

Crystal Tursich

# **RUN, HIDE, WAIT**

MFA: New Projects 2012

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Thesis work can be found online at:

<http://crystaltursich.mosaicglobe.com/page/53325>

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**ABSTRACT**

The body of work I have created is an illustration of personal struggle through the depiction of three actions; running, hiding, and waiting. The initial concept was drawn from my experience of struggling with a loved one's alcoholism and addiction and finding my own independence through this struggle. It is intended that work be both personal and applicable to any struggle or emotional tension the viewer may bring to it, so distilling the concept down to three actions was imperative. In most any emotional struggle, a person may find themselves wanting to escape (run), hiding emotion, or perpetually waiting for change within a situation. The constant desire, need, and/or choice to run, hide, and wait recurs throughout each piece or grouping within the work and is reiterated within the titles, further facilitating the illustration of a struggle.

While all actions are portrayed differently, similar attention is paid to the subject and its movement throughout the space or scene presented. Repetition of images and scenes within the work represents a passing of time along with the idea that the desire to escape or hide and the agony of waiting is constant or repetitious. In some pieces, the individual images are numbered to further perpetuate this idea of passing time while in others seasonal changes or changes in light patterns work to communicate the same idea.

Throughout the work, I use myself as the sole subject or model perpetuating the personal nature of the work. Relying on myself to perform for the camera, recalling memories of events and emotions, aids in illustrating the struggle, tension, and frustration of my personal experience and invoking similar feelings for the viewer.

Soft vignettes around the images combined with blurred motion comments on the ever-changing-ness of the human memory and illustrates that the represented action is in process. This allows the viewer to assimilate with the action being performed while reflecting on the haziness of memory.

In order to ensure that the work is accessible to all viewers I looked to contemporary photographers such as Haley Morris-Cafiero, Jen Davis, Nancy Rexroth, and Susan Burnstine. Haley Morris-Cafiero and Jen Davis for their inclusion of self-portraiture in portraying such a personal struggle as that of women and weight issues. Nancy Rexroth is best known for her Iowa photographs, black and white images made using a Diana camera, which portray intense longing for a past time and place. Susan Burnstine for the way in which her work evokes emotion while creating an alternate reality.

The end result, the collection of images on display, successfully illustrates my struggle and elicits a reaction from the viewer. I have formulated three questions to determine the success of the work: Did viewers feel a struggle and create a connection to the work? Did others having an experience with an alcoholic understand the work? Can I see places in which this work could branch out to newer works? In all instances, the answer is yes. I received many positive and reaffirming comments from viewers at the opening of the thesis exhibition to confirm that people had an emotional reaction and connection to the work, including a few self-identified Adult Children of Alcoholics. I also see possible works that can be created off this same theme, including a video piece

and possible performance/audience interaction piece. In all, I feel this work is a success and illustrates my personal struggle in the most appropriate way possible at this time.



Figure 1, Installation view, entering the exhibition

## INTRODUCTION

The body of work I have created, titled *Run, Hide, Wait*, is an illustration of personal struggle through the depiction of three actions; running, hiding, and waiting. The constant desire, need, and/or choice to perform these actions recurs throughout each piece or grouping within the work and is reiterated within the titles, further facilitating the illustration of a struggle.

My experience drives the work as the struggle being illustrated is my own. The initial concept was drawn from my experience of struggling with a loved one's alcoholism and addiction, of finding my independence from the situation, of developing



my own identity outside of the one forced upon me. In that respect, the work was always meant to be personal while also being applicable to any struggle or emotional tension a viewer may bring to it. Because of this, the distillation of the concept to the three actions was imperative.

Throughout the work, I use myself as the sole subject or model perpetuating the personal nature of the work. Personal experience as the concept becomes personal experience in the creation of the work. By using myself as model, I incorporate the aspects of my identity (female, twenty-something, single, educated, white, etc.) into work already attempting to comment on a search for self. Relying on myself to perform for the camera and recall memories of events and emotions aids in illustrating the struggle, tension, and frustration of the experience while invoking similar feelings for the viewer, which is the goal of the work.

## **HELP FROM CALVINO**

In reading Italo Calvino's *Six Memos For the Next Millennium*, I was struck with a sense of clarity in thinking about my work and the creation of my work. *Six Memos*, is focused on the creation of literature and the characteristics that Calvino found necessary to all writing. The author had intended on producing six lectures, each addressing a singular issue, however, the sixth (Consistency) did not reach fruition due to the author's death.<sup>1</sup> The existing five written lectures are titled for the specific characteristics they

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<sup>1</sup> Calvino, Esther. "A Note On the Text." Foreword. *Six Memos for the next Millennium*. By Italo Calvino. Trans. Patrick Creagh. New York: Vintage International, 1993.

encompass, all of which can be understood when applied to visual art as well as literature; Lightness, Quickness, Exactitude, Visibility, and Multiplicity.

In short the Memos can be described as follows: Lightness is the quality of creating work that is not heavy handed or drowned in theory. Quickness is engaging the viewer with immediacy. Exactitude ensures that the viewer understands the artist's intentions. Visibility allows the viewer to interpret the work in its entirety. And, lastly, Multiplicity is cohesion within a body of work and having each piece play off of one another.

Calvino's ideas, fresh in mind as I began work on *Run, Hide, Wait*, were addressed in order to make the work accessible to the viewer. Every aspect of the work was carefully calculated and distilled down. In thinking of my concept, the struggle dealing with another's addiction, I recounted Calvino's Lightness. How was I to create work that was not heavy handed while dealing with such heavy subject matter? What were some aspects of this type of struggle that could transcend to other situations, therefore becoming more easily accessible to the viewer? The decision was made to focus on the three actions; running, waiting, and hiding.

