(Un)seen: Reshaping Emotional Abuse

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(Un)seen: Reshaping Emotional Abuse

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

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

by
Emily Ann Collins
December 2023

Accepted by:
Kathleen Thum, Committee Chair
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(Un)seen is a collection of sculptures, drawings, and video performance that reveals the unseen physiological and psychological effects stemming from emotional abuse. I use the human body, its anatomy, and contrived anomalies to reshape and give form to emotional abuse that typically remains unseen. The bulk of research in neuroscience and the related fields have focused primarily on the response to visible causes of trauma such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, and combat trauma, leaving the trauma from emotional abuse less acknowledged. Studies of this type of abuse are sadly overlooked due to the lack of an outwardly visible appearance. Despite this, emotional abuse has lasting physical effects on the nervous system and brain which has been documented scientifically. Through sculpture, drawing, and video performance I reveal these various physical qualities and conditions in the form of anomalies and mutations. There are three components in the exhibition, each pairing an image and a form. Plaster carvings are displayed with charcoal and graphite drawings, a latex wall installation with a video performance, and a latex sculpture with a graphite drawing. The form in each of these is a further mutated version of the image it is displayed in proximity to. At the same time, these vulnerable bodily conditions are being reshaped into adaptive forms. When these anomalies are revealed, it leaves room for repair, the gaining back of control, and prompts the viewer to consider the unseen and concealed effects of emotional abuse.
DEDICATION

In memory of my dad, my biggest supporter and the reason why I am an artist.
I would like to express my deepest appreciation to everyone who has been by my side:

To Kathleen, for reigniting my love of drawing.

To Dave, for being our mentor and human thesaurus for the past couple of years.

To Beth, for your endless knowledge, books, and sources.

To my fellow grad students, old and new, especially to Nicole for being on this journey with me.

To everyone who helped with installing this exhibition, it wouldn’t have been possible without you.

And to my family, for always being so invested in my art and for being my biggest motivators to pursue an artistic career.
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(Un)seen is a collection of sculptures, drawings, and video performance that reveals the physical and deeper, yet unseen, physiological and psychological effects of emotional abuse. The human body, its associated anatomy, and contrived anatomical anomalies are used as a representation of visible and invisible manifestations of emotional abuse. Emotional abuse is defined as non-physical behavior that aims to control, manipulate, and isolate individuals resulting in effects such as anxiety, diminished identity, and dissociation. When unresolved, a trauma response with lasting emotional, neural, physiological, and psychological changes occurs. The bulk of research in neuroscience and its related fields has focused primarily on the response to visible causes of trauma such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, and combat trauma, leaving the trauma from emotional abuse less acknowledged. Through sculpture, drawing, and video performance, I reshape the possible physical qualities and conditions of emotional abuse that are unseen and provide room for one to experience repairing, restoration of control, and prompts the viewer to consider the concealed effects of emotional abuse.

Each piece is a hyperbolic anomaly in which I physically alter objects and materials that depict human organ systems affected by emotional abuse. Just as this abuse alters the brain, I physically alter objects and materials into forms that deviate from the
norm. Just as trauma removes one from reality and causes discrepancies in the mind, anomalies are further removed from what it once was or what it is meant to be. Furthermore, my use of materials is anomalous. I use plaster and claim it is bone, I use latex and claim it is skin.

Every piece consists of an accumulation of material or forms such as ink drops or individual nerve-like latex strips, all pointing to the gradual and often times subtle growth of emotional abuse. I use video performance to embody the perception of time and the painstakingly slow process of psychological disintegration that emotional abuse accomplishes imperceptibly. I am not literally showing the process of abuse but rather the process of the effects of abuse. This process is yet another unseen quality that I am revealing.

