Beth Gouldin
Extended Artist Statement
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As far back as I can remember, there was art in my life. It existed for me in very basic forms of imagery that were viewed by people, admired in museums, and bought and sold in galleries. Throughout my childhood, I was always drawing but would never have called myself an artist. Artists were almost mythical in my eyes---men and women of museum and gallery legend. What I made may have been art, but I was not an artist. I preferred nature and science. Almost all of my early drawings were of animals rendered in the vein of nature-oriented illustrations. For me, representing the physical world was another way of gaining a better understanding of its functions and processes. That drive to experiment and explore has continued to be important in my work.

Another major influence was my early introduction to Japanese aesthetics. My mother had a friend, Noriko, whom she met through our church and immediately became close to, tied through bonds of home-schooling motherhood and as lonely wives with absent partners. Their relationship grew deeper as my mother supported Noriko through the birth and death of a severely handicapped child. For several years, the lives of our families were intertwined through life and death, pain and beauty. Early in the relationship, there was a dialogue about our separate cultures, Noriko wanting her children to grow up experiencing all things American, and my family desiring to appreciate Japanese tradition. My mother became interested in Asian art and artifacts, often purchasing unmarked pieces from estate sales, craft shows and antique stores. These little treasures would be mused over by the two women, with Noriko often scornfully stating, "This is not Japanese." Those opinions never changed my appreciation for the objects from many different origins that occupied a shelf in my mother's home. Our West Texas country-styled house became host to exotic traces of Japanese culture. They held for me a beauty that the imagery of my American heritage seemed to lack.

Watercolor painting has a rich history in life illustration, so it was a natural tool for someone interested in representing the physical world. I reveled in its range and nuance; the tendency for watermarking and blooming. It has a dual nature, seeming to be remarkably simple--pigment plus water-- yet truly retaining a complexity that intrigued me. Its reputation as the most challenging of painting mediums only made it all the more appealing because of its similarity to the problem-solving demanded in my study of chemistry. I determined to learn watercolor painting's dual languages of control and automatism.

My creative process was a journey marked by periods of success and failure. Due to my chemistry background, I approached art-making both creatively and analytically. During my first semester, I explored a water-based chemical solution that formed regular crystals. Used in conjunction with watercolor paint, I found the results to be successful. I later focused on re-creating images of faceted gemstones collected while working in the fine jewelry industry. I developed a tactile relationship with these objects that I documented. Many of my favorite gemstones were never displayed in the showcases but were hidden in paper sleeves in the vault because of flaws which made them undesirable for use in fine jewelry. I learned later that the Japanese have a word for beauty in imperfection -- "wabi-sabi."

After a time I became dissatisfied with the literal representation of the crystalline form and moved toward an abstraction of that form. In my attempt to grasp any idea of substance, I found myself floundering without an identity while moving through various styles and modes of expression.

I felt pressured to conform to post-modern ideologies in order for my work to be accepted by the UNT art community. As failures mounted, I needed to re-evaluate my ideas, indeed my very reason for creating art. I immersed myself in Japanese art, movies and poetry, not seeking resolve but inspiration and escape. It was familiar and reminiscent of home. For me, the act of revisiting elements of Japanese culture presented the possibility of locating balance and tranquility in the midst of crisis. In my retreat, I actually found the answers to many of the questions that had been raised concerning my work.

Instead of committing to a style or artistic mode, the answer *was* balance and the act of embracing contrary natures, imperfections, beauty and form. My focus shifted away from literal interpretation to the essence of the object. The imagery became simplified and abstracted through a focus on a quiet elegance and sophistication of form. I continued to find inspiration in traditional Japanese woodblock prints, origami shapes and scroll paintings. Within this balance, I never strayed from my original appreciation of nature and science evidenced in my work with its complex natural forms and mineralogy. Later, I moved toward geometric and organic shapes that remained after simplification.

