Deep Within

2009

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DEEP WITHIN

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Studio Art and the Computer 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
As a contemporary photographer, I focus most on light and color to bring out the uniqueness of my images. Photography is about lighting and I manipulate lights to raise questions in my viewers. Manipulating light is my way of being curious about how it may change mood physically and emotionally. Inspired by classical paintings, I have developed a body of photographs that can be admired by anyone. Although the main focus of my work is light and color, this body of work is also intended to empower those with little confidence in themselves and those who have been rejected, abused, or mistrusted.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I do not want to forget anyone, so I would like to say thanks to all of you!
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INTRODUCTION

The artist’s mind is a mysterious instrument provoking powerful thoughts and images. It is like a galaxy full of information waiting to explode; a gravel pit full of solid source material ready to be used. It is like a tunnel in which light shines through to create conscious memory. The mind of an artist is unique and full of visual information but to understand an artist’s mind, you first have to understand his or her work.
CHAPTER 1: WHY PHOTOGRAPHY

During my three years as a student in the Master’s of Fine Arts program at the University of Central Florida I have worked with sculpture, fashion design, and even short film to create art. Above all of these related areas of interest, I have found photography to be the most compelling subject to study. Choosing photography as my main subject opened a whole new door in my imagination. With lights, set design, and technology, I have invented an original style that I can call my own. Since the success of photography is largely dependent upon the quality of lighting and since, to me, lights are equal to life itself, I decided to use this method to bring my photographs to life. Adding well-considered lighting to my images helps make my photographs stronger and push me to instill a greater degree of mystery into my work. With the

Figure 1: Hard Shell (Sculpture 2008)
manipulation of the light, I have found traditional studio lighting to be best for accomplishing the type of detail that pursue in photography.

Figure 2: Glow (Sculpture 2007)
Figure 3: *Four Tiers* (Sculpture 2008)
Figure 4: *Tulip* (Sculpture Fashion Show 2006)
Figure 5: *Banana Tree* (Sculpture Fashion Show 2006)
Figure 6: Graffiti (Sculpture Fashion Show 2006)
Figure 7: CJ (Fashion Design 2007)
Figure 8: Strips (Fashion Design 2006)
To illustrate my photography, I created a diverse range of themes which include (but are not limited to) poetry, photography in general, dramatic and emotional photography, and culturally influenced photography specifically. I direct each character to enact, to perform, and to interpret the character of interest and the costume in question. I also manipulate skin tone and facial expressions to obtain the type of peak performance and high-impact emotionalism that I seek in my original photographic oeuvre.

Figure 10: *creatures* (Digital 2007)
Figure 11: Seeker (Digital 2007)
Figure 12: *Bird’s Eyes* (Digital 2007)
To enhance my photographs, I chose to design various sets. I design these sets to generate a world that fits each character involved as a special and unique individual. In doing so, I found myself creating images that managed to transcend everyday reality and can thereby be critically analyzed, critiqued, and appreciated at the highest level by an audience of surprising socioeconomic, cultural, age, and gender diversity.

Figure 13: Fireman (Digital 2006)
Figure 14: *No Answers* (Digital 2006)
Figure 15: *Tangle* (Digital 2006)
Figure 16: *Movement* (digital 2006)
Figure 17: *Candy* (Digital image 2006)
Since technology is forever on the increase in our progress-oriented society, photography continues to evolve and change in many new ways. Photographers can now create photographs using various digital technologies. With the growth of technology, a photographer encounters fewer challenges to overcome in attempting to produce an image. For a photographer to take an image in the pre-digital past, he or she would have to upload film into the camera, take the photo, process the film, and print the image which required a cumbersome enlarger and many other difficult tools. Today, a good photograph can be taken using nothing more than a camera phone. As long as the photographer understands the concepts and the techniques of photography, he or she can create an image that is significant in its value. Using the techniques that I had gathered during my undergraduate years and the knowledge that I received during my years in the graduate program, I am now able to create images using some of the most up-to-date technologies available.

The primary function of the human eye is to visualize images. The ability to see images, shapes, and colors through the eye is emulated accurately by the camera lens. What you see through the naked eye is transformed into an image which is stored in your memory for future retrieval. The human eyes can be described as the first compatible camera lens ever created. For example, after a camera records, it fabricates an image of what it records. After the eyes see an image, the brain records it, and constructs an image of what the eyes see. Henri Bergson, a French Philosopher, said “the eye sees only what the mind is prepared to comprehend” (Thinkerexist.com). There is only one difference between the two functions. The eyes were created to shoot multiple snapshots at a time—the camera has the advantage that it can shoot a single frame or multiple frames at a time. The amount of megapixels that the eyes possess and the quality image that the eyes can produce, requires a medium format camera or a 4 x 5 camera to have the same quality image as the eyes do. According to the Clark Vision Photography Web site, “the Human eye is able to function in bright sunlight and view faint starlight, a range of more than 10 million to one. But this is like saying a camera can function over a similar range by adjusting the ISO speed, aperture and exposure time” (ClarkVision.com). The camera is designed to exhibit 20/20 vision as it records images, and sometimes photographers would use other accessories to see further, up-close, or to produce and even clearer image. However, the images would resolve as merely blurry due to a lack of focus within the camera. Whereas, the human eyes are designed to have 20/20 vision, but sometimes the eyes require glasses (lenses) or other material accessories to maintain their ability to see clearer images. They sometimes produced blurred images as well, but due to deteriorating vision.

