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IP Section 004

My drawn self impatiently paces the collaged landscape of rocky terrain surrounded by mountains. An unusually large landline phone and TV antenna rest on the top of the mountains as if the mountain is a power source waiting to signal a call. Frustrated by the silence and isolation, I begin to scream out and jump, causing an electrical storm that shakes the entire composition. My real self is not actually in a rocky terrain, but instead pushing my negative emotions into my subconscious as a way to avoid the feelings of frustration and sadness they bring. This denial, or repression of emotions, causes a lot of internal stress that disrupts my instinctual response to everyday situations.

Through surreal collage animations, I examine my internal emotional drive that is created through my repression of traumatic experiences. By investigating these subconscious emotions, I am attempting to come to terms with what I had previously avoided, in order to come to terms with my actions. My instillation will project surreal collage animations that incorporate found imagery and my photography on to 3D objects. Each animation is driven by my subconscious and aims to capture the essence of my repressed emotions.

Freud & The Uncanny

Through my process of creating unfamiliar scenes with familiar imagery, I have found that I am exploring a feeling called the uncanny. The uncanny is a term developed by Sigmund Freud and used to describe a psychological experience of something familiar, but also unfamiliar in the sense that its shocking and cannot be readily identified. I am exploring my own feelings of

uncanniness by investigating previous experiences, emotions I have repressed, and how I can evoke this uncanny feeling through collaged imagery. As Freud describes, the uncanny traces back to a time when our ego (our pre-conscious mind) was not "differentiated from the external world and from other persons."¹ Our unconscious mind (the id) is our instinct and what influences our ego. When our ego cannot cope with unwanted feelings of anxiety or distress, our unconscious kicks in and illustrates an instinctual response, often being a defense mechanism like repression. In order to visualize my repressed emotions, I create dreamlike collages using my own photographs to illustrate times where I have used repression as a defense mechanism. Using collage to narrate personal experiences gives me the ability to channel my unpleasant emotions through fiction. Relating to Freud's claim that fictional experiences can, "awaken an uncanny feeling, which recalls that sense of helplessness sometimes experienced in dreams."

¹ My hopes are to accomplish this 'sense of helplessness' that Freud describes and use my fictional collages to evoke an uncanny feeling by illustrating instances where I have felt isolated or frustrated.

Freud's Influence on Dali

The Dadaist and Surrealist movements revolve a lot around Freud's theories about the subconscious mind and dreams. Stimulated by World War I & II, many artists such as Salvador Dali used their work to communicate their explorations of their subconscious. His work encouraged new ideas of communication and aimed to strengthen societal relationships with reality. There were many criticisms on the new art forms that Dada artists such as Dali created,

¹ Freud, Sigmund. (1919). The 'Uncanny'. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, 217-256

because of their dreamlike and sexual natures that explored new ideas of human life. Dali for example, would paint surreal scenes that were taken from his dreams and subconscious thoughts, similarly to what I am exploring in my collages. His paintings included distorted figures, floating objects, rotting animals, etc. Many galleries hesitated to display his work, mostly in fear because they had never encountered such extravagant ideas about human nature. Dali claimed that his viewers were attracted to his work because of its ability to reach their subconscious. One example of Dali's exploration of his subconscious is his painting *The First Day of Spring* (1929)². The composition is quite empty, and most of the imagery is rested below the horizon line. This use of empty space draws viewers to look directly at the painted symbols. Dali incorporates symbolism in his work as a way to explore Freud's theory of the unconscious mind. In fact, he even painted a figure in *The First Day of Spring* that strongly resembles Freud. This painting specifically focuses on Dali's childhood, as he includes photos of himself as a young boy and suggested representations of his father. He also touches on certain childhood fears such as bugs and distorted animals, which he painted at an unrealistically large scale. By adding Freud and symbolic imagery, he creates dreamlike compositions that reflect his subconscious thinking. These symbolic elements or objects have a personal connection to Dali, yet he doesn't explicitly describe the meaning to his viewers. I believe Dali's lack of description makes his work more powerful because the viewers are led to create their own interpretations. It is this feeling of the unknown or the uncanny that grabs the attention of the audience, which is why I also chose to leave my personal connections to my collaged photographs undescribed.

