

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SOUL

by

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ABSTRACT:

My work transforms negative emotions, thoughts, and experiences into positive results through the act of painting and weaving. This process of overcoming the internal battle of negative emotions through painting and weaving is inherently dualistic, often combining contrasting elements, processes, and concepts. By taking my emotions and turning them into gestural abstract paintings, my active style of painting becomes a physical representation of the chaos behind my emotions and the struggle to make sense of them. I then take these source paintings and shred them by hand into strips of varying lengths and widths, illustrating the break down of my emotions. I then weave together the strips into a woven object. The woven object illustrates the transformation of overwhelming emotions into an order and unified work. Even if it is diverse in its makeup coming from the previous abstraction, it still embodies strength, stability, and control. The dualistic process of deconstruction and reconstruction paintings into woven objects represent the process of rebuilding one's self and taking back control.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Suffocating. There is no relief. Everything is too loud, too shrill, too much. Voices are raised, words are being tossed to and fro like softballs, emotions are raging, the temperature soars, and there is no air. Heavy darkness lurks around every bend and groove. Despair accompanies loneliness as they stroll down the worn paths of the heart and mind, weeping as they go. Then, there is silence.

The mind is an interesting thing. At times it can seem like a battlefield full of danger, or a sponge that soaks up everything it encounters, becoming so heavy that it's unbearable. My work is an investigation of the transformation of negative emotions into positive results through the act of painting and weaving. This process of overcoming the internal battle of negative emotions through painting and weaving is inherently dualistic, often combining contrasting elements, process, and concepts. In the beginning stages of my process, I take my own negative emotions and experiences and turn them into gestural abstract paintings. This active style of painting is a physical representation of the chaos behind my emotions and the struggle to keep them at bay, to make sense of them. I then take several of these source paintings and physically tear and shred them into strips of varying widths and lengths, representing the breaking down of my emotions. After shredding them, I weave the pieces back into one solid object, or final painting. The woven object illustrates the transformation of overwhelming and chaotic emotions into an ordered and unified work—even if it is still diverse in its makeup coming from the previous abstractions—that embodies strength, stability, and control. The dualistic

process of deconstructing and reconstructing paintings into woven objects embodies and represents the process of rebuilding one's self and taking back control.

Having suffered from depression and anxiety throughout most of my life, finding a way to overcome my dark emotions became a mission for me, a means of coping and survival. I started looking for ways to resolve what was going on inside, beyond the act of painting. I originally tried knitting and crocheting to convey what I felt, but they didn't have the depth of meaning that I was searching for. They were too straight-forward somehow and presented for me a pattern without purpose. When I turned to weaving, I found my answer. In weaving, the individual strips and strands are flimsy and scattered but when woven together, each strip adds stability to another until they can't be broken apart without brute strength. One strand cannot be removed without hurting another. This sense of one thing adding strength to another while being weak by itself led me to a solution. The almost violent and chaotic nature of gestural painting was my way of release, while weaving was the resolution. Within the strips that compose my final woven works, the variation in their size is important. The thinner or smaller pieces show that only a little bit of the original piece was needed in the resolution of the woven object. The larger pieces show that larger structural forms were also needed as anchors for the reconstruction process. When reassembling an object, there is an importance of balance. Too much of one thing is never good, and when rebuilding one's self, keeping too much of the original forms and meanings doesn't necessarily lead to proper healing. The strips themselves come from—as in they are physical made from—the negativity I associate with my abstract paintings. When weaving them together with parts from another painting, I transcend the associated negativity. However, I also make sure not to add too

much from one previous painting because doing so for me would negate healing, making the final work too similar to the original work. Instead the pieces from multiple paintings are somewhat equal in number as they are dispersed throughout the final work, making a new and newly united object. The act of deconstructing my paintings and then combining them into a new work becomes my personal narrative. In the words of Sheila Hicks, an artist who has greatly influenced my work, “I often make a statement about my feelings regarding the world using textiles as my language.”¹ It is my hope that others see my art and find a way to also overcome their own hardships knowing that they are not alone in how they feel. My work is a reminder that sufferers don’t have to suffer in silence without a helping hand. My final woven pieces can serve as a flag of hope for others that rebuilding yourself is possible. No matter how broken a people may feel, they can rebuild themselves into something stronger and even more beautiful. The strength of that new form woven together will signal that strength of finding renewed purpose.

My work is an exploration of several dualities. By combining the opposing dualities, I aim to transcend the old binary and dualistic way of thinking. First, my work represents the relationship of a problem to its ultimate resolution. Second, my work also embraces both the process of deconstruction and of reconstruction, building upon one another. Deconstruction is very chaotic, and tearing apart or deconstructing my paintings resembles an internal monologue for me. Scraps and strings from the canvas fly everywhere, and then they are tossed into a pile, ready for the next painting to be shredded. In this stage, it is as if my struggles and conflicting thoughts take on material form, and I can see them outside of myself, piled up before me. In contrast, the

¹ Joslyn Art Museum, “Material Voices”. Demisch Danant, 2016. Online at <https://www.demischdanant.com/news/sheila-hicks-material-voices-solo-exhibition>

reconstruction of my paintings is ordered. The weave is neat and planned, controlled. Everything has its own place and a reason for being there. I pull pieces from that pile of “chaotic thoughts” on the floor and carefully weave them into something new and reasoned out. As mentioned above, each individual piece adds structure to another, again contrasting that messy pile with an ordered pattern. And yet, you can still see fragments and traces of the mess, in the irregularity of the strips and in the threads that are still present and untamed. I like how those traces don’t entirely erase the chaos and struggles but build something new and strong out of them, while still revealing their origin. This rebuilding process reassumes control over the chaos. In the dualities that make up my work, I find that combining two opposing sides collapses them into a new whole, and produces a neutral ground of productivity and positivity.

The play between painting and object is yet another duality in my work. In the beginning stages, my pieces start out as several paintings. Paintings are understood in the art world to be valuable two-dimensional things that need to be stretched or framed. There are even jobs for people to restore paintings that have aged and began to break down. In museums, paintings are often stored under special glass away from prying hands and destructive elements. Some are even stored away from light to preserve them for as long as possible. In taking these paintings and physically destroying them, I am doing the opposite of what is “supposed” to be done. I am not treating them like special or sacred or expensive objects, things to be framed, protected, and revered. Rather I am treating them as if they are any other piece of fabric. I am not revering the painting but destroying it as if it has wronged me, and enjoying doing so. It is as if I am breaking down a destructive system of norms holding us all back. The pile of shreds and threads that

remains after my destruction contrasts the perfection of most paintings framed and hung in museums. Then, I pull the remnants out from that pile, organize them carefully, and weave them back into a large textile-based object. On the one hand, this re-creates the painting format because we must remember that it was originally just a woven textile itself. But on the other hand, the messiness of the new object belies that status of “painting” in a productive way for me. It draws attention to the materiality of the construction as an “object.” And “objects” are not traditionally framed. They are often hung or placed with care, but not the same care as paintings, which tend to stand for the epitome of human creation. When we think of “woven objects” we think more of clothes that are worn, often until they have holes, or a rug that gets stepped on and threadbare over time from use. This use value of a woven object also contrast the painting, of which the “use” is above all to be “art.” Objects, on the other hand, have many practical and functional uses, like clothing or rugs. Such objects are not protected from the elements, from hands or feet. They are made to be dirtied or stepped on, and used up. So when I take this object and transform it back into a painting, I end the process by sealing it and cutting it to fit stretcher bars, coming full circle again from art to object back to art. What then, does this say about the importance of art and painting versus object if my woven work is both and neither at the same time? Both objects and paintings are things connected to our human lives, and meant to be cherished for that. Frames or stretcher bars don’t make a work more important or vital in its essence than an object that is meant to be hung or worn, used and therefore loved. Art can be made from both useful objects and painted canvases, and my thesis work aims to remind us of that meaning of the notion of “art.”

Still another duality that interests me is the tension between the craft of domestic weaving and the fine art of painting. While the play between painting and object in my work portrays the internal dialogue of negative emotion, the advancement of craft in the art world challenges the definition of fine art. In the emergence of craft practices, there are now quilts, tapestries, and similar objects hanging in museums next to grand paintings and sculptures. One artist recognized for their craft like art is Faith Ringgold. She is most known for her narrative quilts. When's she was asked why she does quilts she answered, "It was the art form that slaves used to keep themselves warm and to also import their art because they couldn't bring the art forms they practiced in Africa.... [it's] acceptable to the slavers because it was keeping them warm."² It wasn't until recently that people began to somewhat respect craft-like- traditions in the art world. In the mid to late 1900's critics began to write about artist making craft like art. To name a few, Sheila Hicks, Faith Ringgold, Judith Scott, and Billie Zangewa were all pioneering textile artists.³ They began to break the mold of the patriarchal western definition of art. Art work could no longer be defined as painting and traditional sculpture made by men, but so much more. Gee's Bend is a group of women quilters that I look to as influence. They're a group of black women who live in a remote community in Alabama. They make quilts from whatever they can find and assemble in abstract composition shapes. In this fusion of old process and new design, they took the art world by storm, accidentally. When making

² Arwa Mahdawi, "The Quilts that Made America Quake How Faith Ringgold Fought the Power with Fabric". The Guardian, 2019. Online at <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/jun/04/faith-ringgold-new-york-artist-serpentine-gallery-london>

³ Sarah Gottesman, "10 Pioneering Textile Artists". Artsy, 2016. Online at <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-10-textile-artists-who-are-pushing-the-medium->

their quilts, they were not trying to make art. They were merely performing another one of their duties, but were then discovered by an art collector. I will discuss this in further detail in my chapter 2. In doing what they loved, they paved the way for other craft like forms to be respected as fine art. Vanessa Kramer Sohna wrote in her book about the group saying, “The Gee’s Bend quilts defy traditional definitions of both high art and ‘traditional’ quilting.” She also went on to say, “The transition from treating the quilts [of Gee Bend] as mere craft to serious works of artistic objects worth critical approval was cemented with New York Times critic Micheal Kimmelman’s reviews.”⁴ It’s interesting that when an art critic in the art center of NYC gives the quilters the time of day that it is suddenly “art” more than craft or folk art. I am working within a wider trajectory of the resurgence of craft and textile art.

