

Halley Sun Stubis: *The Sun, The Sky, and The Ocean* *Senior Thesis Spring 2020*



Photograph of the artist by Gabriella Elizabeth Melchiorri

COVID-19 amendment:

Due to the worldwide pandemic and the subsequent closing of the SMFA at Tufts, Halley's most recent Senior Thesis work, titled *The Sun, The Sky, and The Ocean*, was not able to be completed the way the artist had originally intended. Her Fall 2019 Senior Thesis work can be viewed more fully online, but this document is meant to give a glimpse at her process and what she had been hoping to create. For updates on her progress regarding this unfinished work, please contact her at hstubis@gmail.com or on Instagram @halleystubis.

Artist Statement

Halley Sun Stubis is a storyteller. She mainly shares her narratives through handmade books, embroidery, and paintings, and enjoys focusing on intimate, hidden tales that might normally go unheard. Halley loves feminism, psychology, and family history, and works to weave all three into her artistic practice. She explores the disturbing nonchalance of everyday sexism, mental illness in the heavily female world of classical ballet, and transgenerational trauma through maternal family lines. She has been making art since she was young, and has been heavily influenced by her artist grandfather, ballet dancer grandmother, and two literature and music-loving parents; one could say that art is in her genes! She was a classically trained ballet dancer for 12 years before turning to the world of visual arts at the SMFA at Tufts, which has become a second home to her.

Artist Statement Cont.

By making artwork about people's lives and inner narratives, she hopes to inspire people to be more empathetic in their day-to-day lives and to seek out the beautifully complex stories behind each person they encounter. At the core of Halley's artistic practice lies her love of people. Their narratives have a huge influence on the way she lives her life, and she aims to share those perspective-changing stories with as many people as possible.



The artist in her studio. Photograph by Alonso Nichols

Project Statement

“I have always been fascinated by the intersection of the supernatural, the coincidental, and the everyday. My first introduction to these themes were through family stories. While growing up, a secret test of friendship I imposed on people visiting my house for the first time began with begging my father to tell them the story of how he was almost born a werewolf, and then examining how they reacted to the riveting, based-on-a-true-story tale that I held so close to my heart. As I’ve grown older, I’ve found that that sense of wonder I still so treasure and seek out in my everyday life tends to live in the realm of spirituality. I grew up almost completely without religion in my life, so I always found it confusing when friends would note how spiritual I was in my beliefs. At that point in my life, I was not yet aware that spirituality and religion could be separate from one another...



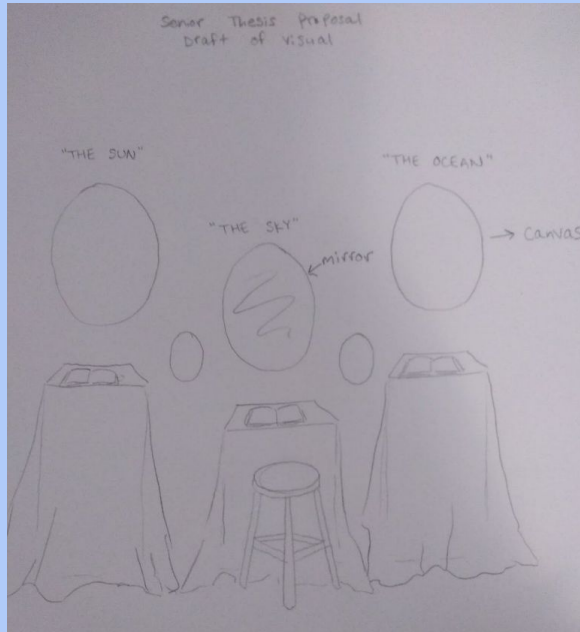
An in-progress portrait of my father

Project Statement Cont.

...As I've grown older, however, and as I've heard more and more stories from my closest friends and family about 'magical' occurrences and coincidences too specific and meaningful to be accidental, I've formed my own understanding of what spirituality means to me. For me, it is heavily based on themes of life, death, love, transfiguration, and the natural world. Eerily compelling stories of crying dinner knives, lost sisters who return as butterflies, and babies inhabited by the spirits of wandering beggars have haunted my life. I am hoping to share these beautiful, sometimes terrifying, stories with you in order to inspire the same sense of awe and wonder at life that I experience when thinking of these transformative tales."

