

Voici est ma Vie (This is my Life)

Carly Fox
Integrative Project Thesis Paper
19 April 2017

I. Introduction

Voici est ma Vie is an immersive multimedia installation that forms a nonlinear narrative around the painful but unavoidable human experience of loss through the lens of losing my mother. Through a series of photo collages displayed via projection and on light boxes, as well as a handmade book about my mother's life, I am constructing a contemplative environment that explores unresolved questions surrounding how to navigate memory, grief, loss, and honoring the dead. Central contrasts include subjectivity versus objectivity as well as attachment versus detachment and central themes span the nonlinear grieving process, catalog as narrative, and an investigative or archival process.

In my experience in American culture, the heavy topics of grief, loss, and death are not typically discussed openly (ignoring or repressing these feelings and conversations is the norm, at least in public situations). I would like to change this practice. Annually in the US, just over one million young women lose their mothers in adolescence or childhood.¹ However, a week after my mom died, I was back in school taking my midterm exams like nothing had changed, and I was only welcome at the university's Counseling and Psychological Services for six months, as if grieving could magically have an end date. Unable to grapple with losing a mother at their age, my peers did not know how to discuss the death with me, and most of them stopped asking about it after a few weeks. Further, I was dissatisfied with certain events in the aftermath of my mother's death—specifically, disappointed in the way my mother was portrayed in her obituary and funeral service. Though such acts claim to be honoring the dead, they seem more frequently to be used for the comfort of the living, sometimes even shifting focus away from the deceased person and onto conversations about divine retribution. For these reasons, in my work I aim to address these heavy issues head-on, attempting to elicit an

¹ Edelman, Hope. *Motherless Daughters*. Boston: Da Capo Press, 2006.

emotional response and cause people to feel to the depths of emotion, reminding them what it means to lose a loved one.

The following are some of my central research questions: first, how objective can I be, as my mother's daughter, especially as an artist and not a scientist?; second, are memories haunting or comforting? what about objects? can I find meaning and connection in her objects? can the objects act as a replacement or representation of her?; third, is detachment or attachment a better coping mechanism for loss?; and finally, is forming an archive a way to make sense of loss, or memorialize someone? Other relevant research questions include: can a catalog or archive be a narrative?; will physically collecting family archives become a thing of the past as we enter the digital age?; is learning new things about my mother and getting to know her better now a way of keeping her alive?; by finding connections between my mother and I, am I keeping her alive? can I keep her alive through my work?

Fascinated by the objects my mother kept, I am interested in curating, cataloging, and manipulating this collection, piecing together a narrative around these precious yet ephemeral pieces that are a part of my family history. By connecting the strands of my mother's story, I would like to relay who she was, who I am, and how I am trying to carry on her legacy. By selecting which parts of my mother's life to tell, I am creating a chronicle of my own, which alludes to the nonlinear, individualized nature of the grieving process.

II. Contextual Background

Initially, I turned to literature about loss to guide me. After losing her mother to cancer in adolescence, Hope Edelman found that not much was written on the specific subject of mother-loss, so she wrote *Motherless Daughters*,² in which she solicited stories from a diverse group of women who had lost their mothers at different points in their

² Ibid.

lives. Similarly, Edelman's *Mother of my Mother*³ discusses the primal bonds between mother and daughter as well as how dealing with loss can deeply affect one's identity. Further, Joan Didion dissects the experience of loss in detailed, poignant memoirs including *The Year of Magical Thinking*⁴ and *Blue Nights*⁵ after losing her husband and daughter in close succession. Contemporary poet Nikita Gill writes candidly of love and loss in *Your Soul is a River*,⁶ and Vladimir Nabokov's memoir *Speak, Memory*⁷ is quite enlightening from an existentialist perspective.

From a creative standpoint, my project exists within the context of Mark Dion's scientific approach in his *Cabinet of Curiosities* collection;⁸ Val Britton's road map collages commemorating her father;⁹ Christian Bolkanski's lit, photographic installations exploring life, death, and memory;¹⁰ Jennifer Loeber's juxtaposed photographs of her mother's things;¹¹ and Sarah Anne Johnson's psychologically charged work about her grandmother.¹² Because much of my process initially involved growing my archive of familial images, I am interested in Dion's systematic approach in categorizing objects and creating archives, intersecting the fields of art and science. Artist Sarah Anne Johnson has drawn over images of her deceased grandmother in her *House on Fire* series, speaking to the trauma her grandmother underwent as well as her relationship to her grandmother and her experience with the loss.¹³ Johnson was an inspiration especially when I was working on combining images to create my photographic overlays. After

³ Edelman, Hope. *Mother of my Mother*. North Carolina: Random House, 2009.

⁴ Didion, Joan. *The Year of Magical Thinking*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005.

⁵ Didion, Joan. *Blue Nights*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011.

⁶ Gill, Nikita. *Your Soul is a River*. New York: Thought Catalog Books, 2016.

⁷ Nabokov, Vladimir. *Speak, Memory*. New York: Vintage International, 1989.

⁸ Dion, Mark. 2015. *Memory Box*. Shed, shelf and boxes. New York: Bonakdar Gallery.

⁹ Britton, Val. 2014. *Voyage*. Laminated glass panels, ceramic glass melting colors, graphite and lacquer paint. San Francisco: San Francisco Airport.

¹⁰ Boltanski, Christian. 2015. *La Traverse de la Vie*. Printed veils, light bulbs, and wire. Paris: Marian Goodman Gallery.

