

LENGUAJE VULGAR

A Thesis

by

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This thesis meets the standards for scope and quality of  
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

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## ABSTRACT

As an art form, tattoo flash is traditionally comprised of generic illustrations for walk-in customers, but is also graphic imagery easily accessible to the artist, collector, and admirer. People's choices of flash from a parlor's walls generally hold specific symbolic representation, and in relation to other tattooed works on the body, begin to create personal narrative.

This work expresses the tragedy of my paralysis at the age of nineteen due to a gunshot wound, and the trials, tribulations, and triumph that followed. These works convey the emotions I encountered when confronting my paralysis, and the overwhelming pitfall of depression, hatred, and shame I had to overcome in response to a reckless act of violence. While these realities linger deeper than any physical scar, I have found healing through family and friends, martial arts, and visual arts.

Through arrangements of graphic objects depicting my cultural heritage, aesthetic interests, and personal influences, the public bears witness to representations they can recognize, and begin to complete the narrative. Despite the personal nature of the compositions, the individual elements, as with flash, become desirable images independently associated to the individual. This collective contract between imagery and viewer, along with the help of decoders emphasize the use of symbols in a contemporary visual language.



## DEDICATION

To my family - especially my mom, dad, and sisters - mentors, peers, faculty and esteemed committee members who helped to make all of this possible: I appreciate your guidance and patience in paving the path of my future. A very special thanks to Carlos Fresquez, Eldon Cunningham, Ryan O'Malley, Julia Curran, Dan Heskamp, Andy Murdoch, Ross Turner, Lars Roeder, Allison Mott, and all the Full Court Press TX crew. None of this would have been possible without you, I love y'all!

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## LENGUAJE VULGAR

*Lenguaje Vulgar* is an exhibition of works comprised of multi-color woodcut prints arranged to create a visual language. Heavily influenced by the aggressive graphic styling of tattoo flash, I use a variety of individual images, created as personal symbols and arranged in a similar fashion as ancient hieroglyphics or contemporary emojis, to communicate, and above all, punctuate, a personal narrative of tragedy to triumph. *Lenguaje Vulgar* refers to cussing in Spanish, and literally translated means vulgar language.

To provide context for understanding the works in the exhibition, I will briefly describe the history and usage of cussing or swearing as taboo within cultural interactions, and how that in turn relates to recognition of tattoos and tattoo culture.

Philosopher Rebecca Roache says as the ingredient of offence, swear words tend to have a cluster of other characteristics. We will often use swear words “to vent some emotion,” she says. “If you’re angry or particularly happy, swearing is a catharsis. Swearing also centers on taboos. Around the world swear words will tend to cluster around certain topics: lavatorial matters, sex, religion.” There’s also a paradoxical component to swearing, says Roache. “As well as being taboo-breaking, swear words are taboo-breaking, swear words are taboo-breaking for the sake of taboo-breaking. The whole point is that you’re not allowed to use them, but they exist just for that rule to be broken.”<sup>1</sup>

Words develop their power over time; it's a historical process. In the past, many swear words were linked to religion. But as countries like Britain have become increasingly

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<sup>1</sup> David Edmonds, *Why Do People Swear?* BBC News, February 27 2017  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-39082467>

secular, imprecations such as "Damn" and "Jesus Christ", have begun to lose their force. The emotional release from swearing has been measured in a variety of ways. It turns out that swearing helps mitigate pain. It is easier to keep an arm in ice-cold-water for longer if you are simultaneously effing and blinding. And those who speak more than one language report that swearing in their first language is more satisfying, carrying, as it does, a bigger emotional punch. Catharsis aside, swearing can boast other benefits. The claim has been made that swearing is bonding: a few blue words, uttered in a good-natured way, indicates and encourages intimacy. A very recent study suggests that people who swear are perceived as more trustworthy than those who are less potty-mouthed.<sup>2</sup>

Children begin to learn words before their first birthday, and by their second they Hoover them up at a rate of one every two hours. By the time, they enter school children command 13,000 words, and then the pace picks up, because new words rain down on them from both speech and print. A typical high-school graduate knows about 60,000 words; a literate adult, perhaps twice that number. People recognize words swiftly. The meaning of a spoken word is accessed by a listener's brain in about a fifth of a second, before the speaker has finished pronouncing it. The meaning of a printed word is registered even more quickly, in about an eighth of a second. People produce words almost as rapidly. It takes the brain about a quarter of a second to find a word to name an object, and about another quarter of a second to program the mouth to tongue to pronounce it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Steven Pinker, *Words and Rules: The Ingredients of Language*, (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 3.

Cussing is no different, children encounter cussing by way of adults and caregivers, but lack the nuanced understanding of its usage in language, but they do understand, by way of cultural or religious upbringing, the concept of taboo. *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, defines taboo as a social or religious custom prohibiting or forbidding discussion, practice, or association with a particular person, place, or thing.<sup>4</sup> The word taboo is borrowed from *tabu*, from the Polynesian language of Tongan, and translates to *set apart, forbidden*. Taboo language is defined by culture and processed in the brain through a complex interaction of speech, emotion and motivation centers. Some of the topics that fall under taboo in English are: bodily excretions, death and disease, sex, privacy, discriminatory language such as racism and sexism, but most important to my purposes for this thesis are the taboos of “four-lettered words,” or cussing.

