

CLOSE TO HOME

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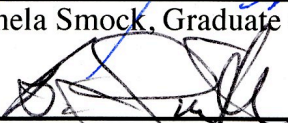
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Date Degree Conferred: April 30, 2011

The background of the entire page is a repeating floral pattern. It features delicate, light-colored flowers and scrolling vines in shades of pale yellow, cream, and light blue, set against a white background. The pattern is dense and covers the entire area.

CLOSE TO HOME

Master of Fine Arts Thesis Work

ERICA BUSS

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ABSTRACT

In late 2007, the crash of the housing market plunged the United States into the nation's worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Although foreclosures, unemployment, bankruptcies and bailouts still flood the news, the crisis remains largely invisible as its victims strain to conceal their distress behind closed doors. "Close To Home" explores the causes and the destabilizing effects of corporate greed and the socioeconomic burdens it places on families and individuals. Collaging domestic wallpaper and Wall Street papers, the paintings tell the stories of those struggling to make ends meet in pursuit of the American Dream.

KEYWORDS: Unemployment, financial crisis, class, housing crisis, wallpaper



Sinking Further, acrylic and wallpaper, 66" x 48"

INTRODUCTION

Hanging between two worlds is a distressing state of existence, for the downwardly mobile individual has to juggle two incompatible senses of personhood. On the one hand, he or she is a well-educated, skilled professional, accustomed to power, to deference, to middle-class norms of consumption. Yet behind the façade of the split-level executive home, the wallpaper is peeling, appliances are breaking down, clothes and shoes are wearing thin, and adults are venturing out to work at low-level white- or blue-collar jobs which afford no authority, no autonomy, no sense of self-importance... And society looks the other way because, frankly, it is embarrassing to see someone in such a state, and it's disturbing to treat the situation as anything other than an aberration. Any closer scrutiny makes us squirm... (Newman, 10).

In December of 2007, the United States entered into a deep recession, throwing the nation into an economic crisis. We continue to hear about it in terms of job losses, factory closings, bailouts, bankruptcies and unemployment lines. Newspaper headlines proclaimed it to be “The War on the Middle Class,” and the battle of “Wall Street Versus Main Street.” Millions of Americans have lost and continue to lose their jobs. The recession hit my family especially hard. Since beginning this body of work, both of my

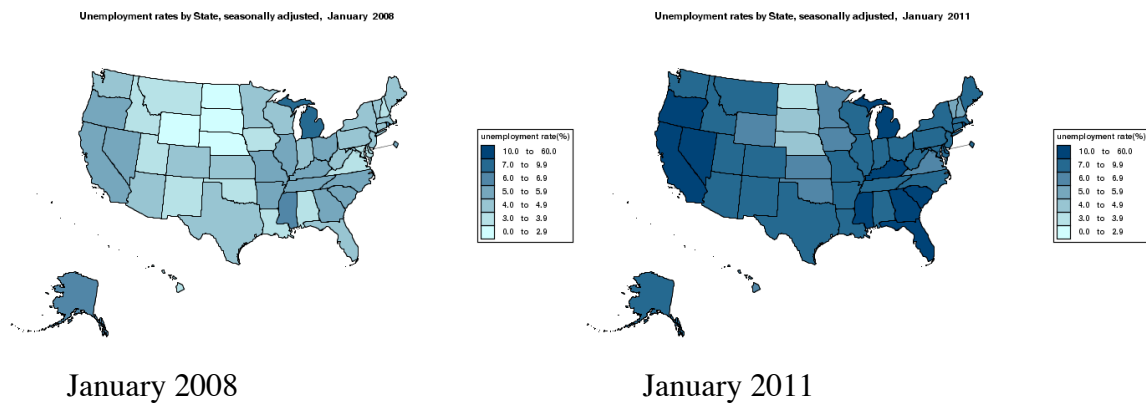
parents have lost their jobs. Joining them in the lines of the under- or unemployed are two of my aunts, four of my uncles, ten of my cousins and eight of my neighbors. I can't help but empathize with these people who occupy my thoughts throughout the day. My father was laid off twice when I was growing up, imparting me with an intimate understanding of unemployment and downward mobility. I am interested in the vulnerabilities we are reluctant to talk about: shame and disappointment, tested pride and strained hope, shifts in family dynamics, fear and anxiety, bringing together and tearing apart of relationships.

