The Ties That Bind

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THE TIES THAT BIND
by
SARAH RENE
(Under the Direction of Professor Jane Pleak)

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the body of sculptural ceramic work developed for my thesis series, *The Ties that Bind*, which addresses the impact negative life experiences have on the human psyche. Some discussion focuses on various artists throughout history who have used their work as a vehicle for addressing similar issues, as well as the philosophical influences behind my work. *The Ties that Bind* was inspired by personal experiences and serves as a visual, metaphorical representation of the effects dysfunctional relationships can have on one's sense of Self.

INDEX WORDS: Abstract, Art, Deconstruction, Dysfunction, Expressionism, Figurative, Fragmentation, Intangible, Invisible, Metaphorical, Psychological, Relationships, Representation, Self
THE TIES THAT BIND

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

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THE TIES THAT BIND

by

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DEDICATION

The work and writings contained within are dedicated with love and cherishment to my daughter, Fiona Rose. May she find the strength to walk her own path and never lose sight of what true love and happiness means.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the love and support of my family, friends, and faculty, the completion of this work would not be possible. I would like to especially thank my parents, brother and grandparents for the compassion, help and strength they have given me throughout the most difficult times in my life. I would like to thank my fellow artists, colleagues, and friends, especially Jenn Galusha, Jess Stewart, Gayle Shaw Clark, Ian Winsemius, Jason McCoy, and Duke Oursler – I am so grateful to have gone through this journey with each of you and wish you all the best in your future endeavors; I will miss you greatly as the distance grows between us, though I will always be there whenever you have need. I would finally like to thank all of the faculty members who have touched my life and the direction of my work over these past three years, especially Jane Pleak, Marc Moulton, Bruce Little, Onyile Onyile, and Patricia Carter. It is amazing to me how much you have each influenced my life, all in your own unique ways. Jane and Trish, I am strengthened by your outlook on life’s circumstances and how you deal with issues head-on. Marc, I do not believe I have ever met anyone with such an infallible humor – your approach with students is something I admire and strive to emulate. Bruce, your knowledge and wisdom are unbelievably valuable, surpassed only by your compassion for others. Onyile, I appreciate how your unique perspective on life helped open my mind to see things in so many different ways.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Beginning with a statement of the artistic problem for my thesis work, The Ties that Bind, Chapter 1 continues forward with a discussion of the development of my artistic problem. To that end, precursors to my thesis work and early artistic influences are discussed in the sections “Beginnings” and “Progression,” while “Revelations” briefly addresses the intentions behind The Ties that Bind. Chapter 2 discusses the artists who have directly influenced the development of my thesis work. My thesis work is presented and discussed in Chapter 3, with a focus on conceptual, technical, and formal considerations. Chapter 4 concludes this supporting paper.

Statement of Artistic Problem

The goal of this body of work, The Ties that Bind, was to create ceramic figures that metaphorically represent how life experiences impact the human psyche. This paper examines my thesis work, focusing on how historical and contemporary artists have used their work as a means to address detrimental life experiences. While each piece is based on an individual autobiographical experience, specifically related to dysfunctional relationships, I appreciate the work’s ability to speak to a wider and more universal audience on the fragmentations of life, speaking to any number of situations and circumstances.

Development of Artistic Problem

In life, there is always a beginning that progresses towards an end. So, too, my work has evolved over the years, through revelations resulting from self-reflection. I have come to realize that, since my time as an undergraduate, my artwork has been subconsciously addressing personal experiences that were otherwise too difficult to resolve. Thus, it is important to provide a background in order to better understand the development of my thesis work in The Ties that Bind.
Beginnings

I consider *Meditation Domes*, (Fig. 1, 2, 3) created during the period from 2001 to 2003, to be my first true series, as it was a cohesive body of work that led me to become more self-reflective. At the time, I was fascinated by the process of working with coils; the repetitive and, ultimately, meditative rhythm was very soothing and comforting. For me, the work in the *Meditation Domes* series embodies a sense of calm, intimacy and stability – elements I later realized were lacking in my life. Remembrance of the meditative construction process and the smoothed, horizontal texture of the forms themselves are what provide me with a sense of comfort. They are intimate in size and I still enjoy the ability to hold these pieces in my hands, to nestle them close and take comfort from them. I love the way the textures of the delicate coils play upon my skin, smooth and rough at the same time catching the light in the most interesting ways. The flat bases, domed walls, and openings that reference windows and doors call to my mind the sense of hearth and home, sanctuary and stability.

Progression

When I first began the Master of Fine Arts program at Georgia Southern University in 2007, I took up where I left off in order to explore the potential of the domed forms. Perhaps more importantly, I desired a deeper level of personal understanding as to why I was drawn to such forms. It is important to note that the work at that time was exploratory. It was typically far more exciting and engaging for me to have an open dialogue with the clay – to begin with a few handfuls, pushing or pulling at its body until it responded to my touch in a harmonious give-and-take relationship.