¹¹ Loeber, Jennifer. 2014. *Left Behind*. Archival imagery. Online debut.

¹² Johnson, Sarah Anne. 2009. *House on Fire*. Mixed media. Ontario: Art Gallery of Ontario.

¹³ Ibid.

studying at her work, I became more cognizant of the strong emotional effect my images could have.



Jennifer Loeber, *Left Behind*, 2014
Source: jenniferloeber.com

After losing her mother, Jennifer Loeber created a series of juxtaposed photographs of her mother's rather mundane objects placed next to related images where her mother is using, wearing or interacting with these objects.¹⁴ Loeber is an inspiration because I too have a collection of my mother's things, some of which may seem mundane to others, and I am trying to find connection and meaning in it. Her series *Left Behind* was especially influential when I created a book about my mother's life, which features many images of her objects. Jennifer's work is interlaced with complexity because she pairs images and objects together that bear some connection to each other, but it is up to the viewer to determine the significance of the pairing. For instance, she places an image of her mother wearing long, elegant gloves next to a different, more ragged pair of winter gloves. Similarly, I am interested in the tension between the subjective and objective; how objective can I be as my mother's daughter and an artist (not a scientist) in portraying my mother's life? My mother writes about making a painting in her diary, and one of her paintings meets that description; however, it is unclear whether these two

¹⁴ Loeber, Jennifer. 2014. *Left Behind*. Archival imagery. Online debut.

threads are connected. It is up to me to discern what “objective” facts about her life form part of my own subjective account.

Founded originally in the 1970s by Guy Coggins and practiced today by photographer Christina Lonsdale, aura photography¹⁵ is an influence because I am trying to achieve a similar luminescent effect with my projections. Aura cameras translate electromagnetic fields into color, creating angelic, other worldly portraits. Similarly, spirit photography¹⁶ is an offshoot of portrait photography that began in the late-nineteenth century, as a form of double exposure that generated ghost-like imagery of lost loved ones with their family members. Early pioneers of the movement include William Mumler, Fred Hudson, and William Hope. My work relates to spirit photography because of the similar subject matter of loss, but also in the way that I am overlaying translucent imagery.



Anne Carson, *Nox*, 2009
Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/>

Similar to Anne Carson’s approach in her poetic epitaph *Nox*¹⁷ where she displays disjointed letter scraps and photos from her late brother’s life, in my work, I am turning to fragments of evidence to understand more about my mother and convey a nonlinear narrative around memory, loss, and grief. Carson creates an elegant interplay between

¹⁵ Frank, Priscilla. “Here’s how one photographer, and her nifty handmade machine, can photograph your aura.” Huffington Post. <https://goo.gl/skGX4t> (accessed October 2016).

¹⁶ Timberlake, Howard. “The intriguing history of ghost photography.” BBC. <https://goo.gl/f3Hp82> (accessed November 2016).

¹⁷ Carson, Anne. *Nox*. New York City: New Directions Publishing, 2010.

word and image that pieces together disjointed memories about her brother, which is what I aim to achieve in my book about my mother. Comparably, Leanne Shapton's *Important Artifacts*¹⁸ follows the course of a relationship where she brings to life black and white photographs of otherwise mundane artifacts that are supposedly up for auction—all while shedding light on the modern love affair. I too aim to tell a story through my documentation of pieces of my mother's life and my relationship to her. Other artistic influences include Bobby Neel Adam's *Family Tree*¹⁹ project where he integrates two separate photographs of immediate family members into one image, David Hockney's method of photographic collage and fragmentation,²⁰ and Matt Wisniewski's double exposure methods.²¹

Culturally speaking, similar to memorials and monuments surrounding the Mexican holiday Day of the Dead, Ground Zero in New York, and Egyptian temples and tombs that exist as public works of memory, my work serves as a reminder of my mother's life. My work is also in conversation with how the social sciences address grieving and speak to the universal experience of loss and the stages of grief. Different frameworks exist for grief, such as the evolutionary perspective, the dual process model, and the biographical perspective. However, Nesse in his *An Evolutionary Framework for Understanding Grief*²² states that a unifying framework for grief is still needed. In addition, C.S. Lewis' *The Problem of Pain*²³ and *A Grief Observed*²⁴ explore the psychology, history, and inner-workings of grief. Because I am exploring how to represent and deal with loss via the creative process, my work has ties to the realms of

¹⁸ Shapton, Leanne. *Important Artifacts*. Brooklyn: Sarah Crichton Books, 2009.

¹⁹ Adams, Bobby Neel. 2007. *Family Tree*. Photographic prints.

²⁰ Hockney, David. "David Hockney: Works." David Hockney. <http://www.hockneypictures.com/> (accessed Feb 2017).

²¹ Wisniewski, Matt. "Matt Wisniewski – art." Matt Wisniewski. <http://mattw.us/images/> (accessed Feb 2017).

²² Nesse. *An Evolutionary Framework for Understanding Grief*.

²³ Lewis, C.S. *The Problem of Pain*. United Kingdom: The Centenary Press, 1940.

²⁴ Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed*. United Kingdom: Faber and Faber, 1961.

psychology and art therapy as well. I have found making work about my mother therapeutic because it provides an outlet to release feelings about her death that are hard for me to express otherwise. Because of this work, I am not only honoring her, but I also feel as though I am acting constructively in response to her untimely death. I hope that my project can illustrate the power of vulnerability; because I am being vulnerable in making this work, I wish to inspire viewers to do the same. In connection with art therapy, my dissection of the grieving process through a creative means offers a new perspective on ways to approach and attempt to overcome such difficult universal issues at the heart of humanity.

