

“Constructing the Memory-Self”

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**“A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Bachelor of Arts at Kalamazoo College.”**

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“Constructing the Memory-Self” is a two-quarter Art SIP installation featuring the mediums of video, photography, sculpture, and book arts. The installation explores the themes of building and memory preservation. The main idea behind this project is that when one enters a space they leave a memory or aura behind as well as take a memory from the building space with them. This installation incorporates both personal memories within the composed music and historical memories within the video footage.

Narrative Description

Previous work

Whenever I create a piece of art, I have to make sure it is something I am very passionate about. There are a few common themes that are noticeable throughout my body of work: abandonment, urbanity, elders, music, and edginess. I choose to display these themes through the medium of video, and sometimes photography. For me, video is a great way to tell a story, and the medium allows me to choose to leave images exactly as the human eye sees them or to alter them into some alternate visual realm. I love to tell stories, but to also make people think in an abstract way about them, especially visually. I am also very into technology, and use that to my advantage during my filmmaking.

Clandestine: The Beginnings was my first attempt at experimental filmmaking. I made this film my senior year of high school, and it involved a mysterious box and key that housed a metaphoric death. My first go at filmmaking had many continuity errors, including the change of one of the actors half way through the film and an ever failing editing program. I did however learn how to string together a story full of oddities and imagery that poked at the surrealist realm. The passion for filmmaking that was "different" than everyone else's, especially that of my classmates, was kindled during this year.

Deterioration, an experimental video piece I made about Alzheimer's and mental decay, was my second attempt at experimental filmmaking, which took place the spring of my sophomore year. In this piece, I played a lot with filters in Final Cut and pieced together a solid emotional film with interesting visuals. I am still very

attached to this film and its location at Noble Lodge in Kalamazoo, which is a location I used for my SIP as well. I have always been interested in psychological treatments, and abandoned buildings, especially psychiatric facilities. All of the visuals for this piece were filmed at Noble Lodge in black and white and in varying degrees of blur, symbolizing the decaying mind. All of the audio was a tape-recorded phone conversation with a family friend about her husband who was slowly deteriorating from Alzheimer's. It is such a sad disease, especially for the family of the victim, and I am still honored that I was able to tell her story. This film was recently entered in to the American Neurology Film Festival.

Mirrored Visions was a film I made during my independent study I had with Dhera Strauss. I played a lot with effects in this piece especially regarding elements of motion on film. In this film a girl is running throughout the woods and has to face people making fun of her, but what she is really facing is a mirrored image of herself. In this piece I also experimented with audio, trying to manipulate it to enhance the experience for the viewer.

Beautiful Mourning, was the first experimental fashion film I made, and the first non-test film I made using my Canon DSLR. Shooting on a DSLR for video was a whole different game in itself, but with 1080p at 18 megapixels you can't beat the quality. With this film I was really able to explore the element of color, trying out different film looks to give it that 1970's, Super 8 feel. I also worked on my continuity shots, organizing and directing the actor and each of the shots like a filmmaker. I also explored the element of horror in this film, which I liked and hope to continue to use.

Most of the ideas for my advanced work were spawned from the sub-conscious mind. The concept of what it literally means to be in a dream is captured in the video *Le Cauchemar*. In this piece fragments of a specific dream are pieced together into a mosaic of black and white, super-saturated, blurry, and crisp to replicate the essence of this experience. Humans each remember these occurrences at various stages of clarity, so my goal was to capture that aesthetic. The use of the montage technique can also be seen in this film, which is meant to resemble a period of time being repeated.

I also aim to accomplish a sense of disorientation or confusion. In *Your Beauty Disgusts Me*, sixty-four Barbie dolls create a miniature world in the corner of the space. I hope this arrangement forces viewers to question their relationship to the dolls. By leaving the Barbie dolls naked with just letters on their torsos, I aim to have the viewers draw similarities between the bareness of the dolls and the silhouetted form of the living human being on the television. The silhouetted body was also used to display a generic form, similar to the non-specific appearance of the dolls themselves.

