

IN MY OWN INK: THE INTIMATE POWER OF WORDS

by

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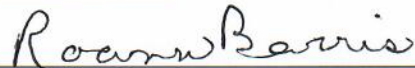
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Mr. Kenneth Smith
Thesis Advisor

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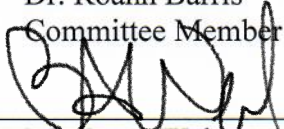
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ABSTRACT

In My Own Ink: The Intimate Power of Words consists of a series of 12 photographs that depict the inner journey of a female character, from her childhood to her mature years. In this work, I visit themes of female vulnerability, social expectations, suffering, and eventually, healing. I am interested in how people can access their deepest emotions, revealing something ambiguous, dark, and auspicious at the same time. I am compelled by moments where individuals are on an emotional edge, and how they transit their emotions to rise stronger. These images explore how words can be powerful tools to reach deep within oneself, both through emotional writing and through encountered words.

To create this body of work, I pull out inspiration from my own life experiences. Based on my own memories, I meticulously designed the complete sequence of images, both from an aesthetic and a storytelling point of view. The series as a whole tells a story of struggle and growth, while each individual image explores different aspects of the human condition.

Metaphors and symbolism help tell the stories from a poetic and imaginary perspective. My visual approach is a result of a blend of influences on several origins: from photography to painting, from contemporary to modern artists. A myriad of inspirations shapes my photographic language in this series.

Words and writing are an essential element of this project, both from a visual and an invitational perspective. Most of the images include readable text written or collected by the character. This adds another layer of meaning and significance to the series.

The physical component of this project includes photographs presented in a painterly manner. In the gallery space, images were accompanied by elements shown in some of the photographs. This facilitates entry into the character's world as well as discovering additional

information not revealed within the context of the images. To start experiencing the intimate power of words, at the exhibition, visitors are asked to start to express their emotions on paper.

Overall, I aspired to create a cohesive and profound body of work, expressed with a poetic visual language, that invites the viewer to discover and complete the character's inner journey. All this presented in a way that respects and enhances the narrative.

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Department of Art, 2022

Radford University

DEDICATION

To my *yayo* and my *yaya*,
for nurturing my soul with unconditional love that lasts a lifetime.

To my baby boy among the stars,
for being the force I needed to apply to the program.

To my inner child,
because she deserved to create freely.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My MFA journey has not been a solo experience. I am deeply thankful to numerous people who have helped me along the way. I could have not done this alone.

I am deeply thankful to the faculty at Radford University for every learning opportunity and for helping me grow as an artist. And beyond that, I am grateful to the whole Highlander community, for helping me achieve my dream and making me feel valued and supported since the beginning.

A heartfelt thanks to my committee: Prof. Ken Smith, for his support, his understanding, and his quick response to everything I needed; Prof. Webb, for challenging my ideas and his rich inputs; Dr. Barris, for opening the doors of the program to me and for her constant support; and to Andrew Ross, for believing in me and for inspiring me to become a committed professor and a caring artist.

A big debt of gratitude is owned to another group of people: those who have been part of my photo shootings directly or indirectly. In particular, I will always be in debt to every woman who appears in my photographs, for their immense generosity and support of my art.

And finally, thanks to my close family. To my husband for his absolute support. And to my three kids, for enduring so many long days and weeks without their mommy, for being unconditionally proud of me, and for empowering me to become the best person I can be.

This has been a dream come true to me. A personal journey that has transformed me profoundly. I will always be thankful for it and to those who have been part of it.

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CHAPTER 1. RATIONALE AND REASON

In My Own Ink: The Intimate Power of Words consists of 12 sequential photographs that tell the story of a female character, from her early childhood to her adulthood. Words and writing help her to express her pain or distress caused by her traumatic life experiences. Using emotional expression as a cathartic tool to navigate through her emotions will help her ultimately embrace her suffering. As a visual storyteller, my intention is to tell a story of growth and the search for answers using metaphoric, poetic, and symbolic visual language.

The conceptual images have an intriguing atmosphere and a painterly quality to them, to recreate the illusion of a timeless place. They are constructed in a way that feels like we are peeking into somebody's inner world. Not revealing the face of the character makes the stories more universal and it is up to the viewer to complete the story interpreting the visual metaphors and symbolism.

The personal journey of the character is depicted through a chronological narrative that explores four main ideas:

1. In Western culture, we are generally educated to turn our back to suffering. This juxtaposes with a Buddhist principle that assumes that suffering is part of life (Tyson & Pongruengphant, 2007). *Dukkha* (suffering) is the first Noble Truth and one of the three characteristics of human existence. In the photography series, once the character embraces suffering as a part of the human condition, she will be able to achieve some healing.

2. The second idea is the power of words. There is extensive academic literature that supports that emotional and expressive writing has healing powers. As Professor Tyler (1999-2000) explained:

For readers, a well written essay about a traumatic personal experience can help us find meaning in human suffering and enrich our understanding of the human condition.

Ideally, it can provide us with an aesthetic experience and help us better understand the pain we experience in our own lives. For the writer, it is an act of courage and responsibility, a way of trying to understand and come to terms with one's past. Writing about pain literally has the power to heal.

