a table, the irises are all facing downward towards the table, which can lead us to suspect he was again experiencing sadness and depression. Also, there are not any bright colors but soft pastel cool tones that give the perception of sadness lingering.



Fig. 8. Vincent Van Gogh, *Iris*, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Canada, 1890



Fig. 9. Vincent Van Gogh, *Irises*, oil on canvas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1890



Fig. 10. Ranae Daigle, *Renewal*, woodblock print, 2014



Fig. 11. Ranae Daigle, *Restoration*, woodblock, 2014



Fig. 12. Vincent Van Gogh, *Wheatfield with crows*, oil on canvas Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam
(Vincent van Gogh Foundation), 1890

Van Gogh's only painting containing a crow is *Crows over a Wheatfield* (Fig.12). Many critics have taken this painting to be a foreshadowing of Van Gogh's death: soon after he painted it he took his own life in a similar open field. Van Gogh typically

followed a morning routine that consisted of waking up, eating, then going out to paint a new area. However, one day he decided to go a wheat field that he was currently painting and tried to kill himself with a revolver, shooting himself between the stomach and heart. Van Gogh passed out and woke up later. His friends got help for him, but it was not enough to save his life. Though Van Gogh was unsuccessful in bringing about an instant death, his wound put him into a coma, and he died two days later on July 29, 1890. According to the curators at the Vincent Van Gogh Museum, “This monumental landscape was long considered the last work Van Gogh painted. The menacing, stormy sky, the crows and a path apparently leading nowhere have all been read as hints of his suicide.”²² Even if the artist didn’t know that he would soon take his life when he painted this scene with crows, he nonetheless presents us with an image that is dark in its mood and expressive of deep and sad emotions. Since I use the death of a raven as a focus for my work, I was able to combine the idea of the raven’s death to symbolize the end of the tragedy, and the irises’ life to leave a sense of hope. In my work *Processing* (Fig. 26), I carved a field of irises with ravens flying in the sky, similar to Van Gogh’s *Wheatfield with Crows* (Fig. 12). This image continued my use of the wavy cutouts for all my prints. I wanted the curves to give a sense of motion just as the brush strokes did for Van Gogh’s paintings. I want the pieces to feel alive and not dead or stationary. The wavy lines are a means for me to express emotions through the woodblocks just as Van Gogh showed linear marks with great energy and dynamism in his paintings.

²² “*Wheatfield with Crows* - Van Gogh Museum,” as on the Vincent Van Gogh Museum website: <http://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/collection/s0149V1962>.

In addition to the painters O’Keeffe and Van Gogh, I draw inspiration from the French sculptor Camille Claudel, whose work similarly deals with her personal emotional struggle. Her written statements describe how she dealt with numerous hardships, especially relating to her gender, including abortion, death of loved ones, heartbreak with romantic relationships, and prejudice against her as a female artist. As might be expected, Claudel’s sculptures reflect themes of sadness or trauma; however, they also express the themes of victory, love, hope and faith, similar to how my works combine these themes as well. One example is Claudel’s *Clotho* from 1893, depicts the Greek goddess who gave life to people, while her sisters, Lachesis and Atropos, would determine when these humans’ lives ended. Claudel’s sculpture is of an older woman with long braided hair that resembles the strings of life in Greek mythology, which are cut when it comes the time for someone to die. This hair is falling thickly around her frail, wrinkled body. In my piece *Healing* (Fig. 17), the forms of hands cast from my own hands resemble the organic, abstract, and frail aspects in Claudel’s work. I combine the delicate frailness of the hands, which is that skin can easily tear or be cut just as ceramic would break if it fell to the floor. These hands carry either the burden (the raven) or the hope (the iris) of the tragedy. All of Claudel’s early sculptures were about life and having a sense of hope. However, her hope was shattered when her family gave up on her and refused to help her. Claudel started experiencing signs of paranoia after her abortion procedure around 1895. As Odile Ayral-Clause states, “After the abortion, she may have unconsciously viewed herself as a witch destroying life, and some of her delusions probably started at that

time.”²³ Claudel’s life brought events that influenced her perspective: abortion, no support from family, financial struggles, and striving against social norms to become a successful female artist. Yet Claudel was still able to make sculptures that emulated hope. Claudel’s *Perseus and the Gorgon* from 1902 was an image of Perseus with Medusa’s chopped head in his hand. This piece is a victory sculpture for overcoming fate, just like my woodblock prints with the dead, decaying ravens and bones show the iris growing and blooming from them. Claudel’s *The Wave* (Fig. 13) renders three women holding hands as a hopeful gesture with a giant wave behind them about to crash down. Her sculpture connects to my woodblock prints of the large iris with the dead raven lying on its leaf. My work displays a similar formal style, with the organic, curvy shape of the leaves and wave, whereas the diminished humans and ravens are enclosed within the larger natural form. Like Claudel, I use the natural shapes as metaphors to describe the emotions I want my viewers to feel or understand. Claudel’s work abstracts nature and uses it as expressive and metaphorical for the tone of the piece, much like Van Gogh’s brush strokes and the carvings in my woodblocks. I have created work that emulates Claudel’s approach through organic shapes and forms.

²³ Odile Ayral-Clause, *Camille Claudel A Life* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 115.



Fig. 13. Camille Claudel, *The Wave*, Onyx marble and Bronze, Musée Rodin, 1900

My work also draws upon the prints of German artist Kathe Kollwitz. Many of her prints illustrate people enduring some kind of suffering, and are done in relief, allowing texture and rougher marks to express her emotions. Kollwitz lost her son in 1914, her husband in 1940 and her grandson in 1942. Her own death came in 1945. Her art focused on the tragedy of war, poverty, the working class, and the social conditions around her. According to the curators of MoMA, “Kollwitz’s intensive artistic engagement with the war and the death of her son make clear that all of her work was shaped greatly by her personal life, by events and emotions that she had experienced

directly.”²⁴ Her art is abstracted, expressionist, and emotional. In her self-portrait woodblock print (Fig. 14), the lines portray her strength but also her sadness.



Fig. 14. Kathe Kollwitz, *Self-Portrait*, Private Collection, 1923

Kollwitz’s art relates to my own work through her approach of expressing tragedy. The lines, roughness, and sadness she incorporated into her works, such as this rendering of her own face, communicate emotions tied to tragedy. My enlarged iris with a raven laying on one of the leaves emphasizes the same stress in the markings. Like Kollwitz, I have motifs that demonstrate what life has done in the traumas it has presented me with. While Kollwitz shows the effects of tragedy, I show the healing that can follow trauma.

