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Until It Doesn't

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UNTIL IT DOESN'T

by

Kendall H. Johnson

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master in Fine Arts

Major: Art

Under the Supervision of Professor Karen Kunc

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 2016

UNTIL IT DOESN'T

Kendall H. Johnson, M.F.A.

University of Nebraska, 2016

Advisor: Karen Kunc

And I said to my body, softly. 'I want to be your friend.' It took a long breath. And replied
'I have been waiting my whole life for this.'

--Nayyirah Waheed ¹

My artistic explorations of self are fueled by my experiences as a person who has struggled in the past to acknowledge a facet of my identity. Consumed by questions and doubts I've rarely wanted to accept the different truths of who I am. I often feel in conflict with myself and sometimes I feel it might always be this way. The struggle is always there until it's not but when is that?

There are two parts of me: my physical exterior body, the part of me wanting to connect, to share; and then the abstract emotional interior, the part that doesn't feel valid enough to do so. This duality of self has evolved into inventive visualizations and variations as drawings. The drawings represent my struggle, the two selves fighting each other. My struggle to find balance was destructive. I have not been kind.

I am developing my work from the energy of these experiences, which manifests as figures interacting that make reference to my own body. Forms are composed of delicate veils, gridded dots, engulfing smoke, doorways/portals and geometric hard edges. Some of these motifs visually describe a means of concealing, whether it's a

¹ Waheed, Nayyirah , *Salt* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, Sept 2013) Print.

thick smokescreen billowing out of a figure, delicate draping of a thin veil or doorways to escape. Some describe a surface, something hard-edged, protective, impenetrable. These motifs are considered when I approach the drawing surface with careful consideration of what's being revealed and what's still hiding in the smoke or concealed in a veil. I have created a dynamic arena - a back and forth between concealing and revealing.

While I have codified my imagery these drawings do not reveal the whole truth because the allure of mystery is more interesting to me. It's that mystery of how a billowing smoke cloud can coalesce into two arms holding each other or how three doorways veiled in a transparent network of curtains can imperfectly describe feelings that are experiences of being human. The mystery drives me to make, and it is vitally important because I don't want to be defined by my past or by my struggles. This work is intended to move beyond, to describe the multi-dimensions of the human condition to which everybody, whether they want to or not, submits.

Additionally, these drawings are a space for me to be vulnerable, yet, at the same time, they are never a complete disclosure. There is a satisfaction of projecting my own emotions onto a surface that wholeheartedly accepts it without judgement. In transferring my identifying actions onto the surface, through mark making, graphite powders, erasures, and engraved marks I am expressing the tension and release I feel. The substrate receives the transference of the mark making from the body to the paper.

I am still contending with my identity and have made great strides at understanding who I am and what I want, but I was expecting so much more. I thought resolving my issues on my identity would change my outlook for the better and they have not quite reached those initial expectations. We will all hurt, we will all long for more and

because we acknowledge these things, we can begin to use this energy in a positive way, for making, for connecting, for sharing. We can build on these experiences and find contentment and absolution. I think my sense of body will endure but I find myself acutely more frustrated. I am still hurting, I am still longing. My body and the multiple dimensions it's composed of will always be in some degree of contention and I think that's part of the reality of being human. It will all hurt until it doesn't.



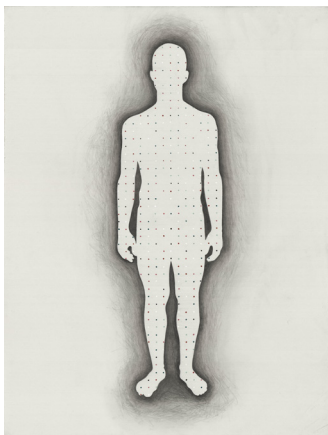
"Other"

Collage Cut Paper, Graphite, Colored Pencil, Paint



"I Have a Hard Time Looking at Faces"

Graphite, Colored Pencil



"It's Complicated"

