I’ll Grow Back: Exploring the Surface

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During the flood of 1997 my father stayed up for a week straight watching the flood wall and he broke the dike between his dreams and waking life. I was 10 years old, hiking up mountains of sandbags. I came home with sand in my shoes, getting dizzy on the tinfoil top containers of fermented grape juice, that the Red Cross kept leaving on our street corner. One night I woke up to my fathers face.

Water.

He said Water water water water.

He ran out the kitchen door and I chased after through the swinging hinges and in the yellow floodlights, my dad in his boots and boxers flapping like a goose, filling and throwing a bucket full of nothing.

Dad, your bucket is empty.

I close my eyes and the image splashes among other memories, each clamoring over the other to break the surface.

During my graduate studies in Sculpture at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, I have explored the relationship of the body to objects using live performance and personal storytelling to investigate gender, sexual violence, intimacy, and healing. This paper in support of my MFA thesis exhibition makes the case for exploring the intersection of live performance and sculpture through investigating the “becoming” body’s relationship to surfaces. This body of work is a response to the moment when boundaries breakdown, the moment of possibility, of destruction, and of belonging.

My sculptures are objects of obsession and accumulation built from the repetition of the hand, the stitch, and the caress. I utilize common textiles such as hosiery and poly-fil (polyester fiber) latex, duct tape, ace bandages, dead plant matter, and cotton batting in addition to knitting my own textiles out of wire, hair, and thread. My interest in common, inexpensive material is influenced by Post-Minimalist traditions explained by Richard Pincus-Witten as a shift away from precious, expensive materials to “the limp, the pliable, and the cheap” (Miller 83). Though
decomposing, both metaphorically and literally, the surface is full of new growth. Underneath may be hollow and eaten away, but the skin is becoming something new. Perhaps what is decayed, the parts most wounded, are the most fertile areas of growth. Perhaps what appears on the surface as wounded is not damage, but evidence of change, of new beings, new subjectivity, and new methods of negotiating.

Within this thesis paper I will be experimenting with the practice of embodied writing, a mode of writing that incorporates the writer’s internal and external sensations through language. This type of writing seeks to allow the body to speak, to slow down a lived experience to re-live, remember, and describe kinesthetic impulses. The beauty of embodied writing is its ability to allow the writer to practice the actions of the body, both clumsy and fluid, its unreachable itches, the pit in the stomach, its explosions and repressions. In his book, Reading Minds, Mark Turner argues that the human passion for metaphor relies on the ability of those metaphors to be understood against and through the body. As readers, the hope is that we recognize these metaphors and movements as our own embodied experience.

In his beautiful essay “Written Through the Body,” William Banks states “I know the bodies of others by knowing my own body and vice versa; I read into those bodies as I read into my own; I write those bodies as I write my own. Such writing does not come in neat linear progressions, nor in stable, unquestioned fragments of meaning and understanding” (Banks 23). By splicing narrative passages written from the body within the body of this paper, I am attempting to practice through words what I practice in my object making and performance work, visceral identification, an attention to the body, and a dynamic movement between outside and inside.
My skin was a surface of repulsion, my insides a dark room I refused to open for fear of what I would find. Like a neglected kitchen sink, at some point one forgets what is at the bottom, submerged in water and rotting scraps. Occasionally when you pass by, you catch the scent of something growing in the foulness that repels you like a strong magnet. But I was frozen, afraid of what neglect had made of my insides, terrified to face the mess I was storing in my gut.

I came late to sculpture in my education; I received my Bachelors at the University of Minnesota where I studied both Physical Theatre and Fine art, specifically drawing. I found myself split artistically into separate worlds, neither of which I fully belonged in or knew how to integrate and cultivate the work I felt driven to do. In my undergraduate program where my fine arts practice was tightly focused on charcoal figure drawing my practice began to dissolve into two genres, expressive gestural depictions of form and figure, and explorations of texture on paper. I also began my research in experimental physical theatre through training with Kym Longhi and Kari Margolis, members and founders of the Margolis-Brown Adaptors Theatre Company. Despite shifts in both medium and form, one element remains unchanged. The body is the site of my artistic practice.