Original Proposal:

Rough draft of proposed setup:

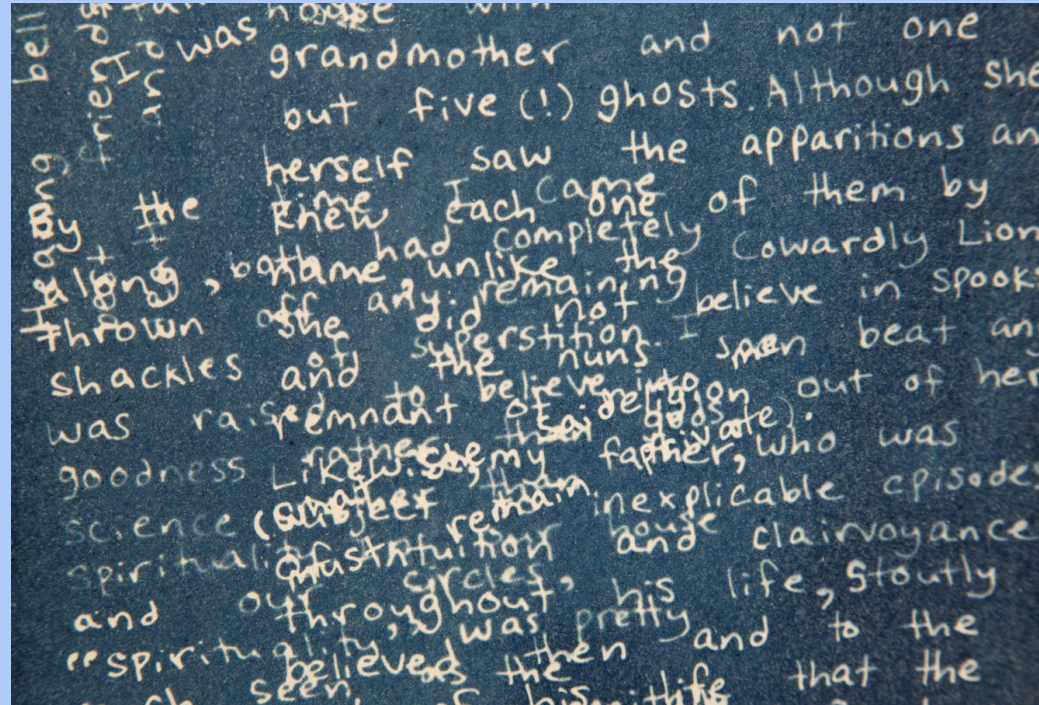


Summarizing Statement:

“‘The Sun, The Sky, and The Ocean’ will encompass the lives and experiences of me and my parents, and will explore the role of spirituality in our love of storytelling. It will serve as a sort of familial autobiography as well as a fantastical storybook with the strange and exciting tales that I grew up hearing (and after the interviews, probably some new stories that I have not yet heard).”

Conceptual Statement:

"The goal of this project is to explore my family history through spirituality and storytelling. The spiritual has always played a large role within my family and in our love of storytelling and history, so for this project I will be digging deeper into this subject to learn more about my parents, myself, and how people in general communicate their experiences/emotions to others through the act of storytelling. I'm deeply interested in the fantastical and how we incorporate it into daily life. Spirituality is like a grown up sort of magic, and I want to explore how we share/teach with that magic through stories. How do we personalize it and how does it make its way into our family histories?"



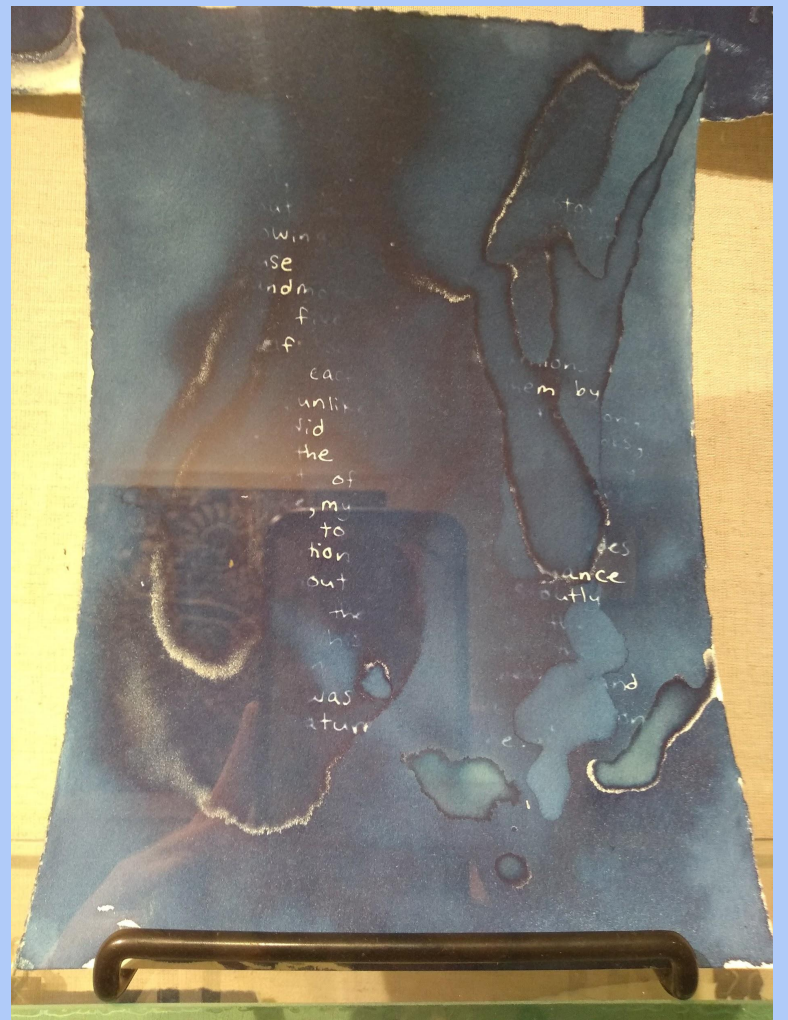
Cyanotype prototypes. Photograph by Margot Mitchell-Nockowitz