After the work had really begun to come together, Quickness came in to play. It was necessary for the viewer to become immediately interested in the work and the most obvious way to do that was by scale and placement. By shifting the scale of the works, some larger and some smaller, and arranging them within differing groups, the viewer is forced to investigate the work presented.

Exactitude was addressed in the positioning of myself within the photographic frame. If my facial expression showed or my motion was completely stilled, the meaning of the imagery would change. After all, the viewer is intended to feel a struggle so the portrayal of the body should exhibit that.

Visibility and Multiplicity were addressed on many levels. The works should read as a whole and not be positioned within a space where the viewer had the ability to stray. There should be a similar treatment to the production of the work and no one piece should stand out as the perfect illustration of the concept. The space was arranged in such a manner that the viewer is at any time surrounded by work on three sides, with the large grid of images central to the space. Images were printed on the same paper with the same treatment to framing and matting given to all images. The process used to create the work was the same in all cases, in order to maintain a similar blurred motion and soft vignette.

## DESCRIPTIONS OF THE WORK

While all three actions are portrayed differently, similar attention is paid to the subject and its movement throughout the space or scene presented. Repetition of images and scenes within the work represents a passing of time along with the idea that the desire to escape or hide and the agony of waiting is constant or repetitious. In some pieces, the individual images are numbered to further perpetuate this idea of passing time while in others seasonal changes or changes in light patterns work to communicate the same idea.

### RUNNING

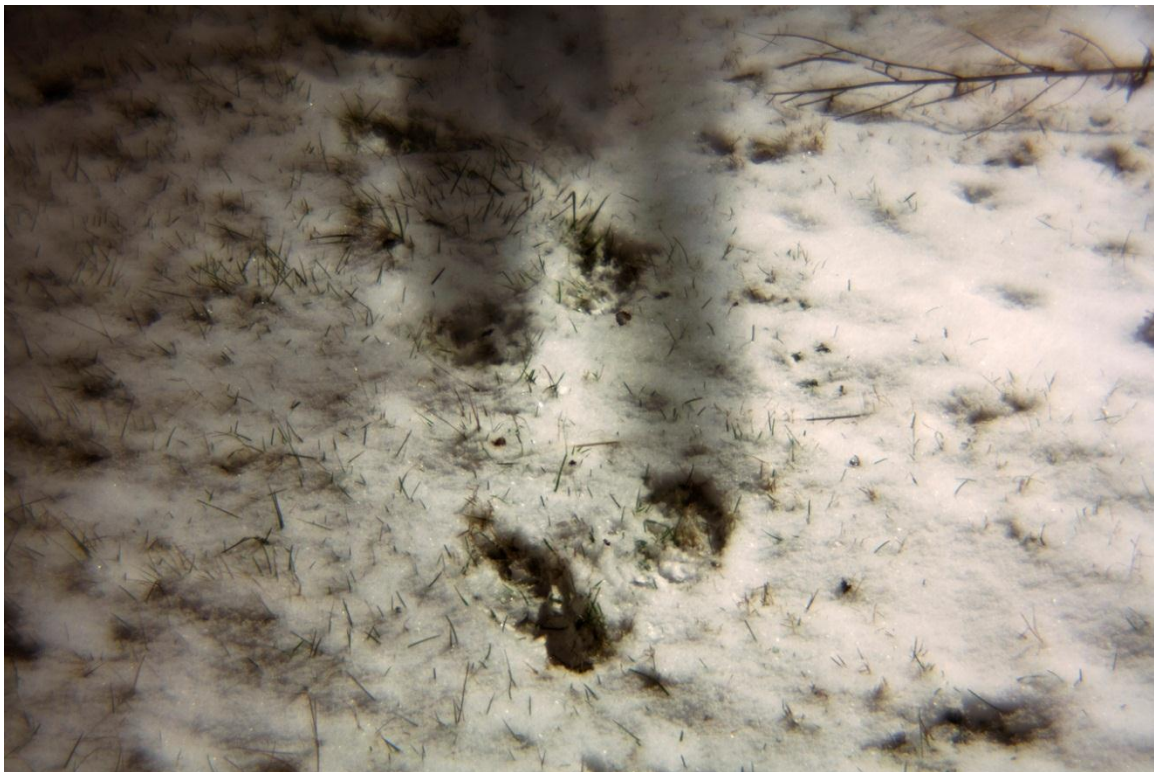


Figure 2, *Wanting to Run Away: January*

Running is illustrated in the grid images entitled *Wanting to Run Away*. Throughout the images a figure can be seen entering and exiting the frames, feet become

blurred by movement, scenes are left slightly awry, a set of footprints cuts through snow, and a lone figure sits upon a curb. The repetition of images and scenes works to showcase a passing of time along with the idea that the desire to escape is constant or repetitious. The grid is arranged in such a way that repeated scenes are slightly separated in an attempt to illustrate returning to the same emotion and recurrence of events. Titles of the images within the grid are differentiated by unique suffixes that when read in succession, no matter the order, become poetic or lyrical. Read from top to bottom and left to right the work is read as:

*January, In a dream, In the Rain, Birthday party, Contemplate, Ruins, Backtrack, Repetitive dream, Return*

