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Printmaking and Textiles

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Summer 2013

Printmaking and Textiles

For my project, I explored the themes of destruction, re-growth, and time through the mediums of textiles and printmaking. At the onset of my project, I thought I would focus mainly on the process of printing on textiles, but it has evolved into two 3D installation pieces containing printed textiles as an element of the larger whole.

I took inspiration for my project from a stop I made at Garnet Ghost Town along my road trip West this summer. Garnet was a small mining town in Montana until the majority of the city was burned to the ground in a fire in 1912. The remaining buildings have been preserved as they were post-fire. My inspiration came from the Victorian wallpaper inside several of the main buildings. The edges were torn and/or burnt away, revealing patterns of older wallpapers beneath. I was drawn to the delicateness of the remains and the temporality of beauty. From there it was just a matter of figuring out how to construct a piece that replicates the process of destruction and regrowth.

After a period of intense sketching, I determined that I wanted to use hand-printed fabric to upholster a chair. I scavenged many garage sales until I found the perfect piece of furniture for my project: a Victorian folding chair. Meanwhile, I also determined that the imagery I wanted to use, namely flowers, and the level of detail I hoped to have reach would best be achieved with through an etching. When printing etchings, one soaks the paper so that it can squeeze into the crevasses of

the etching plate that contain the ink. At first I wasn't sure whether or not fabric would work the same as paper and was worried the fibers of the fabric would not be fine enough to hold the image. However, my experiments were fruitful. After experimenting with ink consistency, different kinds of fabrics, and registration, I printed my final fabrics on cotton gauze using the etching press.

Next I had to figure out how to transform my freshly printed fabric into something that implied the passing of time and destruction. I found that using fire was the quickest way to activate destruction with natural results. Age, water decay, drying, etc. all take a significant amount of time to render results. Fire, however, is a natural method of destruction that occurs quickly both when naturally occurring and when assisted. Before burning the final textiles for the chair, I practiced how to achieve a controlled burn on other scraps of muslin. During this trial burning period, I started making small roses from the burnt scraps of fabric. Although at first I was unsure of how these roses could tie into my piece, I felt they emoted the theme of beauty juxtaposed against the destruction of fire. After completing the chair and making dozens of roses, it was time to consider how I wanted my piece to be displayed.

Initially I envisioned re-growth surrounding and climbing up the base of the chair. For the new growth, I used a combination of wool, lichen, and the burnt fabric roses. I had gathered naturally shed wool while living in England this past semester and used it as a base to build up the "growth." I also gathered pieces of lichen from the Tacoma area and incorporated them with the roses. I reconfigured the artificial growth I had created in many different ways and ultimately determined that it was

distracting from the focus of the chair. Therefore, I decided to remove the “growth” and use it to create a separate, independent installation, *Installation II*.

I realized that for the final product to be successful in my mind, I needed to achieve an overall atmosphere and feel for the piece. Therefore, the final element of the piece is the space and lighting. *Installation I*, in its final form, is made up of the chair, which sits alone in an empty room, lit by a single spotlight. The light focuses the audience on a single moment and place in time, isolated from any outside context. The isolation of the piece is meant to remind the viewer of the artificiality of the scene. The upholstery on the chair has been burned implying that the chair caught on fire at one point. Yet, the wood of the chair shows no trace of the fire. Still, the chair has been rendered unusable. I enjoy this element of the bizarre and mysterious. The history of the piece is false, in that it hasn't been in place for longer than a few weeks at most, but I want the audience to perceive a longer sense of time behind it.

Over the course of this summer, I feel I grew a lot as an artist and subsequently as a person. Meditating on the themes of destruction, re-growth, and time, I came to the conclusion that the state of destruction is transient. New growth comes forth from the rubble and destruction in a new and delicate form. This idea is applicable for many situations and is a good reminder in our daily lives. Upon completing these two pieces, *Installation I and II*, I am very pleased to say I achieved my aims for this research project.