²⁴Joseph Gabler. "THE COLLECTION: Kathe Kollwitz," MoMA.org. January 1, 2009, accessed November 19, 2014, http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=3201.

For example, many of Kollwitz's self-portraits have stressed line marks in the facial features to show the effects of pain and time. In contrast my work shows a healing process, including grieving, through the sequence of a raven dying and an iris rebirthing from the process. Many tragedies result in a grieving process; Kollwitz dealt with traumas and tragedies by turning to her artwork to express how those feelings can be reconciled.

Another artist whose work is influenced by the effects of tragedy is Anselm Kiefer. He focused his art on modern Germany and its trauma-filled history, including the national tragedy of the Holocaust. His work was a way for him, and his viewers, to come to terms with the atrocities of the Nazis. In *Margarethe*, Kiefer is able to convey the longterm effects of the Nazi regime without showing directly the drastic details of the horrors it brought to the German community. *Margarethe* (Fig. 15) is constructed with oil paint and straw. He chose to use straw, wood, plants and other natural materials in his works to embody the effects of war that Germany experienced. Like Georgia O'Keeffe and Van Gogh, Kiefer also uses nature to symbolize his and his nation's emotions, integrating components of nature collaged in his work. His dark ominous background and rough, brittle lines compare metaphorically to pain and suffering. I similarly use nature figuratively to deal with the effects of tragic life events.

Like Kiefer, I reveal in my art the representation of tragic acts that were done against people's will. People are more willing to accept the painful reality of tragedies when it is expressed through the presumed innocence of nature. The human mind tends to block out traumas it does not want to comprehend. I believe Kiefer is successful in

accepting the tragedy of the past that the Nazis left for Germany and for the world. I attempt to do the same in light of the tragic act of rape by showing people it is necessary and cathartic to deal with bottled up emotions. Some of Kiefer's first works were dressing up as Hitler's statues and being photographed as if he was posing in a Caspar David Friedrich painting. He portrayed Hitler in ironic ways that included some provocative gestures. I see in these acts Kiefer being able to vent his personal frustration, and facilitating a broader social grieving process over the state of collapse in which Hitler left Germany.

Kiefer is working through the acceptance of an immutable past, in which he cannot change his culture. His artwork is his process for healing from the past, helping him and his viewers cope with the pain left by leaders like Hitler. He uses the language of nature to symbolize the catharsis for the people affected by those in charge. I connect with Kiefer through his use of symbolism and the catharsis of nature. Kiefer worked through his culture's past with a healing process just as nature has rejuvenation. Pains in life are unavoidable; they are a part of life that should not be repressed, but have to be dealt with to maintain a healthy life. Kiefer uses the natural forms in and on his painting to make this point of not repressing traumas. I do this as well through the depiction of natural forms.

Van Gogh's paint marks and Claudel's sculptures, like Kiefer's forms, are expressive, and I have drawn from these emotional marks and styles in my work. Kiefer abstracts the plant in his painting to have rough brittle brushmarks from the paint and straw itself. Van Gogh uses his brushstrokes to make his paintings have a soft edge

instead of a crisp view. Like these artists, I deal with tragedies, both personal and cultural; like Kiefer, who experienced personal suffering as a German but who also explored the wider social traumas of post-apocalypse Germany, I hope to blend my response to my own personal victimization with one that recognizes how rape is also a social and cultural issue.



Fig. 15. Anselm Kiefer, *Margarethe*, oil and straw on canvas, Saatchi collection, 1981

One final artist whose work I explore in my own pieces is Louise Bourgeois, a French artist who was influenced in part by her trauma as a child of finding out that her English governess was also her father's mistress. Bourgeois created art that is considered abstract, while it uses suggestive themes of the human figure. Bourgeois started

portraying more sexualized sculptures, including *Destruction of the Father* (Fig. 16), which might reference her father's affair but which also seems to ask us to question our own desires and sexual vulnerability.

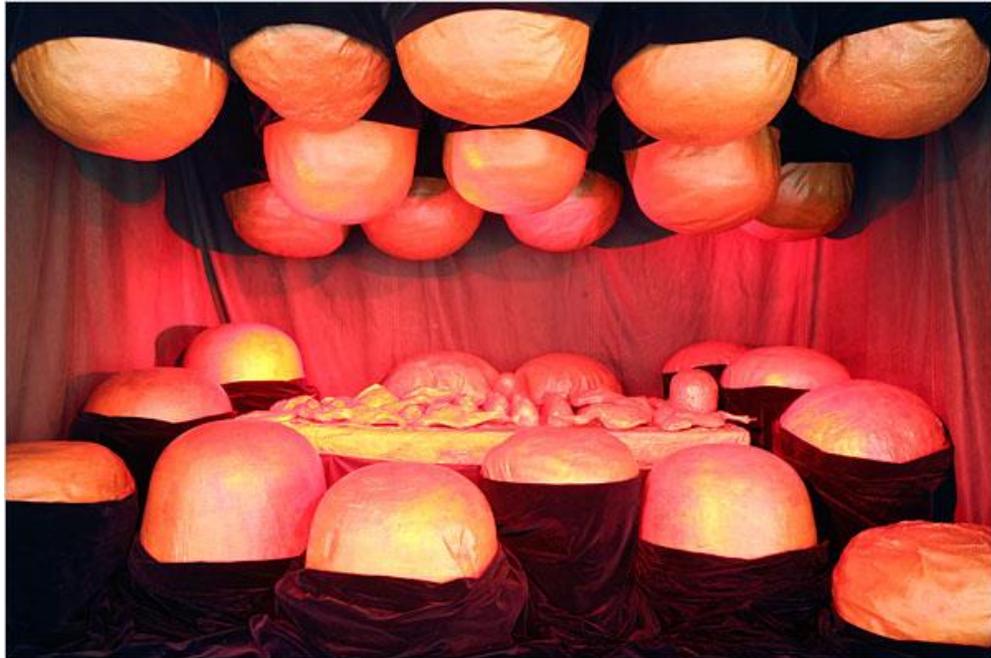


Fig. 16. Louise Bourgeois, *Destruction of the Father*, Museum of Contemporary Art, 1974

Destruction of the Father is made out of plaster, latex, wood, fabric, and a red light. It is displayed in a dining room with all the children rendered as large bulbous forms or blobs. The children decide one day that they can no longer endure their father's domination. This piece was based on a dream where the children tear their father apart and start eating him. According to the curators at the Guggenheim, *Destruction of the Father* was “a grisly evocation of a cannibalistic family meal.”²⁵ Bourgeois' piece is liberating and a

