

**DAMAGED**

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A Thesis  
presented to the faculty of the Graduate School  
at the University of Missouri – Columbia

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Fine Arts

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by  
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The undersigned, Appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have  
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DAMAGED

Presented by Deborah Lynn Crites, a candidate for the Degree of Master of Fine  
Arts, and hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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## **DEDICATION**

To my parents and family who were always there to support and encourage me, both emotionally and financially, along my path. Without the unending and unconditional love and support that I received from them I would not be who I am today.

To my fellow graduate students: For their wonderful critiques and conversations, which helped me, formulate my words and thoughts. Without their encouragement, support and commiseration in our shared experience, I may have never made it though.

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## **Abstract**

I have always been fascinated human behavior and what motivates peoples choices made in life. This interest is more profound than merely my own inactive and proactive conduct, it also involves others behaviors as well. In other words, what influences our attitudes and actions toward other's and ourselves?

My work is an investigation into why we do the things that we do. In my self-exploration and observation of others I have discovered that one motivating factor for human behavior is based on past experiences and events, specifically traumatic events that have happened in the course of life. One commonality is that we all bear physical, emotional and psychological damage from traumatic events, often from childhood. We carry these experiences in our memories physically and emotionally like scars. Scars mark time, record personal histories, shape our mental processes, directed our life course, define who we are and how we behave and treat others. I am spotlighting these areas we often disregard to gain insight into the nature of human behavior.



## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of art the subject of psychological issues and a deep emotional response to life has been a common theme. Recent writings on the subject are expressed in *The Emotionalist Manifesto*, written by James Desrosier in 2009. This document conveys the idea of making art through emotional expression. Within the manifesto Desrosier discusses an emotive approach similar to the expressionist movement. Desrosier states that:

True artists cast themselves headlong into the awesome ephemera of human emotion—life-begetting, life-giving, life-defining emotion. They enter, go deep into any single emotion, wade through any sector of emotion. Or they pause at the brink of all emotion and withstand the onslaught to observe adroitly the content, dynamics, implications and manifestations of emotion. Then they render this for us to consume visually, viscerally, verbally, aurally. (Desrosier, 2009, p.1)

My work resides in this area of emotional investigation. In this body of work, like the expressionist and the emotionalist, I pause at the brink of emotions to illustrate difficult and very personal issues like emotional traumas from abuse or painful events, that otherwise tend to be marginalized. Expressionist artists like Edvard Munch, Vincent Van Gogh and Kathe Kollwitz dug deep in their psyches to discover what it means to be alive through emotional reality. Expressionism in art was a movement that rejected traditional methods of representing objective reality. Instead, the expressionist exaggerated and distorted aspects of the outside world in order to express subjective moods and feelings. “Above all, this

was an art that looked inward, to the soul and psyche (Gilbert, 1992, p.47).” In other words, their landscapes and portraits were actually internal landscapes often times expressing dramatic and emotionally weighted themes that explored and conveyed fear, horror and the grotesque expressing more personal outlooks or states of mind.

More recently artists like Louise Bourgeois have also delved deep into the subject of emotional traumas. Bourgeois’ work “...atmospherically reprises [an] aura of psychic pain (Goodman 2009, p.74).” She digs deep into personal traumas and “[in] the process, some of the darkest and most complex existential states including fear, anger, joy and self-doubt, are exposed and materialized into works memorable for their unabashed honesty and visceral ambivalence (Tanguy, 2010, p. 66-68).” The visceral appeal of Bourgeois has both a seductive and repulsive quality as in *Arched Figure* and *Blooming Janus*. This quality has a push-pull effect that draws on the emotions. Her work is autobiographical and inspired by her childhood traumas of her father’s blatant adulterous affairs as well as her mother’s illness. These events “stained Bourgeois’ psyche with obsessions like fear of abandonment, infidelity, loneliness, loss of innocence, decay (of love, of body), punishment, emotional blindness (Sonnenberg, 2006, p.36).”