The last duality I am exploring in my work is that between so-called masculine and feminine approaches to art. The art world itself is still very much as a man’s world. Evidence for this is that women continue to earn only 40% of what men make on their art: The most expensive painting sold by a woman was Georgia O’Keeffe’s, “White Flower No.1”, selling at \$44.4 million⁵, but there are dozens of men artist who have sold work for over 100 million. In the same article, they list the top 10 highest paid artist, and out of 10 artist, only one is a woman. Just recently Jeff Koons’s, “Rabbit”, set the record for most expensive work by living artist selling at \$91 million.⁶ If this doesn’t show the

⁴ Vanessa Kraemer Sohan, “But a Quilt is More” Recontextualizing the Discourse(s) of the Gee’s Bend Quilts. *College English* 77, no. 4, 2015.

⁵ Rozalia Jovanovic, “Top 10 Most Expensive Living Americans Artist”. *ArtNetNews*, 2017. online at artnetnews.com

⁶ Aubie Cornish, “All Things Considered”. *NPR*, 2019. online at npr.org/Jeff-Koons-rabbit

divide between men and woman artist, I don't know what does. Moreover, gestural abstract painting is historically seen as a masculine practice. In Amy Von Lintel's and Bonni Roos's book, *Expanding Abstract Expressionism: Women Artist and the American West*, they state, "Women artists of the movement [abstract expressionism] tended to be, out of interest and necessity, more nomadic than their male counterparts, whose careers were less hampered by gender discrimination." Women abstract painters just were not respected at the same level as men artist, and still aren't to this day. Below is a photo of

Jackson Pollock taken by Hans Namuth. Pollock is shown in his natural element, for a male painter. He is actively slinging paint onto his canvas. The tossing and flinging of paint onto the canvas without any specific direction can be compared to male ejaculation. According to Jane Livingston in her book, *The Paintings of Joan Mitchell*, "the brush is phallic," and "artists have been said to paint with their pricks—and how can a woman do that?"⁷



Hans Namuth, *Jackson Pollock painting "Autumn Rhythm"*, 1950.

⁷ Jane Livingston, *The Paintings of Joan Mitchell*. NY/ Berkeley: Whitney Museum of American Art in Association with University of California Press, 2002, P. 52.

Mitchell was in denial about this practice. She even left an event in a huff after being asked, “What do women artist think...” instead of being asked, what does and artist think. The categorization was beyond demeaning to her and she would not stand for it.⁸ Where gestural abstraction is seen as a masculine practice, weaving is seen as feminine because it is domestic, because it has been women’s work in many cultures, including Mayan, Guatemalan, African, and Asian, however, the only known male weaving culture comes from the Navajo Society. It was originally used for making functional household items such as baskets, clothes, and quilts. In combining the two sides of this gender binary—“male” gestural painted abstraction and “female” weaving—I am hoping to undermine and question such binaries. Artists don’t have to be either artists or women artists. They don’t have to be either abstractionists or craft workers. Such categorizations are limited, restricting, and demeaning. For me, the question or identity of gender does not define or prescribe artistic practice. As with all the other dualities in my work, combining both sides works to attack a problem and form a solution on a more neutral ground.

In chapter 2, I discuss my artistic influences in depth, but Joan Mitchell and Sam Gilliam are the two primary artists that I looked to for my abstraction practices. Mitchell talks a lot about embodying her emotions and forcefully applying them to her canvas. In doing so, she is giving the world her narrative. She also struggled a lot with being seen as a woman artist instead of just an artist. Mitchell plays a very important role for me in helping me approach questions of gender bias in my art practice. In being a woman and

⁸ Ibid, P. 51.

making traditionally “male” paintings—gestural abstractions—she was constantly challenging the gender roles prescribed in the art world. However, Sam Gilliam, a male artist similarly challenges those expectations of what a “man’s” style of painting might be. He is known for making abstractions on canvas but then taking his canvas from stretcher bars, and freeing the fabric for ultimate manipulation. Suddenly, his “paintings” register in the gallery more like blankets, curtains, or other kinds of functional textiles. What this shows me is that other artists are finding new ways to deal with questions of gender roles, of fine art versus craft, and of the very definitions of art and of painting. In my chapter 2, I explore other artists as well, including Karen Rubado, Line Dufour,⁸ and Gee’s Bend . All of these artists explore the use of craft as a means to share meanings about their thoughts and emotions. Though art itself is a form of indirect speaking, these artist show that fabric, needles, and yarn are the pens that will rewrite the definition of what art is and can be.

In Chapter 3, I discuss my process, which, as mentioned above, employs two different art techniques: abstraction and weaving. My abstract painting style is all about my emotions and the way I express them, while weaving is all about the resolution and self healing process. These two approaches are the very foundation of thesis and its basis in examining dualities. In the chapter I explain in detail how I tie emotional meanings into my color palette, mark-making, and finished image in my paintings. It’s a long and painstaking process, but it effectively conveys my narrative, and mirrors the meaning that I want to communicate.

In Chapter 4, I will discuss each individual piece in my show. The weavings may seem to have pieces at random, but each painting has a purpose for being in its woven

final product. I made each painting with its own partner(s) to tell its own story. The smaller weaving made from the larger weavings also have their own purpose. The 22 paintings and one installation are my life put into art form. They are the way I harmonize meaning, and balance the dualities together into a new unified concept.

Taking on these many dualities—deconstruction and reconstruction, painting and object, fine art and craft, masculine and feminine—I want to show that combining both sides addresses the problems of such binary schemes and offers solutions and alternatives on fresh equal ground, transcending the old dualistic way of thinking. In deconstruction and reconstruction, it provides relief and catharsis. In the other dualities, I aim to challenge biases and even the playing field. My work is about addressing dualities but also about the healing of the mind and soul. In breaking down paintings and rebuilding them into woven pieces, I offer a physical representation of coping, healing, and taking back control.

CHAPTER 2: ARTIST INFLUENCES

The influences for my work draw from several categories of artists, including Abstract Expressionist painters, quilters, and other textile artists.

Joan Mitchell and Sam Gilliam are the most important influences to my abstraction process. As I explained briefly in my first chapter, Mitchell talks a lot about forcefully applying her emotions to her canvas, conveyed within the gestures she makes with the brushstrokes that apply the paint.⁹ The emotion she discussed the most was anger. She was angry about being labeled as a woman artist in a traditionally male art world. Jane Livingston explained Mitchell's gendered rage saying, "She [Mitchell] wanted to be thought of as 'one of the boys' at least as far as her work was concerned. If she did not want to be categorized as a woman painter, it was because she wanted to be a *real* painter."¹⁰ Along with other women artists trying to find recognition in the art world during that time, she felt that the designation of "woman artist" belittled her status as a serious artist, that the separation of the sexes was demeaning. It presumed that women would never be as great as men so there was no sense in comparing them; segregating them was the only way women could fit into the art world, not unlike African American artists being labeled as "black artists" rather than just "artists." However, instead of allowing her anger to consume her, she channeled it into her work. When explaining her work in an interview with Yves Michaud, she exclaimed, "I'm trying for something more specific than movies of my everyday life: To define a feeling."¹¹ This statement

⁹ Ibid, P.49.

¹⁰ Ibid, P.50.

¹¹ Yves Michaud, Joan Mitchell, *New Paintings*. Xavier Fourcade Inc.: Xavier Fourcade, 1986.

exemplifies why she is a perfect influence for my work. She created her own language of color and form and gesture as reflective of her “feelings” through her work. She challenged the limiting categories of the art world, combating the dualities forced upon her. Her painting, *The Bridge* (fig. 1) features her sharp and swiftly painted lines that seem to express her anger and pain. The rushed lines start and stop so abruptly like the flow of emotions. It’s almost as if she’s “writing” out her anger so fast that her hand can’t catch up to her thoughts. The lines also become smudged in the work, reminding me of ink or makeup being distorted by tears. [cut a sentence] The dark colors express the negativity she was feeling at the time, making her work so relevant to my own. She would not be tied down by the conventional standards of the art world. She fought back with brush to canvas to prove her creative and human worth.



Figure 1. Director Marion Cajori, “Portrait of an Abstract Painter (Joan Mitchell)”. 7

Another Neo-Abstract Expressionist painter that my work draws from is Sam Gilliam, who often removes his canvas from its stretcher bars so that he can paint on the loose fabric. Gilliam's non-traditional approach to the use of canvas perhaps has had the greatest impact on my work. Gilliam's methods built upon those of Jackson Pollock, whose work laid the foundations for the Abstract Expressionist movement of US art in the 1940s and 50s. Pollock would also lay his canvases on the ground and paint directly on them, standing over them or even standing upon them and splattering his paint around the fabric ground (fig.2). What makes Gilliam's approach different than Pollock's, and more useful for my own work, is the way Gilliam fills his entire space in his studio with paint, not limiting himself to the frame of the canvas. Moreover, he doesn't then restretch his canvases like Pollock and Mitchell and the earlier abstract expressionist artists. Instead, he drapes and hangs them loosely in galleries, drawing dramatic attention to their role as fabric, something that my shredding and rebuilding likewise tries to do.



Figure 2. "Studio Sunday: Jackson Pollock" <http://www.tes.com/lessons/hv6Yx1-isHcilQ/abstract-art>

Those who have seen Gilliam's studio often comment on the space that is created around his actual art. According to John A. Harlem, Jr., "Anyone who has watched Gilliam work has seen him wading among the lengths of his canvases, folding, staining, spreading, cutting, adorning, and sharing them, the artist himself becoming subordinate to the creative process but letting it happen also, working within and without it, all of him subsumed, first in the existential crisis of expressing himself, but then in the process of enormous, spontaneous creation."¹² Gilliam makes himself and his body part of his work, in a performative process where he glidies between the buckets of paint, plastic, and pieces of canvas in his studio. He paints without worrying about the other space around him, about staying "within the lines" or the frame of the rectangular cloth. While Mitchell slashed her canvas with color to break out of the boundaries of limiting categories of art, Gilliam does so in his own way too.