What holds my attention in the practice of photography is what it is capable of doing: it capturing, recording, exposing, and reflecting various objects. Because of photography, people
can now freeze and document time. I use the concept of the decisive moment myself in each of my scenes and the characters contained within them. Since photography functions the same way as the mind—as a storehouse of memory—I choose photography as my creative method. It has become my primary medium due to its ability to show the viewer accurate picture of what is inside my mind at a moment in time. The eyes work to render an image—they reveal what is occurring in the present. The brain processes and holds it. It is the same in the combination of the camera and the photographer; the camera transmits and reveals the light as chosen by the work of the photographer through the viewfinder and the film or video memory records it.
CHAPTER 3: MY STYLE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

The art world is a freeway to creativity, but oftentimes that open road alone is not enough to assure arrival at the destination of visibility. To be part of the art world, one has to understand the rules, the history, the styles, and the meanings behind it. For example, many artists have a style that can be recognized by others right away; however, many other artists have a style that they can truly call their own. The former tend to be artists in their own minds, but not in the minds of others—they are merely craftsmen and copyists. I choose to photograph in my own way. I have chosen to invent a style that is unique—one that I can call my own.

There are various components that bring my style of photography together: colors, sets, lights, and costumes. Colors, in my opinion, are a powerful element that all artists need to truly be creative in the context of their varied imaginative worlds. I use a color palette that unifies most of my images. As a result of this unification, others can recognize my images without second thoughts—without confusion of intention. Most of the colors that I consciously use (to list a few) are red, orange, yellow, white, and black. Each of these colors has helped me to describe my images and they have also added symbolism and personal meaning to my photography.

First, red is a color that has many meanings: evil, love, peace, and even freedom. In my photographs, red is used to create literal symbols such as: blood that flows through the character’s body and the symbolism of blood that flowed from the body of Jesus Christ. For example, in figure 20 “The Eye of a Goddess,” the character has a red cloth that is draped over her shoulder like the red cloth that Jesus Christ had over his shoulder when He was walking on
earth. The cloth that was draped over His shoulder was a symbol of His identity. Whereas in figure 20, the red cloth is used to strengthen the character and to also show the pain that she has gone through. I used the color red in this case to generate emotions, passions, and the energies that I want each character to have in the photographs. In figure 27, “Untitled” and in figure 28 “Thinker,” the color red dominates because I want the characters to emit strength of personality.

I used the color orange in my photographs to raise the energy level because inherently, some of my photographs are more vibrant than others. Some need amplification. For example, in figure 21, “Untitled,” the character is very calm and peaceful, but to raise the energy level in that photograph, I have added the orange color. In figure 22, “Secure,” although the character is very powerful in the image, I added the color orange to suggest greater personality to the character. Orange is one of the warmest colors aside from red and as a result, it can change the mood drastically.

Yellow is a color that is equivalent to happiness, but in my work, I invert it because even all good things come to an end. There is an old proverb that says “Life is not what it seems” which means that just because a person appears to look happy it does not necessarily follow that he or she is really happy. In figure 19, “No More,” the character is bruised and hurt, but the yellow fabric that folds over her head like a veil uplifts her spirit to make her say “that is enough.” In this example, the yellow veil is used to protect her femininity and her virtue. In figure 23, “Please Don’t Cry,” the characters are very heartrending; the yellow is used here to strengthen the mother’s personality and to also add a dramatic touch to the photograph. In my
photographs, I also often use the color yellow as a formal mechanism to compliment other colors like green, red, and even orange.

Color is what makes my photographs come to life. Using a color variety of colors such as red, yellow, orange, subtly different blacks, and white brings a powerful symbolism into effect in the images. In my work, the color black represents power, judgment, fear, evil and mystery; I feel that white represents goodness, purity, and clarity. Although these colors might have other meanings, certain cueing characteristics of the human subjects I shoot describe the colors that they are wearing. With the color palette that I devised for use in my photographs, I not only improved my photography in general but I also succeeded in creating my own personal style, visual vocabulary, and in all, my unique creative voice.
Figure 18: *Looking Up and Down* (Digital 2007)
Figure 19: No More (Digital 2008)
Figure 20: *The Eye of a Goddess* (digital 2007)
For every photograph that I created during my studies in the graduate program, I constructed a world and costume that would fit each character’s personality and that would also give them meaning either from a historical or mythological point of view. Each set is designed for one photo shoot because I wanted each character to have a different meaning. For most of my characters, I designed the costume on the set using four to five yards of fabric. I used the fabric to wrap around the character’s body to create the type of costume or clothes that would be best for the character and the set that he or she would be in. I have employed my costumes as metaphors to illustrate cultures, faiths, religions, powers, and conditions of defeat.