I am influenced by late 1960’s “post-minimalist” artists such as Eva Hesse and Louise Bourgeois. I am drawing on Kristen Osborne’s writing on Post-Minimalism identifying the movement as a broad range of styles including Body art, Process art, Site-Specific installation, and performance. I identify with Hesse’s play with material utilizing “bulbous shapes, hair-like tendrils, materials that resembled skin, juxtaposing interior and exterior surfaces, mixing the hard and soft. Louise Brenda Miller, in her book String, Felt, Thread discusses Lucy Lippard’s writing on 1996 exhibit she curated titled Eccentric Abstraction, highlighting the simultaneous seduction and repulsion of play with the texture/drape of skin. I adopt materials that attempted to
elicit a “visceral identification” with the viewer, that ensnare them in both the “desire to caress” and repulsion, “the reaction against certain forms and surfaces that take longer to comprehend” (Brenda Miller p.68).

I start by allowing myself to become conscious of my skin, pushing all my attention to the surface of my own body, I resist the urge to play the character experiencing this on it through scratching and twitching, I try to accomplish the action without comment. The blanket flows over me slowly; I pull it until it envelops my body. I attempt to be involuntary to it, letting the fabric puppet my body, expanding and contracting underneath it. The power of this object in motion is its constant reveals of new colors, its changes in texture, it is capable of morphing form with even slight change. I allow my breath to respond to impulse toward sound by resisting the language of words, working only with sound. After exiting the blanket, I stand on shaky legs, feeling what this new life is. Have I really changed? Yes. Is everything the same? Yes.

Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, in her writing “On the Performed Limits of Human” argues that “performance is itself a becoming, a laboratory in which to explore” (Parker-Starbuck). Though it is time specific and impermanent, it leaves traces of its communal experience with both the performer and the audience. “Becoming’s” can offer us something new, “something beyond skin, beyond a fixed sense of self,” an opportunity to see past our own blocks (Parker-Starbuck). My work, Becoming is a monstrous blanket created from tubes of finger knitting, a process using ones own hand as the looping hooks for creating form. This became the piece I went to when I was out of ideas, when I was unsure where to go next, when I needed to do something. It was not an answer in itself, it was a constant question, a practice of trusting the unknown of making, the patterns, the colors, the rhythms, and letting it unfold and become. Knitting, looping, hand wringing, and twitching is the practice I fall into as a practice of comfort when faced with daily anxieties, pain, and the constant struggle to harness my unreliable attention. I collected yarn over
a period of six months, cheap synthetic colors from craft stores, natural wools and raw silks from knitting circles, rope, biodegradable hemp, and unraveled sweaters. Alongside these acquired materials are gifted, hand created fibers, hand dyed linen in water colored purple and blue, hand spun yarn with beautiful asymmetrical line in earth tones. Once I had a pile of long knit tubes, I laid them out on the floor, or pinned them to piece of foam, arranging them in undulating lines, swirls of different textures and colors crossing over each other and I sewed them together.

Many of my performance strategies are derived from Bertolt Brecht’s alienation principle and Jerzy Grotowski’s concept of Via Negativa. Generated in the 1920’s Brecht’s theater was influenced by Hegelian philosophy, Marxist sociology, and the aesthetic theories of the Russian formalism. The basic idea is that, in contrast to a style of realism or naturalism in theater (or art practices) in which ideology is masked by convention and familiarity, Brecht’s theater sought to make ideology visible, to awaken self-awareness in the audience by making the familiar seem alien. This practice was highly utilized in the history of feminist performance artists (of the 60’s and 70’s) such as Carollee Schleeman act who sought to blur distinctions between subject and object and create tension between the concept of “acting” and lived experience. As performance theorist Rebecca Schneider has stated, the artist attempted to “stand beside herself…and thus “show the show” upon which rests the naturalizing ideological constructs of sexual hierarchy” (32). In my recent work, I attempt to perform my own words and stories while still maintaining an outside eye and falling into a reliving of the experience. One goal of this double view of the body, seeing both the interior and exterior world of the actor, is to create an experience that is authentically felt by the performer, but maintains enough space for the viewer to enter and engage.
I am interested in a generative process of seeking that is based on building structure off of improvisational research. This research involves improvising with my sculptures from an open place of curiosity. Instead of rooting each object into a particular framework, I want to embrace an attitude of intuitive play, challenging my own preconceptions of how it was constructed, its possibilities, and its meaning. Instead of dictating a prescribed role onto an object, I want to embrace and perform its multiplicity. I believe this embrace of the unknown and shedding of blockages is applicable to the studio practice of object construction.

