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Invisible Labor and the Preservation of Dignity

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INVISIBLE LABOR AND THE PRESERVATION OF DIGNITY

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School
of Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree
Masters of Fine Arts
Visual Art

by
Laken Grace Bridges
December 2014

Accepted by
Professor Sydney Cross
Professor Kathleen Thum
Dr. Beth Lauritis

ABSTRACT

My art seeks to question the social value of labor. Throughout history, labor hierarchies influenced by social class and economic stigmas have informed how laborers are viewed in the United States. Physical jobs such as menial and domestic work are a common form of invisible labor that experience debasement and stereotyping. In my art, I use labor-based and ordinary objects as a metaphor for the worker, linking the value or disposability of the object to the societal value of labor. This critique of labor is enhanced by the manipulation of text, by the formal tools of scale and perspective, and by the use of everyday materials as substrates for printed and drawn images. An expressive hand in drawing works to render the unique identities of objects and combats notions of the object as disposable and the worker as anonymous. These combined elements create themes of irony, subversion, and empowerment that elevate the ordinary. In referencing the ordinary, my art rethinks the Pop Art movement, critiquing societal values as opposed to questioning what art can be. While my art offers comfortable approachability through its formal qualities, subliminal cues created by challenging an object's function and meaning encourage a reconsideration of perceived social differences and assert the value of even the most basic types of work.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this body of work and the supporting written thesis to my family. Their patience, support, and investment in me have been essential to helping me pursue my research with enthusiasm and confidence. I am truly grateful for the sacrifices they have made to allow me to complete this goal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to recognize my fellow graduate students for their camaraderie and support, be it a midnight coffee break or an impromptu critique. Specifically, I would like to thank Tanna Burchinal and my studio mates Adrienne Lichliter and Alexandra Giannell for friendships that have enriched me personally and professionally. I would like to thank the faculty for their thoughtful observations and challenging questions that have helped inform my research. Specifically, I'd like to thank my committee members Kathleen Thum and Beth Lauritis for their guidance, support and constructive critique. Finally, I would like to thank my committee chair, Sydney Cross for her encouragement, her sense of humor, and her friendship. I continue to be inspired by the dedication and investigation she demonstrates in her personal studio practice as well as by the way she challenges and engages her students. She holds a wealth of knowledge and I am honored and humbled to have worked under an artist and a person of her caliber.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

One afternoon in 1941, a pipe-fitter left work and drove an old beaten car to a local dealership where he sought to acquire a new model. The salesman met the pipe-fitter with disdain, asserting the business was interested solely in paying customers. The pipe-fitter left, but returned the following day, this time arriving in a brand new sedan. He flashed a “paid in cash” receipt in front of the salesman before driving away, chiding the man for a biased viewpoint that lost business for the dealership.

The pipe-fitter was my grandfather. His experience with stereotyping was not unique to himself. Our jobs and the objects we own inform societal assumptions. Though my own history is rooted in a working class experience, connections between class, labor, and culture prove worthy of inquiry on a much larger scale. Throughout history, socio-economic stigmas and class hierarchies based on jobs have played a prominent role in society. The societal value of work is influenced and even manipulated to complement the agendas and politics of greater institutions. An example of labor manipulation is seen in the labor force needs of WWII. “Rosie the Riveter”, a heroine designed by the United States government, was created to encourage women on the home front to join the war effort via industry. After the war, “Rosie” was followed by 1950s government propaganda sending the no-longer needed female workforce back into the domestic sphere.

Industrialization in the United States put the worker in a more disposable role as technological advances lessened the value of manual skills. Though labor unions and

government mandates strive to create job opportunities and quality work environments today, the social stigmas surrounding many working class jobs remain. Many low-wage workers are viewed as lazy and dispassionate regardless of the tasks they perform— often because misinformed groups continue to embrace the bootstrap theory of social mobility which maintains social status and economic stability are solely controlled by the individual. Though research disproves the outdated theory, it remains in much of the subconscious of society. Following this misunderstanding, individuals in poverty or low wage jobs become stereotyped as lazy or having poor judgment. Subsequently, many types of labor must contend with societal shaming. Grimy, physical labor is particularly looked down upon and often associated with ignorance (Ashforth 5). This is perhaps in part due to associations of goodness and cleanliness in the ethical foundations of the United States.