Emotional abuse can occur in a multitude of scenarios and situations such as childhood trauma, workplace abuse, or abuse in intimate relationships. My work, however, encompasses a broad-spectrum of emotional abuse, all of which center on the desire for power and need for control by the abuser. Through my creative process, I endeavor to gain back that control and prompt the viewer to consider the unseen and concealed effects. Emotional abuse typically removes the individual from reality, therefore the act of revealing the truth associated with these anomalies restores a new reality and awareness to the viewer.
I use anomalies and the body as a site of evidence for the unseen effects of emotional abuse. Although I mutate the forms and materials, there are adaptive qualities that indicate a healing and repairing process. For example, in *Repairing Memory* (Fig. 1) the sheet of latex from the video performance has been further modified by being cut and pinned to the wall. Subsequently, this mutation has adapted to its new form, being reminiscent of the original. Similarly, when experiencing a trauma, including emotional abuse, the brain is physically altered, but new neural pathways are created in the healing process to adapt to this alteration. I do not define an anomaly as the “other.” Rather, it is a discrepancy that is able to adapt to the environment or particular situation. Anomalies in this exhibition are realized in the inaccurate representation of vertebrae and illogical anatomical relationships in *Hierarchy of the Body* (Fig. 2), a latex skin being stained then cut in *Waiting for the Drop* (Fig. 3) and *Repairing Memory*, a nervous system excluding a head in *The Unseen Body* (Fig. 4), and nerves that are not in their normal bodily form in *(Dis)connect* (Fig. 5).

These anomalies manifest as fragments, distorted representations, and both overt and subtle bodily forms and materials. I use anomalies to signify various parallels in the context of emotional abuse including cognitive dissonance, the loss of one’s sense of self,
and the blurring of boundaries between reality and falsehood. They serve as visual representations of the complex and unsettling nature of emotional abuse.

Joseph Beuys uses peculiar materials such as fat and felt to communicate equivalent aspects of catharsis and healing. *Fat Chair* (Fig. 6) is a sculpture consisting of a wedge of fat cut at a 45-degree angle sitting on a chair. Beuys states he was involved in a plane wreck in Crimea where the Tartars came to his rescue using fat and felt to warm him. This created an arcane relationship with this material lead to continued use throughout his sculptural and performative practice. Similar to Beuys, I activate my anomalous materials to use as a process of reconciliation or healing. Beuys used fat and felt as a representation of healing, and I utilize latex as a material representing protection and the vulnerability of our skin. This cathartic act of an anomaly adapting to its environment can especially be seen in the sculpture installation *Repairing Memory*. The material from this sculpture has endured various stages of mutation. The latex sheet was stained with black ink, cut into multiple strips, reattached end-to-end, then pinned to a wall. Despite these many alterations, the final sculpture is reminiscent of its original form. It has adapted and reconciled with its new form. I further elaborate on this installation in Chapter 5.
Some overarching tactics used in emotionally abusive situations include manipulation and control over another person. While there is no single definition of what exactly constitutes emotional abuse, a study done on women’s experience of emotional abuse in intimate relationships defines it as “the patterned non-physical degradation of one person by their partner through the conscious or unconscious gaining, regaining or maintaining of power through the repetitive overt or subtle acts and messages that control or attempt to control, which negatively affects the abused partner’s emotions or self-value in the long term” (Lammers, 31). Although this study discusses emotional abuse specifically in the context of heterosexual relationships, its definition applies broadly to all forms of emotional abuse.

The ability to create hierarchy and control over another person is central to emotional abuse and takes one of three predominate forms - dominant control, silent control, and manipulating control which distorts the victim’s perception of reality. Contradicting words and actions, followed by shaming and insults if the victim questions the dissonance, is particularly effective in gaining control through confusion. I aim to exemplify and reveal these insidious actions and the psychological discrepancies caused by them in the series, *Hierarchy of the Body*. 
I meticulously carved twenty-four anomalous vertebrae out of plaster and displayed each with a respective drawing. The vertebrae are anatomically inaccurate; each is a fusion with its mirror image (Fig. 7). These fictitious anomalies exemplify manipulation, power, and control. They are not displayed as a complete spine, rather they are displayed individually across the gallery. Through the use of fragments, I influence my viewer through the lack of context and the right amount of familiarity, so that they consider this is an accurate representation of a vertebra, not the anomaly that I have created. Within this construct, there are aspects of psychological manipulation distorting reality. Furthermore, with the anomaly being used as an illustration for manipulation, it is also a discrepancy; a discrepancy between what’s true and what’s not true. The mutation of the vertebrae parallel, the psychological discrepancies caused by the effects of emotional abuse, namely, the distortion of reality. Lastly, in addition to using vertebrae because they house the spinal cord and nervous system where these experiences are stored, I also chose the form because of its inherent range of subtleties. Each one being slightly different from the previous, only to become noticeable once further down the spinal column. This is a specific reference to the slow and insidious growth of emotional abuse accumulated over time.