² Dali, Salvador. *The First Day of Spring*, oil and collage on wood panel. 1929. The Dali Museum, 2017.

Dali & The Transpersonal

Dali's choice of objects and symbols were not randomly chosen, but deliberately incorporated into his paintings because of his relationship to those objects. According to Michael Daniels, transpersonal psychologist, certain objects hold auras or energy that can evoke knowledge based on the history of the object and its relationship to the individual.³ This phenomenon is called psychometry, which is also known as token-object reading. The psychological experience one may feel from an object can also be referred to as a transpersonal experience. Transpersonal psychology studies how one can reach areas of unconsciousness to achieve a greater sense of reality. Daniels defines transpersonal as "experiences, processes, and events in which the usual self-conscious awareness is transcended and in which there is a sense of connection to, or participation with, a larger, more meaningful reality."³ The way I interpret this is that certain experiences that influence the way our self-conscious awareness responds and connects with reality. The transpersonal can, essentially, create a feeling of alternate reality or a reality dominated by the feelings caused by one's experiences with an object. In Dali's work, he is creating his own alternate reality that Daniels speaks of by collaging with objects that speak to him on a transpersonal level.

Methodology

I have always been aware of my transpersonal relationships to certain objects and imagery. Over the years I have become a huge collector of old photographs, letters, and keepsakes from my childhood. As I got older, I began to wonder why I choose to keep these mementos. I wanted to investigate my relationship to my past through objects and through this

³ Friedman, Harris L., and Hartelius, Glenn, eds. 2013. *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated. Accessed April 19, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central

investigation, I was able to identify specific emotional ties to traumatic moments in my past. I have gone through a lot of hardships within the past year, specifically with my father being incarcerated with 10 more years to serve. This tragedy has caused a lot of emotional build up and through my process of searching through old childhood photographs, I have discovered feelings such as sadness and anger. These emotions and feelings are constantly determining my instinctual response to everyday situations. I focused on identifying these emotions such as frustration, isolation, and fear as a way to guide my visual narrative.

My process for creating my collaged scenes consists of many steps; searching for images, collaging the images, animating, and adding myself as the protagonist in my narrative. Since I was creating work based on my actions and emotions, I felt it was necessary to include myself in my work. I chose to do this through a rotoscoping process that I recently familiarized myself with. I start this process by filming myself acting out the movements that my figure will have within the animations, rather than hand drawing each frame of movement from memory. I then import this video into Photoshop, and outline each frame of my body through line drawings. I sequence these drawings in After Effects to create an animated version of myself that will move through the collage animations. This process has been a learning experience for me, as I have never used After Effects until this project. A lot of my time is spent teaching myself the technical skills to create my animations, as well as intersecting my animated figure within these animations. The way my figure interacts with the collaged objects reflects how I respond to traumatic situations and describe my relationship to the objects. Using body language is how I narrate my emotional experiences. Whether my figure is jumping with fear or kicking with frustration, each movement is stimulated by the collaged scene around me.

During my attempts to make animations specific to one emotion, I felt very constrained and disconnected to my work. I ended up with multiple collaged scenes, floating across my compositions as clouds, with no relationship to one another (*Image 1*). These scenes felt very separate from each other, which was not my intention. My goal was to narrate my emotional past that has been repressed into my subconscious mind. These emotions, although identifiably separate, build off of one another and influence the appearance of future emotions.



Image 1. *Obscure Reactions, Digital Composition Draft, 2018*

After making multiple animations that consciously focused on one emotion, I realized that I need to be using my subconscious to make them, and not my conscious, in order for the emotions to be a genuine representation of my subconscious. When I stopped focusing on a

Creative Work

The manifestation of events that my drawn figure cycles through is dependent on my emotional response to the animated collage elements I interact with. Each scene appears as my figure enters the space, as if I am activating the space with my presence. The story begins with one scene, and the composition gradually grows as I am carried through each setting. My figure is taken from one scene to another by different modes of transportation such as a hot air balloon, birds, balloons, etc. The obstacles I endure in each scene trigger a response, and force me to find a way out of the traumatic emotions they cause through transporting to the next scene. The entire animation is on a loop, as if it is a never-ending cycle of emotional events. Each emotion feeds upon each other, causing my emotional responses to escalate as the narrative progresses. As I previously mentioned, each repressed emotion is not a singular feeling, but combined with other emotions that build off of one another. I chose to loop the cycle of my animation to dramatize the persistent development of repressed emotions in my subconscious.

