

In the Skin: Disease Mongering

AnMaree Williams

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AnMaree Williams- Rest

First Twitch: Entering the Skin

There are moments in any given day when I feel trapped within my own skin. I am a hostage caged in by billions of microscopic grooves that act as a barbed wire fence. My veins, organs and arteries are contained by these cellular chains, causing me to feel claustrophobic. Each breath becomes more difficult to inhale. My fingertips begin to twitch; thumps resonate beneath my chest; my toes are clammy; my tongue goes dry.

Inside the Skin: Disease Mongering is a video installation that creates a surreal experience of being inside the body. Using two dimensional animated drawings, surround sound, and dual projection, this piece becomes immersive. The animated drawings that make up the installation are black and white representations of the human anatomy, which transports the viewer into the human body in an unearthly way. When entering *In the Skin* the viewer is accessing a fantasy world that is both beautiful and frightening, much like the body itself.

I have asked myself from the beginning of this project how can I create the experience of being inside the body while invoking an uneasy emotional response through movement and drawing. Throughout my process, I realized that I needed to redefine my intention of invoking a specific emotional response into creating an environment in which the viewer is free to feel their own personal response. This revelation was important to my process in that I was then able to focus on the content that inhabits the environment, rather than focusing on how to force the audience to feel uneasy.

Following the Tic: Experience of Anxiety

I can't seem to catch my breath. Each inhalation becomes more painful to take in. A rush of warmth creeps up my toes to the tip of my forehead. A drop of liquid drips down the line of my jaw. I can feel my heart beat inside my throat. I take a seat before my legs become too weak to hold my

weight.

The creative work I value the most is the work that challenges me emotionally and is based on personal experience. I am especially interested in the experience of anxiety. During my Integrative Project my anxiety was the most difficult challenge to escape. I knew then that my anxiety must become part of this project and my process. I harnessed these feelings and used them to my advantage. I devoted this time to embrace my fears, try to understand them. By doing so I allowed my skills to naturally form based on intuition. My drawings not only became images, but each staggering line that builds up the form of the body tells a story. The lines within my work have become my voice. I placed the responsibility on the lines of my drawings, freeing my hand to scratch, scrape and score in any way it pleases. The process of drawing in this way became cathartic and eased my anxiety.

After being in art school for so long and producing art work for grades, I had forgotten that drawing was always a creative outlet for my anxiety growing up. I was reminded of this when I looked at the work of artists who inspire me. David Small's book, *Stitches*¹, has been a strong influence on my work in the way he uses art cathartically through drawing and narrative. This book is a collection of illustrations composed of black ink that tell the story of his childhood, his relationship with his mother, and his battle with cancer. The black and white ink drawings create a mysterious, dream-like atmosphere. The main character is a little boy who travels inside of his drawings in order to escape the tribulations of his life. The concept of travel Small uses in his book inspired me to do the same with my installation. The viewer is on a journey entering the skin from the neck. The image zooms into the neck, revealing the bold staggering lines that make up the form. The image becomes unrecognizable while the viewer becomes lost inside the body.

Within *Stitches*, David Small reveals his story in an ominous tone. The reader can feel a menacing tension within the narrative, and upon learning that Small's is diagnosed with cancer, a tingle runs down your spine. This nerve wrenching sensation is a feeling I am familiar with as I struggle with

debilitating moments of hypochondria. Anxiety, particularly related to the body, is what I have illustrated within my installation. I have achieved this by making the installation a multi-sensory experience by using the darkness of the space, the light from the projectors, the contrast of the black and white drawings, the movement of the drawings, and the echo of sounds surround the viewer. I have channeled my experience with my own body through this installation.



AnMaree Williams- *Mountains in a Mile*

Forced Convulsion: Disease Mongering

Why can't I seem to catch that breath? Why is my heart bounding uncontrollably? Am I about to die, or is this just another panic attack? Is there something wrong with me? Am I sick? Doctor please give me the answer.

