

APPLES FALL

By

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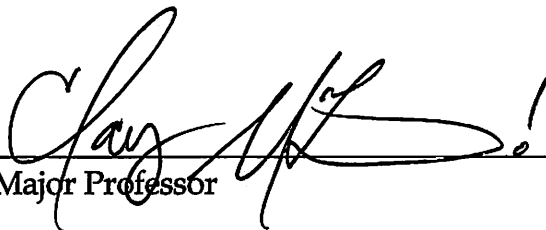
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

APPLES FALL

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As the youngest of five children, I never wanted to seem younger, smaller, or weaker so I spent a majority of my time trying to observe, mimic, and absorb whatever I could from those around me, most often my siblings and/or parents. The observation of simple, everyday actions as well as mimicry and repetition are very important procedures that have stuck with me and are critical to my work and practice as an artist.

When I was in kindergarten, my mom and I went to the Arby's at our local mall every Friday. We always sat in the same booth, and we always shared a sandwich, fries, and a cherry turnover. After we ate lunch, I would be her "little assistant", as she always said. I helped her with any errands that she needed to take care of, and it always made me feel so special that I was the one that got to do this with her.

As I got a little bit older, I realized that my sister (who is 9 years older than me) was the coolest person that I knew. I wanted to spend time with her, go places with her, and be her best friend. More importantly, I wanted her to want the same thing. I can remember a couple times when she asked me to go to the mall with her to help her pick out some clothes. She was the epitome of "stylish" to me, and I was a tomboy. The fact that she wanted me to come with her made me feel so special. No matter where we went I would become her shadow; following her around until she was ready to try on the clothes she had chosen. At that point, I would open whatever book I had brought and read while she decided what she did or did not want. I never got very far in my book as I wasn't paying much attention. I was instead much more interested in observing what my sister was doing and how she was deciding what did or did not look good. I inevitably read the same sentence repeatedly the whole time we shopped.

Black Friday has become a yearly tradition for the women in my family. We get up before the sun rises and spend all day shopping. Shopping is a very important social ritual in my family. It is a time to have fun as well as a time to have important discussions; my mom's version of a sex talk (which consequently can be boiled down to "they're not going to buy the cow if they're getting the milk for free") happened one beautiful sunny summer afternoon while shopping at outlets. My mom is a private and fairly shy person when it comes to very personal topics like sex. Shopping is something that we know, as a family, and are comfortable with as an experience that we can share. Because of this, we are able to speak openly and have important conversations that can be difficult or uncomfortable.



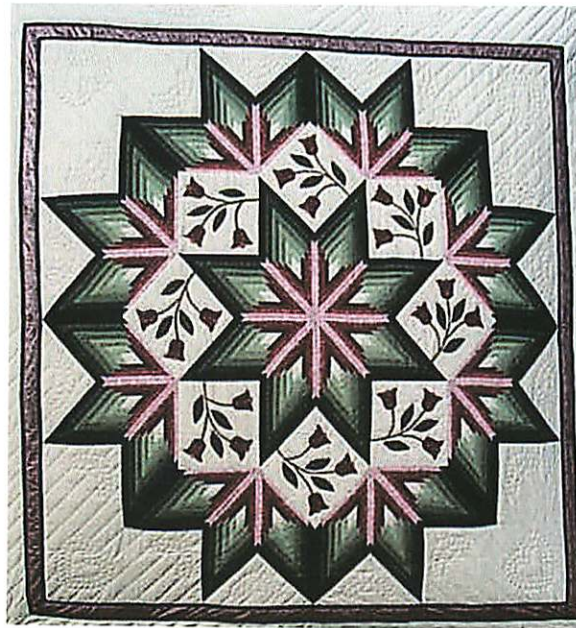
(Figure 1) - *Apples Fall*

Apples Fall (Fig. 1) is my reaction to the emotional and psychological weight that the retail world holds for me in respect to the relationships that I have with my mother and sister. Because of the experiences I have had in the past, I have many very happy memories that deal directly with shopping. I believe that it is experiences such as these that now make me feel like I might be able to recreate that happiness, make a new memory, or feel that connection to something or someone once again through shopping.

Receipts are objects which document a shopping experience. They are a record of what was purchased and what store it was purchased in. Normally just a piece of paper that is discarded, lost, or shoved somewhere to be forgotten, the receipts in this piece were created to become something and suggest something more about what this object can represent. All of the receipts used to create this piece are either mine, my mother's, or my sister's which have been turned into screen printed and quilted cotton and silk objects. Each of the 14 frames represents an experience, a day, a portrait, a

conflict, and/or an emotion and was made with one of the three of us in mind. Color, thread length, and organization of the frames vary from woman to woman and frame to frame.

Quilting the receipts was a natural development in the process of creating *Apples Fall*. As a craft, quilting is something that is often learned and passed down through families from one generation to the next. It is a process that brings women together to lend a helping hand and to bond. This history of quilting as a social network for women parallels shopping in my family. Quilting has always been something that I am drawn to for its beauty, history, and technical skill. Growing up near Lancaster County, Pennsylvania I was lucky enough to encounter Amish quilts (Fig. 2) from a very early age.