I was in high school the first time my dad lost his job. The plant where he worked as an electrician for 20 years moved out of the state, leaving him and hundreds of others jobless through no fault of their own. Several months of applications, odd jobs and disappointments passed before he landed another job at the age of 50, this time as a construction electrician, working more strenuous hours and earning substantially less pay. The new increase in heavy manual labor took a toll on his knees, requiring surgery several years down the road once he could afford the time off. When that company unexpectedly declared bankruptcy, he was jobless once again. This time the turnaround between jobs was much shorter. Once again he started at square one with a new company and suffered another decrease in pay and benefits. In hopes of making the business more competitive, his boss asked him to take classes outside of work to earn a higher certification as a foreman, increasing his pay and propelling him further up the company ladder. Soon afterward the company unexpectedly announced that they would

be eliminating a handful of higher paid workers on the top rungs to make room for more lower paid workers at the bottom. At age 60 and with retirement becoming a seemingly unattainable dream, my dad was sent home without notice, with his tools crammed into a cab and a severance package of two days pay.

Unfortunately this has become a common story for many Americans. According to the *New York Times* and CNN, job seekers outnumbered job openings six to one at the beginning of 2010. By March 2011, this statistic has only slightly improved at a rate of five job seekers for each job opening. Through first- and second-hand experiences I know the people attached to these statistics. Listening to and understanding their stories fuels my artwork.

US Unemployment Rate by State



Local Area Unemployment Statistics Map
United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics



Burdens of Education, acrylic and wallpaper, 78" x 48"

CLIMBING THE LADDER

The content of my paintings reflects my socio-political beliefs and my cultural background. I am from a traditionally blue-collar, white, Midwestern, middle-class family. This is visible in the clothing, wallpaper patterns, hairstyles, and implied professions of the people I choose to portray. My exploration of class struggles began with a painting in this body of work entitled, *The Burdens of Education*. In this piece I painted a caricature of myself in my high school uniform sitting on top of a stack of books piled on top of my father's back. Hands clad in boxing gloves as if ready to fight, the figure is unable to turn the pages of the book she holds. Below her, a caricatured father hunches on all fours on a ladder, his attempts to climb up or down hindered by his electrical cord hands and feet and an extension cord that ropes him in place. The ladder has no evident beginning or end, stretching across a wallpaper backdrop.

I am the daughter of an electrician and a first generation college student. My parents both came from large lower-class families that were constantly struggling to get by. Through a lifetime of overtime, they worked their way into the middle-class. Wanting to give us the best education they could afford, they placed my sisters and me in private Catholic school from kindergarten through twelfth grade and helped us pay for college. While I am grateful for this opportunity, it placed me in a persistently defensive class-straddling position, being considered uppity by my relatives yet struggling to keep

up with my affluent classmates. I believe that everyone has the right to an education, but the increasing cost of tuition creates an economic barrier that prevents many people from attaining one. Education is one factor in judging a person's class status, not only because of the inferred intellectualism but also because of the ability to afford it. A college education often sinks students and/or their families into debt, jeopardizing their attempts at socioeconomic elevation.

My interest in understanding class divisions deepened as news sources painted the portrait of the rise in unemployment as "a war on the middle class." Class is simply a taboo topic that people don't like to talk about because it reveals the pervasive inequalities built into our lives. I am interested in what defines class in America, and how its social and political reinforcement bonds and divides people.

WALLPAPER AND MEMORY

I use wallpaper to reference a sense of home. Nearly every room in the house where I grew up used to be covered in wallpaper. A pink, blue and beige country cottage motif in the kitchen; quiet blue flowers enclosed by stripes in the dining room; rows of pink bows in my bedroom; energetically colored flowers splashing over a sea of white in the living room. Since wallpaper is a headache to install, the patterns often live with families for years. Slowly the flurry of daily activity begins to leave its mark. The color fades with the sun and rubs away where a chair continually pushes against the wall. Seams begin to show, rejected by the wall, and peel further by curious fingers. If we can afford the time and expense, our tastes are allowed to change. One by one each room is laboriously stripped of its paper decoration, eventually leaving a single bathroom as a relic of its past life. Tall and narrow in scale, my paintings simulate the size of these interior wall panels. This encourages the wallpaper to be read as if a portion of someone's wall, or a piece of someone's life, has been removed from its home and placed on display. It becomes both a part of a wall and part of a story.