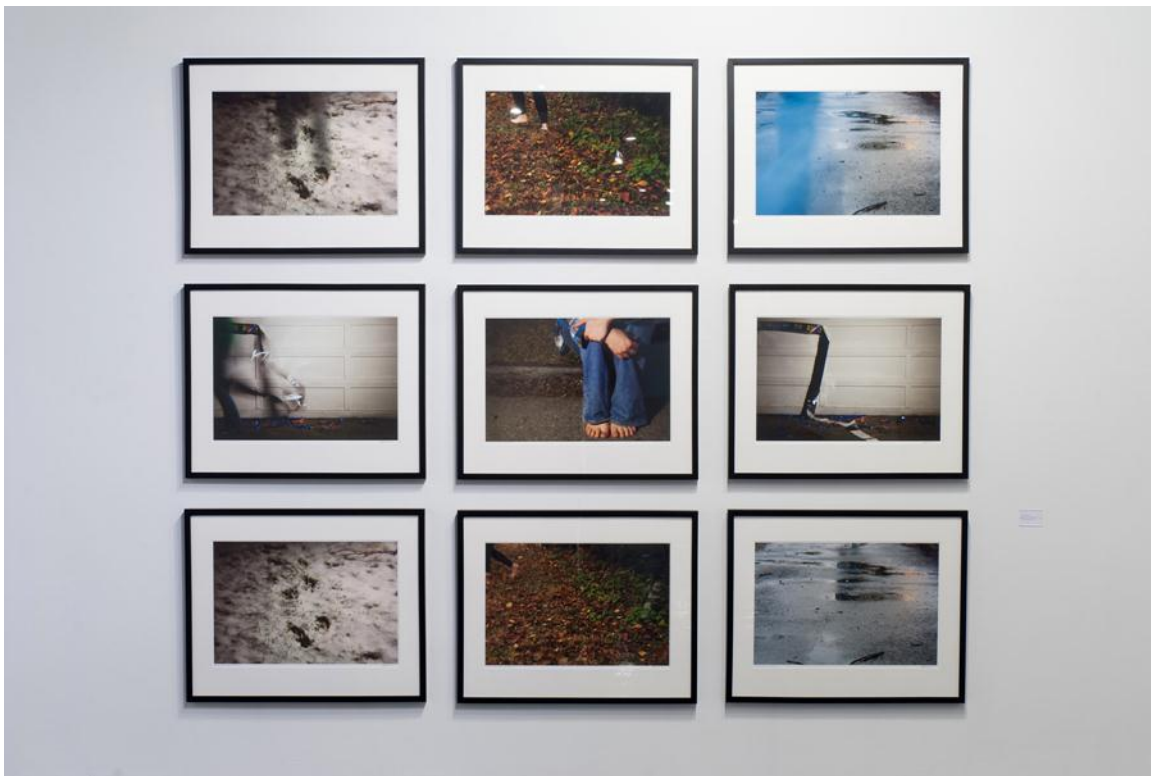


Figure 3, Installation view of *Wanting to Run Away*, full grid

*Wanting to Run Away* is meant to illustrate an unfulfilled desire to escape, one that returns time and time again. The grid is a presentational tool used not only to represent passing time but to create drama and encompass the viewer, encouraging him/her to explore all the images.

## WAITING

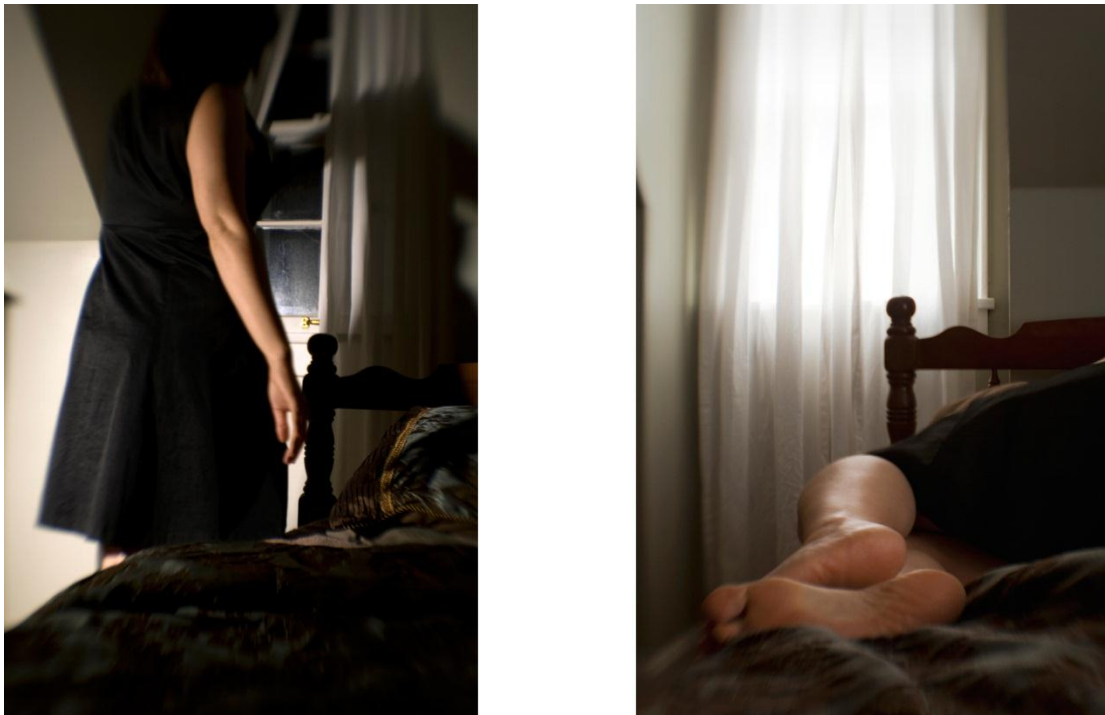


Figure 4, *I Waited All Night Part 1 & Part 2*

The act of waiting is illustrated in two different sets of images, the triptych entitled *Constantly Waiting* and the diptych titled *I Waited All Night*. In both instances, a figure is shown and moves throughout a particular setting in an act of prolonged waiting. Also, both pieces' individual images are numbered to perpetuate the idea of passing time.