Although not in the most overt manner, my work relates to the artistic genre of *memento mori*, or “artwork designed to remind the viewer of their mortality and of the shortness and fragility of human life.”²⁵ Photographer Bobby Neel Adams is currently working on such a series, in which birds and other mammals are the subjects.²⁶ My work serves as a personal remembrance of both my mother’s life and her death, as well as more broadly, a reminder of viewers’ lost loved ones. In telling pieces of my late mother’s story, I am reminding viewers the importance of cherishing memories with loved ones, both before and after they are lost. Because my work approaches a more universal theme of mortality, it also calls upon viewers to examine their own ephemerality.

III. Methodology

In an attempt to keep my connection with my mother, I have been trying to find out more about her life. By continuing to discover new things about her, I believe that, in a way, I am keeping her alive. I am interested in investigating whether detachment or attachment is a better coping mechanism, which is an important consideration for others

²⁵ “Memento Mori.” Tate. <https://goo.gl/04hGkh> (accessed Jan 2017).

²⁶ Adams, Bobby Neel. 2016. *Memento Mori*. Photographic prints.

undergoing the universal experience of loss. In addition, I hope my project will become a source of empowerment for others who are dealing with the unpredictability of grief in their own ways.

Because I had yet to acquire all of my mother's things at the start of this project, the objects that I did have were incredibly precious to me. Since I felt compelled to have these items, I went to great lengths to reconnect with people from my mother's past (including distant relatives and friends from her childhood) to acquire enough material (such as objects, memories, and photographs) for this project. As part of my investigative process, I have sought out access to more items, such as her medical records, letters she wrote to an old student, as well as contacts, photographs, and audio from my grandmother. My mother was the archivist of my life; now I am becoming the archivist of hers.



Letters my mother kept from exchanges with old students

The above letters are an example of my mother's artifacts, from an exchange with an old Korean student of my mother's from when she used to teach English as a second language. After consulting with Jungwon Yang, a librarian in the international studies department here at the university, I managed to track down and connect with this woman near the beginning of my project, which was quite meaningful since she exchanged letters

with my mother for over ten years, and I found these letters after my mother's death.

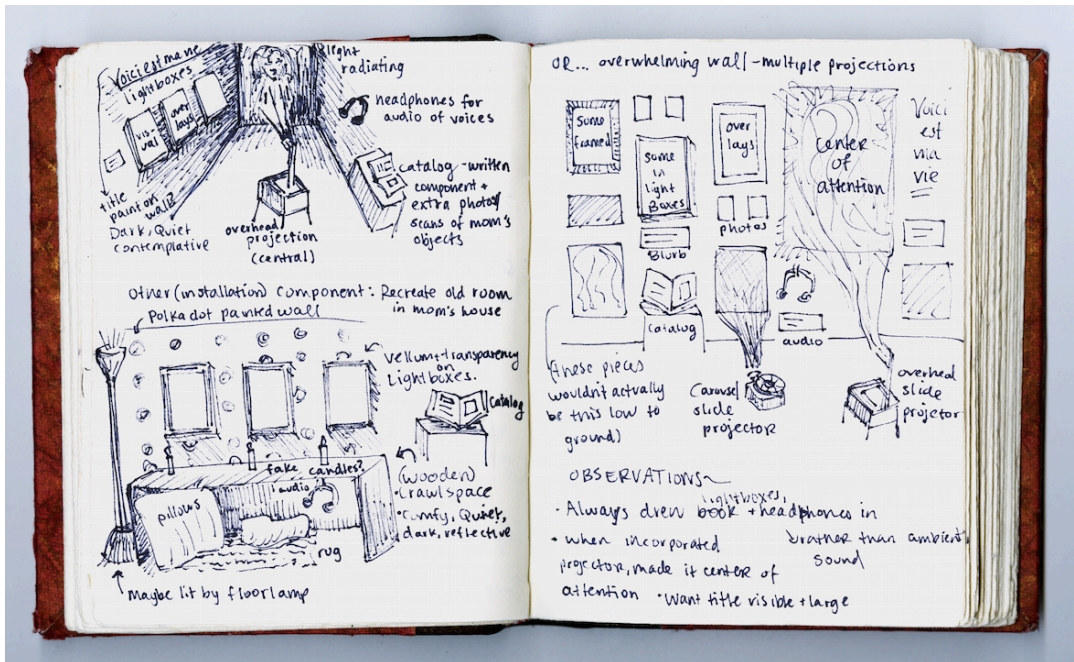
A large part of my process initially was collecting these objects and scanning them in digitally so as to not alter the precious originals. I encountered some challenges along the way, however, when I was unable to acquire some things that I wanted, including her medical records and contact with my godmother. This was a turning point in my project when I realized I might not be able to have everything, but I could still work with what I had, creating new items by collaging and combining the objects and images from what I already had.



An image of the wall in my studio, where I attempted to organize and display a curated selection of my mother's objects and photos throughout the course of the semester.



A small sampling of the collection of my mother's things that I have acquired, including her high school yearbooks, photographs, cassette tapes, home videos, letters, notes, postcards, scrapbooks, ticket stubs, and other memorabilia.



