Damaged Goods

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DAMAGED GOODS

by

DANNA MICHELLE PARKER

(Under the Direction of Christina Lemon)

ABSTRACT

Art is a form of expression. When used as a channel for emotional catharsis from trauma, it facilitates healing. Research has found that victims of childhood trauma often cannot find words to express their feelings, and are paralyzed and unable to move on with their lives after trauma. My research explores how creativity and metalsmithing have provided the tools necessary for me to construct my own method of expressing emotions, through visual representation. Repeatedly, I have made the same mistakes in life; and time and time again have worked to figure out not only why, but also how to repair the dysfunctional behaviors that led to these mistakes. My intent here, and in my work, has been to document how art has helped me along this journey towards healing. I will discuss how creating each piece of artwork has made it possible for me to face my fears and emotions directly, allowing me to overcome my personal obstacles and ultimately live a happier life. I will also discuss how trauma affects a person’s ability to function and grow, and why it is helpful to engage in an empowered re-experiencing of the trauma in order to move forward.

INDEX WORDS: Metalsmithing, Small Metals, Sculpture, Childhood Trauma, Abuse, Art as Therapy, Trauma, Mental Health, Georgia Southern University, Thesis, MFA
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by

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DAMAGED GOODS

by

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DEDICATION

This written documentation and visual images of my personal healing are dedicated to my mother. She ignited my artistic talent and was a wonderful teacher. She has always supported my artistic endeavors and my decision to abandon my business career in order to pursue the MFA degree. I feel that creating this body of work has not only helped me along my path of healing, but has also helped to heal our relationship as well. I know this has been extremely difficult for her, and I am so proud not only of her, but of what our friendship has become. Thanks Mom! Your approval and support mean so much to me!
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To Christina Lemon for teaching me the necessary skills to become a metalsmith, and for pushing me to create works of art which, ten years ago, I would have never imagined I could make. She taught me how to tell stories beautifully without being too direct; sometimes less is more.

To Rebecca Murray, a clinical psychiatrist, who for the last ten years has helped me overcome personal struggles. She has eagerly welcomed my artwork as a part of my treatment and has patiently guided me through the intense emotional catharsis. I have developed a healthier and happier life and I owe so much of who I am today to her and her caring approach to therapy.

To all of the artists who have sought emotional release and reparation through visual expression. Their work has touched the lives of many and gives voice to those who have not yet chosen to speak. When Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote about the spirit of man, he said, “By descending down into the depths of the soul, and primarily by a painful acquisition of many manual skills, the artist attains the power of awakening other souls.”

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Throughout their lives, people experience events that leave imprints in their memories. These events can range from good to bad: a daughter graduating college or a death in the family. For some, an event such as being abused mentally, physically, or verbally can traumatically affect them for the rest of their lives. Trauma can occur throughout their life span, from childhood to adulthood. Childhood trauma can result from a disruption in a child’s sense of safety and security, including, but not limited to: bullying, serious illness, separation from a parent, domestic violence, neglect, or sexual, physical, or verbal abuse. Adulthood trauma can stem from an accident, intensive surgery, cancer, rape, war, and/or other similar experiences. Those who have experienced trauma need to find ways to cope with the disruption in their lives. Treatment options may include: counseling, seeking a trauma therapist, self-help techniques, such as books, videos, or art therapy. Those who choose not to use healthy coping methods run the risk of becoming alcoholics, drug addicts, developing post-traumatic stress disorder, becoming emotionally numb and disconnected toward others, being severely depressed, or possibly becoming suicidal. There are several artists, including myself, who have had negative experiences impact our lives. Creativity became our way of expressing the unspeakable.

The reason traumatic memories resurface repetitively and are so troublesome is their lack of integration with other memories; they are stagnant with no progression or evolution in time - they just continue to be invasive repetitions. Sigmund Freud expressed that the key to healing from trauma is the transformation of the dissociated
traumatic material into a verbal narrative to be integrated with other memories in one’s life story, allowing the personal identity to become continuous and complete again (Reviere 15). The recounting of childhood memories may allow the survivor to replace irrational, childhood perspectives of and reactions to the trauma with adult perspectives, thereby divesting them of power. Further, the painful emotions associated with memories can be reduced and better tolerated and modulated over time (Reviere 10). In addition, facing such memories in adulthood can aid in removal of guilt, redirection of responsibility to other than self, and mastery of crippling fears associated with the trauma. Mastery of such fears will often enable a reduction in unmanageable and continuous physiological arousal and somatic difficulties experienced by many trauma survivors (Reviere 113).

Through creating art one can reorganize the pieces of traumatic memory, formulating a coherent narrative. Once the narrative is created, understanding of the event can begin, and emotional recovery can occur. Healing is a continual process and it takes ongoing hard work and devotion. When we embark on the healing journey we move from anger, pain, and other unproductive emotions, to more self-sustaining ones such as acceptance, understanding, empathy, and the realization of our incredible personal strength.
CHAPTER 2

TRAUMA

What is Trauma?

Several factors contribute to a traumatic event, including the type, its length, age of the victim at the time the trauma occurred, and how the person reacts to the situation. There are two aspects of trauma: pathology and psychiatry. Pathologically, the body endures a shock or wound produced by a sudden physical injury, as from violence or an accident, such as artist Frida Kahlo’s bus accident. The condition produced from the violence or accident is referred to as traumatism. Physical symptoms or reactions can include insomnia, nightmares, being easily startled, physical aches and pains, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, edginess and agitation, muscle tension, and a racing heartbeat. Frida Kahlo endured devastating physical injuries; among many crushed bones, her spinal column was broken in three places, her pelvis was broken, and a steel rod pierced the left side of her abdomen and exited through her vagina.

In psychiatric terms, trauma is an experience that produces psychological injury or pain. The psychological trauma results from extraordinarily stressful events that shatter one’s sense of security, making one feel helpless and vulnerable. Symptoms such as anger, irritability, mood swings, guilt, shame, self-blame, feeling sad or hopeless, confusion, anxiety and fear, withdrawing from others, shock, denial, or disbelief may result from a psychological trauma. Kaethe Kollwitz, printmaker, painter, and sculptor, wanted to help relieve other’s pain along with her own. She conveyed a wide range of strong emotions in her imagery, her personal grief, and the innate compassion she felt for the struggles of others. “It is my duty to voice the sufferings of men, the never-ending
sufferings heaped mountain-high” (Kollwitz 96). Kollwitz was able to relay the fear,
grief, and pain of mothers in wartime, having witnessed and experienced loss of loved
ones during both World Wars. In her paintings she expressed the horrific psychological
pain she and other women had endured with exceptional beauty and strength. Kollwitz
wanted to “exert influence in these times when human beings are so perplexed and in
need of help” (Kollwitz 104).

**Unresolved Trauma**

Trauma that occurs in childhood and is still evident in adulthood is unresolved
trauma. Signs include intrusive thoughts, recurring images, memories, flashbacks,
nightmares, out-of-control behavior, self-injurious behavior, an inability to tolerate
extreme emotions or conflicts, distorted patterns of thought, intense self-blame, feelings
of guilt and unworthiness, difficulty maintaining a healthy sense of self or healthy
relationships, several forms of dissociation, or thoughts of suicide. Often those with
unresolved trauma run the risk of symptoms resurfacing later in life no matter how hard
they try to forget. Trauma acknowledged or not, has the potential to negatively impact
every aspect of one’s life.

In my case, when I was seventeen years old, I thought when I moved away from
home the bad memories could be left behind and I could start a fresh new life.
Unfortunately, I found this to be untrue. Every aspect of my life was being ruled by the
past, and not always for the better. Each decision I made was unknowingly based on past
experiences. I experimented with many different coping mechanisms, trying to avoid the
horrible flashbacks, feelings of isolation, and constant fears of falling asleep. As I grew
older and started realizing the coping mechanisms were not working, I started trying to
deal with the issues in healthier, creative outlets. In graduate school I began to explore
and express these memories with small sculptures. The work was so cathartic and
healing that I created a whole body of work which eventually turned into my thesis
subject and exhibition. One piece of work, *Sleep Tight*, Fig 25, is a small bedroom scene
depicting many of these haunting issues. To this day, glimpses of images in my mind turn
into large, lurking silhouettes. I often integrate the silhouette into my small domestic
settings. Silhouettes are confrontational, yet evasive, and lack real features. Silhouettes
create a presence and help set a mood, but are disconnected because there is no identity.
I best express emotions of trauma through small scenes where only a few seemingly
innocent elements are brought together to create beautiful, yet thought provoking and
disturbing narratives. My intention through providing only a few symbolic elements is to
allow the viewer his own interpretation of each piece, thus creating his own special
connection to it. This opens the door for the viewer to possibly tap into emotions they
have yet to face.
CHAPTER 3
TRAUMA AND THE BRAIN

**Fight or Flight Response**

The sudden shock of trauma can throw the body and mind off balance. When the body’s state of normalcy is interrupted, it will “respond with compensatory responses in order to protect and repair itself and to restore balance” (Waites 22). One way the body does this is by going into a state of fight or flight response mechanism, in which “the body’s metabolic processes distribute energy optimally to those bodily systems involved in defense” (Waites 22). Trauma reactions are affected by how the brain’s fight or flight mechanisms are stimulated. Therefore, “if the energy used to mobilize oneself in the face of personal threat is not utilized in a productive way, then the energy is absorbed in the nervous system.” From here the energy “may resurface as a disruption or impairment in normal functioning”. “An individual could potentially develop noncompliant behavior, psychological numbness, and cognitive disorders” (Malchiodi, Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children 7). These disorders can disrupt a person’s developmental processes, such as the process of integrating parts of the self and gaining control over emotional responses. These disorders include, but are not limited to: dementia, attention deficit disorder, and dyslexia.

**Fight or Flight Response: Repeated Trauma**

In the case of repeated trauma, the body becomes exceptionally sensitive to any form of stimulus. In other words, the body loses the ability to differentiate extreme danger from a mild stressor. The body eventually starts to react as though every stressor is a crisis. Even simple everyday challenges make small, moderate stimuli become
aggravating and frightening. People can lose the ability to enjoy the stimulus of learning something new, because everything is approached with over-arousal (Waites 27). A person may lose the desire to plan for the future from fear of re-experiencing familiar damaging stimuli. In my own life, I found myself avoiding new and unfamiliar situations. I did not look forward to or plan for the future. If I made it to the future, it was most likely not going to be a good one, so why plan for it? Also, the idea of changing a job to advance my future was not out of the question however, leaving the known for the unknown was not a high priority. The thought of starting a relationship and learning someone new was terrifying as well, not to mention the thought of that person getting to know the “real me.” My life was a prime example of just “going through the motions.”