In the late 1950’s Jerzy Grotowski, a Polish actor with an extensive and diverse background in theatrical techniques including Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Japanese and Chinese theater, moved to a space in Opole Poland with a group of performers and began his research into what he believed theater could be. Growtowksi’s acting training is reductive instead of additive, an approach he called the Via Negativa. Instead of thinking of building a skill set, learning tricks, and seeking mastery, the actor attempts to strip away their blockages and resistances so that there is nothing imposed between impulse and action. The actor must not hide from their uncomfortability and fear; they must be willing to live in the experience of unknowingness. In my process, I attempt to live openly in the deep waters of unknowing, trusting that fear, vulnerability, and uncertainty, both on stage and in my studio are not “something to be saved from. They are the very heart of acting” (Heuvel 5).

Influenced by Jerzy Grotowski, My personal definition of the artist is an individual who works publicly with their body, not simply trying to capture and embody the mundane movement of everyday life, but exploring the extremes of the human being. The artist seeks to discard their fears and free themselves from the everyday masks they wear and does not merely display their body, but sacrifices it. The artist seeks to give of his or herself, to confidently share their deepest
intimacy with confidence “as one gives of oneself in love” without defense. My hope is that the audience doesn’t specifically see my stories, but instead are invited to look inward at their own wounds, their bodies, their own personal history and simultaneously realize that pain is pain, and everyone in this room has a story capable of bringing us to our knees or opening our hearts.

The ultimate goal of this collapse and dissonance between life and art, body and object, acting and authenticity is to create an art practice that transforms life itself. A practice of political and personal agency. My performance research with this work does not follow a narrative series of events, but does contain a series of encounters, visual moments. The performance is mediation, not a character study; it is aiming at a deeper connection to metaphor. Instead of a character expressing and commenting on its becoming, I am seeking to embody the becoming, the character is the action, the action is the character.

As the sun goes down I wander, accompanied by the rustling of the plastic bags in my hands and the droning of cars. I freeze in the headlights until they pass, uncertain if motivated by privacy or fear. I do not touch the flowerbeds, these feel sacred, like paintings in the soil. I hunt for flowering bushes, the kind with tiny white and blue clusters of flowers that poke through fences and obscure the ground when they drop. I gather handfuls of small white petals, blackened roses fallen onto the pavement, pink blossoms knocked out of the trees by the squirrels. I visit craft stores and wander the plastic and silk oasis, plucking the stems I can almost smell.

In Welsh mythology, there is a story of a woman named Blodeuwedd, which translates to “flower face.” She was built to be the wife of a man cursed to never take a “human” bride. The piled flowers higher and higher in a pile, until what stood before them was a beautiful woman, not quite human. I am struck by the notion of a flower woman, a creature build of accumulation, of cut and pulled foliage that no longer rooted, slowly starves and turns brown. Like a carcass or
fallen tree in the forest, the body is crawling with life. I am building a woman of flowers [5]. She is dry, decayed, fresh, plastic, silk, milky, and smooth. Some parts of her blacken, others are preserved within airtight rubber, and she changes daily as the latex goes through chemical flux. She is at the whim of her body, its moods, its rhythms, and its changes.

I am fascinated by perceived boundaries, with the resilience and the vulnerability of the skin, the vast organ that is our most exterior, yet for myself, the most private. It is the landscape of our historical markers, our wounds, and the recipient to acts of love. Much of my work is influenced by my own coming to terms with the tension of my greatest gifts/strengths and weaknesses stemming from the same source, my vulnerability and sensitivity. With my hypersensitivity to touch, history with anxiety, and proclivity to disassociating and obsessive daydreaming, it is not surprising in retrospect that my experiences with sexual violence resulted in a six month episode of Post Traumatic Stress Injury, an experience which drastically changed my worldview, and threw me into a new understanding of my body and its function in space.

