

**The  
Poetry  
of  
Transcendence**

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**“An awareness of death is what connects us to objects through our own sensate bodies, and an interrogation of objects mirrors our own mortality. Sensation and imagination defy the inevitable passage from life to death.”**

**—Josephine Halvorson**



rustling nostalgia, 2013  
discarded painting and cement, 32" x 26"

**“To mark a grave is to extend the life of the dead through the memory and imagination of the living.”**

**—Josephine Halvorson**

Wild flowers, 2013  
Discarded painting, Cement, 22" x 26"



**"I See painting as a place to acknowledge the time revealed by object that are in the process of disappearing when legibility is more subject to erasures and erasure more subject to legibility."**

**—Josephine Halvorson**



Elusive Butterfly , 2013  
Discarded painting, Cement, 18" x 16"



Abstract

As an artist, I want to create artwork that presents the liminal space between life and death so that it enables the viewer to think about their own loss and invisible mortality. I want the viewer to imagine various stories including their own stories behind the objects that I created. I feel destiny owned me in this direction.

Disappeared  
bridge

A small pedestrian bridge in my neighborhood in Seoul was a part of my everyday life; I crossed it daily. One day, it was taken down overnight without notice and the absence of the bridge made the surrounding area immediately foreign and isolated despite my intimate familiarity of the area. I took a lot of time to remap the surroundings and realize that the space is same except the vanished bridge. I just couldn't believe that the bridge is gone and it just happened while I was sleeping. I was bewildered at the site of the sudden change as well as by the fact that I am the only one who cares about the disappeared bridge. The invisible trace of the bridge impressed me so much and gave me a radical point of view on object's effectiveness and annihilability to define an environment and form one's memory. I believe that this happening was a subplot of my upcoming things in my life and art.

Soon after, I left Korea to study in New York and started living by myself without a family and friends. In New York, everything was different. A lot of things happened and changed and kept leading me to a different environment. Two years later since I have lived in New York, I started working in production at an apparel company and at the same period of time, I got married with a man who became a supporter of me studying Fine Arts later. A year later, I was laid off from the company. It gave me a depression and was not easy at all than I expected to get over it. I had to remap my life again from this sudden change that I didn't expect. After half a year of thinking, I decided to study Fine Arts, which was what I really wanted to do since I was young and gave up for the lack of confidence.

Since I started to create this art, all of my experiences of loss and the trauma from it including the disappeared bridge event became important inspirations to find my own subject matter. I was surprised

by that there were so many objects, actually all of the objects in the world, have distinctive histories and traces. When the objects that triggered my memories were turned into significant objects for my work by doing so, I wanted to express all kinds of losses, we inevitably experience in life. These objects with their solemn traces can be reinterpreted as a kind of death in a matter of speaking, and perhaps a kind of remembering.

Remembering  
—Shadow  
of  
Original

My early works are simple oil paintings on canvas, broadly based on my disappearing bridge experience. In them, tension exists between space and its elements, most of which are people. Continuing the development of my work, I attempted to create illusions in space to reproduce the confusion that arose from the bridge experience. It was trompe l'oeil of sensation that allowed me to experiment with that idea. What is an image and what is really there were my questions when I painted objects around us. I placed my painted image next to its object. For example, I duplicated entryways on canvas and installed the work next to the original objects. Even though the physical dimensions are identical, the objects in the paintings exist in a different space, arousing tension through the fracture of ordinary expectations. And most of time people couldn't realize that one of them is a painting. From that experience, it tells us that what we expect to see and how it is embedded our mind and affects psychologically. We cherish invisible afterimages like a shadow even though the object is not existed any more and try to remember it at the place where it was there.

