Truths, Realities And The Easily Transmitted Image

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TRUTHS, REALITIES AND THE EASILY TRANSMITTED IMAGE

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Art in the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

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ABSTRACT

By the documenting and examining things that are often overlooked in everyday life, I try to find the beauty of these objects, of people, their lives and their homes. I am interested in the current technology and the influence of the easily transmitted image.

What is the truth and reality of the images shared by the current youth culture because of the use of camera phones, digital image takers, and the constant image transmissions through online social networking venues such as My Space and FaceBook? The current digital image is no longer a precious object as it was in the past. The easy accessibility of technology and the growing popularity of an affordable camera have made these images a common object, easily replaced. It is my interest or concern with this technology that led me to my final body of work, images of this youth culture.
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INTRODUCTION

In the past, traditional artists have often sought after and incorporated new technologies to enhance the creative impact of their artwork. This is especially true for today’s artist and the endless possibilities available through the use of computers and emerging technologies. It is amazing that with today’s computer graphics software, a printmaker can separate the colors of a complicated image, a painter can experiment with various color schemes or textures, and a sculptor can view a design from any angle within the virtual space of his computer, all in a matter of seconds.

Only recently have artists working in traditional areas really begun to explore this exciting new realm of computer technology. As part of the intellectual exchange of ideas available in an academic program, I have continued to explore my artistic side through traditional methods while experimenting with new technology. I believe that becoming an effective artist requires constant study and research. I took this time in graduate school as an opportunity to experiment and allow myself to grow as a person and as an artist. I have been drawn to current technologies and the idea of the easily transmitted image. Questions of realities and truths are posed in this exchange of images. Are the images that one sees on the internet truly represent the person or are they taken and shared as a way to have themselves perceived as something they are not?
INFLUENCES

I admire the work of Thomas Ruff. He tests the limits of photography while he consistently introduces new styles and methods without formulating a “signature” style. He has been testing the limits of this medium for more than two decades, completing a dozen series of photographs that range from seemingly banal images of streets and buildings to computer-generated prints of sensuous psychedelic color fields. I see my work paralleling his, my experimentation and continuing series of works range from abstract, flowers, landscapes, to my current work of portraits of youth culture.

I find the portraits of Rineke Dijkstra to be quite intriguing. In her portraits, the figures are purified and abstracted, free from any embellishment. The simplicity of attitude reinforces the simplicity of the visual composition. This formal treatment of the figure and background make a ‘classical’ impression in her photographs. They are of young people who are at an age in which character traits are gradually beginning to form. This lack has a soothing effect on the picture, a calming of the visual impression.

“This series plays lavishly with the young people’s surroundings, clothing, natural, inborn differences and codes of conduct, and shows how attitudes, gestures, expressions and clothes form themselves into symbols, into meaning, only to disintegrate once more because these young people are in a stage of transition in which the child has not yet been cast off and the adult not yet integrated.” (Dijkstra 148-149)

In Dijkstra’s choice of a ‘post-climax’ as a starting point for three series of work, she opens up insights into the human condition. These portraits show the first signs of scarring, the first achievement. The first ‘post-experience’ of young people is shown as the first sign of maturity and
depth. She creates portraits that are not a confirmatory ritual but which represent a balance between
the individual, the group and universal human existence in general in the face of birth and death,
developing a new and individual interpretation of the classical portrait. (Dijkstra 152)

Rineke clearly deals with ‘rites of passage’, to adulthood, to motherhood. There are moments
when a person enters into a new, different community but before all else, into a new emotional
phase. (Dijkstra 13)
ABSTRACTIONS

I started out with abstractions. I take photographs of objects from my space, my life. I want to keep them a secret so I use photography and abstraction as a way to keep the viewer out of my space, out of my life. These are frozen moments in time. I have used various tricks, not focusing clearly on my objects, photographing the reflection of the objects in metal, aluminum or anything that will reflect. Have I given the viewer enough information to hold their interest? Can I transform my space, my inner circle, my secrets into a “surrogate space”? Can I create a space that the audience can see, but one that will keep them out of my life, out of my space? These objects, these moments, they are not just for me. They are global, universal. Does the audience have secrets? Are they the same secrets as mine? Do my moments in time evoke a memory from them? Are these images truth or reality?
Figure 1: *Zenith*, Digital Photograph, Fall 2004, 30 in. x 40 in.