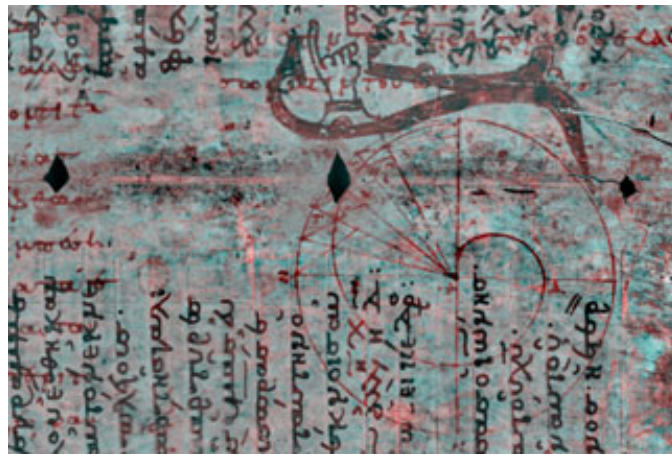
Early sketches of how I envisioned the final exhibit space

I will create an intimate environment (perhaps reminiscent of my old house where I have most of my memories with my mother) reflective of this dedicated investigation that invites others to contemplate—a place to reflect on what form grief takes on in their own lives. Further, I am interested in transforming these objects that I have collected (including ticket stubs, letters, postcards, diaries/notebooks, photographs, yearbooks, 35mm film slides, albums/scrapbooks, paintings, audio tapes, and home videos) by layering, fragmenting, and collaging them to make new visual pieces. Because of the antique nature of many of my mother's objects, I was drawn to using older technology, which is inherently nostalgic. I have experimented with material such as vellum and transparency film, using both light boxes and overhead projection as methods of display.

By altering these artifacts, I am giving new meaning to old objects while collapsing time, place, and memory. My project becomes less about the individual

artifacts themselves, but more about what I create by juxtaposing the pieces, representative of my intersection with my mother's life. By overlaying myself as a child with a photo of my mother at the same age where we look strikingly similar, the image begins to resemble one person, instead of two, which speaks to my closeness with my mother. Similarly, what my mother or grandmother says in the audio clips may not be important, but it is more important that her voice, my voice, and my grandmother's voice are heard together (I experimented with audio earlier on but later decided not to focus on it). As a whole, this work is a physical manifestation of the overlaps, consistencies, and intersections between mother and daughter and what it means to be a mother or a daughter.

Though I am creating a narrative around my mother and constructing a handmade book, my work differs from that of written memoirs; although I would love to encapsulate my mother's life completely (every moment of her life feels important), I am not sharing every detail in all of its fullness. I am carefully piecing together memories and in effect creating new ones by combining various images and objects from different times. I am not simply telling objective facts about my mother; I am inserting myself into the subjective narrative I'm creating. In addition, I am reshaping memories, as each time an event is recalled it is altered, and I am also working with recollections other than my own (primarily from my grandmother). My narrative is further complicated by the complex nature of familial relationships as well as my own feelings surrounding my mother's death. For example, at times I feel an overwhelming sense of guilt surrounding her death, as I see the act of mourning itself as quite selfish. For, in grieving the death of my mother, how can I know if I am actually mourning her death or simply mourning my own mortality?



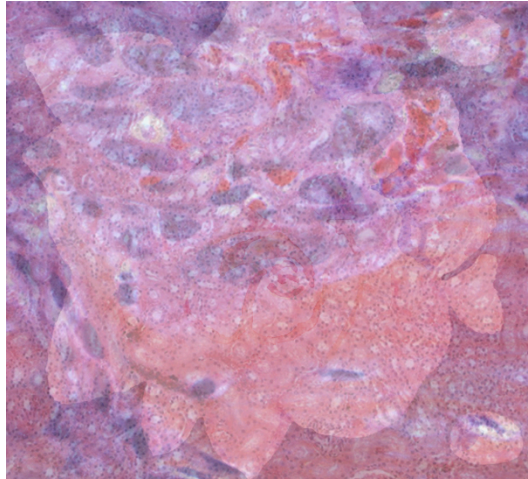
Archimedes Palimpsest, Circa. 287-212 B.C.

Source: <http://www.PBS.org>

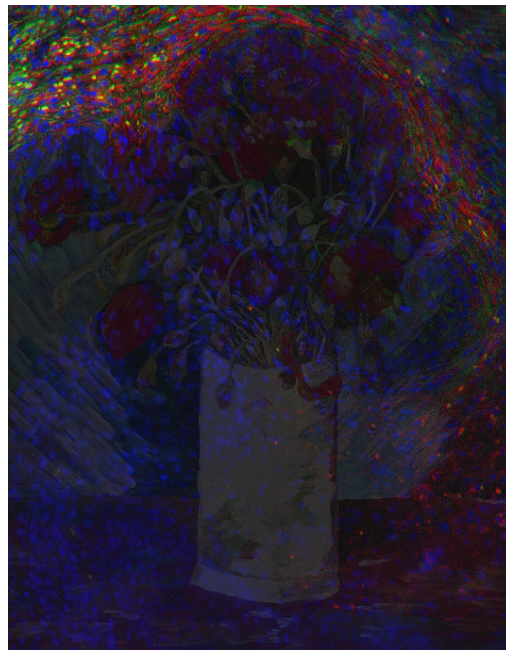
Further in the realm of literature, my process relates to the creation of palimpsests, “a parchment or other writing surface on which the original text has been effaced or partially erased, and then overwritten by another; a manuscript in which later writing has been superimposed on earlier (effaced) writing.”²⁷ Though I am working with imagery rather than text unlike Archimedes’ discourse on mathematical theorems, I still aim to tell a story through layers of family history. However, my layers only span at most a century (with the inclusion of my grandmother) of generations rather than thousands of years. Otherwise known as a layered written record, the palimpsest draws parallels to my work through its materiality, implementing the use of layers and vellum, both of which are reflected in my process of creating photographic overlays.