My thoughts about what was happening while I was in the studio revolved around the calm and meditative creative process, though I became increasingly conscious of stray thoughts about life that would enter my mind while I was working. Such thoughts were soothed, controlled and contained by the physical work and rhythm of the construction process. *Vortex* (Fig. 4), which was created
during my first semester in the program, signifies a break from the process-centered approach to one where greater attention was paid to the resulting form. After reflecting on my decision to open up the domed form of Vortex to expose its tumultuous interior, I recognized the psychological connection between my life and work – I was beginning to open myself to auto-psychoanalysis through self-reflection, honing the emotional energy I had previously controlled and contained within myself.

I decided to work through the construction of forms on a more directly emotional level and sought other artists’ forms and surfaces for reference. I looked at the works of Sara Radstone (Fig. 5) and Erica Jane Huntzinger (Fig. 6) for the way they use surface color, Jane Burton (Fig. 7) and MaPo Kinnord-Payton (Fig. 8) for the abstracted quality of their work, and Rebecca Hutchinson (Fig. 9) for her ideas on construction and surface quality. I was especially influenced by the work in Andy Goldsworthy’s ephemeral Time series that utilized the drying properties of clay, which he allowed to dry and crack on walls, floors, and rocks (Fig. 10). I began to experiment with treating the work more aggressively – both in construction and extreme drying-out conditions, as both would allow for extensive cracking and breakages. I began to realize my fascination with fragmentation at that point and, subsequently, I was struck with the realization that I have always been far more interested in objects that are fragmented, missing components, or are somehow out of place. There is in them a sense of mystery, of wondering how they came to be, what happened to them; there is tangible evidence that something occurred, though the exact event is unknown. The idea that my work could be a metaphor for my perception of life was becoming clearer.

The experiments gave way to a series of wall pieces, which resulted in Ode 1 (Fig. 11) and Ode 3 (Fig. 12). The Ode wall series represented specific characters in my life and signified a second major turning point in my work. I

1 Ode 2 was destroyed and used as a backsetting for Ode 1.
became increasingly aware of how the resulting form communicates to the viewer. The art theory class I was taking encouraged this growth significantly, especially as we discussed the work of various women Expressionists. I was introduced to the work of Louise Bourgeois for the first time, a discovery that substantially impacted my decision to allow my work to draw more deeply from personal memories and experiences.

As I began preparing for my thirty-hour graduate review in 2008, I attempted to develop work that would provide an adequate, physical identity for the Self.² It was through the process of working with the clay that I intended to make visible the personal emotional weight contained within my Self, all of which was built up after what I perceived as years of life’s complications and fragmentations. I strove to visually translate inner thoughts and emotions into physical objects, concentrating on single emotions and experiences related to my childhood and the paradoxes I found in my adult life. During this time, I developed two paths of work: dysfunctional familial relationships and the duality of the mother-child relationship. I loathed creating forms that were easily interpreted and thusly, the work during this period was intended to raise questions: What is the importance of each form? Why are the forms broken and fragmented? What do the inscriptions speak of?

_Meditations for My Child (aftermath)_ (Fig. 13) was created for my daughter, Fiona Rose, as the broken and inscribed womb-like form references the thoughts, emotions and physical strains experienced both during and in the aftermath of my pregnancy. The text is intended to be secretive, illegible and difficult, if not impossible, to interpret by others. These inscriptions serve as a record of the thoughts and feelings I was experiencing that needed to escape - to no longer be contained within, yet still fulfill my need to conceal them. _Mother-child_ (Fig. 14) was my initial response to what I recognized as being the

² Based on the writings of C. G. Jung, I define the Self as the essential center of being that envelops both the conscious and unconscious (Storr, 19).
duality of the mother-child relationship. As I watch my daughter go through her childhood, I constantly notice the parallels between our lives that reflect back upon my own childhood and relationship with my mother. With this work, my primary focus was on the dual role of being a mother and a child, remembering back to how my own mother dealt with situations that Fiona and I are now experiencing. The inscriptions on this work are again a type of memory-record of the conversations I had with both my mother and my daughter, going back and forth between the two roles.

*Story of the Runaways* (Fig. 15) refers to my childhood and how my younger brother and I would often fantasize about what it would be like to just pack up our things and run away. This is the only piece utilizing a brighter color palette, which was chosen for its reference to the happier thoughts and fantasies of children. *Self* (Fig. 16) references the body as both vessel and containment for the Self and my perception of the metaphorical “beatings” received by one's Self during life's journey. *Untitled (exposed)* (Fig. 17) is along similar lines of *Self*, with obvious reference to the female form. I appreciate the abstracted quality of this work and the fact that it hints at the underlying content without being completely forthcoming. For me, it speaks of the superficial covering, or mask, which we sometimes feel is necessary in order to protect our true Self. From my perception, regardless of how strong we attempt to build our defenses against difficult life experiences, such a mask is constantly barraged by outside forces that we may have very little control over. These gradual development and revelations are what have ultimately led to *The Ties that Bind*. I realized my desire to create work that spoke to a wider audience, embedding itself in the viewer’s memory, to be recalled from time to time and never forgotten.