Figure 2: *Periapsis*, Digital Photograph, Fall 2004, 30 in. x 40 in.
Figure 3: *Aphelion*, Digital Photograph, Fall 2004, 30 in. x 40 in.

Figure 4: *Precession*, Digital Photograph, Fall 2004, 30 in. x 40 in.
FOUND OBJECTS

I continued working within the confines of my space, my house and my yard. I wanted more hands-on work. I tried printing on my photos, making puzzles out of them, collaging them, using printouts as Polaroid transfers, and transferring images onto many substrates. I spent time with my children, thinking about my art, trying to look at what I was doing that would have a global application. Many of my projects were doomed from the start. Some of them influenced my later work.

I gathered objects from around my house. I began looking at the work of Joseph Cornell. He not only placed images in boxes, he also placed objects. At midterm I shared two projects that I felt had a more universal theme, one was a mother/daughter lamp. I salvaged a lamp that my daughter wanted to throw away. She felt she was too old for it. I thought about mothers and daughters and the changes they go through as children grow up. I found old images of us and then took new ones.

I was thinking about my art all the time. What was I doing? How does the art that I make relate to contemporary art? My work continued to be about my circle, my environment, and the people in it. My issues, my circle was the same as many people’s. They are global, universal issues.

Last semester I used objects from this circle, but gave you no information, no clues.
Figure 5: *Mother/Daughter lamp*, Spring 2005, found objects and photographs on acetate.
This semester I have been experimenting. I felt the need to have some hands-on experiences with my art rather than an extensive use of technology. I played with making prints, monoprints, printing on my images, incorporating technology into printmaking, deconstructing the colors in my images then breaking them into basic shapes, and actually cutting my actual images into puzzles pieces and putting them back together. I found myself enjoying this hands-on approach to creating my art. During this time I experimented with different substrates such as wood and plexiglass. I cut paper and tried collage. These were short-lived experiments and I returned to the continued questioning of my art.

Figure 6: Experiment with simplifying the colors in one of my photographs, Spring 2005.
Figure 7: Experimenting with the simplification of one of my abstractions, Spring 2005.
The series called “Coffee Cups” started after I read an article about how coffee can actually be good for you. The need for caffeine is one vice I have. I spent weeks thinking about how often I had a cup of coffee, my preference of coffee cups. What did I do when I was drinking coffee? Was I relaxed? Did I do more than just drink and enjoy the coffee? I decided to take a photo of every cup of coffee I drank over a week’s period. I had someone take a picture of me in the environment I drank that coffee in. The resulting art was a series of sixteen small boxes. In the back of each box was an image of a coffee cup; on top of that was a transparent layer with an image of me drinking a cup of coffee. Each box was different. The boxes were small enough that the viewer had to approach the boxes to actually see the images. They were forced to come close and study them, move around them and try to catch the light just right in order to see the layers of images.

Figure 8: Single box from the Coffee Cup Series showing the layer details, Spring 2005.
These pieces were helpful in discovering the fact that the feelings I had that I didn’t want to share really weren’t just mine. The relationships between people and the things people do are universal.