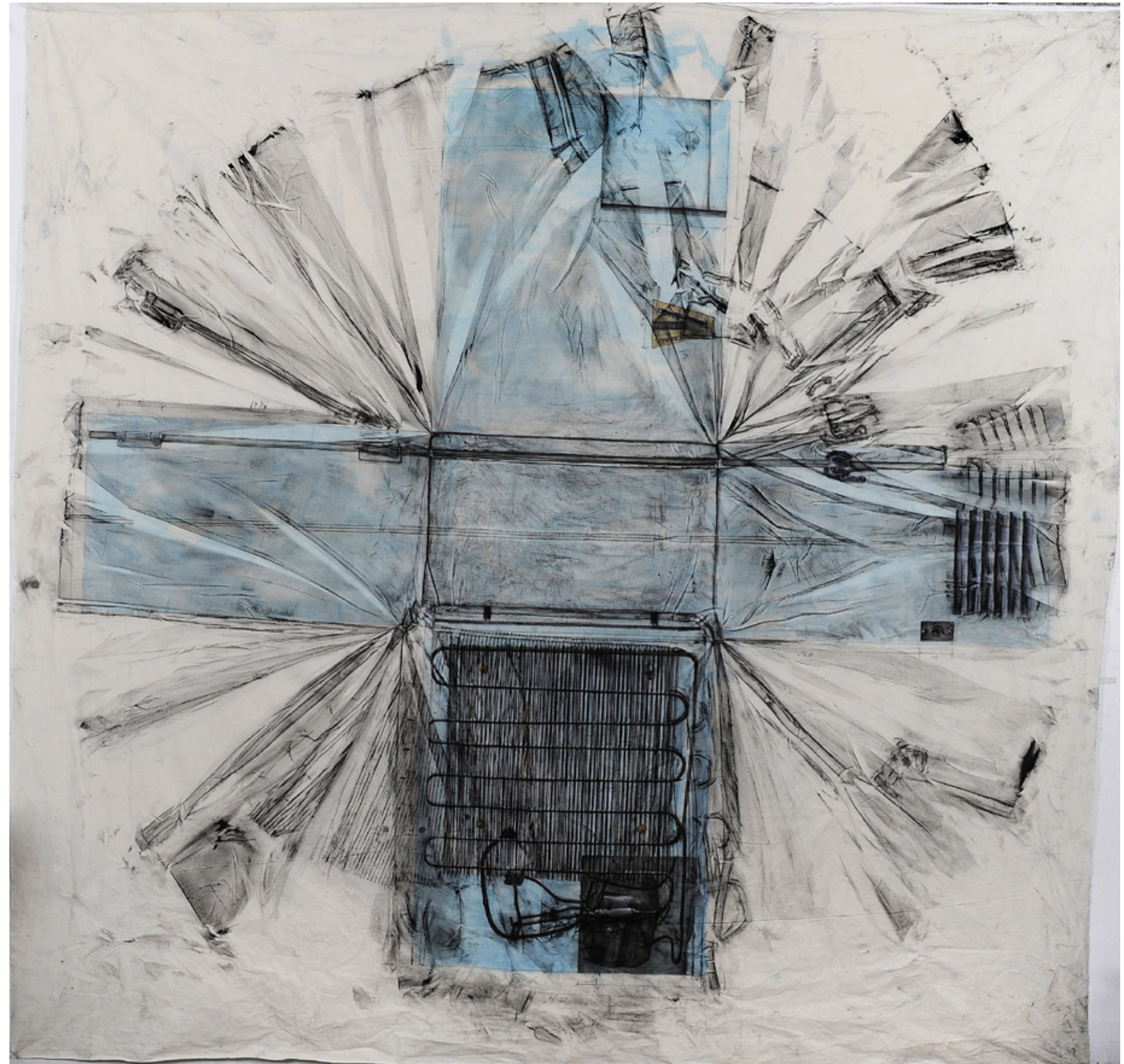
During this process, I drew ample amounts of inspiration from Christo and Jeanne-Claude and Robin Rhode – finding beauty in daily lives using easily accessible materials such as fabrics and charcoal, turning public spaces into their canvas, and inviting viewers to actively interact with their work. I experimented with similar site-specificity in my Turnstile series by installing them in busy subway entryways thereby turning the public space into my canvas and inviting the commuters to interact with my work.