Like Bourgeois my work is deeply rooted in the analysis of the psychological/emotional processes. In an interview in *Fiber Arts* Bourgeois states that she has “always felt that [her] work is a form of psychoanalysis (Sonnenberg, 2006, p.37).” My work differs from Bourgeois in that it deals with less specific

traumas and more from the perspective of an observer to the results of the traumatic events and the mechanisms we employ to hide the pain and embarrassment from the abuse and trauma.

## TRAUMA

Most people bear some kind of physical, emotional or psychological damage from traumatic events that have occurred in their lives. “A traumatic event involves a singular experience or enduring event or events that completely overwhelm the individual's ability to cope or integrate the ideas and emotions involved with that experience (Giller, 1999).” These experiences are carried both consciously and subconsciously, like scars, in one’s memory physically and emotionally. Scars have the ability to record personal histories and are memories that affect the past, present and future. The scars can be seen as stories recorded in flesh as well as in the psyches. These traumatic events shape mental processes and direct an individual’s course in life. They define a person and influence their behavior and treatment of others.

Many times these damaged areas are hidden from public view because no one wants to expose their wounded core. However, this body of work addresses the very tumultuous hidden damage of the internal landscape and reveals the wounds that are caused by the physical, emotional and mental traumas that one endures throughout the course of life. The work gives voice to the rarely revealed and often denied aspects of life. Exposing the hidden damage provides insight into the less attractive events that shape peoples lives and tell the individual's story. I use metaphors dealing with topics of psychological traumas, scars,

isolation, facades and the seduction of the grotesque to give voice to these issues and draw the observer into the inner world that is otherwise kept hidden.

Psychological traumas, for example, are inner traumas that occur when extremely disturbing, distressing, horrendous and painful experiences happen. This trauma can cause emotional shock and often has lasting psychological effects. These events may come in physical or mental forms and may revolve around emotionally stressful events. The trauma, or rather the memory of the trauma, lives on though the wounds may have healed. The damage from the trauma affects one's behavior and emotional outlook long after the ordeal has passed. Life experiences, both negative and positive, influence the individual and has the power to dictate direction in life. Some traumas however, are not obvious or on the exterior but rather are buried beneath the surface. These ordeals may be the result of psychological damage from verbal, physical, and/or sexual abuse. Frequently, the influences from these events go unnoticed and are seldom understood for the effect on human behavior. The damaged, tattered and frayed imagery used in all of my work reflects these wounded areas. There are some wounds that do not leave a physical scar, at least not on the surface. This particular damage is hidden so deep in the psyche that often people are unaware of and even deny that damage exists altogether. People's ignorance of these events does not negate the damage or the affects that the damage can have.

The results of wounds from trauma often leave physical scars in the psyche. These scars represent a traumatic event that is memory recorded in our

flesh. Each disfigurement or blemish has a story attached. Though most scars are associated with pain, they are often displayed proudly, as a memorial to that particular period which, can bring up feelings of nostalgia as that occasion in life is remembered fondly. Still other wounds signify faded memories that are buried deep in our psyche.

However not all scars have a physical reference. Some scars are the result of psychological trauma. A number of traumatic events are remembered in detail, while other damage can be so disturbing that the individual may block the trauma altogether. Jon Allen in his book, *Coping With Trauma* states that:

It is the subjective experience of the objective events that constitutes the trauma. . . Psychologically, the bottom line of trauma is overwhelming emotion and a feeling of utter helplessness. There may or may not be bodily injury, but psychological trauma is coupled with physiological upheaval that plays a leading role in the long-range effects. (Allen, 1995, p.14)

In this body of work scars are used as a metaphor to represent both internally and externally damaged areas that are often keep hidden.

When someone suffers from physical, verbal or sexual abuse, a sense of isolation and depression often results. This feeling of isolation is due in part to the belief that no one else has had these experiences. Guilt also plays a role in some cases. For example the consequence of rape or sexual abuse toward children carries the stigma of guilt. In our society the victim is often accused of not having done enough to stop the abuse. “Why didn’t you just tell him/her no?” or “Why did you stay in that abusive situation?” are frequently the questions and rebukes towards victims. These judgments only further feelings of isolation. The

illusion that no one else has gone through these damaging events and the guilt associated with blame is what supports this sense of isolation and causes a disconnection from reality and personal relationships. These symptoms of isolation cause sufferers to retreat further and further into their own inner world. In my work, I speak to these issues by physically isolating some of the individual pieces as in *Raw* and *Gravity* (Figure 1 and Figure 2) or by speaking directly to the isolation as in *Loss* (Figure 9).

