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Declaration of interdependence

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University of Iowa

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DECLARATION OF INTERDEPENDENCE

by

Stacey Elizabeth Mumm

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts
degree in Art in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

August 2013

Thesis Supervisor: Professor John Dilg

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Graduate College
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Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Stacey Elizabeth Mumm

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Art at the August 2013 graduation.

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David Dunlap

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For Farai—like every great painting, I want to meld with, dream into, and stare at you, again and again. As the canvas which supports all expressions, you have handled my feisty, ambitious, and despairingly self-critical to overjoyed moments of dabbing, pouring, or flinging paint onto you with dignity, strength, and delight.

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My work is a composite honed through the interests and contributions of many individuals and involvements with life for which I am indebted. It is challenging to convey the benefits gleaned through the experience of teaching in the visual arts; for me, mentorship has been a means to many new vantage points and chances to “fly” with others; sincere thanks to all my students. With both their work and their words, every artist I’ve encountered has helped form my vision; particularly, I’m immensely influenced by those acting outside the system, labeled ‘outsider’, ‘folk’, ‘street’, and often ‘non-Western’—your gifts of the unabashed human spirit, uncanny zealous refinement (or lack thereof), the unselfconscious, and the hyper self-aware need to persuade, celebrate, or mourn through the visual have greatly enriched my understanding of the capacity of art. Accordingly, although it may sound “silly”, Mother Nature has been a true collaborator with me; she has given landscapes which echo and resonate with my own feelings and amazed me with her shades of green.

Others for which I am appreciative are both members of my immediate family and those with whom I’ve worked closely. Thanks to my sisters: Jennifer, Angela, Emily, Jill, and Natalie; you have helped turn so many blizzards into minor flurries. I would like to thank my father for his sense of play coupled with an odd irony of atonement, and my mother for her knack at extremity allowing access to life’s far-reaching moods—giving me means to witness temperaments involving beauty or revulsion, pettiness or laughter, and freedom or meddling. I am reminded of (and renewed by) the instinctual human need to draw by the actions of my nieces

and nephews when they pick up a crayon or piece of chalk and spellbind me with the magic they make; for this display which links to the primal, I am much obliged. For those who have worked alongside me with a heartfelt belief in the cultivation of the arts, both in the academy and the larger community, your shared passion has given me hope and support in a culture where the arts might suffocate if not for your lives' work. In this area, I have exceptional regard for my relationship with Giovanna Jackson (my Italian godmother). To all my professors, though most importantly at this juncture: John Dilg, David Dunlap, and Anita Jung—your patience and commitment both intellectually and emotionally to my graduate experience has been profound—thank you. Lastly (undoubtedly, not least), I am appreciative of my Chihuahua, Piño; he has held my gaze in fascination and instilled a limitless capacity for affection in my life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	vi
DECLARATION OF INTERDEPENDENCE.....	1

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

1. Untitled.....	4
2. Untitled.....	5
3. Untitled.....	6
4. Untitled.....	7
5. Untitled.....	8
6. Untitled.....	9
7. Untitled.....	10
8. Untitled.....	11

DECLARATION OF INTERDEPENDENCE

Selfhood is a farce conjured from the make-believe story begun in childhood. Meaning is its scaffolding, structuring and reinforcing its conviction. A divisive cast of isolation, exchange, power, and obfuscation replace the leading role once held by 'union,' perceived and felt as reality rather than the now trumping notion of an independent identity. A self-awareness of the external and internal, unrealized as constructs, creates misunderstanding; they are no longer corollaries of one another. Our immanent nature which once commanded the body's gestures into a visual form of language interacting with sound is now suppressed as the body has become a puppet for the mind's verbal stronghold—we have forgotten our place within and how to communicate with nature by the means of movement and sound. Through these described actions animated by held beliefs, a worldview is developed and concretized paving the former "sacred ground" of nature; pliability has been replaced by fabricated security. To further the disfavor of this reality, the practice of sacrifice formerly used to maintain a bond and balance (a respectful "give-and-take") between humans and nature is broken; it is replaced by human pride and its overwhelming control of the relationship. This existence of the human life may be anchored by nihilism or a belief system which offers a version of an afterlife; both options reinforce a dichotomy of life and death. In these mindsets, life either negates or anticipates death as a space for justice (reward or punishment). If one of these choices opens to doubt, which snags and tears through the quilt of reality composed by the design of our dogmas, then another possibility will be accessible through the hole created. The true visage, a realization of ourselves—unlimited and

formless—is possible; as the perceived context of ‘life’ or ‘death’ is dismissed, we are allowed to become our own wilderness. Absorbing our former presence in its limited capacity into a new immensity wherein we will belong instead of long—this waits not to be observed, but encountered as an immersive experience.

Paralleling our lives, art is also susceptible to an existence and, like life, rouses fortune and consequence as its purity is challenged by motives that deter its original function. If misguided, art will be expected to bear only ‘meaning’ rather than ‘experience’. At its best, art is transformative being both the mirror and the reflection of the change in it. Experienced collectively, it creates a shared identity. This affect emerges through the combination of multiple encounters of the singular (subjective) into the collective (objective); the individual facets form into a rounded whole— truth. The artist’s role is to function as a collaborator with the art being created as well as be the determiner of resolve and moment of cessation for each piece. This decision to fix an ‘ending’ may be countered by another option permitting the ‘eternal’. The latter choice motivates the incidence of the ever-changing and points toward the sublime even defying framing. Therefore, whether hidden or noticeable, the presence of the *perpetual*, if favored, will persist in the work; capturing the notion of ‘forever’.

Furthering this possibility of art’s ability to hold infinity is its capacity to beckon imaginative responses boundless in potential and impossible to reduce to a single cause. This has become art’s pleasure— to provoke our awareness of time as neither finite in beginning nor closure. All this becomes perceivable when surprise interrupts the normal pattern of a reality and through this jest, normal reality, in

turn, is observed as a mystery; this is art. In doing this, art preserves mystery, the utter shuddering of life.

At last, I believe our personal cosmology, especially its component which attests to death, underlies not only how we choose to live, but what and how we make as artists. As an artist, I hope my philosophy motivates my work contributing “in Order to form a more perfect Union” by dissolving the boundaries between human and nature, body and mind, life and death, and art and life.



Figure 1. *Untitled*. Gouache pen on paper, 20" x 28". 2012



Figure 2. *Untitled*. Gouache pen on paper, 20" x 17". 2012



Figure 3. *Untitled*. Ink & color pencil on Yupo, size variable. 2012



Figure 4. *Untitled*. Inkjet print on vellum, 16" x 52" ea. 2012



Figure 5. *Untitled*. Mixed media, size variable. 2012



Figure 6. *Untitled*. Mixed media, size variable. 2012



Figure 7. *Untitled*. Mixed media, size variable. 2012



Figure 8. *Untitled*. Mixed media, size variable. 2012