¹² John A. Harlem Jr., "Sam Gilliam: Owl in the Barn". Accessed September 28, 2020. Online at https://www.artline.com/artists/dealers_artists/gilliam-sam.php

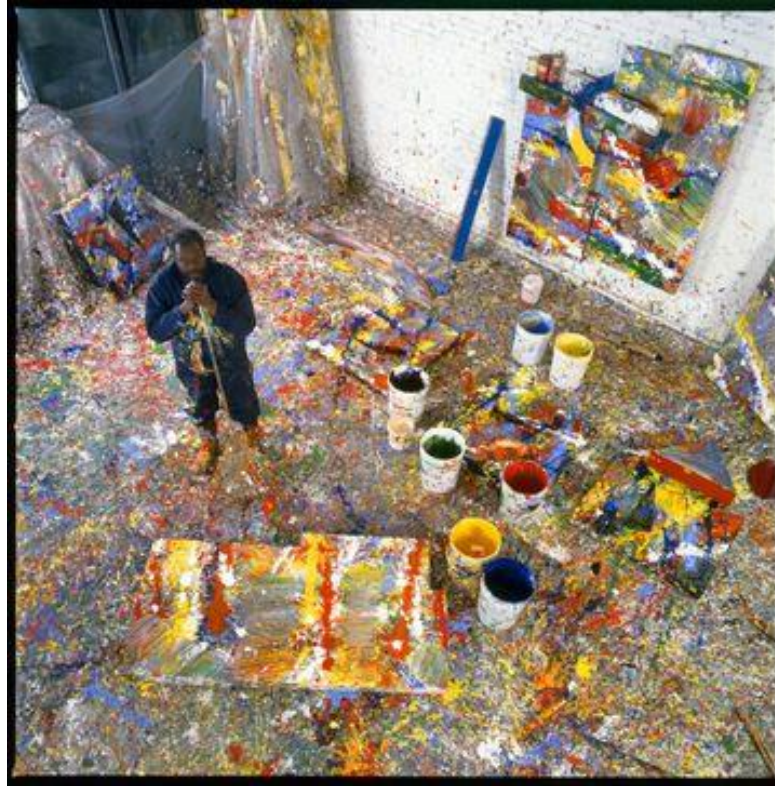


Figure 3. “Gilliam in his paint- splattered studio.”, Washington D.C., 1980.

Photographer: Anthony Barboza. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-02-06/an-artist-born-in-1933-finds-his-hottest-market-in-2020>

A picture of Gilliam standing in his studio shows his painting process doesn't stop with the edges of the canvas but instead carries onto everything around him (fig 3). The way his paint covers things other than the canvas can be compared to how an outpouring of emotions can leak out into and affect one's environment. This aspect makes his process particularly relatable for me. He strips away our expectations of the rectangular stretched canvas, the edges of which contain the paint, and offers an alternative. He turns a painting into a piece of fabric. He takes this fabric and reinstates

its value as art by draping or hanging it in way that showcases its versatility—its beauty as art and its utility as drapery. His process questions the “structured” approach of painting and presents it in a new way, and it has led me to look at my own paintings differently. Gilliam’s work also combats the discrete separatness of the presumed binaries in art—including high art and craft, painting and sculpture, but also clean and messy, control and chaos—all of which play out in my work as well.

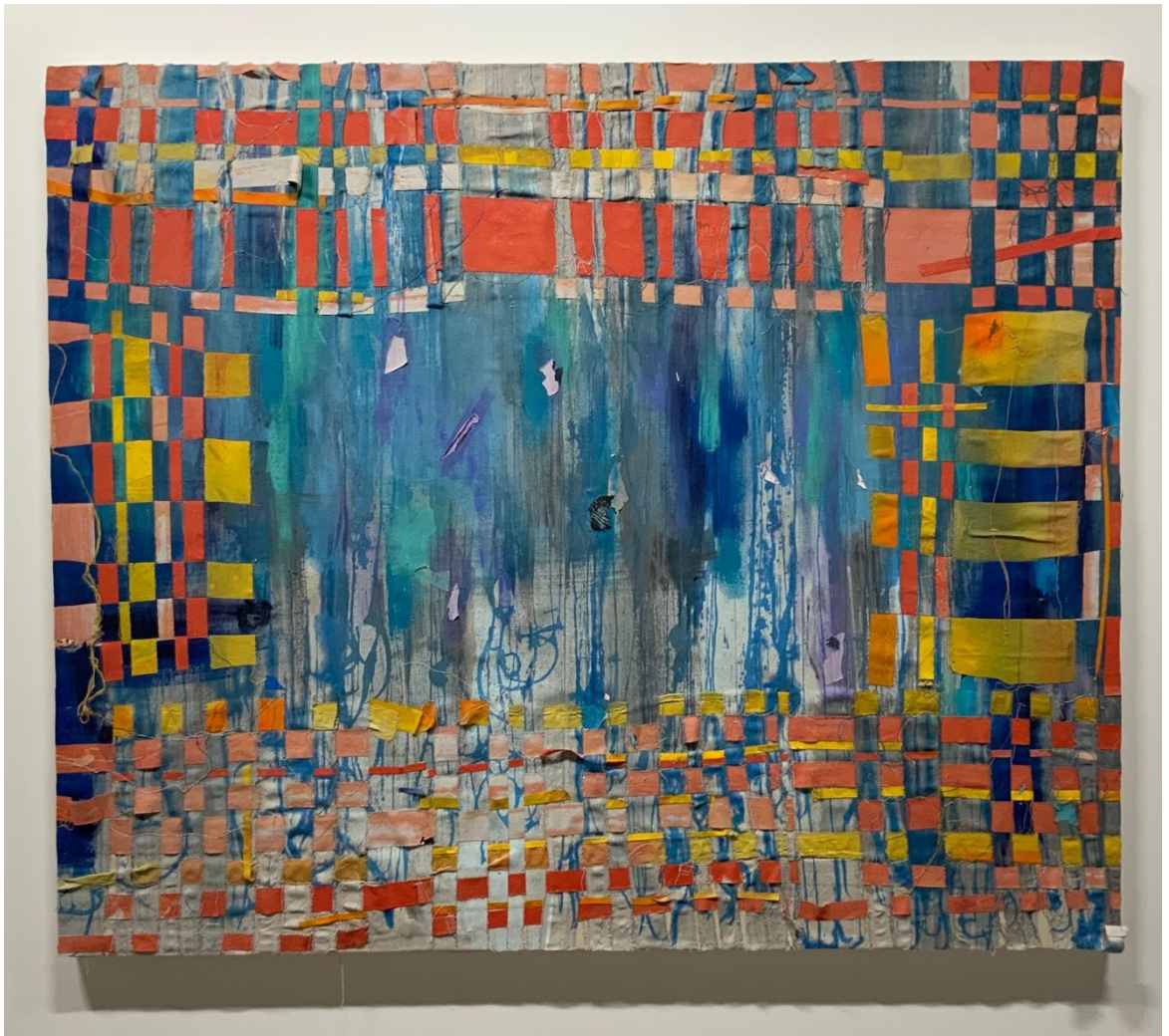


Figure 4. “I Am Me”

In my painting, “I Am Me” (fig.4), I am also challenging the messy vs clean picture plane. “Fine art” paintings are often depicted as an image within a clean rectangular or square frame. The entire piece itself is displayed on a rectangular frame, but the blue center of the painting is framed by a messy orange and yellow frame. It is like the blue portion is the painting and the orange and yellow portions are the frame, thus questioning whether art has to be presented in a clean frame. Also like myself, Gilliam isn’t making “black art”. He is a black man, making art just as I am a black woman making art. Often, I am asked, “How does your race tie into your work?” The answer: it doesn’t. Just because an artist may be black doesn’t mean that they have to make black work or be inspired by their race. I am denying that black artist has to make work that deal with black subject matter in order to be considered a good artist. I am black and an artist, not a black artist. I want to stand in the field as an artist without having to be put into a subcategory, like Gilliam.

Another key influence in my work has been the work of the quilting group Gee’s Bend. This group is made of black women in a small remote community in Alabama, in the deep south which is also my home region. One of the things I find most interesting about this group is that they became famous on accident. There was a woman in the group by the name of Annie Mae Young who made a quilt (fig. 5) in the 1960s that later, in 1998, drew the attention of art collector William Arnett. After receiving her contact information, Arnett personally went to see Young. She had almost burned the quilt in the decades since its production, using it for the practical purpose of letting the smoke from the cotton deter mosquitos. But when she saw how badly Arnett wanted the quilt, she

offered it to him for free. He insisted on paying, and wrote her a check for a few thousand dollars. She then told her group of other quilters that a “crazy white man” was paying “good money for raggedy old quilts.”¹³ Arnett then showed photos of the quilts

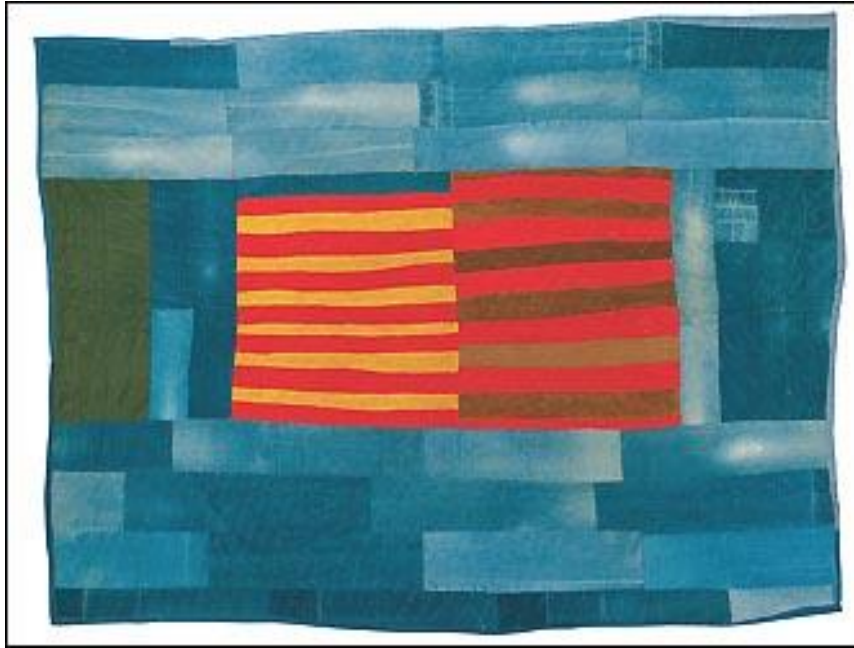


Figure 5. “Annie Mae Young’s 1976 work clothes quilt”

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/fabric-of-their-lives-132757004/>

to Peter Marzio of the Museum of Fine Arts Houston (MFAH), and was so impressed that he agreed to mount an exhibition of them in September 2002. That exhibition, *The Quilts of Gee’s Bend*, revived but also commercialized what was becoming a dying craft in Gee Bend, and raised the production of these quilts to the level of “high” or “fine art.”

