THESIS

PSYCHOLOGICAL EXCHANGE

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Adriane Byrd

Department of Art and Art History

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Master's Committee:

Advisor: Erika Osborne

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ABSTRACT

PSYCHOLOGICAL EXCHANGE

My artwork functions as a way to explore and define the personality traits that I developed as a consequence of early life experiences. My paintings are highly introspective and depend on themes of repetition, time, aspects of the gaze and a relationship with the viewer to understand their true meaning. I use my own personality dispositions toward subtle emotion and properties of observation to create a psychologically active dialogue between the viewer and the content of my work. I also employ the use of time and the compulsive need for order and repetition to reveal the desire to define and understand my own psychology.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Andy and Charlotte, who continue to fully devote their hearts toward raising, supporting, and encouraging me so that I may do what I love.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL EXCHANGE

My paintings investigate interactions between the self and the viewer by using themes of repetition, time, and aspects of the gaze to explore the personality traits and temperaments that I developed as a consequence of early life experiences. My paintings are highly introspective but depend on a relationship with the viewer to understand their true function. I use my own personality dispositions toward subtle emotion and properties of observation to create a psychologically active dialogue between the viewer and the content of my work. I also employ the use of time and the compulsive need for order and repetition to reveal the desire to define and understand my own psychology. The three characteristics of my work, mentioned above, are prevalent throughout each piece. Repetition is applied to my artwork in a subconscious way. I have always gravitated toward creating pieces that are made up of the multiple. The compulsion to repeat imagery is a characteristic of my personality that yearns for consistency, habit, and revelation. The manner in which I use repetition also alludes to elements of time, either through a traditional, linear passage of time or manifested within the viewer's interactions with a piece. The gaze is applied in different forms throughout my paintings. The concept of the gaze is about possessing power while controlling visual exchanges. To gaze implies more than to look at—it signifies a psychological relationship of power, in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze". Furthering this idea, philosopher Michel Foucault states, "Everywhere that power exists, it is being exercised. No one, strictly speaking, has an official right to power; and yet it is always

¹ Jean Robertson and Craig McDaniel, "The Body," in *Themes of Contemporary Art: Visual Art*

² Jonathan E. Schroeder, "Consuming Representation: A Visual Approach to Consumer Research," in *Representing Consumer: Voices, Views, and Visions*, ed. Barbara B. Stern (New York: Routledge, 1998), 208.

exerted in a particular direction, with some people on one side and some on the other".³ Within my work, I address the gaze as a form of power that is exchanged through observation, surveillance, voyeurism, and the medical. The gaze depends on viewer interaction with my artwork in order to understand its function.

My painting *Affect* consists of nine different self-portraits, all displaying the same seemingly neutral facial expression in front of spatially flat, colored backgrounds. (Fig.1) When a viewer comes into visual contact with *Affect*, a layered, psychological dialogue begins to take place with the subject of the piece. The neutral expression I depict is derived from a personality trait where I do not show overt displays of emotion even though I am feeling the emotion within. To explore this trait, I used my camera to take a picture of myself while I was feeling different emotions and expressing them in my characteristic way. The camera has a natural ability to arrest a moment in time, allowing me to capture what psychologist Paul Ekman describes as 'micro-expressions', which are "very fast facial movements lasting less than one-fifth of a second...revealing an emotion a person is trying to conceal". The resulting images are of different faces in time, captured at a moment of true emotion but guarded by a neutral facial expression that elicits viewer interaction.

In *Affect*, the flat, colored backgrounds are a contradictory characteristic of the piece. The colors are intensely saturated and their vibrancy is in opposition to the neutral facial expressions. A viewer will immediately bring their own associations with those colors into each self-portrait, which will aid in informing them of the emotion being expressed. Also, each color does not stand alone but is reflected within the skin tones between multiple self-portraits. This complicates the

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³ Barry Smart, *Michel Foucault* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 66.

⁴ Paul Ekman, Emotions Revealed: Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2003), 15.

viewer's relationship with their notions for each color, causing a subconsciously complex reading of the piece as a whole.