Parents, teachers, and caregivers, generally punish children when they swear, and through aversive conditioning learn that certain phrases and taboo subjects are to be avoided.<sup>5</sup> As we mature we learn the nuanced social structures that provide an understanding of when and where to use taboo words, specifically cussing. In regards to decorum within Mexican culture that I have encountered, cussing is discouraged or inappropriate especially due to primarily Catholic connotations. I say this knowing full well that it is drastically different from family to family, for example my maternal grandma says the rosary every day but will cuss with no hesitation.

An example of taboo language within colloquial Mexican Spanish is the word *güey*, which references a castrated bull, or an ox. Directed toward a stranger or antagonist, *güey* can translate to “fool” or “asshole” but between friends can be used as a standard fill for a word such

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<sup>4</sup> Angus Stevenson and Christine A. Lindberg, *New Oxford American Dictionary: Third Edition* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Michelle Drews, *The Science of Swearing: A Look Into the Human Mind and Other Less Socially Acceptable Four-Letter Words*, Harvard Science Review, January 23, 2014  
<https://harvardsciencereview.com/2014/01/23/the-science-of-swearing/>

as “dude.” My connection to the Mexican community is subject to a type of decorum where I could not address anyone older, or in a position of respect, as a *güey*. The Spanish language is based in a very hierarchal system of relationships, between age, and gender and to go against this system is to sit outside of the community, reprimanded, and potentially worse, - them’s is fighting words!

However, swearing is not always about evoking negative emotions; swearing itself can also be a cultural phenomenon. The willingness to break a cultural taboo in front of others creates an atmosphere of informality and sense of community. If taboos are defined by the greater society, and environments where subverting those taboos is acceptable creates a smaller, more intimate society inside of the greater society<sup>6</sup>

In an effort to understand how swearing provokes a strong response in individuals, neuroscientists looked to the brain for answers. Using neuroimaging techniques such as PET, or positron emission tomography scans; they demonstrated that a small part of the brain called the amygdala is highly active when exposed to threatening words. The amygdala is part of the limbic system, one of the primitive parts of the brain responsible for processing emotion and memory. In particular, amygdala activity is correlated with negative emotional associations; stimulating the amygdala can cause panic attacks and aggressive behavior, while destroying the amygdala causes unusual placidness or fearlessness. Therefore, it makes sense that the amygdala would be activated in association with unpleasant words such as swear words. The amygdala also makes several connections to memory and association centers in the brain, which could also be

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<sup>6</sup> Steven Pinker, *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2007)



responsible for the increased memory skills when subjects are presented with swear words.<sup>7</sup>

Swear words, when used as punctuation, are more likely to drive a point home.

In regards to obscene or harmful speech, verbal harassment, and aggression have been shown to have clear negative psychological effects. On the other hand, the evidence against swearing alone is much less compelling...there are many psychological studies that suggest swear words, in the appropriate context, can be beneficial when used for group unity, coherence, and general expressiveness.<sup>8</sup>

A remarkable variety of linguistic forms can be considered as cursing and swearing. There are the complex and sophisticated expressions that may be found in religious, legal, and other contexts. At the same time, there are many daily examples of taboo language that express emotions such as hatred, frustration and surprise. The most common speech, comprise single words or short phrases, conveying different levels of intensity and attracting different degrees of social approval. English examples range from the mild such as *heck* and *damn*, to the most harsh one, *fuck*. In these social contexts swearing can become a dominant linguistic feature, with sentences often containing taboo words, sex, excretion, and supernatural power are the main sources of swear words.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Michelle Drews, *The Science of Swearing: A Look Into the Human Mind and Other Less Socially Acceptable Four-Letter Words*, Harvard Science Review, January 23, 2014  
<https://harvardsciencereview.com/2014/01/23/the-science-of-swearing/>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Chunming Gao, *A Sociolinguistic Study of English Taboo Language* (Finland: Academy Publisher, 2013), 3.

The rate of comprehension between words and meaning is extremely important in demonstrating the power of the brain to decipher information. This interface between language and mind is called *semantics*.<sup>10</sup>

Semantics is about the relation of words to thoughts, but it's also about the relation of words to other human concerns. Semantics is about the relation of words to reality – the way that speakers commit themselves to a shared understanding of the truth, and the way their thoughts are anchored to things and situations in the world. It is about the relation of words to a community – how a new word, which arises in an act of creation by a single speaker, comes to evoke the same idea in the rest of a population, so people can understand one another when they use it. It is about the relation of words to emotions: the way in which words don't just point to things but are saturated with feelings, which can endow the words with a sense of magic, taboo, and sin.<sup>11</sup>

This understanding is employed when it comes to specific words such as curse or swear words. But as semantics applies to *Lenguaje Vulgar*, “the anchoring of thoughts to things” is specifically represented in the form of personal graphic symbols. Another form of attaching thoughts or ideas to objects is *semiology* – a general study of sign systems and symbols that make up our societies... semiology should ultimately encompass linguistics, since language is merely one of the systems of signs which *semiology* will study.<sup>12</sup>

French literary theorist, philosopher, linguist, critic, and semiotician Roland Barthes (1915-1980), states that the sign is, in fact, involved in a three-part relationship. A sign is the

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<sup>10</sup> Steven Pinker, *Words and Rules: The Ingredients of Language*, (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 22.

