LIVING LIES

“MY LIFE HAS BECOME A PALIMPSEST – A PIECE OF PARCHMENT FROM WHICH SOMEONE HAS RUBBED OFF THE WORDS, LEAVING ONLY A GHOST IMAGE BEHIND,” (Bartok 4).

Memory is a vital contributor to our identity, which places great importance on how we view our memories, our current actions, and future actions. While memory is a constant in our everyday lives, it is not a stable element. This instability leaves us with a constantly changing self and memory that is a malleable web changing by the second. Using our own memories, we have to create narratives for ourselves, about ourselves, and about our world. These fabrications are used to make sense of the world, create our character, and our vital lie (Becker 51). Our normal associations with lies are negative, but I want to think about a lie as something that is not real, concrete, or an absolute truth, much like our memories. If we look at a child’s most intense occupation, playing or making believe, we see children create a world or rearrange the things of the world in a new way (Popova). I like to consider our memories to be the same type of process and therefore a series of lies. Freud once said, “The opposite of play is not what is serious, but what is real” (Popova). In my work, I am devoted to exploring our representation and application of memory, where everything can become a player in our daily illusion.

Memories play an important role in creating our character and in turn become objects in our vital lie. Our memories are supposed to give us the meaning of who we are, giving them great importance and a mirage of concrete meaning. Memories are a comfortable web of
invention that keeps a person buoyed up and ignorant of the fact that a person does not rest on their own center (Becker 55). We interpret and apply memory to make sense of our daily life. My investigation of how memories affect our character begins at the place where memories are first established: vision.

Vision is a complex function of the eye, by which we see the world, negotiate it, manipulate it, physically and mentally, or file it away in memory for future reference (Pinker 213). In our living experience, we see the world with binocular parallax, taking two combined images and unifying them, for the brain to use (Pinker 218). This representation of the world is known as our “mind’s eye” because our mind literally creates a new experience by combining images. The “mind’s eye” has its roots in cubism, along with my work, in that it involves stratification and recombination of imagery. Because of the process of vision, sight only creates hypothetical images. The binocular parallax creates a combined or manipulated image, which is the foundation of our experiences and memories. All of our known imagery that we experience life with has had alterations without any notice because of the creative experience of vision. Alongside, as we see and think, dozens of interactions of information processing, go on beneath the level of consciousness (Pinker 236). While we are completely unaware, sight creates illusion, and memory continues this process.

In memory, images are further created during an intricate state of observing and adapting information and knowledge. Therefore, memory is a flowing storage bank of information where some images are more vivid than others, often dependent upon stimuli. Even the slightest outside stimuli, like a sound or smell, can trigger changes in the firing rate of neurons in a way that changes the flow of information between different parts of the brain and alters one’s perceptions (Bergland). Memory in turn becomes dependent on not only accuracy of recall, but upon current
stimuli. This gives us an interpretation rather than an exact reproduction when we recall an object, face, or scene.

We know that memories are not formed in isolation, but are built up over years of incorporating previously learned information. The past is not separate from the present; it is constantly being broken down and reintegrated into the current (Lippard 85). Our brains are not built to fix memories in stone, but rather to transform them, often according to what we currently think. Scientists have honed in on specific neurons, which act like “memory switches” to turn a recollection on or off and interweave past experiences with each new exposure to an environment. By these means we create hybrid memories that can connect to any other experience by similarities of pattern (Bergland). The brain performs the buildup of information by using the activity pattern of nerve cells from old memories to merge with the activity produced during a new learning session (Bergland). I use the same connection of pattern when combining imagery in my paintings. On a picture plane, I use images that repeat color, shape, and line. Others are simply connected by a sense of familiarity, caused by my own “memory switches”.

Our recollections change in their retelling (Bartok 29). Every time we recall, the initial memory is severed and modified and a new memory is stored or reconstructed. “Many of our memories are records of our own stories, not of events that actually took place” (Kornell). Neuroscientists suggest that while the core meaning of a long-term memory remains, the memory transforms each time we attempt to retrieve it. In fact, anatomical changes occur in the brain every single time we remember (Bartok 19). We often feel that the more we reflect on something, the more solidified it becomes. In reality, we have provided the story or moment with more information each time we talk about it. It is much easier to remember the story we told three months ago verses the experience or the moment when we realized it was a memory.
Our interaction with our own memory becomes mysterious and often misleading. We naturally start to intermingle the information we have with the imaginary. If we give in to our creative impulses, we will mix things known and unknown, past, current and future. The mind can create a collection of memories that become little worlds we can control, in which we tentatively express our emerging personalities (Heatherwick 11). These worlds inside our minds have infinite possibilities, which are juxtaposed with our experiences outside our bodies.