The isolation and scars caused from these traumatic events are usually a source of embarrassment for the individual. In order to hide psychological damage, as well as the pain from the memory, people may create a façade as a means of protection from the judgment of others. The façade presented to the outside world conceals abused and neglected interiors. Additionally, a façade can function as a shell or cocoon to protect and contain potential growth, but it can also act as a trap or cage, making it difficult to escape or overcome vulnerabilities and limitations. The shell may be transparent or opaque, successful or unsuccessful. What lies beneath the surface is a ravaged psyche, personal fears and the worn delusional path that is habitually tread. The exterior does not go unmarred but shows signs of wear and tear from time and the strain of concealing what is inside. Oddly there is a certain amount of endearment and beauty bestowed on these disturbed areas. Perhaps it is because the wound has been carried for so long that the memory of the pain is comforting and even desirable.

The comfort and pain from the damaged areas, created within the internal landscape, is rarely pleasant to look at and often times and often avoided. However, there is a seductive quality to these scars and damaged areas that has the capacity to attract and repel despite or because of their revolting nature. The attraction to unresolved trauma is often relived over and over again through out ones life. "Our unresolved, implicit memories from our early childhood often result in our re-creating similar situations in an attempt to resolve early childhood trauma (Ream, 2010)." The ability of an image or object to attract and repel simultaneously creates a dichotomy between what is perceived as the beautiful and good or ugly and bad. The dichotomy between the two polar opposites would seem to contradict one another. However, what may not be apparent is the capacity for a thing to possess qualities of both. That is to say, having the power to draw us in and repulse us at the same time. For example, when we come across a horrific car accident many people slow down to look. What are they hoping to see? Perhaps it is in anticipation of seeing something disgusting or the disbelief that such a horrific event could and actually does exist. What quality in the human character allows for the desire to witness these uncomfortable and frightening images?

In this body of work all of the pieces have the characteristic of seduction and repulsion of the grotesque. Using seduction and repulsion, scars, facades, isolation and distressed materials as a metaphor for psychological and emotional traumas that we shroud, I construct pieces that reveal the wounds and damage that is conceal as well as how they affect the individual's life.



## MATERIAL PROCESS

The material process is as important to the work as the imagery itself. To further the ideas of damage, scars and emotional pain from life's traumatic events, I actively damage the work. Using hand-made paper, clay, pigments and rope I rip and tear, construct and deconstruct. Distressing the very structure, I peel back the layers and reduce the object to its bare bones. Stripped of its exterior the work reveals the innermost turbulent traumas that lie beneath the surface, hidden from public view. Overbeaten flax and abaca are the materials used because this material offers both strength and fragility that furthers the idea of the resiliency and vulnerability of the human condition. Additionally this type of paper creates a skin-like quality that connects the work visually to the human body.

Another material used for its strength and fragility is clay. Ceramic forms are incorporated for their surface quality, which can be manipulated to look distressed and worn. However, it is the characteristics of weight and density that impart a feeling of impenetrable emotional gravity that is best conveyed through this material. The flexibility of the material choices of clay and paper allows for a variety of treatments that reinforce a distressed surface quality. The overall result is a disturbingly beautiful form that speaks of damage, beauty and growth from the emotional, psychological, and physical scars that have become an integral part of an individual (see Figure 3).

## ADULT TRAUMA

When I began to investigate these areas of trauma I looked to examples of adult traumas. The first area researched was psychological damage from lost love within the context of emotionally charged love affairs and relationships. The work *Raw* (Figure 1) suggests the result of bruised and abrasive emotions due to a broken heart. The grief of a lost love, though potentially devastating, seemed somewhat superficial and still did not quite get at the underlying causes for the distress, so I dove deeper. I began to look at the effects of the emotions themselves and how they affect the individual. Unprocessed and negative feelings, like fear, anger and sadness imparted a sense of heaviness as they accumulate inside the psyche. *Gravity* (Figure 2) addresses the sensations of overwhelming emotions that weight us down. After the completion of *Gravity* I began to consider how undesirable emotions are often hidden away behind a front that is put forth in an attempt to protect more delicate areas. The pieces that grew out of this vein of thought were *Gilded Cage* and *Façade* (Figure 4) both of which speak to interior verses exterior spaces.