My art examines these social stigmas and is concerned with the experiences of those in working and lower social classes, particularly their experiences with stereotypes within the field of labor. I explore this subject from both a personal and socio-political perspective, implementing elements of subversion and parody to encourage questioning of labor hierarchies and limitations imposed by social stigmas and economic conditions in the United States.

I primarily locate my art in experiences of groups in the Central and Southern Appalachian region, a place of my heritage and immediate cultural experience. This is a location whose socio-economic conditions and history of stereotyping continue to exist beyond immigrant labor, unlike other areas of the U.S. However, these works elicit a

broadier critique and consider the issue of the worker as anonymous and disposable. I use materials and process to help underline these ideas. Non-traditional substrates such as plastic bags, drafting paper, drop cloths, and repurposed fabric can offer an additional layer of content and place the imagery in more specific context, elevating or empowering not only the subject but the ordinary material on which it is placed.

The depiction of labor-based and common objects is paramount in my work. These objects function as a metaphor for these groups of people and at times become surrogates for human subjects within a marginalized labor force. Through this art, I seek to establish a critique of stereotyping that occurs through othering—alienation and dehumanization—of these groups. Yet to address only the disconcerting experiences of menial laborers and working class would be a disservice to the individuals reflected in my art. My prints, drawings, and books serve a dual purpose as portraits of people who take pride and satisfaction in their work and whose jobs are valuable to their communities.

CHAPTER TWO

DEVALUED LABOR AND THE WORKER IN ART HISTORY

Within the world of art-making and art history, labor hierarchies have long existed. Printer's assistants often labored over printmaking plates and sculptor apprentices followed instructions from their master artists. A cursory overview of art history points to labor and social class depicted as glorified, exploited, or fetishized. Though many representations of laborers were presented from outsider perspectives that emphasized differences or reinforced hierarchies, some presented thoughtful critiques through challenging imagery.

Artists like Van Gogh and Millet championed labor and sought to establish social critique. Millet's social realist painting, *The Gleaners*, 1857, glorifies lower class. A contemporary critique of the painting suggests Millet sentimentalizes workers and daily struggles of the poor. However, the painting was progressive for its time and quickly became an unwanted reminder of poverty. Depictions of rural labor were threatening to the establishment, as fear of workers organizing to revolt could easily become a reality. Gleaning is the act of harvesting crop remnants unfit for sale due to damage or spoil. The official permission of gleaning was considered an early form of a welfare system. Millet depicts the entire act of the gleaning process while the wagon and supervisor figure in the background act as a reminder of social ranks. As such, Millet's painting marks a significant instance of artists recognizing a marginalized group.

Reduced (Figure 1) is an installation of layered plastic shopping bags with text and objects printed on their surfaces. In this installation, I recognize marginalized work and

thankless jobs to invite a questioning of the value of work and to critique labor as a commodity. The installation resides both in the gallery and in a storage space. By placing the installation in both the accepted gallery space and the storage area, I include that which is aside or behind the scenes, directing attention to what we are accustomed to ignoring. Like Millet's *The Gleaners*, the difficult subject of labor or lower economic class is brought to the foreground.

In *Reduced*, some of the bags feature lithographs of everyday objects and objects of work expressively rendered to create a gritty, used quality and emphasize a unique identity. These bags are treated with gesso and acrylic paint to create a papery, skin-like surface, enhancing the individuality of the objects printed on top of them. Other bags feature the words, "thankless" and "thank you" to challenge expectations of exchanges between worker, consumer, and industry. Whether the bags express insincere thanks and ungratefulness or reference unappreciated work, the repetition of these terms empties them of meaning. The "reduced" sales sign hanging above the installation asks whether the value of labor has been reduced, whether the worker has been reduced to a task-based identity of repetitive, thankless work, or whether the label speaks to a greater capitalist experience in which all is reduced to an economy of the same.

While the shopping bags provide an immediate reference to thankless and mind-numbing duties of grocery baggers and cashiers, they also address the concept of labor or people as a commodity. Through repetition and pairing with the "thankless" bags, the bags with objects referencing menial tasks or dirty labor become goods to use and discard. Yet

the treatment and arrangement of the bags elevates them beyond vacant containers. They rise from the floor and escape over the wall. Through the dissimilarity created through drawing, they become more precious and unique and less disposable or forgettable, and are divorced from the realm of anonymity.