Human kind has a paradoxical nature, because we are part body and mind. Humans are literally split in two: there is an awareness of our own amazing uniqueness in that we stick out of nature, and yet humans will return to nature just like every other animal. We have a symbolic identity that exists in our mind and a physical one that is connected to our body (Becker 26). From the beginning, there is the confusion about where humanity really is—in the symbolic inner self or in the physical body.

The inner self represents the freedom of thought, imagination, and the infinite reach of symbolism, while the body represents determinism and boundness (Becker 42). The internal and external struggle of reality begs the questions of who we are. Most of our meanings are built into us from the outside, from our dealings with others (Becker 48). These meanings later continue to transform within our mind. Memory appears as a great example when a moment outside the body continues to live inside the body.

We live in half obscurity about our lives because we are in a constant state of interacting with our reality and with the interactions going on in our mind. In addition, there is a reality that we produce for ourselves, and another reality that is unseen underneath the reality that we are conscious of. In *Descartes’ Error*, Damasio describes our reality as a marvelous construction complicated by all types of images. We have a reality that we experience which appears
streamlined, but there is an abundance of complicated imagery and actions that go on to create this hybridized experience.

I want my paintings to appear in process, so that the image can at any moment stabilize or fall apart, much like what happens when we look into our own paradox. Interacting with these spaces and objects is like interacting with ourselves; where we can find stability or fragility with a given set of circumstances. With our unstable identity, we are constantly reapplying memories and trying to interpret what is going on in our minds. Our sense of self is always in process and changing, depending upon a new illusion.

There is no constant self; there is always instability or movement, unlike the solid, immovable representation we often seen in photographs. The center of our self is not visual, but images can become our double, doppelganger, or ghost. Memories, images and objects all become means of how we identify who we are, making them all our double. When we look at ourselves, we are dealing with the other, and the double becomes our second body. The extension is separate, fragmented and is always an alteration of reality.

Our ability to view ourselves has created introspection. Mirrors, pictures and video are means to self-discovery. We are affected by stories of ourselves from others and the constant barrage of past images. Who we appear to be in those pictures changes even though the image is stable, and we review and reapply how they affect us. As we learn more about our lineage or relatives, we also let this affect how we view ourselves.

With pictures and video we have more ways to examine and dissect moments. Our own image shows us people who are not really ourselves and confuses us with multiple levels of truth. We identify who we are from photographs; they become proof of our character at certain points in time. Photos let us go back to things we missed when or if we were there, and stories, photographs, and memories often contradict each other. Images are how we fill the voids of
memory in modern culture, to preserve the remnants of a world that has disappeared (Lippard). These sources are removed from reality, and their selection can be used to obscure or produce the truth. Our identity becomes what we deploy with these images, and we develop an ownership of these objects, as props in our personal identity. Photographs are objects of memory for many people, and they become signifiers or proof in the existing world of moments that are no longer real.

In my work, I show the collection of memories meeting in clusters or collision points. In these situations, I imagine that a type of device functions to process the imagery. The devices are receivers and out-putters that mix and organize the information in unusual ways. I explore the mind-space as a machine like construction regenerating and eating images, in a constant state of change. The transformation of memories and experiences though the functional object serves as a contemporary metaphor of the mind.

The device starts to appear as something that is predictable in its functions, but also that works on its own priorities. These devices skew imagery and elements of normal reality to show the instability that occurs within our mind as we think. The object describes a moving process within time, which filters memories in stages of transformation. Each device seems to work compulsively; like the way our mind continuously works with imagery in an effort to make sense. This compulsion parallels our need to rework memories that we cannot figure out. These devices function and develop because of associations made intuitively or dwelled upon.

This idea of the device is important because it is an object that is constantly changing, much like what happens when we look at memory objects. We believe objects are stable and unchangeable because they have physicality. Even though the physical form may not change, the meaning of that object continues to adjust. The metaphor of the device seems to meet both criteria, because it is both an object and always changing.
The use of the device formulates a painting that translates the meeting of these images. The viewer can focus on the images combination and movement, while thinking of what stories can be created from the images provided, or wonder what has been left out. The images create an interaction, which allows for the work to be about creating narratives, with both real and unreal elements.

Obscurity is a crucial motif within my work, which occurs when imagery collides. This obscurity parallels our own process of remembering. Through abstraction I show the reconciling of images as they are transformed or removed from our lives. We are often left with small parts of unreliable knowledge that are not complete thoughts in linear time. I show obscurity through blurring images, combining imagery, and fracturing imagery. I also use any efforts of combining or dividing images, to parallel the obscurity in our thoughts. I prefer to reach a point where the image can be coming or going in an enigmatic state. With the lack of clarity, the viewer is invited to interact with the imagery the same way they do with their own memories, similar to a dream.