Women began to come out of retirement and showed the traditions to their children and

¹³ Amei Wallach, “Fabric of Their Lives”. Smithsonian Magazine, October 2006. Online at <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/fabric-of-their-lives-132757004/>

grandchildren, in part because they realized the cultural value of their work but also because it suddenly brought in cash to their community.¹⁴

This group and their story interests me because they at first didn't view their work as "fine art"; rather it was a way of life, a cultural practice, more of a craft that served a purpose in their community. Their production of quilts followed traditional skills and patterns that had started in the early 1800s. They made quilts to keep their family warm in sheds that had no heat to drive off the cold. Some of the other members of the group spoke of making quilts from their husbands' clothes to remember them after they passed away. Others made quilts from clothes that were too small or too worn to wear. This practice of utility and craft inspires my own investigation into the historical separation of fine art and craft. My work challenges these dualities and demonstrates that these women's quilts and my own works can be both at the same time. On the one hand, quilting and weaving textiles like my own work functions as part of housekeeping and domestic duties, registering as women's work and therefore highly gendered labor. But on the other hand, the abstract patterns, creative designs, and complex compositions of the quilts also caught the attention of critics, scholars, and curators at museums of "fine art." I believe my final compositions are similarly creative and complex, using abstract composition to convey ideas without reference directly to the material world. As Vanessa Kraemer Sohan writes, "The Gee's Bend quilts defy traditional definitions of both high art and 'traditional' quilting." She continued: "Gee Bend quilt makers demonstrate the

¹⁴ Amei Wallach, "Fabric of Their Lives". Smithsonian Magazine, October 2006. Online at <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/fabric-of-their-lives-132757004/>

power of the needle as pen,” creating a story rich in meaning through their designs.¹⁵ My work similarly aims to convey deep meaning not through the pen but through the weaving of my canvas strips back into a new composition.

Another textile artist that has influenced me is Karen Rubado. In her work, she takes discarded materials, usually found in landfills, and turns them into woven pieces of art. Her reuse and repurposing of objects connects directly to my reuse of the canvas in a new way, and her choice of weaving as a technique is also related to my own use of weaving. Rubado challenges the art world by taking trash and giving it worth; my works likewise shred a work of art into something that seems like rubbish and then rebuilds it into an entirely new work. In her artist statement she writes, “The act of reconstructing refuse into art places value on the worthless, while also reintroducing it into society as something to be valued. This process not only attempts to confound a capitalist political economy’s account of value but also subverts it through an act of transformation which can cause a shift of perspective to reveal an alternative reality of things.”¹⁶ In doing this, she redefines value and worth in art. My work similarly challenges the preciousness of paint on canvas as a material whose price skyrockets with a famous artist uses it. To draw attention to the inequalities of the art world, and the often arbitrary aspects of the contemporary art market, I shred that supposed preciousness, and rebuilt it into a much messier but more honest format. [or something like this]

Rubado also says, “[This is an] investigation into the nature of objects and the appearance- disappearance- the reappearance of value.” This cycle of value—creation,

¹⁵ Vanessa Kraemer Sohan, “But a Quilt is More” Recontextualizing the Discourse(s) of the Gee’s Bend Quilts. *College English* 77, no. 4, 2015.

¹⁶ Karen Rubado, “Place/Making”. *Elam Artist*, 2017. Online at <https://elamartists.ac.nz/projects/place-making>

destruction, re-creation—is the foundation for my work too. She undermines the distinct dualities of image versus object and painting versus sculpture, as my works do as well. She transforms trash, which often has no value, into her woven work of art, which reinstates a considerable amount of value—but only because of the concept and meaning she imparts to it. My shredding and reconstruction of canvases similarly destroy supposed value only to re-create it in a new form. Rubado even takes this one step farther because woven objects are traditionally seen as functional pieces, the antithesis of painting; but Rubado’s process turns them into beautiful works of art and negates any functionality in them. Their new function is as art. Her work (fig. 6) doubly challenges the art world’s notions of value and valueless, functional object and work of art, by utilizing trash as her materials and then using traditional craft as her process, and making us think again about the old adage “one person’s trash is another person’s treasure.” We

begin to realise that these categories are constructed rather than natural and we productively question them, as I hope viewers of my work do too.



Figure 6. Karen Rubado's, *Untitled*. Online at <https://www.artache.com/karen-rubado/>

Rubado writes that she sees worth and spontaneity in weaving, “as a subtle form of opposition to the authorial powers of tradition and the expectations emanating from both craft and contemporary art conventions.”¹⁷ To her, the art world isn’t what other people say it is, it’s what she makes it. Art has no essential or fixed definition, but rather it is fluid and flexible. My work makes much the same argument in undermining any kind of fixed categories and dualities.

¹⁷ Karen Rubado, *Weaving Structural Improvisation into Contemporary Arts*. University of Auckland, 2018.

Line Dufour is still another textile artist who recently grabbed my attention with her show *Fate, Destiny and Self-Determination* (fig. 7). This exhibition includes an installation made from small weavings from people around the world, exemplifying the contemporary practice of tapestry weaving, where the artist and the weaver are the same person.¹⁸



Figure 7. “Installation Setup”. Photo from Line Dufour’s Facebook Page.

To Dufour, weaving is an exploration of what being healthy and whole is, positive production in the form of color, shape, and form. She states, “ My own great need to be creative through fiber and tapestry weaving is a vital part of who I am and what I do.”¹⁹ She also writes that through weaving, she is giving visual expression to the wide range of human emotions. Like the Gee Bend quilters, each weaving for Dufour explores memory

¹⁸ Line Dufour, “Fate, Destiny and Self-Determination”. Accessed September 30, 2020. Online at <https://www.linedufour.com/fate-destiny-self-determination>

¹⁹ Line Dufour, “Artist Statement”. The Textile and Fiber Art List. Accessed September 30, 2020. Online at tafalist.blogspot.com/2010/08/line-dufour.html

and emotion in ways that are also integral to my own work. Dufour also says, “If we grapple with our inner uncertainties, fears and uncomfortable emotions in a way that honors them, those emotions and thoughts can be transformed and we can grow and change.” This practice of art being cathartic is one of the very things that I based my weavings on. Even though Dufour’s practice doesn’t have the deconstruction aspect that my work does, it has key aspects of reconstruction. She takes weavings from people around the world and makes them into the building blocks of her complete work of art. These individual pieces were once separate and the possession of many people become something new and unified, collectively owned and shared by Dufour and all the artists she involves. Collecting small works from other craftspeople is a collaborative, community-based method, like quilting or knitting groups, and it gives a voice to those who may not have had one before. It shares their designs with a wider audience through remaking their weavings into a larger, more critically-acclaimed work of art. [cut beginning of this sentence] Dufour’s process provides a platform to the smaller voices that some people may ignore as insignificant. When all these small voices come together its like a song resonating out from a community of previously repressed, overlooked, or forgotten artists.

Dufour also explores women’s roles in art making in her other artist statement. In being a woman, she noticed things that go underappreciated in a patriarchal world. She writes, “So much of women’s labour is invisible, impermanent and unseen. Domestic work is consumed , disintegrates, dissolves, disappears, is forgotten, is invisible....so many of these hours reggraded as insignificant and inconsequential.”²⁰ She understands

²⁰ Line Dufour, “Tapestry and Textiles”. Line Dufour, September 4,2019. Online at <http://linedufourtextiles.blogspot.com>

that women in their everyday roles and as artists are not given credit for these seemingly banal works. Domestic practices like weaving, quilts, and sewing are seen as things that women should do, and because it's their "job", and this functional labor doesn't need to be celebrated. Dufour's work challenges this tired trope, and it has been inspiring to see so many other artists pushing back against the stereotypical categorizations of the art world.

Overall, all these artists reflect my approach and my concept in some way, especially in how they each worked to challenge the accepted and conventional categories of art. Mitchell challenged the presumably fixed but oppressive gender roles in the art world with her paintings, and her response was to evoke her raw and even violent emotions in her process of putting paint on canvas. I also respond to my own raw emotions in the first production of my paintings, although I then choose to shred them and rebuild them into something new. Gilliam removes his canvas from his stretcher bars and refuses to fit his paintings into the typical hung, rectangular formats. In doing so, he questions the very nature of art and painting, just as my work does not stick to the tradition paint on canvas in rectangular fixed format. The works of Gee's Bend challenged the structures of the art world by not making their works as art at all, but instead by producing useful, domestic, functional but beautiful abstract designs in the form of comfortable and sentimental quilts. It was only when the art world took notice and paid money for their objects that they became "art." This story questions the segregation of traditional craft from fine art, just as my works involve a blending of high art painting with craft weaving, showing that the supposedly fixed categories of art are in fact fluid and more inspirational because of it. Rubado deals with the true worth of art through the disappearance and reappearance of value by using trash to make her work,

just as my work draws on the destruction of presumably valuable high art that is then shredded trash, only to be remade into a new work of art, but one that reminds us of its messy, even trashy process. Lastly, Dufour deals with reconstruction and collaboration by making an installation with woven works by other artists and craftspersons from around the world. She is also dealing with women's roles in the art world, as her collaborative weavers are largely women, and she herself is a woman facing gender issues head on. My work similarly uses weaving in a complicated way to challenge gender and race stereotypes, pulling my own canvases apart and then restructuring them with a new weaving pattern that both denies and calls attention to the fact that painted canvases are themselves woven cloth. All these artist are vastly different in their approaches, but they all have helped me build the ideas and methods of my thesis.