Words are accessible to everyone, yet most of us are not conscious of the effect they have on us. In this series, I portray the character using different media, such as ink and paper, chalk and board, or a typewriter, to express her emotions. However, this project is not a literary one and the images are the ones that tell the stories through visual language. In this project, words are used to support the main visual narrative.

3. Another idea I explore in this series is another Buddhist approach. Buddhism suggests that most of the answers we look for in the outside lie within ourselves and arts can help us reach there. In Western culture, we are raised thinking that others know more than we do, or that all the answers can be found in books. However, what this Buddhist principle teaches us is that most of the answers we desperately look for in the outside lie within ourselves. Eleanor Rosch (2001) argued: Our present cognitive sciences give a particular analytic picture of the human mind and body. But that picture is roundly contradicted by another coexisting set of human intimations and intuitions. These alternative intuitions are most fully developed in the meditative and contemplative traditions of the world. Such traditions have evolved systems for talking about those intuitions and methods for teaching people how to know and live them [...] According to some meditation traditions (particularly later Buddhism) activity of the senses and of thoughts are inherently double-

faced: they arise from and can point back either to their surface confused habitual mode of operation, which is what humans are conscious of most of the time, or to a deeper ... immediate wisdom way of knowing, feeling, and being. Such an underlying nascent wisdom mode is said to be always available, half glimpsed, by everyone). It is this double-faced conundrum that forms the arena in which the arts are at play.

In other words, writing about our deepest emotions can be used as a cathartic tool to dig inside ourselves and to get to places that cannot be reached otherwise, a place where our own fears and truths conceal.

4. Lastly, in these photographs I explore the power of letting go. Quoting Buddhist Lama Paljin Tulku Rinpoche's own words, "We must let go of the attachment to those thoughts, words, and actions that create discomfort and suffering for us, the other or both; to the tendencies that darken our minds, that lead us away from wisdom and burden our spirit" (Namdak & Geshe, 2022). Certainly, letting go of painful past experiences is a hard step to achieve. Reaching the level of consciousness to recognize a painful attachment and gathering the strength to release that attachment is part of the healing process. Personal expression and writing can be an effective tool to accomplish this hard process.

The photographs can be read individually as well. Each image presents its own narrative and portrays a turning moment in the character's life. In the different scenes, I visit themes like social expectations, loyalty, female vulnerability, loss, and family issues, among others.

CHAPTER 2. INFLUENCES AND INSPIRATION

My visual and narrative approach are a result of a blend of influences from several origins: from photography to painting, from contemporary to modern artists; a myriad of inspirations shapes my photographic language. In this chapter, I present the main artists and art styles that have influenced my artistic vision and this body of work. From some, I have been inspired by their technique; from others, their approach to tell visual stories.

Source 1. Brooke Shaden

One of the photographers who has greatly impacted my creative expression is Brooke Shaden. She is a contemporary self-portrait photographer who explores the dark side of the human condition. She uses photography to delve into her darkness and confront her fears. She combines her creativity and the magic of Photoshop to place herself into imaginary places and situations, otherwise not possible without the use of digital postproduction. She is a successful and prolific fine-art photographer, who also focuses on teaching her techniques and her creative vision encouraging artists to create fearlessly.

Her passion, emphasis on storytelling, and her ability with Photoshop inspired me to try new techniques and exposed me to different ways to approach photography. She opened me to a wide range of possibilities that could be achieved in postproduction through the use and mastery of Photoshop.



Figure 1. Photograph by Brooke Shaden

Figure 1 serves as an example of her photographs. This image, although apparently simplistic, tells a profound story. The photograph showcases Brooke's surrealistic style, possible thanks to the technical power of Photoshop.

In her book *Inspiration in Photography*, she teaches creative techniques and inspiration for creators. Brooke Shaden motivated me to look at and explore my darker side and use it as a source of creation. Her work also motivated me to explore the world of symbolism and to feel attracted to the use of metaphors in my images. I understood that images could tell stories with a layered approach. Including visual metaphors and symbols helped me construct non-conclusive scenes rich in meaning.

Source 2. Jennifer Thoreson

Jennifer Thoreson is another American fine-art contemporary photographer. "Her work is heavily metaphorical, and delves into the nuances of human relationships, human fragility, and the ephemeral, temporary nature of human life" (Thoreson, 2022). Although she also explores faith and religion, I am mainly interested in her representations of female fragility and her creative process.

She is drawn to the 3-dimensionality and texture of objects. In her recent work, she includes sculptural elements created by her in her photographs. With her I share the passion for textures, and the exploration of female fragility and human psychology.

Contrary to Brooke Shaden, she is not a prolific artist. Her creative process consists of developing and creating a new body of work during a year and promoting and exhibiting that work the following year. She dedicates an extensive amount of time and attention to creating cohesive and strong closed bodies of work. I relate to that creative process along with the way she follows a very personal process when creating.

Her photographic series *Medic* (see Figure 2) motivated me to not be shy when approaching the production of my own images. Even though many of the elements that she included were photographed in places other than the scene of the final image, she did build the room in which she shot the images. She also released a 20-page art book of that body of work. Learning about how she approached the creation of her book



Figure 2. Photograph of the series *Medic*, by Jennifer Thoreson

served as an example of how a short series of photographs could be presented in such a way. She has inspired me to create my own monograph about *In My Own Ink: The Intimate Power of Words*.