Gustave Caillebotte's *The Floor Scrapers*, 1875, addresses another type of repetitive, thankless work. The painting depicts a group of shirtless male workers scraping the floor of a bourgeois apartment. Though working class themes were earlier advanced by Realist artists, Caillebotte's painting was rejected by the Salon. The depiction of workmen with uncovered, imperfect bodies laboring at a task was deemed unacceptable, grotesque, and an offensive display of sexuality. Some scholars argue Caillebotte presented the workers from a strictly bourgeois perspective, emphasizing the workers' lower social status. Regardless of intentions, this depiction of semi-faceless workers points to a viewpoint of workers as anonymous, mechanized bodies.

The reminder of uncomfortable realities of social structures depicted in the paintings by Millet and Caillebotte led me to create the wood lithograph, *Olympia* (Figure 2). I printed a large-scale toilet scrub brush on satin fabric. Here, the brush becomes a stand-in for the figure, positioned on its side, reclining. As the title suggests, *Olympia* references the art historical nude, specifically Manet's 1863 painting, *Olympia*. In Manet's painting, a reclining nude prostitute brazenly holds her gaze with the viewer. Though common among middle-class and bourgeois men, the mistress was a figure both resented and scorned. Yet women in these roles were expected to remain invisible. While a

voyeuristic view of the female nude in art was acceptable during this time, a direct gaze by a worker engaged in a morally offensive yet tacitly accepted trade reminded viewers of aspects of their culture they preferred to ignore. Manet's *Olympia* is not an idealized representation of beauty and she is unapologetically confrontational. My version of *Olympia* depicts an abject object, not an object of beauty. I display my version of *Olympia* on a curtain rod, referencing paintings of female nudes hung behind viewing curtains by their bourgeois owners. Instead of being hidden behind a curtain for select viewing pleasure, the toilet brush refuses to be hidden and is confrontational like *Olympia's* gaze.

The toilet brush symbolizes the worker as domestic or custodial. Here, an object that symbolizes a vital part of a workforce that helps keep society running but is often unnoticed asserts itself by spanning across five feet of shimmering fabric. The wood grain of the wood lithograph corresponds to the ordinary, humble subject, while expressive mark-making in the drawing asserts a unique identity. The banner-like size of the print and the scale of the brush take on a sense of monumentality, establishing an elevated emblem of labor. The luxuriousness of the fabric juxtaposed with the abject subject initiate a sarcastic critique of labor valued by some and dismissed by others. The handle of the brush reads, "Made in USA". The United States boasts a history of an abundance of American-based jobs and American-made products, yet today labor in the U.S. faces multiple challenges. While some jobs are outsourced to the lowest bidder, other unwanted jobs are sloughed off to lower classes and immigrant labor. Overqualified groups also experience a

real struggle for work and the financial prestige that being American once held comes into question.

Within the history of art, printmaking boasts a rich heritage of socio-political critique. The nature of the process facilitates dialog and distribution of information to mass groups of people in a democratic and timely manner. Francisco Goya used intaglio printmaking to create *Los Caprichos*, which critiqued various aspects of culture ranging from poor political leaders to ignorance in society. Honoré Daumier used the lithographic process to provide accessible critiques to the public. The politically charged subjects of many printmakers in history could easily be connected to what has recently been referred to as the ninety-nine percent, a term used by the Occupy Movement to describe contemporary economic inequality and income disparity (The 99 Percent).

During the 1930s few critics valued social issues presented in printmaking, arguing that a focus on the socio-political distracted artists from developing a quality aesthetic. However, the concept of “pro-labor” grew in popularity, and the Marxist theory that all workers deserve respect, decent wages, and humane treatment was embraced in leftist art (Langa 78). Leftist printmakers such as William Gropper and Elizabeth Catlett saw an opportunity to create works to influence a change in thought regarding socio-political issues. Printmakers addressing labor subjects had to develop new symbols and definitions of labor to create a visual language relevant to the times. Many of these early prints used pointed text and objects to symbolize abusive powers and mistrusted institutions, but few presented objects in a way that invited a dialog rather than made a statement.

My print, *Bliss* (Figure 3), examines assumptions about contentedness with social expectations, labor roles, and class position. In the print I combine images of objects that reference labor in both a domestic and institutional space. By using objects that reside both in and outside the home and that are associated with the female gender, I am considering the gendering of labor. Gendering is the process of attributing characteristics of masculinity or femininity to a position, a person, or an object, putting the subject in a place of privilege or disadvantage, of power or oppression. Gendering labor leads to greater biases about who should perform a job and subsequently how much that job should be valued. What does “bliss” express? Is it bliss to perform tasks of cleaning and care? Is it bliss to be exempt from these tasks? Or do some individuals assume others are blissfully content in their social or economic positions? The expectation of bliss is a promise that is never fulfilled. The print offers a biting critique, but also leaves lingering questions of assumptions about those who perform certain labors.