The constant state of hypersensitivity takes its toll on the body, and defense mechanisms may become pathologically altered in ways that subsequently interfere with normal, everyday learning and coping (Waites 24). The body’s internal warning system, which should be a survival mechanism, has gone awry and is now a problem rather than a solution (Waites 7). Individuals can start to feel as though they are no longer in control of their responses. Over time, this can lead to negative self-appraisal. For me, every incident turned into a crisis. There was no median; everything was a large ordeal. This drama created a nuisance for other people, and it drew unwanted attention. I began to feel as though my existence was one big sore that would never heal. Eventually, I withdrew from other people, dragging my self-esteem even lower. *Will I Ever Heal?*, Fig. 27, is largely based on this experience. Often I wonder if I will ever learn to deal with life more effectively or ever have fulfilling interpersonal relationships? In Fig. 27,
the needle and thread are literal symbols because they are used to physically close a wound, and metaphorically for closing the psychological wound, thus allowing the healing process to begin.

**Explicit/Implicit Memory**

The brain stores information with two different types of memory: explicit and implicit. Explicit memory “allows processing of information, reasoning, and meaning, helping individuals define and make sense of experiences” (Malchiodi, Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children 9-10). In other words, explicit memory is a conscious recollection such as remembering what day one has class. Implicit memory is sensory and emotional; it is an unconscious form of memory. This type of memory is related to the body’s learned memories; there is no language. In essence, the senses are the memories; “what we see, hear, smell, touch, and taste become the implicit containers of that experience” (Malchiodi, Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children 10). In implicit memory, previous experiences aid in the enactment of a task without conscious awareness, such as tying a shoe. These different types of memories stem from one another. For example, an individual remembering a specific art lesson is an explicit memory, while an improved artistic skill as a result of the art lesson is an implicit memory. When dealing with trauma, according to Rothschild, a leading psychotherapist and traumatic stress specialist, “the problem occurs when one’s implicit memory of trauma is excluded from explicit storage;” thus, the individual may not have access to the context in which the emotions occurred (Rothschild). This is where using art helps to bring thoughts and feelings together through imagery. One can create artwork expressing the traumatic imagery and this in turn helps to deal with the associated feelings that arise.
during the creation process. Behavioral psychology has established that “memories determine the interpretation of the present even when they are not conscious” (Michaesz 243). Psychiatrist Leonore Terr states, “trauma does not ordinarily get better by itself, it burrows deep down further and further under the child’s defenses and coping strategies” (293). In other words, trauma must be dealt with before it consumes a person. Trauma will not go away on its own. Dr. Dori Laub, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine, states, “None find peace in silence, even when it is their choice to remain silent” (Laub 64).

Before I found catharsis in my artwork, my life had reached a point where not dealing with the issues was no longer an option. I was restless from having so many bottled up feelings. The pains, memories, and fears were haunting me constantly, resulting in the use of unhealthy coping mechanisms. Realizing my life was not going in the right direction I began seeing a psychiatrist, and along the way enrolled in a jewelry class where I found a way to express myself artistically. I had an innate need to release my emotions through art, but my many attempts at painting, drawing, ceramics, etc never completely created the release desperately needed. I quickly found metal to be the medium that would allow me to articulate difficult emotions. The techniques involved in manipulating metal through bending, twisting, scoring, and hammering appealed strongly to my senses. The physicality of forcibly manipulating the material was a desirable attribute. Soldering metal added a new exciting dimension to the manipulation process. I am somewhat of a pyromaniac, and take pleasure in the way metal melts and can be joined permanently into new forms. Being able to control the amount of heat and the
flow of solder at just the right time requires skill; there is much enjoyment being in control of such a dangerous process.

Making three-dimensional objects also accesses the mechanical aspects of my thinking; I love disassembling and reassembling items. Creating pieces that can be worn also appeals to me. Jewelry is a very personal aspect of bodily adornment, which is why I feel great pride and a sense of accomplishment when I see someone wearing a piece of artwork I made. There is an emotional connection to each piece, because they are created and caressed with my own hands. They are like my children; they each carry a piece of me.

Early in my healing process while I found writing to be exceptionally cathartic I felt I needed more of an emotional outlet because words were difficult to articulate; words could not explain the level of pain and despair felt. Visual expression on the other hand was a much better method for me to convey my feelings. Writing, when employed along with the visual elements, facilitates understanding and is a useful journal for reflecting to see how far I have come and often sparks ideas for new pieces and wonderful titles for the existing pieces. Writing, just like being visually creative, allows me to distance myself from the traumatic memories while at the same time confronting them.

The two sculptures that provided the most healing were Ghost from the Past, Fig. 23, and Sleep Tight, Fig. 25. The emotions were so overwhelming and even crippling at times. They were the first two pieces: the painful and haunting emotions had been building up for so many years and there was so much to be expressed.
CHAPTER 4
NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF UNRESOLVED TRAUMA

Some people never acknowledge they have difficulty functioning in life after a traumatic experience. Traumatized people who cannot spontaneously dissociate, and sometimes those who can, attempt to produce similar or heightened numbing effects by using alcohol and/or narcotics. From using these substances a person can experience an altered state of the mind that helps keep the traumatic experience walled off from ordinary consciousness, preventing the integration necessary for healing. However, occasionally during these altered states a fragment of memory will emerge threatening their current state of mind (Herman 45). When this happens some people will attempt to create a sense of safety and control. This is done in order to avoid exposure to stimuli that remind them of their traumatic experience, thus interfering with anticipation and planning for the future (Herman 47). Many people who resort to drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms do not recognize their symptoms as a developing issue because doing so may bring back the pain, terror, and rage. These people are in denial and will go to great lengths to keep the trauma from resurfacing. In avoiding any situations reminiscent of the past trauma, traumatized people deprive themselves of new opportunities for successful coping. People are advised to seek a healthy lifestyle in order to deal with their experience such as using art as therapy. In trauma treatment it is not the verbal account of the event that is important, but the non-verbal memory of the fragmented sensory and emotional elements of the traumatic experience. Art therapy has long been recognized as a method that constitutes a primary process that taps into the non-verbal realm of imagery. Successful art therapy can serve to integrate right and left brain
functions that, in turn, help integrate experiences, especially on a non-verbal level. However, those who do not deal with their trauma run the risk of developing other problems besides alcoholism and substance abuse, such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, or other unhealthy habits. Even though they are trying to defend themselves against exposure to overwhelming emotional states, they pay a high price for that protection. They narrow and deplete the quality of life and ultimately perpetuate the effects of the traumatic event (Herman 47). They may begin to feel as though they are simply going through the motions of every day, as if they are observing life from a great distance.

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is seen as one of the most severe forms of emotional and psychological trauma. The criterion for the diagnosis of PTSD in the American Psychiatric Association’s reference, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition*: the victim has to have “characteristic” symptoms after “an extreme traumatic stressor involving direct personal experience” where the victim has “intense fear, helplessness, or horror” (APA). In other words, if a response to trauma persists in an exaggerated state long after the actual event, the victim can have post-traumatic stress disorder (Curtis 134-135). Several symptoms of PTSD include: hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction. Hyperarousal is the constant expectation of danger. The victim sleeps poorly, and is easily startled and irritated; the physiology of his or her nervous system has actually been altered. Intrusion is the permanent imprint of the traumatic experience. The victim “relives” the experience as though it is continuously happening through intrusive recollections, dreams, and sometimes
hallucinations. Constriction is numbing, giving up control, or giving up feeling any emotions. The victim’s consciousness changes to enable escape from the dire situation. The persistence of this hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction, rather than the intrinsic experience, “drives” the psychological and physiological dimensions of PTSD (Kolk 6). Other symptoms of PTSD according to APA, DSM-IV include: a loss of ability to enjoy previously enjoyed activities, constricted affect, a foreshortened sense of the future, somatic complaints, fear of repeated trauma, and possible “psychic numbness” after the trauma (Malchiodi, Breaking the Silence: Art Therapy with Children from Violent Homes 43). Also, some victims who sense pressure or pain in their stomach or other parts of their bodies during traumatic events may feel these same sensations when everyday stresses or incidents evoke connected emotions. Chronic trauma can cause permanently altered hormonal biochemistry (Curtis 135). Again, the effects of PTSD’s symptoms vary from victim to victim and the treatment for the disorder varies as well.

One method of treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder is art as therapy. Researchers feel that information absorbed through a patient’s senses such as smells, sounds, physical sensations, intense feelings, and emotions constitute the most powerful input (Terr 133). A patient can express these sensory impressions through activities involving drawing, painting, or sculpting with clay. Using art is the most effective way for some patients to initially recall and convey what happened during their traumatic experience, because they cannot verbalize the trauma. Also, art can allow them to recognize how the traumatic experience has affected them. In 2005, the American Art Therapy Association (AATA) Research Committee handed out a survey to registered art therapists who treat clients with PTSD. The survey mentioned seven different
therapeutic mechanisms of art therapy: reconsolidation of memories, externalization, progressive exposure, reduction of arousal, improved self-esteem, reactivation of positive emotion, and enhancement of emotional self-efficacy (Collie). The survey found that art therapy helped reduce the symptoms of PTSD.

**Alcoholism**

Alcoholism is characterized by compulsive and uncontrolled consumption of alcoholic beverages at a level that interferes with physical and mental health, as well as social, family, or job responsibilities. According to the APA:

A DSM-IV diagnosis of alcohol abuse is made when an individual’s pattern of alcohol use is maladaptive, as indicated by at least one of the following symptoms within a 12-month period: recurrent alcohol use that results in not being able to fulfill major role obligations, recurrent use in physically hazardous situations (e.g., drunk driving), recurrent alcohol related legal problems, or continued use despite persistent social problems, occupational problems, or both caused or exacerbated by alcohol’s effects (Stewart 84).