Throughout my process my challenge was to understand my anxiety. I looked to social psychology to help explain how such feelings can come about in a person. In my research I came across the term “Disease Mongering”, which helped explain why I might experience symptoms of hypochondria. I decided to use this term to define my project as it clarified my intentions of creating an insidious and ominous atmosphere within the installation.

Disease Mongering² is a term that sociologists and psychologists use to describe the process of making healthy people believe they are sick and sick people believe they are very sick. Disease Mongering is a tactic that the pharmaceutical industry as well as their allies use to “sell sickness”.³

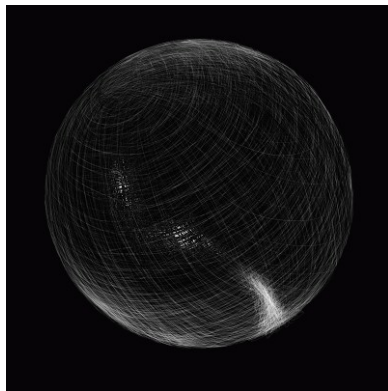
As a young child I was exposed to an excessive amount of television and I watched MTV regularly. During the 90's and early 2000's MTV campaigned the “Get Yourself Tested” movement, which brought awareness of HIV/AIDS to viewers.⁴ I was highly affected by this movement as I was too young to grasp the true concept of the campaign. I believed whole heartedly that there was a globe epidemic and that “anyone could be infected” at anytime. The words “get tested,” “infected,” and “stay safe” were ingrained in my head for years. As I grew into adulthood I realized that my anxiety then was fabricated by my own imagination. However, the fear of illness still affects me and I continuously feel myself getting anxious just from being anxious.

My experience is my driving force within my creative work, which gives me the power to create valuable meaning for myself and for the viewer. *In the Skin: Disease Mongering* is an inspection of my nervous thoughts. Creating the environment that reflects those unruly senses was the next step in making the installation a success.

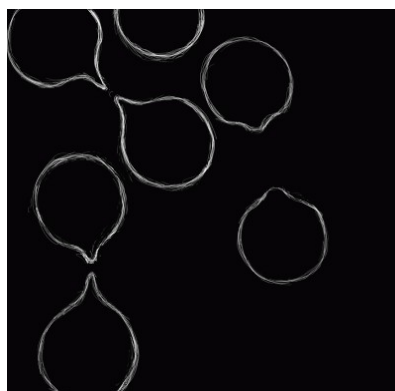
Quiver in a Digital Space: The Fabrication Process

I trail a white line that leads me into a dark room. A digital light forces my steps closer as I peek into a curtained space. I move slowly, feeling disoriented and unsure of where my hands should go. The light illuminates the space, revealing its depth. I continue to make my way around the open area, surrounded by a white cloth resembling a cellular membrane. A gurgling echo bounces off that membrane.

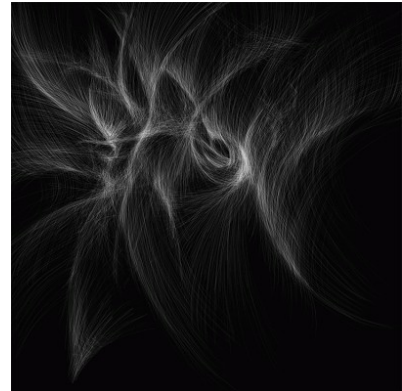
Letting go of fear is a challenge in itself, yet this project challenged me technically as well. I had never worked with animation and movement before, and I spent most of my time on drawing experiments. By using my intuition to achieve certain effects, I made up my own technical process in order to create my vision for each sequence. Although, the materials and methodologies I applied were simple. I used a Wacom tablet and Adobe Photoshop as my drawing tools. I developed each drawing frame by frame, similar to a stop-motion animation.