**Revelations**

At the time I began my thesis work, I was struggling with life-changing personal decisions resulting from on-going difficulties. I have heard it said that the most negative experiences are those we most remember; so it is with *The Ties that Bind*. During the months that followed, I honed my energies and pent-
up emotions, diving hands-first into my work. Using a cast mould as the basis for my structures, I tore, ripped, stabbed, gouged, shot, and otherwise invaded and violated the essence of my Self in clay. The resulting forms, each one based on the memory of a specific event or experience, became a direct embodiment of my innermost emotions. In short, each form represents a culmination of the mental anguish and emotional turmoil. It is important to note that, while the work in this series touches upon such a deeply personal level, the aesthetics of the work itself was never ignored. My formal artistic training continued to influence the development of form, texture, and the interplay of light for each piece.

Ultimately, my intention for creating The Ties that Bind was three-fold: first and foremost, the process of working with clay was to be genuine in its communication and expression of the Self; second, each piece must have the aesthetic strength to stand on its own, as well as with the larger body of work; third, the work must elicit a response from the viewer, whether it be a visceral response or a more subdued, emotional connection. These intentions are what led me to research other artists who have addressed, either directly or indirectly, the various impacts of life experiences upon the human psyche.
CHAPTER 2
HISTORICAL REVIEW OF ARTISTIC PROBLEM

Introduction to the Historical, Contemporary and Philosophical Influences

Over the years, I have come to believe our lives and sense of Self are built upon all of the individual events and relationships we experience. Whether such experiences are happy or sad, joyous or traumatic, the way we respond and what we take away from each will ultimately influence and impact every subsequent experience. When we find it difficult to cope with such events or relationships, intangible scars are left upon our psyche – some scars easily heal over, while others may have cut so deeply that we may never fully recover from them. In order for us to continue moving forward with our lives, we must either learn to embrace such experiences or let them go. It is the artists who visually express such traumatic events - whether personally experienced or indirectly witnessed, autobiographical or historically referenced - who interest me the most. The following chapter will discuss the primary historical, contemporary and philosophical sources utilized in the research and development of The Ties that Bind.

While my growth as a visual artist has been impacted by any number of artists and movements, Anselm Kiefer, Kathe Kollwitz, Eva Hesse and Louise Bourgeois are those whose work has especially informed The Ties that Bind series. While many artists have used their work as a vehicle to address the impact of various life experiences, both joyful and sorrowful, upon the human psyche, it is the work of these particular artists that has substantially influenced my artistic style. The rawness and overwhelming emotion I sense from Kiefer's large-scale paintings, the aggressive and emotional markings of Kollwitz's mother/child prints, the metaphorical reference to life in Hesse's latex sculptures, and the autobiographical context of Bourgeois' Cells series is what has drawn me to examine these artists and their work more closely. By utilizing such aesthetic and conceptual ideas within my own work, I hope to engage the viewer more fully so that they walk away with a permanent impression of experiencing The Ties
that Bind. Such intentions have also been philosophically influenced by theories of Expressionism and the writings of Agnes Martin. It is through Martin’s words, especially, that my thoughts on the creative process and the intentions behind my work have become more fully developed and evolved.

**Historical and Contemporary Artistic Influences**

One of the first artworks I recall having an immediate impact on me was *Burning Rods* (Fig. 18) by Anselm Kiefer. I remember looking at the enormous canvas, realizing he had actually used shards of wood, metal and other foreign material I could not readily identify. The compilation and application of material conveyed the sense of destruction and the ravages of war through the touch of man. Through all of this, there was a solemnness about the piece, a presence or essence that was felt while I stood in front of it. The feeling was almost overwhelming, though at the time I could not understand why I felt such a powerful reaction to the work. It is this type of subconscious response I hope to elicit from viewers, which is why, in *The Ties that Bind*, I chose to utilize an abstracted representation of the female form; it is easily recognizable, though distorted and decontextualized in order to meet my needs, much like Kiefer has done with his abstracted and ravaged landscapes.

Kathe Kollwitz's prints and drawings from her *War* series have a similar effect on me – there is a tremendous amount of raw emotion coming through her work (Fig. 19, 20). While the severe contrast of her black and white prints initially caught my attention, it is the expressive quality of her marks that I admire most. The psychological impact of experiencing both World Wars and the loss of her son is clearly evident in Kollwitz's imagery. I have used this influence to convey a sense of anguish and turmoil through my own mark making and deep contrast of color.

As Eva Hesse herself once commented, it was the difficult experiences of her life that allowed her a certain freedom in her work, feeling as though she was able to take risks she otherwise would have shied away from. The latex
sculptural work (Fig. 21) Hesse created toward the end of her life has had the greatest impact on my work. The ephemeral quality of such work calls to mind the fragility of the human experience, delicate and beautiful in its simple essence. However, it is the fact that any number of interpretations may be derived from it that attracts me, as a multitude of responses is what I prefer for my work. Obviously, it is the abstract nature of the piece that allows for such open-ended analysis, though the placement, proportion and materials all factor into the discussion. There seems to be meaning, a purpose behind each element of the work, which is something I want to convey in my own.

Along those same lines is the installation series, *Cells* (Fig. 22), of Louise Bourgeois. I greatly admire Bourgeois' work for its autobiographical nature and metaphorical reference to the events and relationships she experienced during her childhood and for the thoughtful and concise execution of her installations. As Bourgeois has openly discussed during interviews, the basis for her work is deeply personal, often revolving around the dysfunctions of her childhood home. However, even without her orated background, it is still clearly evident that much of Bourgeois' work, especially that which is included in her *Cells* series, relates to family relationships and issues.