Alcohol affects the central nervous system as a depressant, which leads to anxiety, inhibitions, tension, and a decrease in activity (Nazario). Symptoms of alcohol usage include: slurred speech, lack of coordination, decreased attention span, and impaired judgment. Symptoms of alcoholism are abdominal pain, confusion, drinking alone, making excuses to drink, nausea, vomiting, neglecting to eat, numbness, tingling, or need for daily or regular alcohol use to function. Artists who have suffered from alcoholism include Jackson Pollock and Vincent Van Gogh. Pollock, a very process-oriented abstract painter, suffered from alcoholism along with being bi-polar. He died at age forty-four from a single-car, alcohol related accident (The Global Arts Group, LLC). Van Gogh, an impressionist painter who suffered from malnutrition, depression, and possible mental disorders, was a heavy absinthe drinker. Van Gogh used his creative
efforts to overcome his helplessness. For him art was a means of gaining control as well as a means of expressing emotions. His only sense of accomplishment in life was the mastery of expressing his feelings on canvas. His artistic style was not appreciated while he was alive; therefore, he lived in poverty. Due to the lack of sales of his artwork Vincent Van Gogh became extremely depressed. At the age of thirty-seven, he walked into a field and shot himself in the chest with a revolver (Stucke). In my early twenties I too used alcohol as a means to avoid my trauma. At that point in my life I did not want to live, however, I had no desire to harm myself intentionally. Every day was a battle; alcohol felt like my saving grace, the tonic that could numb me.

**Drug Dependency**

Drug addiction is the compulsive use of a substance despite the consequences or negative effects. Three categories of drugs are opiates and narcotics, central nervous system stimulants, and hallucinogens. Opiates and narcotics are substances such as heroin, opium, codeine, morphine, Demerol, and other similar drugs. Symptoms of usage include: needle marks on the skin, scars, rapid heart rate, small pupils, coma, and even death due to overdose. Central nervous system stimulants are drugs such as cocaine. Symptoms of usage include: exaggerated feelings of well-being or euphoria, dilated pupils, fast heart rate, or restlessness and hyperactivity. On the other hand, hallucinogens are substances similar to LSD. Those using LSD may experience anxiety, hallucinations, paranoid delusions, blurred vision, dilated pupils, or tremors. Related factors that may cause drug addiction can be depression, trying to self treat a mental illness, the person's genes, the affect of the drug, peer pressure, emotional distress, anxiety, depression, and environmental stress. Researchers have found at least half of those who become addicted
have depression, attention deficit disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or other mental health problems. Jean-Michel Basquiat, a neo-expressionist painter, was known for his mixed media of painting, drawing, and collage onto a single canvas. His work, *Catharsis*, from 1983 is a collection of images and thoughts resulting from trauma that occurred at the age of seven. He was hit by a car and suffered a broken arm and the removal of his spleen. Basquiat employed riveting verbal and graphic images in this piece, even referencing suicide. After studying this painting, one would infer that he was still being haunted by the event and possibly suffered from PTSD. He later developed an addiction for heroine and died of an overdose at the age of twenty-seven (Live Auctioneers).

Another person who was known to use drugs was Sigmund Freud. He was a user and proponent of cocaine as a stimulant as well an analgesic. He narrowly missed out on obtaining scientific priority for discovering its anesthetic properties (Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia). Some critics have suggested most of Freud’s psychoanalytical theory was a byproduct of his cocaine use.

**Anxiety**

Anxiety is a major system of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as described in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, third edition (Waites 11). Anxiety disorders illustrate what happens when the fight or flight response goes haywire due to over stimulation. The distress caused from anxiety can interfere with a person’s ability to lead a normal life. Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is distinguished by excessive, exaggerated anxiety and worry over day to day events with no apparent reason to worry. Symptoms of GAD include: excessive,
ongoing worry and tension, unrealistic view of problems, edginess, irritability, muscle
tension, sweating, headaches, difficulty concentrating, nausea, tiredness, trembling, being
easily startled, and having trouble falling asleep, or staying asleep. The symptoms can
grow to be so uncomfortable that the afflicted person becomes almost as terrified of the
symptoms themselves as of the original precipitating stimulus. These disorders are not
just found in adults and are quite common. One group found to suffer from anxiety is
sexually abused children (Pretorius 63). GAD can be influenced by genetics, but
environmental stresses such as trauma, death of someone close, major changes in life, i.e.
divorce or job changes, are more common triggers. Edvard Munch portrayed his
everyday existence with anxiety in Scream, 1893. He stated that “my afflictions belong
to me and my art – they have become one with me. Without illness and anxiety, I would
have been a rudderless ship” (Warick).

Treatment for GAD most often includes: art therapy, a combination of
medication, and/or cognitive-behavioral therapy. Cognitive behavioral therapy is a
method that allows the patient to recognize and change thought patterns and behaviors
that lead to anxious feelings; and redirects distorted thinking by helping the subject look
at worries more realistically. On the other hand art therapy appears to be able to reduce
the release of tension while simultaneously minimizing anxiety and depression levels
(Pretorius 64, 70). Also, art therapy tends to be seen as the most successful alternative
therapy for children due their inability to verbalize emotions and thoughts generated by
abuse due to feeling overwhelmed and being intimidated (Pretorius 64). A study was
conducted “to evaluate a group art therapy intervention designed by the authors aimed at
reducing depression, anxiety, sexual trauma and low self-esteem among twenty-five
sexually abused girls aged eight - eleven years” (Pretorius 63). Pretorius, Gertie, and Natascha Pfeifer concluded this group art therapy program may improve symptoms of depression and anxiety.

**Depression**

Depression is a condition of general emotional dejection and withdrawal. It is sadness greater and more prolonged than that warranted by any objective reason (Nazario). In psychiatric terms, when a person’s depression becomes abnormal due to no obvious environmental cause or when his or her reaction to a traumatic event is more intense or prolonged than what would be generally expected, it is considered severe depression. This severe depression can disrupt one’s life, appetite, sleep, work, and even relationships. Symptoms may include constant feelings of sadness, irritability, or tension, decreased interest or pleasure in usual activities or hobbies, loss of energy, fatigue, significant weight loss or weight gain, difficulty sleeping, early morning awakening, or sleeping too much, restlessness, inability to make decisions or concentrate, feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, guilt, or even thoughts of suicide or death. Most of the time depression results from a combination of these symptoms relating to the physical changes in the brain, which could be a result of an imbalance of chemicals. An example of an artist who had suffered from severe depression was Van Gogh, who in the end took his own life. Depression may be caused by trauma, stress, physical conditions, pessimistic personality, family history, or other psychological disorders such as anxiety disorders, eating disorders, schizophrenia, and substance abuse. Methods for treating depression include antidepressant medications, herbs, supplements, cognitive behavioral therapy, interpersonal therapy, and problem-solving therapy.
Depression is something I have always battled. It has even been debilitating at times, which is why I began seeing a psychiatrist in 1991. I had no idea my past had anything to do with abuse. I was angry when the psychiatrist started asking about my relationship with my parents and step-parents as a child. It quickly became apparent that she was on to something when I began to dissociate while trying to answer the questions.

In cognitive behavioral therapy, the therapist helps the patient take an individual role regarding depression. This allows the person to examine the way he or she thinks about depression. Interpersonal therapy concentrates on the patient’s relationship with other people and how that relationship affects him or her. Also, the therapist will help identify unhealthy behaviors so the patient can change them and live a better lifestyle. On the other hand, problem-solving therapy is used to point out specific problems a patient is currently facing, and help find solutions to those problems. Cognitive therapy is a form of therapy I have experienced that helped me deal with the learned dysfunctional ways of dealing with my situation. This form of therapy was extremely helpful because it taught me not to internalize every little problem as being my fault along with learning I am not “bad” simply because a problem arose.

**Repetition**

Researchers have connected certain repetitive behaviors to trauma. These forms of repetition can be manifested as repetitive nightmares and flashbacks; the rhythm and repetition of violence inherent in chronic trauma; the repetition of moments of fear, rage, pain, control, and lack of control; and the repeated future trauma likely to befall a victim of childhood experiences. Repetitious behaviors some people utilize to deal with their traumatic experiences include: dissociation, splitting into multiple personalities, super-
alertness, self-mutilation, and compartmentalization. Trauma victims will engage in repetitive behavior to escape or gain control of reality. Freud described what he called “traumatic neurosis” after observing that people who had experienced war and other “painful events” suffered from repetitive nightmares and “reenactments.” Victims appeared to have no control over these “intrusions,” which would repeat themselves over and over (Freud 32). Miller suggests that victims who repeatedly hurt themselves through self-mutilation may be recreating their experiences of trauma over and over. A few actresses that are known to have cut themselves are Drew Barrymore, Angelina Jolie, Christina Ricci, and Courtney Love. They have each said cutting made them feel better, or just simply made them feel anything at all (Self-Injury.net). Terr states “that in children, repetition itself is a clear indicator trauma has occurred, and that the repetitive imagery of children indicates their need to overcome or “master” their traumatic experiences” (Curtis 209). The repetition is usually of a certain theme or aspect of the trauma, such as constantly stabbing a stuffed animal with a fork or inserting objects into another object or animal. Another sign of post-traumatic play in a child experiencing trauma is when the child living in a war zone plays with toy soldiers and pretends to kill and blow things up. In other words, as opposed to ordinary child’s play, post-traumatic play is repetitive and recreates the trauma in an absolutely literal way (Terr 239).
CHAPTER 5

RECOVERY

In order to recover from trauma, one must be able to recognize there is a problem. According to Herman there are three stages of recovering from trauma: reestablishing safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection with daily life (Herman). The beginning process is done by restoring a sense of power and control over a person’s environment and body, which allows the person to feel safe again. During the second stage, remembrance and mourning, a trauma victim must retell their traumatic experience. This description must include detailed images and emotions related to the traumatic experience. One way to do this is by recreating the experience through art as many artists have done. Art gives the detailed images of the encounter with emotions expressed with every brush stroke or piece sculpted. The trauma victim can look at the artwork, verbalize their memories and thoughts, thus can feel loss, grieve, and move on from the experience. Empowerment continues to be a key component of recovery. After coming to terms with the traumatic experience, the victim is able to go into the third stage: creation of a new self and reconnection with daily life. The reconnection process is done by learning/exploring new ways to cope with other people including those that may have inflicted the trauma. However, even though a victim goes through these three stages, “the resolution of the trauma is never final; recovery is never complete” (Herman 211).