In her book *On Longing*, Susan Stewart remarks on the paradoxical nature of the body as both a container and the contained. Due to this paradoxical doubling, our attention is “focused upon the boundaries or limits of the body (...) those areas where there are cuts and gaps on the bodies surface” (104). These areas form a body of parts, what she describes through the words of Bakhtin as “the grotesque body (...) a body in the act of becoming” (104). For myself, this “becoming” body is tied to Julia Kristeva’s concept of the “abject”, what the self must expel or push away to maintain its subjectivity. I am especially interested in Kristeva’s conception of abjection as a verb, “to abject is to undergo the operation of expelling the alien within” (Kristeva 93). But are the body’s limits only to be found in the ready-made gaps, the nose, vagina, anus,
and eyes? Jose Gil argues that it is the entire surface of the body, the skin, which opens the interior world of the body to the exterior. In both performance and everyday existence, the bodies presence affects the space around it, giving it “a diversity of textures (…) as if they were enveloping things with a surface similar to the skin” (Gil 22). The body secretes itself into space, creating a skin. Regardless of this dual understanding, I am most interested in what happens during or after this expulsion, what happens to the subject when looking directly and touching the alien within, the part of them they fear will destabilize their humanity? Once expelled, the abject does not suddenly disappear, it endures, it haunts. The body will not be forgotten. Where do the interior and the exterior confound their boundaries and perhaps demand a new language, a new subjectivity?

I am all hands. The detritus around me rises and falls in geological formations, layers of accumulation. My stretching feet push through plastic bags of fabric scraps, chopped off bits of embroidery floss mixing with cat hair in a creeping moss across the carpet. What does it mean, to lose one’s tongue? What does it mean to stop speaking? I feel trapped here, my tongue is hibernating down my throat and my limbs feel frozen. I would like to reheat this cup of tea, but my body is elsewhere. But my hands never freeze. My fingers fly on needles, wrapping yarn around them like maypole dancers, my palms open to hold the space in front of me while I wait to unthaw. Like the coral in Nic’s tank, I am all hands, delicately waving from a calcium shell.

In her book *Textiles: The Whole Story*, Beverly Gordon describes the unique and intimate bond human beings experience with fabric, going so far as to speak of clothing as “a kind of second skin” (Gordon 30). She references cloth as having living qualities in its capacity to absorb, it takes in human bodily fluids, properties from the air surrounding us, and also absorbs sound waves. Due to clothes intimate relationship to our bodies, many experience emotional attachments and even haunting presence in uninhabited clothing. Essayist Peter StallyBrass
articulated this ghosting when he wrote of the experience of putting on his deceased partner’s suit jacket “he felt that Allon wore (him). He was there in the wrinkles in the elbows…he was there in the stains at the bottom…he was there in the smell” (Liebman 30).

After building costumes for *SheMyth*, an original work directed by Kym Longhi and performed by Kirsten Frantzich for her thesis work in Depth psychology, I was motivated, inspired, driven back to performance. I was so moved by the generosity, the bravery of a body in space, falling and flinging into the unknown, leaning into the support of strangers and friends that in a Bed and Breakfast somewhere in a Wisconsin farming community, I did something I believed for 6 years I would never do. I forgave the man, the lover who raped me. Not only that, I named and clarified what happened between us, and I forgave myself. I contacted him, spoke to him through e-mail, and the words rattled off the keyboard and illuminated my heart,

“I have tried for 6 years to forget you, to move on and there is still something stuck, a smell, a lingering, a scrap that will not come clean. I am a different and worse person for having known you, but I have changed. I want to live this beautiful life, I want to love, and have sex, and make beautiful art that blows people open to the joys and horrors of living, and I can’t do any of that and hate you this much. There isn’t room. I am sick of living with your ghost. I forgive you. I forgive you. I forgive you. You are not defined exclusively by my story, you must be somebody to someone, and I hope you are a better man than the one I knew.”