²⁷ “Palimpsest.” The Chicago School of Media Theory. <https://goo.gl/GT17tK> (accessed February 2017).

V. Creative Work

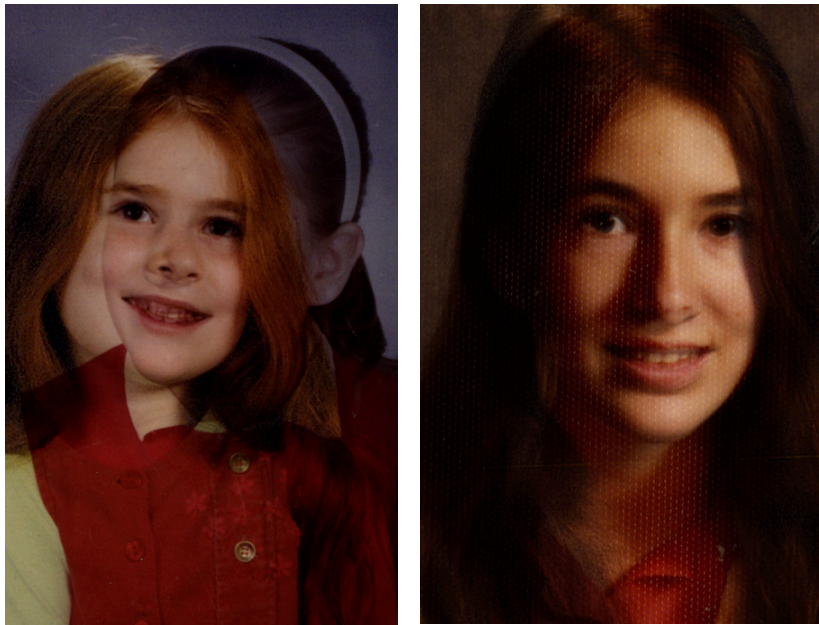


Overlay of mother's painting and cancer cells.
*Source for cells: Khalid Mohammad and Theresa Guise,
National Cancer Institute Indiana Univ. Simon Cancer Center*



Overlay of mother's painting and cancer cells.
*Source for cells: Frank C. Marini, National Cancer Institute
Comprehensive Cancer Center of Wake Forest Univ.*

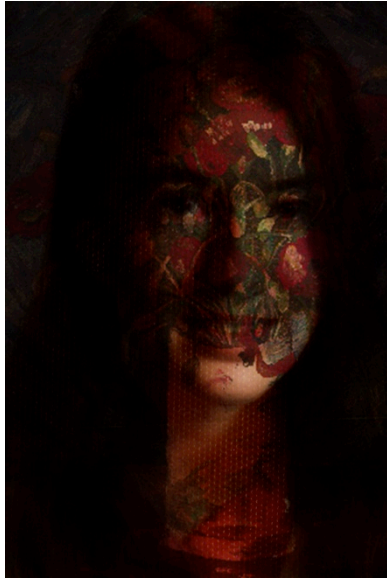
At first, when I did not yet have all of my mother's belongings, I created a metaphor for her by superimposing her paintings with cancer cells of similar colors and patterns, as illustrated in the above two images. I found that using cancer cells created a bit of tension in my work since although they are aesthetically beautiful, they are also the reason for my mother's death and are destructive, internal, and out of one's control, in contrast to my own careful curation of my mother's objects and photographs. In both of the above images, I am interested in the confusion that can arise between where the cancer cells end and the paintings begin. The paintings and cells themselves conflict at their cores—the former, created by my mother, and the latter, a cruel process of nature. Further, I have intersected myself into this contrast by consciously choosing to juxtapose these conflicting pieces that happen to resemble each other so much aesthetically.



Digital overlays of my mother and me at various ages in childhood

I began working with images of my mother and me rather than just images of her objects, after noticing how alike we look, especially at particular ages. I appreciated how my mother and I seem to resemble one person in some of the overlays, since most of the

facial features match up very closely, especially in the above image on the right, where only the noses seem out of alignment. Although our faces are in different directions, our mouths and eyes line up almost perfectly in the left overlay.



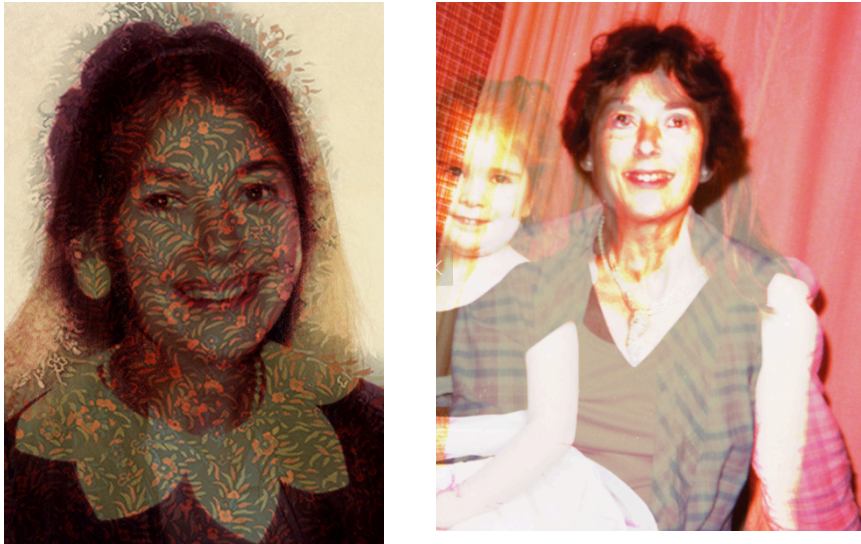
Employing the use of texture in digital overlays of mother's photos