The medium of video is a way to create the "is it real or isn't it?" illusion in which surrealism is based on. In *Le Petite Eat*, the dancer is edited in such a way where I aimed to make her movements reminiscent of a toy doll. The use of black and white, film grain, and sped up motions were used to achieve this effect. This piece also incorporated tiny animations, which enable the replication of a surreal action, without the literal filming of the action. The use of music in this piece also attempted to add to this eerie surrealist feeling, which many times can be achieved

by duplication and unusual note combinations. This piece also marked my first experimentation with music composition for my own films.

Technically speaking, a lot of my work deals with issues behind medium and the evolution of film to digital video. In *Serenity vs. Chaos*, a vintage element is incorporated, both in the editing technique and the actual footage. The use of the past in this sense is also akin to surrealism. My work is primarily shot on a DSLR camera, but is then altered to either make it seem super crisp and sharp or purposefully unclear to create a surreal effect. *Serenity vs. Chaos* is shot using a homemade pinhole DSLR adapter, which I hope helps me to attain that dreamy surrealist film feeling successfully, while also mixing traditional and new-age technologies.

Influences/relationship to other art

Throughout my entire high school career I didn't take one art class. I did take a Film as Literature course, in which I got my first exposure to experimental filmmaking, but that spark died down a bit. I then decided I wanted to pursue music business in college. I did pursue music business for my freshman year and into my sophomore year. Fall quarter of my sophomore year I took the intro to documentary film course, with Dhera Strauss, my first art course at K College. I immediately fell in love. I would sit at the computer for hours on end, and would spend upward of 30 hours on each project. I then declared an art major, and progressed from my documentary roots to experimental filmmaking and installation work. I still incorporate the idea of story telling, and it is an honor to tell people's

stories that may have never otherwise been told. As a teaching assistant for Dhera, my 4th quarter now, I am also given the opportunity to film various events around campus, from classrooms, to orchestra concerts, to lectures.

After taking advanced documentary film, I really started to get into the surrealist/experimental genre. Surrealism is that grey area between reality and fantasy where the brain can be tricked into going in either direction. My artwork draws upon the works of traditional surrealist filmmakers, such as Buñuel and Dalí, as well as my own surrealist dreams and experiences. Besides the surrealist founders, modern directors David Lynch, Guillermo Del Toro, and especially Darren Aronofsky also inspire me. I have drawn upon some of their ideas such as the use of double imagery, montage sequences, the use of black and white, and fantasy states of mind. Like a dream, my work embodies the feeling of surrealism, creating a disorienting experience for the viewer. Through the use of video and installation elements, the theme of neo-dark surrealism can be seen in my work.

Being a video artist, especially at Kalamazoo College, I feel that I have the ability to try something new, and that there is lots of room to explore in this medium. With video art just starting in the 1960's it is a fairly new medium with not as many followers. Some traditionalists still have yet to accept video as an art form, so I feel that part of my job as a video artist is to contribute cutting edge work to help prove to the art world that digital media exists, and is just as much an art form as any other medium.

A few artists and filmmakers I learned more about during the Advanced Studio course were Michael Donnor, David Lynch, and Nam June Paik. Michael

Donnor is a younger up-and-coming photographer whose work explores the construction of self-identity and the projection of self. He is known for destroying his photo negatives by freezing, melting, scratching, and cutting them up before he makes his prints. After the prints are made he then burns the photos slightly and alters them even further. I am inspired by the experimental approach he takes to his artwork and also the vintage feel of the photographs he produces. The majority of his photographs have a ghost-like eerie figure in them, which is also a subject I am exploring as well.

David Lynch is a well-known filmmaker who I was familiar with long ago, but I wasn't familiar with his earlier experimental films. These earlier films contain nightmarish and dreamlike images similar to the style and feeling I try to create in my own films. One of his characteristics is featuring a female actor with multiple or split roles and fractured identities. He uses dreamlike imagery that relates to the surrealist ethos of his work.

Nam June Paik is considered to be one of the first video artists and he influenced my work structurally based on his tv-collection installation style. He was known to incorporate and sometimes base his installations on music, which is an element I have recently been including in my work as well.