My work visualizes my subconscious in a new, augmented context, similarly to how Dali paints his subconscious. The way Dali incorporated symbols and objects into his work was very purposeful and direct. Each element derived from some aspect of his thoughts whether it was from present day or subconscious remembrance of his childhood. In my collages, I am also incorporating imagery from my childhood and subconscious feelings. For example, in my third scene I comment on the frustration I feel while talking to my incarcerated father on the phone (*Image 3*). The imagery I use includes a photo of my mother that my father took when they first met, and a photo of my father that my mother took on a trip they went on while they were young/still together. I also include a balloon taken from the children's book *Goodnight Moon*,

which was my favorite as a child. I move through the scene pacing between my mother and father, both of which are being shown at a time of innocence and bliss. I start the scene sitting cross-legged, with my legs folded outwards instead of inward like a pretzel, which is how I used to sit as a child. I am listening to my father on the phone and get overcome with frustration and kick the phone, causing a balloon to exit from the phone. The balloon symbolizes the blissful innocence of my childhood with him and how I am still reminded of a time where I idolized him as a father figure. My process of adding imagery is the way I incorporate my identity within my collaged scenes. Since I use both found imagery and my own photographs, I am placing myself within a new context of my reality by transforming the realness of photographs to evoke my emotions.



Image 3. *Obscure Reactions Scene 3, Animation Still, 2018*

In the next scene, I am carried by the balloon to a new collage that reflects my shifting opinions of my father and the financial struggles I have faced due to his incarceration. I land standing next to a tin can with a jail cell above me, encasing an article of my father that was written about his success for improving odds for a Hispanic workforce. Next to him is a statue of a woman with her head in her hands as if she is disappointed or sad. Statues typically represent something of importance or commemoration, yet she is in a place of sadness and sorrow. A faucet is mounted to the statue, sending a sea of coins down for me to frantically collect with the can. This juxtaposition between the previous success of my father and placing that success behind bars, shows how my perception of my father has changed. The absence of my father has caused a lot of financial troubles for both me and my family, which is seen through the collection of the falling coins. Any outsider would not be able to piece together this representation of my fathers' incarceration. This process is more for my own therapeutic expressions. However, because I am including imagery that holds a universal symbolic meaning, such as the coins and jail bars, my hopes are that viewers can still associate the sadness and financial struggles illustrated in the collage.

Conclusion

My visual narrative portrays emotions through the vulnerability of my drawn self and the cycle of never ending emotional situations. I am telling my story through fictional settings that reflect my subconscious emotions. I have chosen to use fantastical collages because of the possibilities they hold and the uncanny effect they can have on the viewers. I select parts of reality that we are familiar with, and construct them in a way that evokes this feeling of uncanny that is separate from conscious reality. As Freud has said, "The distinction between what has

been repressed and what has been surmounted cannot be transposed on to the uncanny in fiction without profound modification; for the realm of fantast depends for its very existence on the fact that its content is not submitted to the reality-testing faculty.”¹ The surreal qualities of my work allow for greater possibilities in reflecting my subconscious. The emotional rollercoaster my figure rides is exaggerated through the fictional collages and is understood because of its lack of reality. The feelings expressed through my drawn self are real, but the causes and stressors are replaced with symbols and objects to create a more intense, heightened emotional state.

The completion of this project has opened my eyes to new ways of storytelling and has shown me how to create a relationship between objects and meaning. I have learned that there are many ways to tell a narrative, and that narratives can still tell a story without words or descriptions. I told my story through the relationship I created between my animated collages and the physical responses of my drawn figure. My hopes are that my viewers are able to identify my emotional states and the formation of them.

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