<sup>11</sup> Steven Pinker, *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2007), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Graham Allen, *Roland Barthes* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 40-41.

relation between a signifier and a signified, a sound or mark and a concept. The sign is the relation we draw between signifier and signified.<sup>13</sup>

Tattoos are both a mark and a concept, a visual language that is taboo and vulgar to some and a form of aesthetic beauty and magic to others. A tattoo from a physical perspective is colored pigment implanted in or injected into the dermis, usually for decorative purposes.<sup>14</sup>

Tattooing, the practice of inscribing the skin with permanent designs and patterns, is a global and indefinably ancient practice. Historical and archeological evidence show tattooing was practiced throughout the world in antiquity, and indigenous cultures from every continent except Antarctica included tattooing as an essential element of their cultural fabric. Both the body marks and the tattooing process acted to negotiate relationships between individuals and their society, nature, and the spiritual realm.

Depending on the culture and time period, indigenous tattoo traditions have functioned to signal entry into adulthood, reflect social status, document martial achievement, demonstrate lineage and group affiliation, and to channel and direct preternatural forces.<sup>15</sup>

Previously, the earliest radiocarbon dating of a mummy found to have tattoos was from the *Chinchorro* culture from El Morro, Chile, which dated between 7000 to 1500 BCE.<sup>16</sup> More recently and after lots of debate and analysis, Ötzi from the Tamins-Carassolsera culture in the Austrian Alps, [Fig. 1] has been identified as the oldest tattooed human remains discovered and predates the mummy in El Morro by at least 500 years.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>14</sup> John M. Last, *A Dictionary of Public Health* (New York: Oxford University Press 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Aaron Deter-Wolf, Benoît Robitaille, Lars Krutak, Sébastien Galliot, *The World's Oldest Tattoos* (Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports Volume 5, February 2016) 19.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Allaby, *A Dictionary of Geology and Earth Sciences* (Oxford University Press 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Aaron Deter-Wolf, Benoît Robitaille, Lars Krutak, Sébastien Galliot, *The World's Oldest Tattoos* (Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports Volume 5, February 2016) 22.

Tattoo comes from the Samoan word *Tatau*. In 1769, Captain Cook noted in his journal the Tahitian and Marquesan sounds for “marking the skin with *pigments*” were *tatau* and *tatu*, respectively.<sup>18</sup> In an interpretation by Samoan author Albert Wendt, *tatau* when translated has a few meanings. The word *ta* is defined as the striking action considered the root in *tatau*. The word *tau*, has many meanings, used in context of *tatau*, it can mean to reach the end, to anchor/moor a boat or canoe, or to fight. There is an interesting correlation here to the action of anchoring, as I was physically anchored to my wheelchair through a striking action, and now as Pinker describes, conceptually anchor thoughts to things through the works comprising my thesis. Also intriguing is the correlation of *tau*, to fight, for I have had to fight nonstop to overcome my disability and now fight through martial arts as a way to maintain physical and mental health.

A *tatau*, in Samoan culture is a very honorable practice as tattoos denote strength – once you begin a *tatau* you must finish it otherwise be known as a coward. [Fig. 2] Other cultures used tattooing for protection or as amulets. The art of *tatauing*, or more correctly, the way of life centered around *tatauing* in Samoan culture and cultures around the world, had to survive the onslaught of missionary condemnation and colonialism. *Leviticus 19:28 says, ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the lord.* While Samoans showed a remarkable resistance to these forces, most cultures succumbed and tattooing became ubiquitously taboo throughout the Western world.

The view toward tattoos in indigenous American culture was definitely affected by religious missionaries and colonialism yet regained prominence through subcultures such as bikers, gangsters, prisoners, the military, and immigrants. [Fig. 3] Stigmas surrounding tattoos

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<sup>18</sup> Norman Goldstein, MD, *Clinics in Dermatology: Tattoos Defined* (Elsevier: Volume 25, Issue 4, July-August, 2007), 417.

began to loosen their grip in the same way that taboo words lose their power through colloquial interpretations or widespread usage – starting with unruly sailors returning from the South Pacific during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – creating a demand for tattoos domestically. One such pioneering American tattoo artist was Sailor Jerry, or Norman Keith Collins (1911-1973), who developed his particular style after touring Southeast Asia in the Navy. Known today as *American Traditional*, his works have been hugely inspirational, with images reflecting his style lining the walls of tattoo shops worldwide in the form of *flash*. *Flash* is the term for tattoo designs set on paper. Patrons use it to choose tattoos. Artists use it as a way to showcase their designs and give patrons ideas of what they want tattooed. This is how Sailor Jerry’s legacy was preserved.<sup>19</sup> [Fig. 4]