It was through Bourgeois' work and her statement, “Art is not about art. Art is about life, and this sums it up,” that I became inspired to delve even deeper into self-reflection.³ I realized how much emotional weight is truly contained within one’s Self and began considering the relationship between childhood and adulthood. I was interested in the potential impacts that relationships can have on the human psyche and our sense of Self, and how easily art may be interpreted as a reflection of life.

³ (Morris & Bernadac, 25)
Philosophical Influence

As many artists have experienced in their lifetime, the motivation and inherent style of my work has undergone a series of shifts over the years as I have progressed in my artistic development. I appreciate and respect a multitude of art theories, especially those of Realism, Formalism, Abstract Expressionism and Postmodernism, as they have all contributed to the development of my ideas, attitude, and perception of art and the art world. However, at this point in my life, I most closely relate my work and its process to the ideas posited by theories of Expressionism, namely those set forth by R. G. Collingwood and John Dewey.

Collingwood and Dewey shared similar ideologies when it came to artistic expression. For Collingwood, an artist’s purpose is to express his or her own emotions and, by doing so, they experience an increase in self-knowledge. Dewey’s theory followed along such lines, asserting that artists should be motivated by a desire to embody various emotions into a physical form. Both philosophers saw art as serving humanity: Collingwood, with his assertion that artistic expression is a “public labor,” and Dewey, who believed art has the potential to give meaning and value to life. However, while Collingwood and Dewey saw the viewer as an active participant, they differed greatly in what that role entailed. Dewey argued that, only through a thoughtful reconstruction of the artist’s intentions, would the viewer be able to fully appreciate and interpret a work of art. Collingwood, on the other hand, contended that, while the viewer must be able to re-create the work of art in his or her mind, such scrutiny was unnecessary; rather, Collingwood considered art to be a mental experience, one in which the imagination of both the artist and the viewer must be employed in order for a work of art to come into existence.

Taking from these theories of Expressionism, I see my work as an embodiment of emotion, expressed through the use of imagination and personal interpretation of the meanings behind the process. Through my work, it is true that I have come to a better understanding of who I am and what motivates me to
create. However, while I will agree with Dewey that there are works of art that require viewers to actively investigate the intention of the artist, I would agree with Collingwood that, due to a viewer’s imagination, this is not always necessary. Take, for instance, the work of Kiefer and Kollwitz; both artists have definite influences, which have motivated the development of their work. However, it is unnecessary to understand that the works of those artists revolve around the issues and tragedies of war. Through Kiefer’s and Kollwitz’s use of line, contrast, color, media and creative process, we are able to perceive a sense of distress, sadness and turmoil, simply by viewing their work.

Of course, each interpretation has the potential for variation depending on the psychological and experiential background of each viewer. The following statement by Martin, regarding responses to art, sums up such thoughts:

> When we go to museums we do not just look, we make a definite response to the work. As we look at it we are happier or sadder, more at peace or more depressed. A work may stimulate yearning, helplessness, belligerence or remorse. The cause of the response is not traceable in the work. An artist cannot and does not prepare for a certain response. He does not consider the response but simply follows his inspiration. Works of art are not purposely conceived. The response depends upon the condition of the observer. (Martin, 18)

I agree with Martin insomuch that, while I work, it is less about the viewer's reaction to the piece than it is about the process and the piece itself – the dialogue and relationship I have with the material, the freedom of expression, the provocative physical qualities of the clay. Once the work is finished and installed within the gallery, my personal perspective on the work matters very little; for me, whether my work is effective is dependent upon what its audience takes from the experience.
CHAPTER 3

PRESENTATION OF WORK

Introduction to the Presentation of Work

Every aspect of our lives leaves its mark. For my thesis work, *The Ties that Bind*, I am dealing with the negative impacts, which I see as cutting very deeply. I have come to realize how much we live with cycles and how the relationships during our childhood are inevitably relived throughout our lives. Likewise, every event, experience, and relationship in our past has influenced our actions and reactions to present circumstances and relationships; every proverbial cut to our Self is left as a scar, some are more healed over than others, but always present beneath the surface. In order for us to move forward in life, we must either learn to embrace such experiences or let them go. These are some of the thoughts that have molded my thesis work and research, leading me to ultimately be influenced by the powerful works and ideas of Kiefer, Kollwitz, Hesse, Bourgeois and Martin.

**Discussion of Selected Works**

At times, it may prove beneficial for us to suppress difficult or traumatic events that are otherwise too difficult to cope with. I have found that my own mind has developed a severe tendency to block painful memories and experiences, seemingly as a mode of survival and comfort. It is these detrimental memories and experiences that I have attempted to visualize in *The Ties that Bind*. Memories that have been blocked for the sake of my own protection, which allowed me to survive the pain and trauma caused to the psyche by such experiences and relationships. This work serves as constant, tangible evidence of the impact personal experiences have had upon my sense of Self.