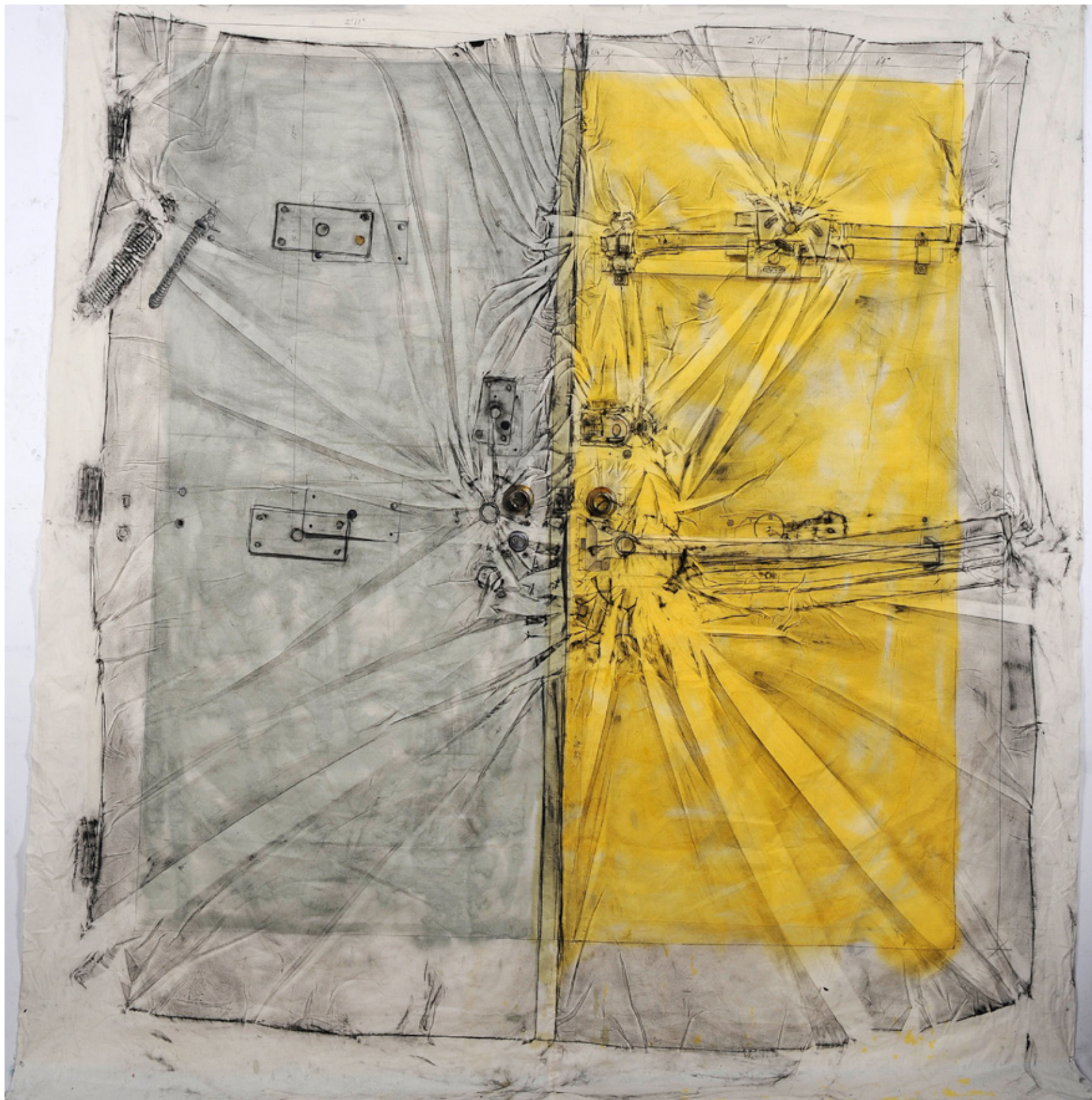
Further interests in the object's existential matter led my work to be broken free from the two dimensional canvas. I wanted to experiment our mental processes and memories to "own" the object. I tried to fully

deconstruct the Euclidian perspective, simultaneously expressing the three-dimensional physical world as well as the two-dimensional canvas. This was done by wrapping the object with muslin and painting on it, then unwrapping the work. Before doing that, I also painted a planner figure again all the dimensions I measured in detail so that two different images – an image by rubbing and an image by painting – overlapped each other. This approach is displayed in Staircase and the Fire Door series, where all the information of the three-dimensional object is present but exists in a distorted form through the conflict with the two-dimensional medium. The finite, variable and extinguishable nature of the physical world is thereby conveyed.