### *RAW*

The raw emotional feelings one experiences after a break up are not merely unpleasant but often devastating as seen in *Raw* (Figure 1). What is left behind are agonizing and tender sensations that can scar one for any future relationships. What is carried forward is personal baggage. In order to depict these feelings and abrasive emotions the work is constructed of manila rope that

has been distressed by cooking it in a caustic substance, soda ash, and then dyed red to give the underlying effect of flesh, tendon and muscle fiber. The rope was used because it has the quality of sinuous or fibrous tissue that operates as a metaphor for the human body and what lies under the surface of the skin. The rope was knotted and crocheted to represent the tangled knotted emotions we feel after being jilted. For the surface treatment the rope was covered with many layers of overbeaten flax both in its natural color, which is similar to decaying skin, and in reddish pink flesh tones to give the scraped raw look. The piece was further altered using a drill with a wire brush attachment to scratch, tear, rip and cut into the surface to expose the sinewy structure of the flesh and muscle. Finally I mercilessly torched the surface to give a burnt effect to further the sense of tender, burnt and charred emotions one has in this situation. The action of ripping, slashing and burning expresses the psychological wounds associated with a break up.

There are two separate forms held within this piece that are only connected at the bottom and the top, to indicate that the two individuals were close but now estranged. The forms are not embracing but held apart with only a minimal connection. The divided forms resemble slabs of meat that have been run through the grinder. This refers to the term “meat market” which, is a metaphor often used in a negative way in the world of dating. The entire piece is then encased in a crocheted net-like form. The structure acts both as an entrapment and a safety net. This web pattern also relates to an exterior manifestation that characterizes a desire to cover ones bared soul in this kind of

situation. However, the netting is quite transparent and offers very little protection, to reference the idea that these raw feelings are like wearing your heart on your sleeve. The transparency of the façade gives the observer the opportunity to see the interior landscape that oftentimes is covered from view. The viewer must bare witness to the trauma. The work also has a push-pull effect that visually seduces and draws the viewer into the piece. However, upon further inspection the onlooker is met with a shocking scene. The scorched, disgusting and gnarled image that once seduced now repulses. It is through this dichotomy of pulling the spectators in to engage the work in this way that reinforces the affects of the seduction of the grotesque and brings up memories of personal traumas.

In addition to these unprocessed emotions the traumatized victim may feel isolated and cut off, not just from that person, but from others as well. In order to exemplify these sensations I have suspended the work from the ceiling. The suspension acts as an element of isolation because the work is denied the support of the wall, the pedestal or the floor that is traditionally used to display sculpture, and is only connected by a thin thread-like element to the ceiling. Exhibiting the work in this way also allows the viewer to engage with the piece in the round, which exposes it from all angles and contributes to the idea of raw uncovered sentiments. The overall effect is difficult to look at but at the same time we find ourselves seduced by it. Despite the unpleasant image, the viewer is drawn into the piece and there is a certain beauty in that rawness that is difficult to look at and yet we cannot look away. I call this the “train wreck effect.” It

happens when we come across something disgusting yet simultaneously intriguing. The overall effect of the work speaks to emotional damage, psychological trauma, and an interior landscape that the public audience is often denied.

### *GRAVITY*

The weight of emotions can be overwhelming and feel heavy. Unresolved emotions a sense isolation and loneliness. However, in this case the trauma is not a single event but rather suppressed emotional burdens that over time build up and create an overpowering sense of impending danger. This is often how one feels when depression becomes overwhelming. These emotions can be from contrasting influences that battle for supremacy. The weight and pressure can be so great at times that it feels like the bulk of the world is on ones shoulders. The result of this emotional gravity can send its victim crashing to earth, feeling shattered, broken and crushed. *Gravity* (Figure 2) deals with this sensation of feeling overwhelmed and defeated by a force that seems out of control. The sensation is laden with unresolved emotions so massive that emotional weight pulls its victim deeper in a downward spiral.