Creative Interventions

There are creative interventions that can tap into sensory memories of the traumatic event and help bridge implicit and explicit memories. Two creative interventions are iconic symbolization and sensory expression through creativity. These
interventions are possible because humans use emotion to express the experience that haunts them. Researchers have found that “part of the implicit process is referred to as ‘iconic symbolization’ as a means of giving traumatic experiences a visual identity” (Malchiodi, Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children 16). In other words, “the brain creates images to contain all the elements of traumatic experience – what happened, emotional reactions to it, the horror, and terror of the experience” (Malchiodi, Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children 16). Therefore even if the brain cannot speak about the event, it will remember the event in its symbolic form. For example, an ordinary person trying to release the pain in order to heal may create a painting, as Linda Ness did in Dead Limbs, Fig. 11, to express the trauma in a symbolic form. Expressing trauma in symbolic form is important because in order for a person to be able to retrieve a memory and make it become conscious, the memory must be externalized in its symbolic form. As for sensory expression through creativity, it provides iconic representations of feelings. This form of expression facilitates progressive exposure to the trauma making it tolerable, which in turn slowly helps the victim overcome avoidance of expressing the trauma (Malchiodi, Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children 16).

My work, Ghost from the Past, Fig. 23, is a sculptural room depicting a bathroom scene with a skeleton and a young lady in the shower together. The architectural aspects of the scene were created with an actual room in mind. The positioning of the shower, the mirror, the door, and the window are in the exact positions from my memory. The door in the floor is from one particular occasion that left an imprint on my mind. This was the day I became scared of being closed up in a small bathroom due to a traumatic experience. For me, having an escape route would be better than having privacy.
Making this specific memory become a physical entity lessened the emotional impact; the piece became the container to house the emotions, fears and pains.

Re-exposure of the trauma experience is the core component of intervention and healing (Malchiodi, Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children 14). Trauma victims often have dysfunctional thoughts and feelings about their experiences. Bringing these experiences out into the open can help them to see the experiences for what they are in reality, not as how they originally perceived them. In other words, traumatic memories need to become like memories of other everyday experiences. The individual needs to be able to learn to deal with the stimuli of new experiences without reacting to everything as being dangerous or harmful. When Linda Ness began to paint, she realized the importance of her work in allowing her to release angers, fears, anxieties, and pain. “I was forced to see and take responsibility for my thoughts as I saw them reflected back to me on the canvas; each painting seemed to demand attention and become more powerful” (Curtis 112).

For me, the creation of my small sculptural narratives and jewelry was the re-exposure to the trauma. I relived my experiences and expressed the associated emotions through these small scenes. The release of emotions was so cathartic that it kept the ideas flowing, but the work was very strenuous on my mind and body. I was re-experiencing so much pain, fear, shame, and guilt that I could only work for short periods of time. I had to arrange limited timeframes for working that would least interfere with the responsibilities of daily life. I knew when I worked on my artwork depression would take over; I would feel emotionally paralyzed for hours afterwards and sometimes completely shut down in isolation. However, I knew this difficult process had to be done
in order for me to release the pain, understand the dysfunctional patterns, correct them, and move forward. The emotions and memories had been pushed away for such a long time in fear of what might be discovered. These sculptures make everything concrete. There is something to show for the feelings and memories; they were and are real.

Creative expression is useful for those who cannot describe the traumatic event in words; they can express the trauma in art form. When we are given a chance to create our unconscious preoccupation with traumatic memories will resurface; “art gives voice to that which has not been spoken” (Mann). Art taps the unconscious and helps individuals to express covert conflicts, bringing into awareness thoughts and feelings that were previously hidden. Creativity provides for an externalization of the experience and helps move one from a passive, powerless involvement to active control of the experience. Also, creative methods can allow a person to actively imagine, experiment with, and possibly even reframe an event. Another positive benefit in creative expression is that it offers a way to contain traumatic material within an object which can be physically altered, giving an individual a sense of control with a reduction in distressing reactions. For example, in *Ghost from the Past*, Fig. 23, the scenery was arranged according to memory, but with a twist. The perpetrator is now a skeleton. Changing the role of the perpetrator is the result of a fantasy where the victim gained control and became the victor. The role of the imagination can help someone move beyond preconceived beliefs through experimentation with different modes of expression. Also through creative expression, one can begin to pull iconography together to tell stories. Taylor observes that “we tell stories because we hope to find or create significant connections between things” (Taylor). A leading art therapist, writer, higher education
faculty, and research psychologist, Cathy Malchiodi states, “Stories link the past, present, and future in a way that tells us where we have been, where we are, and where we are going” (Malchiodi, Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children 167). Memories are important in uniting the past and present. “Memory provides the glue with which our life stories connect; it gives us the integrity of our own biographies and our collective history” (Curtis 13-14). Without remembering our history, good or bad, we are lost souls.
ARTISTS WHO USE ART AS THERAPY

With art therapy, an individual can be encouraged to engage in externalizing troubling thoughts, feelings, and experiences. “Art therapy is defined as the use of art media, images, and the creative process and respects the client responses to the created products as reflections of development, abilities, personality, interests, concerns, and conflicts” (About Art Therapy). This type of therapy “is a therapeutic means of reconciling emotional conflicts, fostering self-awareness, developing social skills, managing behavior, solving problems, reducing anxiety, aiding reality orientation, and increasing self-esteem” (About Art Therapy).

Historically, visual art has been used to make sense of crisis, pain, and psychic upheaval. Human suffering has been the subject of many of our greatest works of art. Goya’s Disasters of War, 1810-1820, which consists of eighty-two prints, and Picasso’s Guernica, 1937, are both based on the devastating effects of war. There are many artists who use art as a treatment method for their personal trauma. Louise Bourgeois’ sculptural work expresses themes of betrayal, anxiety, and loneliness. Frida Kahlo’s imagery portrays a wide range of pain from physical ailments and psychological pain as a result of her husband having an affair with her sister. To overcome this trauma she used painting as her therapy, which she could do while she was confined to a bed. Linda Ness, on the other hand, experienced psychological and sexual abuse from her father. She created paintings as her form of therapy as well. Kara Walker endured psychological trauma as a result of unfair racial prejudices. She grew up in California and was not prepared for the level of racial inequality that she encountered when she relocated to
Georgia. She produced stories using antebellum-style paper silhouettes to explore and expose many hidden truths about the distressing treatment of slaves by their owners.

I have used creativity, specifically metalsmithing to create small sculptural settings depicting disturbing childhood memories. My artwork has been a major part of my therapy and has helped me to come to terms with what happened to me as a child. Art has made it possible to turn offensive, startling, and upsetting dialogue about my trauma into beautiful, elegant pieces of work. As Georgia O’Keeffe said, “I found I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn’t say any other way – things I had no words for” (R. &. Chandler). Recovery is a developmental process of self-discovery and transformation that empowers people to develop lives of dignity and purpose; it attempts to restore wholeness to the body and/or mind (Waites 22). When we are creative, we experience a power reversal. After being subjected to events in which we were powerless to control, our art becomes something we can control.

Louise Bourgeois

A recurring anger found in Louise Bourgeois’ work is aimed toward her father. He enlisted in WWI when she was almost three. She felt like her father’s absence was an abandonment, a wound. Later in her childhood she discovered her live-in teacher’s main role was as her as father’s mistress. This process of humiliation lasted for ten years, even though Louise’s mother knew the truth. Bourgeois’ negative reaction to the woman and her father are a prominent part of her work. She also felt betrayed by her mother’s silence and acceptance. The conformity that should have existed within the family unit was construed and broken. Bourgeois says, “My childhood has never lost its magic, it
has never lost its mystery, and it has never lost its drama. All my work in the past fifty years, all my subjects, have found their inspiration in my childhood” (Rainer Crone 17).

Bourgeois states, "My goal is to re-live a past emotion. . . to re-experience fear. . . Fear is a passive state, and the goal is to be active and take control" (Press Release: Louise Bourgeois at the Daros Collection March 13 - September 12 2004). She uses her art as an exorcism and as emotional healing. In 1974, she said, “The search for truth is what has kept me going” (Bourgeois, Destruction of the Father/Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews, 1923-1997 72). Later she adds:

It is a progression. The strength you need to explore your own fate and your own situation…It is a psychological evolution…a familiarization and acceptance that was not present at the beginning…it is a dissolution of the fear…fear of being unable to cope with the situations that you are in…and the desire to escape. So later on not only do I accept the self but I enjoy it (Bourgeois, A Conversation with Louise Bourgeois).

The work of Bourgeois has always intrigued me. I feel a close connection to her work on so many levels. One of the most interesting aspects about Bourgeois is she found inspiration from her childhood, and openly referenced and portrayed her trauma. Bourgeois never acts like a victim; instead she takes an active stand and confronts the pain caused by her history. I am drawn to her reference to the house as body and soul: the first place of refuge, warmth, and memory. She says the home means childhood, the first receptacle of life, and the first psychological marks. These sentiments represent my opinion and are part of why my small environments are portrayed as domestic settings.

Bourgeois is best known for her Maman, Fig. 1, a sculpture which closely resembles a female spider, over thirty feet high, with a sac containing pure white marble
eggs. *Maman* means mother and it signifies the protectiveness as well as the fragility of motherhood. Bourgeois states:

The Spider is an ode to my mother. She was my best friend. Like a spider, my mother was a weaver. My family was in the business of tapestry restoration, and my mother was in charge of the workshop. Like spiders, my mother was very clever. Spiders are friendly presences that eat mosquitoes. We know that mosquitoes spread diseases and are therefore unwanted. So, spiders are helpful and protective, just like my mother (Tate Museum).

Bourgeois at one time felt portrayed by her mother, but yet, in the end she considered her mother as her best friend, which is how I feel about my mother. My mother never intended to hurt me. Sometimes a mother has to do what she feels is best in the long run. I am sure Bourgeois’ mother was trying to do right by her children as well. Sometimes one’s efforts to protect and provide are accomplished with ironic results. But, all in all, my mother is a positive and loving influence in my life. Our relationship was almost ruined by the pain and guilt she felt. I lost enough from the abuse; I did not want to lose her too.

