

Skin/Bone/Viscera

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The goal of my thesis project is to provide an environment in which to explore my relationship with my body and my emotions relating to my body. I also want to allow myself to share these intimate thoughts with other people, perhaps inspiring them to do the same.

One issue with my project is that my depression and sleep problems affect how much work I can get done within the timeframe of the Integrative Project. Additionally, because being introspective in this way is emotionally exhausting, it makes it even harder than normal to stay positive and awake when I am working on my project. I also have difficulty reconciling my process of not analyzing or judging my work until I feel it is complete with the structure of IP and being required to present and write about work I am still creating. I am attempting to incorporate these difficulties into my work, particularly the way sleeping too much affects my output.

All three of the books share a few characteristics— they all have pages of thin, translucent paper, which I chose to represent single cell thick sheets of tissue. All three books incorporate short pieces of text, from single words to several sentences relevant to the theme of the book and of the series as a whole. All three books also share a hanging structure with long, thin pages. This allows the books to have movement, and for the transparent nature of the pages to catch light.

My way of dealing with my sleep and mood problems and how they affect my work is to allow the way I make things to show through. I'm making an effort to not try to make everything perfectly finished and polished. This allows me to be less stressed out and more able to work, and also creates a product more evocative of my emotional state. While I need the work to be finished enough to be understandable, I am slowly

becoming more at ease with the thought that it might be a cascading fall of pages rather than a perfectly bound book, and that may actually be a better product.

With the skin book I am exploring my relationship with my skin as a protective device and a canvas on which my emotions are prominently portrayed. I feel like my skin is a barrier protecting my insides, both literally and metaphorically. While my skin keeps me from getting infections and damage, in my image of myself, my skin also keeps me from feeling as much emotional pain from the outside as I would otherwise. I imagine it dampens the blow of things that upset me and cause me stress, and in turn it shows the marks of that.

Recently I had an allergic reaction caused by stress about school. Breaking out in hives across all my skin was a visible, physical expression of how unhappy I was, and it inspired a lot of the way the skin book is manifesting. I am using a thin tracing paper for pages, to represent the fragility I feel my skin has, and how easily I am torn and emotionally hurt. The way hives made my skin pucker up inspired me to experiment with various ways to make the paper wrinkle and show stress lines. In the end I created a raised hivelike effect by using strips of thicker, curled paper to add texture to the page. This text is single lines of self-destructive thoughts I have had. I used white nontoxic ink to add to the paper white prints of my actual skin. Using the water-soluble ink, I am able to press paper directly to my skin, creating a more textured print than a more traditional method of printing. The pages are noticeably thicker where the ink is, which I find to be evocative of both the calluses that skin creates as a part of protecting us and of the raised nature of many skin irritations.

For the bone book, I chose a stronger, more opaque paper than in the other books. Thai unryu paper has long, curled fiber inclusions that mimic the open pocketed texture of bones. I used red thread handsewn in a running stitch to create text. The text, words that relate to my impressions of my bones, is a part of the image created by the sewing. To evoke a feeling of the blood that is created in bones and the marrow that produces it, I used a trailing line of red sewing moving through thick paper cutouts reminiscent of cross sections of bone. The thick paper contrasts with the thinness of the pages, and creates a visually interesting landscape.

Of the three types of tissue I base my books on, bone is the one which I trust the most. I have had problems with most of my organ systems at one time or another, but my bones have yet to show any signs of weakness. I've never broken a bone, and despite my long-term use of birth control and soda drinking, my bone density has been measured as normal for someone my age. Because my bones are some of the only parts of my body that I don't feel betrayed by, the words I use in the bone book are noticeably more positive than those in the skin and viscera books.

The viscera book is visually different from the skin and bone books— the pages are long, thin, red tissue paper strips less than one fourth the width of the pages in the other books. The pages are loops and loops of thin, red paper to bring to mind intestine or artery. The tags attached to the pages carry both image and text. The images are of anatomical charts, a method for seeing inside the body. The text catalogues the different issues I've had with my body, from chronic dehydration to major depressive disorder. The form of tag references morgue tags, and the method of attachment creases and marks the pages, as diseases and disorders damage my body.

Kiki Smith's work is something that has affected a lot of my work up to this point, and it continues to be a source for my IP. Her works are extremely interesting to me in the way they expose the insides of the body to the outside world. Smith's works feel like an intimate look into the body, and that instant relationship between work and viewer is something I aspired to incorporate into my thesis project. Part of the way I hope to achieve this is by sharing my secret thoughts about myself— laying a vulnerable part of myself out to create a connection without boundaries.

My most influential teacher in the field of book arts is Margaret Couch Cogswell, who taught a two week class at Penland which I attended. Like the work of Kiki Smith, she inspires me to be more fluid with my work and to allow the evidence of making to be visible. With my bookmaking, this means not using the normal precautions I would to keep pages pristine and bindings intact, but to allow the materials to behave as they will, and to try non-traditional bindings and methods of mark-making.

