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Don't Worry

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DON'T WORRY

by

Patricia Lynn Davis

A THESIS

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In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

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DON'T WORRY

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Advisor: Karen Kunc

When I was really young something at the core of my being whispered to me, "she won't live very long." At the time I didn't know where that voice was coming from, but I knew it was true. It was unsettling. Over the years I realized that I was being prepared for the eventuality of my mother's death and that I wouldn't know when or how it would happen. When it did occur, suddenly I knew there was nothing between death and me but time. This thought has haunted me to the point that I have developed a fear of my body.

Death is a mystery – a reality and yet an unknown. It is an abstract concept that we push away and think we do not have to deal with until later. We indirectly understand death in terms of loss and absence, but ultimately we are aware of this concept of death through the vulnerability of our bodies. Living with that awareness is a delicate balance between fear and hope.

As an artist, my process of making is an embodiment of that balance. I confront my vulnerability through the act of mark making. I allow the act of drawing to be a meditative state where I transfer my anxiety to the surface of the paper. The paper becomes a reference to the body as a site of ambiguity – a space of physical and psychological tension activated by transference, strength, construction and dissolution.

Erasing, incising, rubbing, scratching and spilling create smooth and roughened surface textures that speak of the struggle of the physical body. I create a place of psychological tension by reworking and repeating these processes to make elemental shapes and details. The imagery often grows out of my gestures and the way the materials are applied. Forms and marks appear to be bending, stretching, floating away, separating, isolated, oozing, joining, and colonizing. What results is an imagined space that could be interpreted as of the body and or the mind, but the exact subject of the imagery is hidden. This allows me to create a contemplative experience that is seductive and unsettling and allows space for the viewer to interpret the imagery. Like entering a darkened room, the viewer needs time to adjust and re-adjust to this environment. By doing so, they become immersed in the rich nuances of the surfaces that are simultaneously visual and physical. Details are seen and secrets moments can be found.

The phrase "don't worry" is often said or thought to reassure that all will be okay, and yet it's ironic. If repeated over and over, "don't worry" goes from being a calming mantra to a low humming anxiety – a reminder that something is wrong. As a child I used to tell my mother, "Don't worry so much," but I had no idea what those words really meant. Now that I am older, I often find it impossible to *not* worry; I wonder how much is learned behavior and how much is genetic. The title of the exhibition and each piece form a poem, reminding us of the reality and need for hope. Through this work, I have realized that until I take my last breath, I will be discovering what my body is and what it can be – a vessel in a state of constant change, vulnerable, seeking comfort and relief. Don't worry; let it go.

Don't Worry

by Patricia Davis