In *I Waited All Night*, a person is shown peering through a window into the night and then laying on a bed lit by morning light through the same window. This person

looks to have given up on the thing she was searching for throughout the night. By shooting from a similar angle in both images, it becomes apparent that they take place within the same short period of time. Having the exterior light through the window change, it becomes obvious that time has changed from night to day.

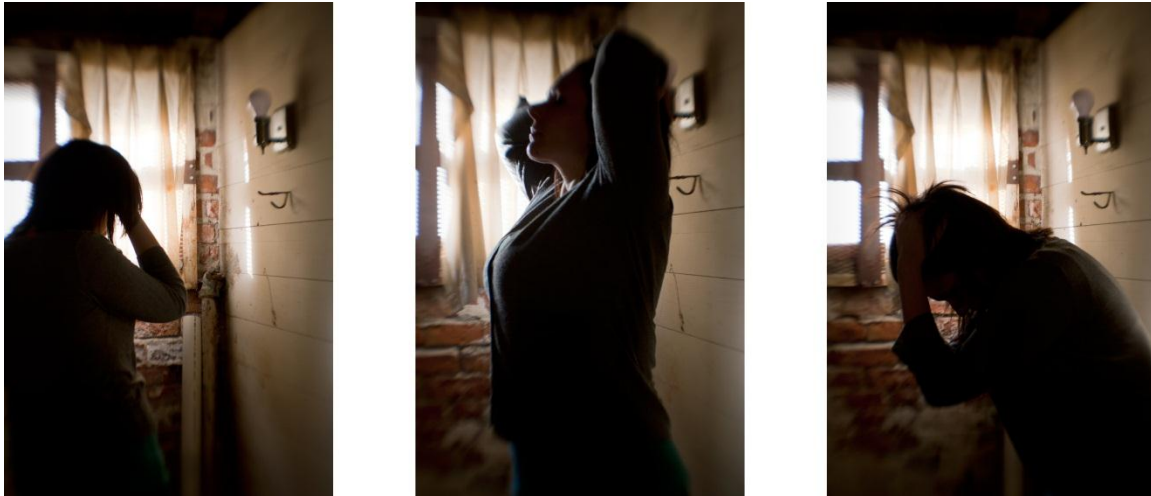


Figure 5, *Constantly Waiting No. 1, No. 2, & No. 3*

The figure in *Constantly Waiting* moves and folds in a display of agony and despair while being backlit creating a silhouette that places the importance on the individual movements of the body. The silhouetted subject was inspired by a scene of struggle in which Leonardo DiCaprio has a break down and falls to the floor following the death of his character's mother in the film *J. Edgar*. The scene depicted so clearly the agony of the character based on the movements of the body that I chose to use a similar lighting scheme, placing myself in front of a window causing my body to be shadowed. By repeating three similar images, the similarity of repeating instances and events without change is illustrated.



## HIDING



Figure 6, *The Difference Between Choice and Obligation Part 1 & Part 2*

There are only three images that work to illustrate hiding. *A Place to Hide* is a singular image that very obviously shows a woman hiding. *The Difference Between Choice and Obligation* is a diptych showing a person hidden behind a curtain with only feet and hands shown.

The diptych, *The Difference Between Choice and Obligation*, was created to illustrate how hiding the pain of personal struggle can be both a choice and an obligation at the same time, how the lines between the two can become blurred after years of hiding painful memories. Within this work a figure is hidden behind a curtain, only the hands and feet are exposed twisting and contorting to show struggle. Again, the two images in



the diptych are numbered to represent a passing of time with only minor changes happening from one to the next.