²⁵ “Full-Career Retrospective of Louise Bourgeois,” as on the Guggenheim Museum website: <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/press-room/releases/press-release-archive/2008/1822-full-career-retrospective-of-louise-bourgeois-presented-at-the-guggenheim-through-fall-2008>.

catharsis from the trauma she had as a child. Her inspirations came from working through the pain in her past. Bourgeois stated, "What helps me is to realize my own disabilities and to expose them."²⁶ In other words, she observes here how her personal and emotional issues define her work. This piece deploys the symbolism of how bodies are soft and vulnerable and as such, can be either harmed or nurtured. My piece *Healing* (Fig. 17) relates to Bourgeois' work, as it is composed of four images, two of which illustrate the tragedies of the ravens dominating the iris, and the raven decomposing, only leaving its skeleton. The two pieces on the edges portray a raven standing on top of the iris and crushing it, and a raven biting at the iris leaves to tear them off. Both of these images reveal that the raven is winning at that moment, which would mean the tragedy is maintaining a hold on the individual. The inside panels portray the ravens as being decomposed and dead, while the iris springs forth new life and new hope for the future of the individual. Here, I used abstracted nature in a similar dreamscape mode that evokes trauma followed by catharsis.

²⁶ Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., "Figures of Difference," in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, 2nd ed., (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2003), 1089.



Fig. 17. Ranae Daigle, *Healing*, woodblock, 2014

Another piece of Bourgeois' that I especially connect with is *Maman* (Fig. 18). Bourgeois describes the spider as resembling her mother, who was a weaver like a spider. She also refers to her mother as being clever, helpful, and protective like a spider. I also see Bourgeois' piece as representing her mother as a safety net. Her mother gave her confidence and hope to endure life. Bourgeois' spider was created in memory of her mother who encouraged her to stay motivated and not let troubles like her father's affair bring her down. My metal sculpture *Promise* (Fig.23) compares to Bourgeois' *Maman* in that it is large just like the spider, and conveys a surprisingly positive meaning. Just as Bourgeois's spider plays with our expectations of fear to show how this tall, scary figure can actually render maternal protection, my sculpture stands tall and firm and resonates with positive reinforcement for the future.



Fig. 18. Louise Bourgeois, *Maman*, bronze, marble, and stainless steel, Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa, 1991

As Bourgeois stated, “All art comes from terrific failures and terrific needs we have.”²⁷ Her words communicate what all individuals go through in life, but also speak to the separate struggles of an artist. I connect to this with my personal experiences with failure after multiple attempts to create images that portrayed my message. The day did come when I was able to succeed through overcoming all the failure, and I was able to achieve a successful image and maintain my confidence. It took time and endurance to keep going even when hope seemed lost. People want to see themselves as completely whole, but, like art, people are as much the process as the product.

²⁷ Harrison and Wood, 1090.

Chapter III

Materials and Processes

The methods and processes I used are relief printmaking, plaster molds, hand building, and metal work.

Relief Printing

There are different options for wood to use when relief carving; the main type is birch wood, but I chose to use multi-density fiberboard (hereafter MDF), a non-typical wood. I have used birch in the past and found it more problematic, because the layers of grain go in opposite directions. MDF has an easy grain to carve into, and is a more modern wood to use. I usually used pieces of wood 12"x6" or smaller, since I combined all the small blocks into a collage to create one strong image. I utilized 8"x 6", 12"x3.5", 9"x5.5", 9"x5", 9"x6", and 8"x5.5" blocks of MDF.

At the beginning of the carving process, I draw the image right onto the woodblock with a 2H drawing pencil. When I draw directly on the woodblock, it transfers more aesthetically the first time. I researched images of ravens to help capture a specific pose that I was otherwise not able to envision in my head. I had

some bird reference books I made copies of, as well as resourcing the internet for some images. I also purchased and used a faux raven skull necklace, because capturing and killing a raven did not seem feasible or acceptable. I chose the necklace style because I wanted to be able to continue to wear the necklace as a reminder of my personal triumph over tragedy. Irises on the other hand were more attainable. I bought an artificial iris to study for drawing; I was also able to view irises in their natural habitat to capture their living image.

Once I have a finalized image, I go back over my pencil lines with a black sharpie and start tracing the drawing until it looks like a stencil. When everything is outlined, I then begin carving away the background first. This is where I transfer wavy lines into my work, drawing most closely on the style of Van Gogh. I start from the top with thicker strokes. As I work down to the bottom of the block with the lines, I thin them out to create depth in the background. The iris is carved next and the raven last. When the carving is finished, I use an oil based relief ink and place two to three scoops of the ink on the table. I then roll the ink out with a brayer. When I have an even coat of ink, I use the brayer to roll it onto the block. This process requires the brayer to be re-inked in between rolls on the woodblock in order to keep the ink smooth. The next step is to set the press. I cut out mat board squares and tape them around my woodblocks so the blocks do not move. Using a ruler, I measure out lines around the blocks to set my paper for straight edges. This helps keep the collage formation of blocks stationary as I send them through the press. After I print a proof, I have to wait 24 hours before making an edition.

The 24 hours gives the ink time to be absorbed into the block for smooth results of black ink. The paper I use is Stonehenge, a commonly used relief printing paper.

After I finish printing the edition, I let the prints dry for at least 24 hours, so I can tear down the edges of the paper without smearing ink. When the edges are torn down, I sign the title of the piece, the edition number and my name to each print. I do between six and eight prints for most editions.

Woodblock Sculpture

I was inspired to turn woodblocks into a sculpture one day when I had laid all my blocks out on the floor and I took a black and white photograph of them all. I noticed how intricate they looked together and was pleased with the concept of creating a new technique not normally used for woodblock printing. I then rearranged the blocks so they were all right side up. It was like trying to complete a puzzle to fit all the blocks together so they were aesthetically pleasing and balanced. I had two semesters worth of woodblocks to try to piece together. Using all the woodblocks, I was able to make two sculpture sets. Both sets of blocks formed crosses. Drawing on the Christian tradition of Christ's sacrifice, crosses remind people of the sacrificial aspect one feels following a tragedy; yet I use them as a broader symbol as well. To me, they represent not only my own tragedy but also that my challenges have been overcome. These sculptures create dialogue separate from the prints they produced. The viewer can see the lines that have been carved and taken away. The viewer can compare these carved lines to what they feel they personally lost through the experience of tragedy. But if a person is able to combine

those losses to make a new form, it is empowering. The idea symbolizes hope and rejuvenation of life for me. One of my two sculptures consisted of seven blocks and the other of four blocks. Since woodblocks are not lightweight, especially those made from MDF wood, I used wood dowels and epoxy to hold them together. I drilled the sides of the woodblocks evenly on each of the sides that I would have to glue dowels into. I used an all-purpose epoxy and wood glue to bond them together for extra strength. The dowels came in long lengths so I cut them to fit deeply into each block. I used about twenty-two pieces of dowels for both sculptures. Once the epoxy was dry, I attached a heavy-duty picture frame hanger on the back to create a wall display.