Contemporary marble sculptor, Athar Jaber, combined two skull caps onto another to form an abstract rendition for the work *Votive Skull* (Fig. 8), and another piece, *Offering (Ears)* (Fig. 9) similarly mirrors two ears. These are part of a larger series of carvings that speak to the use of votive sculptures. In ancient times, when body parts
were affected by disease one would create and offer a sculptural representation of the sick body parts, which acted as surrogates to their gods to plead for healing. Similar to Jaber’s carvings, I have taken individual vertebrae, mirrored it, and fused the two sides, altering it from being recognizable to something transformed. Conceptually, these two works share similarities and differences. Jaber’s sculptures and marble carvings all explore and portray various instances and contexts of systemic violence. His approach to portraying something malicious using a beautiful and traditional material captivated me. His work is what brought me to explore emotional abuse in my own work. I expand his portrayal of physical violence by looking at the other end of the spectrum to emotional or psychological abuse. Although his ideas are largely focused on an institutional and political scale, I concentrate on the individual level since it is more hidden than society-level abuse reflecting my goal of revealing the unseen. Lastly, I draw inspiration from his mirrored anatomical carvings which convey healing. As previously mentioned, in ancient times, affected body parts were sculpted to offer to the gods to plead for healing. Similar to those times, I create anomalies to signify the offering for healing of the invisible emotional body.

The physical act of carving is also connected to the idea of healing and gaining back control. The reductive process of carving is incredibly meditative. Hours are spent meticulously recreating these vertebrae down to every subtle contour which subsequently builds an intimate relationship between myself and the material. I carve to understand the material, to gain that tactility and meditative intimacy, to dissect and understand our
bodies which I would not be able to experience from 3-D printing or casting processes. So much so, that if I were handed a randomly chosen vertebra, I could easily decipher which specific vertebra it is. Carving thus becomes a cathartic process that allows me to realize a new condition of human anatomy that conveys the effects of emotional abuse to my audience. I use many mediums with different modalities, but the act of sculpting is one that allows me to physically gain control. As the maker, I decide what material stays and what material gets taken away when I am carving. I make these objects to give me just a minuscule sense of control that I haven’t had.

Just as there are outside forces of control and manipulation, so there are unseen systems of control in our body. Each vertebra carving is displayed with a scientific-like drawing of the anomalous vertebrae paired with a secondary anatomical part. The spinal column houses the spinal cord and spinal nerve branches. Each vertebra provides the path for a specific nerve that controls a certain part of the body. These drawings depict the mutated vertebra in proximity to the part of the body that it controls. For example, the C5 nerve controls parts of the arm. Therefore, I paired that vertebra with a rendition of the ulna bone to portray that hierarchy within the body (Fig. 10). Furthermore, in the rendition of the ulna and C5 vertebra, the proportions are illogical, with the size of the ulna much smaller than the C5 vertebra. The inaccuracy of size references the act of distortion of reality that occurs in emotional abuse. I continue this trend throughout the drawings, whether it be disproportionate, or I completely mutate it such as with the sacrum in the first drawing.
Consistent to art practice over time, I have always been interested in dichotomies and contrasts and how my ideas manifest themselves both conceptually and visually. Evidence of this continuing curiosity is seen in these drawings. Ernst Haeckel’s scientific drawings (Fig. 11) of fauna and flora set against a dark background inspired the drawings of the vertebrae carvings. Haeckel depicted these biological entities to factually represent the subjects. I utilize this format of scientific illustrations in my drawings to present the anomalies as possible facts. The contrast of the solid charcoal background works incredibly well with the naturally light tones of the vertebrae drawings. This contrast helps to spotlight the meticulous details in the bones, while also transforming them into objects on paper. The deep black of the charcoal and the Vantablack paint reveals the lack of emotion and even loss of identity as a result of emotional abuse.