For my SIP in particular the editing and special effects style of the film *Jacob's Ladder* by director Adrian Lyne was very inspiring. The shots of the interior of the hospital, with the use of a glide cam were a recording technique I incorporated into my SIP. Also, the famous head spinning shot was a technique I utilized in my SIP to represent mental instability and upset feelings.

SIP Origins

I have always been interested in urban decay and finding the beauty in abandoned decaying buildings. Michigan is a perfect state to live in to exemplify these interests, due to its failing economy and forced abandonments of many of its buildings, statewide. I have a passion for photographing and videotaping these buildings while wandering around them, and I didn't realize why until I started my SIP. There is something about being in a space with so much history that just gives you an exciting feeling inside. An abandoned building is more than just a decaying pile of bricks or wood; it has an aura around it from the history that used to reside in and around it. Part of finding the beauty in these buildings that are becoming more and more dilapidated is knowing the history behind them and what happened in them. By using a camera, I feel like I can share this experience with others via my view through the lens. I also became more passionate about building preservation throughout this experience, as I found more and more of these buildings are either being destroyed or turned into apartment complexes as we speak. Without documentation, future generations will lose the knowledge of the building that once stood. A major goal of this project is to also make things very historically accurate; so much research went into investigations of these different buildings.

Development of Idea

My original SIP idea was to take an experimental approach in portraying abandoned buildings by capturing them on video. I was initially going to film at 5 locations around Michigan, including an abandoned school, factory, theater, church,

and home. I wanted to include one or two of these buildings located in Detroit, but not focus the project on Detroit, but instead Michigan as a whole. These buildings would feature actors playing historically accurate rolls depending on the building. After much debate and difficulties with actors, I decided to focus my project a little closer to home and only film Kalamazoo based buildings with an emphasis on Kalamazoo College.

I wanted this piece to relate to my previous work by including some of the similar themes such as abandoned, deterioration, and urbanity. I am a firm believer in preservation and restoration as opposed to rebuilding when it comes to architecture. In educating the public about architecture that has been lost, or is decaying and on the verge of destruction, the public's realization of these irreplaceable losses is then heightened. "Old architecture prompts recollection of the personal histories which define us," Arthur Cotton Moore, Architect and Planner. My goal for my SIP was to display the beauty in abandoned, decaying buildings through the aura that is present in the building. After focusing in on Kalamazoo College, I chose the recently abandoned Stryker Center to be a main focus, but due to controversy over the building I diverted my attention to the Crown Vantage Paper Mill instead. I did however choose to incorporate the abandoned fallout shelter, boiler room, among others around Kalamazoo College. I also researched and included video footage of buildings around the city of Kalamazoo, such as the Park Trades Center and East Hall. I luckily came across archival footage of Bowen Hall at Kalamazoo College being torn down in the 1960's, and chose to incorporate that footage as well.

The idea that within a dilapidated building lies this aura of what once inhabited the place started to expand and really take a large presence in the piece. I researched online about these places along with some others and found a very compelling history. I then discovered the archives building located in a portion of East Hall run by Western Michigan University. Part way through my research I came to an inevitable large roadblock. Since many of the buildings I wanted to film at were either on Western Michigan University's campus or owned by them, I had to get permission to film there. I received an email from the vice president consisting of only one sentence: "Due to safety and liability issues, the staff has agreed not to allow you to go forth with the project and film in these locations." I suddenly became very devastated, feeling that without that permission my SIP could not progress. That is when I decided to look closer to home at start some of my research at Kalamazoo College. Thanks to the help of Paul Manstrom from facilities management, I was allowed access into any area of campus I wished for filming. I could not have completed my SIP without his gracious help. My project then shifted to include abandoned, restored, and about to be knocked down buildings and areas.