*Avidité* (Fig. 23) was created in response to an on-going sense that my body was not my own, that it belonged to another for whatever use and purpose
it was deemed to serve. When examined closely, the viewer will notice darkened lines wrapping around the torso, impressions left from the rope that bound and dug into the form while it was still fresh clay. Such markings and subsequent breakages were intentional, as they refer to a sensation of being emotionally and psychologically bound. From my experiences, breasts are a primary focal point of the female form; by tearing the “tissue” and scarring it so severely, the breasts have been rendered useless and stripped, in a sense, of the desire to posses them. Raked finger markings, slashes and scrawled writings are evident and emphasized by the use of dark oxide stains, spanning across the interior of Avidité (Fig. 24). Such scarification is in contrast to the pale, nearly stark whiteness of the positive space surrounding the markings, referencing the quiet inner suffering and turmoil. Aside from the conceptual considerations involved in my decision to contrast the exterior and interior of this form, it was my intention that the more subdued surfaces of the interior provided the viewer with an area for visual rest, a time to take in and reflect on their response to the work.

The exterior of Enlevé (Fig. 25) addresses the feeling of being psychologically torn and emotionally scarred by dysfunctional relationships. The resulting cuts represent a history of emotional scars, some healed over while others have cut too deep to have ever fully healed. The scarification across the abdomen refers to the fear, worry and the deep seeded guilt and regret felt for having brought and subjected a child to such a relationship. The interior of Enlevé (Fig. 26) substantially contrasts that of Avidité; it is dark and heavily scarred, with finger rakings evident throughout the entire surface, giving a strong sense of energy and movement. The words, “I AM NOT A STEREOTYPE” are written repeatedly and aggressively upon the interior, which offers the viewer a glimpse of the emotions behind the markings.

Alternately, the broken form of Taire (Fig. 27) refers to the loss of one’s sense of Self that can be experienced when they accept and embrace a role of submissiveness. The color palette is darker here, with a greater amount of fractures and bruises evident, as well as less perceptible scars. Again, the
interior (Fig. 28) contains greater activity; while the surface is stained to a dark grey, inscribed areas have been wiped clean as a way to draw the viewer's attention to the errant thoughts flowing along the raggedly cut and finger-raked surface.

While the concept behind *Averti* (Fig. 29) is similar to the other pieces, it is unique to this series as it is the only one formed of red earthenware. I chose to use such iron-rich clay for the visual contrast it provided. The interior of *Averti* (Fig. 30) is extremely jagged and painful to the touch, with areas darkened to the point of appearing charred. *Tristesse* (Fig. 31), which references sorrow and remorse, has been treated with a greater amount of blue hues in an effort to push such feelings toward the viewer. The interior of *Tristesse* (Fig. 32), scarred and raked much as *Taire*’s interior, was intended to appear bruised from scarification and the experiences connected to such.

In an effort to represent a conceptual shift in this series, *Représailles* (Fig. 33, 34, 35, 36) was created in reference to personal trauma, anguish and self-hate. These three works are grouped together as a single piece because they signify a single concept. While the shells were a direct response to specific, individual experiences and related emotions, *Représailles* is about the accumulated emotions of psychological self-punishment. By shooting and thereby highly disfiguring the forms of this piece, my intention was to convey the idea that some wounds never heal.

*René* (Fig. 37) represents a final conceptual shift. With *René*, my intention was to signify that we *do* begin to heal as time moves forward and, though we may never erase the events and experiences of our past, as we grow stronger and wiser they will have less of an impact on our psyche. The fragmentation inflicted upon *René* is most severe around her foundation, which would otherwise be one of the strongest areas for the form. Some of the breakages have been repaired while others remain; the fracturing lessens in frequency and severity as her walls extend upwards. While I originally envisioned *René* as a much more visually imposing piece, as the work evolved, I
realized she needed to be strong yet soft, worn yet elegant, able to stand on her own while embracing the scars of her past. Certainly, I see René as a final embodiment of my Self an endpiece to this series.

**Conceptual Considerations**

I have come to realize there are many things in life that may metaphorically bind and constrict our sense of Self. Whether the cause is a physical, psychological or emotional construct, imposed by ourselves and/or others, there are times in our lives when we struggle to break free of the past and move on. I chose the title, *The Ties that Bind*, for exactly this reason. This body of work reflects my personal struggle to break free of the psychological and emotional control I allowed to be imposed upon me through a highly dysfunctional relationship. At the same time, the title of the series lends itself to be interpreted on any number of levels – an illness or disease, for example, may be just as confining and devastating to the human psyche as mental or physical abuse, the traumatic effects of war, or psychological disorders.

In that same vein, these works were all originally titled, *Untitled (Reflections of the Self)*, in my effort to permit a wider interpretation. However, I ultimately decided to re-title the works, providing them with a personal interpretation and then translating that into French. This decision came about for two primary reasons. First, after deciding to remove myself from a dysfunctional marriage, I chose to change my last name to Rene (pronounced “rain”), a word based on the French name “René,” which means “Reborn.” Entitling the final work in this series René seemed fitting, as I consider that piece to be the centerpiece of the exhibit, referencing my desire to take the culmination of previous life experiences and move on, stronger and wiser than before. Second, I consider the French language to be very beautiful language, which I see as in contrast to some of the devastation wrought to my work. I appreciate the fact that, in order to understand more of the personal meaning behind the work, a viewer must take measures to translate its title. By titling this work in this way, there is a sense of psychological empowerment.
In *The Ties that Bind*, I see the forms, particularly those of earlier work in this series, such as *Avidité* and *Enlevé*, as shells that have been attacked, damaged, deconstructed, and fragmented. They are a reaction to the reality behind the masks I perceive us wearing in order to protect ourselves and to show others what we want them to see, regardless of the underlying truth. Similarly, I see those masks of protection gradually being broken down over the years by the negative experiences and relationships we live through.