The Vantablack paint on the pedestals reflects the dark charcoal backgrounds of the drawings. The seemingly unrelated and different processes between these sculptures and drawings are actually quite similar. Both involve meticulous and repetitive labor, yet again creating this relationship between myself and the material. Drawing the delicate contours of the bones is very similar to carefully filing down the crevices of the carvings. Eva Hesse’s work portrays a similar relationship between her drawings and sculptures. Hesse’s latex sculptures consist of repeated painted layers which intimately connect to her drawings, in that those also were a “matter of transparency and opacity, heaviness and lightness, darkness and light” (Sussman, 85).
The use of fragments is also indicative of the fragmentation of memory caused by trauma, including emotional abuse. Although *Hierarchy of the Body* revolves around control and manipulation, the relationship between anatomical fragments and fragmentation of memory bears mentioning. In *Dissociation and the Fragmentary Nature of Traumatic Memories*, Dr Bessel van der Kolk and Rita Fisler studied the traumatic memory recall of forty-six participants and noted that traumatic memories are stored in the form of “dissociated mental imprints of sensory and affective elements of the traumatic experience” (Fisler, 505). In other words, traumatic memory differs from normal or explicit memory in that the only imprints left from the traumatic experience are certain sensory indicators such as a visual, a sound, or even a smell. Fragmentation of memory will be discussed further in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER FOUR

Time

The growth of emotional abuse over time that is slow and unnoticed is metaphorically portrayed in my accumulation of vertebrae. Additionally, each piece is an accumulation of sorts. Using the modality of video performance, I further elucidate this aspect of time. Emotional abuse and its effects are far more insidious and subtle in comparison to other forms of abuse because it happens slowly over time, characterized by repeating patterns of behavior that have both short-term and long-term psychological effects. Elaine Scarry speaks of a torture room in her book, *The Body in Pain*. She elaborates on the subjective nature of pain because it is impossible to objectively measure pain itself. Only the response to pain can be visualized. In *(Un)seen*, I make the non-physical aspects of emotional abuse visible. But on a deeper level, I consider the unseen systemic harm depicted in Scarry’s work on torture as parallel to that of emotional abuse.

The link between physical and psychological torture is shown in Chinese water torture. This involves holding someone in place below a stream of dripping cold water on their face while firmly restrained. Because the next drip of water cannot be predicted and the victim cannot escape, it induces jarring anxiety. I create my own rendition of this process in *Waiting for the Drop* to highlight the psychological aspects in a physical way. I cover myself with a sheet of latex and, to make the damage seen, I use black ink instead of water. I endure the claustrophobic and suffocating nature of the latex and the
discomfort of the black ink dripping over me for one hour. I was formally inspired by Lottie Consalvo who also created a video performance using Chinese water torture titled, *Steer a Steady Ship* (Fig. 12). In the video Consalvo is laying on a bed with a large rowboat hanging above her where black liquid is dripping on to her face. Consalvo created this performance shortly after the death of her sister, where she found herself consumed by anxiety and unable to sleep.

The painstakingly slow process of this performance points to the gradual, inconspicuous growth of emotionally abusive behavior. I use the slow build up of black ink to represent this slow timeline and its effect. In addition, the long duration of the video further emphasizes this slow process. Marina Abramovic’s performance, *The Artist is Present* (Fig. 13), utilizes time similarly. She invites strangers to sit across from her for as long as they please and she continues this performance for seven hours a day for three months. Abramovic utilizes time contrast to control how an audience perceives a performance. In other words, “the minuscule action involved in her performance contrasts with its lengthy time span” (Lader 26). The long time span contributes to a greater emotional response from the audience. An obvious contrast to Abramovic’s performance is I am not physically present in the gallery. Abramovic disrupts the viewer’s sense of self by physically inserting herself into their space. The distance created between the viewer and me, however, refers to Elaine Scarry and how she writes about the perception of pain. The viewer has no perception of the pain or abuse due to the space created between.
The expansion and compression of time seems paradoxical. Swiss geologist, Ryan Lader, expresses this paradox best in his interviews of several hikers with near-death experiences after falling. When faced with this near-death experience, time is perceived as being prolonged due to an abundance of thought in comparison to the short time span. The opposite is also true. This contrast can be used artistically as we see in Abramovic’s performance where she incorporates very little interaction in a protracted time span. I engage a parallel strategy by contrasting the amount of interaction with the duration of the video. Watching ink drip onto the sheet of latex one drop at a time provides very little stimulation for the viewer, especially over the course of the length of the hour long video. Furthermore, in the context of emotional abuse, the viewer sees very little build up or difference in the ink stain within a short time span. The slow, insidious growth only becomes noticeable further down the timeline. The long duration also provides an opportunity for the viewer to become absorbed into the video of the performance. The engagement with the video slows the brain down, leaving room to share a certain vulnerability. The viewer has the power to stay or walk away at will depending upon the depth of their engagement.