Figure 1: Louise Bourgeois, *Maman*, 1999, Tate Collection
Bourgeois’ largest collection of works that relate to one another are her freestanding sculptural installations called *Cells*. These *Cells* are places where she unravels the fabric of her memories and her emotions. Within these *Cells* she sculpts the psychological space of different types of pain: physical, psychological, and the mental and intellectual. Each *Cell* deals with the pleasure of the voyeur, the thrill of looking and being looked at. Sometimes one has to peep through small opening to see inside giving the eerie feeling of being a voyeur. They are all made to be looked in, but not physically accessed. There is, as always, ambivalence at work; a push/pull. A cell can have many meanings, but in relation to her work, it is usually along the theme of a place of solitude or a prison cell; spaces where one might live in safety or where one might become completely trapped. The cells are composed of objects that belong to her and have a personal history. When they are all placed together within an enclosure, they tell a story of the past. This forbidden entry gives us a voyeuristic distance, keeping us out while drawing us in, adding to the pervasive power of the work (Charlotta Kotik 62).

Many of her *Cells* employ the use of mirrors, (Figure 2). Mirrors can represent the dynamics involved in looking. Bourgeois feels, “Mirrors can be seen as a vanity, but that is not all their meaning. The act of looking into a mirror is really about having the courage it takes to look at yourself and really face yourself” (Charlotta Kotik 50). I also place mirrors in my scenes for additional insight into the narratives. In *Ghost from the Past*, Fig. 23, a mirror signifies broken trust, pain, and struggles. *In He Watched Over Me*, Fig. 30, the mirror represents the repetition of being watched and how I cannot look into a mirror without seeing the effects of what he has done to my soul. And, in *I Was Robbed*, Fig. 34, three mirrors represent years of self reflection that it has taken for me to
be able to compartmentalize the pain, fear, and emotions and neatly tuck them away for safe keeping within the individual drawers of the dresser.

I relate my work to Louise Bourgeois and what she has created. She too has used her art to exorcise her demons and to relive the pain in order to heal. Bourgeois used art as a means of therapy/healing until she was ninety-eight. My small environments are similar to Bourgeois’ Cells in that they are collections of personally meaningful items that tell a story. My work has the voyeuristic qualities of some of Bourgeois’ work. In He Watched Over Me, Fig. 30, the male silhouette watches from behind the screen. Ghost from the Past, Fig. 23, is about being watched in the shower and Sleep Tight, Fig. 25, is about being watched while you sleep. Bourgeois’ Cells, like my small environments, are void of the main character.

Figure 2: Louise Bourgeois, Cell IX, 1996-90, The Hirshhorn Museum
The environment, *Cell (Choisy)*, Fig. 3, is a cold metal and glass enclosure which houses a pink marble replica of Choisy, Louise’s childhood home. This piece is best described within the Exhibition Itinerary for the Centre Pompidou Exhibition in 2008.

The guillotine shows that “people guillotine each other in a family”. “The past is guillotined by the present,” declares the artist. With advancing age, memories become more and more present, recovered from deep within the individual “prehistory”. The sculpture in itself, a work of volume, physical and tangible, enables the artist to traverse her own past, removing what is morbid and painful. As if conjured up, the ghosts of the past are present in this house, a temple of memories relived and given form in art. The present “guillotines” the past, for art calls the past back to the stage one last time then disregards it (Leoni-Figini).
Cell I, Fig. 4, is also based within a domestic setting. I compare the somber, mostly black and white room to my small bedroom environment, Sleep Tight, Fig. 25. What appears to be a bull’s eye on the pillow draws your attention in a similar manner that the spikes do on the pillow I made. Bourgeois’ bed is that of her mother’s where as mine is that of a child’s. Even though the two beds represent different scenario’s the meaning behind creating the environment is essentially the same. In Cell I, Louise equates taking care of her sick mother with the making of art as a healing process. For Bourgeois, “Art is the guarantee of sanity. It is the definition of self-realization” (Bourgeois, Louise Bourgeois: The Spider, the Mistress and the Tangerine).

Figure 4: Louise Bourgeois, Cell I, 1994, Davos Collection, Switzerland
**Frida Kahlo**

Frida Kahlo was a female Mexican painter whose emotional work portrays very painful emotions and tragic events. Kahlo began to paint after the tragic bus accident, which had occurred when she was only eighteen years old. She had been in the hospital for months following the accident before she started painting “to combat the boredom and the pain” (Brooks). Kahlo’s work is impossible to separate from her life because of its biographical nature; her paintings are her biography. Her work brought out in the open what her life was all about; there are no hidden emotions. When one looks at Frida Kahlo’s work, one sees what she felt when she was painting. She wanted to communicate her feelings with the greatest possible clarity and directness, and succeeded. Kahlo was not afraid to expose the anguish in her life, which I feel is a beautiful and honorable trait. I do not believe that people’s horrible stories should be the main focus of their lives and every day conversation, however, I do believe what has happened to a person is a large part of who they are and what allows them to be open and honest. Kahlo expressed an extreme amount of emotional pain about her sister’s affair with her husband in *A Few Small Nips*, Fig. 6. The idea for this painting stemmed from a news story about a man who had stabbed his girlfriend because she had been adulterous. The defendant pleaded his actions before the judge by stating, “But it was just a few small nips” (Brooks). Frida Kahlo felt sympathetic with the dead woman, saying she herself felt “murdered by life” (Brooks).

The physical pain Kahlo endured is different from my pain, although at times, I have wished mine had been physical. She endured thirty surgeries that left her in severe pain resulting in the consumption of painkillers, which was often accompanied with
alcohol. She portrayed her physical pain in her paintings *Retablo*, Fig. 5, and *The Broken Column*, Fig. 7; both were a result of the bus accident. Kahlo has been quoted as saying, "I paint my own reality" (Benton).

Figure 5: Frida Kahlo, *Retablo*, 1940, Private Collection

Figure 6: Frida Kahlo, *A Few Small Nips*, 1935, Dolores Olmedo Foundation
Figure 7: Frida Kahlo, *The Broken Column*, 1944, Dolores Olmedo Foundation

**Linda Ness**

Linda Ness is a survivor of child abuse by the hands of her father. She does not have any formal training as an artist, but has created some of the most emotional, honest, and thought provoking art that I have ever encountered. One of the things about Linda that impresses me is she has shown her immense pain to the world in hopes of helping others. I first came across her work around 2002 on the website, Survivors Art Foundation: Healing through Art…Art through Healing. The reality of her paintings inspired me to express the truth and not hold anything back.
After studying Ness’ work and reading about her life, I see that not only do I feel a close connection to her art, but our lives have led similar paths as a result of our abuse. We both engaged in unhealthy relationships and coping mechanisms until we realized that these efforts just simply were not working. We both had to reach deep down inside to learn about ourselves, connect to ourselves, and we both found our greatest inspiration through our art. She stated on her website: “The more I learned, the more lost I felt. My life was an emotional roller coaster. I was either flying high or in the deepest depression. I was able to hide within my escapes for several years before I crashed” (Ness). She, like I, confronted her abuser and he also responded with “Satan was behind all the lies that I was making up” (Ness).

Ness and I both read the book, “*The Courage to Heal*”, by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis, and we both realized for the first time in our lives that we were not the one to blame for what happened. On her webpage, Linda describes her paintings as, “They are a gift that has saved my life” (Ness). Linda talks about her work on the Survivors Art Foundation website:

This gallery of paintings serves as a witness to a personal journey of healing from childhood sexual abuse. These richly colored figurative images are seeds of hope and understanding. By stopping the eye, waking the emotions and offering insights into an emotional subject that has been governed by taboo and secrecy for too long, my hope is that survivors become inspired and encouraged to work through their own issues, thus breaking the cycle of abuse (Survivors Art Foundation: Healing through Art...Art through Healing).

Linda Ness creates one of the most realistic portrayals of abuse without repulsing the viewer. The fact that she has stylized the imagery makes this possible. Ness’s attention to detail is affecting, as she gives significant care to the placement of furniture,
the color and patterns in fabrics, wall, and floors, and the expressions on her family members’ faces. I relate to her work more than any other artist that I have investigated. Her work evokes strong emotions within me; I can feel what she is painting. When I view her work and read what it is about, I feel dissociation setting in. Linda states:

A viewer’s first comment is that they love the colors and then there is a silence as the viewer begins to look a little closer. I often think that many people sense the meanings, but just like in real life, there is always a denial of the pain. The only viewers who have consistently been willing to talk are others who have come from abusive families (Ness).

This is how people sometimes look at my sculptures, they think they are cute at first, and then their speech pauses as they absorb the uncertainties and the reality slowly sinks in. I have seen fear in people’s eyes as they view my work.

Ness’ paintings represent literal occurrences of her trauma as do my small sculptures. *Bible Reading*, Fig. 8, *Out of Body*, Fig. 9, *Father Knows Best*, Fig. 10, and *Dead Limbs*, Fig. 11, were single moments of her trauma and were painted as though she were observing from outside her body, or dissociating. Each time these atrocities would take place she saw them from outside of herself. Ness painted the most accurate account of dissociation, or out-of-body experiences, that I have ever seen in, *Out of Body*, Fig. 9, in which she depicts herself as though she were floating over her own father’s body as he raped her. In each of her paintings the perspective is distorted and curved similar to a dissociated memory. Ness provides these horrifying outside views distanced from the events and their excruciating sensations and feelings (Curtis 198).
Figure 8: Linda Ness, *Bible Reading*, 1990, Private Collection

Figure 9: Linda Ness, *Out of Body*, 1989, Private Collection
Figure 10: Linda Ness, *Father Knows Best*, 1991, Private Collection

*Father Knows Best*, Fig 10, carries a twist of dualism like, *He Watched Over Me*, Fig. 30. Unlike the television show, *Father Knows Best*, her father obviously did not know best, although he thought his position of being the man in charge gave him the power to do whatever he wanted. My step-father also thought that his position gave him the power to watch over me with more care than was necessary. He watched and touched when he should not have. A position of power should not allow one to perform harm to the smaller, weaker ones as is done in *Dead Limbs*, Fig. 11. This painting is the most
realistic account of rape, but yet it is painted in a way that is manageable to view, although barely. I come extremely close to crying every time I view this painting; such a terrible encounter for a child to be forced to endure.