When the viewer approaches *Affect*, they get conflicting associations of dominance and control within the gaze, which fluctuate between each piece as the subject's eyes remain fixed and unwavering in their stare. This helps pass power back and forth between the viewer and the subject of the piece, denying either of them the authority they desire within the exchange. As the viewer moves around the piece from face to face, they look for signs of submissiveness and inferiority. They may find it within certain expressions before the eye contact returns them back to a neutral position. As the viewer continues their interaction, they begin to form a deeper emotional connection with each portrait. They may have already noticed the micro-expressions but as they go deeper into their inspection, they become invested in the internal dialogue that is taking place. The viewer forms an intimate and emotional connection with the subject as they become sympathetic to the richness of emotion that is occurring within each portrait. Without realizing it, the viewer has submitted to the gaze of the subject and they leave the power firmly with the piece as they break the gaze and move away.

Hannah Wilke is an artist I have closely researched in terms of using self-portraiture to challenge the gaze into submission. Wilke was one of the first female artists to make artwork about the female body and the negative connotations that were assigned to it. She considered herself a feminist but was ostracized from the feminist community for her willingness to accept 'the male gaze' and use it as a form of empowerment.⁵ According to feminists, the male gaze is a

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⁵ Amelia Jones, "The Rhetoric of the Pose: Hannah Wilke and the Radical Narcissism of Feminist Body Art," in *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 175.

form of looking that dominates women and forces them into submissive, sexual objects. In *S.O.S Starification Object Series*, Wilke had the viewer chew a piece of gum and then hand it to her where she would create a two-fold gestural sculpture in the shape of a vulva and stick it to her body. Fig. 2) The repetition of this action turned into a sort of scarification ritual. She then used her own body to pose in front of the camera with these 'scars' to confront the viewer with the physical and emotional scarring that women go through in order to become and maintain the appearance of the ideal female. However, this dialogue is not passive because she empowers the vulva-shaped scars and turns them into a positive part of the female body through her posing. She purposely invites the male gaze through her seductive poses but instead of adopting the role of submissive female, she harnesses the power of the male gaze and turns it against itself. The viewer's gaze is now at the mercy of her seduction. Although the male gaze is not a focus of *Affect*, the way in which Wilke controls it into submission influenced the way in which I use the gaze to manipulate and confound the viewer.

Compulsion consists of 184 separate circles depicting the same painted scene of the interior space of my living room. (Fig. 3) I broke apart a peephole and used components of it to build an apparatus for my camera. The peephole functions as a safe way to peer from an interior space through a door to the outside. Using this notion, I turned the peephole inward and took photos of an interior space. I snapped one picture every day and transferred the photo into a painting. This

⁶ Jennifer Linton, "The Art of Hannah Wilke: Feminist Narcissism and the Reclamation of the Erotic Body," (MFA essay, York University, 2009), accessed February 3, 2015, http://jenniferlinton.com/2010/12/31/the-art-of-hannah-wilke-feminist-narcissism-and-the-reclamation-of-the-erotic-body/.

⁷ Elizabeth Manchester, "Marxism and Art: Beware of Fascist Feminism," Tate, last modified September 2008, accessed February 3, 2015, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/wilke-marxism-and-art-beware-of-fascist-feminism-p79357/text-summary.

⁸ Manchester, "Marxism and Art: Beware of Fascist Feminism."

⁹ Jones, "The Rhetoric of the Pose," 184.

¹⁰ Ibid. 154.

process reveals the desire for habit and stability within my personality. There are consistencies between each successive circle. Elements such as the light in the corner, the couch, TV stand, coffee table, blue chair and general view of the space all stay constant. Some of the large objects shift slightly while smaller objects move in, around and out of the paintings. The lighting fluctuates between light and dark giving a sense of different times of day. All of these elements are metaphors for a mixed internal dialogue of the self that plagues me on a daily basis.

Repetition and time are themes that function in a combined application within *Compulsion*. Sigmund Freud introduced the idea of 'repetition compulsion', which Erik Erikson describes as "the need to re-enact painful experiences in words or acts". Within the piece, I utilize this 'repetition compulsion' in a very innate and automatic way through my style and application of concept. As I paint, I have an urge to constantly blend the acrylic paint as smoothly as possible. The work also contains high attention to minute, realistic detail that requires consistent, patient focus. In regards to concept, Jacques Lacan beautifully states "repetition demands the new". Lacan beautifully states "repetition demands the new". Lacan beautifully states to all different because there is something new within each circle is of the same space, they are all different because there is something new within each circle. I continue the process of creating more circles as if something unknown will eventually be revealed to me. I also use the gridded format of the calendar to arrange the circles on the wall. The repetition of the circles automatically alludes to a process of time and the organized calendar format adds a sense of purpose by heightening the aspect that this is a daily routine. The calendar arrangement also helps the viewer navigate the piece in the

¹¹ Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (1964; reiss., New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 216.