In *Avidité*, some of the most significant damage has been done to the chest, with multiple slash marks and an opening ripped into one of the breasts. Horizontal lines seem to be burned into the form, intending to give the impression that the figure was fighting against constraint and control. Deeply inscribed writing cuts across the abdomen, which has partially broken away along one of the constraints. A calmer, reflective, more subdued cursive script is inscribed in the less damaged areas of the form, which I see as a consoling voice over the violence. On the interior, the natural coloration of the clay has been left exposed to contrast the dramatic coloration of the exterior. My intention is to address the impact that external forces have upon the inner thoughts and emotions of our psyche. To this end, darkened cuts reflect those inflicted upon the exterior, while deep finger-sized grooves rake across the form to symbolize the inner turmoil of the experience. Incoherent writing has been inscribed, running down along the interior of the piece, referencing stray, errant thoughts that came to mind during the process. By exhibiting the work in a way in which the interior is just as viewable as the exterior, its importance is emphasized to the viewer.

It is also important to note the specific arrangement of this exhibition of work (Appendix A). First and foremost, I chose to utilize a divider wall in order to both physically and psychologically divide the space of my work. As the viewer enters the exhibition space, they see *René*, who visually references an abstracted female torso. She is fractured, yet strong from the silver metal used to seal the fragments together. The other side of the wall contains the forms representing the greatest damage done to the metaphorical, protective shells of
the Self. Displayed and supported by rods on black matte bases, my intention was to hold them as evidence of the most significant events that were impacting my life at that time. Along one wall is Représailles, which translates into “Retribution”. This is significant insomuch that, personally, the work is held up as examples of the psychological self-punishment that can come along with allowing oneself to remain within a detrimental relationship.

By placing a barrier between René and the damaged work, it was my intention to represent a personal decision to move on from the past. René has shed the damaged layers of the Self, has begun to heal and is standing tall, ready to go forward into the future. The wall also represents the mental barrier often required in order to heal one’s Self and, as it does not completely hide the metaphorical memories of past experiences, indicates that we are wise to learn from our mistakes.4

**Technical Considerations**

I am working with a type of mid-range white stoneware because of its inherent qualities: visually seen as delicate and fragile, in reality it is strong and tolerant. Nylon fibers were mixed within my clay body so that I could apply enough stress upon the forms to push them right up to that final moment just before the brink of collapse. I choose to fire my work slightly beyond its maturation temperature, causing it to misform and warp to varying degrees, dependent upon its placement in the kiln. The resulting opportunity for chance is something I appreciate in my work, as I see it as another reflection of life. Nothing is ever perfect or pristine; no matter how much we plan or how much care we take, things will always change and be out of our total control. Therefore, while I maintain control over the form, its markings and coloration, I

4 The method of sealing René’s fractures is based on my appreciation for Asian aesthetics and the idea of renewed life. Since around the 15th century, Asian cultures, specifically those in Korea, Japan and Vietnam, have historically repaired their work using a lacquer resin to seal fragments flush together, sprinkling gold dust over the fresh seal. This technique is often used for tea ceremony cups (Gopnik).
subsequently subject the work to the fire and its effects. Though I still maintain control through the firing process, through the temperature range and number of firings, I want the form to have the freedom to interact with the heat, so it may become susceptible to movement and give me the fractures I find so desirable.

After working on the shell forms, I found a desire to work more in the round, adding greater depth to my work and exploring alternative methods of construction and deconstruction in order to attain the dynamic visual impact I was striving to achieve. The three forms of *Représailles* signify this break. Constructed by packing wet, damp clay into the plaster body mould and then allowing it to dry somewhat, I removed the resulting form and applied scarification by cutting, scratching, tearing, and/or shooting with various guns to enhance the visual impact of the damage caused to the forms. The base surface of the torsos have more of a skin tone to them and appear dirty, adding to the morbid quality of the work, while darker tones and the use of negative space emphasize the damage done to the forms.

**Formal Considerations**

My decision to move towards a more representational form for my thesis work was based on my desire for the viewer to be able to more readily relate to the work on an individual, personal level. Utilizing cast moulds of my own body in this endeavor permitted me to experience a deeper connection with the work. Clay was an obvious medium of choice for me for several reasons. My primary reason for using clay is the fact that it is one of the most pliable and manipulative materials available, soft yet strong, able to give the impression of both strength and weakness, which aided in the visual qualities I was striving to convey. Being that clay has a certain memory of its own, cutting and slicing through leather hard clay allowed for later smoothing of such areas, which led them to retain the visual evidence of traumatic events while giving the impression of healing. Clay has a long history of being a method of recording events and important information. As such, I see these forms as a physical record and visual reminder of the negative effects dysfunctional relationships can have on the human psyche.
Clay presents unique opportunities for coloration and surface treatments. Substantial textures, such as cuts, scratches, and gouges can readily be cut into wet clay, while chemical glazes and stains allowed to soak into the clay body will acquire greater permanency. The markings, fragmentations, and various methods of scarification are accentuated through a color palette of deep greens, browns and blues, no longer hidden within the body but visually pulled up to the surface. Lighter washes of similar color have been applied as contrast to the darker tones, calling greater attention to the expressive qualities of my markings.