These pieces also gave me ideas for continuing my photography and being able to have a tactile experience with my art through building holders such as these for my images. I planned to readdress my abstract images and use them again. I planned on giving more visual clues about the objects I use, either through the holder that I present them in or through the use of elements that make up the object.
Figure 9: *Coffee Cups*, mixed media, found objects and digital photos, Spring 2005.
**INSTALLATION**

Since this was a time for experimentation, I felt I should try everything that popped into my head. I spent a lot of time in my gardens, photographing the flowers and the changes from one season to another. This was a part of my space that I tried to keep from outsiders. I started to share more, to give more visual clues of my world, to let the viewer in. In class we spent time looking at installation artists, emerging artists. We studied video and multimedia artists, among them, Nam June Paik. Paik was amazing in his use of technology. He mixed sounds with images. He created installations of all kinds. We studied the YBA, the Young British Artists, such as Damien Hurst, Tracey Ehman and Sara Lucas. Looking at this work inspired me to try my hand at installation. One day an instructor told me that if I really wanted to take pictures of the flowers in my yard, maybe that is what I should do. I decided to follow this advice, whether it was a sarcastic comment or a real suggestion.

My final critique featured two installations. I displayed a series of abstractions on a shelf, representing objects in my laundry room. I built the shelf in the same style as my laundry room shelves. The abstractions were of products that one would find on anyone’s laundry shelf.
My second installation was a hanging representation of my garden. I tried to create an object that would allow the viewer to stand among the colorful plexiglass pieces that were suspended from a circular form. It was my intention to create an atmosphere of color, allowing others the chance to stand in my garden but using the abstractions of my flowers, a method I have employed to avoid revealing the actual objects in my circle, my space or my life. This was another way for me to create a surrogate space for the viewers, keeping them out of my actual space.
Figure 11: *My Garden*, 75 inkjet emulsion transfers on plexiglass, Spring 2005.
BOOKARTS

Using my photographs as source material, I continued my experimentation with various media. Our classes focused on book arts and serial images. I viewed my photographs as both. I had been successful with various layering of my images. I incorporated this thought into a book. I worked on several styles of books. I began construction of a wooden box in the shape of a house. I imagined this as a universal shape for home and family. I created moveable layers inside the box with layers of images representative of a home, a garden. I included found objects to add a bit of whimsy. In order to draw attention to the box, the viewer was required to look through a small hole in the end of the box. The box had lights inside.
Figure 12: Construction of box, Fall 2005, 12” x 18”
Figure 13: Inside construction of box, Fall 2005, 12”x18”

Figure 14: Inside transparencies for box, 12”x12”. 
I started working on an accordion book. This style seemed like the perfect solution for layering my images. I used inkjet prints on transparency paper. I wanted to create an intimate object for a viewer to hold. I had created another surrogate space through my choice of images. It wasn’t possible to tell if the images were from my home or if they were just representations of my space.

Figure 15: Handmade paper box with accordion book, Fall 2005, 5”x7”
Since I began focusing on Book Arts, I visited the library’s Special Collections and researched several Press websites, particularly Flying Fish Press featuring book arts by Julie Chen. Her works are inspirational as she uses a variety of boxes to display her books and images, which is the direction I was working. I continued reading about Joseph Cornell and his boxes, which inspired me to include objects, rather than just imagery in one of my box projects. As this box project started resembling a stage set, I was directed to view the stage constructions of Robin Germany. She photographs her creations, which is a venue I am considering researching and exploring next semester.

During this time I became increasingly concerned about the amount of time that my teenagers were spending on the internet. I started to monitor what was going on, the sites they visited, and what they spent all that time doing. I was introduced to My Space. I used this opportunity to talk about the internet. My daughter helped me find images from her friends. I used these images to create a series of small boxes. The images of faces, keys from computers and other
objects were representative of the chaos that was prevalent on this space as well as the technology that was involved. Since this was something from my personal space, I used small, found boxes to force the viewers to approach these boxes if they wanted to see what was in them. This social networking space was to become an important theme as my work progressed.

Figure 17: *My Space Chaos*, Fall 2005, mixed media.
SERIAL WORK

Discussions of serial work led me to look at my photographs in a new light. I realized that many of the photographs I take are actually a series of work and as such, should be shown in multiples. I used this time to examine the commonality between the many images I took and to present them in a different manner. I also focused on the formal imagery I take which was influenced by Terri Weifenbach’s interesting use of depth of field.