I started adding other objects related to my mom with interesting textures to add a visual narrative, complicating the images. More specifically, in the above image on the left, I am using her painting to both obscure her face and emulate a nostalgic wallpaper-like quality. The added texture also creates a bit of an unsettling impact, resembling the look of a cancerous growth on the skin. However, in the image on the right, I am superimposing my mother's wedding photo with a photo I took of her about two years before she died. In both photos she is wearing lace and holding flowers, with a similar thoughtful gaze, which is what initially made me connect the two. Additionally, I am employing the added texture of a white lace dress (which resembles her wedding dress). Connections between objects in the collection became of great interest to me in creating these overlays.



Digital overlays of photos of grandmother and mother, implementing their accessories for additional texture and meaning

I began to experiment with creating more of a psychological impact from these images, altering them and creating more different visual effects. In the above left image, I added in a silhouette of her long, elegant black gloves, covering part of her face. I chose to add in the gloves here because on the bottom layer of this image, my grandmother's hair begins to look like a hat on my mother's face (in the top layer), which seems to pair well with the gloves. Here, I am addressing how my mother's objects, although at times comforting, can become haunting to me, as they seem to entrap or enchain her face, especially with the jewelry in the above right image.



Digital overlays of mother, grandmother, and me

In creating much of this work, as seen in both of the above images, I am interested in the intersection of textures, which can work to both highlight and obscure parts of the piece as well as create new patterns when overlaid. The overlay on the left is of my mother and grandmother, and the texture on top is from my mother's skirt, which mimics the scalloped shape seen on my grandmother's shirt. The image on the right is a combination of my mother, grandmother, and me as a child, involving patterns from my grandmother's shirt and the drapery in the back.

Though I had been originally been creating these overlays digitally since my mother's objects were too precious to work with, I found that the physicality of my mother's objects was still an important component to me. It seemed to me that in some way, the authenticity of her physical objects could replace/represent the loss of her own physicality. Perhaps, I could show some of this physicality through my use of both texture and material. For this reason, I began printing out some of these overlays and experimenting with material, first with transparency film. I wanted to work with transparent material to physically show the layers of the digital overlays. Also, working in this way allowed me to mix and match printouts, making a variety of potential combinations.



Process: printouts of separate layers from overlays on transparency film

Experimenting with projecting transparent prints

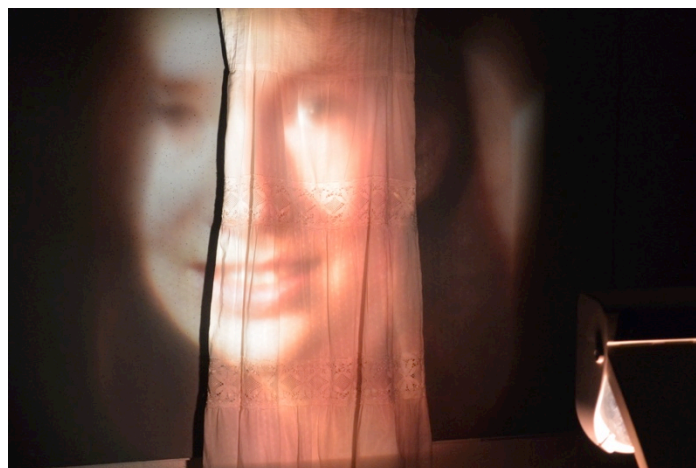
I began experimenting with projecting using an old overhead projector with these transparent overlays. I liked seeing the images at different scales, taking on a larger, more luminous presence. I also enjoyed the dramatic effect I could achieve in a dark room, where the edges of the projection appeared fuzzy and faded out into the darkness, resembling an apparition, which I thought was quite fitting. I wanted to emulate this atmosphere in my final exhibit.



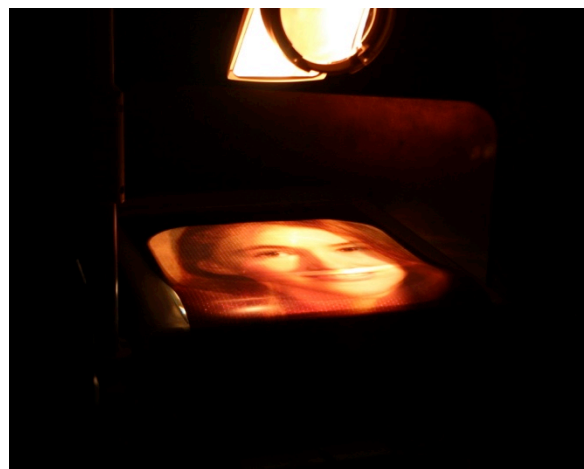
Process: projecting image of mother's painting onto an image of her face



Photos of my mother and me as children overlaid on projector



Experimenting with projecting directly onto my mother's clothing, rather than using scanned in textures on transparencies, allowing me to achieve a heightened sense of physicality



Above two images are of the projection at the final exhibit, where I overlaid an image of myself as a teenager with one of my mother, projected onto a single white lace dress of my mother's, symbolizing her presence, or lack thereof, since it hangs alone on the wall

Layering transparency film and vellum prints on light box

In addition to the transparency prints I made to test out projecting, I also made some prints on vellum, which were too opaque to be projected. For this reason, I began to layer these prints with the transparencies on a light box. To my excitement, I found that the vast array of the textures I achieved digitally was only amplified on the light box, and I found that I was achieving a sharper image than I was with the projection, and the separate layers were more easily discerned. Both methods of display seemed fitting.



