The Self Outside: A Nearly Concealed Shared Heart

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THE SELF OUTSIDE: A NEARLY CONCEALED
SHARED HEART

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts
Visual Arts

by
Lori Brook Johnson
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Accepted by:
Professor Kathleen Thum Committee Chair
Dr. Andrea Feeser
Professor Todd McDonald
ABSTRACT

Rearranging past moments to reveal a nearly concealed shared heart, the work finds people who quickly pass through the gaze of the camera and translates the moment into a pigment referred to here as pastel’d dirt to draw out evidence of an awareness of ourselves in another.

As a salve to separation, the drawings are composed through amalgamated archival footage into a wavering pastiche of historical and contemporary art. This salve is applied via materials that are resolute and vulnerable (pastels both grip and dissolve, travel and saturate), and is thereby used to draw into our inevitable severance from one another: a severance that longingly hunts for its magnet and when found produces something fleeting, invisible, vital and known.

The drawings then, also, become the vehicle—the space giver, the time traveler, the dance composed around a look—for the bygone that lures us to our future (our own ultimate dissolving) to return our gaze.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this writing to my mother, Pamela Elisi Costilow, who presented to me my first encounter with the merging of drawing and the written word: a nightly reading of *The Little House* novels. And how this combination of art could alter reality for three young girls, one of them a mother, tucked away in the hollows and the hills. We were poor, and we didn’t know it: old wire hangers hung on our shoulders as if they were purses full of money. And we were alone, and we didn’t know it: a worn blue carpet imagined to be as vast and full as the sea.

I dedicate this body of artwork to the dirt and mud piled along and within the fields of my childhood homes in West Virginia. The worlds that I (and my buddies made up of tadpoles and dogs) created within that earth were the first of a lifelong series of drawings.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge my advisor and committee chair, Kathleen Thum for her graceful and skilled hand that drew a steady and anchored line along the turbulent waves of attending graduate school during a pandemic. I also wish to thank Professor Todd McDonald for his perfect blending of humor, wisdom and intuition: all qualities that helped me to see Fragonard and Bellini through a whole new lens. And lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Andrea Feeser—a teacher and a writer who holds the space for Twinship to emerge—for convincing me that I have something to say. You are all voices who have helped made my I.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TITLE PAGE .................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT ........................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION ......................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ...........................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. TWINSHIP ....................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. TWINSHIP IN WAR .........................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. TWINSHIP IN WOMEN ...................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. TWINSHIP SOMEWHERE BETWEEN A PROTEST AND A PARADE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. TWINSHIP IN COAL .........................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. A DIFFERENT DOOR .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES .......................................................................</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Conjoined Strangers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>St Francis in the Desert</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>WWII Dogfight</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ferro SP</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1938 Shtetl</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Spinners</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Village Noir Au Ciel Rouge</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Your Red Lips Are Your Pearl</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Fellow Citizens</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Corneliu Baba Fellow Citizens</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The Witches’ Kitchen</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I am Your ____</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Each Other</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The Sower</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>A Tender Touch</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Trickle Down</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Interior</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>1984 Miners’ Strike</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>The Abduction</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Switch Heart Breaker Boys</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Switch Heart Breaker Boys, Section 1</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>The Roaring Forties</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Switch Heart Breaker Boys, Section 2</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Switch Heart Breaker Boys, Section 3</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Switch Heart Breaker Boys, Section 3, Detail</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Switch Heart Breaker Boys, Section 4</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Switch Heart Breaker Boys, Section 5</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Group D</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

TWINSHIP

When researching a village in western Kansas for his famed *In Cold Blood* (2013), Truman Capote wrote:

Holcomb . . . can be seen from great distances. Not that there is much to see. . . . After rain, or when snowfalls thaw, the streets, unnamed, unshaded, unpaved, turn from the thickest dust into the direst mud. At one end of the town stands a stark old stucco structure, the roof of which supports an electric sign — ‘DANCE’— but the dancing has ceased” (3-4).

If an event of dire severance had not originally terminated the sway and rollick of Holcomb, it surely would have in time. *In Cold Blood* was born out of a desire to write about a community’s reaction to the murder of a local family. The book grew into something else (Als 2015), but these drawings took root in its germinating idea of community altered and moved around pastel’d dirt to dig holes in wounds to search for the very thing that would fill the holes right back up again: for where the dancing had indeed not ceased.

Before this digging and filling up, and before the first line was ever made, the drawings, unnamed, unmarked, unshaded and unmade traveled. They traveled not to the village of Holcomb, as Capote did, but, as nomads, tight roped their way to the past. In their conception, already peripatetic and hungry, the drawings saw the past in its inherent death as a fresh source of nutrition. They bypassed time and space and made a direct line from one location to the next—a time travel by tightrope to make immediate connections of a clear and direct social path. But without a balancing tool, the path’s tension—the
toppling weight of history—would cause a fall. The lined text of Capote started the
drawings with community, and we (the drawings and draw-er) moved through the story
not page by page but by location, one book to another, in search for the lined words that
would show us where the dancing had indeed not ceased; and with Hilton Als we found
our balancing pole: Twinship.

Hilton Als tells us that Twinship is a “consciousness of a you that is separate from
you” (Binyam, Orbison and Wagner 2015, under “Reading is a way”). He tells us that it
has duality: “Twinship is the archetype for closeness … and difference; in one’s other
half; one sees both who one is and who one isn’t” (Als 2019, 42). It can be a way to fill
oneself up. It is a reinforcement of self and others. It is both separation and connection. A
twin is two and yet the same. It is not literal. Twinship can happen with and within a
lover, a sister, a co-worker, a stranger, an atmosphere, a place or a time. It can be born
out of a Holcomb-like tragedy where we hold so tightly to another that limbs fuse
through touch and a new language is spoken through a shared secret mouth. Twinship can
be formed with the artists we study whose thoughts amalgamate within our minds. It can
be a self and its environment: the air that both invades and fills up our lungs—when does
it stop being a foreigner and start being ourselves? It can occur in eyes and limbs that
meet. It can grow from language, from “we”. Twinship is the very salve to the loneliness
that the inherent separation causes. It is a dance of urging touch composed around a gaze
that recognizes a shared difference.