In *Protect* (Figure 4), a mixed media drawing of a monumentally-sized dust mask, I consider both the physical dangers and psychological effects of dirty work. Masks without the N95 safety indication are not guaranteed to protect the wearer. This type of mask speaks to the knowledge and skill the wearer must have for his or her task. The text printed on these masks informs the wearer about its proper use. In my drawing, select portions of the text are subdued, emphasizing other words and subverting the printed instructions. My mask advises the wearer to protect him or herself from misuse, a reminder for individuals to protect themselves as well as each other from mistreatment.

While the mask can reference the act of covering the mouth and silencing, it also renders the wearer more anonymous. This anonymity points to the disposability of the bodies that may compromise themselves doing the dirty work. In this drawing, the absence of a body speaks to workers alienation from their work and their own bodies because their physical labor is for the benefit of the institution paying for the labor. *Protect* asserts an identity without naming a specific wearer and does not foreclose the possibility of the other.

CHAPTER THREE

RETHINKING POP ART AND THE FEMINIZATION OF LABOR

The contemporary labor force continues to be stereotyped by its education and redefined by immigrant and outsourced workforces. Though the working class as a whole keeps society running, because of the stigmatization of manual and low-wage labor, the majority of it does so from a place of misrepresentation and invisibility. Part of this invisibility comes from social stigmas. Much labor within the working class is often considered dirty work. Professors Blake Ashforth and Glen Kreiner of Arizona State University executed a study that examined the role of working class labor in American society. In their essay, “How Can You Do It?: Dirty Work and The Challenge of Constructing a Positive Identity”, the authors explain many types of jobs that fall within a category of “dirty work”. The concept of dirty work is a social construction linked to cultural associations of cleanliness as what is good and pure (Ashforth 3). Dirty work is work viewed as shameful or tainted due to negative associations with the task. Work may be considered socially dirty or tainted in the example of a prison guard dealing with inmates or a reposessor retrieving merchandise whose payments are past due. Physical, grimy labor of sewer work or custodial service suffers negative stereotyping due to unclean conditions in which the work may be done. Physical and menial labor remains continually directly associated with dirtiness, and the concept of dirtiness is equated with poverty, ignorance, and even immorality (Ashforth 14). “Because dirt threatens the sanctity of cleanliness, it is cast as taboo, and societies strive to separate what is clean from what is

dirty” (Ashforth 7). This inclination for separation from stigmatized groups increases the divide between classes as well as between types of labor and encourages “cultural superiority that economic and political powers assume and establish” (Couto 120).

In many parts of the U.S. the conversation on labor stigmas gravitates towards labor outsourced to groups willing to do American “dirty work” via immigrants working in the United States or outsourcing from the U.S. to other countries. This perspective on labor often leads to the critique of racial stereotypes and mistreatment in the workplace. But despite contemporary trends of working class and manual labor jobs comprised of specific ethnicities in some areas of the U.S., in many areas of the country, including in central and southern Appalachia, working class labor remains considerably diverse and still includes a large percentage of the white majority.

Willie Cole’s work often addresses themes of consumerism and lifestyle and he both changes the role of and empowers objects. For Cole, objects retain a history and have a life, though he transforms and manipulates objects to create new and contrasting representations and establish metaphors (Sims, 15-16). Cole’s iron prints recall a recent past in American history when ironing and laundry work was one of the few acceptable jobs for African American women.

For *Domestic I.D.*, Cole used irons to burn impressions into paper. The iron prints illustrate the power and capabilities of the object as well as leave distinctive burns that would ruin fabric and be regarded negatively as a blemish. Literally powerful objects, the irons become metaphorically powerful and empowered through Cole’s manipulation of

them to burn emblems of identities into surfaces. These marks assert their existence and document their capabilities, refusing to be ignored.