During the development of the forms, inscriptions were often applied as direct momentary responses to the damage caused to the form. Such writings appear highly aggressive and incoherent, much like how we may recall the fact that hurtful things have been said or done, though our minds may have blocked the specifics. As the fresh clay was allowed to dry, a final layering of text was inscribed. This final inscription is a reflective answer to the damage that was done, as though a consoling voice were inside your head saying, “Everything will be alright.”
CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSION

The body of work in *The Ties that Bind* was developed as a means of providing a metaphorical representation of the impact of life experiences upon the human psyche. Through an examination of the development of my artistic problem, the historical and contemporary artists who have primarily influenced this body of work and the philosophical influences that have impacted my perception of the purpose of my work, this paper provides an insight into my work. With this body of work complete, it is time for me to move on – as someone once said, with great sorrow springs forth great joy and so, too, I will have mine.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
CURRICULUM VITAE

EDUCATION

2010   Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia
       MFA in 3-Dimensional Design

2003   Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri
       BSED in Art Education
       BFA in Ceramics with a minor in Art History

1998   Maple Woods Community College, Kansas City, Missouri
       AA in Art

JURIED EXHIBITIONS

2010   *The Ties that Bind*, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia

2009   *Seeking Solitude*, RFD Gallery, Swainsboro, Georgia
       *College Juried Exhibit*, The Art Place, Marietta, Georgia

2008   *College Juried Exhibit*, The Art Place, Marietta, Georgia

2007   *Wildlife Exhibition*, Averitt Center for the Arts, Statesboro, Georgia

TWO-PERSON EXHIBITIONS

2009   *Sarah Davis and Jenn Galusha: Recent Work*, Averitt Center for the Arts, Statesboro, Georgia

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2008   *MFA Biennial*, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia

2005   *Artists in our Community*, Oswego, Illinois

2004   *The Art Attack School of Art Exhibition*, Sycamore, Illinois
       *Live Wire City Fest*, DeKalb, Illinois

2003   *Students of Students Exhibition*, Springfield, Missouri

COMMISSIONS

2008   *Evolvement III*, Mr. & Mrs. David Espenlaub, Dallas, Texas

2007   *Inner Sanctuary*, Mr. Gerald Friedl, Lenexa, Kansas
GALLERY AFFILIATION

Present - Horizon Gallery, Savannah, Georgia
2008

2007  DeKalb Gallery, DeKalb, Illinois

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

2009  Recipient, Graduate Travel Grant, Betty Foy Sanders Department of Art, Georgia Southern, University
Recipient, College of Graduate Studies Graduate Travel Grant, Georgia Southern University

2008  Second Place, College Juried Exhibit, The Art Place, Marietta, Georgia
Recipient, College of Graduate Studies Graduate Travel Grant, Georgia Southern University

CERTIFICATION

2010-  Georgia Teaching Certification, K-12 Art, to be conferred
Present

2009-  Illinois Teaching Certification, K-12 Art, Initial Special Teaching
2004  No. 2197145

2003-  Missouri Teaching Certification, K-12 Art, Type PC 1
2004  No. 0289358

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2010-  Graduate Teaching Assistant, Betty Foy Sanders Department of Art,
2009  Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia

Spring 2010: 3-Dimensional Design (ART 1030), two sections
Fall 2009: 2-Dimensional Design (ART 1020), two sections

2009  Private Art Instructor

2008  Summer Studios Assistant, Betty Foy Sanders Department of Art,
Averitt Center for the Arts, and Georgia Southern University,
Statesboro, Georgia

2007-  Art Educator, Oswego Community Unit School District #308, Oswego,
2004  Illinois
2003  Student Teacher, Springfield Public Schools, Springfield, Missouri
       Ceramics Instructor, Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Missouri

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

2009-   *Art Student Advisement Center Graduate Assistant, Betty Foy Sanders*
2008    Department of Art, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia

2008-   *Ceramics Studio Graduate Assistant, Betty Foy Sanders Department*
2007    of Art, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia

**PUBLICATIONS**


2009  *Avidité*, Published in *Miscellany*, p. 19

2003  *BFA Exhibition*, Reviewed by Nathan Lewis in “BFA Seniors Display Variety of Art Forms at Exhibition Center,” *Southwest Standard*, Vol. 96(28), p. 4


**PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES**

Present - Member, National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts

2008

Present - Member, Omicron Delta Kappa

2002  Member, Golden Key National Honor Society

2010 - Attendee, the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts
2008    Conference

2010 - Member, Club Mud, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia
2007