Source 3. Eugenio Recuenco

Probably my preferred Spanish photographer is Eugenio Recuenco. He is an established and renowned Spanish fashion, advertising, and fine art photographer. He has worked for international companies such as Versace or Lavazza, creating extremely successful visual campaigns. The marriage between his photographic fields together with his personal vision results in an elegant and cinematographic style that I really feel attracted to.



Figure 3. Photograph of the series *360*, by Eugenio Recuenco

His body of work called “360” (see Figure 3) developed with a Huawei Smartphone for the launch of their new smartphone especially caught my interest. It consists of 360 images all photographed in a plain grey room with a small window on the top left. This proved to me that the sky is the limit when it comes to creativity and what looks like a limitation turns into an opportunity to create something remarkable like that series.

I came across his work when I was already developing my own photographic series, and his body of work inspired me to push myself to the limit of my possibilities. But it is the look and feel of his images that captivated me the most of his work. His delicate use of the lighting appears to be simple but allows him to create magic in his photographs. He works with a team of people. They develop the ideas as a team and create referential mood boards. His creative process inspired me to focus on the research of visual references prior to shooting.

Source 4. Heather Evans-Smith

At Radford University we had the opportunity to attend an artist talk by Heather Evans-Smith. At first, I did not connect with her work. However, time has helped me to absorb her themes and her visual narrative to the point that I feel really connected to it.

Her photography is feminine and elegant, minimalistic but with a strong narrative full of metaphors (see Figure 4). Her work explores motherhood and womanhood, themes that I am

genuinely drawn to. In her artist statement, she claims that she explores the ideas of memory, loss, and family in conceptual settings, themes that are present in my last body of work.

Her images include subtle details and symbolism that invite the viewer to decipher the



Figure 4. Photograph by Heather Evans- Smith

meaning but also to admire the beauty of the simple and elegant compositions.

Heather also wants “stories that come from moments of life, like a still from an old movie” (Evans-Smith, 2022).

Similarly, I construct my images that come from fragments of memories and that have a vintage quality to them.

Source 5. The Pre-Raphaelites

One of the art styles that unconsciously has been nurturing my artistic language is the pre-Raphaelites (see Figure 5). Particularly in my intent to create images with a painterly flair, my photographs take inspiration from this art style that looks medieval but emerged during the period of British industrialization. Late pre-Raphaelite artists were inspired by medieval themes and literature. The painters of that time represented isolated women, with a melancholic flair. These muses were pale, red-headed with wavy hair. The main character of my series follows that same idealized representation.

Pre-Raphaelites strove to create meticulous representations of the reality, almost with photographic precision. In an opposite direction, I endeavor to create painterly photographs. I envision an imaginary middle ground, where photographic paintings and painterly photographs

approximate each other, while keeping the unavoidable distance, that grants each medium its own unique qualities.

Pre-Raphaelite paintings are also densely encoded with signs and symbols. The viewer needs to immerse in the painting to decipher all the hidden messages that are part of the narrative. In my exploration to create meaning in my photographs, I realized that was how I wanted to construct my photographs: as if each photograph was a puzzle hiding many answers that could be read with attention and observation.



Figure 5. *Lady of Shalott*. Painting by Waterhouse, 1888

After studying and analyzing several pre-Raphaelite artworks, I noticed the influence in my visual language, but also served as a source of inspiration to refine my approach to visual narrative in my photographs.

CHAPTER 3. METHOD, MEDIUM, AND FORMAT

THE PROCESS

In this section, I describe the technical aspects of the creation of the photographs as well as the process of idealization of the concept.

Conceptualization, Production, Photo shootings

To create this body of work, I pull out inspiration from my own life experiences. Although based on my own memories, the photographs are constructed following a fictional narrative. I meticulously designed the complete sequence of images, both from an esthetic and a storytelling point of view.

I puzzled the concept and the content of each photograph to control all necessary aspects to match the images with the specific and the underlying narrative. The locations, props, models, and poses were precisely selected for each image. To make sure the series was cohesive, I sketched each photograph on an index card where I included essential elements of each image, such as camera angle, location, hairstyle, activity of the character, and light direction. (see Figure 6). This method was very visual and allowed me to play around and easily work on refining the content and concept of the series.

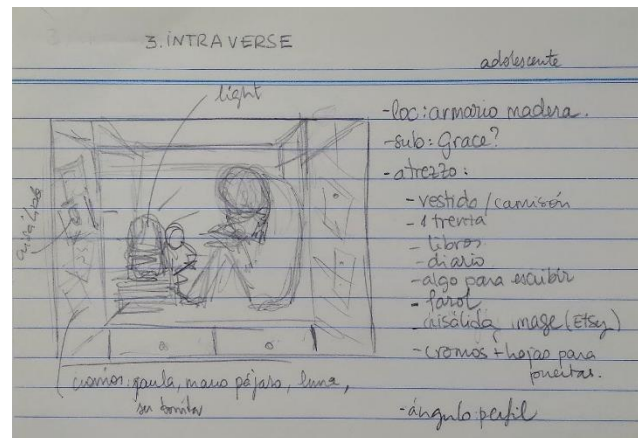


Figure 6. Example of sketch for image *Intraverse*

Photo Creation

I used a Canon 5D Mark II digital camera, which provides a full-frame format. While shooting in full frame was not relevant for any artistic or technical purpose, digital shooting provided creative freedom to manipulate and edit raw file images needed for narrative purposes. This was particularly enabled by shooting all images with a tripod to obtain multiple images of the same scene with the same angle and perspective.