After the initial research portion I started compiling a list of possible buildings to explore and film at in the Kalamazoo area, along with contacts of people who could help me gain access to these places. This portion was much harder than I had initially thought. My list got smaller and smaller as I was denied access to many of the places on my list, usually because of asbestos concerns. My biggest personal gratification came when I was able to film a large portion of video at the Crown Vantage Paper Mill, which is being torn down as of now. I went to visit the mill, and

noticed the gate to the large complex was open. I wandered in thinking that it was possibly open to the public for a short amount of time. After spending around an hour filming in the mill, which was covered in dirt, shoes, clothes, and caution tape, I realized that something didn't feel right. So, I made my way towards the gate I entered through, and low and behold, the gate was locked from the outside. I then had to climb through the fence with my camera to get out. This was a scary moment, but quickly became my favorite SIP story, because I was able to tell people that I got locked inside the abandoned paper mill.

After collecting the footage for the film I began editing. Choosing the editing style for the film as well as the color palette became an interesting challenge. I wasn't sure whether I wanted to make the footage look like an old film reel like I did in *Le Petite Eat*, super saturated like in *Le Cauchemar*, or something completely different. I first tried the film in just straight up black and white, but found that with the loss of color, a loss of ambiance followed. So, I ended up playing with the saturation and made the footage quite high contrast with reduced saturation for the coloring along with a slight blue tint. I also decided to group the footage by building and included text cards with the history of the building, which were later removed in the final product.

My initial idea for the audio portion was to use footage from the Arcus Center planning meetings and the town hall meetings, to display the contrast between pro-rebuilding and pro-preservation opinions. I later decided to scrap that part though and just use more ambient sounds. I did however compose the music for the

installation, in which I chose to use one musical track for the entire room instead of different sounds for each monitor to avoid sound confusion.

I originally thought the installation portion would feature some of the same footage from the film, featured on a multi-channel installation with the inclusion of footage of locals to incorporate an element of social justice. I also wanted my installation to be housed in the abandoned Stryker center, with monitors being timed to turn on and off at different times, but due to safety reasons this couldn't be done. So, I decided to transform the gallery into a visual pleasing place for the viewer to meander through instead.

I then came up with the idea to include a jar sculpture within the installation portion. The idea behind this was to have the sculpture hallway consist of a tower of mason and other food jars stuffed with meat and vegetables, topped with an aquifer jar. Historically, food was preserved in jars and was made to last for several months until the next growing season as well as to carry on journeys across many states. Every scrap of food was consumed or preserved for future consumption. Today, food is frequently wasted, even though there are many individuals in need of food to survive. To survive, humans need water as well as food. Aquifers provide sustainable fresh groundwater to urban areas. I decided to create a tower of preserved meat and vegetables topped with an aquifer that was created 7 years ago in an Earth Science course. I held onto this aquifer, much the same, as we must protect our water supply. I then scrapped this idea as well after realizing that branching out to food preservation was too much of a stretch and may potentially

confuse the viewer. This section was then replaced with a hand-made informational book and building material pile instead.

The idea for a hallway configuration was the last big idea for my SIP. I wasn't sure how I wanted to display all of the elements for my SIP, because they were all separate entities. So, instead of having one part here and one part there, I thought of integrating all of the parts into one bigger installation. The hallway structure was a good way to integrate the viewer into the exhibit while still providing slight delineation between the various parts. That is also why I thought painter's plastic was the best material to use for the divisions due to its semi-transparency.

Final stages/SIP reflection

What do humans choose to preserve and what do they choose to destroy? Why does our brain remember certain things, but not others? How do buildings become enclosures for memories? What do we leave behind when we are in a space and what do we take with us? These are all questions I explore in, "Constructing the Memory-Self". In this project, the multiple mediums of video, photography, book arts and sculpture are combined to answer questions about building, memory, and historical preservation. I hope to spark activism in support of continuing and intensifying the act of preservation today. This being my introductory paragraph to my artist statement, pretty much sums up the meaning behind my SIP as well as questions I pondered while creating this installation.

I felt like there were some things that worked really well in my SIP and other parts I would change or do differently if I could. I really ended up liking the space

that was created by the painter's plastic in the gallery. It felt cozy yet eerie all at the same time. When installing my SIP I would occasionally just sit in the middle of the gallery in the midst of all the plastic and just ponder.