In *Waiting for the Drop*, I chose to cover myself with a sheet of latex to question the protectiveness and permeability of our own physical skin. The ink stains the latex thus leaving behind a representational evidence of maltreatment on a “body”. Just as I equate my use of plaster to bone, I also equate latex to a body by utilizing its skin-like qualities, including its physical protection. The skin, depicted as latex, shields my body.
from the drops of ink, yet, I question its ability to protect emotionally or psychologically. This process of the effects of abuse can be seen in my uncomfortable movements and labored breathing. Although I am not being physically stained by the ink it is still psychologically imprinting on me because I am completely restrained and unable to anticipate the random drips.
Dissociation includes a variety of symptoms such as depersonalization, derealization, amnesia, absorption, and changes in identity. Most studies linking dissociative symptoms and abuse focus on sexual and physical abuse and not emotional abuse. However, research by Lisa Haferkamp demonstrates dissociative symptoms with emotional maltreatment. Although dissociation can be a result of other abuse types, Haferkamp’s study found “emotional abuse was the strongest and most direct predictor of dissociation in multivariate hierarchical analyses with the influence of other trauma types being confounded by emotional abuse.”

How the body and mind recover from trauma is demonstrated in Repairing Memory. I use the stained piece of latex that represents the ability to self-protect but the inability to avoid psychological imprinting to illustrate the process of repair. First, I altered the sheet of latex by reconfiguring the timeline created by the ink, then attempting to repair it. I cut up the latex into a multitude of thin strips then reattached them end-to-end using latex to create these scar-like seams. I then reorganized this seven-hundred foot long strip of latex by pinning each seam to the wall horizontally. The shape of the original latex sheet and the original ink stains are peering through, their ghost-like form attempting to recapture what it was before.
This mutated form of the once untouched sheet of latex alludes to trauma, including emotional abuse which effects the timeline of memories. This is called traumatic memory, or, more specifically attuned to emotional abuse, dissociative amnesia. Traumatic memories or dissociation are lapses or gaps in memories of a traumatic event or time period. When cortisol levels are increased, especially for long periods of time, the memory region of the brain, the hippocampus, greatly decreases in activity. In *The Body Keeps the Score*, Dr. Bessel van der Kolk and his colleagues at Massachusetts General Hospital conducted a study comparing normal and traumatic memory. Most participants were able to recall non-traumatic memories as events from the past, with a beginning, middle, and end. On the other hand, when asked about a traumatic event, the memories were unorganized. The participants could recall small details all too clearly such as a smell or a touch. The sequence of events could not be recalled, however. Traumatic memory has no beginning, middle, or end. It only has sensations (van der Kolk, 194-195).

*Repairing Memory* depicts this stripped and unorganized memory. The once whole, linear, and untouched sheet of latex is now reorganized on the wall. While this piece does show the obvious negative aspects of emotional abuse, there is, however, an attempt at repairing and healing where a new reality is created. There is the destructive nature of repeatedly cutting the sheet into strips but is then they are mended with more latex which produces a scar-like effect. Scars are usually signifiers of physical healing, however I am creating scars to mend the mental timeline to express adaptation and
emotional healing. When interacted with in the gallery, the viewer representationally symbolizes the act of repairing by becoming a conduit between the separation. They thus become a physical landmark connecting the two halves.

Artist Katie Paterson often works with this notion of time and timelines; however, it is in a celestial and astronomical context. Although seemingly unrelated, *Repairing Memory* is akin to Paterson’s *Field of the Sky* (Fig. 14), a large recast meteorite. Paterson collaborated with the European Space Agency to melt down, recast, and return this meteorite to space. Meteorites have been forged through time and space repeatedly during their lifetime, building layers upon layers of its metal structure. The process of melting down and recasting the meteorite completely reorganizes its physical celestial timeline. This act of reorganizing a timeline is also observed in *Repairing Memory*.