Formally, flash is presented as contour line illustrations that often employ drawing techniques such as hatching and cross-hatching, which emulate depth and typically using sparing amounts of color. Flash uses relatively common imagery such as animals, flowers, hearts, military memorabilia, stars, etc., but each with its own accorded symbolism. [Fig. 5] The tattoo designs of flash usually have some sort of theme or idea prevalent to influence the imagery. [Fig. 6] Personally I am drawn to the illustrative style of flash because it is iconic and easy to read. When choosing a tattoo, the concept of the receiver and the aesthetic styling of the artist are of upmost concern, and place inherent value in each tattoo as a symbol and language.

The connection of language to signify visual meaning is what Barthes referred to as a *collective contract*, demonstrating our society has languages oral and written that make up the way we understand their correlation and function to objects or images.

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<sup>19</sup> Sailor Jerry <http://sailorjerry.com/en/tattoos/flash/>

It is by no means an act, and is not subject to any predetermination. It is the social part of language, the individual cannot by himself either create or modify it; it is essentially a collective contract which one must accept in its entirety if one wishes to communicate. Moreover, this social product is autonomous, like a game with its own rules, for it can be handled only after a period of learning.<sup>20</sup>

As a personal collector of symbols inked onto skin, my biggest tattoo is an *American traditional* inspired work created specifically for my body. Yet the average walk-in customer of a tattoo shop choosing work off a flash sheet is image as a generic stand-in, yet a vessel to fill with symbolic meaning. Symbols express an idea that becomes a signifier and the viewer analyzes and interprets the content thus becoming the signified. As for collections of objects, they enjoy the status of systems only in so far as they pass through the relay of language, which extracts their signifiers (in the form of nomenclature) and names their signified (in the forms of usages or reasons): we are, much more than in former times, and despite the spread of pictorial illustration, a civilization of the written word.<sup>21</sup>

Barthes is correct in his assessment of the connection images have to language; even if we are becoming increasingly visual in communication, we are still dependent on language. This adherence to a common form of information can be applied onto an image, object or symbol. Barthes believes that the collective contract is set, but does not take into account that language is always in flux and determined by cultural influences. English spoken in the United States, though based in its ancestry, is a far cry from that of England; not to mention slang, which takes

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<sup>20</sup>Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (New York: Noonday Press, 1988), 14.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

on a life of its own. Similarly, people place different connotations on images under the same principles. Within tattoo culture, what is important and personal to one person in selecting a piece of flash is not the same as another person choosing the same image.

My thesis work follows these principles in that it allows for the individual to associate meaning and symbolic capital, just like the contract made between the tattoo artist and the tattooed. This is further referenced in *The Open Work* by Umberto Eco (1932-2016), which states in part the artist's decision to leave components of a work to public interpretation or chance.<sup>22</sup>

*Lenguaje Vulgar* consists of multi-color woodcut prints that are rendered in an illustrative style presented as symbolic objects. The qualities of woodcut prints exemplify my formal and aesthetic influences and motivations, particularly the multi-color reductive, or *suicide-cut* process. The objects are inspired by both the symbolic resonance of tattoos, as well as a violent act.

I was shot in the back by a stray bullet fired by a gang member during a house party. This caused my paralysis at the age of nineteen. As one could understand, this immediately impacted my mobility, independence and self-worth, creating tremendous anger, grief and depression from the trauma. This was accentuated by the nonchalant way the police handled my case – since I was shot by a gang member, and even though I have never been in a gang, I was lumped into one by default. *Jesus Christ!* I now began to question my relationship to God. I was incredibly insulted that God would let something as tragic as this happen to me; I thought I had always been a good person, what did I do to deserve this? This question lingered in my mind and influenced me to begin reading every spiritual book I could find. I looked to supportive friends and family to help me through the despair and depression I faced in the aftermath, and sought martial arts to

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<sup>22</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

dispel anger, overcome limitations, and regain mental and physical strength. I began searching for answers in artistic expression such as painting, printmaking and graffiti. These are the outlets that led me the culmination of this exhibition.

*Lenguaje Vulgar* was exhibited in the Weil Gallery on the campus of Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi from April 3-16, 2017. The woodcut prints were arranged into 8 installations and one hand-painted mural, displayed in chronological order from the violent act that caused my paralysis; through depression, anger and grief; to perseverance and the achievement of my terminal degree. Through process and intent, these symbolic objects represent words akin to cussing – they are sharp, they are pointed, they are used for punctuation.

The individual objects in this exhibition range from the smallest keys, nail clippers, and disposable lighters, to grenades, straight razors, and switchblades [Fig. 7] Larger objects include zippo lighters, brass knuckles, and canteens. [Fig. 8] The largest of the images consist of duplicate shapes listed above for compositional balance, and impact, as well as a Molotov cocktail, and a wolf head. [Fig. 9] The largest image is the *Quetzalcoatl*, with the Temple of the Sun located in the center.