I also felt that the book was a neat idea and I am happy that I was able to get the old Saniwax paper to construct the book. I felt like the book was a good way to deliver information without being too blunt or obvious like it was before with the text within the video. I also liked how the book played off of that older-feeling of preservation that went along with my SIP theme.

One of the bigger struggles I had with this project was the development and inclusion of the human figure. It was hard to decide how to portray the "spirit" of a building. So, viewed at only partial opacity to give them that ghost-like appearance along with slow and quick motions, and the stuttered movement technique.

I would also change the media carts out for other TV stands if I could, but that was just hard to do because the TV's were locked onto the carts. The interesting thing was when I was making my building materials pile, I was banging with the materials with a stick, and I was positioned behind a layer of plastic. People kept on walking by the gallery and looking in wondering what I was doing, because you could only see my shadow breaking up the materials. That then got me thinking that it would have been interesting to incorporate a performance aspect to the installation where people could watch me interacting with the space in shadow form.

Artist Statement

"Constructing the Memory-Self"

A SIP Installation by Katina Bitsicas

"The camera is no more an instrument of preservation, the image is."

~Berenice Abbott, Photographer

What do humans choose to preserve and what do they choose to destroy? Why does our brain remember certain things, but not others? How do buildings become enclosures for memories? What do we leave behind when we are in a space and what do we take with us? These are all questions I explore in, "Constructing the Memory-Self". In this project, the multiple mediums of video, photography, book arts and sculpture are combined to answer questions about building, memory, and historical preservation. I hope to spark activism in support of continuing and intensifying the act of preservation today.

As you wander through the installation, you will encounter a series of hallway-like structures created from painter's plastic. The hallway form is reminiscent of the corridors found in many of the historic buildings where I filmed, and the layout is also a replica of the bedroom wing in my childhood home. Painter's plastic is a multi-use material, with both a practical and symbolic use in this installation: It is used to preserve floors and furniture when one is renovating, to cover acrylic paintings for storage, as a weed barrier for agricultural purposes, and in asbestos abatement fields. The painter's plastic in my installation is meant to serve as a preservation field for my work.

Along the edge of the room is a series of monitors, each playing different montages of historical buildings or sections of buildings in Kalamazoo, MI. Some of these buildings are abandoned, some are about to be torn down, and some have been successfully preserved. When I enter a building that is rich with history yet quiet from its abandonment, my head starts racing with ideas of what could have occurred where I am standing. A feeling also comes over me that is somewhat eerie; as if I could be in the presence of someone, yet I am sure no one is there. I have included myself in these buildings, but these self-images are my memory-self, almost a spirit of the building if you will. I believe that when one enters a building, a memory is left behind in that space, but also a memory from that space is taken with the person. So, the image of my memory-self becomes distorted with its eminent destruction. When a building is demolished, so are its memories.

The first hallway contains a pile of masonry bricks and scrap wood, which represents a chunk of a building that has been torn down. Among this pile is a book I crafted out of original paper from the Saniwax paper company. This old roll of paper was discovered in the musty basement of the building. Using a manual typewriter, I tell the story of each featured building for this project including a photograph of the space. The book is bound with binder rings similar to those from the Loose Leaf Ledger Company, which then became Saniwax, and today is known as the Park Trades building, a space for artist's studios.

The hallway of photographs displays a collection of suspended photographs featuring photos from my family history. This includes photos of the butcher shop in which my grandfather worked, where no scrap was wasted, and the family farm

in Greece, where traditional farming techniques remain in use today. Also included are photos I took of the historic Kalamazoo buildings featured in the video sequences. Historic photographs of Kalamazoo College buildings, such as the demolished Bowen Hall, have also been included to reminisce about the architecture that used to exist on this campus.

The final hallway features a single monitor playing authentic film reel footage from the 1969 destruction of Bowen Hall, a multi-functional building including the first library and chapel on the Kalamazoo College campus. Erected in 1902, the destruction of this beautiful building represents the destruction of 67 years of memories created on the Kalamazoo College campus.

