

ARTIST OF THE MONTH / SARAH REHMER

SARAH REHMER

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Q & A WITH SARAH REHMER & GALLERY DIRECTOR LAURA MORIARTY

LM: *What is your work about?*

SR: The core idea that I explore in much of my body of work has to do with memory, both as it applies to a person and their memory, and the idea of memories being an intangible object. I also look at the idea of memory loss - what happens to memories when they can no longer be remembered? Do they no longer exist, as if the event never happened? Sort of that idea of "if a tree falls in the forest and no one is around, does it make a sound? Well...if a person can no longer remember an event, did the event ever really occur?"

LM: *Could you speak a bit about how you use wax and books to communicate a sense of emptiness, and how it became such an important part of your practice?*

SR: The concept of "anthems of empty" from my artist statement goes back to the theme of memory and memory loss. Anthems are usually defined as songs or hymns of celebration or praise- if you take the words away then they are just background music, no real meaning. When memory or memories are taken away from the individual, then what is left? The ability to make and retain memories is such a fundamental part of the human existence, that it is truly devastating when the ability to recall memories has failed the individual. What is left behind is emptiness, not only for the individual, but for everyone around that individual.

When I first began working with the antique book pages I was using matte acrylic mediums as the binder. I still like those early works, but that flat paper surface was lacking for me. I began working with encaustic medium in lieu of the acrylic medium and that was a real turning point for me. I still use a great deal of clear medium in my work to play into the optical depth and hazy look that can be achieved. With works like my continuing stories series I have used large areas of black encaustic paint that is highly polished- both the clear surface and the mirror like black surface have the ability to draw the viewer into these desolate areas of tone and color. The addition of the decaying antique book pages, especially the blank end pages, furthers the empty feeling of the work - the viewer can identify them as book pages, but they are lacking any information... working into the idea of where have the stories (memories) gone when the individual (like my 92 year old Grandmother) can not recall them due to afflictions like dementia and Alzheimer's.

LM: *What do you imagine memories are made of?*

SR: There are all sorts of sensory experiences that play into memories- anything from sounds, smells, tastes, etc. All of these have the incredible ability to conjure up memories of events and people from our past. Smoke is always the thing I have related memories to be closest too. When smoke has just been created it is strongest in smell, look, etc. It can permeate your hair, your clothes. As time passes it dissipates, the smell fades and any remnants can be washed away. Memories, to me, function in much the same manner. When the event (good or bad) has just occurred the memory is the strongest, but over time it fades, but there may still be lingering traces, until one day it has all been washed away.

LM: *What is on the horizon for your work?*

SR: The most immediate event happening is that I will be showing 2 pieces during the show "The Wax Book: altered, Repurposed, Remade" at Truro Center for the Arts during The 6th International Encaustic Conference at the end of May. From there, it is all about trying to find adequate amounts of time to get into the studio and work in between classes and workshops! I am continuing to explore working with the antique book pages in more sculptural applications and

starting to consider the scale of the work- and working larger with these paper based sculptures that tend to be very delicate and somewhat fragile, so I have to juggle both making the work and knowing that it will be stable to transport and show.



ARTIST BIO

Sarah Rehmer was born and raised in the western suburbs of Chicago, where she still resides. In 2003 Rehmer earned her BA in Graphic Design and Photography from Dominican University in River Forest, IL. She found her love for working with pages from old books while auditing a class post-graduation at the university. Rehmer continues to use both blank end pages and insides pages in many of her works. Text pages- often used out of order- to create visual texture and as a metaphor for how the brain, with age begins to misplace and forget information. The blank end-pages are especially important to the context of Rehmer's work, which often deals with this idea of memory loss and what happens to memories when they are no longer remember? The blank pages are recognizable as book pages, but without stories. She still uses elements of photography in her work and her background with graphic design when making custom graphics for image transfers. Rehmer is a FY2012 Illinois Arts Council Grant recipient.

Sarah's work can be viewed at www.anthemsofempty.com



ARTIST STATEMENT

What happens when a memory ceases to be remembered? Does it no longer exist, or has it been corrupted into some form of the truth within the depths of consciousness. When memory fails the individual, what is left behind but a word, a partial thought, stories without text, songs without lyrics, anthems that are empty... like an old shack on the side of the road. The shell is mostly there, but the inside is gone and will never again be what it once was. My work is made up of these fragments of memory; built up, pieces of a former whole, rearranged and layered together to make a new.

The action of writing on page leaves a mark, a scar, on the universe. Even if it is erased, it never is totally gone. It may change forms, but once made can not ever really be undone. Even time leaves a mark These scars left on people, on the universe, are not always visible. Sometimes they can only be seen when a portion remains and what was the whole is no more. Material deteriorates, paper yellows, an image fades unto a puff of smoke into the sky... to become some other memory in some other place. These pages from old books, some of which are so fragile it takes all the will in the universe to not have them crumble in my hands, they need something structural, because inherently they are on the verge of total ruin.



RESUME

EDUCATION

2003 Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design and Photography: Dominican University, River Forest IL

SOLO/SMALL GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2011 Organic Inclinations, 2 person show, Mixed Company, Chicago, IL

Veiled Meaning, 3 person show at Coalition Gallery, Chicago, IL,

2009 Anthems of Empty- contemplations of time, La Grange Public Library. La Grange, IL

2008 Mind's Eye, Prospect Federal Savings, Worth, IL

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2011 New Encaustic Explorations, Noyes Cultural Center, Evanston, IL

Time Signatures, Coalition Gallery, Chicago, IL ,

Fused Chicago Group Show, Black Cloud Gallery, Chicago, IL

One of six featured artists for a 3 month show, Utopic Gallery, Chicago, IL

B-Sides, Coalition Gallery, Chicago, IL

Facades, La Grange Art League Midwest juried exhibition, La Grange, IL

2010 Bright New Talent, Coalition Gallery, Chicago, IL

Chicago Art Open River East Arts Center, Chicago, IL

2009 Annual Member's Show, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, IL

2008 Chicago Art Open, Merchandise Mart, Chicago, IL

2008 Chicago Art Open, Merchandise Mart, Chicago, IL
Annual Member's Show, Woman Made Gallery Chicago, IL
17th Annual: Welcome to My World, Glynn Art Association, St Simons Island, GA
CAC Around Town, invitational 4 person exhibit run in conjunction with Looptopia at the Dick Blick State Street store.
2007 Contemporary Symbolism, Prairie State College Christopher Art Gallery, Chicago Heights, IL
Chicago Art Open Iron Studios, Chicago, IL
Loyola National Works on Paper, Crown Center Gallery, Loyola University. Chicago, IL,
Some Assembly Required, Woman Made Gallery. Chicago IL
2006 Chicago Art Open, Zhou B. Art Center. Chicago, IL
2004 Fall Photographic Symposium, Hubbard Museum of the American West. Ruidoso Downs, NM

GRANTS & AWARDS

2011 FY2012 Illinois Arts Council Professional Development Grant
2010 First Place, La Grange Art League, show "Genuine Rose Madder" judged by Zaki Knapen

COLLECTIONS

Various Private Collections in Illinois

AFFILIATIONS

Chicago Artist's Coalition - Artist Member
La Grange Art League - Artist Member, Studio Director, Corporate Board of Directors
FusedChicago - Artist Member

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Classes and Workshops in mixed media, encaustic painting and Photoshop at: LaGrange Art League, McCord House Cultural Center, DuPage Art League, The Fine Line Creative Arts Center and The Peninsula School of Art

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