The Balancing Act, acrylic and wallpaper, 66" x 48"

WALLPAPER PATTERNS AND TECHNIQUES

As I developed a vocabulary with this material, I began playing with the relationship between my images and the wallpaper. Through various studies I developed a range of techniques for working with wallpaper.

Responding to Patterns: As part of my creative process, I respond to patterns in wallpaper to inspire image generation. I intuitively search for images embedded in the buzzing repetition of shapes. This skill is similar to staring at the shape of a cloud and imagining it into a rabbit or a boat. Enhanced by shadows and subtle disruptions in the printing, I can imagine figures emerging from the wallpaper. My sketchbooks are filled with images I envisioned within wallpapers, tiled floors, newspaper spreads or chipped and splotchy wall paint. This technique serves as a way to let my mind and my imagination wander together intuitively without the noise of rational or premeditated thought.

Spatial Illusions: I use the wallpaper to create spatial illusions. Unlike a blank canvas, before I make a mark on this surface its pattern provides the painting with a frontal plane, behind which and before which events can occur. When presented at a large scale, small repetitive patterns can become a background texture that implies visually vast space. Placing a simple shadow below an object can define a second spatial ground as seen in *The Crisis*. Collaging multiple illusionistic techniques together in one

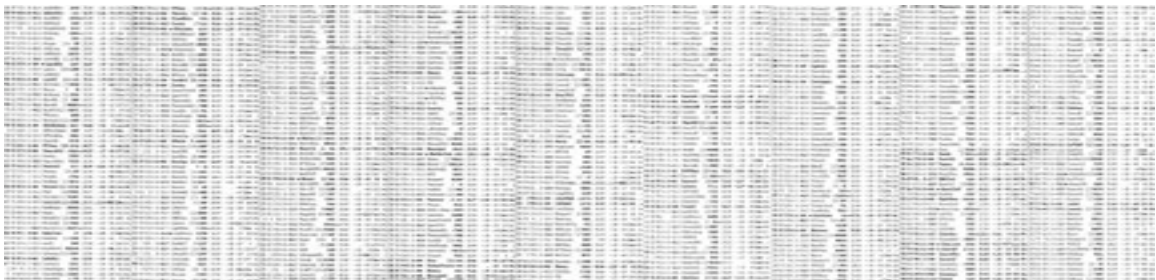
composition can serve to complicate the viewer's sense of space. For example, in *The Balancing Act*, a tightrope made of electrical cords stretches across the wallpaper panel creating the illusion of infinite space in any direction. However, this sense of vastness is disrupted as a woman reaches to hang a picture frame on a tiny nail protruding from the top corner of the wallpaper. The nail forces the top of the composition to flatten and be read as a wall, while the electrical cords below subvert this idea. The larger patterns typically found in most contemporary wallpapers resist this spatial illusion. When presented at a small scale, a motif of interweaving flowers becomes a textured pattern that is almost unrecognizable as individual shapes. By introducing large images onto these small patterns I am able to create a sense of perspective that allows the pattern to recede into the distance as texture. Large scaled wallpaper motifs sit stubbornly in the foreground as clearly defined images themselves, making them more difficult for me to interpret and transform for this purpose.



Laid Off, series of 6 panels, graphite, acrylic, wallpaper, 22" x 22"

Fading: People who live on the margins of society or whose actions are taken for granted are often referred to as “fading into the background.” In studying the recession, a

similar metaphor surfaced as news sources began referring to unemployment as an “invisible crisis.” In the studio I began to develop techniques in both collage and painting that would make these metaphors visual. Mixing paint to match the dominant color of the wallpaper I use subtle washes of paint to allow the figures to literally fade in and out of their background. This is a highly reductive technique as thin layers of paint are repetitively applied and scrubbed away, leaving a ghost-like figure stained into the wallpaper surface. To achieve a similar fading effect with collage, I use the same wallpaper in the background to create the figure’s features in the foreground. At a distance, this part of the image is almost imperceptible, revealed only by shadows cast off of the dimensional picture plane. Both techniques allow the imagery to seem as though it fades into, emerges from, or is bound to the wallpaper.