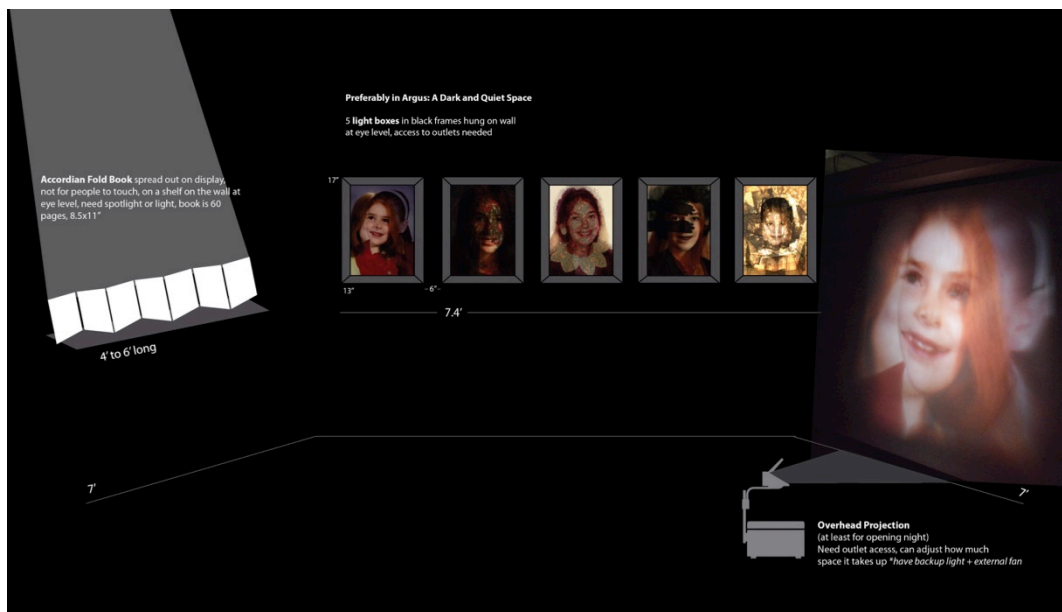
Vellum print of my mother's high school photo, with pattern sampled from her dress applied to her face and photographed on light box



Visual overlays on light box incorporating layers of mostly cancer cells and images of my mother at various ages



The above four images offer a close up look at the layers and textures evident in many of the overlays



Mockup of the how I envisioned the potential exhibit space



Images of the prints on transparency film inside of 13x17" LED light boxes (there were five in total) at the final exhibit

Creating a handmade book



The front and inside cover of my mother's book that she gave to my grandmother, which inspired visual components of the book I made



Photos of the 10x7.5," 66 page archival pigment print handmade concertina style book I created in the exhibit space, and a notebook for people to leave their thoughts/reactions

I also designed a book to accompany the prints and projection at the final exhibit. The aesthetics of this nostalgic book were an important consideration, as I carefully chose objects and photographs to commemorate and represent my mother. It operates as a record of a beautiful life well lived. However, it is not merely a record; it does not clearly state facts chronologically and matter-of-factly, instead intentionally leaving some details and questions about my mother's life unanswered and open for interpretation to the viewer.

The care with which I composed the narrative speaks to the admiration I have for my mother—the book functions as a keepsake piece that I designed primarily for my family and me (of course, I hope that it will also resonate with others, but that was not a

key concern for me in making it). Inspired by the relationship between aesthetics and ethics explored in *On Beauty and Being Just*,²⁸ I have carefully constructed a book in an attempt to intimately portray my mother's beauty in an aura of her beautiful things. A book my mother illustrated for my grandmother's 32nd wedding anniversary inspired some of the visual choices I made. On the cover of this book is a beautiful gold embossing, which is why I have chosen to emboss the cover of my book with a similar emblem. Additionally, my mother's book contained a floral patterned paper for the flyleaves, and so I chose to use a similar looking paper in the front and back of my book.

I have separated the book into the following five sections: one, mom's recipes; two, clothes and jewelry; three, childhood recollections; four, letters, notes and scraps; and five, a day with mom. I am intentional about sequencing within the sections, linking related objects and photographs together. For instance, in the clothes and jewelry section, I sequence photos of mother in a black lace dress followed by the dress itself and then subsequent photos of my mother as an older woman in it. In a posed photo I took of her near the end of her life (shortly before her cancer diagnosis) in this dress, her thoughtful gaze is directed outside the window, perhaps into the unknown. In hindsight, this seemingly foreboding image became eerily symbolic to me.