Looking for Twinship in the past is a look for fresh sources of nutrition; the past
is both fertilizer and story. The drawings ask if the past is more than historical. They
spend time with people with whom the camera scarcely gave a moment—only to be buried in the vast and endless hole of the internet—and ask, as research-oriented artist Dario Robleto does: “What do we owe to each other’s memories?” (Tippett 2020). They ask of themselves, in all the lives that had to be lived, if they can resurrect a touch and continue one that may never have existed. Here lies a mystery worth the investigation. There’s a reason we look in the past; always an immediate Twinship is found in a being from the past: we can know that the person is gone or, at least, the moment is gone. And we have a Twinship in that—a consciousness of ourselves in another. The past lures us to our future—our ultimate dissolving. And there’s an excitement in that—the unknown that is known to some other person or some other moment. The past already knows the part of the story we haven’t gotten to yet. It’s behind us yet knows what happens when we leave. It is problem and resolution--the first and third act. Dual. And through a collection of essays entitled White Girls, Hilton Als introduces us to Twinship and story with his relationship with a man he calls Sir or Lady (SL). He writes:

Metaphors sustain us. For some time before we were known as an “Oh, you two!” I felt SL was my corny and ancient “other half.” Nearly from the first I wanted to “grow into one” with him, as Aristophanes sort of has it in Plato’s Symposium. We are not lovers. It’s almost as if I dreamed him—my lovely twin, the same as me, only different. I cling to that story in The Symposium, of the two halves coming together in “an amazement of love and friendship and intimacy, and one will not be out of the other’s sight,” because that’s all I want to know. Like most people, I respond to stories that tell me something about who I am or wish to be, but as reflected in another character’s eyes. (2019, 10)

Within the past, we have the fertile ground for story: for who we are or wish or fear to be and feel, but as reflected in another person’s eyes. The story comes from the knowing, or what we think we know, the things we read or heard, the pictures or films we
consumed, how it all turned out. By translating them into this pigment we call pastel’d dirt, the still and moving images of the past are “put back in the real world—in real time” as Vija Celmins tells us (Relyea et al. 2010, 126). Because when the dirt is moved around to make the drawings and we look at the work we “confront the here and now” (126). The drawings are right here—a final document of all the mark-making journeys evolved from one past moment—and they become fertilizer, as does the past, for something new to grow. In it we can find evidence of Twinship. We can read into the story and the still and moving images become the armature, or the groundwork, for Twinship. And as we confront the here and now by looking at the past, the bygone that lures us to our future, the past confronts us too and is brought forward. The drawings then become the vehicle: the space giver, the time traveler, the dance composed around a look. They become the vehicle for the past to return our gaze. In *Conjoined Strangers: 1944, Coney Island Boardwalk* we begin to create the space for the past to have reciprocity with us.
CHAPTER TWO

TWINSHIP IN WAR

In the search for a story that reflects, for evidence of Twinship, the first drawing lands on a home movie made in Coney Island ("Amateur Film" 2002). The connection between Als’ words and the stopping and starting of the home movie is found in absence as a presence. There’s a striving in Als’ words of SL—his clinging to Plato. He reveals to us later the presence textually absent in his initial telling of his “other half” (2019, 10). He will, as he knew he would and brought to us in his unwritten existing words, lose sight of SL. His twin will find Twinship somewhere else. Twinship is a process and an event—it fades away and in and out or flies in as a grace and then leaves altogether. It’s a severance that longingly hunts for its magnet and when found produces something fleeting, invisible, vital and known. Those absent words of Als are quite aware of this.

This first structure for a drawing, this home movie, features a woman walking along the Coney Island boardwalk. Her attire is a decoration, regalia. When the moving picture was halted there was a sense that a-somewhere-else was there, like in Als telling of SL: this a-somewhere-else was his twin falling away in midst of his words of “growing into one” with him (2019, 10). This original Coney Island moving image became the armature for the drawing to make this absence, this a-somewhere-else, a pictorial occupant. The strangers find themselves in a Twinship through the shared experience of this absent presence which in its very geographical famine (as its core body is feasting somewhere else) places a longing between the strangers. War is the a-somewhere-else, the absent presence.
The year is 1944 and WWII looms in the atmosphere, moving its way through thick, layered air that coagulates between two strangers and becomes blue, clouded blood circulating between them, infecting their skin and fusing their bodies, then bubbling down through their attire and metamorphizing into a red-eyed crow peaking behind a man who uncertainly peers at us—through the brimmed shadow of his Anthony Eden hat—just the same. The central woman with her red hair and cocktail hat, ostrich feathered and at a tilt, both grimaces and grins at us. Dual. Her eyes are at a squint and we have to bounce between them to pick up her gaze. She is affected by the sun. Two figures bookend these strangers, strangers themselves. The flow of atmosphere-blooded air fuses them to their neighbors. These bookend strangers are bodies of 1944 and
adjusted to the now. Hair and hat made contemporary, a woman perhaps gazing at her
phone. These bookend strangers are slightly mutated so that the now can enter the scene.
So that we can both be in the past, be in Twinship with it—Twinning—and circle it, then
come back around to meet its uncertain gaze.

Like Als striving to remain a twin with SL, there’s a striving between the
boardwalk strangers. They strain to touch. They look not at one another and walk along
the boardwalk as strangers, but their hair and hats betray them as brims and feather and
corners of coiffures reveal their need to actualize their connection: repeated points
reinforcing one another into a rhythmic motion, like the outstretched fingers of one
inviting another into a dance. These repeated dancing points of the strangers are straining
to touch as, in Bellini’s *St Francis in the Desert*, St. Francis’ chest urges “itself to be a
diagonal” to be in Twinship with his environment (Wardropper 2019). Despite geography
and familial relation, these conjoined strangers exist in the same war space and this seals
their Twinship.
Figure 2: Giovanni Bellini, *St Francis in the Desert*, 1480, Oil, 49.1” x 56”, The Frick Collection.
Conjoined Strangers Twins itself to the next drawing: WWII Dogfight. As a fighter aircraft it gives context for the atmosphere the boardwalk strangers move within.

Figure 3: Lori Brook Johnson, WWII Dogfight, 2020, Pastel, 5.5” x 10”.

WWII Dogfight is a halted moving image reimagined through moving dirt and cropped for the aircraft to both slash the picture plane in half and extend to the very edges to make contact: to reach, to touch, to invite someone inaccessible into a dance. The balanced and abstracted wings of the warplane create this harmonious slash across the surface of the paper as both injury and balance, both metaphor and movement. It cuts across the paper as traumatic division that reflects the time of war yet acts as an opening for us to enter, smoke and wings as black portals flipping the dark spaces from which a Francisco Goya figure would emerge into a doorway within which we can enter. We enter so that we can see the warplane as portrait, as person. There’s someone’s Twin in
there. We slash so that we can express trauma and reflect on war. Artist Alberto Burri shows us the importance of the tense and harmonious slash. Metamorphizing from an Italian doctor for the WWII Fascist forces to US prisoner-of-war to artist, Burri’s work is rooted in the war (Butler 2010, Par. 4). Like *WWII Dogfight*, Burri uses the slash “to evoke a sensation of physical danger” (Par. 4). The slash is a “symbolic wound” on a drawing that, finding a Twinship in Burri, uses abstraction to “heighten the ambiguity of the work, making it not just a record of specific actions … but an evocation of sensations of peril in the viewer” (Par. 4).

![Figure 4: Alberto Burri, Ferro SP, 1961, Welded Iron Sheet metal, oil and tacks, 51 1/5” x 78 7/10”, Guggenheim Museum.](image)

As *Conjoined Strangers: 1944, Coney Island Boardwalk* turns the gaze back to the viewer from the past and flips Capote’s dance-less community into a search for
Twinship; *WWII Dogfight* turns around Burri’s non-art material practice (Butler 2010, Par. 1) by using traditional materials unconventionally and thereby forcing an abstraction rather than organically intending for one.