Wall-Street-Paper, sample

Wall-Street-Paper: Through my research I began noticing the similarity in pattern between the busy columns of stock quotes and the wallpaper. It occurred to me that when creating work critiquing Wall Street villains, using domestic wallpaper seemed

inappropriate. I decided to fabricate wallpaper using stock quotes from *The Wall Street Journal* and *Investor's Weekly*. By scanning several pages of stocks and piecing each section together in Photoshop, I was able to create and print 8-foot long strips of what I call *Wall-Street-Paper*.



Details left to right: *The Subprime Game*, *The Balancing Act*, *Burdens of Education*, *The Crisis*

Collage: I use wallpaper for collage, sculpting it to protrude from the 2-dimensional surface. This gives the composition an unexpected dimensionality and allows me to create the lines and forms of the images using just the paper and its cast shadows. When constructing the image of a house, I cut and paste each brick and layer each piece of siding individually. On human figures I use the paper to individually create each strand of hair and the folds in their clothes. Although I apply light washes of paint to enhance these collaged elements, their skin is often the only imagery created entirely of paint. Painting enables me to capture the subtle nuances of facial expressions and

personalities with a softness and more expressive use of color than I am able to achieve with the more linear technique of collage. This detailing is my way of giving the figures I represent the individual care and respect I believe they deserve.



Left to Right: *Welcome Home*, Jack Levine; *Alan Greenspan*, Kerry Waghorn; *Actualités*, Honoré Daumier.

CARICATURE

I draw stylistic inspiration from the political caricatures by artists such as 18th century French artist Honoré Daumier, American Social Realist painter Jack Levine and contemporary caricaturist Kerry Waghorn. In his ongoing series, “Faces in the News,” Waghorn combines disproportionately enlarged heads, characteristic of caricatures, with meticulously rendered and subtly exaggerated portraits of prominent political figures. This sense of animated realism subverts the images of the characters, enabling the artist to question them with the simultaneous severity of a photograph and humor of a cartoon. By adopting the style of caricatures, I invite my audience to connect my work to this genre’s ongoing history of political commentary.

WHEN GREED LENDS A HAND: UNDERSTANDING THE HOUSING CRISIS

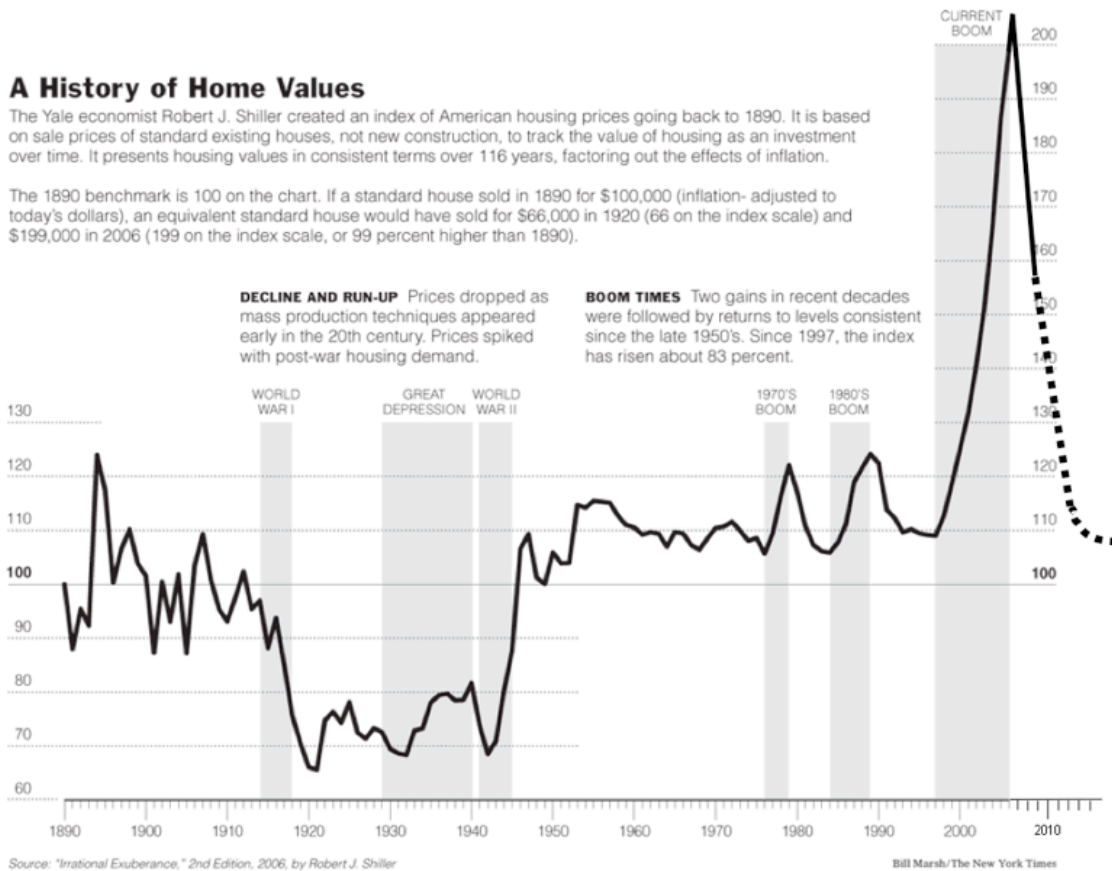
As the recession unfolded, I scoured newspapers and weekly magazines, talk shows and documentaries, trying to understand the root of this ongoing financial crisis. I discovered fingers pointing in every direction, from Wall Street banks and lending institutions, to the US federal government, to the American consumers in their pursuit of the American Dream. After the Great Depression, laws were passed to regulate the banking system, keeping private and investment banking separate. During Reagan's era, bills were passed allowing for bank deregulation. Now, instead of a loan agreement existing solely between the bank and the borrower, banks are allowed to sell these loan responsibilities to investors, placing themselves at less financial risk. As banks became less accountable, they became less cautious about who received loans. During the Clinton and the two following Bush administrations, the government endorsed these subprime mortgages, creating additional incentives to provide access to the dream of homeownership to minorities and the lower, middle and working classes. This was supposed to help narrow gaps in social inequality. Instead it created a boom that nearly doubled housing prices over the past decade and further increased the demand for mortgages.