The distance between the two halves of these strips is relevant to how the systems of the brain react to abuse. When reactivating the trauma in a laboratory setting by integrating the same sounds, images, and sensations while a patient was in an MRI machine, multiple regions of the brain are shut down. There is a dissonance between the rational and the emotional brain. High arousal from reactivating trauma changes the balance between these two but also “disconnects other brain areas necessary for the proper storage and integration of incoming information, such as the hippocampus and the thalamus” (van Der Kolk). The distance between the two halves of the latex depicts the dissonance between the emotional and rational brain and, more specifically, the hippocampus and the thalamus.
CHAPTER SIX
Depersonalization

Depersonalization is a symptom of the massive dissociation caused by trauma. The mind goes blank, and you feel nothing. It is the complete loss of the sense of self, including the connection to the physical body and surroundings. Dr. van der Kolk in *The Body Keeps the Score* discusses his experience with patients not feeling whole areas of their bodies. Participants were unable to identify common objects placed in their hands with their eyes closed. Using MRI, further study led to the discovery of the “default state network” (DSN), the state of the brain when trauma is not recalled and “the brain areas that work together to create your sense of ‘self’” are activated (van der Kolk, 92). The “normal” subjects had normal activation of the DSN regions but those with chronic PTSD showed almost no activation of the self-sensing areas and minimal activation of spatial perception areas, a disconnect between mind and body.

*(Dis)connect*, is a large and dense column made up of hundreds of strips of twine dipped in latex and suspended. The organic nature of the dripping latex taking form around the texture of the twine visually resembles nerves. Yet again, these bodily parts have been mutated. Clearly these “nerves” are not in the form of a human, as they should be. They are an unorganized body made into an organized structure. The density and overall weight give this sculpture strong and structural qualities. A sturdy form such as this does not seem fragile at first glance, however there are contradictory qualities. The
sculpture is incredibly vulnerable and manipulable. The viewer can physically penetrate through the latex nerves and enter into an empty space in the center. When inside, the viewer is encapsulated by walls of latex surrounding them, cutting them off from the environment outside, and instilling vulnerability and claustrophobia. The disconnection takes place visually, as well. The rows of nerves let in small amounts of light that interferes with our vision and depth perception as we move and as the tendrils move. This phenomenon of losing a sense of self, of awareness, and of space is a result of depersonalization. My goal was to recreate the experience of the patients in the MRI machine by physically encapsulating this boundary between our body and the space around it. In addition to revealing what happens with depersonalization, I also question this aspect of isolation used as a protective mechanism.

Eva Hesse utilizes latex as a protective material. I, on the other hand, am questioning its protective qualities. Both Hesse and I see latex as a skin. Skin is the protectant of our bodies. However, this protection is not absolute and is emotionally vulnerable, as depicted in Waiting for the Drop. I also use sculpture as a physical and interactive way to reveal this in (Dis)connect in which the layers do not shield the interior from the viewer. Yet, while inside this column, the viewer is completely isolated from the environment around them. Isolation is a common coping mechanism in response to trauma that serves as a means of self-protection from painful triggers. However, since emotional abuse is relational, then healing can only occur relationally. Even though isolation can physically protect, it prevents this emotional healing.
My use of accumulation is also reminiscent of Hesse. In *Schema* (Fig. 15), latex sphere molds were created with successive layers of latex “proliferating laterally and sequentially” in an almost absurd repetition that “both activates the surface and undoes it as a coherent composition” (Sussman, 82). The insidious nature of abuse in which ordinary circumstances are manipulated to achieve control never occurs all at once to not alert the abused’s defense mechanisms. Rather, almost imperceptible layers of abuse slowly chip away at emotional warning signals and accustom the abused to accept very unacceptable behavior. Repetitive accumulation and layering of the latex communicate the physiologic effects experienced in the stages of Accommodation Syndrome: “Initiation, intimidation, stigmatization, isolation, helplessness, and self-blame” (van Der Kolk) that the abuser adeptly and patiently accomplishes in the abused. This process of accumulation, however, is incredibly meditative for me. Hesse argues it points to the absurdity of life, but the tactility of the repetition gives me a sense of calm and control. With repetition I always know what my next step is. There is never any uncertainty. This creates a meditative healing process.