Most of the images were shot with a wide-angle lens (16-35 mm) because of the constraints of shooting in small spaces. Natural light was used for all images to achieve an organic painterly look. Some props used in the series, such as candles, a table lamp, or a lantern, were also sources of light. However, their purpose was not to light the scene, but to aid the narrative.

Photo Editing

For the creation of each final photograph, many images were used. None of the final photographs are straight out of the camera. Rather, they are composed using digital manipulation in Photoshop. This technique allows me to select and combine the elements that are portrayed most effectively into the final image. Therefore, the purpose of using compositing in Photoshop is not to show that they are digitally manipulated but to construct the final images as designed. Sometimes this need resulted from physical or economical limitations. For example, in the image “Emptiness,” the same group of balloons



Figure 7. *Emptiness*

was photographed in both sides of the room (see Figure 7). Then they were combined using digital manipulation.

This technique offers a lot of flexibility but at the same time requires a longer time and complex postprocessing, especially if willing to blend it smoothly.

Printing and Framing

The images were printed on 16 x 20-inch archival paper. This was not a choice, but rather a limitation of the available printers. The images were printed in an EPSON SureColor P800. The paper was EPSON Velvet Fine Art Paper. This is a matte, archival paper that adds a soft texture to the print and helps infuse a painterly look to the photographs.

The images were presented in natural wood frames (see Figure 8). The wood looks aged because of the effect of dings and dents on the surface. I chose this material to support the organic look and color palette of the series. Glass was not included in the presentation of the final pieces to avoid reflections and glare, and to expose the texture of the paper. This removes barriers between the viewer and the artwork, allowing a more intimate connection. This manner of presenting the photographs also reminds us of traditional paintings.



Figure 8. Example of the print presentation

DECONSTRUCTING THE SERIES

In this section, the main conceptual aspects that take part in the conceptualization and composition of the images are dissected separately.

The Character

Early in the creative process, I decided to not show the character's face in the images for two main reasons. First, it would make the images more universal. Second, I wanted to avoid the direct connection with the woman in front of the camera. Focusing on the narrative of the images would allow the viewer to unveil and interpret her emotions.

The character is captured doing personal activities, such as writing in her diary, typing about conflicting doubts, or sending letters to a baby that is not with her. All these actions represent how she transits her inner struggles. Not being faced towards the camera makes her unaware of us looking at her, creating a voyeuristic relationship with the scene.

The hair is another key element in telling the life-long journey of the character. I decided that wavy red hair and braids were going to be the main connective thread. I looked for women with a similar hair type in different life stages. Since the character is inspired by my own life, I chose to represent an idealized version of myself, most likely influenced by romantic paintings of the 19th century and more specifically of the pre-Raphaelite style, where their muses were predominantly pale, redheaded, and



Figure 9. *Homecoming*

feminine. They would exude elegance and melancholy, qualities that I instinctively infuse into my photographs.

The braids or lack of them also help situate the character in her different life stages. For example, as a girl, she wears two braids. In the images that represent her teenage years, she only wears one braid. During her adulthood, her hair is loose. In the “Homecoming” photograph, she appears wearing two braids again as a symbolic connection to her childhood (see Figure 9). As explained, hair has been used as a conducting element in the series to support the storyline.

The Spaces

When choosing the places in which the character was going to appear, I was certain they had to reinforce the story while adding variety and rhythm. During the first part of the character’s life, while she is experiencing her troublesome life events, she always appears in man-made structures, mainly rooms. Only at the end of the series, when she is able to find some relief, she appears outdoors. This is in part related to the idea that nature is associated with wilderness and freedom.

An element present through all the series with a strong visual weight is wood. This is an organic material that changes and quickly decomposes with time, just like memories and living creatures do. I believe that there is a subtle connection with the life-changing condition of anything alive. Another reason why I chose wood as a constant element in the series is that it is associated with vintage construction and furniture. This connection would help me locate the character somewhere in the past, rather than in a specific moment in time. The natural color and warm tones of wood also add to the color palette of the series, and therefore to the overall melancholic mood.

Each space was chosen for its specific qualities, such as flooring, window location, light direction, and size. Locations had to enable the character to carry out her different activities while being visually compelling.

The Light

The photographer's key component is light. For this body of work, I chose to use natural light as the main light source. The light is diffused, warm, and dim, while allowing me to recreate low-keyed scenes that reinforce the intriguing atmosphere that I yearned to recreate. These lighting qualities likewise emphasize the dreamy and melancholic mood of the photographs.