Many of these images conjure thoughts of violence, which is apparent, but I am more concerned in depicting them as protective devices against the ills of my life, or in the case of traditional tattoos, as protectors or amulets. Colors are loud and highly prismatic, influenced by my background in graffiti. Lettering, on the edges of the pieces, incorporate their titles in a cryptic font influenced by the *pachuco* or *cholo* style. [Fig. 10]

Decoders provided at the exhibition explain many of the symbols use a one-word summations that indicate both titles and meaning. This key can be compared to the codex, or documentation used to understand native glyphs during the Spanish conquests of Latin America;



[Fig. 11] or the *Rosetta Stone*, which translated *hieroglyphs* from Egyptian culture. [Fig. 12] Like all of these forms of communication, comprehension is achieved through an object that translates visual information into language, like breaking a code to unlock the information contained in my compositions. This movement from image to word, and back to image can be best explained by contemporary usage of the emoji, or *e*-picture and *moji*-letter, or character. This communicative phenomenon began in Japan in the mid-1990s when it was added as a special feature to a brand of pagers popular with teenagers. It wasn't until 2008 that a uniform emoji alphabet was created to minimize inconsistency across platforms. Apple adopted it in 2011, adding it to its iOS5 operating system.<sup>23</sup> Since then the emoji has been steadily gaining, and sometimes replacing, written language in the platform of text messaging. In this way communication is making a return to visual cues as a ubiquitous translator across languages and cultures. [Fig. 13] My brand of symbolism in this body of work relates to this same idea – it can be criticized as a limited and maybe vulgar type of language, but one that has potential to be understood and reinterpreted by individuals.

Razor blades (*Sharp*) represent the idea of wit and cunning; the Molotov cocktail (*Venom*) [Fig. 14] my outrage at the flawed social structures that perpetuate violence or those unconcerned with my physical mobility; switchblades represent (*Reflex*), [Fig. 15] my reaction to perceiving judgment or insult by the words or actions of others. The brass knuckles (*Fortitude* and *Grit*) [Fig. 16] represent equally my stubbornness and need to confront my frustrations, as well as my role in society.

Keys are the (*Entry*) [Fig. 17] point to the locks, my (*Heart*), [Fig. 18] expressing the desire to be loved regardless of my disability as well as the struggle to open up and form

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<sup>23</sup> Jessica Bennett, *The Emoji Have Won the Battle of Words*, The New York Times, July 25, 2014. [https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/27/fashion/emoji-have-won-the-battle-of-words.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/27/fashion/emoji-have-won-the-battle-of-words.html?_r=0)

intimacy with others. Light bulbs, old and new, represent the distance between the interpretations of (*Ideas*). [Fig. 19]

Symbols forming more complex narratives include the wolf which links to the idea of a pack animal – where each member has a specific role and position to further the collective whole – like my position in society, within my culture and my political beliefs. In addition, I have associated myself to the wolf for its calculated thinking; it is commonly portrayed as a vicious animal, but in reality, is efficient in its actions for the pure will to survive.

The majority of these objects are compositionally arranged on the gallery walls to reference *mandalas*, which are Hindu and Buddhist geometric designs that symbolize the universe. [Fig. 20] From a Western perspective, as explained by Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) “...I saw that everything, all the paths I had been following, all the steps I had taken, were leading back to a single point – namely to the mid-point. It became increasingly plain to me that the *mandala* is the center. It is the exponent of all paths. It is the path to the center, to individuation.”<sup>24</sup> These compositions relate to my crossroads that passed through anger and acceptance, tragedy and triumph to find a center equaling transcendence. I would be remiss if I did not address the violent connotations in the mandalas or the potentially racist stereotypes associated with much of the weaponry. They certainly contain threatening or violent potential, yet I am subverting these generalizations with titles such as *Fortitude*, *Repair*, *Resolve*, and *Renovation*.

The installation *Tools of the Trade* [Fig. 21] employs usage of the same symbolic objects but stands alone as the most literal of compositions. It is an example of knolling, or a photographic technique that displays objects in parallel or ninety degree angles as a method of

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<sup>24</sup> Carl G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) 196.

organization. The objects presented are each implied and actual, aesthetic and functional. Collectively, they document the tragedy of my paralysis to the coping mechanisms that helped me survive. The physical presence of a noose stands out most prominently for hanging on by a thread, that fine line that kept me from taking my life, with thanks to family, friends. Weaponry such as boxing gloves, rattan sticks and the *karambit*, [Fig. 22] or hook knife, represents the martial arts. The wheel at the bottom of the installation is from my old chair, irreparably damaged after I was hit by an SUV the first summer I arrived for graduate school. This signifies a turning point, where I chose to confidently move forward. Ultimately it is art that has repeatedly saved my life and equipped me with physical tools to assist in this trajectory, and the means to express it.