*WWII Dogfight* is composed of long-established art materials that are in conflict with one another. An academic rendering was attempted with materials that could not produce the desired outcome. The quiet voice expressing that the attempt was futile was suppressed in favor of battle with materials. The pastel was layered on a soft, small piece of paper that—by its very particular existence—called out for a delicate, immediate and relaxed touch. The paper was a tiny, velvet surface that only acted as a momentary disturbance for the pastel to fall to the ground. It was a constant fight with matter to build the composition. A careful rendering could not occur; and the paper had to be beat up and overly worked for shapes to finally emerge, leaving painstaking modeling of the realist tradition to at best abstract a form that was already removed from reality through video, time, and the indistinct outcome of halting a moving image. Yet this still frame is looked at as a surface. This image’s topography is a skin that acts like a barrier and protector to all its moving parts and an absorber to fresh sources of nutrition—to whatever we hand over to it through our gaze. As Vija Celmins show us, it is still a surface to be scanned and walked upon as terrain (Relyea et al. 2010, 125). The image gifts to us distance and through this separation we can look at this moving-still warplane slowly, build a relationship with it, (125) and reimagine it in other terms (130) of pastel’d dirt and Twinship.
*WWII Dogfight* is not without its own sense of beauty. Thoughtfulness to shape, form, value, matter, and existence is still there. Just as Burri’s slash causes a chaos; it also invites color, shape and value in through the opening of space. In content and material, we find the duality of war and Twinship: “Twinship is the archetype for closeness … and difference; in one’s other half; one sees both who one is and who one isn’t” (Als 2019, 42). While gazing on this warplane, we can feel both empathy and repulsion. We can both see ourselves in the pilot and run from the outcome. We can feel both horror and love, Twinship and separation. We see both who we are and who we are not. The slash can both separate and fashion an entrance, a doorway. It creates both chaos through symbolic injury and balance by opening space for form, value and color to move through the picture plane. The war, the plane, the sky: they are all huge; yet the drawing is small. The drawing is intimate: it is a finger curling down and straightening back up saying “come closer.” It seeks another who is alone, to be collectively alone with—a singular plural (Watkin 2007). The drawing looks to us, the viewers, to continue a touch that may never have existed.
The Twinship in World War II drawings ends just before the beginning. In 1938 David Teitelbaum returns to his hometown of Wielopole, Poland from the U.S. and films his homecoming; one of his last before the German occupation (“Rare Color” n.d., Par. 2). As a traveler and a man of his community, Teitelbaum takes many journeys to his homeland (Par. 2): metronome’d pilgrimages that pulse him back and forth from the U.S. to Poland almost as if, we imagine, he is waltzing across the vastness of water and land, tapping his toe and hat when reaching the edge of each territory and traversing through the places and people of his life in a slide-to-glide cadence of the trusted old and the...
unplumbed new. The drawings travel with him, one more time, back to his homeland and translate the moment—in tandem with the colors of something ripening: perhaps the hopefulness of his new life informing his love for his village and its love for him—into pastel and watercolor dirt. We halt at a moment where Teitelbaum, in blue, seems to just land (“Rare Color” n.d.). He is leaning into his advent with his hat at his side as a tip to us and the ground. A young girl swings in with enough life to blow the dust off the atmosphere while two women trimmed with dyed garments that lean into complimentary colors, dip into one another with enough Twinship that it fuses their arms and rocks them to-and-fro.

The 1938 film dissolves the nuances of the villager’s faces, yet the gaze is somehow still available and shows a reflectiveness only a smooth surface could reveal: faces like tiny handheld mirrors we haven’t quite positioned ourselves in front of yet. All the townspeople are defined enough to begin an advent into either distinct focus or boundless disintegration—nothing too crisp and nothing too uncertain so that the person, place and atmosphere are both individual and undivided. Two figures on the left face us straight on, shoulders at a square with a 9-year-old Etlä who, warm-bellied and peached by an à la mode scarf, will soon “[disappear] without a trace” (“Rare Color” n.d., Par. 7).

The moment of Twinship comes in as a ladder that connects two spaces: Twinship as one space that has a consciousness of itself if the other space: the interior and exterior, the future and the past as a reaching beyond death, and the love and horror that can exist in one life. We see the ladder at a lean on the bottom right. It both connects two separated bodies (two separated spaces) and points to the fused arms of the complimentary women.
It leans, as the women lean into one another, as David Teitelbaum leans into his landing, as a child leans into her run, to show the duality of support.

Two things that lean into one another create a triangular brace whether stable or with a tipping dynamic (Frank, 2020) and this triangulation, this leaning things and people up against one another, works to highlight Twinship in the materiality and meaning of the piece. Here we lean together hope and vulnerability, other and self in other, resolve and sensitivity, the lamenting and warmth associated with history and memory, the sensitive yet resolute nature of pastel (they both grip and dust, saturate and dissolve) which is worked as dirt alongside water and its own color. This leaning together gives us distinct duality: the duality of being reliant on and finding comfort in both stable and unstable supports; the duality of having imagination and hope in the stark terrain of reality where we can reimagine this time of celebration and offer a moment of resurrection: a brief return to allow space for all the other things that defined this family, to envision a fuller picture from ourselves, in the midst of them knowing now something that we simply cannot know.

As the ladder leans, it also connects—as Twinship does—and as seen in Diego Velázquez’s *The Spinners*. In this work we see a ladder that connects two literal spaces as well as the places that reach across time and space to couple Roman mythology of weaving with women workers of the time (Frank, 2020). 1938 Shtetl: Wielopole Skrzyńskie, Poland, takes from *The Spinners* this idea to use the ladder as a tightrope across time and space and expands upon it to reach into an interior world of the villagers and the viewer. We flip the ladder on its side and thicken its rails, too wide for a hand to
grip, in service of stripping it of its intended function and to accentuate its use to link intangible spaces and to reach through a portal to the unseen. Compositional elements of *The Spinners* are also engaged by asking us to enter the space with the turned, inward facing figure of the young girl blowing the dust off the atmosphere. The ladder, grounded and broad-railed, then guides us into an interior world, both literally and figuratively, and points to the fused arms of the women. These arms embracing Twinship are spotlighted as a nod to Théodore Géricault who emphasizes the limbs of his many subjects by fusing them into the role of supportive neighbors of one person, animal or prosthetic to another (Erickson 2020, 51). These Shtetl limbs are also in Twinship with Velázquez who exposes arms and legs in *The Spinners* to celebrate the work of women (Frank 2020).

Figure 6: Diego Velázquez, *Las Hilanderas (The Spinners)*, 1655, Oil, 5’6” x 8’ 3”, Museo Nacional del Prado.

The colors of ripening fruit and flowers in bloom weaved upon the shtetl of our piece reflect Marc Chagall’s *Village Noir Au Ciel Rouge*. Finding a Twinship with David
Teitelbaum, Chagall uses his piece to pulse him back and forth from his childhood in a Russian shtetl to his new-found life in France. As we imagine Teitelbaum bringing back the ripening colors symbolizing his new life to his former home, Chagall brings forward the blooms, fruit, and foliage of France as curtains that open up to a dark scene from his childhood village of Vitebsk ("Lot Essay" 2018).