Figure 21: Untitled (Digital 2008)
The costumes are intended to be read as symbols to pose the overriding question: how does society view us? Also, my subjects pose the secondary self-consideration of brooding with fear of how much society knows about us as individuals in our varied life conditions. The clothes or costumes in my photographs symbolize the things that people do not want other people to see. The sets are metaphors for worlds that people would want to hide in to avoid problems that may be greater than they can handle.
Figure 23: Please Don’t Cry (Digital 2008)
Figure 24: *The Voice From Above* (Digital 2008)
Figure 25: Inner Pain (Digital 2007)
Figure 26: *Let it all go* (Digital 2006)
Without light, there would be no photography. That is fundamental to why lights play a major part in my photographs. I use them to illustrate hopes, enlightenments, consciousnesses, and degrees of truth. Light is the key to illuminating darkness—to read a good photograph, it needs to have great lighting. The Bible states that “The symbolism of light...is used to show direction or instruction... (Psalms 119:105). This is the key to the inspiration I obtain to create the unique lighting that exists in my photographs.

Figure 27: *Untitled* (Digital 2008)
Figure 28: *Thinker* (Digital 2008)
I used dramatic lighting to create strong attention between the subjects and the set that they are posed within. Dramatic lighting helped improve the character’s personality in the photograph. My photographs could never reach full success without the colors, the sets, and the costumes that I create. These factors are vital formal and conceptual ingredients in my photography.
CHAPTER 4: MY CULTURAL BACKGROUND IN RELATION TO MY PHOTOGRAPHS

The world we live in is not a world of milk and honey—meaning that it is not a world of love and peace. We are living in a world where power and money can rule and overrule everything in the society. People are afraid of those who they think can hurt them—this is a concern that constantly plays out in their minds. Now, in the 21st century, crime, dishonesty, hate, respect, and trust seem to walk hand and hand. The question remains: can we trust people we know and people who we do not know? I find it hard to answer this question especially when some people on this planet are actively engaged in killing in the name of a higher power. The saying used to go “you scratch my back and I scratch yours” but now it seems to have devolved into “you scratch my back and I’ll stab yours.” My photographs contain a great deal of tension because they are a culminating reflection of my own cultural background, my family influence and experience, and also those of the characters in my photographs.

Growing up in another country—Haiti—where violence such as kidnapping, rape, slavery, the torture of men, women, and children, and also the misuse and abuse of governmental rights certainly had a strong effect on me. I wondered if Haiti would always remain this way or if it could change. I watched people suffer because of their beliefs or alternately, for their lack of the proscribed beliefs. According to the Human Rights Watch, “Haitian victims are thirsty for justice and deserve their government’s and the international community's best efforts to provide an accounting of their ordeal and those responsible for it” (hrw.org). Most of the time the Haitian government is very corrupt—people pursue the presidency in order to manipulate the system. When a person does become president, it seems that he simply kills as many
people as possible with opposing agendas and views until he is forced out of power. Most Haitian presidents’ motto themselves in this way “if you are not with me, you are against me.” Any person who is not in their favor has to be tortured until he or she changes his or her mind or they have to be killed if he or she refuses to change his or her mind. For example, a former Haitian president, Francois Duvalier, became a dictator to rule Haiti with an “an iron fist.” To show the people that he meant business, he created a personal military called “ton ton macoutes” to kill anyone not in his favor. The Haitian people always stood up for what they think was right for their country, but sometimes what they think is right has turned out to be a crime against nature itself. To free themselves from “ton ton macoutes,” the Haitians took matters into their own hands by burning the macoutes alive, beating them, and burning down their houses. To them, they felt that taking matters into their own hands was justice.

Knowing the violent nature of my country made me wonder if there were any other countries like Haiti. After doing research on other countries, I discovered that no matter where you go in this world, there will always be unlawful activities. In some countries, people put into their minds that they are free; however, in reality, they are strangled in the web of others. In all, bringing these personal matters into my work has helped me develop work that I can be proud of—work that I feel exposes for all to see the sad darkness and hopeful light that my country and this world are composed of.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In my work, I have developed a personal form of drama in my photography. It has to do with discussions undertaken among my colleagues, friends, and acquaintances met during my years of study. Figure 23, “Please Don’t Cry,” is filled with anger, fear, hate, and depression. In the photograph, the mother watches the child cry while holding the child in her arms. Creating these photographs is part of a mission I undertake to show people consumed with depression, fear, anger, and hate that it is wrong to attempt to feel better about oneself through the suppression of bad memories. When they do so, they spend the bulk of their lives getting madder at the world, at the people around them, and at themselves. They become blind to this negative cycle of repression—they never find a way out and they become consumed. They become afraid of the world and they believed that the world is entirely dark. They feel that the world is filled with thorns and sharp objects that will never be smooth. Life is short, but some people make it shorter and more brutal because of what they let happen to them. In contrast, some people simply make the pursuit of happiness their journey and mission in life. They live their lives like every day is their last—as mere consumers of pleasure. According to Bergson, “The only cure for vanity is laughter, and the only fault that is laughable is vanity” (Thinkerexist.com). Laughter can add many years to a person’s life because a person can forget about depression, anger, fear, and hate.
REFERENCES