To make an even larger profit, Wall Street created a new money market creating and selling derivatives of these loans. With the explosion of this market, banks found that granting more loans was more profitable than granting more trustworthy loans. Driven by profits even at the expense of people, large banks and lending institutions began approving subprime mortgages for people who they knew could not afford the payments. American consumers readily accepted their tickets to the American Dream, living off a greater amount of negative or borrowed money than ever before.

A History of Home Values

The Yale economist Robert J. Shiller created an index of American housing prices going back to 1890. It is based on sale prices of standard existing houses, not new construction, to track the value of housing as an investment over time. It presents housing values in consistent terms over 116 years, factoring out the effects of inflation.

The 1890 benchmark is 100 on the chart. If a standard house sold in 1890 for \$100,000 (inflation-adjusted to today's dollars), an equivalent standard house would have sold for \$66,000 in 1920 (66 on the index scale) and \$199,000 in 2006 (199 on the index scale, or 99 percent higher than 1890).



Shiller, *A History of Home Values*

Over five million homes have sunk into foreclosure since 2007. So many people began defaulting on their loans that lending institutions quickly began falling into debt, owing investors billions of dollars they didn't have.

The problem was that millions of adjustable-rate mortgages began to reset last year, causing monthly mortgage payments to soar while at the same time the value of these homes tanked... Too often, facing bankruptcy or eviction, and finding they owed more than their homes were worth, people simply walked away (Wong).

The US government issued a \$700 billion dollar bailout to American banks, lending institutions and the auto industry. Unfortunately, the bailout lacked rigorous guidelines on what these institutions could do with this money. To the horror of the US taxpayers funding this bailout, less than a year after receiving federal aid, banking executives again received millions of dollars in bonuses and severance packages, spending funds on extravagant company retreats and million-dollar office redecorating projects.

Recognizing the housing market crash as the catalyst for much of this crisis, I began to use this as a focal point in my work.



The Crisis, acrylic and wallpaper, 82" x 48"

VISUALIZING THE HOUSING CRISIS

Our homes often become intertwined with our sense of identity. We become attached to these spaces as we create histories and memories within their walls. They provide us with the security of knowing there will be a place to return to at the end of each day. Since the beginning of the US housing crisis, millions of Americans have lost their homes to foreclosure with millions more anticipated in the coming years.