On a broader scale, Cole's prints examine the function of power struggles and class stratification with which myriad groups continue to experience. Though racial biases can be a significant factor in the world of labor, job hierarchies are also influenced by the feminization of labor. The feminization of labor is a cultural theory maintaining that low-wage jobs and jobs previously dominated by males face a societal bias because they are now associated with women. As more females enter a particular workforce, that profession becomes "feminized", or associated with the female gender and thus devalued. Due to institutionalized patriarchy engrained in U.S. culture, this "feminization" results in lower pay and lower status for the worker due to views of women as intellectually or physically inferior second-class citizens with marginal value (Lorber 61). This informs another bias applied to males who perform menial jobs and work in female-dominated industries. Today maintenance and domestic labor are among types of work that are most debased because of their historical connections to women.

In *Economy Model, User Friendly* (Figure 5), a lithograph of a string mop head, I use expressive drawing, scale, and juxtaposition of subject and substrate to assert the worth of menial labor. The mop head spans across a grid of pages from a book on management and how to build an efficient and productive worker. Through expressive and at times aggressive drawing, I render the mop head as an animated, energized object that refuses to hang limp and wait to be used. The handle of the mop is not included in the drawing to

emphasize a severing from a controlling authority or institution. The mop becomes figurative, the swinging strings referencing hair, while the metal frame may vaguely reference a crown, elevating the object. The scale of the mop asserts its presence, empowering the ordinary. The mop refuses to be dismissed and challenges the devaluing of feminized labor as it dominates the book pages.

In this print the importance of the hand in drawing is perhaps most evident. This way of making enables me to render expressively and directly, pushing greasy lithographic crayon and splashing oily tusche wash onto the printing matrix, the energetic application giving the work emotive authenticity. Despite expressive method of drawing, the rendering of the image does take time. Spending time with the object during the process of drawing helps me to understand its identity. In my artistic practice, to draw an object is to know the object. Drawing is essential to the way I depict an object – not as a process of illustrating what I see, but as a process of translating my psychological and emotional response to what I observe. Drawing on a large scale requires me to use my entire body to develop an image. The development of these images requires significant labor: the labor of moving the entire arm instead of the wrist, the labor of climbing a ladder or climbing on a table to reach a part of my paper or plate.

Some may argue my prints and drawings follow the principles of Pop Art more than they depict images of empowerment, relics of recognition, and sincere portraits. My art raises questions about what society values through the use of ordinary objects as metaphors for people. Pop Art used ordinary objects to raise questions about what art is.

Pop Art celebrated reproduction and embraced realism and the everyday with a strong sense of irony. Though some of Claes Oldenburg's tongue-in-cheek sculptures have influenced the way I consider the use of scale and monumentality, his re-presentation of objects as functionless underlines the differences in what is at stake in our art. Oldenburg's *Soft Light Switches* is a sculpture of a monumental set of light switches constructed with soft, sagging, stuffed vinyl. In this and other art, Oldenburg uses scale and materials to subvert the identity of objects and sever them from their functionality. In my art, objects gain specific identities through an expressive hand in drawing, perspective and scale, and substrates that underline the history or location of the object. The un-idealized is embraced through gritty textures, non-traditional materials, and a subtle color palette, muted like the invisible labor it references.

In my print, *Sop Up* (Figure 6), a sponge rendered from a low vantage point perspective takes on a monumental presence. In this image, the position of the sponge references the Classical contrapposto, or weight shift pose, and the object becomes a surrogate for the figure. Contrapposto, a tactic to express beauty and balance, was also used in sculpture as a means to express life and movement in an otherwise static figure. The sponge is personified and almost heroic as it stands positioned towards the light. Like *Olympia*, it takes the stage, commanding attention. *Sop Up* represents an identity from within the group of laborers that my print, *Bliss*, advertises. As a verb, the word "sop" means to soak up or absorb. But as a noun, the word is defined as something given to

placate or pacify. The sponge symbolizes someone who has perhaps soaked up or absorbed unfair treatment, but it also considers the idea of standing up to gestures of pacification.