Metal Work

Metal is a common medium for sculpture. Many artists that use metal have an expertise in it, because of the investment in time and money. When I went to purchase the metal for my flower sculpture, I knew what I was making, but that was all. I wasn't quite sure what types of metal I would need. I visited Public Steel in Amarillo and had help in choosing some metals. I needed a sheet of metal for the base and petals that were a tenth of an inch thick. I also needed a pole long enough for the stem. I was able to obtain a 5' sheet of metal that was cut into half, a long hollow square pipe that was 5/8" thick, and a solid round thin pole for the fine details. I made another trip for a 1/4" thick square sheet of metal that was 2'x2' for the base of the flower sculpture, since the original sheet of metal was not thick enough.

I had Public Steel cut square petals. Having the square petals, I was able to draw out the design of each individual petal directly onto the metal. I used the band saw to cut the outline of the petals. It took five hours to cut the first three and then another hour on each of the last three petals. Once all the petals were cut, I had to grind off the sharp and rough edges for a nice smooth feel. I made a petal holder to help with heating up each petal in the glass furnace to make them easier to grab. I was able to pound the petals with a hammer as soon as they came out of the furnace. With the assistance of fellow graduate students, I was able to bend all of the petals into an organic form. The heating and shaping process took four days. Once I had the petals done, the next step was to heat and form the stem. This process took a total of six hours with assistance to hold the stem and pound the metal.

With the stem complete, the next step was to decide where to tack the petals onto it. Chad Holliday, my sculpture professor and adviser, helped me weld the petals onto the stem. Some of the edges of the petals flared out so I went back with the flame torch and bent the hard edges in around the stem for a more organic look. For the base, I had a spare thick rod that I welded to the center of the base. The hollow stem would slide onto this rod, making the sculpture two parts, which made carrying or moving it around much easier. After viewing my iris, I decided to create life-like leaves using the same process I had on the petals. I cut their forms with the band saw, heated up the metal to bend it, and welded them to the stem for the full iris effect.

The last portion of my metal sculpture was adding the raven skeleton. I cut the small, round metal rod to form the skeleton of the raven. I heated the metal, cut it into

usable pieces, and shaped them into the wings, neck, head, and rib cage. For the rest of the skeleton, I used scrap leftovers from my petals for the legs, back of the head, tail, and finer details of the rib cage. I had assistance tacking and welding the skeleton shape, as well as with proper welding touch ups so the miniature would stay together. The miniature sculpture was now set at the base of the iris. It was designed to represent the process of death: that the skeleton's decomposition symbolizes the flesh and bones being returned to the Earth, while the iris grew with the idea of rebirth.

I used a blue universal patina for the iris and a black universal patina for the skeleton. Both patinas came from Sculpt Nouveau. I heated the metal with a blowtorch to have the patina set properly. When the black patina was heated, it became clumpy, creating more of a rustic look that went along with the decomposition idea. After the patinas set, I waited a day for the metal to cool before putting the matte finish over them. The matte finish protected the patinas from outside conditions.

Plaster Casting

I proceeded with the intention of making 10 pairs of hands out of plaster, going in sequence from the most malformed to the most accurate form of human hands. I used quite a few different methods when creating the hands, because no one method worked for making multiples. The first method I used was alginate. It is an instant-mold setting process that other artists and crafters use for hands, face, and the rest of the body. Alginate, however, did not make a perfect set of hands. Instead, it gave a decomposing pair of hands. This became the first pair of the set. I believe the problem occurred when

the alginate mix set for too long. Alginate was an expensive medium to experiment with so I decided to use another method. The next attempt was sticking my hands into a bucket of clay, and then mixing up plaster and pouring it directly into the clay mold of my hands. My hands still came out bumpy so I searched for yet another method.

I discovered an insta-mold mix. This method was 1/10 the cost of the alginate. For the insta-mold mix I used a big bucket to mix the ingredients as well as for sticking my hands in while I let the mix set. This process only required me to blend the dry mix with water, so it was simple and fast. When I pulled my hands out of the mixture, I then filled the mold with plaster and let the plaster set up in the mold. I finally received an almost perfect set of hands. There were a few fingers I had to fix, but it was still the most accurate set of hands to date. My next step was to use a rubber mold to make a mother mold. This technique is used for mass-production. Rubber molds require a list of items that are needed beforehand: silicone, liquid glycerin, Dawn dish soap, acrylic paint, and mineral spirits. I also needed a bowl in which to mix the ingredients. I added half of the silicone with a few drops of the liquid glycerin, some mineral spirits, and added some color paint to the mix so I could see the mold. I used my hands to evenly set the mixture over the plaster hands. Another bowl and the Dawn soap were used to make soapy water which kept the mixture off my hands. Once it was dry, I had to flip the hands over and repeat the same steps on the other side.

When the rubber mold was dry, I cut a seam around the edge but not all the way, just enough to be able to remove the plaster hands. I had another mold to create; this one was a mother mold. The mother mold is made out of plaster and it is the main support for

the rubber mold since rubber is flimsy. For the mother mold, I had to build a clay wall tall enough to go around my hands for the plaster to set in. I also had to impress a line in the clay, known as a key, when separating the mold for later. I used Vaseline around the edges to keep the mold separated, because plaster will not stick to Vaseline. Once the clay was set out, I poured in the plaster. I let it dry for about an hour. I then flipped the mold over and created a key. I rubbed Vaseline on the edges and started another wall to hold the plaster again. Once the plaster was dry, I got a chisel and hit the plaster lightly to break the seam. When the mold making was completely finished, I was ready to start filling the rubber mold with plaster to create multiple perfect hands.

I placed the rubber mold without my original plaster hands into the mother mold and tied it together with tire rubber. I then placed the molds into a bucket and started to fill the hand-shaped space with plaster. I noticed some plaster leaking out, so I quickly filled the leaking point with some clay. When the plaster was dry, I pulled out my first successful pair of hands. That ended up being the only successful pair of hands from the mold. After three more unsuccessful attempts, in which fingers would break, I gave up on this method and went on to the next, which was plaster gauze.