Experiment #1



Experiment #2



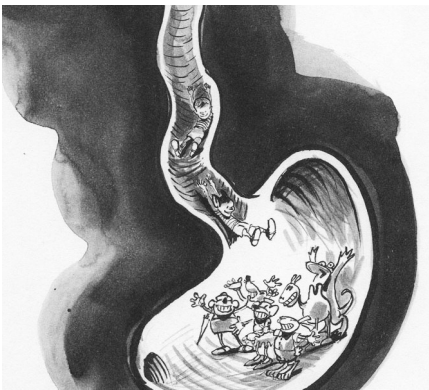
Experiment #3

During my experiments I paid close attention to the movements of the drawings and to their transitions. I researched film transitions and effects such as zoom shots, cut frames, panning, tracking, pedestal shots, and practiced making less obvious loops. The entire animation is one single frame by frame drawing file, which allowed me to export the frame-by-frame drawings into a single movie file in

Adobe Photoshop using the animation tool. I then burned the movie onto a DVD to be projected onto the screens.

This project it is about the experience of being “in the skin.” To fully embody this experience, I decided to project two drawing sequences on two screens that are parallel. The screen in this particular site is a curtained fabric that surrounds the entire room. However, the projections are only emitted on the two opposing sides. The drawings on each screen communicate with each other, utilizing the empty space between them as an extended dialogue. A cellular entity flies away from one screen, passing through the empty space, and onto the opposite screen. The audience enters the curtained membrane and stands in between the parallel projections as if they were inside the body.

The choice to make this piece a video instillation made light, space, moment and sequence important. I looked to the work of Norman McLaren's optical printer animation, *Pas de Deux*⁵, to observe the ways in which light can be used to create form. His animation shows dancing figures that are made visible only by the highlights reflected on their skin. The highlights are what make up the body forms and their movements become enchanting as they create trails of light. The viewer is left having to construct the rest of the image. McLaren's piece taught me the importance of ambiguity. By not showing all the visual information, I leave room for the viewer's imagination to complete the visual and the concept of the piece. The glowing figures are majestic, like that of an X-ray, revealing what the human eye cannot see.



David Small- *Stitches*⁶



Norman McLaren- *Pas de Deux*⁷

Revealing the Unnoticed: The Radiograph

The visual quality of X-rays has become a central reference in my work. The black and white images create a glowing effect that is attractive to me, appearing mysterious and almost magical. I draw with white on black because the contrast draws attention to the specific relationship of the values, enriching the balance between background and foreground. This helps to create a strong sense of depth and dimensionality within the drawings.

An X-ray is documentation of ourselves that is hidden from the outside world. It shows us the inside of the body, something that we can really only imagine. The X-ray aesthetic has become a platform for me as its visual aesthetic resonates with my work. My conceptual understanding of the X-ray also has become the conceptual premise for this project. The installation dives deep inside the body, revealing details and environments we are not used to experiencing. The installation elicits an emotional experience and at the same time reveals a physical environment of being inside the body.

Medical illustration, microscopic videos of blood cells and bacteria, and three-dimensional medical animations were all important resources I observed in the making of *In the Skin*. Studying the movements of microscopic organisms has been crucial to my process. These organisms have a subtle, organic movement that is only recognized by its kind. The real life microscopic videos have a slippery, slithering motion to the organism, where the more fabricated three-dimensional medical animations have motions of epic proportions. Becoming familiar with both of these ways of representing the body has added a level of knowledge that has influenced the approach to my animations.