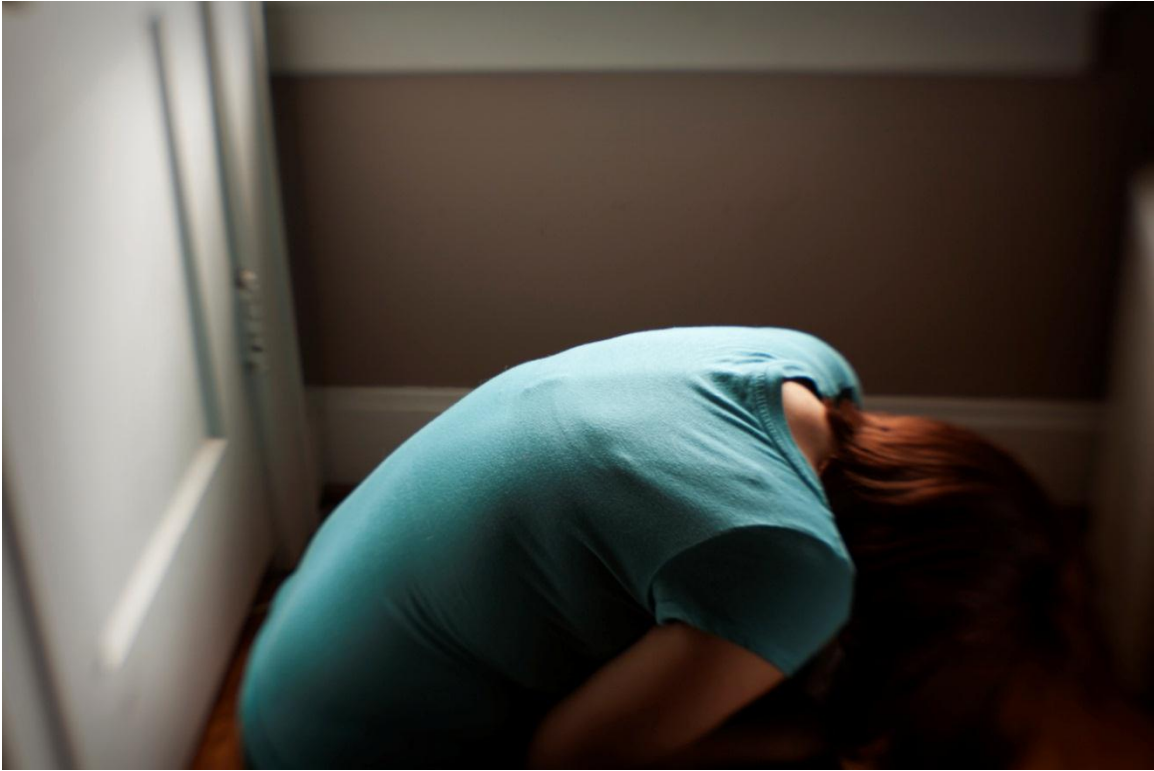


Figure 7, *A Place to Hide*

A woman is shown crouching on the floor in the corner of a room in *A Place to Hide*. Light from the window above spilling across her back reflects a blue haze through the image and adds to the loneliness created by the composition of the body. The viewer is given no clue as to what the woman is hiding from; is the woman hiding from the viewer? Is she hiding from herself or someone else? It is intended that the viewer ask these questions while experiencing a sense of loneliness and despair in viewing this piece.

## PORTRAYING MEMORY

In thinking about portraying memories, I was reminded of the novel *The Giver* and the memories passed from The Giver to The Receiver of Memory. The story is complex, relating to social commentary and heightened political skepticism of the early 1990's. However, it is the simple story of the young boy growing up and finding himself while being passed a conglomeration of memories through his newly acquired position as "Receiver of Memory" that interests me most. The protagonist, Jonas, is awarded this very complex but overlooked position with a warning that previous candidates have failed to complete the rigorous training, the passing of the memory. Ultimately, Jonas fails to complete the training as well because he becomes too emotional about the memories presented to him and begins to question the structures of his society.

It intrigues me that the author imagined this world in which just one person is given the burden of keeping all memories, painful and joyful alike, while the remainder of the society functions in a purely utilitarian manner. In remembering this story, I question how much of my memories I want to give to the viewer, how much is too much, because I certainly don't intend to drive them into a fury of pain like that of Jonas, The Receiver of Memory.



Figure 8, *Wanting to Run Away: Ruins*

In the anthology *The Anatomy of Memory*, there is an essay by Toni Morrison which details using memory for creative use. In this essay, Morrison refers to memory as “a willed creation” and states that the point of memory is “to dwell on the way it appeared and why it appeared that way.”<sup>2</sup> She is describing using memory as a tool for creation, explaining that our memories help us to understand our truths and, later in the essay, how we can use our cultural experiences to comment on sociological conditions.

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<sup>2</sup> Morrison, Toni. “Memory, Creation, and Writing.” 1984. *The Anatomy of Memory: An Anthology*. Ed. James McConkey. New York: Oxford UP, 1996. pg 213.

Throughout the writing, Morrison circles the same topic of using experience to inform creative work (in her case literary, in mine visual). Below, is an excerpt in which she details her use memory:

“The pieces (and only the pieces) are what begin the creative process for me. And the process by which the recollections of these pieces coalesce into a part (and knowing the difference between a piece and a part) is creation. Memory, then no matter how small the piece remembered, demands my respect, my attention, and my trust.”<sup>3</sup>

Using this statement as a guide, I can begin to inform my audience about the reasons for my photographs. Seeing as how my work is derivative of my personal experience, I have drawn specifically on what Morrison calls “pieces” of the memories; i.e. bare feet on snow, folding my body into a tightly wound coil, peering out of a bedroom window. Those pieces are then reassembled into visual scenes that create emotions of loneliness, pain, and struggle and can begin to tell my story and each viewer’s personal story as well. Toni Morrison also describes a similar intention within her work by stating “I want my fiction to urge the reader into active participation in the nonnarrative, nonliterary experience of the text, which makes it difficult for the reader to confine himself to a cool and distant acceptance of data.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Morrison, Toni. "Memory, Creation, and Writing." 1984. *The Anatomy of Memory: An Anthology*. Ed. James McConkey. New York: Oxford UP, 1996. pg 214.

<sup>4</sup> Morrison, Toni. "Memory, Creation, and Writing." 1984. *The Anatomy of Memory: An Anthology*. Ed. James McConkey. New York: Oxford UP, 1996. pg 215.

In a similar essay preceding Morrison's in *The Anatomy of Memory*, Patricia Hampl addresses the invention of memory. She states that we often invent much of our memories because only specific details of the memory can be recounted. For instance, in *Wanting to Run Away: January*, the most prominent portion of the memory is my fear and the feeling of my bare feet on the snow as I ran through my neighbors' yards. This is why the piece shows only the motion of legs and footsteps on snow covered ground. Some pieces are specific to memories of events while others speak to the memory of an emotion, as can be noted in the aforementioned *The Difference Between Choice and Obligation*.

*The Anatomy of Memory* begins with an excerpt from St. Augustine's *Confessions* which, although quite different from that of Morrison or Hampl, includes an important interpretation of memory. In his writing, St. Augustine describes trying to remember things despite the mind bringing forth other memories or parts of memories, forcing the mind to recall a specific memory or part. He also describes sensory memories and how the mind recounts smells, tastes, sounds, sights and feels without these things being accessible at the moment of recollection. St. Augustine appears to be more concerned with the scientific explanation of the experience of remembrance, writing this piece as a testament to the power of the human mind, in bewilderment of the strength of memory.

It is this experience of recalling memory, perceived by all senses as described by St. Augustine, that I wish my viewers to experience when interacting with the work. If the work allows a viewer to recount a time of personal struggle, through all sensory perception, invoked by the pieces of memory presented, then the work is most successful.