This type of lighting is also a key factor in creating a painterly look. When observing classical paintings, such as pre-Raphaelite's, we appreciate that they only use one main light source, the sun. By mimicking that type of lighting, I associate those classical painting lighting conditions to my photographs.

Lighting is also used as a storytelling element in the series. The temperature and the direction of light can inform about the time of the day or if it is cloudy. For example, the image "HOME" depicts a clear sky, with an angled diffused light coming from the horizon (see Figure 10). This represents sunset, the end of the day. This concept, the ending of a cycle and knowing that naturally a new one begins, subtly



Figure 10. *HOME*

supports the narrative of the character in that image, who is leaving her up to then house. A chapter ends. A new one begins.

Some of the images additionally include a second light source, such as candles, a lantern, or a table lamp. These were used as part of the narrative and not with lighting purposes.

The Color

The color palette of the series is predominantly warm, including a wide variety of yellows and browns. The color scheme of the series consists of yellow, red, and blue. These three colors form a triad in the color wheel. This triadic color scheme creates a vibrant contrast between colors even if they are desaturated and warmed as in the series. Using the yellows and browns as the dominant colors leaves the blue and the red to be used as secondary colors. When used for specific elements in the image, it emphasizes the connotations associated to each color. For instance, in many of the images, the clothes that the character wears are blue. Blue, in Western culture, is traditionally associated with sadness, but also with calmness. These two qualities support the emotions that I want to convey in those images. The balloons in the image “Emptiness” are also blue, which traditionally is also associated to a baby boy, and therefore the color respects both the narrative and the values of the image.

The other color of the triad is red. Red appears in the house that the young girl is drawing, as well as on some of her crayons; it also appears in the red of the girl turning into a woman, and in the thread in the image “Bond” (see Figure 11). In these



Figure 11. *Bond*

images, red has different connotations but allows a consistent and harmonic use of the color.

Point of View

I designed the different camera angles with the intention of silently peeking into someone's inner world. However, including variety in the viewpoint was an important factor for the rhythm of the narrative. Not showing the face of the character was one of the main conditions that would limit and define the angles I could shoot from. I chose to shoot from her back, from her profile, and from above. Alternating these different perspectives gives a sense of variety, while creating rhythm and unity.

Another important consideration is that I chose to portray the character's full body. This condition would help maintain the cohesion in the series. Later in the creation of the series, this would turn into a difficulty, since, for some of the scenarios, it was more challenging to show the whole body rather than cropping it. I had to find a way to tell the story while respecting each of the creative conditions that would make the body of work look and feel consistent.

The Actions

To add variety and progress in the story of the character, the different actions related to writing needed to be distinct. In the first half of the series, the character is depicted during the act of writing or right after it. During this phase, the woman is expressing and exploring her traumatic life events, a more introspective stage. In the "Dead End" image, she does not write, but rather looks for answers in words found in the outside (see Figure 12). In the seventh and eight



Figure 12. *Dead End*

images, the character is immersed in her pain. I approached that through the representation of ink. In the healing phase, we see the character “Writing” through embroidering and finally releasing all her past represented by paper butterflies made with her own writings, and finally leaving all that past and painful life experiences in the past.

Symbolism and Metaphors

The use of metaphors and symbolism allows me to tell the story in a poetic way, while opening questions along the storyline. Some of the questions will be answered in later images in the sequence, while others will remain opened. By presenting a non-conclusive visual representation of the stories, the viewer is invited to bring their own context to the narrative.

Douwe Draaisma (2015) shared in his book *Forgetting*, “When contemplating memory, we think in metaphors. There is no other way.” When considering Draaisma’s claim, choosing metaphors as a narrative figure feels natural since these photographs are inspired by my own life experiences, and for which I looked back to my own memories. These memories, like all memories, are transformed and distorted through time and posterior life experiences as well as altered to fit into the narrative of the series.

The images are rich in symbolism, which adds several layers of meaning to each image.

THE EXHIBITION

The images were presented respecting the sequential order of the narrative. Images were presented in different groups of taking into account different life stages of the character and the different subspaces and walls available in the gallery.

I chose to create a space where visitors could feel closer to the character by including elements that appear in some of the images (e.g., props). Some of these elements were placed in the gallery space, close to the images where they appear. These physical elements not only

created an engaging atmosphere that invited the visitor to enter the character's world but also enriched the experience by adding information about the stories. An example of one of the walls is shown in Figure 13.



Figure 13. Exhibition wall displaying props

Another objective for the exhibition was to create an interactive experience where visitors could start reaching into their own emotions and give them an opportunity to express them on paper, both writing or typing, the same way we can find the character doing in the series. As part of the healing process, after the emotions are transferred to the paper in written form, the visitor is invited to turn their letter into origami butterflies and pin them into a wall called “The Passage of the Wandering Words” (see Figure 14). This personal exercise references the healing process that the character accomplishes in the eleventh image, called “Homecoming.” Letting the words fly away is a metaphor for not getting attached