To demonstrate the sense of emotional heaviness, contrasting materials of clay and speaker wire are juxtaposed and integrated to suggest emotional baggage. The ceramic material, by its physical weight, corresponds to the sheer mass and weight often associated with overwhelming emotions. The forms are simple spheres that symbolize potential destructive emotional forces. Each sphere has a cracked, distressed surface treatment symbolizing individual

emotional pain and how this pain wears us down. This piece is comprised of ceramic spheres entrapped in a loosely woven net. The ceramic material, like that of paper, gives the quality of strength and fragility simultaneously. For example the clay after being fired to a very high temperature vitrifies to form a bond that gives the ceramic form its strength. However, the process of vitrification also leaves the piece glass-like, fragile and prone to breakage if dropped on a hard surface (Figure 3). It is this dichotomy of materials that psychologically addresses the strength and fragility of this emotional condition.

The netted crochet speaker wire incorporated into this form functions in a similar way as *Raw* (Figure 1) in that it provides the illusion of containment. The knotted web acts as an entrapment, tangling and complicating the forms. The open weave of the net provides opportunity for escape as the ceramic spheres bulge from the burden of weight and force themselves into the openings. A single event may not be enough to bring the emotional weight to a critical mass, but as these painful memories collect they can create emotional weight that is more significant than the individual event. However, collectively these individual miseries are able to overload the senses and create a paralyzing effect.

The massive weight of the seething emotions is seen in the piece as the structure fails, relinquishing its battle and simply gives away. In this display the entire structure lays on the ground with the broken fragments strewn about it. Its only support system is inadequate as the bent and mangled metal support hangs precariously to the wall. The over-all form of the piece relates to the devastating

physical weight that emotionally traumatic conditions can sometimes cause. The overwhelming burdens that the trauma creates can lead to psychological collapse. Where *Gravity* (see Figure 2) deals with issues of emotional burdens the works *Gilded Cage* and *Façade* (Figure 4) focus on the ways in which emotional turmoil that resides on the inside is hidden from public view.

#### *GILDED CAGE AND FAÇADE*

What an individual presents to the outside world is usually very different than what lies inside. The works *Gilded Cage* and *Façade* (Figure 4) address the dichotomy between interior versus exterior spaces. The façade, no matter how beautiful or ugly, traps and creates stagnation in personal growth. These works directly address issues of entrapment, concealment and the pain and insecurities we hide versus the façade that is presented to the outside world. The vessel forms are a metaphor for the human body. They are hung in tandem because they speak of the same issues but in different ways. The outer shell represents the façade presented to the outside world while the interior corresponds to the buried damage.

*Gilded Cage* (Figure 4) focuses on the façade that is presented while the interior traumas that are hidden. This piece suggests an external image is created to present the illusion of normalcy and beauty in order to disguise the pain and trauma. The surface of the exterior form is embellished with gold leaf, an adornment that reflects a desire to show only the best to the world, but the gold leaf is imperfect. A wash of burnt sienna is applied over the top of the gold leaf to give a tarnished and distressed appearance. The façade is worn and

spoiled with time. The stress from continually hiding or suppressing the dark, scary wounded areas begins to take its toll. Riddled with small holes, the mental façade begins to fail and allows the viewer access to the interior landscape. It is through these damaged facets that one views and judges others, the world and the self. Using similar techniques of distressing the material the interior of *Gravity* (see Figure 2), like *Raw* (see Figure 1) reveals a tattered and bruised subject. No one wants to look at these dark scary areas. No one wants to deal with these painful memories or events precisely because they can be so horrifying. Initially it is easier to deny these wounded areas rather than deal with the anxiety of confronting the fears. However, as suggested in *Gilded Cage* (see Figure 4) these traumas become so ingrained that they not only become defining traits of an individual but also eventually break through as festering wounds.