However, the strongest sense that I intend for a viewer to perceive within the work is that of emotion.

### **ILLUSTRATING EMOTION**

In most any emotional struggle, a person may find themselves wanting to escape (run), hiding emotion, or perpetually waiting for change in their situation. Evidence of this can be found in Janet Woititz's 1990 edition of *The Struggle for Intimacy*, in which an introduction is added to the updated text outlining the fact that individuals from other dysfunctional family systems may experience similar struggles to that of the individual from an alcoholic home. Throughout the book she details the struggles of the Adult Child of an Alcoholic in all adult relationships; i.e. inability to trust others, constant feelings of dissatisfaction and loneliness, desire to control all situations.

Woititz comments on the confusing nature of a relationship with an alcoholic through describing different scenarios in which the alcoholic sends mixed emotional signals. One such scenario, which I find all too familiar, is the "I Love You, Go Away" scenario.<sup>5</sup> In this instance, the alcoholic offers affection and comfort while also driving the individual away. When this scenario is applied to the child/parent relationship, the child matures to an adult incapable of differentiating between affection and indifference in relationships. This results in self-destructive behaviors in romantic relationships, feelings of loneliness and abandonment, and a general difficulty managing and maneuvering any relationship, romantic or platonic. The feelings that Janet Woititz

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<sup>5</sup> Woititz, Janet Geringer. *Struggle for Intimacy*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 1990. pg 5

attributes to the Adult Child of an Alcoholic are the feelings that I have attempted to illustrate.



Figure 9, *Constantly Waiting No. 2*

The most perfect illustration of personal struggle in a creative work that I have encountered comes from early feminist literature. Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote her famous short story “The Yellow Wall-paper” in 1892; with it she portrays a woman forced to bed rest after suffering what can be believed now to be post-partum depression. The narrator explains such a lack of stimulation and interaction by being forced to remain within a bedroom that she becomes engulfed by her surroundings and is driven insane by what her imagination creates with the room’s décor- its yellow wallpaper. So striking is

the story that I often return to it for inspiration. Is my story not in some ways similar? Being forced into a situation in which I only had myself to rely on, I could have easily been broken down but my inner strength and creativity led me to clarity and independence.

The idea of this woman being so helpless in her situation almost directly relates to the experience of being a child of an alcoholic. No matter what the circumstance, doing anything other than what is expected of you, which sometimes is difficult to decipher, could create a conflict so the child learns to deny personal wants and needs in order to maintain some sense of normalcy and order.

#### **A CASE FOR THE CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPH**

In contemporary photography, there are many forms a photograph may take with many different subject matters, intents, and methods involved. Every writer, curator and critic specifies a different set of themes, categories or genres for which contemporary photography is to fit, although most photography fits many molds.

*Photo Art: Photography in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* begins with an essay by Paolo Bianchi entitled “The Aesthetics of Photography” in which the writer interprets five types of photography based on Silvio Vietta’s *Aesthetics of the Modern World*; photography of imagination, emotion, memory, association, and sensation. According to this list, it can be assumed that the work I have created lays somewhere between that of emotion and that of memory.



Bianchi explains that both photography of emotion and photography of memory often lend themselves to the creation of narrative and exploration of identity. He refers to emotion in photography as personal and often based on relationships presented, whether between multiple subjects or between the subject and its surroundings. Furthermore, he describes that repetition can be used to aid in illustrating emotion by stating “the autonomy of human feelings is articulated through copied patterns, copied emotions, and copied lives.”<sup>6</sup> I have used repetition as a tool within my work to elicit an emotional response from the viewer based on Bianchi’s writing.

In describing photography of memory, Paolo Bianchi describes memory as “...impressions, perceptions, and experiences that have been stored in the brain.”<sup>7</sup> With this statement, he seems to be commenting on memory as not just tangible, sensory memory but that of emotion as well. Bianchi goes on to refer to memory as not always being personal but, at times, even historical with photographers often incorporating themselves to comment on their place within, or relationship to, history. It is no doubt that my presented work is photography of memory, and even more so memory of emotion, but it seems more closely tied to Bianchi’s described photography of emotion seeing as how I seek an emotional reaction from the viewer.

Writer and curator Susan Bright has written some very influential books about contemporary photography in 21<sup>st</sup> century. The two that I have referenced, *Auto Focus*:

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<sup>6</sup> Bianchi, Paolo. "The Aesthetics of Photography." Foreword. *Photo Art: Photography in the 21st Century*. Ed. Uta Grosenick and Thomas Seelig. New York, NY: Aperture, 2007. pg 23

<sup>7</sup> Bianchi, Paolo. "The Aesthetics of Photography." Foreword. *Photo Art: Photography in the 21st Century*. Ed. Uta Grosenick and Thomas Seelig. New York, NY: Aperture, 2007. pg 25

*The Self-Portrait in Contemporary Photography* and *Art Photography Now*, have helped in the realization of my thesis imagery.

In *Art Photography Now*, Bright breaks down contemporary photography into seven categories; portrait, landscape, narrative, object, fashion, document and city. She has based these categories off of traditional themes in art and explains that much of contemporary photography has the ability to transcend them. The work for *Run, Hide, Wait*, is unconcerned with landscape, the object, fashion or depictions of a city so those categories will go unmentioned.

Under the category of Portrait, Bright describes any work using the human figure to comment on identity or humankind while inviting the viewer to have an emotional response to the subject. She describes Narrative photography as that of fantasy whilst creating a story for the viewer to experience. In a differing style from traditional documentary photography, Bright describes a contemporary Document photograph as a photograph taken as truth depicting a more private event or thought. Through these three brief descriptions, I find themes in which my thesis work may fit whereas I incorporate a human figure with which the viewer is asked to create an emotional connection while exploring a narrative of my personal truth.

