

SARAH PHILLIPS & LACEY MINOR

2021

MFA THESIS CATALOG



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The Graduate School
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School of Art, Design, and Art History
Dr. Katherine Schwartz, Director

Duke Hall Gallery of Fine Art
Dr. Beth Hinderliter, Director

SADAH Graduate Program
Corinne Diop, Director



JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF ART, DESIGN, AND ART HISTORY

2020 MFA THESIS CATALOG

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DR. KATHERINE A. SCHWARTZ

Director of the School of Art, Design, & Art History

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2020-21 MFA Graduate Exhibition. This catalogue documents the final thesis exhibitions of Sarah Phillips and Lacey Minor, who are the first graduates to complete the new interdisciplinary curriculum. These exceptional artists dedicated hundreds of hours to their research and studio practice, creating an exhibition that demonstrates their perseverance, integrity, and an honest exploration of ideas in a range of interdisciplinary media.

Sarah and Lacey created work in response to the world they are living in, which includes an opioid epidemic that is turning millions of people seeking relief from physical or emotional pain into addicts; the global COVID-19 pandemic; and the inevitable consequences of conflicting religious or spiritual values. The exhibition challenges viewers to contemplate these issues, along with questioning our humanity in contemporary society.

Lacey Minor invites the viewer to reflect upon the opioid/drug culture, that entices millions of people to an early death as they become addicted to drugs that were intended for relieving pain. This important work also creates a space to honor those who have lost their lives due to opioid or heroin addiction. Glass jars lined up on wood shelves hold 99 potatoes to symbolize the number of lives lost in a single day; while long rows of small photographs are symmetrically arranged in grid like fashion, to respect the millions of people who have succumbed to addictions. Minor's work raises the questions: How do we escape the use of pervasive, enticing, and addictive substances? Who should be held accountable for the pharmaceutical drug crisis? Who can be trusted to provide safe medical advice? How do the stories of addicts become part of our own experience, and what can we learn from them?

Sarah Phillips constructs work that invites views to consider the passage of time and asks us to reconsider what is considered holy. Inspired by her spiritual beliefs, Sarah's work incorporates poetry and biblical references to relics, salt, frankincense, and myrrh. Visual recordings of Sarah climbing a ladder in the ocean, which is tied to herself with a course rope, are shown in sequence to demonstrate continuous failed attempts to climb the rungs that are intended to support. Phillip's work raises the questions: How do religious and spiritual values support us, while at the same time, hold us back? Why do we continue to hope in spite of repeated failed attempts? How can we survive when the people and things we are counting on no longer support us? When do artifacts in our lives become holy relics?

The questions raised in this exhibition reinforce the School's vision to radically transform ourselves and our communities through creative and scholarly work. Appreciation is extended to Professor Emeritus Cole Welter, who worked with Sarah and Lacey for two years prior to his retirement; to Professor Corinne Diop, Graduate Director, for the enormous contributions she brings to the program, and to the graduate faculty for serving as artist mentors. I also thank , Beth Hinderliter Gallery Director, for her curatorial assistance; Frank Kwartin for designing this beautiful catalogue; and Karen Gerard, Assistant to the Director, for managing the graduate files and budgets.

Warm congratulations are extended to Lacey & Sarah for this inspirational exhibition.

Thank you.

CORINNE DIOP

Director of Graduate Program in Studio Art

When Lacey Minor and Sarah Phillips started the MFA program in the School of Art, Design and Art History at JMU, they would have never guessed that news of a pandemic would hit the headlines before their three-year educational journey was complete. They had no way of knowing that nearly half of their graduate coursework would take place in online or hybrid formats, or that they would be teaching classes online themselves. Yet, due to the spread of Covid-19 that caused US universities to find alternatives to the usual lectures and group interactions, this is what happened.