My images for the final critique in my second year of the MFA program took on a new meaning. They finally had a relationship to the mixed media objects I had worked on in the past. The book art objects I made during this semester were about intimate settings and were made to bring the viewer close in order to view what was inside. The images that I hung were large and ambiguous; giving no indication of where they were taken or whose space they were from. I displayed a series of six images that were close-ups of objects. The viewer had no idea as to where these images were located. It was also questionable as to what the objects were. This was a new direction for my work. I examined objects up close with the intent of making the viewer question what the images were or how they were taken.
Figure 18: Gallery 210, final critique display, Fall 2005.

Figure 19: *Singles series*, 2005, digital photographs, Fall 2005, 22”x15”.
Figure 20: *Cerus*; 2005, digital photograph, Fall 2005, 32x30".
Figure 21: *Untitled*, Series of six, 2005, digital photographs, Fall 2005, 22”x16”.

Figure 22: *Bug series*, 2005, digital photography, Fall 2005, assorted sizes.
Figure 23: *Flowers*, 2005, Digital Photographs, Fall 2005, 22”x16".
This last critique seemed like my work was finally coming together. The audience saw connections between my images and objects. I worked on another way to present the circular images from the last critique. These images are still from my private space but they represent a closer look at things, an investigation of the environment. These presentations look more scientific in nature, but they have a relationship with the peep hole in my house box. I am still attracted by the bright colors.

Figure 24: *Untitled*; series of six circles, Digital Photography, Spring 2006, 7”x7” each.

Figure 25: *Untitled*; series of six circles, Digital Photographs, Spring 2006, 7”x7” each.

Figure 26: *Untitled*; series of six circles, Digital Photographs, Spring 2006, 7”x7” each.
Figure 27: *Frosted Flowers*, series of six circles, Digital Photographs, Spring 2006, 10”x10” each.
Figure 28: Circle poster; 64 images, Digital Photographs, Spring 2006, 40”x40”.
Figure 29: Ashley’s Picture Poster; Digital Photograph collage, Spring 2006, 30”x40”.
Earlier I was introduced to MySpace.com, a social networking site that is very popular with teenagers over the age of 14. It is also a space where local bands, aspiring actors, photographers, and anyone else can promote themselves. The concept is to share some information about yourself such as your name, age, gender and then start making friends. You add people to your “friends” list in order to share your bulletins and for them to see the images that you have posted and to comment on them. The participants have varying styles of web spaces but there was a particular style of self-portrait that was used. I called it the “My Space Face”.

The concept of this type of networking space on the Internet was unsettling. My concern for the safety of my daughter was exaggerated by news reports of young girls meeting “friends”, conversing with them online, and then meeting them in person. Young girls are often ignorant of the dangers of this and become targets of child molesters, perverts, and criminals. My daughter was spending a lot of time at the computer. I made it my mission to be aware of what she was doing and to warn her of the potential dangers. I started looking and taking images from the computer that my daughter uses. I made some posters from those images. The sheer number of images rivaled my picture taking, but these images were focused on the type of image that my daughter and her friends would post on MySpace.com.
Figure 30: *Ashley’s MySpace Picture Poster*, Digital Photograph collage, Spring 2006, 20”x36”.
The last critique of this semester had me showing the many photos that I took of the happenings in my life. I continued to show events in my life without giving the images any context. I decided that I would display these posters and then pick a couple of my favorite images. I also continued the investigation into my daughter’s time on MySpace.com. While I was looking at the type of image that was being posted on the internet, I also thought about the perception that people had when viewing these images. The teens on this site would post images that were not really a reflection of their true selves, but what they would like to be. Young girls posted images of their faces, hoping to look sexy or older. Sometimes you would get glimpses of their bodies, a small view, yet still keeping their true selves hidden. I decided to display a selection of images that my daughter posted of herself and some images that I took of her on the beach one day. I wanted this comparison to be one of truths and realities... the truth of the way I felt she should be shown, as her mother, and the realities of what she showed to the people in her social circle. These were not images of truth, but the way she chose to be perceived by her internet friends and very likely, by strangers.