Figure 11: Linda Ness, Dead Limbs, 1993, Private Collection

Towards the end of Linda’s series of one-hundred and twenty five paintings devoted to her healing, she started having happier thoughts, and painting happier scenes like Moonlit Cartwheels, Fig. 12, to remind her of happier childhood memories.
Kara Walker

Kara Walker is a young, black contemporary artist who tells nightmarish, but visually beautiful stories with silhouettes in the form of murals, moving pictures, small sculptures, and even pop-up books. Her antebellum style silhouettes force people to deal with the unspoken, forbidden issues of slavery and racism. The paper silhouette once seen simply as an affordable, simple work of art has become in this day and time a means of voyeurism. The viewer cannot be confronted by the flat black paper figure, but they
are by the subject matter of antebellum slave/owner relationships, the power struggles, and the hidden truths.

I feel that if Walker’s work had more detail, it would lose its effect because it would be too startling and repulsive. She has achieved the perfect balance of beauty with truth in her revelations. The beauty along with absence of complete details pulls the viewer in just long enough for the entire story to unfold and become apparent before the viewer can look away. She breaks boundaries of comfort by discussing topics society can view as taboo. By doing so, Walker is exposing a forbidden subject that is often dismissed, denied, or censored. I feel like the silhouette is the perfect medium for Walker to accomplish her task. The silhouette is a medium of avoidance because it prevents the viewer from looking at the subject directly. It misleads the viewer into thinking it is alright to look because there usually is not much meaning behind a silhouette, and then they are fooled as the meaning slowly sinks in.
Figure 13: Kara Walker, *Cut*, 1998, Collection of Donna and Cargill MacMillan

*Cut*, Fig. 13, is a perfect example of her work that mistakenly appears at first glance to be a beautiful story. It is a self portrait that appears to be a young, beautiful girl jumping for joy while clicking her heels and spinning ribbons in the air; but upon closer investigation, it is a much more disturbing image. In this work, Walker responds to a photograph of herself jumping in the air published in *Interview* magazine (Nov 1998). She depicts herself as a silhouetted figure slitting her wrists with blood streaming out of them into the air. The blood is a symbol of fury, shame, and confusion. This was Walker’s reaction to feeling like she prostituted herself out to be accepted by white art institutions. She states that she feels as if she has to metaphorically sacrifice herself and “jump up when they say jump” (Johnson).
Figure 14: Kara Walker, *8 Possible Beginning*, 2005, Moving Picture

Figure 15: Kara Walker, *8 Possible Beginnings*, 2005, Moving Picture
My work is similar to Kara Walker’s in that the true meaning of the scene is hidden at first glance. Walker’s is hidden behind the well-known and safe art of silhouettes. Her figures are beautiful and on the surface seem to be innocent. When I first began telling my stories through metalsmithing, I wanted to be more literal with the information that I displayed. However, I found my imagery to be too stark and repulsive. Walker has managed to put the imagery in front of the viewer without being grotesque or repulsive. Just like Goya, she displays gore beautifully. Her displays are so simple yet so full of meaning. The more one looks, the more one wants to look away. However, one finds himself/herself drawn in even more. Walker says that she uses silhouettes to engage people on an innocuous level, “then I could pull the rug out from under them” (Garrels).
Anthony Green

Anthony Green, a contemporary realist painter, displays his own unique style through his technique of showing interior spaces. In his paintings, it appears as if the viewer is looking through the roof of a room while at the same time seeing all four walls, floor, and ceiling. The views are distorted like memories; they are fragments that are never clear and always incomplete. The effects of this are even more emphasized by the unusual shapes of his canvases, which are rarely rectangular. In an interview with Mark Wingfield, Green stated, “…the areas in the mind do not have rectangles round them…the rectangle is simply an artistic convention.” Also, within the mind “you have a multiplicity of viewpoints, so that you simply chose information as and when you need it” (Green, Interview with Anthony Green, Painter). The entire story is difficult to decipher within his narratives; they possess a surrealist dream-like quality where information is brought together, but does not make complete sense. Anthony Green’s subject is stories about his own middle-class domestic life. Green has stated painting has helped to exorcise some of his personal demons (Green, Interview with Anthony Green, Painter).

Green’s multidimensional rooms inspired the use of abstraction to represent the walls and floors of my own domestic settings. Sometimes a skewed sense of perspective is needed to depict multiple elements in only a few planes. I also find it interesting how he can fill a space with so many colors, textures, patterns, angles, and multitudes of small domestic items without boggling the senses. There more information available to the
eye, the more you are pulled in to inspect and absorb. Anthony Green’s paintings are humorous and easy to relate to, while at the same time retaining a touch of eroticism. I feel that Green’s unconventional style creates a chaotic yet simple balance with an enticing charm.

Figure 17: Anthony Green, J'admire beaucoup Marcel Duchamp mais reflexion faite, je prefere ma femme 1967, 2008, Private Collection
Figure 18: Anthony Green, *Chateauroux – Les secrets du confessional 1957, 1982*, Private Collection
Christina Smith

An artist that has had an impact on my metal work is Christina Smith. She is a metalsmith whose narratives are told through a juxtaposition of people and minimal everyday objects. Her brooches consist of simple objects along with simple silhouettes that have compelling stories. Smith’s stories are not necessarily about trauma, but about the struggles of everyday life. One of the main features of her work is the silhouette. She creates these silhouettes from pictures of people she knows, for instance, her brother or
sometimes herself. Christina Smith provides just enough information to give the viewer a feel for the scenario at hand, but does not overtly define the encounter. Her work is executed in sterling silver, which carries associations of privilege, wealth, and power. The miniature stories give loving attention to texture and details.

As an artist I love working in miniature and paying exceptional attention to small details. Christina Smith has helped me to realize the entire story does not have to be placed in front of you; sometimes less is more. Also, similar to Smith, I have posed for several of my silhouettes. An uneasy feeling is created when you are the perpetrator in your own story.

Figure 20: Christina Smith, *Martha's Vineyard, Jackson Hole Twice*, 1989, Private Collection
Figure 21: Christina Smith, *He Always Planned to Leave*, 2004, Private Collection

Figure 22: Christina Smith, *In Search of Terra Incognito*, 2002, Private Collection
CHAPTER 8

INDIVIDUAL ARTWORK

My artwork has helped me on my path of healing from childhood trauma. My small settings and jewelry pieces made of metals, found objects, and enamels began as an overwhelming need to express haunting memories and emotions. Art allowed me the catharsis that I was not able to express in any other way. In the beginning, I could not have imagined how much healing these small stories would provide me. They made my intense emotions tangible and lessened their impact. Somehow giving an emotion a physical existence can be empowering; it can transfer the feeling’s ownership to the piece. There is visible reassurance that what happened was real. The object would encompass the pain and fear while helping me look at things from a new perspective. The artwork can be held in my hand; the memories are now manageable, they can no longer hurt me. I am in control of the story now. These small objects were created by me; they were loved, caressed, and built skillfully, which adds a new element to their strength. I finally have control.

My unfortunate experiences were a case of repeated trauma that began before I was ten and lasted through high school. Sexually abused by my first step-father, I lived in fear every moment of every day waiting for the next encounter. I informed my mother around the age of eleven, and she concluded I was having bad dreams. I remember my first step-father apologizing for his actions only to remit his apology. The abuse at the hands of my step-father was merciless, but the betrayal by my mother was much more damaging and devastating in the long run. As a result of the betrayal I felt from this horrific experience, I have often made bad choices in relationships and life in general.
Keeping everything bottled up led to dissociation, depression, anxiety, and alcohol and drug use. When the coping mechanisms failed to rid me of my problems, I eventually turned to therapy and art. Creating the stories in a three-dimensional form took them out of the nightmare realm and made me almost love myself for finally being able to face them.

My works are in the form of rooms or small scale environments; they are snapshots in time with a significant meaning. Domestic settings can be very powerful because they contain as many meanings as there are people. At first glance, the small environments appear theatrical and beautiful, but then the realization comes, something very disturbing is being expressed. These vignettes allow people’s minds to create their own scenarios. They allow the outsider to observe the chaos at a distance similar to watching an old horror movie like, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.

The pieces are intimate, unsettling scenes from my life arranged with an almost shocking tenderness and obsessive attention to detail. I was very methodical in how the objects were picked, deciding which elements were essential to tell my story, and most importantly placement of the elements. Every element would be drawn over and over and over before the right one was picked. Paper mock-ups were developed of the overall scenes so that changes could be made easily before beginning in metal. Each sculpture comes apart into several different pieces. All four of the small sculptures in the *Damaged Goods* series are made of precious metals, mostly sterling and fine silver with some copper, bronze, and stainless steel. Each of the four sculptures is approximately six inches wide, deep, and tall. Decisions of how the metals and enamels had to be assembled as to not harm the enamel were painstaking. Figuring out the hidden
mechanics, were in many cases more troubling than making the individual visible elements. I chose to use black and white enamels to set a mood of gloominess along with the dark patinas applied to the metals. Enamel is glass adhered to metal during a high heat firing process. The glass is applied to the precious metal in a granular form and then fired and reapplied repeatedly to build thick layers. Enameling is an extremely complex and tedious process; it adds a special touch of color and another level of preciousness to the piece. Teddy bears, slippers, hand mirrors, etc were all chosen with care; just the right element had to be placed in the scene to convey the correct feeling and meaning. Different shapes for the bases would be drawn up to thirty times before the right one would develop. The number and placement of curves and angles had to balance each other to create the perfect overall visual composition with a smooth rhythm. In the same token, the bases had to not only hold the story, but also add to it. Textures were added to make certain aspects stand out and supplement the mood, balance, proportion, and rhythm of the whole structure.

**Ghost from the Past**

*Ghost from the Past,* Fig. 23, displays a series of horrible memories with a twist of fantasy and being in control. Part of the healing process is to see the memories in a different light; you can change the ending to the story, as well as, put yourself in control. Showers can be a place of shame, confinement, secrecy, voyeurisms, and violations, but they can also rinse away the dirtiness and sins and allow you to start anew.
Figure 23: Michelle Parker, *Ghost from the Past*, Private Collection
Skewed planes form the back walls create cast shadows that evoke the feeling of being alone in a dark alley. The acutely defined angles of the base add a sense of precariousness and strong, deep rooted emotion. When you first look at the scene, it draws you in with a sense of whimsy and cuteness, but with more observation you start to realize that something is not right with this story. The enameled white silhouette of a woman does not appear to be threatened; she is actually provocative with her innocent white skin and pink, subtle nipples. The figure of a woman, not a young girl as in my memory, is placed partially behind the shower curtain in order to express the desire for privacy. The evocative silhouette of a woman was intentional; she used the skills the perpetrator taught her to lure him into a trap. The actual abuse was enacted on a young
girl, but the healing and the revenge belong to the woman. She is white because, in an ironic way even if only in a fantasy, killing the perpetrator frees her of the guilt and cleanses her. The door appears to have been violently removed from its hinges and lies useless in the floor. The mirror is broken, the innocence is lost; there is pain. The back wall is textured with erratic scratch marks representing the desire to be freed. The marbleized enameled floor creates movement like electrical currents running wild through the brain.