Both Marc Chagall and David Teitelbaum exist in two spaces of the trusted old and the unplumbed new. Their home holds a Twinning power over them: a consciousness of themselves in another place. And we can, in turn, hold a Twinship with the villagers as Teitelbaum’s documentation of his homeland gives to us the simplified faces of the villagers who both gaze back at us and become like tiny handheld mirrors that potentially reflect us or make us reflect on ourselves: because “like most people”, we respond to stories that tell us something about who we are or wish or fear to be and feel, but as reflected in another person’s eyes (Als 2019, 10).
Figure 7: Marc Chagall, *Village Noir Au Ciel Rouge*, 1951, Oil and India Ink, 29 ½” x 25 ¼”, Private European Collection.
We fixed our tightrope along the line of the Second World War and swayed backward and forward, pivoting our ankles omnidirectionally and reaching out our balancing pole of Twinship to touch people in and around the event—giving these elusive folks space and making them like our high-wire, paralleled feet so that they could see one another even if they would never meet. And from here we fasten one end of the tightrope to a new point, bypassing time and space to make a direct line from one location to the next, to make immediate connections of a clear and direct social path. And with a 1971 Women’s liberation march, we continue our time travel by tightrope and Twinship as we look for ways in which women fill up holes.

The drawing is composed from a 1971 women’s march newsreel filmed in London (“1971” 2014). Moving from primarily home movies to a news documentation is a turn of the head, a movement of perspective. The home movie asks us to come in and if we do, we begin to answer Dario Robleto’s question: “What do we owe to each other’s memories” (Tippett 2020). Even if everyone is in their Sunday best, there is an inviting love in the home movie: the desire and manifestation of a physical imprint of the played or real happy time that can be put on repeat so that both the allied and outlier can become involved in or rejoin the dance. We can trigger our own memory or daydream. The home movie is the ritual of blowing a kiss: a sweet, sweet showboat of a good, good thing; and each family gets to decide on their good, good thing and behave it—even if it’s just the
once. And we are glad they did. The home movie is a performance filled with players for the cause of the appetizing commonplace. And how appetizing the commonplace becomes when set along the delicate and grave edges of the hole of war.

While the loved-one players of the home movie are for the cause of the nourishing commonplace, the women’s march newsreel documents a public gathering for the cause of disrupting a damaging commonplace. And there is a Twinship in these differing forms of the quotidian: “in one’s other half; one sees both who one is and who one isn’t” (Als 2019, 42).

This 1971 Women’s Liberation March newsreel lies somewhere between or beyond a documentary that would ask us to witness or scrutinize and act over a struggle, (Daressa 2008, Par. 4) unless we scrutinize the luxury skipping through it. And luxury is not bad in and of itself, but it brings forth questions about who doesn’t have such luxuries. From start to finish, just over a minute in length, the march reads like a parade: It floats, it dances and sings; there is pride and laughter and a little girl twirling. There are moments of staging the activities that might split a woman from herself as a charade: a marriage is acted out; women play out the rote chore of washing the dishes. The police are present as spectators or men who just stroll along: one blowing his nose. A woman says, “All you have to lose is your kitchen sink” (“1971” 2014) and she’s right; this protest is one without the overt and dismantling loses and damages that we have known or seen far too often—the women appear to move quite freely in this march to liberation. If there are any private or professional consequences for participating in this march, it is beyond the scope of the newsreel to reveal it to us.
Onlookers line up just on the outskirts of the protest. They take pictures, chat, or just stand solidly within their own stare. The bystanders are people watchers, but the people being watched are aware of the gaze and their idiosyncrasies are homogenized. It is a skipping long and thin mass of young, predominantly white, visually non-disabled, college-educated women. One wears her bra outside her turtleneck while another straps a mannequin to a cross, many pucker their faces with big, red lips. These marching women contradict many who long for liberation; those without the privilege to be young and in college with the freedom to protest without brutal resistance or major, immediate consequences. Surely, most don’t have the circumstances or opportunity to attend.

Figure 8: Lori Brook Johnson, *Your Red Lips Are Your Pearl: A Peculiarity in a Homogenized 1971 Women’s Liberation March*, 2020, Pastel and Graphite, 16” x 20”.
A notion of Twinship can easily be seen in a mass of similar women marching for the cause of disrupting the damaging commonplace. But we are searching for something else within that. We are people watchers too, wanting to speculate over another person’s story through the use of archival footage that includes all the ways dated images shape our memories of a past we were not privy to. We ask: *Who are these people?*

Moving from the home movie to the newsreel, our relaxed eyes burrow down into a focused brow, and we fuse three halted moments of the newsreel and inspect them through the feelers of our sharpened pencil. The pencil becomes antennae: sensory appendages that move through the space by responding to the terrain of the women’s faces and softly mines in to move slowly down the turning of their form, while stopping to smell the air when the light falls across their flesh. In this march, these women get a chance to stop and smell the air. The newsreel prompts our brain to inspect, and we respond, like the feelers of our pencil point, through the act of the representational portrait. Here, the representational portrait is an act of investigation but also an act to view a woman as more than an abstraction: something that would be removed from human.

The shadows of every form are delivered as a push and pull between both dissolving atmospheric perspective and high contrast to present some of the spaces as shallow and some deep. This is one picture of a liberation march, one population, in the midst of other communities of women being ignored or revolted against in their efforts. The shadows move to the light and then stop, and the pencil leaves those areas alone to
open the space to the marcher’s open-air, carefree way—to reveal the white of the page. Blurring of fabric and hair, building and body, alongside crisp and bold spaces both state and deny, like Gerhard Richter who engages in “contrary actions of both giving and taking away” (Knapp 2012, 95). This blurring Twins itself to the webbing and mazing of certain architecture, an indistinct puzzle that gives us no “obvious answers” (95) to how change comes about or to the intricacies of these lived experiences as well as the complexities of the situation: within the march for injustice, we see injustice itself. While one group protests quite freely, others cannot. We look at this march and ask ourselves who was feminism for? We cannot look at history without examining privilege and where our Twinship lies within that spectrum.

This march is filled with complexity that would cause a fall from our tight rope if we explored them all here. And these women are filled with their own inner complexity of flaws and grandeur, missteps and successes, horror and love. And the link to finding where the dancing has not ceased as a reaction to Capote’s swing-less community is immediate as these women move their bodies along the unbarricaded streets not in measured tread but through both improvised and determined skip, sway and song.