After this semester I planned to take a more contemporary approach with my subject matter, from the objects in my space to the people in my space, my children and their friends. This would apply to everything I photograph. I was interested in comparing my perception of images to that of the perception of teens that I come into contact with. Using my daughter as a resource, I planned to ask for the cooperation of her and her friends, for advice, their thoughts, and ideas.

The social networking sites that many teenagers are actively participating on are getting a lot of press time. There are articles about the dangers of these spaces and the things that happen on them. There is also a concern about the change in personalities that teenagers display when hiding under their social identity. Is this becoming their reality?
Figure 31: 20 circles, Reminder of midterm critique, Digital Photographs, 7”x7” each, Spring 2006.
Figure 32: *Fire Poster;* Digital Photography collage, Spring 2006, 30”x40”.
Figure 33: *Flower Poster*, Digital Photography collage, Spring 2006, 30”x40”.
Figure 34: *Purple Flower*, Digital Photography, Spring 2006, 11”x14”.
Figure 35: *Amaryllis Lipstick*; Digital Photography, Spring 2006, 11”x14”.
Figure 36: ZOMG Flower! by Ashley Walton; Digital Photography, Spring 2006, 11”x14”.
Figure 37: Blink 182 by Ashley Walton; Digital Photography, Spring 2006, 11”x14”. 
Figure 38: Bitches wanna Fight Me!? by Ashley Walton; Spring 2006, 11”x14”.
Figure 39: *Pink Poodle Cutie!* by Ashley Walton; Spring 2006, 11”x14”.

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Figure 39: *Pink Poodle Cutie!* by Ashley Walton; Spring 2006, 11”x14”.
Figure 40: Ashley’s My Space Poster #2; Spring 2006, 30”x40”.

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Figure 41: *Ashley at the Beach #1*; Digital Photograph, Spring 2006, 14”x11”.
Figure 42: *Ashley at the Beach #2*; Digital Photograph, Spring 2006, 14”x11”. 
Figure 43: *Ashley at the Beach #3*; Digital Photograph, Spring 2006, 14”x11”.
PORTRAiture

Richard Avedon insists that portraits reveal little but the photographer’s own penchants and beliefs. “A portrait is not a likeness. The moment an emotion or fact is transformed into a photograph it is no longer a fact but an opinion. There is no such thing as inaccuracy in a photograph. All photographs are accurate. None of them is the truth.” (Barcoman 100)

In the nineteenth century, portraits were made to be a likeness of a person. Usually that person wanted an image that resembled him and to have it convey his social status. A successful portrait focused on the appearance of the person and emphasized his status in society. Before photography, images could represent the powerful status of a person, but one could not be sure if the image was correct in its likeness of the person.

In the twentieth century, special occasions were recorded according to their importance. Photographs were commissioned for special functions or for identification such as passport photos. There was also an increased interest in the unnoticed, ‘stolen’ portrait. By catching the subject of a portrait at an unguarded moment, it was thought that even if it was not ‘true’, it was authentic and finitely not theatrically produced. Only in this way was it possible to reveal the other real face behind the assumed expression. Photography became more aggressive and overstepped its previously rigid limits. (Dijkstra 145-146)

Since the 1970s, this type of approach took another turn, almost a step backward. In the self-portraits of Cindy Sherman, Richard Avedon’s portraits of the rural population of the American mid-west, or in Robert Maplethorpe’s portraits of figures from the New York artistic community, theatrical staging reappeared. These images were considered photographic theatre and therefore a certain amount of staging was necessary. These images once again create stages for the figures to
enter, introduce themselves and take up a pose. The preconditions for this change were a different understanding of the human being and a different approach to the truth.

In these images, identity takes the place of truth. The construction of identity required a new form of photography, one that no longer glorifies the subject but serves as an analysis of the figure. The backgrounds or stages of these portraits are reduced so as not to compete with the figure.