*Eternidad*, [Fig. 23] which means eternity, incorporates *Quetzalcoatl* posed in the shape of an *Ouroboros*, [Fig. 24] to signify the past, present, and future through both spiritual and alchemical relationships, and represent infinity or wholeness. *Quetzalcoatl*, or feathered serpent in *Nahuatl*, was a deity to many indigenous people of Central and South America. *Nahuatl* is the native language of the Mexica, more commonly known as the Aztecs, but was commonly used throughout the region. *Quetzalcoatl*, [Fig. 25] is the god of intelligence and self-reflection, of creation and the arts. The *Ouroboros* originates in ancient Egyptian iconography and represents the formless disorder that surrounds the orderly world and is involved in that world's periodic renewal.<sup>25</sup> Within the middle is the Pyramid of the Sun, a symbol of knowledge located in the Avenue of the Dead at the sacred site of *Teotihuacan*. [Fig. 26] Aside from the cultural and symbolic references, the two pyramids are nearly identical in base perimeter. Ironically, this seemingly coincidental detail reinforces the idea of a purpose or power greater than ourselves.

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<sup>25</sup> Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Egypt: The One and the Many* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1982) 163-64.

For me, this is the mandala best representing my transcendence, remembering who I am, where I come from, and most importantly – where I seek to go from here. As the saying goes if you do not study history you are doomed to repeat it.

*Ah, a shot, traject, your talent from a wound.*<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ralph McFarland Esquire.