There is an immediate double over visual Twinning in this reel, the same population represented time and again; and so, we fuse together multiple halted moments of the newsreel to double a woman of the march: reproducing her to be a Twin to herself and shifting her in space—giving her dual directions for her gaze—to broaden her perspective in a moment so that she can join two views and see who is and isn’t there with her even if the input isn’t immediate or calculated at all. Her march is one of
celebration and we don’t know if her jubilee is a reflection of her resolve or her experience, so we render one face with the sharpened, focused pencil to show resoluteness and pinch the cheeks of the other portrait with pink pastel to show naivety. We darken her clothing as a deep space we can enter and ride it up into her arms to enter the tunnel of abstracting her hands into soft color fields half-hidden by fabric to remind us of her nuance and our concealed knowledge: we do not know her. A different treatment of face and hands, a meditation in, for any person, how we are expected to appear versus what we must do to survive or to be ourselves. But we did not draw this scene because of this woman we Twinned. We did not halt at this moment because of this woman we saw reproduced in class, age and race throughout the march—even though it became a lesson in and of itself. We remember that without a balancing tool, the path’s tension—the toppling weight of history—would cause a fall. The lined text of Capote started the drawings with community, and we (the drawings and draw-er) moved through the story not page by page but by location, one book to another, in search for the lined words that would show us where the dancing had indeed not ceased; and with Hilton Als we found our balancing pole: Twinship. So, we zeroed in on this scene because of its peculiarity: “in one’s other half; one sees both who one is and who one isn’t” (Als 2019, 42).

*Your Red Lips Are Your Pearl: A Peculiarity in a Homogenized 1971 Women’s Liberation March* is named for this anomaly. Peering back at us, the past returning our gaze, is a figure graffitied with big red lips. Marchers wore them in an act to satirize beauty pageants (Ferguson 2018, under “Sue Crockford’”). But a beautiful and peculiar
personalization unfolds from the irony. Defying a particular agenda caught in a moment, the travel of time comes in as a connecter, making room with its elbows to haunt and rock-a-bye us between spaces: the spaces between now and then; the spaces between the gaze of eyes and lips. This red mouth made of wax and Halloween is its own painting standing on the street. It’s graffiti that turns form and hijacks our attention. The red-lipped figure unlawfully seizes our attention, and then catapults us into a love story. We are infatuated with them: this dual figure—this Twin within themselves—who embodies Twinship of the two sides of both beauty and ridicule, mimicry and distinction, comedy and refinement, and the past and present. They speak to us silently through their Multitudes:

“Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself,

(I am large, I contain multitudes.)” (Whitman 2015, 83).

Multitudes, our red-lipped gazer, is a freshwater mussel making something beautiful out of an intruder, turning parasites into pearls. And we see the pearls line up, a necklace skirting Halloween flesh, in the parting of their lips. Multitudes takes the ridiculousness of beauty, the objectification of women, the red lips forced on by dominion to incite the prowl and metamorphizes it into a statement of power, a moment of ritual and self-making, and an act of art—of graffiti. Multitudes releases personal flesh that is distinct, fleeting and vital from within the confines of reproduced, waxed lips. They tightrope their gaze into the future and turn an entire event, for a moment, on its head. They make us only to want to know about them: Your red lips are your pearl.
Penciled on top of our drawn liberation march, is a fallible ledger. It is a salute to the credits and debits that must occur in a life for a movement to take place coupled with the meditative quality of applying the grid. It adds a complexity to the moment. The ledger places on the still frame something that wasn’t there: a measured contemplation on the women who could or would not join this particular march or were ignored or revolted against in their own efforts. The ledger gives “tranquility and order out of chaos” of trying to understand this moment in the context of the whole with a “simultaneous play between the faultless and faulty, certainty and uncertainty” as seen in Agnes Martin’s work (Gompertz 2020, under “Grid”).

Figure 9: Agnes Martin, Friendship, 1963, gold leaf and gesso, 6’ 3” x 6’ 3”, MOMA.
Figure 10: Lori Brook Johnson, *Fellow Citizens: A Singular Plural*, 2020, Pastel, Watercolor, Graphite, Charcoal, 18.5” x 16.5”.

Multitudes migrates to the next drawing, making an immediate Twinship between the liberation march and *Fellow Citizens: A Singular Plural*. We brought the red lipped figure from their alternate reality in a newsreel and followed a tightrope from them to fresh sources of nutrition. We asked: *Who else is out there?* And overlapped and enveloped them into one space that is both compressed and deep, a feeling of being in the
vastness of an underwater landscape along with the confines of existing underwater caves and shadows. Cool colors of blue that jellyfish into neon are likened to a collection of creatures we don’t quite understand. To that end, the drawing is composed around a pastiche of particular portraits whose identity remains undisclosed without specific familiarity. These are complex people who embody hero, villain, ordinary, unseen and vain; with several—if not all—embodying everything. They are a prime minister, a labor union activist and single-mother, a children’s rights activist and lawyer, a pageant contestant in Abigail Heyman’s *Growing Up Female*, a b-movie actress, a refugee and a controversial academic. Two of the women were assassinated.

We think of this collection of people as a Hilton Als essay. He writes: “In an essay, your story could include your actual story and even more stories; you could collapse time and chronology and introduce other voices. In short, the essay is not about the empirical “I” but about the collective—all the voices that made your “I” (as cited in Sargent 2017, Par. 2). The essay “I” becomes a visual “I”—a roadmap of experience and particular lived experiences through the landscape of the multiple portrait bust that inserts both the desired and undesired empirical “I” into a many-headed creature of the singular plural, the collective “I”.

Twinship is then garnered through an amalgamated “I” made of a collection of women of a particular time of the 70s. The heads are positioned to build multiple stable triangles, many forming more than one. This gives a sense of stability and union in community: common ground. A grouping of hands, the only visible ones of our collective women, acts as an arc to the corner of the drawing—a triangle itself. A gloved hand
emerges from this arched tunnel accentuating a depth of space: a little secret hideaway and a protective posturing. The women are tightlipped, on the verge of speaking, singing, or with mouth agape. They look in all directions—a signal of many viewpoints—and are dressed in drape—the hang of hair or fold of fabric—as if women’s bodies are sheathed in curtains to which they or others can slide and adjust: an act to close off or let in. One fellow citizen shows her collar bone which whispers to us that Twinship is skeletal in its secrecy: full of structure, boney landmarks and unseen passages.

_FellowCitizens: A Singular Plural_ is composed from, Twinned from, and named after Corneliu Baba’s _FellowCitizens_ where people are positioned in both diagonal pathways and triangular supports.
Baba’s community also finds a Twinship with our collection of people in the peculiarity: his citizens are individuals within a mass, each with their own very particular face and gesture. The pull to stop the newsreel of the 1971 women’s march came from Multitudes’ penetrating and unusual face and we felt urged to continue their gaze. We tight roped this peculiarity into *Fellow Citizens: A Singular Plural* to assuage the balancing pull to travel a person from the 1971 march composed of sameness and drop them into a larger world compressed into a tighter space made up of more variation in age, class, race and experience.
The paradox of individuals made distinct by their reinforcement through others is furthered in *The Shape of Content* (1958) by social-realist artist Ben Shahn who finds union in peculiarity. He writes:

I was impelled to question the social view of man to which I had adhered for a number of years without actually doubting that it might be either a right view or a natural one to me. Now it dawned upon me that I had always been at war with this idea. Generalities and abstractions and vital statistics had always bored me. Whether in people or in art it was the individual peculiarities that were interesting. One has sympathy with a hurt person, not because he is a generality, but precisely because he is not. Only the individual can imagine, invent, or create. The whole audience of art is an audience of individuals. Each of them comes to the painting or sculpture because there he can be told that he, the individual, transcends all classes and flouts all predictions. In the work of art he finds his uniqueness affirmed. Yes, one rankles at broad injustices, and one ardently hopes for and works toward mass improvements; but that is only because whatever mass there may be is made up of individuals, each of them is able to feel and have hopes and dreams. (38-39)