¹² Jacques-Alain Miller, ed., *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), 61.

correct 'left-to-right' manner. However, controlling the direction in which the viewer reads the piece is the only power the piece holds within the interaction.

In *Compulsion*, the viewer holds the power of the gaze as it shifts to the act of surveillance—the voyeuristic version of the gaze. The size and shape of the circles offer a lens-like form that caters to this act. As the viewer looks into each circle, they are forced into the role of the voyeur as they constantly peer in to a private space that is not their own. The space, a living room, is taken from its normal size and depicted as it is seen through a peephole, making it miniscule and small. This action reinforces the power of the viewer by making him dominant to the reduced space. One thing is clear: a person does inhabit this space. The viewer then begins to search each circle, looking for this person, transforming their gaze into an act of voyeurism. The concept of voyeurism adds an anticipatory, sexualized component to the definition of the gaze. ¹³ By probing a private space, analyzing its contents and searching for an inhabitant through the safety of a lens, the viewer is in violation of that space.

Gail Albert Halaban is an artist who uses photography to explore the boundaries between public and private life. Her series "Out My Window" and "Paris Views" points the camera into her neighbor's windows to address the private and public aspects of daily life within a city. ¹⁴ She puts the viewer in the place of the voyeur, causing them to gaze into these exposed environments and observe the private lives of these strangers from her perspective. In photographs like *Glass House at Night* and *Rue de Belleville*, 20th Arrondissement, Paris, there are very subtle qualities that cause the viewer to look very intently through the windows of the spaces. (Figs. 4, 5)

Sometimes the spaces are obviously occupied and sometimes the viewer has to search for the

¹³ Robertson and McDaniel, "The Body," 95.

¹⁴ "Gail Albert Halaban," *Houkgallery.com*, accessed March 3, 2015, http://www.houkgallery.com/artists/gail-albert-halaban/.

inhabitants. Halaban seems to deliberately set up her compositions to draw out the voyeur that she believes is inherent in everyone.¹⁵

Eric Fischl's early paintings also have a voyeuristic quality as he explores taboo aspects of life that occur in suburban culture. Paintings like *Sleepwalker* and *Bad Boy* show a forbidden sexual honesty as they shock the viewer with the obscene before moving into a more intimate truth about life. (Figs. 6, 7) Fischl says these early paintings have a "presence/non-presence that creates the tension... It moved me into a realm of exposure and for the first time made me aware of how critical it is to consider where you place your viewer". The scenes become voyeuristic because the viewer is at a viewpoint that is above and slightly removed from the scene. It is as if the viewer is seeing these interactions from a safe, elevated place. This creates a power relationship in which the viewer is above the subjects who are participating in a forbidden action. The use of the gaze in *Compulsion* was influenced by the subtle way in which Halaban constructs her compositions to force the viewer to look more closely into open spaces. In addition, Fischl's awareness of viewer placement was key to my choice of using the peephole to explore the concepts within the piece.

My painting *Tactile Manipulation* consists of 15 square panels that interlock with one another to form a puzzle. (Fig. 8) Although the imagery is mixed up, it is evident that it is a part of a body. As a baby, I was constantly being poked, prodded, and operated on. I spent time in oxygen tents and incubators before I was sent through therapy that included being hit very hard

¹⁵ "Gail Albert Halaban." *Houkgallery.com*.

¹⁶ "Biography," *Erikfischl.com*, accessed March 3, 2015, http://www.ericfischl.com/html/en/bio/Bio.html#.

¹⁷ "In Conversation: Eric Fischl with Robert Berlind," *Brooklynrail.org*, last modified July 15, 2014, accessed March 3, 2015, http://www.brooklynrail.org/2014/07/art/eric-fischl-with-robert-berlind.

all over my body. My parents were very cautious and nervous when holding my fragile body, especially with the tubes and cords attached to me. I believe these interactions influenced the way I feel about being touched. Whether people know me or not, they seem reluctant to interact with me on a physical level. I've grown accustomed to just getting waves and nods from people instead of hugs and handshakes. *Tactile Manipulation* investigates these interactions and my feelings toward them. I find myself wondering why people don't interact with me in a physical way, but at the same time, I don't want or like to be touched.