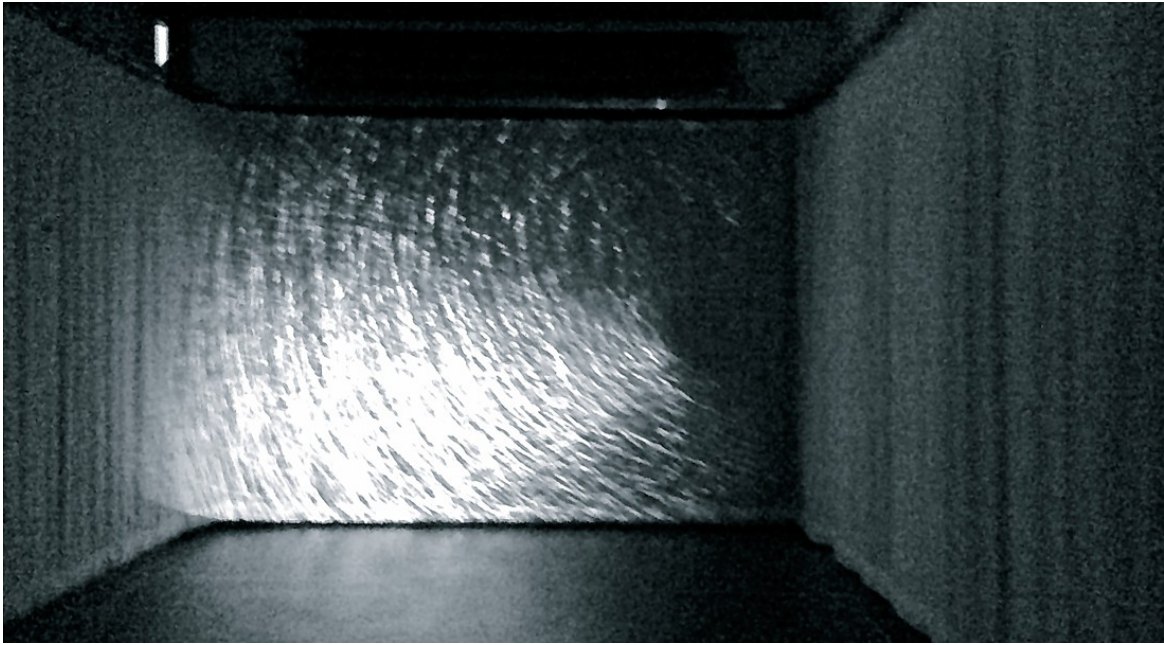
On an illustrative perspective, my drawings contradict themselves in that they are detailed yet gestural, realistic yet imaginative. The detailed, realistic properties in my work are strongly influenced by early Renaissance polymath artists such as Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo. Their sketches and anatomical studies fascinate me the most. They are comprehensive, layered, and annotative. I look up to their processes as well, reminding myself that art is about curiosity and discovery. On the other

hand, the fluidity and imaginative properties in my work are strongly influenced by the painter Frida Kahlo. Kahlo's paintings are representational and surreal. Many of her paintings reference the human body and its anatomy, yet are based on her imagination and her knowledge comes from her pain. The artistic expression and symbolism of pain, and the reality of anxiety is translated through my work as well.

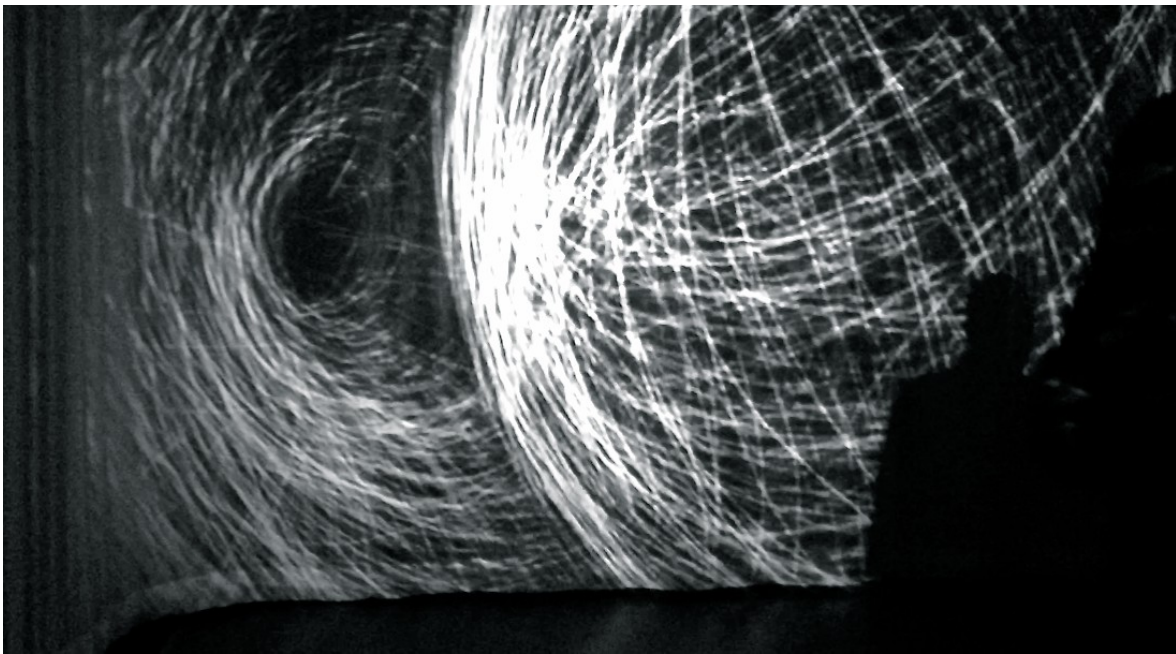
Itching that Twitch: Reflecting Upon the Journey