I am seduced, (yes, seduced, lured, perhaps manipulated into sympathy by or driven to propagandistic rage) by the Greek myth of Philomela; a woman whose tongue was cut out after her sister’s husband raped her. Voiceless and locked in a wooden hut with a loom, she
saves herself by weaving a coat inscribed with her story and manages to have it sent to her sister Procne, whose grief and rage was so deep she slaughtered her children, cooked them, and fed them to her husband. In the end, Philomela, Procne, and husband/rapist are all transformed into birds.

My fascination with this story is not in the violence and dramatic elements so much as in the image of this injured woman weaving, and my hunger to know what this garment looked like, what she used, how long it took, and if it was birthed with hands dripping with blood and tears, or calm fingers whose tug and pull brought the mind back from insanity. It strikes me in the heart, this idea that perhaps it will not be words, ideas, or even other people who save us, but the act of making itself.

What started as a fascination turned into an obsession, a constant companion that sparked advice on crewel stitching from my hermit neighbor, incited irritation from friends whose Friday nights don’t typically involve emergency trips to Michael’s Crafts, and induced mild horror in my mother, who vetoed embroidered genitalia at the dinner table. I embroidered a series of drawings onto a men’s dress shirt depicting a woman turning into a frog and morphing into a tree [4]. What I did not anticipate is that embroidering a square inch took around an hour, and 5 drawings each easily filling a standard sheet of notebook paper. My skin, sweat, blood, and pulse is embedded into the surface of this shirt. The hand-stitched line forms a kind of deliberate and yet meandering path. The imperfection and flaws in sizing and spacing I hope pull the viewer back and forth between the object as a whole, and the micro-focus of how the work is pieced together.

The shirt now begins at the collar with a hint of its masculine origins, but from the chest down it grows unrecognizable. My aim was to change its surface through continuously cutting
and mending, patching it until the original material is perhaps completely obliterated, but the form remains. Philomela’s coat becomes an uncontainable dress, patched together in a long train that becomes a lake, or stretch out into tattered wings as she imagines her life as a bird. I wrestled with its installation, but ultimately, it seemed to choose how it wanted to exist in space. Lying “face down” on the floor with the arms outstretched to the side, the shredded hem expanding tendrils into space, I am struck by my immediate identification with this gesture of soft surrender. There is nothing that feels heavy, the white cotton, the clashing colors; the fabric seems to float on still water. Like a snow angel, its shape calls out to body that once filled it.

The mythologies in my mind are swarming with hands building women, packing them into molds with wet sand, scraping them out of blocks of stone, seaming skin together with thread, arranging each part like a bouquet of wild flowers. I pull off layers of nylon skin, the cotton and stuffing showing through like white fat, collecting around me like a soft snowfall. The head comes free, popped out of the torso like a cork and followed by a spine of wire and pipe cleaners, like small colorful berries, or electrical wires. Holding her cheeks in my hands I lay my forehead on hers and try to believe this is not violence; the surface was masking the beauty underneath.

Europa’s Bull and Echo went through a material evolution, and in this exhibition are shown stripped of their excess material, reflecting an earlier impulse, but still holding the history of their changes. Originally these two pieces where part of a piece titled Ripping Apart, I created two large-scale figurative puppets with outer surfaces of hand sewn nylon stockings [1]. The translucence of the nylon contrasts with the denser seams of the stitching, creating the effect of a network of dark scars or veins streaking across the figure in meandering paths. The figure of the woman has exaggerated body proportions, small shoulders and breasts resting on top of a large belly and wide hips with a dark colored, plate sized vulva. She is the manifestation of my own
imagined origin story about a man who wakes up alone in the world and builds a companion out of the detritus around him, Frankensteining her together. When she fails to be the lover or daughter he hoped, he rapes her in desperation to gain control, justifying it by telling her that she is made of garbage. This narrative is far from an optimistic story of alternative origins, and in fact partially enactis western patriarchal models of gendered behavior, male aggression, the woman as essentialized other, and the use of sexual violence to control female behavior. However, I believe that embedded within this story and performance are threads of resistance and active critique, and its performative framework pushes against normalized gendered ideologies by re-performing oppression.