To visualize this personal yet sweeping crisis I began collecting and drawing pictures of foreclosed homes from the real estate section of the *Detroit Free Press*, a newspaper from a local city notorious for its soaring foreclosure rate. Attempting to convey this sense of destabilizing mobility in a painting entitled *The Crisis*, I created an anthropomorphic house to represent its former owners. Foreclosure signs pierce through the house, their stakes protruding as wobbly stilt-like legs below. Uprooted by the signs and aided by a crutch, the house is frozen in stumbling motion within a vast, undefined spatial field of old wallpaper.

Foreclosures force families into a traumatizing and uncertain state of rootlessness. While savings, investments, or the generosity of family and friends provide a safety net for some people, others are left scrambling to find shelter. It can mean leaving familiar neighborhoods, schools and friends for more cramped living arrangements in smaller houses, smaller apartments, in shared housing or in shelters. For my cousin Steven, it

meant losing the first house he ever owned—the house his parents had lived in for a decade before selling it to him the previous year—and moving into a small two-bedroom apartment the next town over with his wife and two kids.



Sketches from *The Greatest Show on Earth*; photos from *Pictorial History of the American Circus*, Durant.

STUDYING THE CIRCUS

To help establish a visual language for this body of work, I searched for reoccurring metaphors people use when talking about the financial crisis and related struggles. By paying attention to these repeated words and phrases in readings, films and conversations, I noticed a pattern: It resembles a circus. The following are recurring phrases used in reference to economic crisis: jumping through hoops... just trying to catch my footing... it's a balancing act... juggling responsibilities... placed on the high-wire... like we were puppets... climbing the company ladder... knocked down a few

rungs... sinking further and further... caught in a free-fall... no safety net. These physical metaphors help to convey a sense of the emotional and physical turmoil felt when a person loses his or her job or home and finds him/herself struggling just to get by. I do not aim to literally represent a circus, but rather convey the movement from these circus acts in an attempt to translate these feelings visually.

To better understand the physical dynamic of the circus metaphor, I drew references from books that visually documented the history of the circus and from its theatrical advertisements. I found movies that not only boast narratives of the grandeur under the big top but also capture the potential of physical risk to the performers and the degree to which this risk is entertaining in the context of the circus experience. Intermittently pausing the films, I was able to review, absorb, and sketch moments of kinesthetic tension: the cyclist pedaling around the ring with twenty acrobats balancing on her bicycle, the tightrope walker's teetering arm shooting up to maintain balance, or the clown cramming his body into a car one third his size. Pausing the videos allowed me to study framed, well-lit views of the faces of the audience. As a performer plummeted from his flying trapeze, I drew the faces of the crowd behind him, staring in horrified wonder and shielding the eyes of peeking children as they watched him fall without a safety net. In the financial circus, people are falling every day, but the spectacle remains hidden.



The Subprime Game, graphite, acrylic, wallpaper, Wall-Street-Paper, 78" x 48"