The other aspect of concealment in this installation is seen in *Façade* (Figure 4). In this piece the shell acts as a protective cocoon to keep harsh outside influences at bay rather than a presentation to impress others. In this instance the shell functions both as an element of protection, a shield, and an opportunity to transform but also as an aspect of entrapment in an emotional prison. After all, the act of metamorphosis is not usually a pleasant experience nor is it always successful. The outer cocoon of overbeaten abaca has an underlying construction, loosely crocheted cotton cord, which resembles a net and reflects the tangled web we weave as well as the difficulties and obstacles in our path. The cocoon conceals a wounded interior but the exterior casing itself is flawed. Holes have been burnt into the shell allowing the viewer access into the



turbulent core, which metaphorically depicts the damage from repressed memories and emotions on the inside. The viewer is confronted with an image that is battered, bloody and difficult to look at.

This piece, once again the façade is constructed to protect, but this is a short-term fix. It may seem easier to deny these wounded areas than to deal with the feeling of anxiety from the thought of confronting these fears. However, over time, as seen in this piece, these trapped injured areas become so ingrained that they become an integral part of the whole. There is a certain irony at play here in this flawed design that protects and enslaves simultaneously.

The effects of these adult traumas represented in the pieces are comprised mainly with emotional turmoil and the manner in which the trauma is concealed. The gravity of these feelings can be destructive and cause depression, anxiety and stress. Many individuals may find these emotions crippling and hard to overcome. The pieces in this section of work reveal the wounded psyche, turmoil and stress of the individual so that the viewer may recount their own personal stories and perhaps begin to heal.

## CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

In working through some of these adult traumas I realized I still had not dug deep enough into the underlying factors that affect one's life. After further thought it seemed apparent that most of the personal baggage that is carried throughout one's lifetime starts much sooner. This damage happens at a very early age before the child is aware or conscious of the situation. The extent of childhood trauma is confounding. "Everyday children are beaten, burned, slapped, whipped, thrown, shaken, kicked and raped (Giller, 1999)." It can take years to process this deep seeded trauma that happens in childhood. These traumatic events have the most profound effects and are the ones that can define the individual. According to Bruce D. Berry, and Ronnie Pollard, "Childhood experiences define the adult by shaping the developing brain (1990, p.35)."

The first piece in this series, *Hear No* (Figure 5), simultaneously addresses the marginalization of children by adults as well as how adults for various reasons ignore and deny abuse perpetrated on children. *Abused* (Figure 7) focuses on the very complex issues of child abuse, specifically sexual abuse. *Loss* (Figure 9), on the other hand, addresses the lost of our childhood innocence from abusive and traumatic events.

### *HEAR NO*

*Hear No* (Figure 5), a triptych, incorporates the qualities of clay into three cast baby forms. The cast figures are arranged in a line and their positioning is

like the three-monkeys in the proverb “hear no, see no, speak no evil.” The surface treatment of the clay in this work is distressed like in *Gravity* (Figure 2). However, the clay in this case is under-fired giving the piece a dried out and thirsty presence. The parched surfaces suggest a feeling of wanting and the effect conveys a sentiment of incompleteness or a need for more attention. The dry surface treatment also reflects the overall idea of how children are often left wanting, and their needs are marginalized or ignored altogether.

The distressed surfaces provide a worn appearance that also helps to elicit feelings of empathy from the viewer (see Figure 8). The work speaks to issues of parental denial around child abuse and children’s needs by using baby forms instead of the monkeys. The distressed babies are covering their ears, eyes and mouth to suggest that children should not be seen, heard or speak of the abuse. This abuse could be physical, verbal or sexual.

This conspiracy of silence, combined with repeated shaming messages, may increase the likelihood that the child will feel that their experiences reflect negatively on themselves as well as their families and therefore they may continue to remain silent about the abusive episodes. (Robinson, 2010)

As Robinson said, time and time again adults deny the fact that a child is being abused. This issue is particularly difficult to expose. Parents are supposed to do their best to protect their children from harm, at least that is what most would like to believe. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. It is hard to admit that parents sometimes fall short in this task. Often the adult chooses to ignore the abuse hoping in some way that it will simply go away. Instead of addressing these issues they put on blinders so they cannot see the abuse. The blinders in

this case are put on the child and the silencing of the child is a way in which the parent ignores what is happening. The child, being incapable of defending herself is left isolated in her experience. This piece proposes that like the old proverb, if we do not hear, see or speak of the abuse or give any attention to the event, then we can pretend that it does not exist or that it will simply go away.