Blue Refrigerator, 2011  
 oil, black gesso & charcoal on fabric, 95" x 98"





Fire Exit, 2011  
oil, black gesso & charcoal on fabric, 111" x 80"

**“That could stay, not forever, because we believe that nothing exists that is forever, not even the dinosaurs, but if well maintained, it could remain for four to five thousand years. And that is definitely not forever.”**

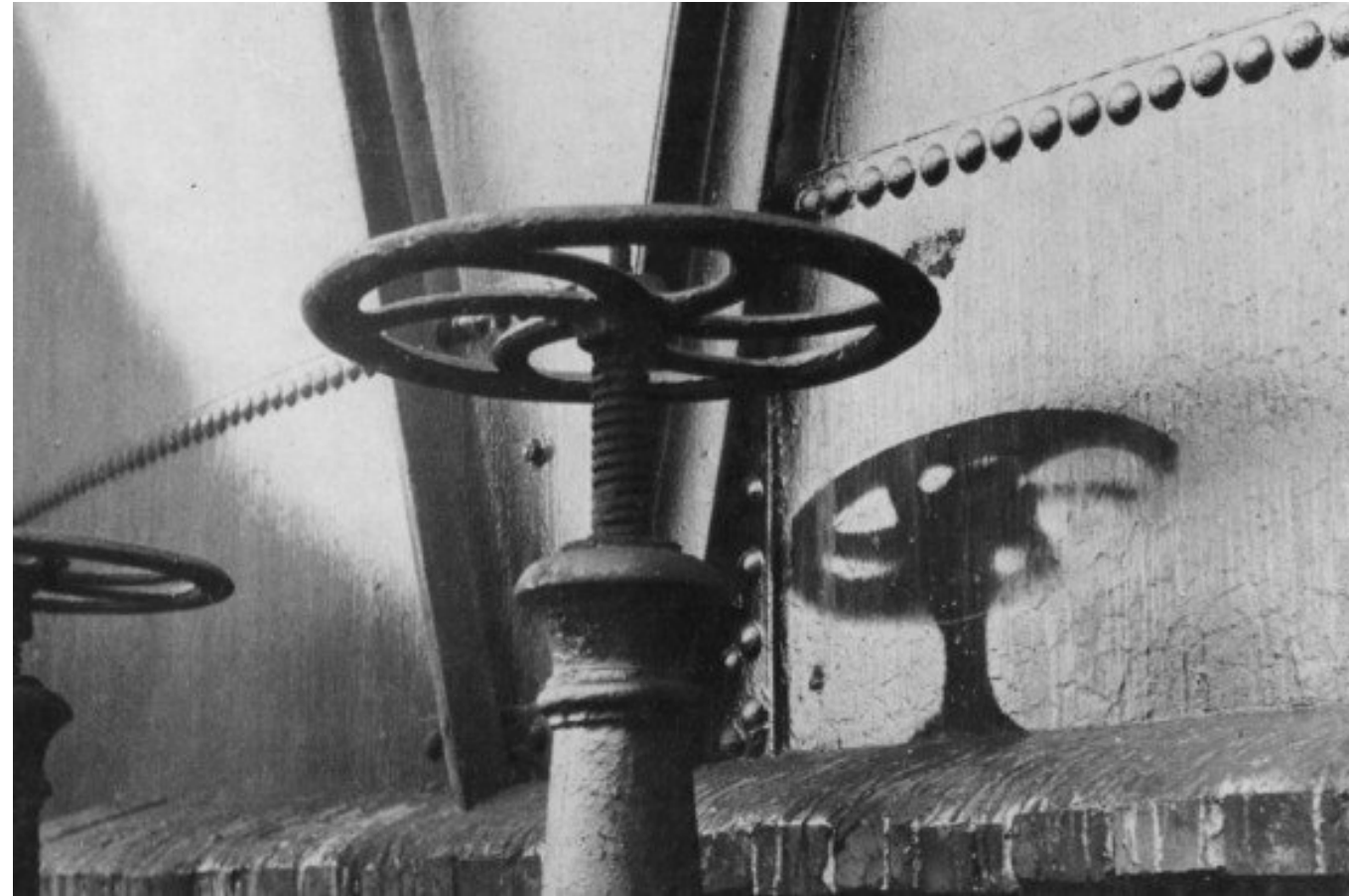
**–Christo**



Pompeii Victim

The  
lost  
city  
of  
Pompeii

Mount Vesuvius, a volcano near the Bay of Naples in Italy, is hundreds of thousands of years old and has erupted more than 50 times. Its most famous eruption took place in the year 79 A.D., when the volcano buried the ancient Roman city of Pompeii under a thick carpet of volcanic ash. The dust "poured across the land" like a flood, one witness wrote, and shrouded the city in "a darkness...like the black of closed and unlighted rooms." Two thousand people died, and the city was abandoned for almost as many years. When a group of explorers rediscovered the site in 1748, they were surprised to find that—underneath a thick layer of dust and debris—Pompeii was mostly intact. The buildings, artifacts and skeletons left behind in the buried city have taught us a great deal about everyday life in the ancient world (History).