Plaster gauze is very similar to bandage gauze, the only difference being that it is filled with plaster that sets when wet. I cut the plaster gauze into small strips so I could form the gauze over my hands. When all the gauze was cut, I got a bowl of warm water to dunk the strips in. Warm water helped the plaster set up faster on my hands. I had to use this process on only one part of one of my hands at a time since I did not have a partner to help me. I began by wetting the plaster strips and placing them on the top side

of my hand. I slowly built the layers up until the cast was strong enough to support weight. Once the plaster dried, I removed it and flipped to the palm of my hand to start again. I repeated this same process for my opposite hand. Once the plaster gauze molds were made, I started to roll out slabs of clay. After I rolled out slabs of clay I began placing them inside the mold, pressing the clay against the mold to get the details of my hands. I let the pressed slab dry until it was leather-hard so I could place the parts together. I ended up creating six pairs of hands with this method. I made two full hand molds from the plaster gauze because after the third clay press the plaster gauze weakens from absorbing the moisture from the clay and loses its structure, thus necessitating the creation of a new mold. When the hands were leather-hard, I went back and corrected the flaws in the details from the mold. With the majority of the clay hands I had to go back with a needle tool and add details to the hands because they were lost after the initial pressing of clay.

Once I had the clay hands made, I bisque fired them. I painted two sets with a faded black paint; one glazed clear with a flesh-color paint; two glazed with flesh-color glaze, then sand blasted to remove the shine; and glazed the last one with a mint green and brown mixture that looked flesh-like. On one set of the hands, I added holes for stitching such that I could go back with a needle and thread after they were fired in the kiln. I soaked the plaster hands in a sink full of coffee so that they would not be plaster-white. I then used two shades of wood varnish to coat the plaster hands as well. I went back over the more realistic pair of hands with a flesh-colored paint to make them look

more like my actual hands. In total I made four sets of plaster hands and six sets of clay hands.

Hand Building

I made five small ravens and five small irises out of clay. Because they were so small, I did not make them hollow. They were small enough to dry fully and be fired without shattering in the kiln. I pressed little balls of clay together until I got a form that looked like a raven. The first raven was meant to be alive and well. The second one was meant to be dead. The third, fourth, and fifth ravens show the process of a slow deterioration ending with bones. I had created all the bones of a raven, but placing them in hands made it hard for the structure to stay in place, so I made a bigger skull to replace the bones. I hand painted each of the ravens black, using less and less black paint as I followed the decay process. I spray painted the skull white and then rubbed some wood varnish on it to make it look like real bone.

For the five small irises, I used the same process of pressing clay into my forms. I started with a blooming iris, followed by one that was starting to wilt, and then to a completely wilted iris. I started again, first creating an iris bud, and then shaping a bud that was starting to bloom to show the idea that life can come out of death. I hand painted each of the irises; I needed bright colors and different shades, but I did not have the proper glazes to achieve the desired results.

I also used hand building to create a big iris and big raven pair. I started by rolling out four big slabs of clay and letting them dry for a day so I could bend them and have

them hold their shape. Once the slabs were dry enough, I started to fold out one slab into a stem of the iris. The slab was still a little wet so I placed some plastic bottles in the stem to help hold its shape while it dried. After I finished the stem, I started cutting up another slab to make the petals. I cut them one by one, attaching each of them to the stem. After all the petals were attached, I went back with a needle tool and drew lines into the stem to help it look more like an organic iris. I used my finger to draw texture into the petal to add its detail. Then I let it dry over the course of a week. When it was bone dry, I bisque fired the iris beforehand painting it.

For the raven, I also used slabs of clay I had rolled out. I cut one slab into a big teardrop shape. I then crumpled some newspaper and taped it into an egg shape. I placed the newspaper on the teardrop-shaped slab and began to form it around the newspaper. I sealed up the slab and had two pointy ends, with one longer than the other. The longer end I used for the raven's tail, and the shorter end I used for the raven's head. To finish the head, I took a ball of clay and started to pinch the center of it like I was creating a bowl. I made sure the head was proportioned to the body and when I got the head the right size I used the slip and score method on the inside of the head and stuck it on the body for a sealed-tight effect. I attached some clay on each side to make the wings. I also attached a slab of clay for the tail, attaching each of these by slipping and scoring the slabs. Finally, I made the beak and attached it to the head. I let the raven dry for a week before firing it. I bisque fired it and used black paint to color the raven.

Chapter IV

The Projects

My woodblock collages, as I stated previously, inspire interest through their unique form and being able to tell a story within one piece. The collage gives the viewer space to keep searching for where they believe the story starts and where it should end. Melioration is not an easy concept to obtain through one image, which is why I worked in sequence to create a narrative, similar to a book. The images I used in the collages were all older woodblocks I took from my portfolio that were not being used individually. The woodblocks in the collages have been attached together using glue and wood dowels to make them a sculpture-like print. I have printed these woodblocks separately in the past, but this is the first time I have arranged them together as a big piece. The woodblock collages make crosses, signifying the sacrificial catharsis of trauma.

The first arrangement, *Processing* (Fig. 4), consists of seven previously printed woodblocks: an iris with two dead ravens and one flying raven; an iris field with ravens flying above it; a close up of an iris with a raven on the petal; another close up of an iris with a raven skull on the petal; an iris that is being picked at by a raven; an iris without a raven; and last, an iris with a raven flying away. I have combined all of these images into

one final print in order to leave the viewer with a sense of the process of healing and the resultant hope. Each image has the motif of either hope prevailing or tragedy fighting to win. I show both sides of the concept because our lives can take some rough turns, but ultimately our hope is what helps each of us endure the pain.

The second arrangement, *Healing* (Fig.17), consists of four blocks: a raven standing on a wilted iris; a raven pulling at the iris' petals; a raven skeleton and a bud of an iris; and a decomposing raven with an iris growing out of it. The message presented in these blocks is rebirth. Rebirth is a transformation process that shows the old has died and the new has begun, conveying the idea that tragedy has ended and now hope can start. Again, these blocks form a smaller cross shape, which is symbolic of the sacrifice of pain and being able to begin again.