Cindy Sherman’s work is not concerned with finding an essential core but with debunking it. Her work focuses on the postmodern belief that our identities are made up of multiple selves dished up and adopted in a series of performances and masquerades in order to fit in with how culture has defined and determined us.

“A portrait is the questioning or exploration of self and identity through a literal representation of what somebody looks like. The assumption is that the inner workings of the complex human psyche can never really be understood by looking at a picture. However much one is tempted to read a face subjectively for clues of someone’s character, the many versions, and the many selves, which can be fashioned in front of the camera can say anything the artist or the sitter wishes to say at that precise moment. The viewer of the photograph then adds his or her experience to it to create another version of its meaning. However much we want to capture a person’s true personality with a camera, it just isn’t possible. If you put a different caption under the image or change its context, the meaning will change with it. Identity can be changed in an instant.” (Bright 20-21)
TEEN CULTURE

My final body of work is of images of my children and their friends. I thought about how my parents would line my brothers and sisters in front of our house, or someplace in our front yard. We would all stand like little soldiers until our picture was taken. As I look at those images, I wondered what my parents were thinking. We have hundreds of these pictures documenting our progression in age and of who was living at my parents’ house. These pictures were not always great pictures. They seemed to be an important visual record of their 8 children, as they grew up and changed. My parents used any holiday or get together to hold this ritual. We still continue to do this on holidays. This is typical of photographs in the twenty first century.

In the summer of 2006, I began documenting the teens that came to my house. If they were spending time at my house, I would ask for a small amount of their time and photograph them in my yard. In the beginning I tried various places in the yard, I followed them around, photographed them interacting. I wanted to catch their real reactions to my invasion of their time together, the tension of a mother’s control over where they should stand or sit as well as what they were to do.

After starting this work, I began to look at portrait artists. I visited the re-opening of the Portrait Gallery in Washington DC and saw the work of Dawoud Bey. His photographs of young, inner city kids are large, but I wonder if they would give viewers an insight into who these youths are, what they are thinking, or what their worlds are like? I thought about my images and the social significance of them and I felt that my images are a glimpse into the youth culture of today.
Figure 44: Ashley, May 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 14”x22”.
Figure 45; Skylar, May 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 14”x22”.
Figure 46: Casen, May 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 14”x22”.
Figure 47: Ashley, June 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 14”x22”.
Figure 48: Casen, June 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 14”x22”.
Figure 49: Tim, August 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 14”x18”.
Figure 50: Ashley, June 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 14”x22”.
Figure 51: Ashley, September 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 14”x18”.
Figure 52: Ashley, June 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 14”x18”.
Figure 53: Tina, June 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 14”x22”.
Figure 54: Tim, September 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 14”x22”. 
Figure 55: Ashley, September 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 14”x22”.
Figure 56: Skylar, September 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 14”x22”.
Figure 57: Skylar, September 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 58: Jon, September 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 59: Ashley and Bouncer, September 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 60: Ashley, Jon and Skylar, September 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 61: Ashley, October 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 62: Morgan, October 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 63: Ashley and Morgan, October 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 64: Ashley, October 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 65: Tim, October 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 66: Ashley, November 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 67: Ashley and Tim, November 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 68: Ashley, November 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 69: *Tim, November 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".*
Figure 70: *Adam, November 2006*; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 71: Ashley, December 2006: Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 72: Tina, December 2006: Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 73: Tyler, December 2006: Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 74: *Tina and Ashley, December 2006*: Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 75: Tyler, Tina and Ashley, December 2006, Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 76: Skylar, December 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 77: Ashley, December 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 78: Hallie, December 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 79: Ashley, December 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 80: Skylar and Ashley, December 2006; Digital Photograph, Fall 2006, 12"x16".
Figure 81: *Adam, January 2007; Digital Photograph, Spring 2007, 12"x16".*
Figure 82: Ashley, January 2007; Digital Photograph, Spring 2007, 12"x16".
Figure 83: Skylar, January 2007; Digital Photograph, Spring 2007, 12"x16".
Figure 84: Hallie, January 2007; Digital Photograph, Spring 2007, 12"x16".
Figure 85: Tim, January 2007; Digital Photograph, Spring 2007, 12"x16".
Figure 86: Ashley, January 2007; Digital Photograph, Spring 2007, 12"x16".
MFA SHOW