Both *Sop Up* and *Economy Model, User Friendly*, function as a rebuttal against socially constructed stigmas that label dirty jobs and feminized labor as anonymous and insignificant forms of work. The mop and the sponge in these prints rise from their ordinary substrates and command attention, empowered by aggressive drawing, scale, and perspective, unapologetically asserting specific identities. By presenting these objects singly on a substrate, I direct focus to the object instead of its surroundings, elevating its role and heightening its perceived value.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUBVERTING LANGUAGE AND ELEVATING THE ORDINARY

In recent art history the worker's role in art has expanded beyond a tool for political propaganda to that of a group depicted as equal and sharing a collective human experience. Mierle Ukeles' 1977-1980 performance, *Touch Sanitation*, consisted of Ukeles shaking the hands of New York City sanitation workers and personally thanking them for the work that keeps the city functioning. The performance critiqued institutionalized labor and class hierarchies, but also sought to facilitate interactions that illustrated commonalities between human beings instead of differences between laborers and social positions. In 2012, Choreographer Allison Orr collaborated with Austin, Texas sanitation workers to present sanitation work to the public in a respectful and engaging way as a preservation of dignity for necessary work that is trivialized and unappreciated in U.S. culture. Through a choreographed dance routine that involved machinery, tools, and workers, Orr's *Trash Dance* recognized the skill and dedication required to maintain Austin sanitation. Don Anderson, a member of the Austin sanitation team, voices the frustrations of social stigma: "[I] have to be a skilled professional. We are not these dirty people...there is a grace to what we do" (*Trash Dance*). These homages and preservations of dignity function as equalizers instead of sensationalist or romanticized portraits.

My print, *Cushion* (Figure 7) depicts graphically-rendered objects including work boots, cinder blocks, a mop head, and a scrub brush that function as a metaphor for laborers. These objects are symbols of physical protection, elements of construction or

foundation, and references to cleaning and care. They are all a similar size and equated with a pearl. Equating ordinary objects with a pearl reinforces the value of the tasks they are used for as well as the value of the individuals who utilize them. These items represent work performed that cushions the work of others. Additionally, the paper of this print was made by Eugene Dietzgen Drafting Company, a business with Marxist roots that redesigned its factories to provide a healthier worker-friendly environment. *Cushion*, like the works of Ukeles and Orr illustrates the value of labor and demonstrate recognition of laborers as a reminder that every individual has value and experiences life beyond the stereotype of social standing or economic background.

My book, *Upwards Trend* (Figure 8) is about empowerment and respect. It utilizes phone book pages as a symbolic equalizer in addition to gesso-ed plastic bags that offer a distinctive skin-like tactility. This book holds a collection of prints of ordinary objects. My goal was to render each object in the same way, not privileging one over another, but elevating the ordinary. A grouping of phrases collected from news articles about economic struggles in the United States are presented across several pages to create a message:

Upwards trend
A symbol of efforts; the uprising that led to a fall
Clashes between –under increasing scrutiny
Circumstances are undetermined

I see this book as a manifesto for empowerment. Everyone together: the same, none immune to struggle. By taking the time and care to prepare the pages, to render the objects, and to bind them in a book, I emphasize the worth of the individual. There is also a connection to Marxism that argues workers are inevitably enslaved under a system of

production while society degrades people by categorizing them by class and objectifying them as replaceable parts within a machine.

Text plays a powerful role in my art. The written word is normally used as a tool for logic. But in my work I often challenge the logic of language by subverting its meaning, the truths in the message appearing only upon being flipped or unscrambled. My use of text is essential in the book format. In the small size of a book, objects depicted are not empowered through perspective and scale, but through multiplicity and particularly through accompanying language that speaks for unseen bodies.

Jenny Holzer's text-based installations reveal truths through methodologies that subvert expectations. Holzer's work varies from subverted to sensational and has been described as that which represents things uttered by people no longer able to say them (Grynsztejn and Keller, 19). It is not my goal or intention to don the role of ambassador for others. However, Holzer's process of questioning established belief systems and values is an act that resonates with me and can be linked to my art. In her 2007 projection over the Guggenheim museum, messages including the text, "someone has to trudge through sludge and ashes" scrolled across the building. This projection and many of Holzer's Truisms such as "money creates taste" and "there's nothing redeeming in toil" encourage a consideration of the self and others in relation to social expectations and position.