CHAPTER 3: PROCESS

When it comes to hand-making art, Karen Rubado explains it best, “Making by hand is a dialogue where the maker is speaking and guiding the exchange but also listening and responding to the materials...”²¹ My practice creates a conversation between materials by using both painting and weaving. With weaving, I am creating my own language and using the stripes of canvas as sentences in order to tell my narrative. Without understanding how the paint and painting medium affect the canvas, weaving would not be possible. Paint that is too thick does not allow the canvas to rip, and too much medium makes the canvas stiff and unyielding. In order to bring painting and weaving together, there is a lot of preparation involved.

Before I start painting, I first plan which negative emotion or memory I want to express as a source painting and then choose colors that I associate with that memory including different tints and tones of each hue. Next, I stretch raw canvas drop cloth on the wall and staple it into place. I prefer raw canvas drop cloth over regular canvas because its thinner than canvas. It’s also coarser and is more absorbent. There are two different ways that I prep my canvas: a single color wash or matte medium. Matte medium seals the canvas but it is very flexible and doesn’t weigh down the canvas, while retaining the appearance of raw canvas. When using the matte medium, I coat the entire canvas. In doing so, the canvas is partially sealed to the wall. After allowing it to dry, I rip the canvas from the wall. This method pulls paint from the wall in patches that stick to

²¹ See the artist website of Karen Rubado at <https://elamartists.ac.nz/projects/place-making> .

the canvas, giving it random spots of wall paint. I enjoy this method because each painting takes on the residue left on the wall from the last painting and parts of the wall itself. Sealing the canvas with medium also allows it to shred with a clean edge when it comes to the weaving process. My studio wall (figure 1) shows the paint stains as well as missing portions of wall paint from the matte medium sealing process. The “conversations” that I have with an individual painting affects the wall, creating an indirect relationship with it.

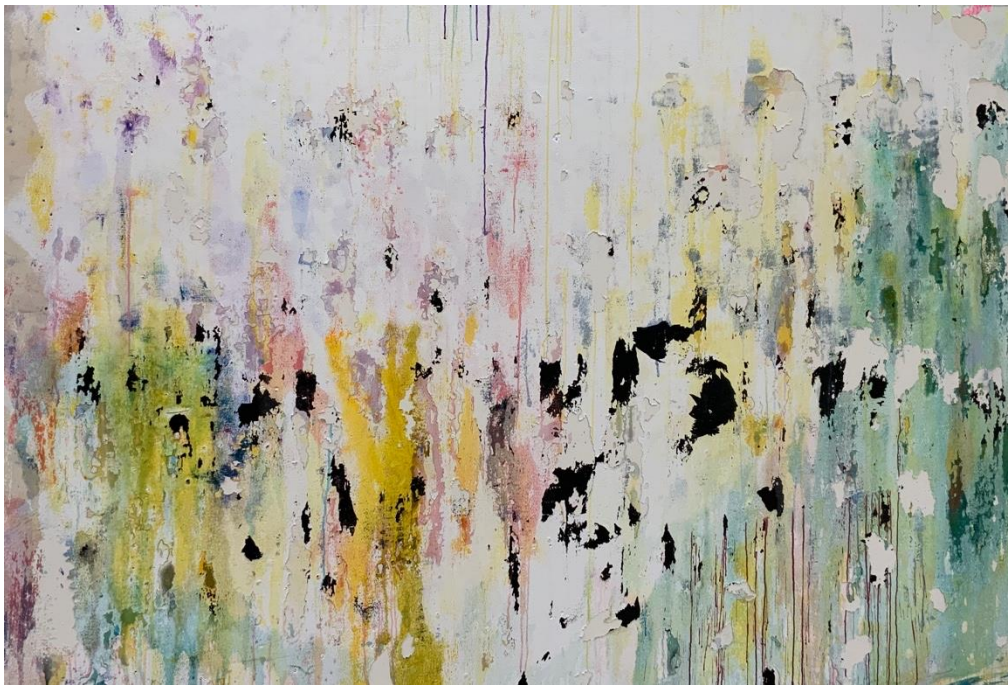


Figure 1. Studio Wall.

The second method of preparing my canvas is the single color wash. Using a wash on unprimed canvas allows me to create gradients and drips that spread throughout the canvas evenly rather than sitting on the surface of gesso or medium. Using a wash also gives the canvas a raggedy edge when torn.

The paintings with matte medium tear smoothly and seamlessly while the unsealed source painting unravels while shredded, creating loose threads and ends. Below is an image (figure 2) of the two strips of canvas showing the difference in the tearing of the two preparations beside each other. The gray strip was torn from a canvas that received a wash of paint while the orange strip was torn from a canvas that was sealed with matte medium. The orange strip has a much cleaner edge quality compared to the gray one. The contrast of edge quality creates another contrast in my work, and combining the two methods keep the woven work from being too uniform or too messy.



Figure 2 Paint Wash vs Matte Medium Prep

Once I prep the canvas, I begin to paint my source painting. My painting style is gestural and automatic. I use paint thinned with water, and this viscosity allows it to flow

after the paint is applied to the canvas. For my mark making, I use a combination of brushes, palette knives and spray bottles. The painting process acts like a counseling session between the canvas and myself. I pour out my emotions to my canvas and it absorbs them sometimes literally pouring paint from the top of the canvas and letting it travel down. My painting practice lets the paint react the way it wants rather than forcing it (Figures 3 and 4). I usually allow every layer to completely dry before adding another. I continue this process until I have made 2-4 source paintings to make into my final paintings (Figures 5 and 6).



Figure 3 Blue Abstract Painting



Figure 4 Red Abstract Painting



Figure 5 *My Protector*



Figure 6 *Chasing Away the Dark*

The next step is to shred the paintings by hand (fig 7). By taking these source paintings and physically destroying them, I am doing the opposite of what is “supposed” to be done. I am not revering the painting but destroying it. I am not treating it like a special object but rather as pieces of fabric for consumption.



Figure 7 Shredded Painting

After shredding the source paintings, I begin the weaving process. There are two different types of woven pieces in my thesis work: partially woven, and fully woven. With the partially woven object, I first select the area that I want to remain solid and tape a border around it. I then tear the remaining parts of the canvas and weave around the solid areas. The solid areas represent things that I want to stay the same or things that don't need to be discarded in the reconstruction process. They are core ideals or emotions that I don't want taken away, repaired, or added to unlike the rest of the canvas.

With the fully woven pieces, I tear each canvas into strips completely and lay down the warp part of piece. Warp are the lengthwise portions of the woven object. Once

placed, they stay stationary, becoming the foundation of the work. The strips that are woven into the warp are called weft. They are inserted under and over the warp. The weft creates a pattern on top of the warp by disappearing under and resurfacing over the foundation pieces. Figure 8 is an example of an in-progress example of a partially woven piece. The orange or yellow strips are the weft and the blue portion is the warp/foundation base. Figure 9 is an example of a fully woven piece.