And with *The Shape of Content* in mind, we shape these separate people, into a singular entity swaying on the ocean floor, moving slowly by way of slight vertical and hopping float, shadows revealing themselves from the consequence of drowning sun or diver’s spotlight: each person a star in a collective show. This *singular plural* (Watkin 2007) makes their way through darkness and sublime slime as affected individuals, their uniqueness affirmed. Certainly, though, the transcendent individuals morph into one below the waist, engaging in some sort of entangled enmeshment that transforms them into a plural “I”. There is both a sense of hope for equality within and outside the collective and a feeling of unequal footing made by someone else’s toppling weight whether that someone else exists in the collective or not.
In the midst of Twinship, and perhaps because of it, we find peculiarity. There is something to the “singular plural” as coined by Jean-Luc Nancy (Watkin 2007, 50) — multitudes in one. We find ourselves in being confirmed and reinforced in others and their existence in us. We can potentially, if we are reflective, see ourselves, or something about ourselves, or another, more by its reinforcement in others.
The Twinship in women’s liberation march drawings ends with an imagined gathering—a pastiche of Francisco Goya’s *The Witches’ Kitchen* composed around a medley of archival footage. The Twinship here is found in separation. “Twinship is the archetype for closeness … and difference; in one’s other half; one sees both who one is and who one isn’t” (Als 2019, 42). With the arrangement of children among adults and symbols of adulthood, we see that difference within the confines of a trajectory that the children will eventually become adults. The difference will become a closeness. The

Figure 12: Francisco Goya, *The Witches’ Kitchen*, 1797, Oil, 17” x 12”.
children find Twinship within their currency with one another and within their future as reflected in the adult participants of the piece.

Figure 13: Lori Brook Johnson, *I am Your___*, 2021, Pastel, 24” x 18”.

There is a separation inherent in being a child: a young person puzzle-pieced into the big world. And we move through this drawing as a child, gliding our way through shoes that ping pong and dizzy us through the ground plane and up into a mannequin that
is both foreboding and comforting—a symbol of the making of clothes and a forced narrative of the female form. The weight of the ceiling looms over the children: the world is so tall. The women emerging from the shadows are given a cartoon character as they Twin behind the children and yet separate themselves with legs so long that their heads and feet could be from two different bodies. The children look out from the drawing. They are not engaged with the others but holding their own space with both resolve and the fear to tread within it. The weight of the world they must travel intightens its way through thin shoulders and the small space of their bodies. Their faces blur or dissolve as they split their minds to balance the wants of being a child in a complicated landscape: 

*What does it mean to be a woman?* And further, *what will my race make of me?* But they hold a Twinship with one another is this terrain: the vehicle of their bodies traveling in the landscape of culture. A line is drawn between them—a connecting thread formed from the hems of their skirts that imply their way between an adult woman’s gate. This line continues to move the children through the future given to them in their present moment: their arrangement within an adult world. Implied lines of a diagonal force guide our eyes from the shadows casted by the mannequin stand through the point of black shoes that help continue this line by being intermittently picked up by the trim of the children’s garments. Handles of protests signs then carry us up and through a hovering sign and ambiguous space that passes the baton of our eye to a clothesline—that hangs a garment like a haunting—and pinballs its way to a seam of a mannequin that glides us downward and thereby completes an implied and slanted rectangle. This rectangle forms its own undulating and waving sign, or protest flag pieced together by our multi-
dimensional participants and also acts as a rope that connects the women and girls, allowing them to double-Dutch between two spaces: their future or their past and their now alongside their camaraderie and separation.

The two girls are downloaded into a world where their potential must navigate the landscape of being female as reflected in this woman who stands between them: a relatively tall figure resolute in her stance and gaze. She holds up both sign and ceiling, one arm exposed while the other blackens its way into the background. She is both herself and a sinking-in to her circumstances. She has both camaraderie in the world and separation from it: her blue skirt Twinning itself to the red lips of the mannequin—the most vibrant colors of the piece—and oh, how they stare at one another. We brought this seamstress tool into I am Your ___ to give it new space from its use in the 1971 Women’s Liberation March film footage. There, it was placed on a cross as an in-your-face look into our culture’s sacrificial relationship with and forced requirements of women’s bodies (“1971” 2014). In this piece, however, it holds duality. It is a torn torso with perfect curves and fire red lips. It is both an object that nourishes and destroys: a nurturing tool to make garments, to clothe, that also presses on us an idea of what a body is to look like. The mannequin is an un-body that tells us how to body. Its wear and tear reveal that it simultaneously exists in another space, one of home and work and making and gift. The attention to turning of form of the mannequin leaned up against figures that are emboldened with flat, graphic shapes holds duality. The body of the mannequin is drawn most realistically in the work, yet its definition also confines it. It is locked into what it appears to be. It has been spoon-fed to us. The women and children are given more space
to exist within their nuances; their beingness. They are not confined with the strict rendering of the body of the mannequin. They are drawn un-modeled (of the classical drawing tradition) to hold more hope and more room to grow. The children and women’s unrefined and not fully articulated passages speak to the complexity of their existence in interpretation.

The room for interpretation within the piece allows for a Twinship to happen between us as viewer and the participants within the work. We get to fill in the blanks and take part in Our beholder’s share—the idea that a work is always finished by the viewer (Gurney 2020). The protest sign of the central woman is incomplete; inciting our cerebral, self-centered, or connection-orientated tendencies to finish someone else’s sentence. The sign asks: *What words does your mind place on her?* We can hold a consciousness of ourselves in another, a Twinship, as we fill in the blanks, or we can separate ourselves.
CHAPTER FOUR

TWINSHIP SOMEWHERE BETWEEN A PROTEST AND A PARADE

The tightrope walk continues on in Chicago somewhere between a protest and a parade. The Twinship here is found in who we cling to in public gatherings.

Figure 14: Lori Brook Johnson, *Each Other*, 2021, Pastel, Graphite and Charcoal, 20.5”x26.5”.

We found these two in the 60’s on a moving reel (“Confrontation” 2021) leaning into one another somewhere between a protest and a parade. They were standing in the liminality of sailing in or deploying out, and our eyes were struck by the buttons on their
coats. Garment gold made metronome and back and forth we went—a sliding weight across some vast and shadowed standard issued coat that wouldn’t let us in on any division between the two. Their leaning into one another takes advantage of the negative space to reveal a nearly concealed shared heart. Their flesh is rendered to absorb and protect and feathers out into edges that silhouette.