The dream is an important influence in my work because memory is stored and explored through dream lives. “Our dreams are a conglomeration of the firing of the central nervous systems as we sleep, and our experiences help us put these things together in some sort of imagery” (Coyote). In our dreams, our brain plays with the role of objects and memories. While we sleep our associations are relaxed and more intuitive. We are able to put together unrelated elements because we are having the freedom to make greater and wider associations. In dreams, we are able to play out scenarios, fears, and apply knowledge while connecting learned knowledge to memories. During sleep our brain strengthens our perceptions of events that happen throughout the day. Most researchers think that once information has been stored in long-term memory, it is in our brain permanently. When we are unable to retrieve the information it is
not because the information was lost, but rather that the link or association had faded. Short-term memories fade quickly, sometimes after only a few seconds and are often replaced by incoming information.

Our dreams are rooted in reality but elements have been skewed (Coyote). All of my imagery is reality and logic-based, but it is manipulated to connect to the internal or evoke a sense of dream logic. I use dream imagery to more freely express how fanatical the self is, and I use an intuitive and non-linear approach for free associations to play with the idea of self. I play with reality to expose that our own realities are exactly what we have depicted for ourselves. By using multiple viewpoints and playing with gravity, light, and scale, I try to provoke that our own pasts are non-linear and like complex maps.

I prefer the blurred boundaries of showing a dream and a state of reality. When memory meets with the dream, it is often jolting or unsettling because it ties up our emotions with this fictional state. The dream to most people is considered made up, false, or has the ability to be fantastic because we know it is not real. Memory, on the other hand, is tied to our ideas of truth, reality, and a stable sense of self. Memory happened to us, we saw it or experienced it, so therefore we think it is real and does not connect to the unreal of the dream. We don’t like to think of our memories as a false state, we want them to be real and a “Truth.”

The memory depicted in my work is more associated with dreams. They have the danger of change, not being real, or being embellished. I like to look at the illusion of memory as a similar experience to the dream. Both are a form of illusion, and we consider illusion as a type of lie. We normally define a lie as something we know is false and but intentionally use it to deceive others, but how is this idea changed if we don’t know something is not a truth, or if we are telling it to ourselves? Memory is no longer happening, so it is no longer connected to our waking reality. Memory exists only in the reality of our minds, one that has all the great freedom
of our dreams. This connection is uneasy because we feel that the imaginary is not important, so
connecting our memories to the false puts the makeup of our identity in danger. That is where we
are wrong. Just because something is not real, does not make it less important, or worthy of
emotion.

We may often feel that the illusion of play or daydreaming has no real importance in our
daily lives, but it is in the following situation we could learn from “child’s play.” “In spite of all
the emotion with which he cachets his world of play, the child distinguishes it quite well from
reality; and he likes to link his imagined objects and situation to the tangible and visible things of
the real world” (Popova). This describes what we are unable to do with our memories. A
memory is like a day dream. It is a continuation of and a substitute for what parallels the play of
childhood. (Popova)

The dream is a space where reason can take a break and dream logic can take over.
Dream logic involves the overlapping, displacement or compression of time, location, space, and
meaning. While in the dream, we interact as if things are normal, not until we wake do we realize
that most of the imagery and narrative are extremely strange. While some can appear to be
frightening, dreams often have an element of play or fun. There is a game-playing element to
solve and make sense of the happenings. In my work, I am simultaneously preserving and
destroying what our memories represent, as an element of play for myself to mix and interact
with imagery. Our dreams become mysteries that give us insight that we might not have in our
conscious life, or can lead us to further understanding of the self. In these dream scenarios, there
is a feeling of seeking and there are multiple ways that yearning is fulfilled.

My work has its roots in surrealism, with motif connections, such as the uncanny or the
dream. The surrealists thought about the subconscious and how unpredictable our minds can be.
Because of thinkers like Freud, we came to look under the surface of things and focused on
sleep, the subconscious, and the psyche. Freud spent a fair amount of his career exploring the psychology of dreams, as well as other explorations in day-dreaming (Popova). Though his theories have been the subject of much controversy and subsequent revision, they remain a fascinating formative framework for much of the modern understanding of the psyche (Popova). This exploration broadened our view of the mind, and provided us with information about the psyche that was previously unexplored. My work connects to the aesthetic of surrealism because I am thinking about the dream and places outside reality, much like the surrealists were. I also have learned a great deal about the functioning of the mind from these foundations of scientific exploration of the brain.