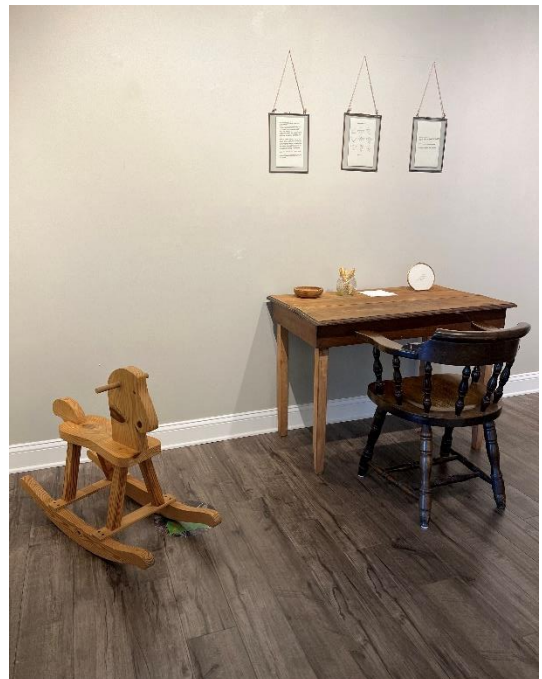


Figure 14. Detail of one of the writing set-ups

to painful emotions. Based on Buddhist principles, by accepting our emotions and letting go of the attachment to the life experiences here represented by words written on paper is when we can ultimately experience happiness.

CHAPTER 4. ASSESSMENT

Attainment of Goals

Looking back at the beginning of my thesis journey, I can affirm that I have met many of my original goals. First, the images explore a deeper side of myself, moving away from telling the bright side of other women's stories.

Second, I have completed a sequential and cohesive series of photographs around a storyline, putting into practice narrative mechanisms such as visual metaphors and symbolism for the first time. I have designed and puzzled each element of each photograph so that they could work both independently and as a whole.

Third, I believe that I have expanded and consolidated my artistic style that started to emerge in some of my images of 2014.

Fourth, I have learned new ways of presenting my work, such as image transfers and photographic frescos. Although I decided not to use any of these techniques in the presentations of this body of work, I am determined to keep on exploring that creative path in future work.

Fifth, I have planned a more complex solo show by including physical elements into the exhibition space and offering interactive experiences to the visitors.

Overall, I have grown as an artist and visual storyteller.

Learning From Challenges

One of the initial artistic challenges I encountered when developing the concept for each image was to tell a lifetime story of an imaginary character without showing her face. What resources could I use to achieve that effectively if I only had a few months to create the images? This presented an artistic challenge since in the past I felt comfortable focusing on women's facial expressions. However, for this project I opted to step out of my comfort zone. Transmitting

a whole interior world of emotions without portraying the character's face was a challenge, but if successful, it would make the images more universal, and I would grow as a visual storyteller.

Another challenge was photographing other people during the pandemic. Portraits require one to shoot other people. Normally, finding people willing to get involved in artistic projects is not an easy task. Doing this during physical restrictions because of COVID-19 made this step of the process harder to achieve.

At a personal level, my family life and logistics were also impacted by the pandemic. All this caused many delays in my schedule, eating up most of the time that I had designated for the MFA production phase. As a result, I barely had time left for the editing, printing, and framing of the images.

Lastly, if I had the freedom to print at any size, I would have chosen larger than 16 x 20 inches. I believe that experiencing the images in a larger format facilitates travel into the scene and allows one to observe and appreciate the details. On the contrary, presenting the images at 16 x 20 inches offers a more intimate experience since one needs to get close to discover some of the details.

Future

Following my graduation, I intend to present this body of work to art calls, group exhibitions, and art galleries. I am determined to learn good practices about how to develop and present limited editions, introduce my artwork to galleries, as well as find channels to expose and sell my work.

During the upcoming months, I also plan to design my first artbook about *In My Own Ink: The Intimate Power of Words*, combining the photographs with some of the writings that

appear in the images and paying special attention to the paper and materials used in the production of the monograph.

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Appendix A. Project Statement

In My Own Ink: The Intimate Power of Words consists of a series of 12 photographs that depict the inner journey of a female character, from her childhood to her elderly years. In this work, I visit themes of female vulnerability, social expectations, suffering, and eventually, healing. I am interested in how people can access their deepest emotions, revealing something ambiguous, dark, and auspicious at the same time. I am compelled by moments where individuals are on an emotional edge, and how they transit their emotions to rise stronger. These images explore how words can be powerful tools to reach deep within oneself, both through emotional writing and through encountered words.

In this body of work, I rely on a fictional character to reference troublous personal experiences and my longing to find a cathartic process to cure emotional wounds. Through the use of visual metaphors, symbolism, and infusing a painterly quality to the images, I seek to depict the character's journey with a poetical visual language, dissociating it from realistic life events. These techniques, together with the composition of the photographs and the meticulous selection of the elements that appear in them, allow me to add layers of meaning to the narrative, setting the scenes at the edge of reality. To construct the images, I styled them with antique or used elements that add past and richness to the stories. This exhibition includes some of these key elements.

These photographs are an intimate collection of moments that tell a story about human fragility and the search for inner peace and belonging, a journey of self-discovery that inevitably needs to embrace suffering as an indivisible part of life; a call to put into words what the deepest emotions conceal and let the inherent power of the process lead to growth.