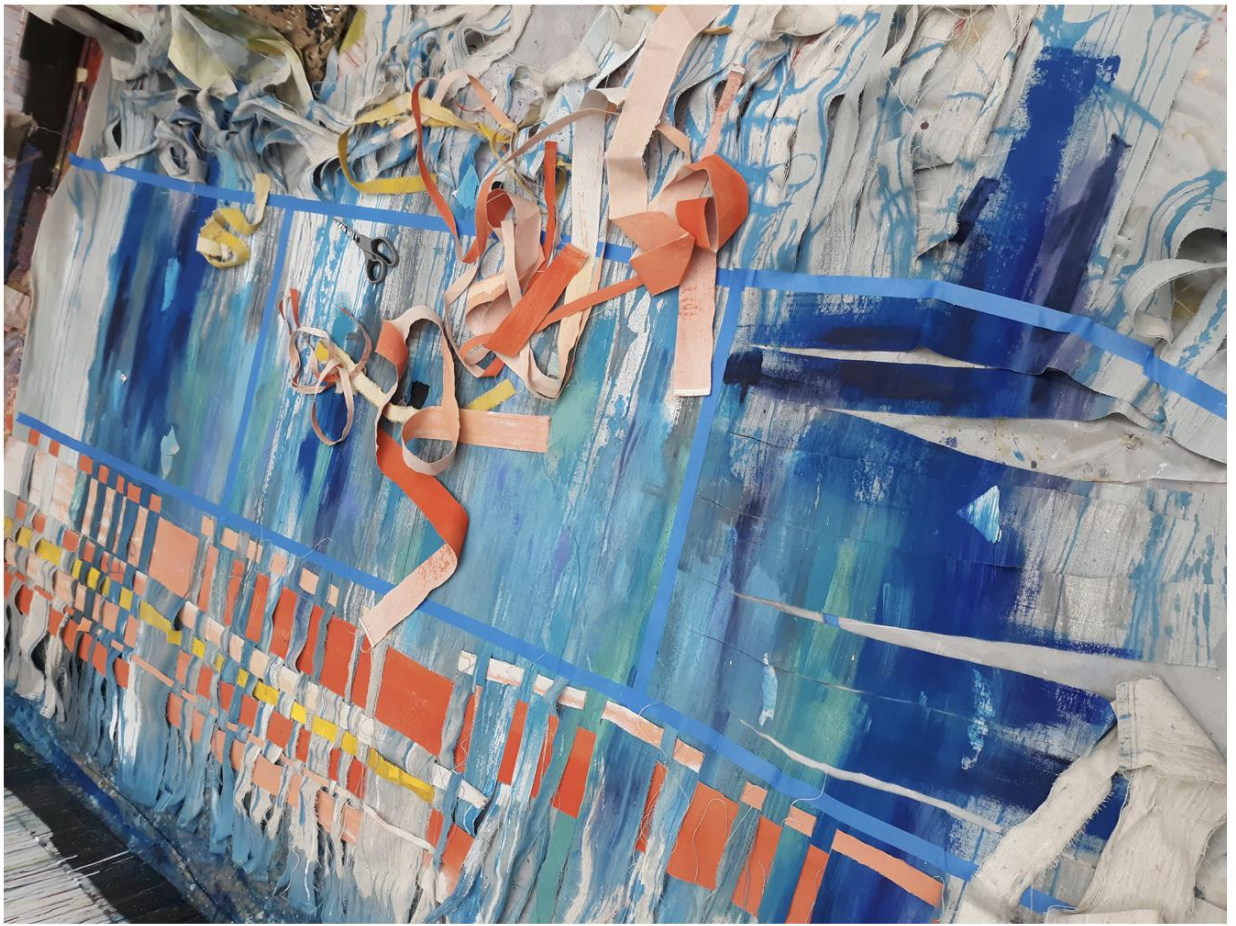


Figure 8 in progress (Partially Woven)

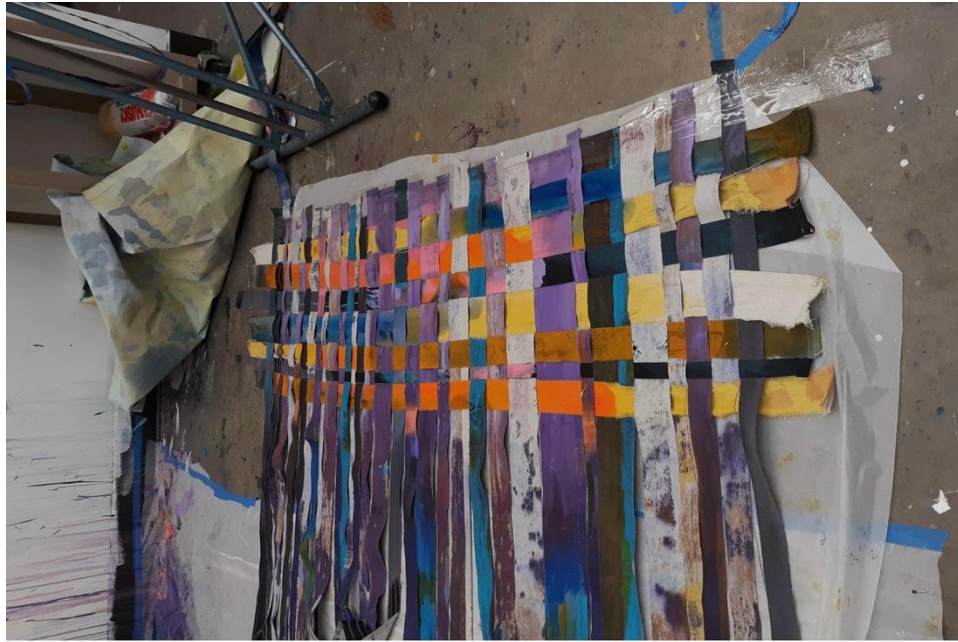


Figure 9 *Above the Storm* in progress (Fully woven)

After the pieces are completely woven, I make a mixture of three parts matte medium to one part water to seal the strips in the weaving and hold them together. While the woven piece is drying, I build my stretcher bars. I then stretch raw canvas over the bars and staple it into place and coat the canvas on the stretcher bars with a mixture of three parts matte gel and one part matte medium making a heavy body paste to adhere the weaving to the canvas. Lastly, I place the weaving on top of the stretched canvas and seal the top with another layer of matte medium and water mixture. In figure 10 is a picture of my work *Better Days* after being sealed and being left to dry. Once this sets over night, I flip it over and trim the excess canvas off, giving the finished piece a clean presentation. The clean edge represents the resolution that I talk about in my work. Just as weaving is a physical representation of rebuilding the soul, the cutting away the raggedy edge is a representation of removing lingering negativity, completing the full cycle reconstruction.

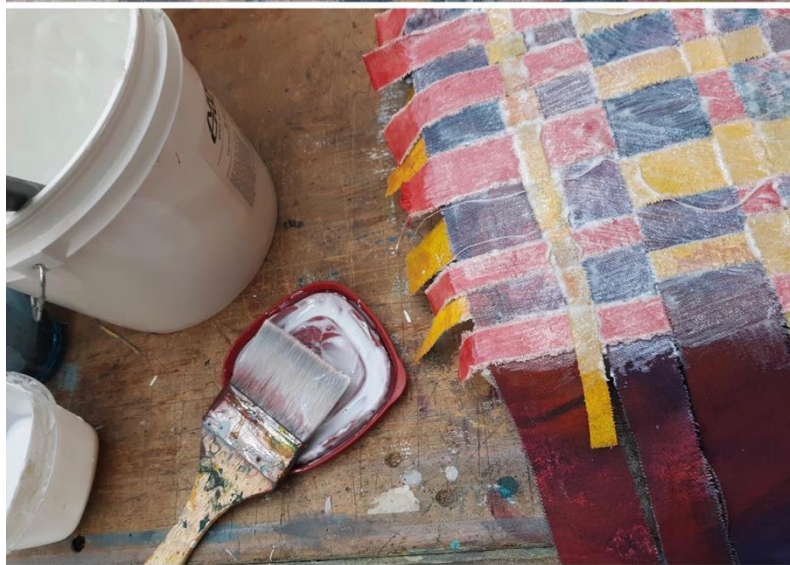


Figure 10 "Better Days" being sealed.

When I take my sample paintings and shred them, weave them into an object and, transform it back into a painting, I end the process by sealing it and cutting it to fit stretcher bars, coming full circle again from art to object back to art. By taking paintings, turning them into textile objects, and then transforming it back into a painting, I am challenging the art world's traditional definition of art. What then does this say about the importance of art and painting versus crafted object if my woven work is both and neither at the same time?

My active, almost spastic style of painting is a physical representation of the chaos behind my emotions and the struggle to make sense of them. I then take several of these source paintings and physically tear and shred them into strips by hand representing the breaking down of my emotions. After shredding them, I weave the pieces back into one solid object. The woven object illustrates the transformation of overwhelming and

chaotic emotions into an ordered and unified work that embodies strength, stability, and control.

CHAPTER 4: WORKS

In this chapter, I provide descriptions and photos of each work. In total, there are 23 works in my show: 12 final paintings, 10 fragment/mini paintings, and one installation. My final paintings are often made from strips from 2-4 different source paintings, and my fragment paintings are made up of portions leftover from the final paintings. The source paintings are the original abstract paintings that later become the strips for the finished woven paintings. These strips of source paintings are found across my finished paintings, depending on their subject and the problem being resolved. My source paintings represent emotions, and fragments of these emotions are present in several of the issues my completed works address. I tear several of these source paintings into strips of varying widths and lengths, representing the breaking down of my emotions. After shredding them, I weave the pieces back into one solid object. The final woven painting illustrates the transformation of overwhelming and chaotic emotions into an ordered and unified work that embodies strength, stability, and control.

Reunited Brothers

The first completed piece is *Reunited Brothers*. There are four abstract source paintings in this piece: one magenta, one blue, and two yellow paintings. I reference the CMYK (Cyan, magenta, yellow, key) colors of four-color printing to represent my three brothers and myself. This association becomes a metaphor for them because my brothers always seem to clash, but they work together seamlessly, much like these colors do in the print process. However, I replaced the “key” source painting, which would be black according to four-color process, with another pure yellow source painting to represent me because the first yellow source painting represents my twin brother. I choose for us to both be yellow because we are twins and are two sides of the same coin. The magenta painting symbolizes my big brother and little brother who were so close to each other. The blue drips painting are the tears that were shed by us when we were separated from him when he was 15 years old. Lastly, the gray/blue painting shows how we had less light and laughter in our lives after our big brother was gone. The act of shredding the four source paintings mimics the trauma of our separation. Then I chose to recombine them as an uneven, messy weave, which shows that even though we were reunited after eight years, the separation is still evident. This is also represented by the ragged edge quality of many of the strips in the weave. *Reunited Brothers* tells the story of the emotional dissonance by the separations of siblings and the act of reconciliation by aligning the visually dissonant colored strips of canvas into a unified composition. After

being apart for so long, we had to relearn about each other and process the pain of having to grow up apart.



Reunited Brothers
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
70" x 49"

Missing Piece

Missing Piece is about my twin brother, Nick. It is made up of 4 source paintings, two of which are from *Reunited Brothers*: the pure yellow painting, representing me, and the gray/blue painting, which still holds the same meaning of having less light and laughter in our lives. Another source painting has coarse sand mixed into the paint to symbolize the aggressive and angry nature of Nick, and he is removed from us because of his actions. The blue gradient source painting also represents our joint favorite color. The title refers to the fact that Nick is the missing piece in my life. Before he went to prison, he was my best friend, but now we are separated for years because of his crimes. Weaving the piece was me coming to terms with not having my best friend around anymore, and he is still the missing part of my life. Even though we are separated, we still contact each other as much as possible. He may be missing physically but he is still there in other ways. The strips from the blue gradient source painting represent this absence and by weaving them with paintings that represent myself and things we enjoy symbolizes my attempt to rectify his absence. This painting has a tight uniform weave to represent that we are still close despite being apart.