Graphite, Colored Pencil



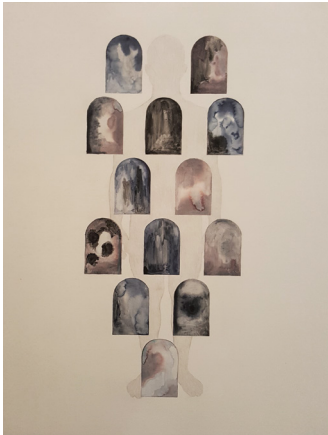
"This is Fine"

Graphite, Colored Pencil



"I've Been Smoldering For Years"

Graphite, Colored Pencil



"Misdirection"

Watercolor, Colored Pencil



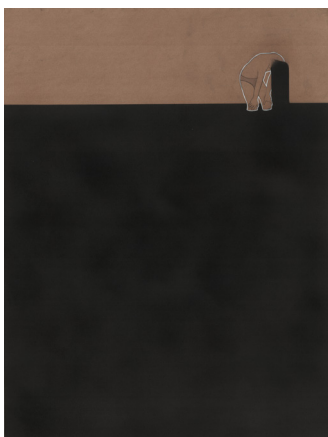
"I'm Not Saying You Have To Be This
Way Forever"

Graphite, Colored Pencil



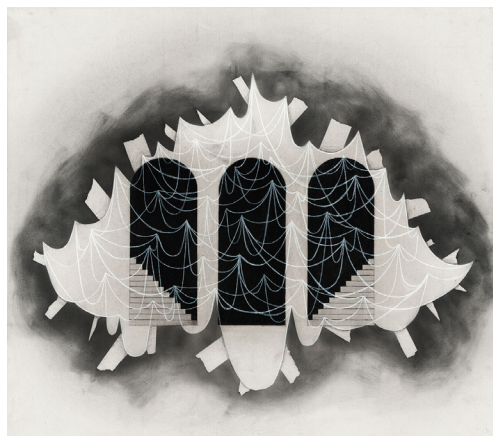
"As Much as I Couldn't, You Would"

Watercolor, Colored Pencil, Ink



"Exhausted"

Graphite, Colored Pencil



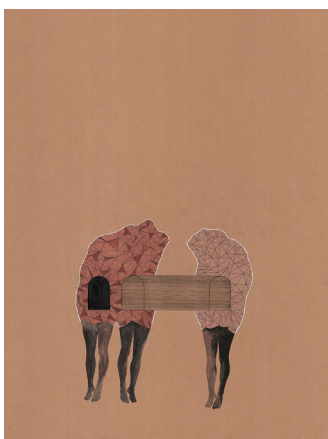
"Hideaways"

Graphite, Colored Pencil, Gouache



"It's Okay"

Graphite, Colored Pencil



"It's Difficult When It's Like This"

Watercolor, Colored Pencil
Ink, Gouache



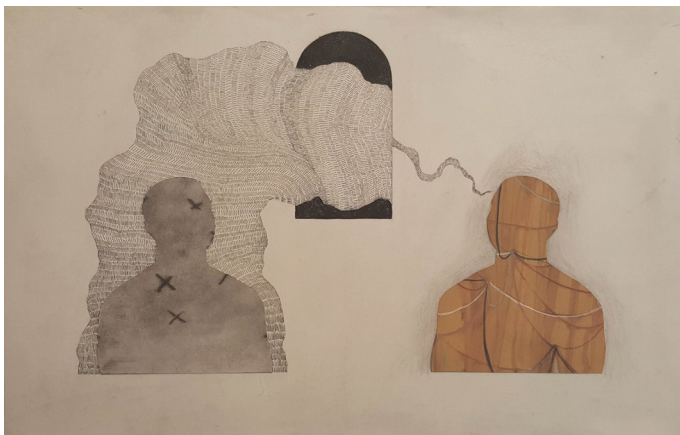
"If This Then That"

Watercolor, Ink



"You Were Vast, I Was Small"

Watercolor, Colored Pencil



"Reaching Out"

Collage Cut Paper, Ink,
Colored Pencil, Watercolor, Graphite



"It's Like This"

Graphite, Colored Pencil
Gouache Paint