Incorporating the self into photography, such as in self-portraiture, has become so common in contemporary photography that Susan Bright has created an entire book dedicated to it. Within *Auto Focus: The Self-Portrait in Contemporary Photography*, Bright breaks self-portrait photography into five groups; autobiography, body, masquerade, studio and album, and performance. She describes autobiographical

photography as commonly creating “a visual record of personal tragedy or difficult time in life” while also relating it to the term “memoir” which she attributes to “merging fiction with fact, as memory is inclined to do.”<sup>8</sup> It is in this respect, autobiography as memoir, which I find my work most closely relating.

I am unconcerned with issues of the body, I do not wish to photograph myself in costume, or to create a comment on the album so these categories are unconsidered. However, I am in a sense utilizing repetition which derives from the album and performing in front of the camera, relative to performance.

In her description of performance photography, Bright commonly refers to the documentation of performance but makes room for performance within photography in order to create narrative. Again, my work falls into more than one described category. I use myself as the subject to perform for the camera in a display of selected memories, making the work both autobiographical and performative.

While relating my work to what Paolo Bianchi and Susan Bright have described as common themes of contemporary photography, I discovered another theme, that of melodrama as outlined by Kathleen A. Edwards’s introduction “Melodrama and Photography” in *Acting Out: Created Melodrama in Contemporary Photography*. In her writing, Edwards explains that the presence of melodrama causes photography to become more accessible to viewers. She often assimilates melodrama with pathos, which as she

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<sup>8</sup> Bright, Susan. *Auto Focus: The Self-portrait in Contemporary Photography*. New York: Monacelli, 2010. pg 25

describes is “the use of emotion to cause a spectator to identify with observed actions.”<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps pathos, rather than memory, narrative, or self-portraiture, is the key ingredient to my work if it is to be successful in allowing viewers to access it.

### **A RESPONSE TO BARTHES**

By incorporating myself as sole subject in this body of work, I cross the lines of what Roland Barthes explains in *Camera Lucida* as the three positions used to understand the photograph; Operator, Spectrum, and Spectator. As photographer and creator, I serve as the Operator of the photograph. As the subject, I become the Spectrum. As a member of the ACoA and art communities, I myself am a Spectator and am capable of viewing the work. Barthes uses these positions to illustrate how people interact with and understand photography, how the public can appreciate the photograph. He recounts his own interactions with photographs, both those he has seen and those in which he has served as subject. By simply viewing photographs, Barthes explains what interests him about photography. He describes that a photograph must incorporate something familiar to him (studium) while also piercing his interest or emotion (punctum).<sup>10</sup> Seeing as how the subject matter of the work is based off my own personal experience, this operates as my own studium and the use of myself as model, or Spectrum, reinforces the personal nature of the work.

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<sup>9</sup> Edwards, Kathleen A. *Acting Out: Invented Melodrama in Contemporary Photography*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Museum of Art, 2005. pg 6

<sup>10</sup> Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981. pg 27

Barthes also addresses the different aspects that create a noteworthy or interesting photograph. Whereas the viewer can see and understand the studium as an obvious statement, the punctum is what interests the viewer, what the viewer brings to the photograph. For my work, I intend for the viewer to bring aspects of their own relationship struggles, personal conflicts, and desires and to see these things as a punctum or interest.

Further into *Camera Lucida*, Barthes lists five “surprises” to be found in photographs which enhance the viewer’s interest. One of his listed “surprises” is “the contortions of technique: superimpressions, anamorphoses, deliberate exploitation of certain defects (blurring, deceptive perspectives, trick framing)...”<sup>11</sup> I utilize this aspect throughout my work, using a specific plastic optic lenses to create soft blur as an aesthetic not inherently accomplished through any other means. In some cases, by slowing the shutter of the camera, I can enhance the blur or sense of movement within the image. In either case, I am enlisting Barthes idea of “surprise.”

## **INFLUENTIAL ARTISTS**

Initially, upon determining the basis for my thesis work, I looked to other photographers who had dealt with addiction within their work. Being a longtime fan of both Nan Goldin and Larry Clark, I was already familiar with their photographs. Clark’s Tulsa images depicting images of meth addicts during the 1960’s and Goldin’s Ballad of

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<sup>11</sup> Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981. pg 32-33

Sexual Dependency featuring she and her friends immersed in the New York City club scene of the 1980's. Both photographers were at once active participants as well as bystanders to the photographs' events, enlisting a documentary style of capturing these scenes. As I began to work, I intended to stray from the documentary style of photographing things as they happened or reenacting scenes of events. I desired to create work that was not necessarily about addiction but about the emotional struggle faced when disassociating oneself from the addict. The work was also meant to be accessible to any viewer without requiring a history of experience with substance abuse to understand the images.

In order to create work that was accessible to all viewers I looked to contemporary photographers such as Haley Morris-Cafiero, Jen Davis, Nancy Rexroth, and Susan Burnstine. All of which create emotionally charged imagery of differing themes and methods. Haley Morris-Cafiero and Jen Davis both work with self-portraiture as a means to comment on the struggles of dealing with weight issues. Both have a very straightforward approach in their illustration of personal struggle. While Nancy Rexroth and Susan Burnstine use subdued imagery from plastic or homemade cameras to create dreamlike black and white images depicting loneliness, loss, and longing.