Missing Piece
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
15.5" x 12"

Chasing Away the Dark

Chasing Away the Dark is not only about finding a resolution to accepting my older brother's new and dangerous job but it is a commentary on how the world is today. This piece is about my big brother Shon, and is made up of two source paintings. Right before the riots breaking out around the world during the summer of 2020, Shon was promoted to lieutenant of his prison SWAT and riot police team. The red source painting represents my fears of my brother's dangerous job because the world is in a violent and crazy state currently. The blue source painting is about my mixed emotions over his promotion. When he told me about his promotion, I wanted to be happy but I was also terrified. His team could be shipped to anywhere they are needed at anytime.

The final panting is different from the others in this body of work because it intentionally represents an American flag by leaving it partially woven for the stripes and an unwoven piece where the stars would be. The inversion of color is reminiscent of the Blue Lives Matter variation of the flag, which represents my brother because he is in law enforcement. My flag looks ragged because the nation seems to be divided and falling apart. The strips used to weave the painting are not torn in a straight line, giving them an uneven line quality. There are also bundles of canvas thread used in some parts of the painting instead of full strips, giving it an unraveled look. The weave itself is also crooked and jumbled instead of straight and geometric like the traditional flag. People are killing officers and officers are killing people. Every time I turned on the news this summer, a new riot had broken out due to this violence. I represented that sense of violence and trying to overtake others through force by having blue strips in the red

woven areas and vice versa. I wanted these strips to overlap and interrupt the opposing colors area to symbolize force.

My painting addresses a complex issue: my brother feels conflict due to his job and he has told me countless times that people of every color will approach him and tell him that he can't be a black man and an officer. They ask, "Are you standing for black or blue?" People question why he would break up fights that break out at Black Lives Matter protest. People ask how can he look at himself as a black man in a police uniform. That is why my flag lacks stars. The stars on the flag symbolize the union of the fifty states, but to me, the states are not united. This is proven to me because people feel that they can go to an officer of color and question him, because of his skin color.



Chasing Away the Dark

2020

Acrylic on Canvas

60" x 84"

My Protector

My Protector is another work about my brother in law enforcement, and is made from sections of *Chasing Away the Dark*. It uses the American flag reference again to symbolize the fact he is a hero despite backlash from the people of different races. The vertical composition represents his strength and will to stand against unfair criticism from the public eyes, almost as if he is still holding his head high and working to protect all people. The bond string woven into the painting represent the unraveling of the nation because of violence and racial ignorance, but it is woven into a single painting to show his resolution to do good despite the unraveling. Even though there are things going wrong in the world, my brother and others like him are still fighting for justice. This painting also has the inversion of the flag colors reminiscent of the Blue Lives Matter Flag. It also lacks stars to show, in my opinion, the failing union of the country. This painting is woven on the right side of the painting, but on the left side, there is a solid border strip. The border strip has red drips that represent the blood my brother, other people in the force, and those involved in breaking up riots have shed during the Summer of 2020.

I chose this composition, the woven portion reminiscent of the American flag being larger than the blood border, because regardless of the danger, my brother is still fighting to protect the public.



My Protector
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
39" x 52"

About Time

About Time is about my little brother Taurus. It is made up of 4 source paintings, each with their own key color: baby blue, medium blue, cool green, and bright yellow. These were the colors of the baby blanket my mom wrapped Taurus in when he was a baby. I made the small source paintings using each color from the original blanket and wove them together. He is the youngest of my siblings. I made this painting as a resolution towards the negative feelings that I felt about Taurus getting away with mischief and receiving everything he wanted because he was the baby. I used a tight weave to represent the bond between my brother and mom, which stopped him from being punished or disciplined. Taurus would make trouble quite often when he was younger, and because he was the baby of the family, he never got reprimanded by our mom. The rest of us would have been disciplined for the same problem had we caused it, and I harbored negative emotions against my brother. It wasn't until later in life that I realized that he just needed time to grow up and mature like any other child. The baby blanket I once despised is now a symbol of my little brother's innocence instead of one of getting away with making trouble. That is why the weave is mostly straight and uniform instead of intentionally crooked.



About Time
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
16" x 13.5"

Coming up for Air

Coming up for Air is about my twin and I, and comes from two source paintings. This piece has the same yellow representing my twin and I that originally showed up in *Reunited Brothers*. The other painting was a gradient of cool colors to represent stormy days in my undergraduate program without Nick. I graduated high school a year ahead of my twin. Skipping a grade worked out for me academically, but it separated the two of us. That is represented by the stormy colors underneath the orange and yellow stripes. This piece is about me discovering myself as my own person without my twin and coming up for air from the suffocating waves of being on my own. The complementary color scheme creates tension and represents the difficulty of being separated. I wove the yellow and orange stripes over the cooler blue colors in order to create a visual representation of the push and pull of contrasting colors and the relationship with my brother. Intentionally arranging the warmer colors over the cooler colors alludes to the dominance of positivity and the resolution that was reached.



Coming up for Air
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
12.5" x 12"

Branching Off

Branching Off is about me leaving home early to go to college and starting a new life without my twin, much like *Coming Up for Air*. It is made up of two source paintings, that had colors that were reminiscent of spring: deep greens, pinks, and soft oranges. These colors were important to me because I was finally growing and “branching off” into my own person. That is shown through the dark pink lines running horizontally through the light pink strips. The lines are like fresh roots, growing and branching off to become an independent being, a fully formed self. In the spring of my life, I was finally my own person. The tight weave represents my determination to be myself and to be on my own. The line quality of the strips is rough and toothy showing the difficulty to be without my other half; but the weave counteracts that by being tightly woven without gaps.



Branching Off
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
27" x 24"

Above the Storm

Above the Storm is about my mom, and like her, it is unique. It is made up of three original source paintings that do not reoccur in any other piece. The source paintings were all an explosion of color and emotions. There are bright saturated colors overlapping the underlying desaturated and much darker colors. Growing up, we were all so angry at her for separating our big brother from us. All we understood is that she was kicking him out to go live with his dad. We felt a deep void, symbolized by the blacks and deep purples in the piece. The darker colors are like deep bruises and my color palette represents the shifting hues of a healing bruise. Bruises fade into sickly yellows, muddy orangish brown, and then to reddish pink, like the colors in this painting. The strips all have a straight and sharp edge quality representing my mom's strong personality as we were growing up. It wasn't until later that I began to understand that she did so for her own reasons and that she didn't want his disrespectful behavior to reflect on her other children. This slow realization is embodied in my use of all the colors of a healing bruise, showing the ultimate resolution of the initial wound.



Above the Storm
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
62" x 58"

Alone, Not Lonely

Alone, Not Lonely is about me finally becoming my own person, and is made up of three source paintings. This piece came after I realized that I was own person without Nick, my twin. This is reflected by the tight weave as well as the similar color palette to *Branching Off and Coming Up for Air* with the addition of blue. I was alone without him, but finally not lonely. The pinks and oranges of the piece are the more saturated versions of the pinks and oranges I used in *Branching Off*, and they represent the hope I felt in being my own person. This piece uses a lot of blue, which can represent sadness, but it is also my favorite color and it is a color of peace to me. The blue strips also have a sharp edge quality compared to the other strips in the painting. This represents the new sharp focus on myself as my own person and not simply “Twin A.”



Alone, Not Lonely
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
28" x 21"

All Grown Up

All Grown Up is about my little brother Taurus, and is made up of two small source abstract paintings. In this piece, I wanted to show a physical representation of the growth that my little brother had gone through. Under the weaving of this painting is a fluorescent orange. This bright color peeking through symbolizes the still fiery and somewhat angry nature of my brother. However, the more muted colors on top shows his maturity. The strips in this painting have a ragged, toothy, and unraveled edge quality to represent that he still has some growing to do. There are still immature moments that remind me of his younger self, but he has grown so much. He used to be that annoying little brother that terrorized me, but now he's a great friend, and the tightly woven structure of this painting alludes to that.



All Grown Up
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
10" x 8.5"