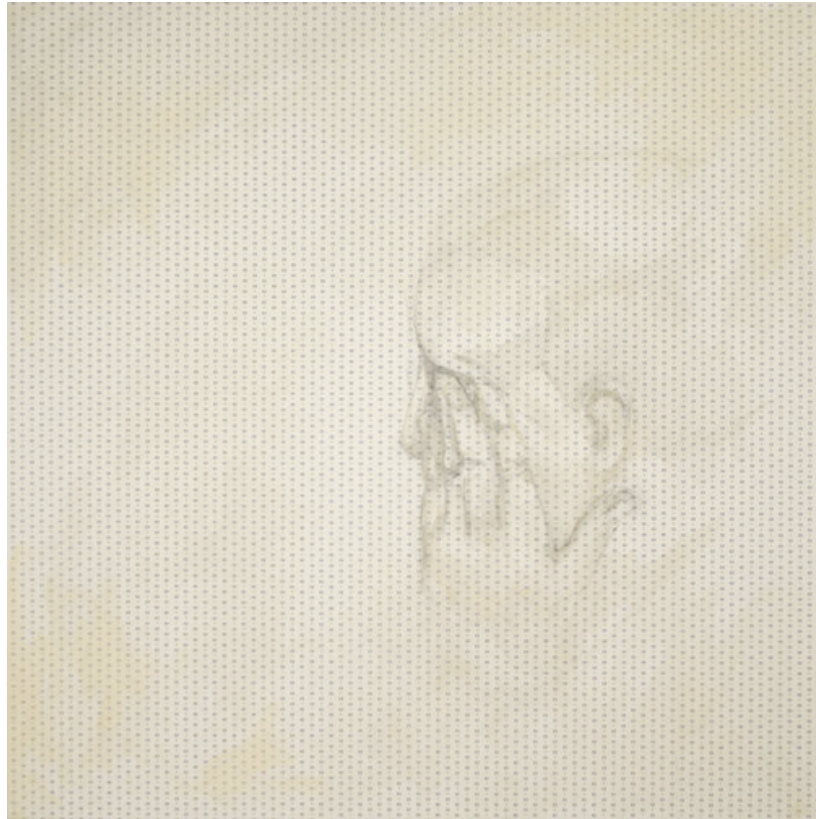
PLACING BLAME

After watching several revealing documentaries about the causes of the financial crisis, I realized that while my sketches were empathizing with people facing unemployment, foreclosures and instability, I was not placing any blame for the meltdown. I was naming a victim without naming a villain, expressing empathy without addressing my overwhelming anger. I turned my attention to the CEOs of the major banks and lending institutions that went bankrupt, were forced to sell or received bailout money, focusing on those who were notorious for granting or receiving extra bonuses during a time of financial distress. While I understand that both lenders and consumers can be blamed for the subprime mortgage crisis, I believe the lenders preyed on the hopes and dreams of people who believed them to be trusted experts in their fields. These beliefs are reflected in the political positioning of my paintings.

In *The Subprime Game*, caricatures of Wall Street CEOs are shown as puppeteers in control of a mess of houses that swing perilously below. I pulled visual references for the collaged houses from foreclosed homes in both Detroit and St. Louis, my hometown. Disregarding the fate of the houses they control, the men instead focus on each other. Competitive arms thrust their stringed hands above, across and behind one another. *Wall-Street-Paper* creates the background and thus stock quotes are imprinted on their suits and skin. It becomes a part of them.

These CEOs represent the lenders many consider to be the most responsible for the financial crisis. Moving clockwise from the top left: John Thain, former CEO of Merrill Lynch before its rescue merger with Bank of America—he used millions in federal bailout money for corporate bonuses and to extravagantly renovate his office; Angelo Mozilo, former CEO of Countrywide before its fire sale to Bank of America—he was found guilty of predatory lending to minority and subprime borrowers while simultaneously offering mortgages at below-competitive rates to influential lawmakers and politicians in a VIP program titled, “Friends Of Angelo”; Martin Sullivan, former CEO of AIG—he was charged with using federal bailout funds for outrageous executive expenditures while his insurance corporation received \$48 billion in the bailout, an amount surpassed only by Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and General Motors; Richard Fuld, former CEO of Lehman Brothers—he refused offers that could save his company from collapse, forcing them into bankruptcy and leaving tens of thousands of people without jobs; James Cayne, former CEO of Bear Stearns before he was forced to sell it to JPMorgan at \$2 a share to avoid bankruptcy—even after the collapse of his Hedge Fund department, he refused to admit his company was in danger and took no action to save it.







Laid Off, acrylic, graphite, wallpaper, six panels 22" x 22" each

AN INVISIBLE CRISIS

As a visual artist, the most ironic part of these events is the degree to which people try to hide the personal consequences. In the US, a country where material wealth has become a measure of success, the norm is to deal with these effects privately behind closed doors. To keep up appearances, the cultural tendency is to mask economic distress. For these reasons, the recession is referred to as an invisible crisis.

In many documentary films capturing the causes and sweeping effects of the financial crisis, photographers and videographers on Wall Street captured poignant moments of corporate drama. Documentaries including Charles Ferguson's *Inside Job* and Michael Moore's *Capitalism: A Love Story*, vividly capture the panic and defeat of the Wall Street workers as they watched stock prices plunge during the peak of the 2008 crisis. Their distress manifests visually with unconscious hands touching heads, faces and necks in desperate attempts to cover, comfort and console. Able to scan through these shots frame by frame, I captured their expressions in sketches and screen shots to use in future drawings.

I noticed the same gesturing in print images of people losing their homes or jobs. Our hands lend us aid when our heads become too heavy to support themselves. When surrounded by family, extra hands often become available to help provide this physical comfort. To me these gestures are both personal and universal. I observed a similar hand

covered mouth and finger pressed forehead by my mother the day my dad lost his job this winter and his hand supporting his burdened head throughout fruitless job searches. These unconscious motions of comfort are physical manifestations of our attempts to suppress overwhelming emotions and stress. These physical indicators render the invisible crisis subtly visible.