My book, *Record* (Figure 9) uses language and drawing to examine hardships faced by some wage-laborers experiencing economic struggles. The book is constructed with pages of trash – old payroll sheets, food wrappers, and plastic bags were carefully gesso-ed and

sanded before being glued and stitched together to make the pages of an accordion book. On these pages I used iron oxide rust to draw the perimeters of U.S. cities with high rates of poverty. I added text describing experiences that were my own, but similarly shared by others in economic struggle. Text including phrases, “a pair of athletic socks stitched down one side substitute a pair of mittens” and “ten pounds of stripped copper wire yields funds for food for three days for five people” span across the accordion pages, nodding to Holzer’s matter-of-fact Truisms in a more specific and personal way. The accordion format of the book illustrates the discomfort often experienced when addressing difficult subjects. When closed, the book is tidy and occupies little space. Once open, the flimsy pages prove difficult to re-fold, leaving the interactor in the awkward position of having to deal with the mess of pages too delicate to be confidently handled and too cumbersome to be replaced in the book efficiently. While the book presents an uncomfortable reality for some, it also acts to empower a group through textual documentation and recognition of their experiences.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

My art explores the treatment and experiences of working class laborers from both a personal and socio-political perspective. Objects of labor and the everyday are subjects in my art and function as metaphors for groups of people and surrogates for human bodies. On a surface level, my art is not confrontational as the hand in drawing offers an aesthetic appeal. However, monumental scale, manipulated text offering ironic double meanings and the substrates holding these images offer more cues to a socio-political commentary.

In my small prints, I use text to create multiple meanings and establish a critique of assumptions made about laborers and their social class. In my books, I utilize language as a voice for absent bodies and ironic or uncomfortable statements that empower groups and document their experiences. In my large prints and drawings, I establish unique identities for objects through the execution of perspective, scale, and expressive drawing on ordinary substrates. These grimy or distressed surfaces underline the ordinary dirty work of my subjects but also become stages on which the subjects refuse to hide. By emphasizing these identities, I seek to combat associations with the laborer as Other, anonymous, or invisible. These monumentally sized objects become memorializations of workers and function as preservations of dignity.

By elevating the everyday and empowering the ordinary, I seek to recognize a marginalized, often invisible, labor force. I seek to initiate a conversation about labor hierarchies and social class stereotypes that affect our interactions with each other. In my

work, it is my goal to encourage a more thoughtful consideration of the world we live in and the socio-political and socio-economic conditions that dictate experience.