Better Days

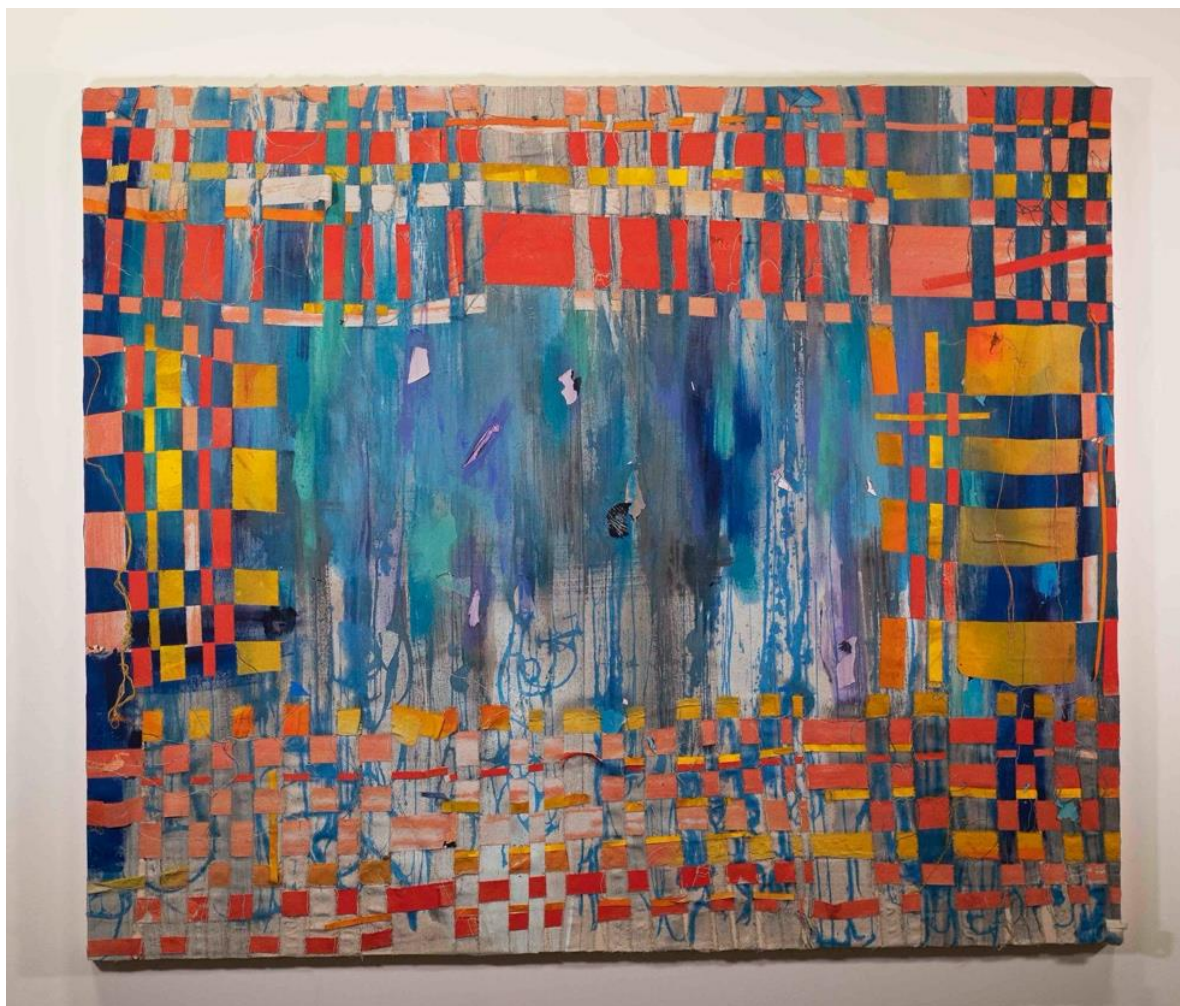
Better Days is about building new relationships with my brothers despite the rough years. The pinkish-purple and yellow strips from *Reunited Brothers* show up in this piece as well as the yellow source painting representing me and my twin. I reused these strips because after our reunion, we really saw that we needed to build new relationships instead of trying to patch the older ones. These strips were reused to retain the old memories we have, but they were combined with a new red painting to symbolize the newness we have to discover. We are all adults now who grew up in different areas, so basing our relationships on who we were as children does not work. The red represents the frustration at not understanding each other anymore, but it also shows the passion to become connected again. This piece is about us coming to terms with the fact that we are different and we learn about our adult selves instead of being stuck in the past. Our dedication to form new bonds is shown through the tight weave used in this painting. There are also loose canvas strings sealed on top of the painting. The strings are like thread we are using to sew our relationships back together.



Better Days
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
24" x 24"

I Am Me

I Am Me is obviously about me. Moving far away from home, I felt lost. I was in new place, trying to make it on my own. The culture, climate, and people were all different from Mississippi. Even the definition of Fine Art was different from what I was taught in undergrad in Alabama. After I moved to Texas, I realized that I had to rebuild myself. If I couldn't rebuild or adapt, I would be miserable. This painting is made up of three source paintings, representing the three geographic locations where I have lived. The orange and yellow strips are woven into the blue painting. The blue painting is only torn in areas that the other stripes needed to be woven through. The unwoven center represents my core self. It is the parts of myself that make up who I am. No matter what, nothing can change or take away my core beliefs. I am also challenging the messy versus clean picture plane. The entire piece itself is displayed on a rectangular frame, and the blue center of the painting is framed by a messy orange and yellow frame. It is like the blue portion is the painting and the orange and yellow portions are the frame, thus questioning whether art has to be presented in a clean frame. The chaotic outskirts represents the way many people perceive me, but at my core I am calm and center, just like this painting.



I Am Me
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
82" x 60"

Fragment Paintings:

8 Years

Missing Out

7 Months

10 Minutes

4 out of 4

Breath

Prime Time

Remember the Time

Thing 1

Thing 2

These ten mini-paintings are made up of fragments from my twelve final paintings. My process creates a lot of excess strips. I decided to make these fragment paintings because they were the cast offs of the source paintings and the final paintings. The fragments are like the small resolutions leading up to the final resolution. The fragments are also like smaller issues that came to a quick resolution rather than taking an extended period of time.



8 Years
 2020
 Acrylic on Canvas
 6" x 6"



Missing Out
 2020
 Acrylic on Canvas
 6" x 6"



7 Months
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
6" x 6"



10 Minutes
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
6" x 6"



4 Out of 4
 2020
 Acrylic on Canvas
 6" x 6"



Breath
 2020
 Acrylic on Canvas
 6" x 6"



Prime Time
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
6" x 6"



Remember the Time
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
6" x 6"



Thing 1
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
6" x 6"



Thing 2
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
6" x 6"

Discarded Negativity

Discarded Negativity is my installation of painting scraps. These are the discarded parts of every painting. This pile represents the negativity ripped away and left behind after the resolution process. Even though these pieces were not needed after reconstruction, I wanted to show that they could be beautiful in their own discarded way.



Discarded Negativity
2020
Acrylic on Canvas

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

My thesis is an investigation of the transformation of negative emotions into positive results through the act of painting and weaving. Overcoming internal turmoil of negative emotions through my creative process combines contrasting elements, practices, and concepts together that I find productive. I take my negative emotions, memories, and thoughts—especially regarding family relationships and my own identity—and turn them into gestural abstract source paintings. The active way I paint these works is a physical representation of the chaos behind my emotions and my fight to understand and tame them. I then shred the canvas of each source painting, a practice that represents the breaking down of my emotions and my own process of coping with them. After shredding the original paintings, I weave them into new works of art, ones that are at the same time paintings, textiles, and sculptures. This process also shows my challenge to traditional art categories. I reject the confinements of “pure” painting and instead embrace a mixed media practice that shows my own inability to fit into one box as an artist or a woman. The woven object illustrates the transforming of my difficult and often overwhelming emotions into a calm, ordered, and unified work that embodies stability and control—and my success in coming to terms with my selfhood.

My body of work explores several dualities: problem versus solution, deconstruction versus reconstruction, painting versus object, craft versus fine art, and masculine versus feminine. By combining the opposing dualities, I aim to transcend a traditional binary way of thinking about the art world, and life in general. Taking on these many dualities shows that combining both sides of a binary can counteract the problems

of such binary schemes and offers solutions and alternatives on fresh equal ground. For instance, my methods of deconstruction and reconstruction provide relief and catharsis, while my simultaneous engagement with both craft practices and fine art traditions creates what I hope are fresh and exciting works of art. My goal is to challenge biases inherent to these dualities, to even the playing field, and to accept myself as a complicated, creative person.

For my artistic influences, I look especially to Joan Mitchell, Sam Gilliam, Gee's Bend, Karen Rubado, and Line Dufour. These artists reflect my approach and my concept, especially in how they each worked to challenge the accepted and conventional categories of art. Mitchell challenged the oppressive gender roles in the art world with her paintings by evoking her raw and even violent emotions in her process of putting paint on canvas in an active and supposedly "masculine" way. Like Mitchell, I respond to my own raw emotions in the first production of my paintings, although I then choose to shred them and rebuild them into something new. Gilliam often removes his canvas from his stretcher bars instead of fitting his paintings into the traditional rectangular formats. In doing so, he questions the very nature of art and painting, just as my work does not stick to the traditional paint on canvas in rectangular fixed formats. The works of Gee's Bend challenged the structures of the art world by not viewing their works as art at all, but instead by producing useful, domestic, functional abstract designs in the form of sentimental quilts. It was only when the art world took notice and paid them money for their objects that they became "art". This story questions the segregation of traditional craft from fine art, just as my works involve a blending of high art painting with craft weaving. Rubado deals with the true worth of art through the disappearance and

reappearance of value by using trash to make her work, just as my work draws on the destruction of presumably valuable high art that is then shredded trash, only to be remade into a new work of art, but one that reminds us of its messy, even trashy process. And lastly, Dufour deals with reconstruction by making an installation with woven works by other artists and craftspersons from around the world. She is also dealing with women's roles in art and life, as her collaborative weavers are largely women. And she herself is a woman facing gender issues head on. My work similarly uses weaving in a complicated way to challenge gender roles by pulling my own canvases apart and then restructuring them with a new weaving pattern that both denies and calls attention to the fact that painted canvases are themselves woven cloth. All these artists are vastly different in their approaches, but they all have helped me build the ideas and methods of my thesis.

My practice creates a conversation about materials by using both painting and weaving. In the painting process, I first create my source paintings, which act like a counseling session between the canvas and myself. Presenting the problem, I pour out my emotions to my canvas and it absorbs them. These are the strips that make up the final painting. The next step is weaving, which creates my own language and uses the strips of canvas as sentences in order to tell my narrative and give a solution to the problem, whether it is a problem of identity, familial relationships, or maturity. After the woven process is complete, I seal the work onto a stretched piece of canvas, and trim the excess bits of canvas. The clean edge represents the resolution that I desire in my work. Just as weaving is a physical representation of rebuilding the self and the soul, cutting away the raggedy edge is a representation of removing lingering negativity, completing the full cycle of reconstruction.

For my MFA show, I made a considerable amount of work. There were 23 works in all: 12 final paintings, 10 fragment paintings, and one installation. The 12 final paintings are the larger scale works, and these are made up of 2-4 source paintings, which means I made approximately 30 source paintings first. The ten fragment paintings were made up of fragments from the 12 final paintings, and are like the after thoughts of the final resolution. The installation piece is made of the leftover strips from the deconstruction process. This pile represents the negativity ripped away and left behind after the resolution process.

All of these paintings, both source works and finished pieces, gave me a complex vocabulary to work from, and allowed each finished painting to hold its own narrative, including both the problem and the solution. The two techniques of painting and weaving address various dualities that intentionally I synthesize to combat damaging societal preconceptions. At the end of the day, my work is about the healing of the mind and soul. By breaking down my emotions and converting them into paintings, I am presenting the problem; however, in rebuilding the paintings into woven pieces, I offer a physical representation of coping, healing, and taking back control. This act of creation is much like alchemy, turning my negative emotions into positive and beautiful works of art that can be enjoyed by many.

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