This first vignette was full of extremely strong emotions. I was able to look at the sculpture and see the feelings as being housed there. I released the emotions and transferred the lack of control to the sculpture. The shame and guilt was transferred away from the girl and to the skeleton where it belonged. She was finally in control! All the helpless feelings were released. The perpetrator is no longer larger than life; he is now a dead, harmless skeleton. Showers no longer haunt me, but the fear of being behind closed doors without a path to escape does. Herman states that:

the revenge fantasy is one form of the wish for catharsis. The victim imagines that she can get rid of the terror, shame, and pain of the trauma by retaliating against the perpetrator. The desire for revenge also arises out of the experience of complete helplessness. In her humiliated fury, the victim imagines that revenge is the only way to restore her own sense of power. She may also imagine that this is the only way to force the perpetrator to acknowledge the harm he has done her (Herman 189).

This addressed the issue of confession on the perpetrator’s behalf. At one point, my abuser admitted his wrongdoing, then later changed his story and stated that I was lying; he wanted to know why I would make up such terrible stories about him. This piece in part was about the fact that I will never receive complete admission of guilt from him. He will never take responsibility for what he has done. If he would admit it, then
the release of guilt on my part would be so much easier. When one clings to the desire for the perpetrator to admit what he has done, one is keeping one’s fate tied to the perpetrator. This desire must be renounced.

An abused child cannot accept the fact that their parents, their protectors are bad. They are taught adults are always right and they do things “for your own good”. Therefore, the child decides they are the one who is bad because they are being punished. This creates so much guilt for the child. I felt like I was dirty, that the ugliness inside of me drew this negative attention to me. Many times during my healing process, as the guilt and shame would become heavy, I would take a shower and just stand there and cry until the hot water ran out. I needed to be cleansed of the guilt. Creating this sculpture helped to reduce the amount of guilt I felt; it was an act of cleansing.

*Sleep Tight*

*Sleep Tight* was inspired by my fears of falling asleep. Even as an adult I fear what might come and wake me in the middle of the night. This piece is somewhat of a continuum of *My Alarm Clock*, Fig. 29, about the memory of what happened after the headlights came through my window at night. The bed chained to the wall is a metaphor for me not being in control, not able to leave the situation. The spiked pillow insinuates danger; there is no possible way that you can sleep tight, as the old saying goes, in this room. The spikes also represent pain similar to Frida Kahlo’s nails. The sharp angles in the back wall suggests deep piercing anger, but the foundation is softer and more stable than the one in *Ghost from the Past*, Fig. 23, which symbolizes my growing stability. The abstract black and white enameled checkerboard floor recedes as a compositional
device; carrying your eyes towards the bed and the silhouette in the doorway. The bars in
the window are similar to those of an old jail cell.

The perpetrator is a visible part of the narrative, but the victim is not. After
completing the Damaged Goods series I realized that I, the victim, was not actually
portrayed in a few of the narratives. I thought it was strange that I somehow left myself
out of such strongly charged stories about myself. As I was designing the vignettes, my
thought process was to leave the main character as implied so that people could place
themselves within the scene. But, I realized that the meaning was much deeper than I had
originally thought. The whole time I was avoiding the connection of the abuse to myself.
This was my form of dissociation. As a child I learned to leave my body, dissociate,
when the abuse happened. Therefore, even though I experience horrific emotions and
fears, and I know that the memories are true, there is still a detachment.

I do have specific memories that I produced work about, but I am aware that my
emotions are much stronger than the occurrences I remember. Research has discovered
that when children of abuse are asked to draw themselves, they often have a very difficult
time and leave out essential elements or largely distort them (Malchiodi, Breaking the
Silence: Art Therapy with Children from Violent Homes 53). I cannot draw myself. In
the past I blamed this on my lack of sketching skills, but I now realize there is more to it;
there is a lack of connection to myself.
Figure 25: Michelle Parker, *Sleep Tight*, Private Collection
In the original design for *Sleep Tight*, Fig. 25, the teddy bear was not included. After completion of the sculpture, I realized the piece did not have the feel of a child’s room as I wanted it to. The room was complete as far as the visual elements that were intended, but it was lacking something. Even after I decided on a teddy bear to represent a child’s innocence, there was much difficulty in deciding where to put the object. Placement on the bed would have been too comforting; it needed to look as though something had gone wrong. When set, as if fallen, on the floor showed the displacement needed, and completely changed the atmosphere of the room accomplishing the tone being strived for.
My fears of falling asleep and the constant appearance of silhouettes, that are not actually there, are symptoms of post traumatic syndrome disorder. *Sleep Tight*, Fig. 25, helped to lessen the impact of these symptoms. Turning the fears into a visible story gave the fears a container to house them. I was able to look at my fears from a distance and understand them as a normal result of abuse. I faced my fears head-on and developed a better understanding.

*Will I Ever Heal?*

![Figure 27: Michelle Parker, *Will I Ever Heal?*, Private Collection](image-url)
Will I Ever Heal?, Fig. 27, is a simple brooch with multiple deep rooted meanings. I often wonder if I will ever heal from what happened to me. On the larger level of meaning, I feel my entire existence is one big open sore. On another level, this brooch represents dangerous self-injurious behavior. As for the healing side, this piece represents the lancing of festering wounds so the healing process can begin. However, I find that as my work is continuing to help overcome current issues, new unresolved issues arise. Apparently each new victory opens the door for realizing another flaw.

One of the most powerful and overwhelming emotions abuse elicits is rage. This rage, bubbling, and seething within the victim like lava in a volcano, is one of the explosive fuels that feed self-injurious behavior. Self injury attempts to alleviate inner rage when feelings cannot be expressed verbally, to provide a sense of control over the body, to express shame, and to provide biochemical relief. There was so much pain inside me that was not visible from the outside. I felt as though blood needed to be visible in order for there to be a reason for the pain. I would pick a spot and dig at it for hours like there was something inside that I had to get out. I would dissociate and completely lose sense of time and surroundings. I hid many of my sores, but purposely made some visible to other people. I needed to feel the shame that was produced by making myself look bad. The outside needed to match the inside. I was punishing myself just for existing, but it enabled me to feel. I saw it as a shameful relief; a bad person deserves to look bad. This repetitious and ritualistic behavior helped me keep people at a distance which greatly increased my depression. Who would want to date someone that looked like I did? My ritual kept me emotionally and physically
unavailable. My pain and ugliness became my best friends. Dr. Suzanne Sgroi, who
works with children of sexual abuse, notes:

Most sexually abused children have an extremely poor self-image, describing themselves as “ugly” and doubting that they are attractive to others. Sgroi says it is not uncommon for these children who have been sexually abused to view themselves as “damaged goods.” This reflects a feeling of being physically damaged, dirty, ruined, or no longer whole or perfect (Sgroi).

At first I was ashamed to tell people what this brooch was about, but it became easier over time. I decided that if I was going to do these things to myself then I need to be willing to admit them. Part of my healing was to bring things out into the open and not be ashamed. This brooch helped me look at my behavior from a distance. It was sad that I saw my existence in such an ugly way, but even more horrible was what I was doing to myself. My body is left with many ugly scars to remind me of my struggles and how far I have come.

On the healing side, the band aid represents my desire to heal. I can see the possibility of healing in the future. The band aid has been on this sore for a long time. The sore underneath is beginning to heal and the band aid is starting to peel away. Soon it will no longer be needed and only the battle scars will be left behind.
My Shell, Fig. 28, was the beautiful, innocent, sweet child that deserved to be loved and protected. I had a chance to make something out of life; I was confident and eager to live and learn; I felt loved. The title for this piece was inspired by the one male figure in my life that I remember being so dear to me. My loving grandfather had his own way of saying Michelle; he changed it slightly and called me My Shell. I have such wonderful memories of him and how close we were. How I wish he were still alive. Unfortunately, his death happened at about the same time the abuse began.

The three silhouettes were made from pictures of me at different stages of childhood. The figure on the right is from a ballet recital at the age of six. The center figure is from a paper silhouette made at eight years old. This is when my love for the art
of silhouettes began. The figure on the left is from an x-ray where I broke my nose in the second grade. The three silhouettes as a group are mourning the loss of the innocent child. She did not die, but lost so many important aspects of herself. This is the only piece of the series with bright, happy colors because the silhouettes were happy in their young age. The enameled silhouettes are positioned on pieces of nickel silver cut to resemble doilies. I consider doilies to be prissy, dainty, and feminine. I do not see myself as a frilly girl, but I possibly could have been had I not lost my sweet innocence. The doily effect plays well against the repetitive pattern in the three, found colored glass pieces. I often use the ballerina symbol to signify myself as a small girl. I like many girls, had dreams of becoming a beautiful ballerina. Ballerinas are soft, beautiful, elegant, and graceful, yet very strong. When the innocence was taken, so were the thoughts of ever being beautiful, elegant, and graceful. All I was left with was the strong part, but it was now angry. Silhouettes are the most recurring theme in my work. They give the essence of the character without complete details. I like the ambiguity; the silhouette is not set to one exact person.
The meaning this piece revolves around the headlights being a metaphor for an alarm clock. There was an extended period of time during my childhood when my stepfather worked a night job. He would come home about two o’clock each morning. I eventually became accustomed to headlights coming through my window to wake me in time for what was about to happen while in the process developing a fear of falling asleep. Placing the scene inside a clock body was perfect for representing time and the repetition of being awakened at the same time night after night.
This is a small scene standing three and three-quarters inches high. In the background is a photograph of headlights on a highway. The small item in the upper right hand is a window made from sterling silver and a watch crystal. The sterling silver ballerina signifies me as a young girl: pure, innocent, and beautiful. Glitter falls to the bottom of the clock creating a reference to a snow globe. As a child I loved snow globes. They were objects that held dreamlike scenes; my past all feels like a dream to me now. The clock body being white represents innocence and adds to the snow globes effect. Once again I was able to give my memories a concrete container to be housed in. The small size gives it such an intimate personal feel that could not have been achieved with a larger clock. This piece is simple, but says so much.