The music I composed for this installation features a layering of sounds relevant to the theme of "constructing the memory-self." The first layer is the droning piano, playing an eerie repetitive melody. The second layer is the scratching tin-like piano strings being played with my finger. The third layer is myself quoting lines from my personal journals as an adolescent. By listening to them the viewer can gain a slight insight into some of my personal memories. The fourth layer is the sound of a construction team tearing down a building.

Since this installation is time based, my intent is for every viewer to gain a different experience each time they view it. Similar to the buildings I visited, I believe that every person who enters my installation space will take something with them, but also leave something behind, constructing their own personal memory-self within the space of the installation.

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TV Cello. Dir. Nam June Paik. 1964.

Un Chien Andalou. Dir. Luis Buñuel. 1928.

Katina Bitsicas SIP Portfolio Inventory

Please drag files onto computer for smoother playing

Disc One

SIP Components

Selected Film Scenes.mov

Music SIP.wav

SIP Preview.mov

Selected Photographs

BitsicasKatina01.JPG

BitsicasKatina02.JPG

BitsicasKatina03.JPG

BitsicasKatina04.JPG

BitsicasKatina05.JPG

BitsicasKatina06.JPG

BitsicasKatina07.JPG

BitsicasKatina08.JPG

BitsicasKatina09.JPG

BitsicasKatina10.JPG

BitsicasKatina11.JPG

BitsicasKatina12.JPG

SIP Selected Photographs.pdf

SIP Narrative Description.doc

SIP Presentation

Constructing the Memory Self Presentation.p

sip poster.psd

New Project.m4v

Information

Selected scenes from my SIP videos

Original composed music for SIP

Preview for SIP installation

Selected photos used in installation

Thumbnails of photographs

SIP Paper Document

SIP Talk Powerpoint

Poster for SIP Installation

SIP Talk video recording

Disc Two

Installation Documentation

BitsicasKatina01.JPG SIP Installation image

BitsicasKatina02.JPG SIP Installation image

BitsicasKatina03.JPG SIP Installation image

BitsicasKatina04.JPG SIP Installation image

BitsicasKatina05.JPG SIP Installation image

BitsicasKatina06.JPG SIP Installation image

BitsicasKatina07.JPG SIP Installation image

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BitsicasKatina19.JPG SIP Installation image

BitsicasKatina20.JPG SIP Installation image

BitsicasKatina21.JPG SIP Installation image

BitsicasKatina22.JPG SIP Installation image

BitsicasKatina23.JPG SIP Installation image

SIP Documentation.mov

Video Walk-around of SIP

SIP Installation Documentation.PDF

Thumbnails of photographs

Disc Three

SIP Video Portfolio

Video One

Video Two

Video Three

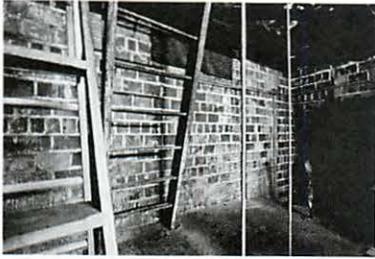
Video Four

Video Five

Bowen Hall Video

Actual videos that were displayed in SIP installation

SIP Selected Photographs



BitsicasKatina01.JPG



BitsicasKatina02.JPG



BitsicasKatina03.JPG



BitsicasKatina04.JPG



BitsicasKatina05.JPG



BitsicasKatina06.JPG



BitsicasKatina07.JPG



BitsicasKatina08.JPG



BitsicasKatina09.JPG



BitsicasKatina10.JPG



BitsicasKatina11.JPG



BitsicasKatina12.JPG

SIP Installation Documentation



BitsicasKatina01.JPG



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Constructing the Memory-Self™

A SIP Installation by Katina Bitsicas

Exhibiting Week 9
February 28 - March 5
located in the FAB Gallery
Calamazoo College



SIP Presentation
March 2, 2011 4pm
FAB Recital Hall

Reception will follow

