My Dearest Darling

Research Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for graduation

"Research Distinction in Printmaking" in the undergraduate colleges of The Ohio State University

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The Ohio State University June 2012

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June 6, 2012
At the start, my purpose for this project was to piece together parts of a story that had been lost for many years. After my grandparents passing, I obtained letters that my grandfather had written to my grandmother while he was away as a soldier during World War II. There are several letters from him that explain many different emotions and events of his daily life while he was away serving in the army. Unfortunately, there are no letters from my grandmother. I started reading these letters out of my own personal curiosity about my grandparents’ life. I then came to realize that because I did not have the letters from my grandmother, I was making my own connections from letter to letter, filling in the gaps with my own imagination. These letters are a rare family treasure and although they connect to me personally, they also offered an opportunity to explore, in general, the various ways one responds to individuals with close ties but with limited information.

I started this project separated from the information in front of me. At the time I could only slightly relate to what my grandmother was feeling. My feelings were assumptions, leading my work to be distant from the viewer and myself. I found that I was laboring over my images by trying to make them fit the purpose perfectly as would be expected of them, given the basic outline I had used to define the project. I had to simply use what would be the normal expectation to portray the missing reactions that were missing, perhaps with added details from my close, personal relationship to my grandma. One of my first pieces was a lithograph titled Sanitarium, (Figure 1).
This print was segmented into different areas containing different objects that I felt were part of a story that my grandmother would have told. There became an overcrowding of information and started to push the viewer away rather than pulling them in for more.

![Figure 1. Saegan Moran. Sanitarium. 2011](image)

It was not until I lost my own soldier that I was able to understand the emotions, the worry that my grandmother went through every day during that time, wondering if her soldier, her love of her life, was going to return from the war. This significant and overwhelming event in my life took my work in a new and much more challenging direction. I was now dealing with emotions that I had never experienced before. They were ones that had no perfect resolution and ones that were even more intense because of
the concern and worry that I now could understand she must have felt. These emotions had now become a reality with very real results.

At times it now made working on my pieces difficult. I found myself struggling to get through and being able to create work without spending too much time lost in my own emotions.

*Love or Comfort (Figure 2)* is one of the first pieces that took me in a new direction in my work. It now captured the deeply felt emotions of a woman torn between waiting for her love to come back from the war or moving on with her life in hopes of feeling safe. This piece was hand drawn, scanned, and then put through a laser cutter. The outcome was a delicate piece of paper that felt like, at any moment, could fall apart in my hands, just like a woman waiting for her love to come home from the war. As I continued to work on this piece by hand: cutting, stippling, drawing, and layering, I realized how fragile the memories and moments were that I shared with my grandmother, memories that we all experience in life. This fragile removal and layering of materials started to capture these emotions as well as preserved them in a way that they could be seen – and felt.
I have believed that with lithography, there is a connection that is made between the artist, the stone and the process. To convey my idea through lithography, I must know all the characteristics of the stone I am using for my drawing and the image I want to create. It is this connection that led me to create the image, *Promise* (*Figure 3*). There is an abundance of emotions and strength that go into keeping a relationship alive, especially one that is shared with someone that is away fighting for our country. There is comfort in knowing that when, or if, your soldier comes home, they will be yours. I spent a lot of time rendering the drawing on my stone, having nothing but time to think about this promise of love and faithfulness. Once again my piece was fragile. This was not only in the way that it was created but also in the emotions that it was capturin
Spending long amounts of time with my lithographs became difficult for me. As much as I loved to sit and render my drawings, there was too much time for me to dwell on the personal connection to my subject matter and the emotions that came along with it and thus losing the larger context. These works were becoming much more about unanswerable questions than defining my individual and personal, emotional responses. This is when I decided that a means of quickly producing work was necessary. *Waiting for Sunday* (Figure 4) is a drawing with screen-printed elements done on layers of laser cut vellum. Working on the vellum allowed me to create layers of information that would lie together to make one image. Creating these quick layers of drawings and laying flat colors over the top of
it allowed me to express my thoughts and then quickly move on without hindering the outcome of my work by bringing it to a perfect, illustrated conclusion. This piece expresses the anticipation of a long awaited reunion. A dress, kept solely for the reunification of a soldier and his love, is encircled by delicately cut vellum. The transparency of layers is significant because at any minute, this awaited reunion could fall apart or disappear, again signifying the fragility of life.

Figure 4. Saegan Moran. Waiting for Sunday. 2012
Still not being able to sort through my own thoughts, I felt as though life was crashing in all around me. One minute I was whole, the next I was in pieces. Reading through more letters, I could feel the pain that my grandmother was going through in a way that I had never anticipated when I began this project. The reality of the possibility of losing her love became real when she received a letter informing her of a shot wound to my grandfather’s arm. In this moment of reading the words, “Darling, I am in the hospital. I have been shot.”, I can imagine that her life came crumbling down. Broken (Figure 5), is an ink-wash drawing of a pile of broken dishes layered with embossed paper and paper cutouts. This piece is a way to express and show the emotional climax that my grandmother must have felt with that news and at the same time my way of seeing my emotions when everything fragile appears to have finally fallen apart; everything starts to feel as though it is slipping away with nothing else left.

Figure 5. Saegan Moran. Broken. 2012
Holding on and preserving memories became a theme in my work. As I read through letters I was enamored with the ones written on V-mail. V-mail was a way to send large amounts of mail overseas while cutting down the weight. These small letters were like little vessels, keepsakes, of something precious. I wanted to recreate these vessels and place, what I felt, were important keepsakes. *My Dearest Darling* (Figure 6), was created on the letterpress in a large quantity. Working on the Vandercook allowed me to produce a large amount of V-mail letter-forms almost like they did during the war. After the forms were printed, I drew on a number of them in a manner that implied the framing of some kind of relative importance without the limitations of descriptive and defining words. These drawings ranged from being of objects drawn in high detail to others that were silhouettes of objects to offer them as less limiting representations of emotions that I had been feeling and feelings that I thought would have been expressed in letters from my grandmother. These letters show the sentimentality of this exchange between two people.
The results of my research are artworks that seek to capture and preserve the potential memories and possible emotions that would have resulted from clues found in the letters written to my grandma by my grandfather while he was a soldier in WWII. However, the limitation that could have been imposed had the work relied only on a more
detailed personal exploration was broadened by my own experiences to provide
something that could be broadly similar but deeply sensitive to those subjective,
emotional connections that others struggle to make to those who are a distinct, and
intimate, part of their life.