Appendix B. The Photographs



Unheard



Woman



Intraverse



HOME



Ms. Trust



Emptiness



Dead End



Tearink



Drop



Bond

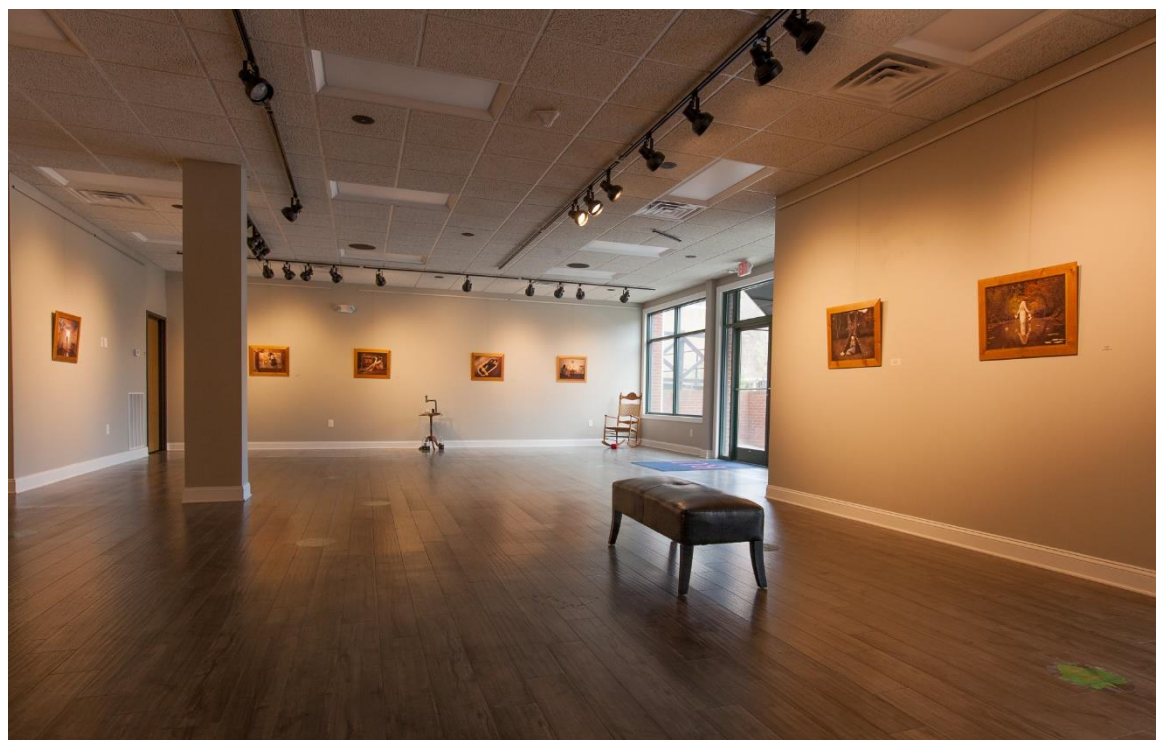


Homecoming



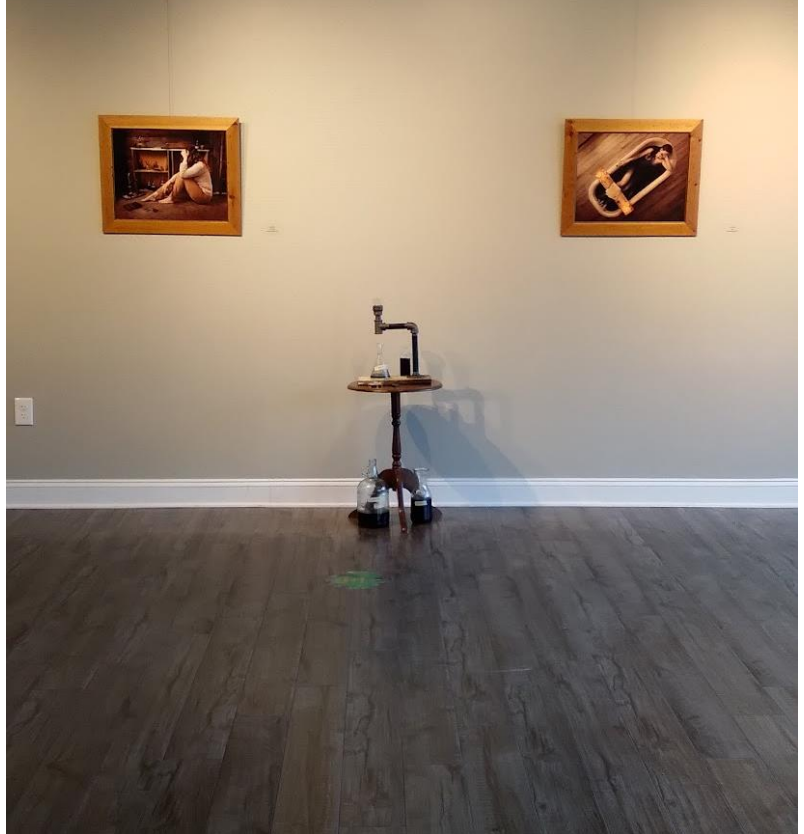