The educational progress of our students was not halted, instead, a willingness to adapt emerged throughout campus. Spaces were rearranged to keep people six feet apart, with clear barriers and hand cleaner stations strategically placed. Masks that covered both mouth and nose were required for indoor spaces and classes were divided into smaller “cohorts”. There were no art opening receptions with guests mingling near the refreshment table and no artist lectures filling Duke Hall Gallery Court. Instead, WebEx or Zoom lectures, gallery talks and even virtual opening receptions became the norm. While the MFA experience was in a completely different form than in the past, Sarah and Lacey marched on.

The successful culmination of their hard work, persistence and resilience is on display in Duke Hall Gallery of Fine Art in a Thesis Exhibition that does not let on that it was made in difficult times. While the gallery is divided in half, in essence two solo shows, a wide passage between the installations allows the work to intermingle and a long, narrow bench allows viewers to face either direction for the deserved contemplation.

Lacey Minor’s work has a distinctively earthy overtone, with potatoes used to reference both happy times in her grandmother’s garden and

their potentially toxic nature, and beyond that to issues of drug addiction in her family. The outer walls of the gallery feature images made by the chemical interaction of potatoes on photo-sensitive surfaces. In the center, viewers enter a tight passageway of potato-printed and stitched fabric and shelves lined with water-filled glass canning jars with sprouting potatoes, roots meandering in search of the ground.

In Sarah Phillips’ installation, dresses of her grandmother and great-grandmother are suspended in space. Ladders are propped against the gallery wall, and mounds of egg shells, dirt, salt and other elements punctuate the floor. Video projections interact with the physical aspects of the gallery, including scenes of performances which featured these objects. Viewers crouch near the ground to see small videos of words being stamped in the earth or look upwards to the projection of the blinding sun eclipsing a ladder, suggesting an attempted ascent from ocean to sky.

Lacey and Sarah’s installations are shared virtually online, reaching those who might have never travelled to our gallery. The artist talks are recorded and this catalog documents their work. What is missing is the waft of smells—potatoes, moth balls and frankincense; the crashing ocean waves and other sounds in the videos; and, the materiality of the objects and the physical movement required to see them. All of this you will need to imagine.

Special thanks to our School Director, Dr. Kathy Schwartz, and Assistant to the Director, Karen Gerard, for their extra efforts in keeping us safe during the height of the pandemic; to the Thesis Committee Chairs and Members; and to the graduating senior in Graphic Design, Frank Kwartin, who designed this catalog.

Congratulations to Lacey Minor & Sarah Phillips!



ICARUS ROOTED

LACEY MINOR

The potato – a humble creature hiding many complexities. Who knows death better than the potato? The potato who has ended and caused famines. The potato who is so prone to disease and demise, who feeds the multitudes with its tubers, but could kill you with a taste of its greenery. Green is a symbol of prosperity and growth, but not necessarily for the potato. Green in a potato reveals that solanine is developing, a consequence of light exposure. A potato cannot live in the light, although it tries. Like Icarus, too close to the sun and the potato falls. To live, a potato must be buried.

In my work, I am using the potato as a symbol for the addicted body, specifically those addicted to heroin.

Icarus Rooted is in dedication to the four family members I have lost to heroin. In the summer of 2019, my cousin passed away from heroin overdose at the age of 28. The summers of our childhood were spent in rural Pearl, Illinois on our great-grandmother's 168-acre farm where we spent countless hours out in her fields digging up potatoes. The potatoes in this installation are an ode to that time, and a memorial to all those who have flown too close to the sun.

We are all subject to decline and destruction. This is the first mark of existence, a fact of lasting. Through trauma and grief, we march forward. In this fast-paced world that often forces us to rush through emotion, I wonder, can I capture that feeling of that time and place? Extract the essence from those moments? I will keep futilely grasping at the fog that is memory, but memory always finds a way to escape us in the end. After all, lasting is all anything can do for so long.