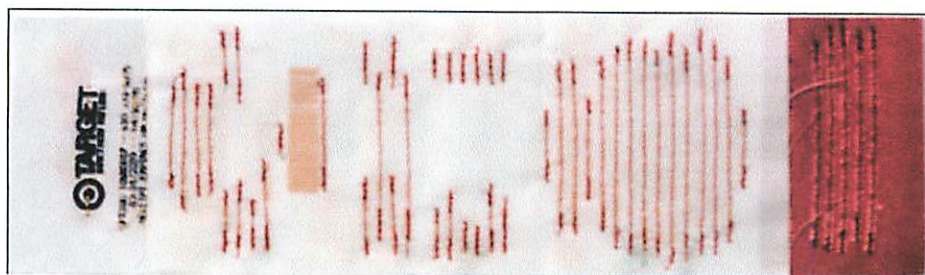


(Figure 2) - Amish quilt

The time and skill required to create something so detailed and beautiful has always been inspirational to me. Although the knowledge and skill for techniques such as quilting did exist at one time in my family, the information was never something that was passed down to me.

Quilts feel loved. You can see every stitch that goes into making them and can therefore understand the time and effort needed to create them. Bringing this into the receipts transforms them into much more precious objects. It suggests that they are something more than what they originally seem; something more than we normally think of them.

The thread used to hold the layers together is sewn through all of the text information on the receipt (Fig. 3). This removal of information makes it much less about the actual objects that were purchased since you can no longer read that information. It is still recognizable as a receipt and now becomes more about the size of the receipt: how much was bought, where it is from, and the experience as a whole. It now becomes about wants vs. needs, and which of these two ideas each receipt represents.

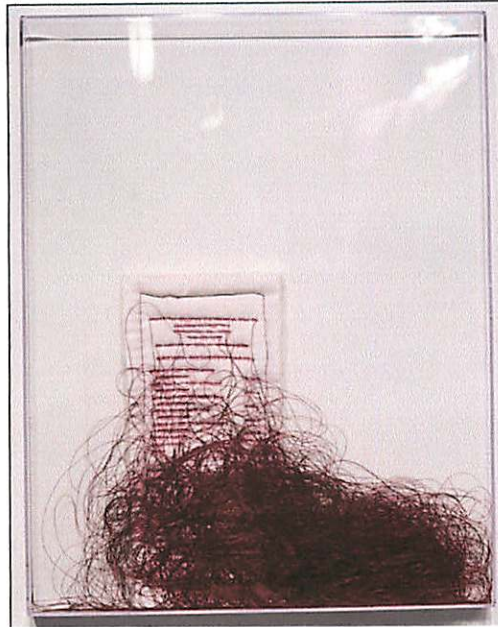


(Figure 3) - detail, *Apples Fall*

The crossing out of this information may also suggest that the items have been returned. Emotionally, this marking suggests a guilt about what has been bought. The search for the "perfect" object can create an emotional high that, once ended, can be just as emotionally low. The highs and lows and feelings of guilt are an interesting juxtaposition to the beauty of these items as individual objects. During the search for the "perfect" object you feel like you have a purpose. Once you have found just one or sometimes many of these objects you have fulfilled that purpose. You feel excited. You have made a connection. While you are having this experience it seems beautiful. There is an emotional high which can do nothing but deflate once you realize that no real connection was actually made. You did not recreate an experience that will leave lasting memories. You now just have more "stuff" which was only able to create a momentary emotional high mimicking the true, lasting emotions felt when having a similar experience with loved ones. In fact, it is not the objects or the actual shopping that are important. Instead, it is the experiences and the people you are with that create these memories. The objects are just tokens that call up memories and remind you what that experience was like.

Some of the threads have been left long and spill out of quilts as though they are being purged or rejected (Fig. 4). The threads feel very alive and active, but are only able to pile up within the frame, creating another juxtaposition of allure and frustration. I left the threads as a representation of emotions building up and needing an escape. They are able to burst out of the quilt, but then get contained within the

frame and begin to build up again creating a cyclical pattern of build up and release that mimics the emotional highs and lows associated with shopping.



(Figure 4) - detail, *Apples Fall*

The color schemes used in the frames depicting my mother, my sister, and I are all slightly different. However, all three work together in the larger scheme as well. Though I chose to use a more feminine color palette I was more interested in it being a warm color palette. While the colors are alluring and rich, warm colors tend to be hard to look at and a little more abrasive which creates an interesting push and pull.

In determining the organization of the receipts within the frames I looked to how objects manifest themselves within our daily lives. My mom tends to be a collector of "stuff", while my sister does not like having any unnecessary "stuff" around, and is consequently not surrounded by clutter (Fig. 7). For instance, if you were to walk in to

my mother's home you would immediately see one display case filled with Hummel's next to another display case overflowing with Boyd's Bears (Figs. 5, 6). You would also see wreaths and flower arrangements as well as other decorative items specific to the current holiday or season. In contrast, when walking into my sister's house you will see bare counters and tables as well as empty walls. You would be hard pressed to find a collectible item anywhere in her house. While both my mother's and sister's aesthetic exist at opposite ends of this spectrum, I tend to be somewhere in the middle constantly trying to figure it out. I have bookshelves brimming with books and a few Boyd's Bears and other small collectibles given to me by my mother while at the same time my walls remain void of decoration or embellishment.