As a natural progression, it became necessary for me to address the role that Japanese culture and philosophy have played in my development. It was not as crude as mimicry nor as easy as appropriation. Rather, it was evidence of my respect and admiration for a culture and the oblique and inadvertent role that it had played in my early life. A trip to Japan in the summer of 2009 enabled me to create a sustainable dialogue between Western artist and Eastern principles, ideas and imagery. It is a conversation that other artists I respected have explored, including the late Rob Erdle.

WHY KITES? Several reasons! Kites, like sculpture, can be art in and of themselves. This is the quality of existing as art and not merely containing it that kite artists such as Anna Rubins exemplify. Secondly, kites fit well into my never-ending search for balance and the faceted form. Indeed, balance is also a key role in the function of a kite, in addition to form, surface area, materials and wind strength. All have to be in equilibrium for a successful flight. Traditionally, the kite has functioned as a mode of communication, an expression of personal liberty, a form of recreation, competition, and self-expansion. Several Asian cultures have used kites for warfare, signals, spying, measuring distances, intimidation, and the transportation of men and other objects. Scientifically, kites have been connected with the understanding of electricity, the study of wind currents and the invention of the airplane. Throughout the ages, kite-flyers have figuratively transcended their land-locked being and soared into the air, ever reaching for heights yet unexplored, not unlike the desired function of art and its creative process.

Art kites allowed me to explore form, function and the hybridization of

traditional watercolor painting on non-traditional three-dimensional surfaces in displayed flight. To find insight and a form of artistic expression that has had limited use and exposure in Western Art, I focused on Japan's rich history of kite-making. Although it is quickly becoming a lost art, through my research I was able to find sources explaining not only the construction but also the painting of the kite body, as well as the significance of the imagery itself. In my exhibition, the four traditional Japanese kites dealt with the preliminary issues of materials, function, imagery and various painting processes. I investigated several forms, eventually focusing on the Edo Dakko and the Saruga Dakko for their extreme stability, large surface areas and simple forms. In Niigata, Japan, I was fortunate to see an example of a large-scale Edo Dakko that measured 40 feet on one side and required more than 20 men to fly it.

The imagery used for all of the kite/paintings in my exhibition was gathered during my trip to Japan in 2009. The strongly recognizable silhouettes of traditional Japanese buildings, trees and other elements were chosen based, in part, upon the ease with which they could be read while in flight. The imagery may seem like a departure from my previous work but it retains many of the same elements. My early work focused on geometric natural forms; it transitioned to geometric man-made forms found in origami and has now expanded in scale to include the geometric forms in architecture. Linear elements, planes and facets are still present in most of the imagery. Harmony and balance are perhaps more important than ever before. I experimented with various methods of applying paint, ranging from brush painting with ink to a flatter, drier application similar to that seen in a woodblock printing process.

The other six large-scale kites are based on the theory of traditional kit-making but are simplified in form. Several of the frames are composed of four or fewer pieces of bamboo. The sail is constructed as the carrier for an image, rather than strictly functional for flight. In the end, the kites became art-objects. None of the six-foot-plus kites have been flown. Successful kite-flying relies heavily on trail and error, making adjustments to each individual kite for each individual flight. Such experimentation would be damaging to the full-scale kites. The scale of the kites themselves also creates difficulty, as safety equipment has to be used due to the extreme force that they exert while in flight. Each kite, however, was designed to stay within the physical bounds of flight capability (surface area, weight, balance and lift). Each large-scale kite has a scaled mockette of the same material which underwent air testing. The smallest of the full-scale kites was flown successfully before witnesses and managed to survive the test.

Gilbert Lescault wrote in *Ecrites timides sur le visible, "*Light and frail as it is, the kite hovers at the opposite end of the spectrum from our traditional museums. It hangs on the empty air, not on a picture rail…to build a kite is to put art beyond the reach of stuffiness and heavy discourse…for the kite is the negation of the academic attitudes of a complacent culture. A kite offers no criticism. It just escapes. It is somewhere else entirely." With my MFA Exhibition, I took art off the walls of the gallery and placed it "somewhere else entirely."