## FIGURES



Fig. 1

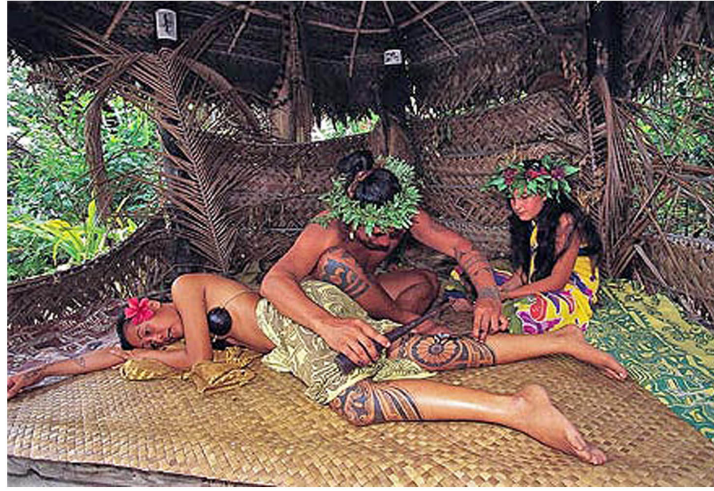


Fig. 2



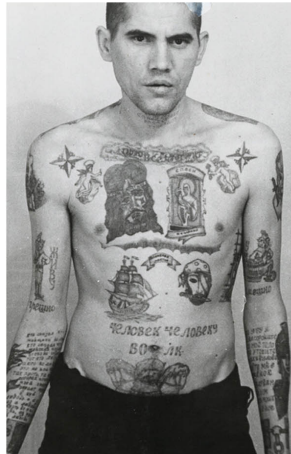


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



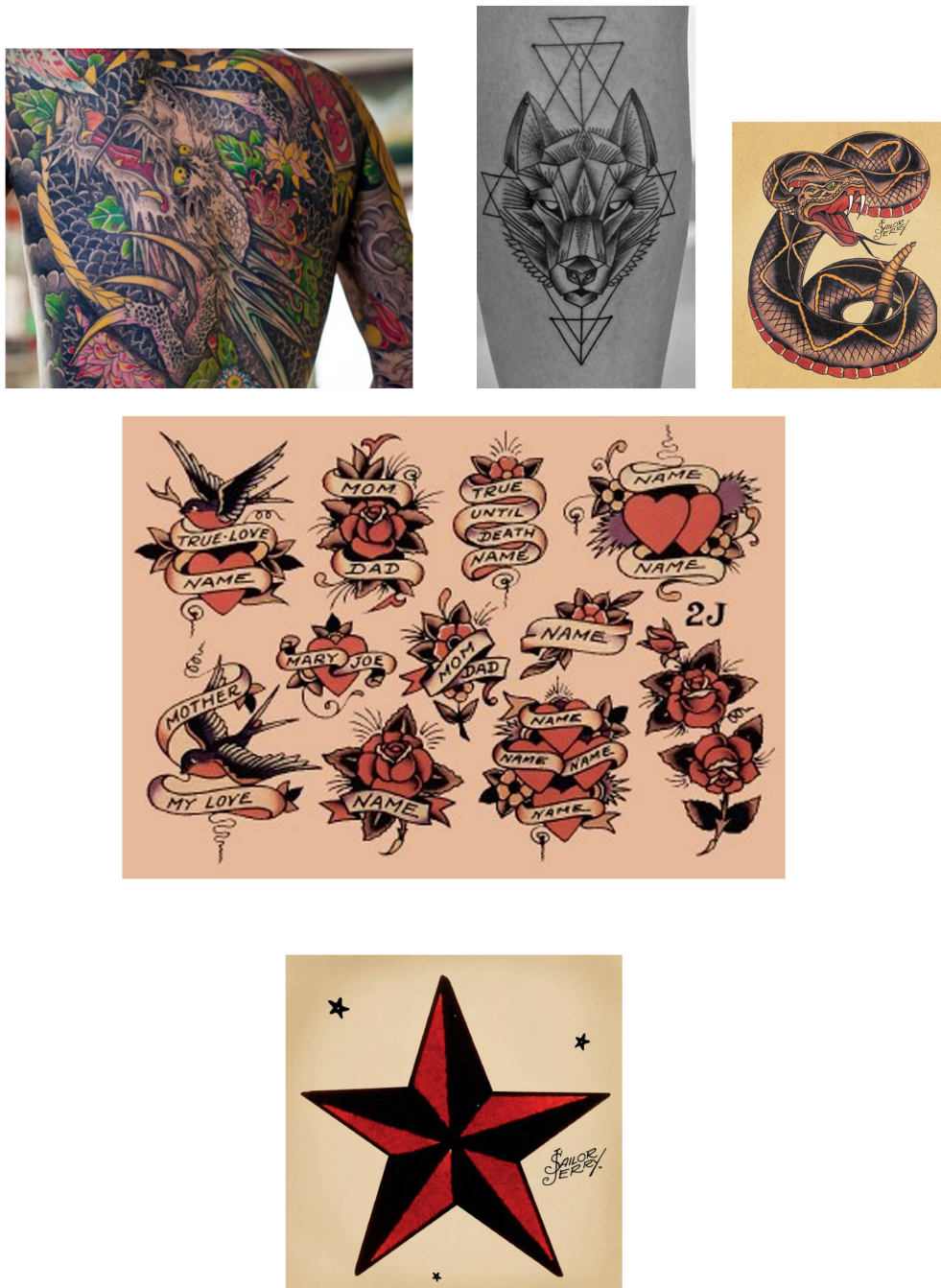


Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8





Fig. 9



Fig. 10





Fig. 11



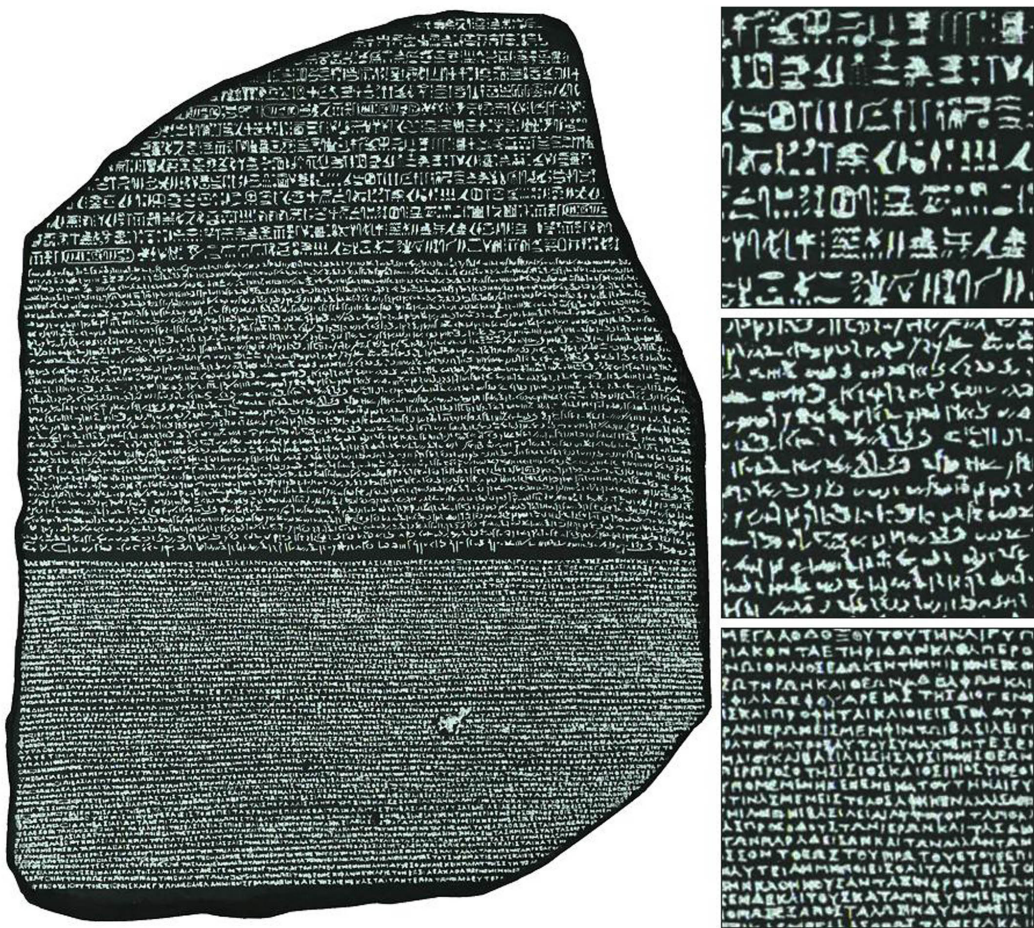


Fig. 12







Fig. 14