Aliferous

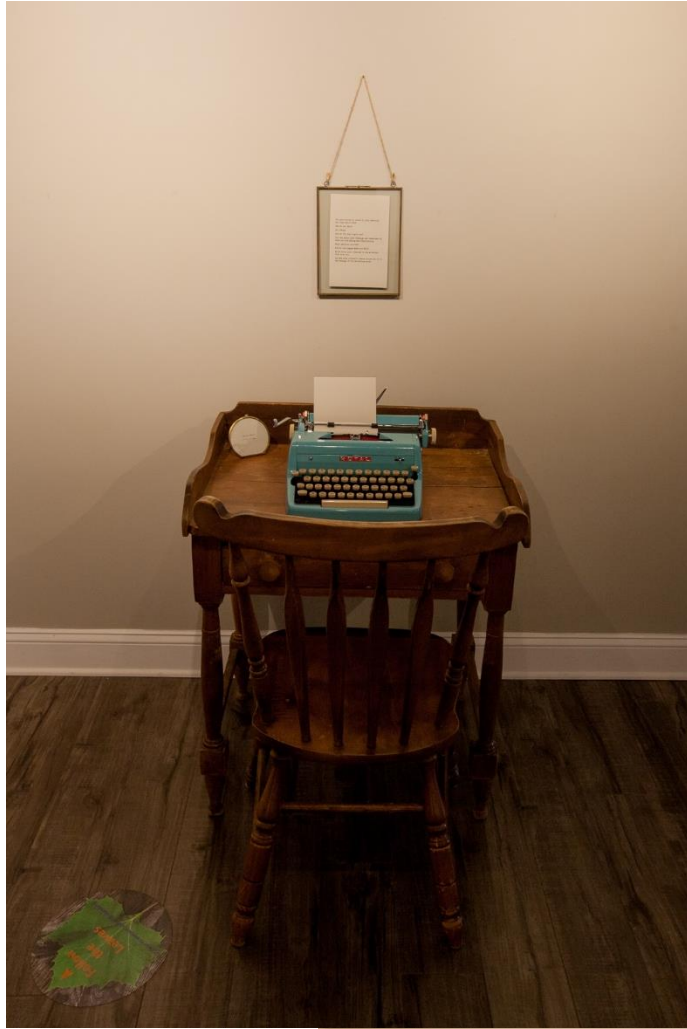
Appendix C. The Exhibition



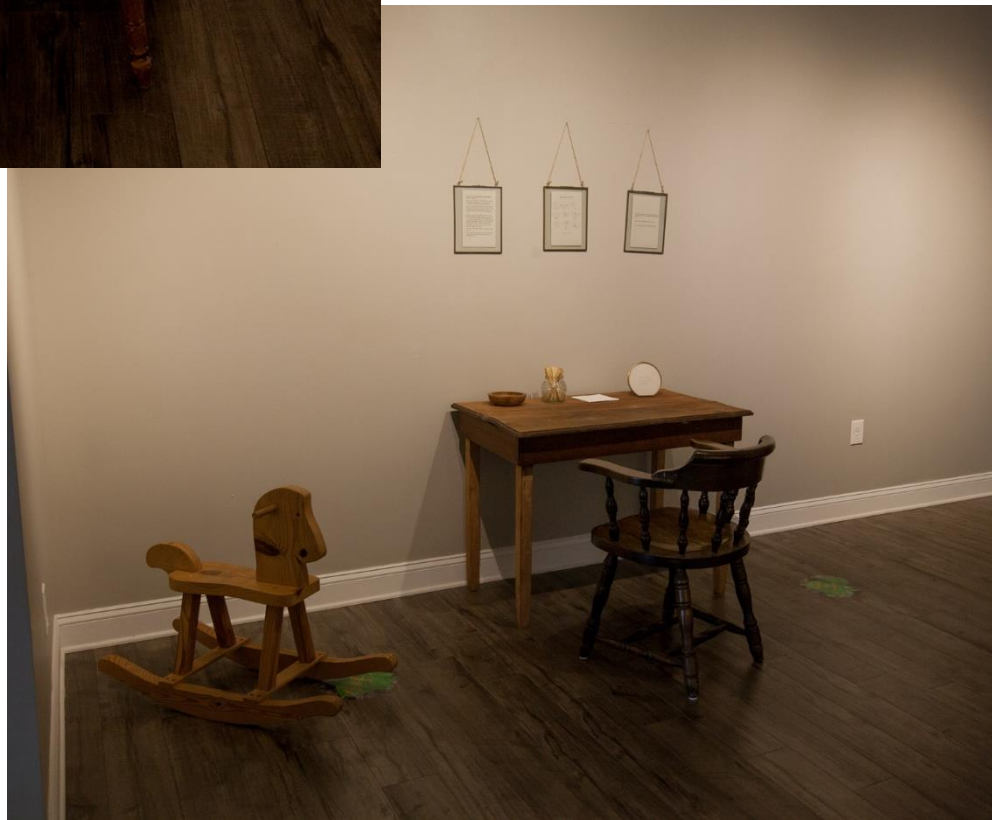


Detail of some elements in the space





Typing and writing set-ups





Passage of the Wandering Words