My painting series titled *Laid Off* features six of these hand-to-head gestures. These small square wallpaper panels deviate in size and style from the rest of this body of work. They are meant as small, intimate insights into these people's lives. Using light washes, the figures both emerge from and fade into the wallpaper background. They become one with it, their features defined by their backgrounds. They represent the invisible crisis, their hands revealing the vulnerabilities they wish to conceal.

CONCLUSION

In creating this body of work, it became increasingly important to me that these images be understandable to an audience outside of the art world. I began to think of these paintings as not only about but also for the people I am portraying. For artists desiring to spark a dialogue with their work, the gallery venue and location can pose a challenge of accessibility to a broader audience. Though I achieved my goal in making work that is visually accessible, by installing my paintings in a gallery within a university

rather than soliciting the attention of a nonacademic audience, I am creating another kind of invisibility and limiting the possible scope of this conversation. Learning from this experience, as I continue forward with this body of work, I hope to develop my art practice in way that can engage a more diverse audience. I use my work as a tool to analyze the world around me, to question inequalities and to convey and evoke emotions. By depicting the emotional, bodily, and communal wreckage that the economic crisis has wreaked I hope to give the victims a voice; to help those less affected understand how it feels; and to prompt people to talk about these personal yet shared experiences.

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ANNOTATED PRECEDENT LIST



Amy Casey, inspiring depiction of precariously unstable, humanized houses



Grayson Perry, conveying suffering within unexpectedly beautiful objects



Kehinde Wiley, use of wallpaper patterning as background, middle- and foreground.



Amy Cutler, absurd metaphors relating physical and emotional experiences



Charming Baker, use of wallpaper as both image and planar fields of pattern



Michael Barnes, subtle and often ambiguous rendering of space with dark, absurd metaphorical imagery



Lee Bontecou, creation of varying degrees of dimensionality within a 2-dimensional form

ANNOTATED LIST OF EARLY STUDIO EXPERIMENTS

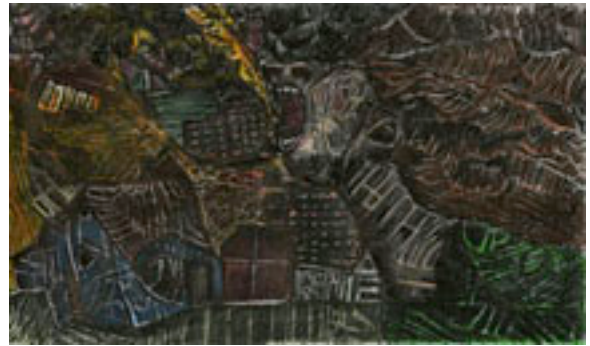
RESPONDING TO WALLPAPER PATTERNS

In this study, I created a single image by intuitively searching for it within one of the wallpaper patterns. Repeating this image on six different wallpaper panels, I wanted to see how each pattern influenced the way I responded to the original image. This was my first experiment with a new vocabulary of images that were fading into, bound by, emerging from or sitting on the wallpaper patterns.



RESPONDING TO PATTERNS IN MAPS

Similar to the patterns in wallpaper, I intuitively find images in the geographical patterns in aerial views of cities and landscapes. This process is difficult to follow when using aerial views of rigidly gridded large cities and easiest to follow when there is a mix of rural and urban landscapes. In this particular study, these map print-offs are found objects and their specific locations are anonymous. I often turn to this form of image creation when I hit a creative roadblock.



Original Map



Discovered Map Image

STACKING POSSESSIONS

In trying to visualize the economic crisis, I searched for meaning in the aftermath of what people left behind. Lawns and gardens quickly become overgrown. Empty windows stare vacantly onto the road. Once loved possessions lay in piles left behind at the curb. I drew and cut images of discarded furniture and appliances out of wallpaper, exaggerating the piles into towering stacks. I wanted these possessions to represent the people who had left them and the precarious nature of the stacking to represent the instability their lives were facing. However, in assessing this work I found that these images ended up feeling too superficial, becoming more about the physical indicators of the family's social class than about the sense of loss and instability I was trying to convey.