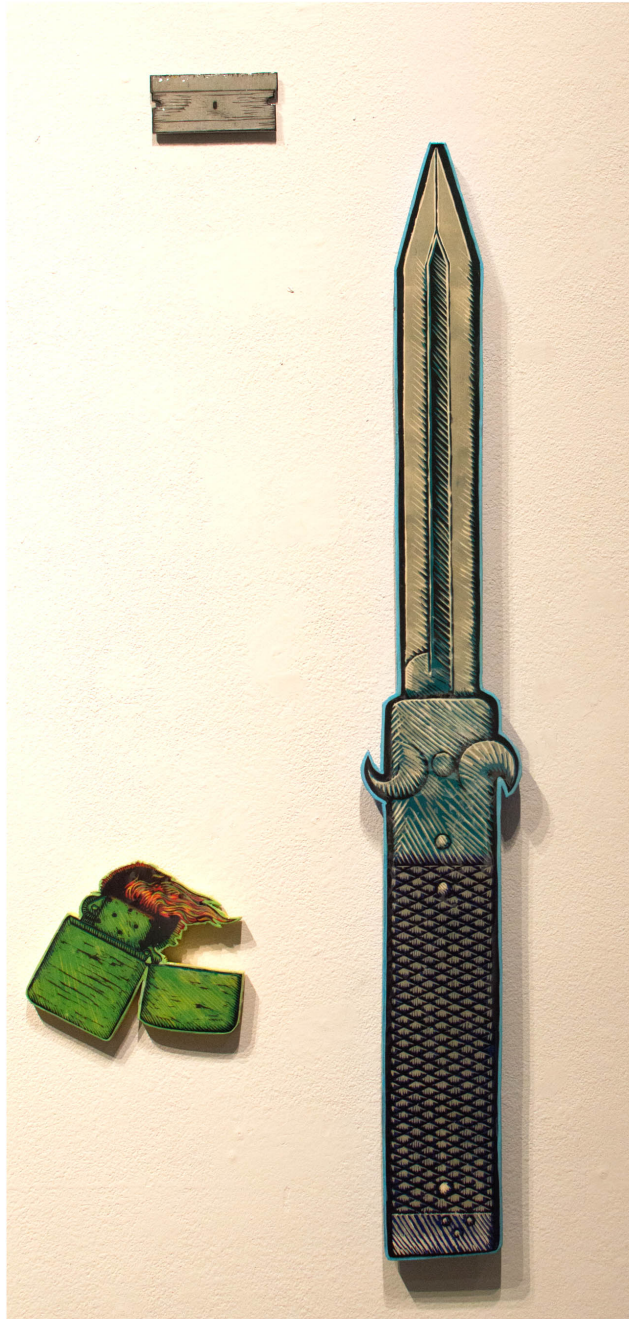


Fig. 15





Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



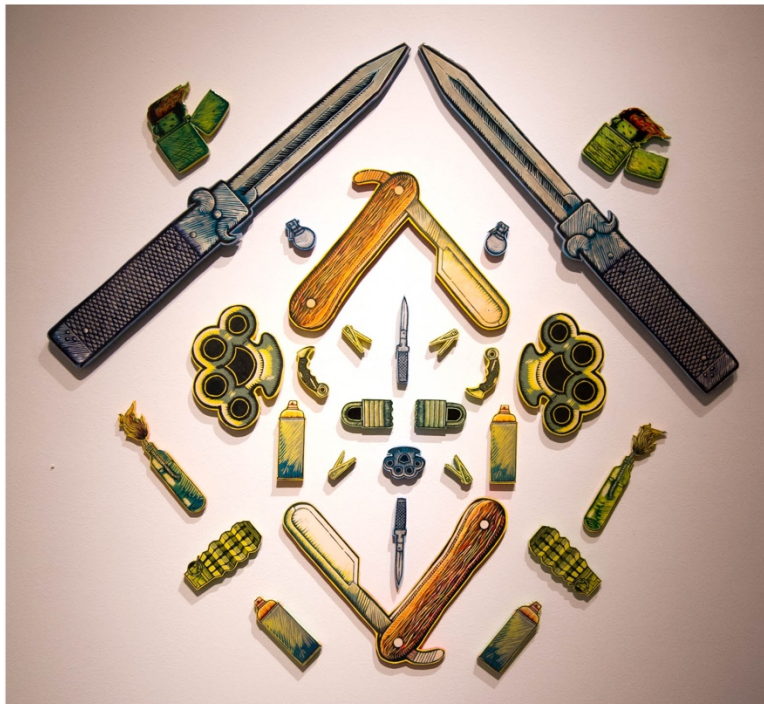


Fig. 20





Fig. 21



Fig. 22





Fig. 23



45



From an early hand-painted Masonic apron.  
A MASONIC APRON WITH SYMBOLIC FIGURES.

Fig. 24



Fig. 25





Fig. 26

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