Tactile Manipulation is dependent on the viewer's interaction to understand what the work represents. The imagery within the panels is of my stomach. It reveals the scars from the surgeries I had as an infant in combination with the fresh incisions I received from a recent surgery to fix complications with my stomach. The viewer is confronted with this imagery mixed up in the form of a puzzle. Because of the soft gradations in flesh tones, they are immediately able to identify this as exposed parts of the body. As the viewer investigates and tries to make sense of the imagery, their gaze takes on a medical approach to looking. Michel Foucault defines the medical gaze in his book *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* as very clinical and scientific in its observations. ¹⁸ The gazer is the calculating doctor, who is endowed with the power of knowledge and justified by the medical institution. ¹⁹ Since the power of the medical gaze lies with the doctor, the submissive object must be the ill patient who is at the mercy of clinical observations and dissections. I translate the notion of the medical gaze into *Tactile Manipulation* where the viewer stands in the metaphorical role of the doctor, gazing at the body of a patient. As the viewer visually dissects each panel, they notice bruised skin,

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¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A.M. Sheridan (1963; repr., London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2003), 109.

¹⁹ Ibid

scarring, holes, fresh incisions, and bandages. To some, it may seem abject and repulsive. Others may feel the need to diagnose and understand what happened to this body.

As the viewer observes the medical nature of the body before them, they see holes in each panel to stick their finger into and slide the panels around. The body becomes a game that the viewer must put back together. The idea to use a game to represent this particular personality trait is derived from Freud's idea of the "repetition compulsion". Freud had observed a young child playing an unusual game with his toys where he would repeatedly make them disappear and then reappear again.²⁰ Freud theorized that this game was a recreation of his mother leaving and returning during the day. 21 The repetition was a way of re-enacting the painful experience of his mother leaving in order to actively control the situation.²² When the viewer begins to interact with *Tactile Manipulation*, the repetitive action of moving each panel is in an effort to make the image whole again. In effect, the viewer has symbolically healed the body through the act of touching and manipulating as if it were a game. Also, the viewer had to touch each panel repeatedly in order to fix it, even if the imagery was off-putting. In order to move the panel, they have to stick their finger into a hole. Since the imagery is of a body, the viewer is effectively sticking their finger into the body in order to manipulate and 'fix' it. However, once the puzzle is put back together in the correct arrangement, one panel remains missing alluding to the idea that the body can never be fully healed. The physical aspects of the medical narrative are directly related to the psychological relationship I have with touch.

There have been many artists who have used art to document their experiences with their own illness narrative. Contemporary artists like Jo Spence and William Utermohlen navigated

²⁰ Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 215-216. ²¹ Ibid. ²² Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 216-217.

their illnesses through documentation and activism. They used their artwork to address their experiences with illness, come to terms with death and bring attention to the symptoms that accompany a diagnosis. William Utermohlen's late pieces address his subjective experiences with Alzheimer's disease, both pre and post diagnosis. "The images show the gradual modification of his perception of the world, both of his external environment and of his psychic universe. Through them, we share his terrible feeling of dereliction, progressive isolation and loss of self-control". 23 His paintings of interior spaces like *Snow* reveal the struggles he had with being able to engage in conversation and accurately perceive the space he was painting. (Fig. 9) As his Alzheimer's took a stronger hold, he began painting a succession of self-portraits like Self-Portrait with Easel and Erased Self-Portrait in an effort to preserve agency over his mind before it was completely gone. (Figs. 10, 11) Jo Spence's work was rooted in activism as she critiqued how the medical institution treated her in a very emotionally detached way.²⁴ In her series Cancer Shock, she described through text and photographic documentation how powerless she felt as a patient, as doctors exerted power over the decisions regarding her own body. 25 (Fig. 12) While these artists deal with illness in a highly direct way, Felix Gonzalez-Torres was a master of subtlety. Gonzalez-Torres addressed the social, political and physical problems surrounding the AIDs virus within his artwork. He invited viewers to draw their own conclusions about his work and utilized them as a fundamental part of his pieces. He also used repetition to help disseminate and spread his artwork in a way that symbolically represented how the AIDs

²³Patrice Polini, "William Utermohlen-the Late Pictures 1990-2000," *Williamutermohlen.org*, accessed March 1, 2015, http://www.williamutermohlen.org/index.php/9-about/essays/5-the-late-pictures-1990-2000.

George Vasey, "Jo Spence: Biography," *Jospence.org*, accessed March 1, 2015, http://www.jospence.org/biography.html.