The narrative of these two sculptures was disseminated in a doubled storytelling, my own personal story spliced alongside its mythic counterpart, jumping without transitions back and forth between each narrative. My personal story described an encountered stranger who sexually assaulted me. My fractured memories of this night were originally that I was an easy victim, who offered him so little physical resistance that though I was coerced, insulted, and taken advantage of, I wasn’t even sure I deserved to call it assault. However, upon revisiting the memory, small acts I had given no thought to began to drift to the surface in small pools of resistance, one being a conversation about fathers and daughters in which he stated that his daughter was “not going to be a slut” like me. I concluded the performance of this piece by returning to my chair among my peers/audience and speaking only to the girl sitting next to me, “after he was finished with me, he asked if I wanted to stay and watch a movie.”

The poetry and force of this piece resided in its shifts between bodily states, the everyday routine injected with violence, a violence that is presented as not alien to daily life, but produced from it. I strove to resist a simple, discrete distinction between victim and violator by
introducing multiple points of view, the justifications and perspectives of both sides. By actively resisting the urge to see the female victim as only defined by her relationship to the perpetrator, the perpetrator also, has an existence outside of their actions, whether or not one wants to see them.

Even as I type these words, I struggle through the impulse to delete them. I am uncomfortable imagining this knowledge of my personal circumstances being public. I wonder which is preferable, to numb your own tongue and keep swollen with secrets, convincing yourself that you are some sort of Pandora’s Box filled with garbage, or to just push all those secrets out and forever have them hung across the sky, to wear your scarlet letter and hope you don’t crumble under its weight. All I knew is that personal, professional, or artistic, these stories were my blockages, something I needed to confront, burn through, soften around, expel, and witness.

After that performance, these pieces felt oddly finished, fixed in a manner I do not strive towards in my work. They were the vehicles that carried me through my resistances and fear, but they were also something more, something less illustrative, something less fixed by my own narrative. Like my friend’s pet tarantula, which periodically spooks me even more than usual by seemingly performing mitosis and splitting into two identical spiders, these pieces are coming out of their skin, juxtaposing decay with growth. For both Echo [2] and Europa’s Bull [3] I cut off their outer layers, not skinning, but shedding the layers of stitched nylon and cotton covering their frames. What remains are the initial impulses of making, the immediate, intuitive process of action followed by impulse.

Europa’s Bull is a “gesture armature”, the skeletal structure of an earlier work stripped down to its bare elements, welded steel, tomato cages, multiple gages of knit wire, nylon, wood,
duct tape, and pipe cleaners. What allures me about this piece is that its making was based in stopgaps. Each part of it was placed with intention, supporting the next part attached. No section is decorative, each is meant to bind, to hold, and to keep together. The bandage of plaster acts as a cast, supporting a weak point, a pipe cleaner is a suture, plastic wrap binds large sections like connective tissue, and broken tree branches washed up from the Red River of the North gesture outward showing me where I intended to add more limbs. The piece has two obvious “limbs” one curving upward made of a tomato cage, the other mirroring it downward that I welded out of steel and bears the last remaining tatters of nylon skin. Fastened to the wall, the shifting scale in knit gages in the wire function as crosshatching, pattern and shading, and the form’s bulbous shape and protruding appendages reference the body of a beast.

Echo is woman’s head, bulbous, shades of flesh tones with a white undertone, like an unearthed root vegetable suspended from the ceiling by a webbing of stretched nylon. Protruding from her neck is a tangle of silver and copper wires, coiled and bundled around each other, held together by green, orange, yellow, and blue pipe cleaners. As opposed to feeling beheaded or victimized, she holds a commanding presence, assisted by her intense gaze and her expression. Her chin tilts downward slightly and her glass eyed gaze falls on the embroidered face of a woman looking up from the work on the floor. The diagonally focused gaze becomes a circle of viewing, who is seeing who? The power of this narrative for me, lies in its openness, it is a suggestion, a single gesture with moving layers. One active figure encounters another passive figure, a woman sees her reflection in a pond, Echo mourns her unrequited love of Narcissus after he becomes a bed of flowers, an act of mutual witnessing.