Original Project Description:

“This project will consist of three books of the same size and shape (one off-white for the sun, one light blue for the sky, and one deep blue for the ocean), as well as two 18 x 24 (approx.) oil paintings on oval canvases that will correspond to the books, and one oval mirror of the same size as the canvases. The Sun book will cover my maternal lineage, the Ocean book will cover my paternal lineage, and the Sky book will discuss my own life with regard to both sides of my family, as well as my own separate/individual experiences. I’ve chosen these symbols because my mom’s maiden name is Sun (Sun), my dad’s last name means ‘little fish’ in Latvian (Ocean), and I was named after a comet (Sky). The books, as shown in the above images, will sit on pedestals next to each other. The pedestals will be covered in cloth that reflects each book’s color scheme, and above each pedestal will hang the corresponding painting. Hanging between the two paintings and above the ‘Sky’ book will be the mirror. To lure readers in, I will make my books with soft, thick, handmade paper that will not be delicate or easily damaged. I want the pages to have more stability than cloth, but to still mimic the comforting feel of fabric. The covers will be made with soft cloth over book board. This materiality will also allude to domestic life and the warmth that I feel when I reminisce about my family’s past. The ‘Sun’ and ‘Ocean’ books will contain embroidered short stories from my parents. The ‘Sky’ book will contain little to no text, but will instead hold images and symbols. This artistic decision is meant to encourage readers to consider how they themselves have been affected by their family histories. I want there to be an air of mystery, fluidity, and transformation in the ‘Sky’ book to represent my identity in relation to the stories, while the ‘Sun’ and ‘Ocean’ books provide the solid, transformative tales.”



"I'm deeply interested in the fantastical and how we incorporate it into daily life."



Conceptual Object Photography by
Margot Mitchell-Nockowitz



Pictured: Cyanotypes, cloth,
embroidery hoop/thread/needle,
lace

Excerpts From An Interview With The Artist's Mother

" I see spirituality as searching and prescribing meaning to things we do and see, may or may not be religious. It gives depth to our existence."

"Storytelling is an important part of my life. As a child, I learned about my family history and the world through the stories my mom told me; As, now, a mother, I want to open my children's eyes through my cross-cultural and cross-time stories. I enjoy telling stories of people/things happened a long time ago, giving my audience a new perspective on life."

"When my younger sister passed away, I grieved deeply. Then one afternoon, I found a butterfly on my doormat three times, circling around me as if this wild creature knew me intimately. This butterfly has brought me a lot of comfort and opened a dialogue within me on afterlife."

Excerpts From An Interview With The Artist's Father

"I'm not sure how to explain certain incidents in my own life. Such as being summoned to leave my bed and my house on a warm summer night to "talk" to the Moon when I was just eight (what She said to me must remain private). Hearing bells and the names of my best friends spoken in moments of death and separation. And the vision vouchsafed to me on the strangely beautiful day I died."

"As the booming echoes of the Voice fell into silence, the vision faded, and the scene quickly morphed from the blackness of space back to that of my cheerful, sunlit bedroom."

"I remained calm as I had been throughout, filled with a gentle wonder as to what had just happened."

The Ocean portrait at different stages of completion

Closing Statement

“My hope is that this project will remind viewers to appreciate and reflect on the role of storytelling in their lives and in their family histories. Stories are all around us, and whether we realize it or not, they are hugely impactful on how we think about the world and how we interact with other people. By giving readers a look into my own background and family history, I’m hoping to also give them a sense of interest and excitement about the world around them, and all of the stories that are waiting to be told and heard. I love to encourage empathy with my work, and part of what empathy is is curiosity; people must be curious about other people’s life stories before they will be able to become aware of the tales that shape those around them. I love reminding people of the rich history of this world that is not discussed on a daily basis, and I love gently encouraging people to take the time to stop, think about where stories may lie, and ask about them. My last project involved personal family interviews (just as this upcoming project will require), and I learned more than I thought I would about my mom. People are so full of narratives that we don’t know, and I’m excited to share my findings with others as well as to invite them to explore their own personal narratives.”