Sonja Baumel's work is very influential in my Skin Book. In *(in)visible membrane* she seeks to map the skin via the bacteria that live on it. To accomplish this, Baumel presses her body against a human sized petri dish to create a print in bacteria of herself. I find that this is more the feeling I hope to evoke than the other ink or paint prints I have encountered— many of the better known body prints are too straightforward for what I hope to evoke. I hope that my prints will be abstract enough to invite the viewer to look more closely. The ink I used holds my skin texture well enough to make my prints reference me individually, as in Baumel's work.

Cristin Richard's pork casing garments were inspirational in my paper choices. *Vixen* and *Trophy* are two pieces that showcase the transparency of the membrane as

material. The idea of inside on the outside is also integral in both Richard's pieces and mine. The intestinal casings as a garment expose the inner workings of the body to outer damage, and I tried to create the same feeling of exposure in my pieces.

The work I created for Skin/Bone/Viscera was a method of exploring my body and my feelings of betrayal and distaste for the parts of my body that fail to function as expected. In making these books, I found a number of new avenues of exploration— I was very interested in the materials I used, specifically the transparency and the idea of crumpling or crinkling. I also want to go farther into some of the individual problems I have with my body, such as depression or my sleep disorder. I am also very interested in hearing other people's stories about their relationship with their bodies, and creating an interactive piece with features of my integrative project.

Bibliography

Sonja Baumel - <http://www.sonjabaeumel.at/index.php?content=im>

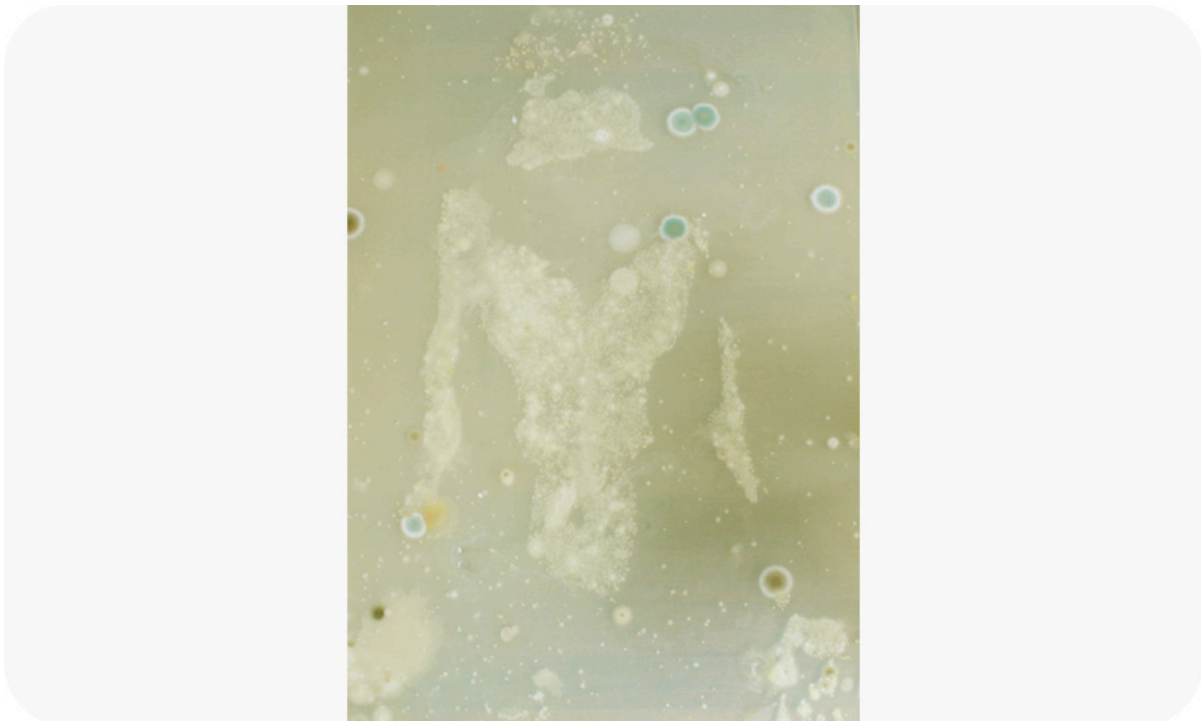
Margaret Couch Cogswell - <http://margaretcouchcogswell.blogspot.com/>

Kiki Smith- <http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2003/kikismith/>

Cristin Richard- <http://cristinrichard.com/?p=112> *Vixen, Trophy*

Inspiration Images

Sonja Baumel



Margaret Couch Cogswell



Kiki Smith



Cristin Richard