²⁵ "Jo Spence: Work Index," *Jospence.org*, accessed March 1, 2015, http://www.jospence.org/work index.html.

virus spreads indiscriminately through society. His candy pile works like *Untitled (Placebo)* are the best example of this action because the weight of the candy pile is a metaphor for a person or people with AIDs and the candy piece itself is a symbol of the sugar pill used in medical trials.²⁶ (Fig. 13) The viewer is invited to take a piece of candy from the pile, which slowly diminishes until it is gone. The viewer then puts the candy in their mouth and ingests it, symbolic of the transference of the virus into the body. Gonzalez-Torres also utilized time in emotionally powerful ways. His piece *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* consists of two clocks that are set to the exact same time. (Fig. 14) The clocks gradually fall out of sync as the batteries begin to fail and one inevitably stops before the other. This piece is just another subtle approach to how illness can affect ordinary people and death is all too familiar. The ways in which these artists address their illness narratives were highly influential in the creation of *Tactile Manipulation*. I am not only bringing attention to the medical state of my body, but I am also attempting to come to terms with my own body defects in subtle, yet powerful ways.

As an artist, I use ideas of control and power as I attempt to manipulate the gaze, which plays into the broad theory of post-structuralism that is evident throughout my paintings. Post-structuralism examines how different language systems are affected by power structures within society and interpretations of works cannot be controlled by one person.²⁷ The French post-structuralist and semiotician Roland Barthes elaborates on this idea by theorizing that an artist cannot fully control how viewers will read their work because the viewer approaches a piece

²⁶ Simon Watney, "In Purgatory: The Work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres," in *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, ed. Julie Ault (New York and Göttingen, Germany: Steidldangin Publishers, 2006), 344-345.

²⁷ Jean Robertson and Craig McDaniel, "Language," in *Themes of Contemporary Art: Visual Art After 1980*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 245.

with their own set of interpretations. 28 The work of art can be interpreted in myriad of ways and the artist does not have power over how the piece is read by the viewer. Conversely, no one viewer has the power to dictate the true meaning of the piece for other viewers and especially for the artist. In Affect, the background colors, hairstyles, clothing and gaze all act as a language system to form a psychological dialogue with the viewer. The power structure is derived from this system and manifests itself through the interaction that happens during the gaze. Power is exchanged during the encounter as both viewer and subject attempt to control the dialogue. Compulsion has a layered meaning between how the viewer interacts with the piece and the reasons for why I created it. The stable and mobile objects within the interior space act as metaphors for the inner self. Repetition of imagery and circle surfaces reflect the compulsive need for habit and stability within my personality. When the viewer interacts with the piece, they become a voyeur who, from a public space, repeatedly gazes through the lens-like forms into the private interior of someone's living room. Compulsion naturally applies post-structuralist theories by inviting multiple interpretations of content and concept within the piece.

Post-structuralists also contend that there are no dualities but instead, think "boundaries and divisions between categories of all kinds are eroding...and the elements merge into hybrids". 29 My paintings are realistic depictions of images derived from the photographs I take with my camera. The camera provides the immediacy of capturing the moments that my concepts require while painting allows me to express my personality through style and paint application. Therefore, painting and photography are not separate medias within my work, but rather merge together as compositional tools for creating visual representations of personality traits. *Tactile*

Robertson and McDaniel, "Language," 245.
 Jean Robertson and Craig McDaniel, "The Art World Expands," in *Themes of Contemporary* Art: Visual Art After 1980, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 29-30.

Manipulation crosses multiple boundaries between notions of touch and the application of the gaze. The viewer takes on the medical gaze, looking onto a rearranged image of a scarred body. They have the power of the physician combined with their sympathy as a human being. In order to put the image of the body back together, they must touch the painting, manipulate it and reorganize it. The scars, bruises and fresh wounds discourage touching but demand healing at the same time. When the viewer interacts with the piece, they are metaphorically healing a body that does not invite touch. *Tactile Manipulation* also combines painting, photography and sculpture within the structure of the piece. It is an object that demands active participation from the viewer in order to move the individual panels that inform the dialogue of the painting.

I produce artworks that function to help me explore and define my personality. My repetitive process allows me to delve deeply into my psyche and work through the questions I have regarding my own psychology. As Michel Foucault states, "by showing itself in a repetitive form, the truth indicates the way by which it may be acquired."³⁰ Although my paintings help me come to an understanding about my personality traits, I know they will never be fully defined, allowing me to continue my repetitive search for something that is constantly evolving. Inviting the viewer into this research is extremely important for my investigation into the self. By allowing the viewer to establish a dialogue with the piece, I am able to get multiple interpretations of concept. This keeps my work from being too internalized and brings it to an external level to help expand my understanding of the self.

