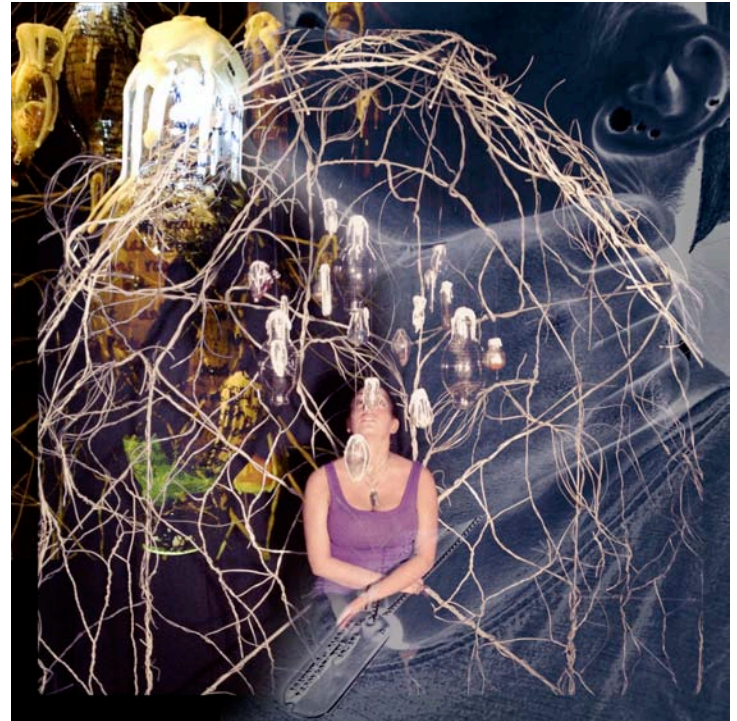


Maria Arambula
IP-Porter/Chung
April 16, 2012
Thesis

“Nothing There”

There is nothing pleasant or happy about this. It is something I never wished would have happened. To be invaded in such a way, to have your memories and things dearest to you simply tormented, and be manipulated to a point that you may never trust anyone again. To have something break you so you do not even realize anything and when you finally do you think, “this is what did it, he is the one that did this.” To question if you will ever be able to come back from it or feel the same, to feel as if you are so far gone and detached from anything and everything you once knew.



My project focuses on the simulation of Post Traumatic Stress

Disorder (PTSD) of a rape victim to the average person without PTSD. I want to trigger sensations of claustrophobia, irritation to vision, feelings of confusion, and emulate the daily life of someone who has been raped, living with PTSD.

To understand why I choose this project it would help one to get a better understanding of who I am. I was born and raised in Westside Detroit in a lower income family. My mother was not around because she was always doing mission work, and my father was constantly away at work. He was a Detroit Police Officer for 36 years. This forced me into the role of caretaker for my older sister who is highly intelligent but lacks common sense. That being said, my sister stood the risk of significantly being taken advantage of. Living on a block where there was a neighboring crack house, “playing with

chalk,” meant using cocaine, and the ice-cream truck was not in the business of selling popsicles, but rather taking, children. A block where most of my friends were either in jail, doing illegal activities, or dead by the age of thirteen. I grew up in a place where statistically the rate of incarceration was higher than graduation. I am a rare exception. I have been privileged to be in one of the best Universities in the country, because of this, I am able to bring to light an issue that is taboo: rape. In the world of modern civilization where sex is so prominently advertised and sold, rape is rarely brought up or mentioned. I have PTSD, which is why I want to publicly address this issue of the PTSD of a rape victim to the public eye.

When one lives with PTSD their life is completely changed. There are three main categories of PTSD; reliving the experience, avoidance, and arousal. Re-living the event is something that disturbs day-to-day activity. First are flashbacks of the episode happen constantly, depending on how recent the event has occurred to date. The most minuscule of things can throw one into a flashback. For example when the event was actually taking place there was a doorknob. The doorknob may be a tiny detail, but after the event if a similar doorknob is encountered one may have a flashback to the event. Memories are repressed because of the immense emotional connection to the event. Flashbacks can take on the form of pictures, sounds, smells, body sensations, and feelings or the lack of them. Someone having a flashback may have the sense of panic, being trapped, or feeling powerless (95 Plackett).

Night terrors are another part of re-living the event. They are terrible dreams that are typically diagnosed by those in the household not the actual person themselves. When one is having a night terror they will be screaming or moving in their sleep and are not able

to be woken out of the sleep. The dreams can last various amounts of time but they are horrible to experience and take both a mental and physical toll. The one experiencing night terrors often is afraid to go asleep and will not sleep out of fear of reliving the event over and over. Dreams are thought of as being a series of events; each one contributes something to the total picture of the person. Often connecting multiple dreams together, or “dream series” (2 Hall). The night terrors reappear more frequently around the time of the incident.

Second is avoidance. The victim will avoid any place, people, phrases, that would remind oneself of the event. Along avoidance comes the emotional “numbing,” the feeling of nothing effecting oneself or caring about anything the way they one once did. It is the feeling of detachment from everyday activities and people is often viewed by others as a general lack of interest in things. When it comes to showing emotion one be completely emotionless, there is very little, if any, reactions to things whether happy, sad, horrifying, or any other emotions. The ability to show emotion as a whole appears to be gone.