I strive to encounter the underside, journey between layers, move through resistances, follow impulses, and attempt to inspire the viewer to journey alongside me, understanding my
movements through their own bodies. I believe that moving beyond the skin, creating a dynamic movement between surface and interior, swimming into the waters of the unknown and learning to live there, the artist begins to feel the language and creativity of the body. Because I am and have a body, I am capable of understanding the bodies of others, as they are capable of understanding me. Within this body of work, I stove to push past my own resistances by confronting the stories and topics I feared would destabilized me, but instead they brought me back to my humanity. I believe that the art can be a reminder, a beacon, an object that calls to the viewer, inviting, demanding, seducing them into seeing something inside them that they have forgotten, or set aside. When I started this program I had the desire to go seeking in the work, but I definitely thought I knew what I would find. I was looking in the mirror and seeing violence, and struggle, and some thrashing on the surface. I started off by finding the violence in myself, finding the survivor and now, I’ve started to find the beauty, the softness. I’m learning how to float, how to stop fighting to breath and to just be.

I twist my anxiety around each finger: pulling it off and watching them grow farther and farther away. The line escapes me, snaking around my toes, meandering under the couch, occasionally stretching into a steep angle when my cat claims it as a toy. Despite its soft associations, there is nothing benign about the ferocity of my repetitive fingers. I wrap myself in the blanket and I breathe in making, the joys and worries catching against the callouses on my fingers. Softening has been the greatest fight in my life. The difference between floating and drowning is thrashing, and I am rising to the surface.
Image List

1. *I’ll grow back* (installation), nylon, knit wire, cotton batting, found wood, steel, latex, flowers, plastic flowers, fabric scraps, yarn, wire mesh, 144x180 in, 2014


3. *Echo*, Nylon, knit wire, human hair, cotton batting, found wood, wire mesh, pipe cleaners, 16x45 in, 2014

4. *Echo* (detail), Nylon, knit wire, human hair, cotton batting, found wood, wire mesh, pipe cleaners, 16x45 in, 2014

5. *Echo* (detail), Nylon, knit wire, human hair, cotton batting, found wood, wire mesh, pipe cleaners, 16x45 in, 2014


11. *Europa’s Bull*, Nylon, knit wire, cotton batting, found wood, wire mesh, welded steel, tomato cages, 55x40 in, 2013

12. *Europa’s Bull* (detail), Nylon, knit wire, cotton batting, found wood, wire mesh, welded steel, tomato cages, 55x40 in, 2013

13. *Europa’s Bull* (detail), Nylon, knit wire, cotton batting, found wood, wire mesh, welded steel, tomato cages, 55x40 in, 2013

14. *Becoming*, yarn, polyester, wool, silk, linen, 125x150 in, 2014

15. *Becoming* (detail) yarn, polyester, wool, silk, linen, 125x150 in, 2014

16. *Becoming* (detail) yarn, polyester, wool, silk, linen, 125x150 in, 2014

17. *I’ll Grow Back*, Dried flowers, plastic flowers, moss, latex, found wood, wire mesh, knit wire, 84x36x18 in, 2013

18. *I’ll Grow Back* (detail) Dried flowers, plastic flowers, moss, latex, found wood, wire mesh, knit wire, 84x36x18 in, 2013


20. *Flying* (detail), nylon, cotton batting, 15x20 in, 2014
Works Cited


Grotowski's Influence on American Actor Training. (a roundtable), Kevin Kuhlke, Wendy Vanden Heuvel, Steve Wangh, Richard Schechner, (Chair)March 8, 2009


Liebman, Caroline.


One day, when you look back, you’ll realize how much you have grown and you can encourage others with your story :) . It’s Friday, yay! Is there anything that you’d like to celebrate today? #glimpseofblessings #brushpenlettering #handlettered... 2× speed video ΔÝŻν I love exploring surfaces to write on, and this time, I get the opportunity to write on plastic glass. It is a fun and inspirational piece for parties! What surprises me is the fact that @kuretakezig_usa painty metallic works very well and smoothly on the surface! I prefer fine strokes to thick strokes, so I think I have found my f Glimpse of Blessings | Jenni.