For the woodblock prints, I followed the same structure I had used for the woodblock sculpture: a collage. This technique helps keep the viewer's interest because the concepts of tragedy and rape can be overwhelming to digest all at once. The prints consist of the same six images within each individual print. I used a maximum of five images and a minimum of two images per print. The images include: a raven flying away from an iris that is losing its petals, a raven skull on a field of irises, a field of irises with dead ravens at the bottom, a close up of an iris center with a dead raven on the petal, a raven on the ground with an iris in its mouth, and a raven gripping a wilted iris. The images within each print are smaller than usual. I want the viewer to feel intimacy with each image and a need to draw close to the images to see their intricate details. Also, having the viewer feel close to the images captures the essence of the intimate nature of

tragedy and the seriousness of its outcomes. I want my viewers to understand how important it is that hope always remains.

The first image in my print series, *Change of State* (Fig. 19), depicts a dead raven with an iris in its mouth. In reality, a bird would not attack a flower, but this imaginative view shows the iris surviving while the raven perished. The second image showcases the raven's skull resting on a field of irises. A common historical representation of victory was mounting decapitated heads of the enemy in public centers, a practice with ancient roots: "Victorious Stone Age warriors mounted the heads of their foes on stakes and carried them home from battle as war trophies."²⁸ I metaphorically represent this practice within my work by having the raven skull lifted up by the irises. When you look at this print you see the contrast of the black and white highlights, with death symbolized by the raven having a darker tone and being on top, and the iris' symbolism of hope portrayed in the lighter image on bottom.

²⁸Jennie Cohen, "Human Skulls Mounted on Stakes Found at Stone Age Burial Site:"
[http://www.history.com/news/human-skulls-mounted-on-stakes-found-at-stone-age-burial-site.](http://www.history.com/news/human-skulls-mounted-on-stakes-found-at-stone-age-burial-site)



Fig. 19. Ranae Daigle, *Change of State*, Woodblock, 2014

For the next print, *Transformation* (Fig. 3), I used a center of an iris with a raven laying on its petal and a raven pecking at a wilted iris. Again, I paired images to show melioration in a feasible way. I applied O’Keeffe’s style by using the captivating center of the iris that most people do not take the time to see. I added a hidden raven that can only be seen close up. I wanted the hidden raven to represent the healing process of forgiving, but even with healing the memory will always be there as a scar. I chose the raven with a wilted iris to portray the need for healing. These two images have a few contrasting shades, but they display the process as it is happening and in the “after” stage.

The trio print, *Pursue* (Fig. 20), consists of a raven with the wilted iris, a field of irises with dead ravens, and an iris that is losing petals with a raven flying away. These show the beginning, middle, and end of the healing process. I show the raven conquering

in the beginning with the wilted iris. The iris remains strong even after the raven's attacks growing tall in a field of hope and the ravens, representing the tragedy, lying dead on the ground. The iris that is losing petals represents the effect of painful memories attacking a person, but that the person is holding fast to hope, forcing the raven to flee.



Fig. 20. Ranae Daigle, *Pursue*, woodblock, 2014

As I added more images, the prints reflect more hopeful irises and portray fewer ravens in a position of tragic dominance. The combination of four images for this next print, *Journey* (Fig. 21), consists of the field of irises with the dead ravens on the ground, the raven with an iris in its mouth, the skull on an iris field, and the raven flying away from the iris with falling petals. These four have a more suggested imagery of hope prevailing. I also put these choices together because they looked aesthetically pleasing while showing melioration. The images draw your attention from left to right, but then

you realize the story begins at the top and goes clockwise, bringing your attention to the entire piece.



Fig. 21. Ranae Daigle, *Journey*, woodblock, 2014

I have another two pair print, *Renewal* (Fig. 10), that emphasizes hope and de-emphasizes tragedy. I used the field of irises with the ravens dead on the ground, the iris with a raven lying on its petal, the raven pecking at the wilted iris, and the skull over the field of irises. This work pairs images from right to left in proper sequence. These pairings show a narrative, starting with the iris defeated by the raven, then moving to the blooming of the irises above the fallen ravens, then lastly showing the transition from the memory of the tragedy (the raven) on the petal of the iris, to the lone skull remaining with hope growing out of the pain.

The last print, *Restoration* (Fig.11), has the field of irises with the ravens dead on the ground, the raven pecking at the wilted iris, the skull over the field of irises, the raven flying away from the iris with falling petals, and the raven with an iris in his mouth. This print shows the full process of two beginning steps where tragedy is dominant, a middle step where hope remains strong despite tragedy, and the ending steps of hope triumphing, allowing melioration to occur. I wanted to portray how people process pain differently. Some are short processes, and some take much longer. But each are processes that require different healing stages with time. I would like people to realize there is a healing stage for each of them too.

Complementing my print series, *Amend* (Fig. 22), my sculptural series of pairs of hands were created for a personal effect that the viewer could connect with my level of pain and experience with the results of tragedy. Also, I wanted the viewer to understand my own personal tragedy and the process I have taken to not be overcome by the trauma, but, rather, defeating it. I used my own hands for each of the molds, which is why the sculptures have tiny hands holding intimate objects. I have friends who have gone through the same healing process. By using my hands, people are able to connect with me by relating to a depiction of my healing experience.

The objects demonstrate through a progression that starts with the unaffected person and shows what happens when tragedy occurs in a life. It then continues to reveal the outcomes of tragedy that have been taken captive, resulting in the renewal of the individual. This is why the hands show the iris first and the raven later. The hands themselves also progress in sequence from being weak, conveying the feeling that they

cannot carry the burden of the tragedy, to finding strength. This way the whole set portrays the vision of melioration through the hands and the objects (Fig. 22). I chose to keep the hands, irises, and ravens small in this installation because the tragedies that people go through are usually kept secret within themselves. They deal with them quietly every day instead of openly sharing them aloud for the world to see. Tragedies are often kept hidden because of the shame, pain, and hurt inflicted. This damages the ability of the victim to trust and seek help from others. This size choice signifies the hiding and burying of pain that has been kept secret for so long. However, the small size also signifies the process of healing, which often begins to voice itself in small and safe ways. This reflects how I have learned how to share my experiences and to overcome my trauma through a long and slow process of healing.

The project focuses heavily on themes of smallness and intimacy. In addition to the small prints, I include tiny iris and raven sculptures that are displayed in the small ceramic and plaster hands. The first pair of hands are bumpy, dark-colored, and not quite formed properly in comparison to a realistic pair of hands. This contrast shows personal insecurities, a theme that is heightened by the delicate, soft irises (symbolic of innocence) that the hands are holding.