2009  Presenter, “Preparing Professors of Art” at Celebrating American Craft in the Southern Mountains, the Georgia Art Education Association Conference in Young Harris, Georgia
2009  Presenter, “Sarah Davis: Recent work” at From Dawn to Digital, the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts Conference in Phoenix, Arizona

2007 -  Member, National Art Education Association
2000  Member, National Education Association

2004  Attendee, National Education Association Conference in Chicago, Illinois

2003 -  Member, Clay Works, Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri
2002

2003 -  Member, Missouri National Art Education Association
2000  Member, Missouri Education Association

2002 -  Attendee, Missouri National Art Education Association Conference
2000

2001 -  President, Missouri National Art Education Association Student Chapter, Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri
2000

COMMUNITY SERVICE

2010 -  Volunteer, Arts Fest, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia
2008

2008  Volunteer, National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

2006  Lecturer/Demonstrator, Boy Scouts of America, Pack 712, Oswego, Illinois

2004  Assistant/Youth Instructor, Art Attack School of Art, Sycamore, Illinois

2002  Volunteer, Developmental Center of the Ozarks, Springfield, Missouri
      Volunteer, Docent/Workshop Assistant, Women of the Book exhibition, Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri
      Volunteer, Arts Fest, Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri
EXHIBIT B

EXHIBITION FLOOR PLAN

Main Entrance

René

Avidité

Enlevé

Taire

Reprisailles

Averti

Tristesse

Secondary Entrance
APPENDIX C
FIGURES

Figure 1: Meditation Domes II, IV, III, 2001
5 ¼" x 3" x 4 ¼", 7" x 7" x 7 ½", 6" x 3 ½" x 4 ½", stoneware and oxide stains
Photograph courtesy of Dan Grych of DeKalb Gallery, DeKalb, Illinois

Figure 2: Meditation Dome IX, 2002
7" x 7" x 7 ½", stoneware and carbonate stains
Photograph courtesy of Dan Grych

Figure 3: Meditation Dome VIII, 2002
5" x 6 ½" x 5", stoneware and oxide stains
Photograph courtesy of Dan Grych
Figure 4: *Vortex*, 2007
14” x 8 ½” x 16”, white stoneware, oxide and carbonate stain
Figure 5: Sara Radstone, *Nushu*. Photograph courtesy of Barett Marsden Gallery

Figure 6: Erica Jane Huntzinger, *Wishing Star*. Photograph courtesy of Erica Jane Huntzinger

Figure 7: Jane Burton, *New Beginnings*. Photograph courtesy of Jane Burton

Figure 8: MaPo Kinnard-Payton, *Mesa*. Photograph courtesy of MaPo Kinnard-Payton

Figure 9: Rebecca Hutchinson, Installation at Washington State University. Photograph courtesy of Rebecca Hutchinson

Figure 10: Andy Goldsworthy, *White Walls*. Photograph courtesy of Galerie Lelong
Figure 11: Ode 1, 2008
12 ½” x 2 ½” x 24 ½”, red earthenware, oxide and carbonate stains

Figure 12: Ode 3, 2008
12 ½” x 1 ½” x 24 ½”, red earthenware, oxide and carbonate stains
Figure 13: *Meditations for My Child (aftermath)*, 2008
12" x 12" x 14", porcelain, oxide stains
Figure 14: *Mother-child*, 2008
10” x 8” x 14 ½”, red earthenware, porcelain, oxide stains
Figure 15: Story of the Runaways, 2008
9" x 9" x 27", red earthenware, gesso, watercolor, colored pencil, graphite
Figure 16: *Self*, 2008
11 ½” x 11 ½” x 18”, red earthenware, glaze-stained
Figure 17: Untitled (exposed), 2008
12” x 9” x 18 ½”, red earthenware, porcelain, oxide and carbonate stains
Figure 18: Anselm Kiefer, *Burning Rods*
Photograph courtesy of the Saint Louis Art Museum
Figure 19: Kathe Kollwitz, *The Mothers*
Photograph courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art

Figure 20: Kathe Kollwitz, *Bread! (detail)*
Photograph courtesy of the Art Museums of San Francisco
Figure 22: Louise Bourgeois, Cell XXV (The View of the World of the Jealous Wife)  
Photograph courtesy of Cheim & Read Gallery
Figure 23: Avidité, 2009
10” x 5” x 16 ½”, porcelain, glaze-stained
Figure 24: Avidité (interior)
Figure 25: Enlevé, 2009
12" x 6" x 20", porcelain, glaze-stained
Figure 26: Enlevé (interior)
Figure 28: *Taire*, 2010
11” x 6 ½” x 21”, porcelain, glaze-stained
Figure 29: Taire (interior)
Figure 30: Averti, 2010
12" x 6" x 19", porcelain, glaze-stained
Figure 31: *Averti* (interior)
Figure 32: Tristesse, 2010
13” x 6 ½” x 19”, porcelain, glaze-stained
Figure 33: Tristesse (interior)
Figure 34: Représailles, 2009
72” x 12 ½” x 23”, porcelain, glaze-stained
Figure 35: Reprisailles (detail)
Figure 36: *Représailles* (detail)
Figure 37: Reprisailles (detail)

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Figure 38: René, 2010
22” x 13” x 14 ½”, porcelain, glaze-stained, tin core wire