The  
permanent  
shadow  
of  
Hiroshima

Hiroshima was an event that left both the emotional shadows of tragedy and also permanent physical shadows on the landscape of Hiroshima, Japan. The great force of the nuclear weapon created these shadows. Thermal radiation travels in a straight line, which means that when an object blocks it, it creates a shadow. These shadows still exist around Japan today. For example, a wheel blocked some of the radiation and created a shadow against the nearby wall. This was a very common occurrence across Japan. Sometimes, there were shadows left of people, but no bodies found. This resulted from the extreme heat of the explosion, which vaporized the bodies, leaving the shadows behind. The shadows are a unique occurrence from the nuclear explosion and they remain even after many years. These shadows stand by as a reminder of a horrific moment in history. They serve as a reminder of the value of human life (Omg-facts).



In  
Memoriam

I grew up with my grand father being a painter. My grandfather's paintings always astonished me. In my grandfather's house, many of his expressionist oil paintings displayed on the wall, and they always impressed me and I grew attached to them. When he moved to an apartment from his beautiful two stories house, he got rid of most of his paintings. When I heard that, I was very sad.

In SVA, I wanted to continue to create an artwork that presents the liminal space between the life and death so that it enables the viewers to think about their own loss and mortality. I wanted the viewer to imagine a lot of various stories behind the objects that I created. And my first project for all of these started by destiny when I visited a flea market in Brooklyn.

On a recent visit to a flea market in Brooklyn, I saw a number of abandoned old paintings similar to my grand father's paintings.

It was a depressing sight at the flea market, and I felt nostalgia for my grandfather's paintings. I was moved to buy some of these paintings and wanted to give them new lives indeterminately. At my studio, I wasn't sure about what to do with these old paintings. I tried the frottage skill on them as I used to do before, but it didn't look good for me. In keeping with my interest, I talked to my professor about my issue, and I was told about the residents of the ancient city of Pompeii that were killed instantly by a pyroclastic blast as well as the everlasting shadows of Hiroshima, which was caused by nuclear explosion during WWII in Japan. Both were very inspirational and it lead me to use cement to preserve the paintings permanently.

I poured water mixed cement over the found paintings and removed them from the cement after they dried. The brush strokes and the paints left on the surface of the cement enabled me

to imagine how the original paintings looked like. Through a process of destroying the paintings and preserving its traces in heavy, solid concrete, my visceral reactions and embedded memories on the traditional paintings were revealed. It was also the moment of remapping my memories on my grandfather's paintings and sublimating them in art.



Missing home, 2013  
Discarded painting, Cement, 48" x 42"



Installation View, 2014



The  
Art  
of  
Disappearing

by Sarah Holland-Batt

The moon that broke on the fencepost will not hold.  
Desire will not hold. Memory will not hold.  
The house you grew up in: its eaves; its attic will not hold.  
The still lives and the Botticellis will not hold.  
The white peaches in the bowl will not hold.  
Something is always about to happen.  
You get married, you change you name,  
and the sun you wore like a scarf on your wrist has vanished.  
It is an art, this ever more escaping grasp of things;  
imperatives will not still it—no stay or wait or keep  
to seize the disappeared and hold it clear, like pain.  
So tell the car idling in the street to go on;  
tell the skirmish of chesspieces to go on  
tell the scraps of paper, the lines to go on.  
It is winter: that means the blossoms are gone,  
that means the days are getting shorter.  
And the dark water flows endlessly on.

“Our relationship to the objects we love runs all the way through our lives as human beings – from a toddler’s security blanket through the lovingly cared-for car or a lady’s designer handbag to the collection of objects that has been gathered together over the years. Our relationship to these things involves extremely personal matters: identity and how we see ourselves; our sense of where we belong in society; our own biography.”