In the same section, a photo of her with a similarly thoughtful gaze in her wedding dress is juxtaposed with the texture from one of her dresses, which is also white lace. This photograph of her alone in her wedding dress is symbolic for her later divorce. It also perhaps more broadly speaks to the idea that even when upheld, the union of marriage cannot protect one from the harsh realities of life; despite the promise of "in sickness and in health," everyone leaves this world alone, and no one is immune from suffering. Further, although it is difficult to tell what she is thinking in her wedding photo since she is looking down and her eyes are not visible, she appears healthy, young, and beautiful. This characterization is somewhat in opposition with the images that follow of

²⁸ Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

her as an older woman suffering from the internal pain brought on by the diagnosis of depression followed by that of cancer.

VI. Conclusion

On the subject of detachment versus attachment, I have found a bit of a paradox; by making this work about my mother, though it brings me closer to her, at the same time, it helps me process my feelings and ultimately let go, to some extent (however, I do not think that I will ever be able to simply “move on”). Grieving for a lost loved one involves a healthy combination of both attachment and detachment; too much of either one is detrimental. At the onset of my project I was researching extensively, and felt a strong compulsion to find answers, both to larger questions about loss and about the details of my mother’s life. In every ounce of my free moments, if I was not pouring myself into this work, it was on my mind. Even though I was not sure what I was looking for, I was naively convinced that I would find answers, as though my mother had left clues that were waiting for me. Of course, this was not the case. There were no clear answers, and there still are none. However, once I moved beyond the research and began to work creatively, I felt that I was creating my own answers, which provided some solace.

Overall, my project has been very process-based, and my process is one of multiplicity; not only am I immersed in the creative process, I am also tackling the grieving process by attempting to make sense of the loss. In addition, another process in which I have been involved is that of memory recall, as I sort through my mother’s belongings. My final process entailed a careful curation of these objects, which was difficult, as I struggled to determine which parts of my mother’s life to exclude. In creating this work, at times I have felt an unshakeable sense of unease as I have unwittingly reduced my mother to an artistic subject of my own imagination. It seems that, using memories and objects of my mother, I have created new objects for

interpretation, in a somewhat futile attempt to ultimately replicate or replace my mother. Interpretation of the work, I have found, becomes a fragile act when one's grief-laden emotions play a heavy part. Because I am so close to the subject matter, it is sometimes difficult for me to objectively reflect upon my work, which often feels inadequate. How could I ever hope to make something worthy of honoring my mother? I feel the debilitating fear of, however impossible, disappointing her. Despite these difficult moments, making work about my mother is probably the most meaningful thing I have ever done. I will probably continue this work in some capacity—perhaps it will become somewhat of a lifelong, cathartic practice for me. I am interested in returning to the audio piece I started earlier on in the project but did not end up pursuing. Also, I would like to experiment with projecting onto some textured paintings I made in memoriam of my mother a few years ago. I made enough prints on transparency film and vellum to show different pieces, should I exhibit this work again. Eventually, I would like to compile all of the projection and light box photos I took throughout the process and at the final exhibition into a printed book, allowing me to utilize my graphic design skillset.

Bibliography

- Adams, Bobby Neel. 2016. *Memento Mori*. Photographic prints.
- Adams, Bobby Neel. 2007. *Family Tree*. Photographic prints.
- Britton, Val. 2014. *Voyage*. Laminated glass panels, ceramic glass melting colors, graphite and lacquer paint. San Francisco: San Francisco Airport.
- Boltanski, Christian. 2015. *La Traverse de la Vie*. Printed veils, light bulbs, and wire. Paris: Marian Goodman Gallery.
- Carson, Anne. *Nox*. New York City: New Directions Publishing, 2010.
- Didion, Joan. *Blue Nights*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011.
- Didion, Joan. *The Year of Magical Thinking*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005.
- Dion, Mark. 2015. *Memory Box*. Shed, shelf and boxes. New York: Bonakdar Gallery.
- Edelman, Hope. *Motherless Daughters*. Boston: Da Capo Press, 2006.
- Edelman, Hope. *Mother of my Mother*. North Carolina: Random House, 2009.
- Frank, Priscilla. "Here's how one photographer, and her nifty handmade machine, can photograph your aura." Huffington Post. <https://goo.gl/skGX4t> (accessed October 2016).
- Gill, Nikita. *Your Soul is a River*. New York: Thought Catalog Books, 2016.
- Hockney, David. "David Hockney: Works." David Hockney. <http://www.hockneypictures.com/> (accessed Feb 2017).
- Johnson, Sarah Anne. 2009. *House on Fire*. Mixed media. Ontario: Art Gallery of Ontario.
- Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed*. United Kingdom: Faber and Faber, 1961.
- Lewis, C.S. *The Problem of Pain*. United Kingdom: The Centenary Press, 1940.
- Loeber, Jennifer. 2014. *Left Behind*. Archival imagery. Online debut.
- "Memento Mori." Tate. <https://goo.gl/04hGkh> (accessed Jan 2017).
- Nabokov, Vladimir. *Speak, Memory*. New York: Vintage International, 1989.
- Nesse. *An Evolutionary Framework for Understanding Grief*.

“Palimpsest.” The Chicago School of Media Theory. <https://goo.gl/GTl7tK> (accessed February 2017).

Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Shapton, Leanne. *Important Artifacts*. Brooklyn: Sarah Crichton Books, 2009.

Timberlake, Howard. “The intriguing history of ghost photography.” BBC. <https://goo.gl/f3Hp82> (accessed November 2016).

Wisniewski, Matt. “Matt Wisniewski – art.” Matt Wisniewski. <http://mattw.us/images/> (accessed Feb 2017).