The next pair of hands are rough, dark, and a little more detailed, but still do not yet look like a realistic pair of hands. They look like lumps with fingers holding a wilting iris. The purpose was to portray the effect of the tragedy that has damaged the innocence of the iris. Part of dealing with trauma is helping the victim realize how their insecurities have affected them as an individual. That is why the hands show a slight change in form:

it represents a little step of growth. Next there is a pair of hands that slowly transforms into a normal set of hands. This pair is cracked, uneven, black from dirt, and more detailed but still holding a wilted iris. This wilted iris reveals the true effects of the tragedy that are finally manifesting. At this stage, the hands represent the victim's realization that help is needed. The front and back of the hand are separated to demonstrate an open wound in need of healing.

The following pair of hands is a little less dirty and more aligned as the wounds are less evident, implying healing. This pair now cradles a raven. The raven symbolizes the struggle and challenge of facing their tragedy. The visible cracks that were present in the previous hands are no longer noticeable, representing the first stage of getting help. In this series of hands a pale skin tone is introduced. However, it is important to mention that the light tone still has elements of darkness, indicted by the presence of dirt on the hands. With each new pair of hands the two halves become progressively more aligned to symbolize further healing. As healing becomes more evident through the imagery of the hands, the raven starts to die. This gives the impression the person is growing stronger and more confident in facing his or her tragedy.

In the next pair of hands the skin tone is more burnt. The purpose of creating a burnt appearance was to portray the process of opening the closed wound that the person had perceived to be buried inside. I show more stitching outlines to represent how the hands will have to be stitched back together after opening the wound. This pair is holding a raven that is seen as dying and slowly decomposing to represent how the pain that was holding the person back is starting to dissipate and the person's composure is returning. I

proceed by next creating a pair of hands that are stitched back together and also have a medium skin tone. This represents the person's proactive efforts at cleaning out the wound, allowing it to reseal. At this stage, the hands are now holding an almost completely decomposed raven. As a result, the viewer is able to re-evaluate the tragedy and see it through healed eyes rather than pain stricken eyes. I created a pair of hands that are stitched back together with a medium-tan skin tone that resemble my own skin. This pair holds an enlarged raven skull. I exaggerated the skull here to draw attention to the almost full decomposition of the raven, a decision that also allows the skeleton to sit ideally in the hands. Along with the skull, I portray how the hands have been sewn back together by rendering scars of stitching. This stage demonstrates that the pain has died with the raven, and that confidence and self-acceptance are growing with the idea of a baptism or rebirth.

I created each pair of hands directly but fragmentarily as indexes or imprints from my own body to emphasize the different stages of the healing process. The cracks and imperfections in clay and in plaster (which can mimic clay) represent damage done to the body both physically and psychologically. The skin is stretched and broken during the act of abuse, and, simultaneously, the mind is also cracked and damaged. This visual effect helps show my own experience of tragedy using the hands as a representation of my body and the trauma I underwent.

The plaster and clay hands became an installation piece that was created to be the support of other specific objects, namely small irises and ravens. The purpose was to create a visual for what the healing process was like when I went through it. If the small

clay pieces were displayed on pedestals, the viewer would not get the same message as they would seeing the objects laying in actual hands. Having the hands present the items in a series also helps portray personal change over time. The small irises and ravens were sculpted out of clay, which connect back to the healing process, since my hands created the work that I am symbolically holding. My hands have, of course, been part of the process of making each of these works of art. The hands that I have sculpted and painted leave my unique fingerprints and scars in the clay as I work.

“Melioration” was chosen for my thesis title because it accurately describes the process of brokenness potentially transitioning to healing. Ultimately, the last pair of hands show scars but the open wounds are gone, thus the relief of ills. There are no longer two separate halves of the hands. I now introduce a pair of hands that are the closest to being realistic and have a tan skin tone closer to my own. The hands at this stage represent being almost healed. This represents the idea that the victim at this point looks back not with despair, but with joy knowing what she has just overcome. The hands now hold the bud of an iris in them, showing the process of rebirth. I wanted it to be clear that the person was not letting the tragedy define her. As a result the individual was being made stronger for the future. I did not want to end the series by creating completely perfect pair of hands, because there will always be scars left from tragedy. Scars serve to remind a person of the pain that she has overcome. As a result some cracks were left visible to symbolize the scars from the past tragedy. The iris in bloom is a symbolic

reminder of the innocence the victim used to have and the potential of returning to that innocence with confidence.²⁹



Fig. 22. Ranae Daigle, *Amend*, mixed media, 2014

²⁹The specific aspect of the definition of “innocence” is referring to “freedom from guilt or sin, through being unacquainted with evil.” (Merriam Webster Dictionary) Also, the definition of innocence, in reference to my work is directly correlated to not only the guilt and shame associated with trauma but also the mindset and sense of well-being that comes with healing and recovery from said trauma. Therefore, a return to innocence is not only a physical matter but also a mental and spiritual recovery as well. As a result, it does make it possible to return to innocence.



Fig. 22. Ranae Daigle, *Amend*, mixed media, 2014



Fig. 22. Ranae Daigle, *Amend*, mixed media, 2014



Fig. 22. Ranae Daigle, *Amend*, mixed media, 2014



Fig. 22. Ranae Daigle, *Amend*, mixed media, 2014



Fig. 22. Ranae Daigle, *Amend*, mixed media, 2014



Fig. 22. Ranae Daigle, *Amend*, mixed media, 2014



Fig. 22. Ranae Daigle, *Amend*, mixed media, 2014



Fig. 22. Ranae Daigle, *Amend*, mixed media, 2014



Fig. 22. Ranae Daigle, *Amend*, mixed media, 2014

To contrast my focus on small-scale objects, I added one large-scale metal sculpture of an iris, *Promise* (Fig. 23). The metal flower sculpture was created to be placed outdoors and to be noticeable from a distance; its size is such that it can be seen across a courtyard. This single large sculpture elevates the idea that hope is undying and is always capable of overcoming tragedy. The power of the iris' symbolic meaning is conveyed through the size of the metal flower. This piece is symbolic of my own triumph over trauma. This variation in size also helps to represent that results are not instantaneous in the healing process. After all, big things take time to grow and people can still feel torn and traumatized while working through the trauma. To be sure, the change in size gives the illusion of growth and the process of dealing with difficulty and healing. The flower, a blue iris, portrays hope and rebirth, in contrast to the death of the symbol of the tragedy, the raven skeleton. The skeleton is shown beneath the iris, decomposing, returning to the ground. Using a flower to portray hope was a natural

choice. Flowers are given as gifts at special times that communicate care and love, whether upon a happy occasion like an anniversary or birthday, or during a sad event such as a funeral. Giving and receiving gifts is one way by which people express love. This helps explain the significance of flowers as gifts in that they show hope and love, even in times of darkness and despair. The raven, on the other hand, has been seen more as a reflection of evil and death, often perceived as a magical being or even a trickster, possessing the power to outsmart or control. For me, the raven is a sign of negative events -events that are outside people's control.