—Annette Schäfer, “We Are What We Have”

Extraordinary  
life  
of  
ordinary  
objects

My nephew, Lim, when she was a baby, she was always playing with a small blanket until it got really tattered. Every time my aunt tried to take the blanket from her, she cried at the top of her voice like she lost her country from an enemy. It was quite fascinating to watch her behavior for me and I was wondering what makes Lim treat the old and shabby blanket as a valuable thing in an obsessive way and why she feels anxiety when it is taken away from her. I used to think that this obsessive behavior to a certain object only happens to a baby as a distinctive characteristic from an adult. However, I realized that most of adults have this kind of psychology on the objects that they have consciously and subconsciously.

As an example, when we are married, we wear rings to suggest that we are not single anymore. It shows that where we belong personally and socially. Wearing a wedding ring is a sign of the commitment we are making to our spouse and to our marriage. It’s about a relationship and a vocation, and about God’s blessing on that relationship. The ring becomes, as it were, a public profession of your marriage and what it continues to mean to you.

Objects that a person carries define the person and the person’s emotional attachment to it grows when he or she cares about it, even though it is not that valuable unlike the diamond ring to others like my nephew’s ragged blanket.

It really applies to my experiences that I mentioned in this essay. I had a great amount of emotional attachment to my grand father’s paintings. I was thrust into a fantastic atmosphere whenever I looked at it. It made me proud of my family and myself. It had me dream to be an artist. When they were discarded, I was the only one who cares about the paintings so much, even more than my grand father who painted them. I felt like a thread that

links myself to the paintings to the pleasant emotions to the desire to become an artist was snapped.

Regardless of relative value, loss of something valuable and the traumatic experience we receive when they are gone from our lives became an important subject matter for me and I want to develop my work visually based on that. I can give an extraordinary life to ordinary objects through bringing them into my art. Recently, I started drawing, which is depicting small objects around me along with a new sculpture using cement and a real object like a shopping cart. It is a different gesture to express my thoughts on common objects in a more playful way than before. And I believe that there are a lot of methods with an endless possibility to convey my message of the relationship between a person and the objects, which are fully able to represent human being’s life and death.

Ode  
to  
things

by Pablo Neruda

I have a crazy,  
crazy love of things.  
I like pliers,  
and scissors.  
I love  
cups,  
rings,  
and bowls –  
not to speak, or course,  
of hats.  
I love  
all things,  
not just  
the grandest,  
also  
the  
infinite-  
ly  
small –  
thimbles,  
spurs,  
plates,  
and flower vases.

Oh yes,  
the planet  
is sublime!  
It's full of pipes  
weaving  
hand-held  
through tobacco smoke,  
and keys  
and salt shakers –  
everything,  
I mean,  
that is made  
by the hand of man, every little thing:  
shapely shoes,  
and fabric,  
and each new  
bloodless birth  
of gold,  
eyeglasses  
carpenter's nails,  
brushes,  
clocks, compasses,  
coins, and the so-soft  
softness of chairs.

Mankind has  
built

oh so many  
perfect  
things!  
Built them of wool  
and of wood,  
of glass and  
of rope:  
remarkable  
tables,  
ships, and stairways.

I love  
all  
things,  
not because they are  
passionate  
or sweet-smelling  
but because,  
I don't know,  
because  
this ocean is yours,  
and mine;  
these buttons  
and wheels  
and little  
forgotten  
treasures,  
fans upon  
whose feathers  
love has scattered  
its blossoms,  
glasses, knives and  
scissors –  
all bear  
the trace  
of someone's fingers  
on their handle or surface,  
the trace of a distant hand  
lost  
in the depths of forgetfulness.

I pause in houses,  
streets and  
elevators  
touching things,  
identifying objects  
that I secretly covet;  
this one because it rings,  
that one because  
it's as soft  
as the softness of a woman's hip,  
that one there for its deep-sea color,  
and that one for its velvet feel.

O irrevocable  
river  
of things:  
no one can say  
that I loved  
only  
fish,  
or the plants of the jungle and the field,  
that I loved  
only  
those things that leap and climb, desire,  
and survive.  
It's not true:  
many things conspired  
to tell me the whole story.  
Not only did they touch me,  
or my hand touched them:  
they were  
so close  
that they were a part  
of my being,  
they were so alive with me  
that they lived half my life  
and will die half my death.

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