### *ABUSED*

As stated earlier, the abuses that are perpetrated on children are horrific and none more so than sexual abuse. Young children are unable to speak up for themselves and are therefore easily manipulated and vulnerable to mistreatment. Like *Hear No* (see Figure 5), the piece *Abused* (Figure 7) broaches this very delicate subject. The work is set in the environment of a baby's crib, generally a safe and protected location, but in this case there is no safety. A family member sexually abuses most children so the home is not always the safest place.

No one wants to think that anything so ugly could happen in their family but the truth is that most victims are molested by someone they know. According to Advocates for Youth a study done in three states reveals 96% of reported rape survivors under age 12 knew their attacker. (Olver, ,2010)

No one wants to believe his or her child could be sexually abused but the reality is that it happens everyday.

In the crib is a ceramic figure of a baby. It's surface is distressed much like in *Gravity* (Figure 2) and *Hear No* (Figure 5) to reflect the damage that is happening to the child. Woven into the sides of the crib are gnarly root-like tentacles. The roots are made of distressed manila rope that has been covered in

red and blue overbeaten abaca paper resembling veins and arteries. This gives a very visceral look that relates to the life giving blood of body, however, in this case the life force is being drained from the child. In the interior of the crib is a fitted sheet (see Figure 8) that is stained with red-brown, dried blood, and dingy yellow to further the idea of the damage and soiled incident the child has endured. The roots also suggest the looming danger and reality of the abusive nightmare. The red veined roots are creeping in toward the child wrapping around, specifically, the genital area to signify the area where the abuse flows to and the blue vines wrap around the neck and mouth of the child to indicate the silencing and the taking away of child's voice, life and power. In the crib is a small woven changing blanket that the child lies upon. The image is a photograph taken from cast ceramic baby dolls that was then woven into a JCad tapestry. JCad is two-dimensional CAD software that allows the user to design a program for machine weaving. The imagery on the blanket is not a happy scene of childhood but instead it is a scene of discarded babies with their genitals exposed. The woven tapestry is altered, stuffed and quilted which gives the two-dimensional surface depth. This depth creates a foreboding environment around the central ceramic figure that symbolizes the child being consumed by the experience. Exposing the child in this way further represents the sexual abuse the child has suffered at the hands of its abuser. The subject matter of this piece is powerful, disturbing and difficult to look at.

The installation is displayed in the center of the gallery exposed from all sides. This display gives the work a sense of isolation in the sterile setting of the

gallery. The foreboding atmosphere this image creates exposes the harsh reality of isolation and silencing that a child experiences. The work also has a seductive quality that draws the viewer in and repulses her simultaneously much like all of the pieces in this body of work. The subject matter in this work is the element that disgusts and repels the observer.

The disgust that the viewers experience from this horrific scene is nothing compared to what the child endures. The effects of these traumatic episodes can leave lasting impressions that affect the child for the rest of their life. Perhaps the biggest tragedy is that the child is deprived of innocence and purity.

### *LOSS*

What is lost after any trauma has occurred is represented in *Loss* (Figure 9). Before damage takes place there is a purity and incorruptibility that exist for a child. There is still a certain amount of naïveté however; this innocence is lost after abuse occurs. The child begins to understand that there is deep-seated pain, beyond the physical, in life. *Loss* (see Figure 9) speaks to that loss of purity and of innocence, which many have felt at one time or another.