Like its use in Millet’s *The Sower*, the silhouette works to commit an image to our memory (Barry 2020). The silhouette finds a Twinship to Dario Robleto's question: “What do we owe to each other’s memories?” (Tippett 2020), and perhaps the answer lies in commitment: using the silhouette as an act to commit another's memory to our own. And so, for this cause, we use the silhouette with life sized portraits so that we can fully participate with these men returning our gaze within the terrain of their love for each other.
This silhouette is furthered in *Each other's Twinship* with Sarah Ball’s *Marie*. Here, value is used so that *Marie's* shirt nearly blends into the background, making the face and neck of focus. We use this strategy with the sailor caps, compressing the value to blend the forms into the atmosphere. Their dixie cup hats, a signifier of their position in life, then becomes nearly like background noise bringing forward both the individuality of their faces and of their Twinship, their each other-ness, found in their coats that act like open-ended puzzle pieces that offer them space to slide into one another and won't let us in on any division between the two.
Figure 16: Sarah Ball, *Marie*, 2019, Oil, 100 x 100 cm.
Figure 17: Lori Brook Johnson, *A Tender Touch Somewhere Between a Protest and a Parade*, 2021, Pastel and Cold Wax, 22” x 17”. 
Along the same space between a protest and a parade we stop a moving reel on what appears to be a mother and her son gliding through the Chicago streets (“Confrontation 2021). In the beginning of this section of the film reel, the expressions of the mother and son are jovial until the military begins their march through the parade, and the mother holds her son closer. His face and her own turn from carefree to serious. The mother’s hands express her love and protection while her head is looming in a space of fog, separated from her body and her son. She is in a headspace of distressful thinking: imagining the things she can’t control for her beloved. *Will his life be affected by the military, by war?* And this question lures us to a new one: *Has her life already been affected by either if not both of these?* The piece is composed of itself, allowing the content of the piece to inform the composition.

Therefore, for the cause of separation and protection, the mother dissolves into cold wax, and the drawing surface is broken to show the disconnect within her of what is cerebral and what is visceral: her hands highlighted as both protection and a gentle compress to her son. The palette of the piece is bright as a statement to the warmth felt between the two main participants in the piece brought together with forms dissolving into both distinct focus and ambiguity to both state and deny (Knapp 2012, 95): to tightrope the line between desire and the unknown terrain of a future reality.
CHAPTER FIVE

TWINSHIP IN COAL

“You live in a company house. You go to a company school. You work for this company according to the company rules. You all drink company water and all use company lights. The company preacher teaches us what the company thinks is right”

—Carl Sandburg (as cited in Turner 2017).

This drawing is the narrative of one imagined family pulled from archival photos and the storied memory of my own and others. It is an amalgamation of archival photographs, art, and personal and extended history. The germinating idea for *The Trickle Down Teaches the Pull Down* grew from the fused memory and narrative of a family enveloped by and mailed out into a tight and confined world for the service of the coal mining industry.
We start with an image of a miner, his face turned by coal dust infects his lungs and stains his overalls. An imprint of a snuff cannister acts as a small orbit that connects a child and woman. The color yellow streams and trickles down from the sky and pin balls its way through the family, ridding the miner of his hands and lower half. He remains incapacitated to bring guidance to his family—he is but a body for the output of world
energy that does not include his immediate orbit. The yellow is both sunshine and piss, both energy and waste. It is a look at what trickles or streams down from exploitation of workers and land: of home. It is a look at the Twinship that is formed from and fills up this coal mining hole.

As we dig and fill up, as we look for where the dancing has not ceased, so do the women. Their hands are numbed out and blank: a meditation in exhaustion and conditioning. But those hands act as a rhythmic hovering. They are both conditioned and prayer makers. They protect, worry and arch over the home and dreams. Dreams emerge as a missing ballet shoe of a foot that still knows how to pointe. The women make use of themselves in making and raising and building. Two bookend sisters or neighbors sit quietly in strong support, setting a rise for the family; hands clasped as a comforter to the self.

The coal field hill rolls and planes its way into becoming a dissolving quilt: a functional art and gem of community. The family sits on top of the coal camps owned by the coal companies and not themselves: a home they are not meant to put themselves in. A window that looks out on industry is a penciled dream of feeling inside and apart of one’s own home. The child with her arms both arched and numb, pulls down what trickles down from the seams of her environment and from what she creates herself. She is equal parts conditioning and hope. Her face is at a tilt of curiosity. She “confronts the here and now” by initiating our gaze (Relyea et al. 2010, 126), wondering why the world evaluates or dismisses her as they do. The child leans her shoulder into her mother or grandmother, her most stable reinforcement. Their bodies curve in gesture so that
rounded shoulders and vaulted clothing can slide into two kissing corners of cloth that form into a point. Together they are a nearly concealed shared heart.

Mother/Grandmother places hands above her home as a protection, a prayer, and a circling of concealed worry beads. One foot holds onto a personal pleasure of dance while one numbs out to all the routines she must juggle. The homes are in shatters and drowning in rain yet absorbs warmth from the trickle down and triangles into geometric shapes to quilt its own pattern that both floats and stabilizes.

Finding Twinship in artists like Builder Levy, Margaret Bourke-White, and the trickle-down fusion of environment and people, both compressed in one space and disengaged with one another, composed in Edwin Dickinson’s *Interior*; this patchwork pastel and pencil amalgamates images and memory as a nod to all the working parts that build a unit.
Figure 19: Edwin Dickinson, *Interior*, 1916, Oil, 84” x 48”, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

*The Trickle Down Teaches the Pull Down* tightropes by way of thread and needle to the next work. From the previous work’s quilting we bring along patchwork to *1984 Miners’ Strike: South Yorkshire*. In this next pastel composed of pieced-work shape and spotlight, we stop a newsreel of a miners’ strike and immediately find our moment of Twinship. Two members of the police force Twin and fuse, their heads pointed in the same direction as a like-minded counterpart to their uniforms that hunch in aggression and duty (“The Miners Strike” 2014). The dress code rids the wearers of any personal identifier or peculiarity other than their role in the monopoly
on violence: punishers for workers who strike against their punishment for being workers. We flip the coin of our original notions of Twinship, finding where connection doesn’t generate warmth, where reinforcement of another tips into a power dynamic. This Twinship is formed and danced due to its opposition or duty against others.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 20: Lori Brook Johnson, *1984 Miners’ Strike: South Yorkshire*, 2020, Pastel, 9”x11.5”.

The two men are Twinned in uniform and institution. This Twinning makes a fellow man another and yet fuses them all together in a violent romance. It is job against job and which worker one is determines the outcome. We don’t know if the police officers live in reluctance or willingness but either way they are obedient to the cause. Picket lines are often violent places, and we hold this violence in stillness, to deafen it and dissociate it to color. The color fills in holes as a patchwork. It is both a sewing and unstitching of pastel’d dirt: some colors layered, and others pulled apart—a
shifting and undulating quilt that pounds the pavement with uncertainty. This patching and un-patching both brings together and separates one form from another: it shows division and yet the division sews the whole together. The patchwork both states and denies, like Gerhard Richter who engages in “contrary actions of both giving and taking away” (Knapp 2012, 95). This police force is formed by their duty to opposition: they exist in this moment due to the very thing they resist.