The images I paint lend themselves to a sense of the uncanny or marvelous. I feel that representing an in-between state of dream and reality results in the strange. The uncanny to me, includes the element of transformation and the tension between the two states. To Jacques Lacan, the uncanny is the spark or flash between two signifiers. To Freud, the phrase, “das unheimlach” (homley & unhomly) becomes representative of the uncanny. It is the battle of dull and familiar with the dangerous and exciting. I find ways to explore these elements to create tension within my work.

The uncanny for Freud involves the return of a familiar phenomenon, an image, object, person or event, made strange by repression. This return of a repressed image creates an ambiguous event, which leads to a feeling of the marvelous. It can occur as an indistinction between the real and imagined, confusion between the animate and the inanimate, or the crossover of physical reality with a psychic reality (Foster 7). I try to create the same experience in my work by mixing everyday imagery with abstraction, and the real of memory with the unreal of the dream.
I use a variety of sources, including personal photos, everyday objects and nonsense imagery in my work. I look for images that trigger my own memory or can be connected to memories through fixation, associations or patterns. Using dream-like associations, I often find seemingly unrelated images. I try to access the uncanny through vanitas-like objects, images with repeated patterns, objects that are in a state of transformation or that can transform the state of others. I also look for obscurities within images that lend themselves to transformation, or shapes that when obscured can appear as another. The tension of these objects in real life and how they are juxtaposed creates a familiar confusion that connects to the historical past of the uncanny.

Collage is important to my work because it can be a literal gathering of things that I use to deploy an image depicting memory. This parallels the process that occurs in our brain. The process of collage ties to the roots of the uncanny in that broken images are readily available, by cutting and recombining images. Collage shows unlikely things being combined in an upfront way. The multiple sources are exposed and the time represented shows a disregard to the linear. Collage actually becomes a visual and physical metaphor to the process of memory and the manipulation that occurs.

The artists I look to for inspiration are also looking into memory, as well as exploring the boundaries of obscurity. Adrian Ghenie is a painter who uses the weaving of personal histories with collective memories to make a psychologically disturbing encounter on the part of the viewer. The viewer may experience a sense of unease or a strange jolt of recognition as he or she surveys Ghenie’s paintings. I share his interest in unearthing marginal events and seemingly insignificant details to explore how these elements inform our identity in the present. Alessandro Pessoli, an artist who is interested in the manipulation of history, also uses the palimpsest. I am influenced by his ideas of fluidity within historical images.
My work is a constant exploration between the internal and external. I am fascinated with memory because it is an example of how a moment occurring outside continues to exist inside. The glut of imagery that bombards us on a daily basis influences me to describe the past while presenting it as fiction. I find systems within the mind that create obscurity through sight, process of memory, gaps of recall, current influences, and exploration through the dream. The devices I create, mimic the way our mind works in order to imitate our own interaction and struggle between body and inner self. Through my investigation, I find that both factual and imaginary experiences have tremendous influences on our memory, which exposes an unclear path of imagery, formed to conjure our identity.
WORKS CITED


Works Consulted


1). DEVISE, 
53” x 45”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

2). FAVORITE, 
48” x 30”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

3). FUTURE RIDDLE OF PAST EVENTS, 
48” x 60”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

4). DISCLOSE THE DOUBT, 
34” x 48”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

5). BILLOW, 
14” x 10”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

6). STILL, 
14” x 10”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

7). UNTITLED, 
14” x 10”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

8). ASSEMBLE, 
11” x 10”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

9). LEATHER LEAD, 
11” x 10”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

10). UNTITLED, 
10” x 11”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

11). UNTITLED, 
12” x 16”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

12). SWAY, 
17” x 11, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

13). ERRATIC, 
17 1/2” x 14”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

14). SIFT, 
17” x 11”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

15). UNTITLED, 
11” x 17”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012
16) UNTITLED,
17” x 11”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

17) DAY,
17” x 11”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

18) CONCOCT,
12” x 16”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

19) FOUNDATION,
16” x 12”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

20) UNTITLED,
12” x 16”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

21) UNSETTLE,
16” x 14”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

22) SWELLED,
16” x 20”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

23) UNTITLED,
12” x 16”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

24) UNTITLED,
14” x 16”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

25) THREE THINGS,
16” x 12”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

26) UNTITLED,
12” x 16”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

27) UNTITLED,
16” x 12”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

28) CONSTRUCT,
16” x 12”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

29) INSCRIBER,
35” x 43”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

30) BARBED WHISK,
45” x 40”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012

31) ROTRUCTOR,
65” x 45”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012
32) DWELL,
45” x 32”, Oil & mixed media on panel, 2012