On the other side of the wall, is a graphite drawing of a life-sized human nervous system, *The Unseen Body*, the diagrammatic version of the column of nerves. In other words, the sculpture is the further mutated version of the image. The drawing visually hints at the column of *(Dis)connect* by showing the similarities of the nerves in the drawing and the nerves made from latex. The column does not have a direct reference to the body without the drawing.
Furthermore, on one hand, this drawing is being used to simply showcase the body I am depicting in this series of works: the emotional body. On the other hand, it is expanding on depersonalization and specifically geared towards exemplifying an out of body experience. Out of body experiences can be the main symptom of a depersonalization disorder. It is a “feeling of detachment or a feeling that one is an observer of one’s thoughts, feelings, or body” (Tracy). Essentially, it is along the lines of the disconnect between the mind and the body as discussed previously. It is another protective mechanism where if you can’t escape a trauma or a trigger then your mind creates an out of body experience to numb sensation. This is comparable to seeing yourself in the third person. Through this life-sized drawing, I aim to achieve this third person experience for the viewer, however it is viewing the emotional body not the physical body. I want to affirm that this is the body that preserves experiences, that keeps the score.

When comparing this drawing to the other drawings seen in *Hierarchy of the Body*, the backgrounds are noticeably different. I decided to leave the background in *The Unseen Body* empty for a couple of reasons. First, I used the dark charcoal in *Hierarchy of the Body* to transform the anomalous vertebrae drawings into objects on paper to associate them with their sculptural counterparts. However, even though the nervous system is physical nerves, I did not want to portray the emotional body as a physical object. The experiences, mutations, and adaptations all stored within this body are deeply ephemeral. Secondly, I am using the blank space to point back to the aspect of memory.
Although this drawing largely reflects on depersonalization and an out of body experience, memory still plays a role in this body of work. Reminiscent of Stephen King’s book, *Duma Key*, the main character suffers a traumatic brain injury from an accident resulting in severe memory loss. King opens with, “Start with a blank surface. It doesn’t have to be paper or canvas, but I feel it should be white. We call it white because we need a word, but it's true name is nothing. Black is the absence of light, but white is the absence of memory, the color of can’t remember.” I left a larger empty space of white where the head of this body should be, where the absence of memory and self is.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

I explore various systems of the human body and manipulate anatomical representations to expose both visible and hidden facets of emotional abuse. Through sculptures, drawings, and video performance, I disclose the unseen effects of abuse, offering a space for contemplation, repairing, and prompting viewers to consider its concealed impact. Each piece, an accumulation of anomalies, communicates the gradual intensification of emotional abuse, while video performance encapsulate its slow psychological disintegration. The displayed altered bodily forms, ranging from ink stains to modified latex strips, signify the enduring physiological and psychological changes from sustained abuse. I create hyperbolic anomalies through distorting materials to mirror the deviation caused by emotional abuse on the human body. This unconventional portrayal, like claiming plaster as bone or latex as skin, aims to provoke contemplation on the profound and multifaceted effects of emotional abuse while ultimately adapting into a stronger form.
Figure 1: *Repairing Memory*, Emily Collins, 2023,
Latex, ink, and pins,
Dimensions vary
Figure 2: *Hierarchy of the Body*, Emily Collins, 2022-2023, Graphite and charcoal on paper; Plaster, wood, and plexiglass, Dimensions vary
Figure 3: *Waiting for the Drop* (Still image from video), Emily Collins, 2023, Video performance, latex, and black ink,
Figure 4: *The Unseen Body*, Emily Collins, 2023, Graphite on paper, 72” x 36”
Figure 5: (Dis)connect, Emily Collins, 2023, Latex, twine, and steel, 103” x 24” x 24”
Figure 6: Fat Chair, Joseph Beuys, 1964-1985,
Wooden chair, wax, fat, and wire,
40” x 16” x 18”
Figure 7: *Hierarchy of the Body* (detail), Emily Collins, 2022-2023, Plaster, 3.5” x 3.5”
Figure 8: *Votive Skull*, Athar Jaber, 2018, Carrara marble, 8” x 5.5” x 5.5”
Figure 9: *Offering (Ears)*, Athar Jaber, 2018,
Carrara marble,
6” x 8.5” x 2”
Figure 10: *Hierarchy of the Body* (detail), Emily Collins, 2022-2023,
Charcoal and graphite on paper,
11” x 14”
Figure 11: *Untitled*, Ernst Haeckel, 1860-1869, Pencil on paper
Figure 12: *Steer a Steady Ship*, Lottie Consalvo, 2012,
Performance, rowboat, bed, black liquid
Figure 13: *The Artist is Present*, Marina Abramovic, 2010
Performance
Figure 14: Field of the Sky, Katie Paterson, 2012, Meteorite
Figure 15: *Schema*, Eva Hesse, 1967, Latex, 42” x 42”