(Figures 5, 6) - A portion of my mother's collections

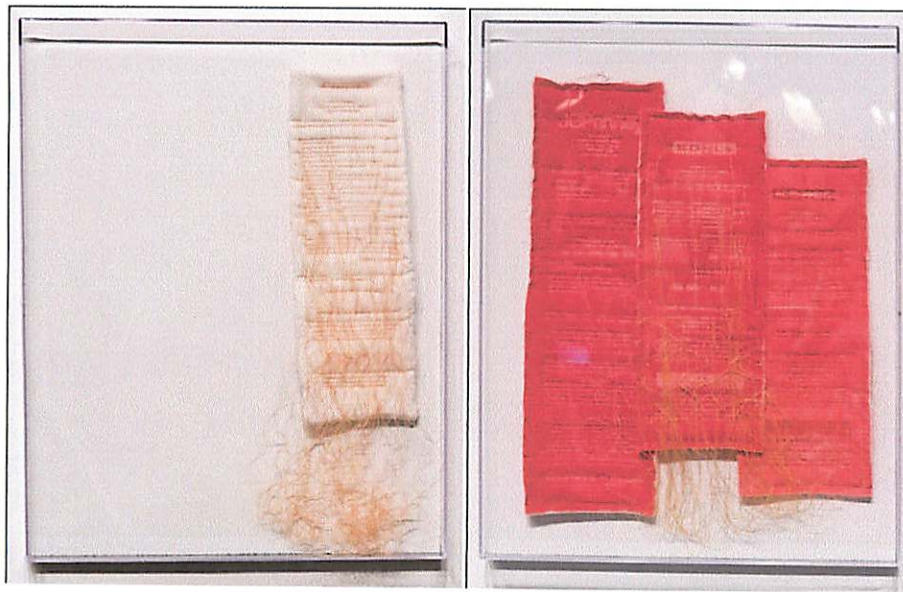


(Figure 7) - An example of my sister's lack of "stuff"

Examining this led me to the decision that my mom's frames would be very full. The quilted receipts would be thicker and have exposed edges. There would be more build up of thread and the receipts would have a sense of being stuffed into the frame somewhat like the collections seen in Figures 5 and 6. On the other hand, the frames representing my sister would be orderly, have trimmed thread, finished quilt edges, and provide an overall feeling of neatness and precision. My frames would be a combination of these things; a mix of order and chaos.

I also wanted to create a range of personalities or moods within the frames. Some seem happy and proud while others seem lonely and sad. Figure 8 is a perfect representation of a shopping trip taken by myself while living 700 miles away from my mother and sister. It depicts a time when I felt like shopping could fill the void created by feeling alone and isolated. The excitement of actually buying something relates to the happiness felt when thinking about memories of experiences I have shared with my

mom and sister. Happiness and excitement are later replaced with sadness, guilt, and new feelings of loneliness. It is actually the people, the conversations, and the overall experiences that create these emotions; the realization that shopping was just the backdrop for these memories results in an emotional nosedive. The receipt in this piece is positioned to the side of the frame, not centered. It is white with a light peach color thread and does not demand attention. It bends slightly, suggesting a slumped posture. Alternately, Figure 9 shows a frame containing three receipts which are placed close together. The three receipts seem strong in their position. Placed centrally within the frame, they are a bold color and command the viewer's attention. They are proud, happy, and beautiful.



(Figures 8,9) - details, *Apples Fall*

I displayed the receipts behind clear frames to give them a space to reside which would again give them a more precious feeling. Presenting them in this manner suggests that they may each represent one day or one shopping excursion. I also think that some of them start to represent specimens being examined or award winning ribbons (Fig. 10). I especially like this association, because it seems like the receipt becomes a representation of finding that one object that either made you feel happy and complete or perhaps created a new memory of a great experience.



(Figure 10) - detail, *Apples Fall*

Each time that I return to Pennsylvania to visit my family, my mom, my sister, and I end up taking a shopping trip as a way to share a day together. During these trips we inevitably end up in a specific fitting room in Sears trying on clothes. We refer to this fitting room as "our" fitting room. This room is large enough for the three of us to

try on clothes simultaneously. By sharing this moment we get to talk, laugh, and create new memories. The relationships between my mother, older sister, and I have always been strong. They have helped guide me through the past 26 years of my life and have had a major influence in shaping who I am. Having physical distance between us has led me to start uncovering just how important these relationships are. Some of the most memorable and special moments we have shared together tend to be mundane and repetitive, but it is these cyclical actions and emotions of our everyday lives in which I find beauty. These smaller moments could go unnoticed to other individuals, yet they truly comprise who we are.