*He Watched Over Me*

The title of this piece signifies the dualism of position: the person assigned to watch over and protect became the voyeur. My abuser took advantage of his position of guardian and took things way too far. One of the most significant consequences of trauma to a sexually victimized child is the loss of trust, particularly with adult figures. The person who destroyed that trust was someone who should have been my nurturer and protector. The closer the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, the higher the chance trust will be severely damaged. This piece is also about how things are not always as they appear. From outside of the situation it can appear as though a guardian is a good parent when in reality they are extremely abusive.
Once again, I have left the victim’s presence out of the story. The small pair of bedroom slippers suggests that the victim is a woman while the fainting couch symbolizes the detachment and denial that is often felt after trauma. As for the small hand mirror, it reflects the perpetrator’s silhouette suggesting the repetition of the occurrence and how haunting he is. The use of a see-through triple screen indicates my attempts at putting up barriers to protect myself; just as the screen, they were ineffective. Black and white enamels along with the dark patina on the silver were used to generate a feeling of somberness and doom.

This piece has a softer base, more curves than previous pieces, it is almost theatrical. At this point I am able to see the scenarios almost like a play that was acted
over and over. The emotions are not as painful, and I am starting to almost poke fun at the ironies of life. In fact, when I could not find a suitable figure to represent the perfect silhouette (the culprit in my nightmares), I began photographing myself and manipulating the image until it became the image with the expression I desired. Also, I am able to express much more emotion and detail from photographs I have taken. Posing for the pictures myself affords me the opportunity to draw attention and accentuate details where I want; like the expression of anguish in the hands. The irony of me posing as the perpetrator, gave me power and control over this traumatic event.

*Til Death Do Us Part*

Figure 31: Michelle Parker, *Til Death Do Us Part*, Private Collection
A huge engagement ring creates the setting for the narrative, which simply pokes fun at the institution of love and marriage, focusing mainly on negative outcomes. This piece demonstrates another use of a clock body as a setting, in which I removed the clock movements and replaced with a small handmade knife, diamonds, garnets, and glass beads. Next created was a sterling silver band with especially large prongs to house the symbol of undying love. The garnets, diamonds, and glass beads signify blood and tears. I feel often in life, love and relationships end with cruelty. An example of why I feel like this is mentioned by Dr. John Briere. Dr. Briere, who studies the impacts of abuse on psychosocial functioning, has described adult abuse survivors “as displaying ambivalence and fear regarding attachment and vulnerability, impaired ability to trust, increased anxiety as closeness increases, expectations of re-victimization, and a need to push others away and sabotage relationships” (Briere). Also, I do not have much faith in love,
commitment, or marriage. To me this ring signifies that marriage and love are too often temporary. The imagery used for this piece conveys the belief that marriage is death to a person’s individuality; at least it can be for the woman. There is also a reference to the fact that through domestic violence, love can lead to an early death.

*Abandoned*

Figure 33: Michelle Parker, *Abandoned*, Private Collection

One concept behind *Abandoned*, Fig. 33, is the feeling of having not been protected from childhood on through adulthood. Another is how people simply walk out your life with no apparent reason, no explanation, and no remorse. I selected a six and a
half inch, nickel silver clock to display this narrative, because time to me felt wasted
every instance I was abandoned; the repetition of the situation was becoming depressing.
The enameled silhouette of a young lady was selected for this scene because the
occurrences of having been abandoned have continued through my adulthood. The
young lady is larger than the enameled man not only because she is closer to the viewer,
but also because she is more important. Through her healing, she is growing stronger
than the ghosts and memories from the past. The main figure is present in this piece
because the feeling of abandonment was not a direct result of the abuse, just an ill-fated
side effect. Black and white were once again chosen as the dominate colors to set the
stage of doom. The arms of the clock denoting time are gone and the numbers are falling
because time has gone completely awry.

The idea for this piece came after I was so devastated by an unwanted break-up of
a long-term relationship. Another lover walked out on me with no apparent reason when
I thought everything was going well. The pain of his leaving brought back feelings of my
real dad having not been there for me and how my first step-father had been there in the
wrong ways. I finished this clock just after my second step-father walked out of my
mom’s life. I was so devastated by yet another prominent male figure walking out of my
life. He had been a loving positive influence in my life that I needed and when he left
mom, he left me too.

Through the years I have learned to deal with this issue better and not let it
overwhelm me to the extent it used to. I try not to let the repeated abandonments
discourage me from creating new relationships, but learn to cherish what I do have.
This necklace symbolizes a large part of my life; I have always been alone and I feel I always will be. After my mother denied me protection; I felt so desperately alone with the pain and fear. Not only did my mother deny me, but I felt as though God had
also let me down. I felt if God would not help me, then I must have been evil and
unworthy, therefore, I deserved to be abused and to be alone with the pain.

Throughout life, I have purposely isolated myself because of my pain, my lack of
trust, and my fears, especially of abandonment. My fear of being abandoned sometimes
made me push people away. Somehow, I thought this was my way of being in control
and if I ended up alone, it was by my choice. The pains and fears were my companions
until the soul searching through professional counseling and art began.

The pendant is made from a found stainless steel pocket watch body while the
inside is painted black along with a white silhouette of a young girl. It is attached to a
twenty-four inch, sterling silver chain made of sixteen gauge wire. As the years go by
and I continue to heal, I release more and more of the guilt and shame. I feel so much
cleaner and more pure than I did before I began this wonderful journey of healing. The
female silhouette is white and the symbol of purity, just like the one in Ghost from the
Past, Fig. 23; but in this case it is no longer part of a fantasy, it is my reality. I am alone,
but a much healthier and happier alone than before. I can now face life with a renewed
sense of self; one that is ready to live, love, and be loved.
This small hollow form sculpture is made from bronze with a sterling silver tri-fold mirror. The curvy shape of the dresser is a metaphor for the hourglass female body; bronze was chosen for the color of skin. My body and soul were robbed and left empty, which is portrayed by the open, empty drawers of the dresser. The closed drawers
represent closed chapters in my history, issues that I have dealt with and moved past, but
never to be forgotten. The triple mirror implies memory and self-reflection haven looked
depth within myself from more than one direction at the same time. I have replaced the
emptiness of my soul with knowledge, empowerment, love, understanding, creativity,
and a wonderfully happy new me. As a whole, this piece has very few sharp angles; it is
comprised mostly of soft, understanding, and forgiving curves. My sculptures are no
longer full of anger, pain, and desperation. They have become a celebration of how far I
have come and how I have been able to put so many horrible aspects of my life behind
me. After many years, acceptance and love have finally been achieved.
CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSION
TRUAMA-INTERVENTION-ART THERAPY-RECOVERY

“One day in retrospect, the years of struggle will strike you as the most beautiful.”

Sigmund Freud (O. Y. Chandler).

Expressing painful events creatively can encourage a deeper understanding, which can help us to accept the trauma as fact; as something that happened to us not something that defines us in order to begin the healing process. “Healing can occur in the present only when we allow ourselves to feel, express, and release emotions from the past that we have suppressed or tried to forget” (Curtis 143). Healing should be thought of as a multifaceted process with acceptance, transformation, and redefinition of the self as the core components.

After someone has been through a traumatic experience, it is important to give time towards healing, and to allow one’s self to be able to go through life without judgment or guilt. One way to start this process is through art therapy where an individual can be encouraged to engage in externalizing troubling thoughts, feelings, memories, and perceptions through visual, tactile, olfactory, and auditory experiences (Malchiodi, Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children 15). According to Cathy Malchiodi, “the very nature of image making makes it a powerful means of eliciting and dissociating painful and frightening images from the self” (Malchiodi, Breaking the Silence: Art Therapy with Children from Violent Homes 5). Also, “the use of art in counseling creates possibilities and broadens horizons, so that the world becomes ever
new and the view of what can be, if worked on, becomes what is” (Malchiodi, Handbook of Art Therapy 252).

Dr. Louise Desalvo, an English professor, has written sixteen books with subjects ranging from writing as a way of healing, adultery, food as a coping mechanism, and a couple about Virginia Woolf and her childhood sexual abuse. Desalvo feels that instead of focusing on the many negatives, we should begin to see the benefits of experiencing trauma. In her book, Writing as a Way of Healing, she quotes author Wayne Muller, “our own wounds can be vehicles for exploring our essential nature, revealing the deepest textures of our heart and soul, if we will only sit with them, open ourselves to pain…without holding back, without blame” (Desalvo 4-5). Through exploring the writings of Virginia Woolf, Desalvo concludes “that the moments of profound insight that come from our soulful, thoughtful examination of our psychic wounds should be called ‘shocks.’ For they force us into an awareness about ourselves and our relationships to others and our place in the world that we wouldn’t otherwise have had” (Desalvo 5). I believe that the pain I possess is going to be with me no matter what; I might as well face, own, overcome, and use it. Through my healing I have been able to create absolutely beautiful works of art. My work has been exhibited in numerous national and international enameling exhibitions. Sleep Tight, Fig. 25, was one of the five-hundred pieces chosen out of sixteen-hundred entries from around the world to be published in, 500 Enameled Objects: A Celebration of Color on Metal, in 2009 (Van 319). This is a prestigious book and I am very proud and honored to have been included.

For a while, I avoided creating emotional work because I feared failure. I consumed myself with making works that were below my capabilities, they did not
provide the emotional catharsis that I needed. It was obvious that I was running away from my fears and myself. My soul longed to tell meaningful, emotional stories, and it finally won. I now create my narratives hoping my work will inspire others to express themselves, deal with issues that are forbidden, and begin the healing process. I have experienced the creative energy that is released when the barriers of denial and repression are lifted. There is power in speaking the unspeakable. “It keeps me searching for the story inside—all that is inside of me that I have not yet confronted” (Curtis 184).


Green, Anthony. Interview with Anthony Green, Painter Mark Wingfield. 19 January 1996.


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