Choosing to have a metal sculpture not only emphasizes importance of size, but also its permanence, as metal is durable. The size of the iris affirms that melioration is ever changing for the better, allowing the tragedy to slowly deteriorate just as a dead raven would return to the earth. If the sculpture was placed in a yard, it would be a constant reminder of hope's permanence. I decided to not attach the raven skeleton directly to the iris. As I envision the sculpture, if it is placed in a garden the grass will grow around the base and the skeleton will be more naturally integrated with the ground. But, I also want viewers to have a sense of ownership in the placement of the raven. If they were to own the sculpture, they could move the skeleton to where they please and even separate the two for their own purposes. Because the sculpture is six feet tall, viewers are able to walk around it and capture its beauty from all angles. The skeleton, being so little and intimate, allows viewers to hold the sculpture in their hands and encourages the idea that tragedy has become small, allowing them to view it with an air of regret rather than pain. This allows viewers to move ahead to the next stage of healing.

I used a blue patina for the iris because the blue iris is one of the most significant metaphors for hope as well as blue representing trust, which is another factor victims of tragedy need. I used a black patina for the raven, representing the color of death associated with tragedy, but also showing earthly decomposition, rusting away while the iris blooms to its full potential in color.



Fig. 23. Ranae Daigle, *Promise*, carbon steel, 2014

Lastly, I produced a large-scale iris and raven, *Desperation* (Fig. 24). The iris is shown to be wilted, reflecting the state of facing the trauma. But the raven, shown with cracks on it, is also in a state of defeat. I chose these two as a pair, because there is a time when an individual is battling his or her tragedy but still feels defeated at the moment. This concept shows that the struggle is very real even as the person is improving. Despite the placement and intensity of the struggles shown in each of these works, melioration is always seen as the story's victor. I show the depths of the pain caused, and the effect it can have on a person's mind and thinking process. I do not want people to believe that the tragedy has become their identity, but that their striving for healing only makes their identity stronger.



Fig 24. Ranae Daigle, *Desperation*, ceramic sculpture, 2014

Chapter V

Conclusion

My work tells a visual story of trauma and catharsis. Most specifically, it is about my own experience with rape, but my work can be more widely understood than this. I hope to reference tragedy, acceptance, and healing together as a more general topic to show people who have experienced any kind of trauma that there is still melioration available for them. My work aims to show others that hope is never entirely lost, nor is it ever too late to find rebirth and renewal. I believe my art's purpose is not simply to be found in the content or the style, but the human connection I can make through it. I use symbolic motifs of plants and animals—namely an iris and a raven—to communicate these ideas in an abstracted rather than literal way. I sought safe and approachable subject matter for my work that, despite dealing with such serious issues, lets people know there is still hope for a healing process. I have used a raven and an iris not only because of their rich and cross-cultural symbolic meanings but because they would not scare viewers away. I wanted to draw people in by using subjects that can be beautiful yet haunting at the same time. These images can help us all arrive at the culmination of our rejuvenation process, to find beauty and peace after pain. Life remains ever a process of melioration. Everything has stages. The healing process is the one most people have a hard time accepting and finding for themselves. I created my work to give an idea of how

the healing process works and what the results can look like if patience and perseverance are exercised.

Bibliography

- Augustin, Birgitta. "Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History." Daoism and Daoist Art. (December 1, 2000). Accessed January 11, 2015.
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dao/hd_daoi.htm.
- Ayral-Clause, Odile. *Camille Claudel: A Life*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002.
- Benke, Britta. "Flowers and Skyscrapers." In *Georgia O'Keeffe 1887-1986: Flowers in the Desert*. Koln: Taschen, 2000.
- Black, Susa Morgan. "The Raven." *Order of Bards and Druids*. Accessed July 9, 2014.
<http://www.druidry.org/library/library/animal-lore-raven>.
- Cohen, Jennie. "Human Skulls Mounted on Stakes Found at Stone Age Burial Site." (September 20, 2011). Accessed February 2, 2015.
<http://www.history.com/news/human-skulls-mounted-on-stakes-found-at-stone-age-burial-site>.
- "Full-Career Retrospective of Louise Bourgeois." (March 14, 2008). Accessed November 12, 2014. <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/press-room/releases/press-release-archive/2008/1822-full-career-retrospective-of-louise-bourgeois-presented-at-the-guggenheim-through-fall-2008>.
- Gabler, Joseph. "Kathe Kollwitz." (2009). Accessed November 19, 2014.
http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=3201.
- Harrison, Charles, and Paul Wood, eds. "Figures of Difference." In *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2003.

"Irises." Accessed July 12, 2014. <http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/826/vincent-van-gogh-irises-dutch-1889/>.

Kandeler, Riklef and Wolfram Ullrich. "Symbolism of Plants: Examples from European-Mediterranean Culture Presented with Biology and History of Art." *Journal of Experimental Botany* 60, no. 11 (2009): 2955-6.

O'Keeffe, Georgia. *Georgia O'Keeffe*. New York: Penguin Books, 1976.

Greenough, Sarah, ed. *My Faraway One: Selected Letters of Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

"Papyrus from the Book of the Dead of Ani." Accessed November 7, 2014. http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/aes/p/book_of_the_dead_of_ani.aspx.

Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Raven." In *Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Poetry and Tales*. Edited by James M. Hutchisson, 60. Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2012.

| RAINN | Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network. "Was I Raped?" | RAINN | Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network. Last modified September 3, 2014. Accessed July 14, 2014. <https://www.rainn.org/get-information/types-of-sexual-assault/was-it-rape>.

Robinson, Roxana. *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Life*. New York: Harper & Row, 1989.

Schaffner, Ingrid. *The Essential Vincent Van Gogh*. New York, NY: Wonderland Press, 1998.

Sommer, Robert and Barbara A. Sommer. "ZooMorphy: Animal Metaphors for Human Personality." *Anthrozoos* 24, no. 3 (2001): 237-248.

"T-Shaped Painting on Silk (206 BC-25 AD)." Accessed January 16, 2015.
<http://www.hnmuseum.com/hnmuseum/eng/collection/collectionContent.jsp?infoId=012fa0841dc9402884832f7093f210ee>.

"Wheatfield with Crows." Accessed 11 Nov. 2014.
<http://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/collection/s0149V1962>.