FIGURES



Fig. 1: *Reduced*
Mixed media installation, 10'x12'x5', 2014



Fig. 2: *Olympia*
Wood lithography and acrylic on fabric, 60"x66"x1", 2014

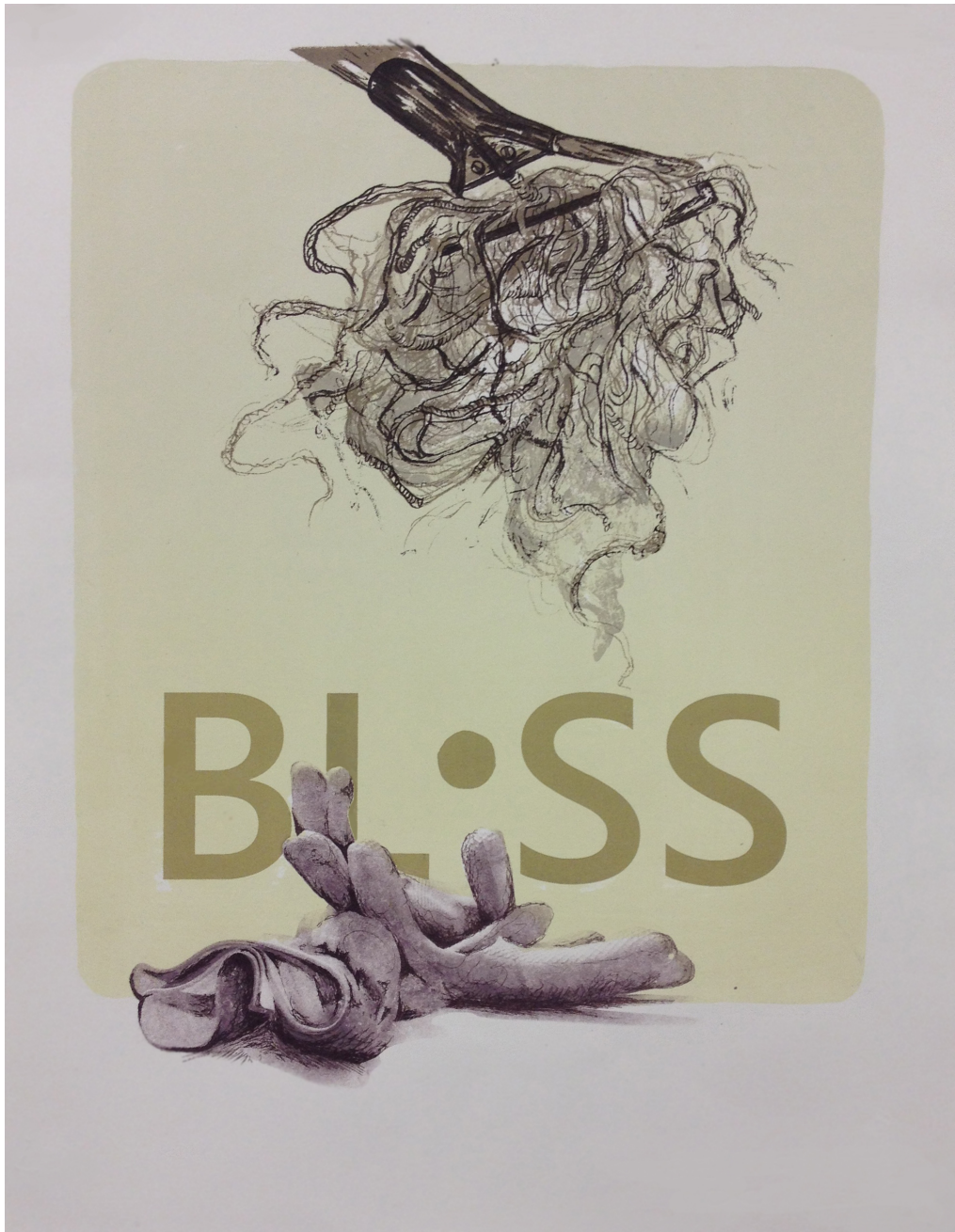


Fig. 3: *Bliss*
Photo lithography and screen print on paper, 14"x19", 2014



Fig. 4: *Protect*
Graphite and india ink on gesso-ed fabric, 84"x60"x1", 2014



Fig. 5: *Economy Model, User Friendly*
Lithograph on stained book pages, 54"x42", 2014



Fig. 6: *Sop Up*
Lithograph on gesso-ed plastic bags, 48"x36", 2014

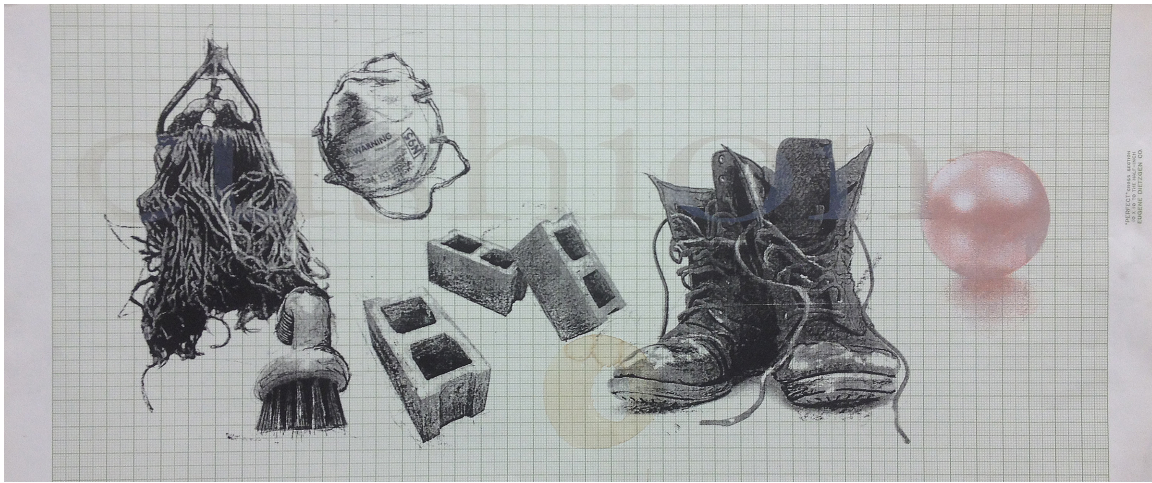


Fig. 7: *Cushion*
Lithography, screen print, and coffee on graph paper, 10"x22", 2014



Fig. 8: Upwards Trend
Mixed media book: lithographs on gesso-ed plastic bags, phone book pages, and vellum,
0.5"x5.5"x9", 2014



Fig. 9: *Record*
Mixed media book: graphite, india ink, thread, and iron oxide on trash and plastic,
1"x9"x6" (closed), 1"x12"x6" (open), 2014

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