I slowly push my palms down lifting myself up from my seat. I can feel the soles of my feet planted on the cement floor, cooling them back to body temperature. The feeling of ants running up my legs lets me know I am regaining my strength. Knowing this eases my heart to a soft patter and the twitch from my fingertips is finally itched.

In the Skin: Disease Mongering is not just a video installation, it is a sensation, an occurrence, a habitat where imagination and reality meet to conjure truth and perspective. The illuminating light of the projectors reveal the depth we have as humans to create our own realities. *In the Skin* has reminded me that I have a unique skill of creating powerful art work that people can relate too. The process of making this installation has reminded me that I have a valuable voice that should be shared and to not be afraid of my sensibilities, but to use them as a strength. In the future I plan to use the strength I found during this Integrative Project to make art work that challenges my curiosity and sensibility. I plan to share this kind of work with others to expand points of view and support others in finding their own strength.



Aggro Crag Senior Art Exhibit Screen 1



Aggro Crag Senior Art Exhibit Screen 2

ANMAREE+GRAPHIC ARTS

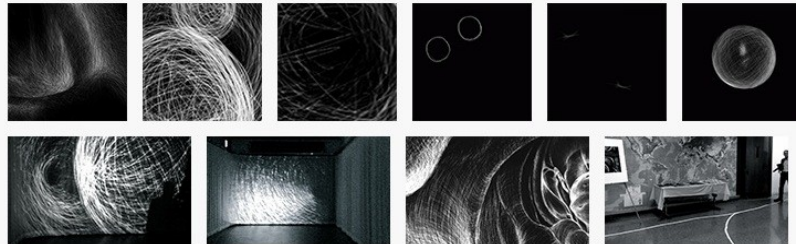
About

Integrative Project



There are moments in any given day when I feel trapped within my own skin. I am a hostage caged in by billions of microscopic grooves that act as a barbed wire fence. Each breath becomes more difficult to inhale. My fingertips begin to twitch; thumbs resonate beneath my chest; my toes are clammy; my tongue goes dry.

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Posters

Logos

Marketing

Web

Animations

Illustrations

Notes:

- 1 Small, David. "Stitches by David Small." *Stitches by David Small*. N.p., 2009. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.
- 2 Moynihan, Ray, and David Henry. "The Fight against Disease Mongering: Generating Knowledge for Action." *PLoS Medicine* E191 3.4 (2006): 0001. Web.
- 3 Moynihan, Ray, and David Henry. "The Fight against Disease Mongering: Generating Knowledge for Action." *PLoS Medicine* E191 3.4 (2006): 0002. Web.
- 4 "GYT Campaign - STD Awareness Microsite." *GYT Campaign - STD Awareness Microsite*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.cdcpin.org/stdawareness/GYT.aspx>>.
- 5 "Pas De Deux (film)." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 22 Apr. 2013. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.
- 6 Eyre, Jane. "Stitches: A Memoir." *Illustrationfixation*. Wordpress, 30 Apr. 2011. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.
- 7 "Norman McLaren Pas De Deux." *YouTube*. YouTube, 04 Dec. 2012. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.