As the uniformed workers lean into one another and into their resistance, we lean together dualities to form unstable triangles. Patches of triangles travel their way from ground to opposing workers as repeated points in knees and elbows; a dark triangle that separates police officers from coal miner bounces its way through multiple shadows, and uniform helmets pinch themselves into a tipping dynamic. These triangles, these leaning structures, embody both duty and reluctance, ideology and the trappings of the need for gainful employment, the “banality of evil” (Popova 2017) and an individual taking responsibility. Where do we separate the system from the individual in two highly controversial jobs? Which seam of division or collision would produce a trickle down to teach a more sustainable pull down? The leaning structures also stand for power and vulnerability, division and unity, and the hunched strength of one set of workers with the incapacitated stability of another: the latter’s legs fused as a caresser and supportive neighbor to himself.

1984 Miners’ Strike: South Yorkshire, finds a Twinship in Paul Cézanne’s The Abduction. In Cézanne’s work we see a similar act played out: the power to move another body—a theme of violence and force. Our miners’ strike drawing Twins itself
to *The Abduction* further by seeing nothing in isolation. In both works all areas of the drawing surface are touched with similar focus. This equal handling of every space forms a Twinship with figure and environment. All are influenced by their circumstances and for this act to be played out: “one will not be out of the other’s sight” (Als 2019, 10). Figures that merge with the backdrop add an additional narrative to each work— Cézanne with his bathers embracing the light and ours with a flat figure, made one with a wall, paralyzed by sight.

Figure 21: Paul Cézanne, *The Abduction*, 1867, Oil, 88 x 170 cm, The Fitzwilliam Museum.
Figure 22: Lori Brook Johnson, *Switch Heart Breaker Boys*, 2021, Pastel, 21” x 11’ 1/4”.

Our final piece is of coal mining breaker boys from the 1911 Pennsylvania Coal Company. Breaker boys sorted coal, at the risk of losing from their fingers to their lives for it (“Breaker Boy” 2021). The piece is over 11 feet long going on in the waves of children affected by this exploitation. And this wave will continue on in their future life and the lives of their descendants.

Figure 23: Lori Brook Johnson, *Switch Heart Breaker Boys*, Section 1, 2021, Pastel, 21” x 27”.

Figure 24: Tacita Dean, *The Roaring Forties: Seven Boards in Seven Days*, 1997, Chalk on Blackboard, 8’ x 8’, Tate.

*Switch Heart Breaker Boys* makes an immediate Twinship with Tacita Dean’s white chalk drawings on black board panels. She sees her work as a performance of “drawing and redrawing”, erasing and “rubbing out” (Krčma 2010, under “Cinematic...
Drawing). Hers are left vulnerable unfixed on a black board while breaker boys goes unframed. The vulnerability of leaving a drawing exposed, easily wiped away, pulls us into the internal worlds of these little boys who hold within themselves little switch hearts they have to turn on and off for the sake of world energy. Their hearts, bodies and minds are at stake, and our breaker boys are drawn in chalk board-like line as a reminder of their sacrificed schooling.

![Image]

Figure 25: Lori Brook Johnson, *Switch Heart Breaker Boys*, Section 2, 2021, Pastel, 21” x 27”.

We start the work with black paper so that the boys can hold in their bones and flesh the elements of coal as well as their missed schooling represented through a blackboard-like surface and pastel chalk. Their occupation in life streaks their faces and makes a permanent imprint when coming home at night and navigating life. The boys are both rendered and lined. They are both demarcations on a chalkboard and flesh coming forward. Their education is in their Twinship with one another: bodies pressed close as
they reinforce each other and use their overworked hands as a gentle compress to their neighbors.

Figure 26: Lori Brook Johnson, *Switch Heart Breaker Boys*, Section 3, 2021, Pastel, 21”x 27”.

Their faces drift from tonal to hatched, how few lines it takes to make a face, to make a dent. And the work is a thin line that goes on and on to show more than number but impact as the coal fields of their childhood will affect their future relationships. And so, the lines are made and then the tone. Continuous lines are for lineage and hatching is made for counting—small areas like pound signs to imprint on us the dizzying numbers and effects of the boy's beginnings in the coal fields.
There's a resolve in their posture and expression as well as a vulnerability that links the boys immediately to the pastels that touch them as there is a vulnerability and resolve inherent in pastel'd dirt: this medium both crumble and layer, travel and grip, saturate and dissolve.

Though the breaker boys' little bodies are being used, they still belong to themselves and to each other. Some are weathered to an age beyond their years while others retain their youth. Grown men behind them show a near inescapable future, but there are still smiles given, and gazes that activate us into a conversation with both the collective and the boundless individuality.
So individual, indeed, that just a few lines make perfectly clear the distinctions and life of a face and a body and a posture. How just a quick pressing of value can show the specific portrait of a hand. And there is union in these peculiarities, these individual portraits. In *The Shape of Content* (1958), Ben Shahn writes: “Yes, one rankles at broad injustices, and one ardently hopes for and works toward mass improvements; but that is only because whatever mass there may be is made up of individuals, each of them is able to feel and have hopes and dreams” (39). And so, to this end, we render specificity within the collective.
And from these individual faces within a mass of Twinship, the work finds further consciousness of a self in another in the work of Salman Toor. Here we see a mirroring of gesture, grouping and hatching. Our hands, twinning themselves to those of Toor’s are like low hanging half-moons, numbed out and reflecting someone else's light. And yet acting as a directional movement for us to link one boy to the next. One twin to the other.

Drifting from close to far, the boys stand in Appalachia, in the hollows and on the hills. We think of this collection of boys in Twinship with all the other work—a time travel by tightrope from one place and time to another— as a Hilton Als essay. He writes: “In an essay, your story could include your actual story and even more stories; you could collapse time and chronology and introduce other voices. In short, the essay is not about the empirical ‘I’ but about the collective—all the voices that made your ‘I’” (as cited in Sargent 2017, Par. 2). It becomes your we.
CHAPTER SIX
A DIFFERENT DOOR

And so, in all the work, we make ourselves a part of the moment by being the present looking at the past and it returning our gaze. We believe in the exchange, no matter how make-believe. We go back to Dario Robleto and ask, “What do we owe to each other’s memories” (Tippett 2020) even though we don’t have certainty in the memory of another. We look for moments where people are finding communion in a hole of alienation knowing that the depths and precariousness of the hole are different for all, and we translate these moments into Twinship when, perhaps, they were just fleeting nothingness or profound beyond measure. We started our journey with Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and we end with it too. While writing his novel, Capote found a bond with Perry Smith, an altered man who altered a community—terminating the sway and rollick of Holcomb. The film *Capote* portrayed that bond between Capote and Perry Smith to be so deep that it would cause him to go so far as to say, “It’s as if Perry and I grew up in the same house. And one day he stood up and went out the back door while I went out the front” (Brand 2005). One became a writer and the other was executed for murder. And our archeological dig into the past is not one to analyze or judge the outcomes of extreme circumstances or the consequence and weight of personal choice. We are looking for moments of Twinship taking root in *In Cold Blood*’s germinating idea of community altered and moving around pastel’d dirt to dig holes in wounds to search for the very thing that would momentarily fill the holes right back up again: for where the dancing had indeed not ceased.
—We are looking and drawing for the fleeting moments of union before everybody walks out a different door.
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References (Continued)


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