This exhibition depicts a darker side of society and human propensity towards addiction. It is an empathetic look at the failings of human nature and a conversation about the magnitude of the opioid epidemic. This issue is deeply rooted in our culture, rhizomatic in its design. The rate of opioid addiction is continually increasing. 99 people die each day in America from opioid use according to the 2019 CDC overdose statistics report. The recently released 2020 report shows that number has increased to 128 deaths per day. When prescriptions are handed out like candy, and quality of life diminishes, how can we eliminate this issue?















And
All
the Things
That
Grew on
The Ground
Sarah Phillips





AND ALL THE THINGS THAT GREW
ON THE GROUND

SARAH PHILLIPS

The hardest part of living is sometimes accepting my own solid presence. Mass and molecules; memory incarnate.

Atoms, flesh, and else which make up body. I-we-should be fluid, vapor, building and unbuckling.

It would seem more likely. And yet--- a body all the same. Unwanted, perhaps-- here, even so. Stillness. Sort of. Potential energy, bone-bound.

My work oscillates on the ideas to the ideas of breath, soil, place, history, body. I have been particularly interested in the history ecology in-relational-performative work recently.

This work began with an archive of dresses left to me by my grandmother. Clothing, textile, what comes with the endowment of textile. We keep clothes, archive them, assign meaning to them. Expectation of performance, behavior, accomplishment-- new, or used-- how do you fit into this prescription of existence-- or fail to-- and of body size-- and what does it mean to gift something that is adorn and protect the self. What is the use of the fabric-- of anything-- if it isn't being worn? Obligation and loss.

In clothing, there is loss, in the act of cleaning them, loss of skin cells, and dirt, and dusk. Risk, too, of shifting their delicate makeup into uselessness. Sewing machine in rhythm with pulse. Umbilical tether, body, kite—and a loss, when it falls.

Earth is the history of itself, and the bodies that have occupied it.

As a whole, my recent work has been about the paradox and negotiations of access to the self, the history, and to the landscape you occupy. Ritual, habit, and transformational cleansing are recurring themes in the work. Body, breath-- access to the invisible. Preservation of the uncertain. Fragility carries weight, and importance; destruction and negotiation as vessels of repair. Washing, waiting, filtering-- and, ultimately, letting go.

Wind and water: unmake me; I am yours amidst the weight of want and momentum. This is a brief and unapologetic existence.

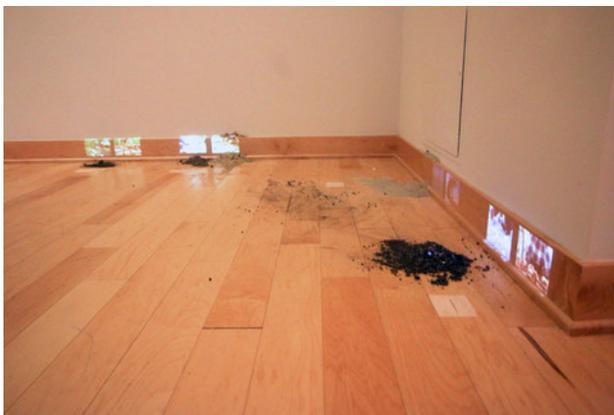
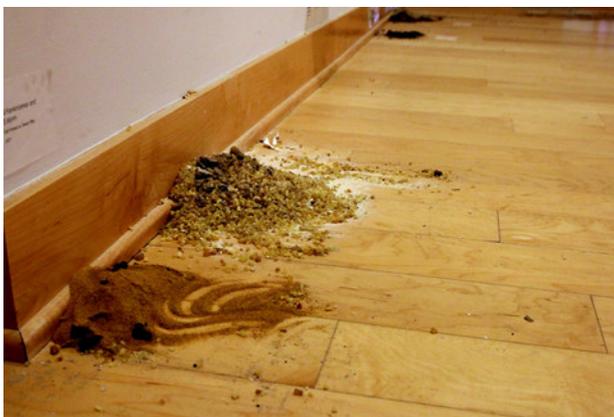
Swallow me whole. I promise never to look back.

SP















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