³⁰ Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 135.

FIGURES



Fig. 1, Adriane Byrd, Affect, 2013-2014, acrylic on canvas, 56"x 74"



Fig. 2, Hannah Wilke, S.O.S. Starification Object Series, 1974-1975, twenty-eight black and white photographs, 7" x 5" each



Fig. 3, Adriane Byrd, *Compulsion*, 2014-2015, acrylic on wood, circles 2" diameter, 42"x 22"



Fig. 4, Gail Albert Halaban, Glass House at Night, 2008, photograph



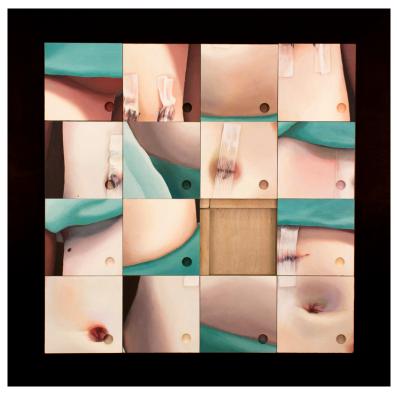
Fig. 5, Gail Albert Halaban, *Rue de Belleville, 20th Arrondissement, Paris*, 2012, photograph



Fig. 6, Eric Fischl, Sleepwalker, 1979, oil on canvas, 69"x 105"



Fig. 7, Eric Fischl, Bad Boy, 1981, oil on canvas, 66"x 96"



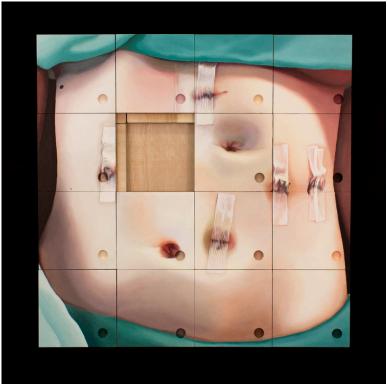


Fig. 8, Adriane Byrd, *Tactile Manipulation*, 2015, acrylic on wood, 20"x 20"

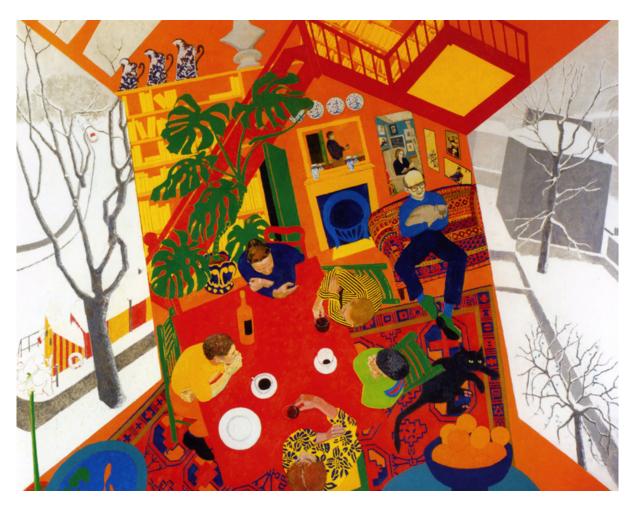


Fig. 9, William Utermohlen, Snow, 1991, oil on canvas, 75.9"x 94.8"

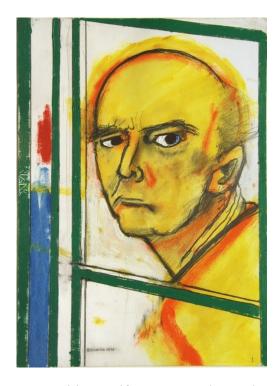


Fig. 10, William Utermohlen, *Self-Portrait with Easel*, 1996, oil on canvas, 18.1"x 13.7"



Fig. 11, William Utermohlen, *Erased Self-Portrait*, 1999, multi-media on canvas, 17.9"x 13.9"



Fig. 12, Jo Spence, Cancer Shock, 1982, photonovel



Fig. 13, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Placebo)*, 1991, candies individually wrapped in silver cellophane, endless supply, overall dimensions vary with installation of ideal weight of 1,000-1,200 lb.



Fig. 14, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*, 1991, wall clocks on painted wall, overall dimensions vary with installation, clock installation 14 x 28 x 2 ³/₄ in., each clock: 14" diameter

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