Haley Morris-Cafiero describes in her online statements for her "Something to Weigh" and "Wait Watchers" series that she was first interested in depicting how she, as

an individual struggling with her weight, “fits into society.”<sup>12</sup> She began this work with “Something to Weigh” and in creating the work, photographing in public spaces, she noticed uncomfortable stares from bystanders. She then took it upon herself to seek out such looks from strangers, thus creating the work for her “Wait Watchers” series. For both series, Morris-Cafiero is always shown alone within a space often surrounded by strangers and the evidence of consumerism. She is interested in showcasing awkwardness and loneliness to comment on her personal struggle. Because she is successful in portraying these feelings, I have found her work inspiring. Using her own body, along with a predetermined location, she seamlessly creates an experience in which the viewer can identify with her on some level.

Recently, *Lens*, a blog by *The New York Times*, published a feature on Jen Davis’ work which is similar to Haley Morris-Cafiero’s while differing in its intent. In the article, Davis speaks to journalist Miki Meek about the difficulty she experienced in producing such a personal body of work and allowing others to view it. “I covered up the part that showed my body with a blank sheet of paper, and thought, ‘Do I really want to show this?’” she explains in remembering printing the first images from the series in a community darkroom.<sup>13</sup> Although, I am not exposing any private areas of my body, I can relate to being uncomfortable in turning the camera on myself for the simple fact that

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<sup>12</sup> Morris-Cafiero, Haley. "About." *Haley Morris-Cafiero Photography*. Haley Morris-Cafiero, 2012. Web. 27 Apr. 2012. <<http://haleymorriscafiero.com/about/>>.

<sup>13</sup> Meek, Miki. "Seeing Yourself as Others Do." *Lens: Photography, Video and Visual Journalism*. The New York Times, 26 Apr. 2012. Web. 26 Apr. 2012. <<http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/04/26/seeing-yourself-as-others-do/>>.

I have exposed something very personal to my audience and peers. My subject matter, much like that of Davis, is anything but comfortable.

Nancy Rexroth is best known for her series of black and white images created in the 1970's titled "Iowa." For this series, Rexroth used a Diana camera, known for creating soft images with a blurry vignette, in order to accomplish subdued images of longing for another place or time. Although she has remained rather low key for many years, Rexroth continues to exhibit her Iowa images. In a 2004 press release for the Robert Mann Gallery, the experience of the Iowa images is described as "one of empathy — as we travel deeper into the artist's past, we also retrieve our own memories of childhood."<sup>14</sup> I am drawn to the simplicity of her imagery, the familiar Midwest landscape and scenery used, and the powerful emotion and memory captured. Upon creating my thesis work, I looked to Rexroth as a guide for creating captivating imagery heavily tied to memory.

Susan Burnstine's black and white images are similar in simplicity to Rexroth's only more recent and detailed. Burnstine constructs homemade film cameras from antique cameras and everyday objects then uses them to create surreal looking images. The scenes in her work become distorted and other-worldly while depicting her longing for loved ones past and questioning reality.

There is still one more specific influence I encountered while creating my thesis work. On a visit to the Detroit Institute of Arts, I was introduced to Marina Abramovic's

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Mann Gallery. "Nancy Rexroth: Iowa." *Robert Mann Gallery*. Robert Mann Gallery, 2004. Web. 29 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.robertmann.com/exhibitions/2004/rexroth/press.html>>.



video piece *The Kitchen V, Carrying the Milk*. The video depicts the artist, wearing a long black dress, standing in the center of the frame in a kitchen lit similar to a Dutch master's painting. She holds a vessel filled to the brim with milk and stands still. As the video progresses, the artist's body tenses and little by little she spills the milk. *Artweek L.A.* likens Abramovic's created scene to that of Vermeer's *The Milkmaid*.<sup>15</sup> It is not the formal qualities of the piece, nor the act performed that struck me, but the tension displayed, the fact that I became tense just watching the video, made an impression on me. It more than adequately created a remembered experience for me, the type of experience I would like to convey to my audience.

Through the work of all the artists mentioned, the viewer is asked to both participate and experience an emotional reaction. That is also the goal of the work that I have created. If a viewer experiences a feeling a struggle or loneliness from the work, then it is a success. If a viewer feels an invitation to experience the projected feelings or acts shown, the goal has been achieved.

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<sup>15</sup> Artweek LA. "Marina Abramovic: The Kitchen V, Carrying the Milk." *Artweek LA*. Gramercy Partners, Inc, 13 Dec. 2010. Web. 29 Apr. 2012. <<http://artweek.la/issue/dec-13-2010/article/marina-abramovic-the-kitchen-v-carrying-the-milk>>.



Figure 10, Installation view, looking toward grid

## CONCLUSION

The end result of my thesis work, *Run, Hide, Wait*, the collection of images on display, successfully illustrates my struggle while eliciting a reaction from the viewer. The images create a unique experience for the viewer as he or she is led throughout the gallery space. Initially, my only hope was for the viewer to have an emotional response but I have since determined three success points for the work: Did viewers feel a struggle? Did others having an experience with an alcoholic understand the work? Can I see places in which this work will branch out to newer works? In all instances, the answer is yes. I received many positive and reaffirming comments from viewers at the opening of the thesis exhibition to confirm that people had an emotional reaction to the

work, including a few self-identified Adult Children of Alcoholics. I also see possible works that can be created off this same theme, including a video piece and possible performance/audience participation piece. In all, I feel this work is a success and illustrates my personal struggle in the most appropriate way possible at this time.

Through the writings of Roland Barthes, Paolo Bianchi, Susan Bright and Kathleen A. Edwards, I may also conclude that my photographs fit within the current themes of photography while utilizing Barthes explained functions of the photograph. I have identified that I have become more than just the photographer as I turn the camera inward. Incorporating aspects of the melodramatic to elicit emotional reactions to the work while drawing on personal memory has allowed me to gain the power of narrative with my photographs. In short, it is understood that my work as an artist holds a place in contemporary photography, crossing the paths of more than a few current and traditional themes.

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