For my final show, I first needed to choose a limited number of these final images to display. I felt the inclusion of early images was important to present a passing of time. This would help with the reading of these images and the documentation format that I wanted to be apparent.

I posted my final choices on the social network, myspace.com and invited my friends in this network to comment on them. I also made some entries into my blog to ask questions of these teens. I wanted to find out their thoughts on images and their ideas and habits of handling their images. Almost all of them had digital cameras, most of them had cameras in their cell phones. They all used their cell phone cameras and often uploaded those images to their myspace accounts. They usually just downloaded the images from their digital cameras to their home computers, using some of their images to post on their myspace accounts or in other photo repositories such as Flickr or Photo Bucket. They rarely printed their images, except as a gift for their mothers. Few of them had ever used a film camera unless they had taken a class. Their images were constantly changing. They rarely had images that were even a year old, unless it had special meaning or was a particularly good representation of them.

I wanted to project the lack of preciousness of photography that these teens feel with their digital images. The fact that they rarely print their images, made me choose a format for hanging my images that might reflect this attitude. I rejected a formal approach of framing or matting my large images. I mounted them on a thick board and devised a way to hang them on the wall to create the appearance of floating, as in cyberspace. The size that I choose created a distance between the viewer and the image. In order to see the entire image, you were required to stand several feet back from them.
I wanted the viewers to bring their experiences and feelings in front of my images and to make them create their own ideas, stories, or truths about these youths. The story the viewer brought would be different depending on the age of the viewer. These images are about youth, their cultures, friendships and their rapidly changing lives, not only in their appearance, but also in the technology that surrounds them.

Figure 87: MFA Show, UCF Art Gallery, April 2007
CONCLUSION

Photographs have always been manipulated, either in the taking or in the printing process. “Photography is constantly changing and is hard to define. Its discursive nature has tended to confuse many people as to its status and value as an art form. The trouble is that it lends itself to many varied uses. We see photography in newspapers, surveillance, advertising campaigns and art galleries, and as fashion shots or family snapshots. Meanings can slip and slide depending on context and the fact that photography lacks any kind of unity and seems to have no intrinsic character, makes this insistent cry of ‘but is it art?’ a constant refrain throughout its relatively short but complex history. What does matter now is that the work communicates intelligent ideas that are worthy of attention, appreciation and investigation.” (Bright 7)

With the acceptance of photography as art, worthy of inclusion in major art collections, new areas of confusion are emerging. Just as early technical advancements caused controversy, photography has begun to mutate once again with the digital revolution. This impact is in ways that were unimaginable only a few years ago. This causes some to ask not ‘is it art?’ but ‘Is this photography?’ The dynamics and volatility in the photographic practice are vital developments that are important to its existence. The appreciation of digital technology has opened up debates, not only of photography’s future, but also of its past and present. Today’s sophisticated audience and the demystification of the process of photographic manipulation have made us aware of how easy it is to distrust a photograph. Digitalization takes us away from reality and into the realm of fantasy. The photograph’s role as a conveyer of ‘truth’ or as a trace of reality has long been questioned.” (Bright 7-8)
I remain intrigued by the inherent contradiction between what is real and what is illusion in the photographic image. I enjoy the creation of artificial spaces that parallel my private space, combing visual thoughts with objects and images. I hope my images move beyond the place itself to reveal hidden meanings that are both personal and universal. No matter what form my artwork takes, it has always been about my space, the issues that I deal with, and the sanctity of my home and my life.
LIST OF REFERENCES