The overbeaten paper is used for its skin-like attributes. Thin sheets of overbeaten flax are cast over realistic baby doll molds (Figure 10). The dolls are then removed when the flax dries, leaving behind an impression of the figure. These shells read as a shroud and are suspended at a height similar to that of a funerary display, which creates a sense of absence. The draping quality of the

paper shrouds is reminiscent of a baby blanket and reminds the viewer of the missing child. The skin-like characteristic of the paper and subject matter give the work a grotesque ambiance, while the empty baby forms seduce the viewer with their smooth surface and delicate features. The installation is comprised of multiples of the same figure that are arranged in rows like infants in hospital beds. Arranging the multiple figures in this way serves to further objectify the individual child signifying that the child is one of many in a long line. Each figure is suspended from the ceiling using very fine monofilament. The element of suspension and the fine thread allows for the individual figures to seem as though they are floating or hovering above the ground, which gives the work an ethereal ghostly quality. Subdued lighting is used to highlight the work and adds to the ghostly characteristics. The hovering or lifting of the work through suspension also acts as an aspect of ascension from the physical to the spiritual and speaks to religious innocence. Overall the installation represents ascension of the innocence that is lost after the trauma has occurred.

The suspension also works as an element of isolation because though the figures are grouped together they do not come in contact with one another. In other words they are together in their experience but separated from one another and therefore unaware of their commonality. The work is hauntingly beautiful in its simplicity. The empty shrouds are intended to elicit empathy from the observer who must bare witness to the pain and agony from the metaphorical death and loss of the child's innocence.

The subject of child abuse and neglect is often avoided which results in further complicating the issue and undermining the health of the child and society as a whole. Unless these concerns are addressed, children will continue to be abused and possibly grow up to abuse others as a result and so the cycle continues. Confronting the viewer with these issues of child abuse and neglect brings this subject out in the open where it can no longer be denied and allows for further discussion. Only by public display and admission of these delicate subjects of sexual abuse and neglect can the damage begin to be healed within the individual.



## CONCLUSION

The physical, emotional and psychological damage from traumatic events that have occurred in life can have profound effects on an individual's well being. These experiences affect the conscious and subconscious and, like scars, are recorded in memories both physically and emotionally. These traumatic events shape one's mental processes and direct one's course in life. What is presented to the outside world is usually very different than what lies inside. The internal landscape is not always a pleasant area to investigate because it often makes people uncomfortable. However, the longer these psychologically wounded parts go unattended, the more they begin to have adverse affects and aggravate other areas of people's lives. Revealing these disturbed areas allow the opportunity to face the fears that rule the internal emotional landscape. Through this emotional investigation into psychological damage I have gained further insight into the nature of human behavior and what it means to be emotionally present. The work gives voice to the rarely revealed and often denied aspects of people's lives. It is my hope to reveal these damages so that others will be forced to look and hopefully gain insight into their own internal workings as well.

In the later part of this body of work I began to investigate emotional damage that happens in childhood. It is my belief that these childhood abuses

are the traumas that have the most lasting effects. In this area of investigation I feel that I have barely scratched the surface. There is much more to be explored and to be brought into the public view. Putting forth these traumatic experiences visually adds a layer of exposure and information that opens this difficult and often painful subject in order to allow others an opportunity to embark on their own personal cathartic journey into their internal workings. The next step for me is to continue my research into personal traumas specifically the subject of child abuse and neglect. I feel that this subject in particular needs to be exposed so that it can be acknowledged, so that healing and prevention can transpire.

## ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1. Deborah Crites, *Raw*, 2009.  
Manila Rope, Overbeaten Flax and  
Crochet Thread.



Figure 2. Deborah Crites, *Gravity*, 2009.  
Ceramic Stoneware and Speaker Wire.



Figure 3. Detail, *Gravity*.



Figure 4. Deborah Crites, *Gilded Cage* and *Façade*, 2009. Overbeaten abaca and Flax and Cotton Cord.



Figure 5. Deborah Crites, *Hear No*, 2010.  
Ceramic Stoneware.



Figure 6. Detail, *Hear No*.



Figure 7. Deborah Crites, *Abused*, 2010 Overbeaten Flax and Abaca, Manila Rope, Cotton sheet, JCAD Weaving, and Baby Bed



Figure 8. Detail, *Abused*.



Figure 9. Deborah Crites, *Loss*, 2010.  
Overbeaten Flax.



Figure 10. Detail, *Loss*



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