Third is the arousal. This means that the reflex time in ones body becomes heightened. There is a paranoid sense about everyday life. One is constantly hyper-vigilant or aware of ones surroundings, constantly checking around, and being easily startled if not aware. One has difficulty concentrating on simple activities because the sensory input into the brain is always hyperactive. Random outbreaks of anger or irritability towards miniscule things are typical in ones life. Along with all this is constant headaches from stress or and a rapid heart beat. The feeling of guilt weighs heavily on the mind. The feeling of guilt hangs over the head of victims and is very difficult to overcome and hard to rid the mind of.

My piece is a walk-through exhibit. The way I imagine it is that my installation will capture the place in the mind where one's repressed memories exist as scenes. Each memory will be captured in one moment but strung together intermittently as if an ever-weaving dome of neurons. Expressing the sorrows, pains, and torment, immeasurable in oneself by pain or mourning. Observers will be able to walk through and under hanging bulbs. The bulbs will be hung with fishing wire to appear as floating in the neuron dome. Inside each light bulb contains different fluid. The bulbs will be different sizes and shapes representing more medical like forms. The anguish that a victim endures and encounters during and after the experience ever haunts the space.

Each material in the project has a specific emotional significance in my life. Many of the materials that I work with in creation of this project are dangerous and hazardous, and all were chosen to be so for a reason. The reason is, that no matter how much hurt, cuts, pain, and danger each material places me in it will never come close to the pain that I have already endured. There have been cuts, burns, and stitches needed but nothing will ever be as painful. In a weird sense it momentarily takes away the pain almost as a cleansing process.

The metal used for the dome is supposed to be representative of the synapses to the brain. Metal is a conductor of impulses to the brain and often used to run medical tests. The metal is a material that is harsh to work with and often dangerous in cutting. The twisting of the metal also is tedious work that takes strength to manipulate to the form desired. The metal is manipulated and changed, like the victims of rape and how their lives change forever.



Yet, the wire stands tall and strong despite being frayed at the ends. Much like the person after the rape the structure remains and is welding pieces of their life back together

Each light bulb is a representation of the rape scene. The objects inside the bulbs are from something that occurred during the rape. The objects that can flash a person back into the event. The wax is used to cap each light bulb. The light bulbs are broken in order to contain objects and fluid. This allowed breaking of glass was dangerous especially when working with three bulbs containing mercury. The breaking of glass is representative of the shattering of the life one used to have, capped by the skin [wax] that was beaten and cut from the actual event. There are 3 larger bulbs with descriptive text covering the surface. Hanging around the 3 larger bulbs are 16 medical looking light bulbs, illuminating them with an eerie feeling.



objects that have festered over months to become disgusting. The objects include: semen, blood, painted houses, candles, chains, fingernails, bruised arms and more grotesque things. I picked light bulbs that were odd shapes and look as if they could be medical because after the event, things within the person medically change. Initially there is the physical, mental, and emotional damage. Later, the mental and emotional continue to fester with-in the person much like the objects. They are to be hung at different lengths both low and

high, to make people aware of the surroundings.

Arambula



Lastly are the projected images of the rape scene. They are photographs taken with models of two people. Faces are not shown specifically to not

identify or stereotype the event. However, I am the woman in the photos: I relived my event. This was one of the hardest parts of the project because I actually re-enacted some of the event. The photos are changed into negatives because when flashbacks occur this is the most realistic form. The skin tones of the people were made to look the same so no racial stereotypes can be inferred. The photos are in video loop, projected onto the ground. They are done in rapid succession and video editing to flash with pauses in between to represent how the flashbacks happen.



From afar, the installation is to look fantastical but the closer one gets to the inside, something disturbing and disgusting is apparent. The idea is to have the object appear intriguing from a distance, but when approached by the viewer it becomes uncomfortable. I



want to publicly address the issue of rape in a way that is not stereotypical, racial, or gender-specific. I fear that often, the wrong misconceptions are drawn from other works before mine that have tried to create a work of art about art. I want my piece to simply be. I am aware people may not even walk inside the dome but much like the subject I realize it is uncomfortable and confusing, so my installation will be doing what it is supposed to. If people do walk in then they will

become exposed to the grotesque images and overwhelmed by the images and alas it will be serving its purpose.

There is no proper way to explain or even be able to describe what it is like to be raped or how ones life changes after it happens. I know I will never be able to convey that trauma to an ordinary person, nor claim all rapes have the same outcomes or stresses. I simply know what I have researched and experienced myself. What I do is convey the feeling of putting someone without PTSD (of rape) into having an overwhelming sense of confusion, hyper-vigilance, and disgust about them; even if they may not realize the subject matter. I can only convey those feelings because in having PTSD this overwhelmed, hyper-vigilant, disgust is what I feel and go through.

Bibliography

Butcher, J. Mineka, S. Hooley, J. Abnormal Psychology (fourteenth edition). Pearson Education. Boston. Copyright 2010.

Finke, R. A. and S. Pinker (1983). Directional scanning of remembering visual patterns. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*.

Hall, Calvin. The Meaning of Dreams. New York, Toronto, London, Sydney, McGraw. Hill Book Company. 1996.

Loftus. Ganaway. Reality of Repressed Memories. Seattle, Washington. American Psychological Association. 1993.

Marieb, Elaine. Anatomy and Physiology (second edition). Pearson Education. California. Copyright 2005.

Plackett. Principles of Regression Analysis. Oxford, London. Clarendon Press. 1960.

Sacks, Oliver. The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat. Summit Books. New York. Copyright 1970.