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This Is My Attempt To Hold On

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THIS IS MY ATTEMPT TO HOLD ON

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Art

in

The School of Art

by

Kimberly Renee' Jones
B.F.A., Texas Christian University, 2011
August 2015

To all of those whose souls briefly aligned with my wandering one

And in those temporal moments,

we were twins.

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My thesis project is, first and foremost, dedicated to my identical twin sister, Shannon. I would not have happened upon this strand of thought without her. She is very much in the work; in fact, it is partially created by her through our shared consciousness. Without her there would be no work.

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Abstract

I am an identical twin.

The connection I share with my twin sister is intense and immediate.

But now, we live over 800 miles apart.

This Is My Attempt To Hold On serves as a visual metaphor for the longing for the undiluted rapport we have when we are together, and the frustrations of communicating with her through a digital device. I am constantly dissatisfied with my attempts to connect with her. I watch myself, my words, and my thoughts become diffused through the pixels.

The work exists as composites of various mediums, creating a dialogue between photography, printmaking, sculpture, video and performance.

Introduction

It's difficult to think about what makes me different.

All my life I've been a twin

and I've never known anything

otherwise.



Figure 1: Kimberly Jones, *Only You Know*, Archival Ink Jet Print, 2015.

Growing up, my twin sister and I were inseparable. Now, we live almost 800 miles apart. Separated from her, I feel incomplete. We are mirror image twins. I am right-handed; she is left-handed. I am an artist; she is a scientist. Mirror image twins share a similar closeness that conjoined twins do because, in the womb, if the egg had split at a slightly later point in time, we would have been conjoined. My sister's and my thoughts and our actions are often synchronized. We have dreamed the same dream before; our strides synch when we walk down the sidewalk; we often complete each other's sentences.

Being away from her is difficult. Although we try to stay connected through texting, phone calls, and Skype, I usually feel distraught and more distant in these connections. I have learned that in using these devices, we were not truly connecting in the way we once used to. I can see her; I can hear her; but it is not the same. Separated from her, I begin to notice our differences more. We have grown distant, not only in miles but in our communications, consumed by other distractions that appear on the screen when we do reach out to each other.

This project stems mostly from my being a twin. The exploration references our childhood closeness and growing up in the 1990's watching personal electronics become more and more prevalent. Separation has allowed me to psychoanalyze myself and better understand our likeness, our differences, and how the means of communication in this age play into our twin connection. My work has become a psychological exploration of what it means to be a double in the digital age.

Digital Communication

What does it mean to connect?

I post a video.

She hits the like button.

She is busy.

She is working.

I send her a 10 second snap.

She sends back one that lasts for 3.

She is busy.

She is working.

I'll call on Skype

even when she is offline.

I text.

She texts.

There is little consolation.

Susan Greenfield, a neuroscientist who studies how the virtual space of the internet is affecting the human mind, asserts:

Unlike any other animal... we are liberated from the press of the moment... because we can turn towards the past and then to the future by using words and symbols. Humans are unique because we can link events, people, and objects that are not physically in front of us into a stream of thought.... but if you place a human brain, with its evolutionary mandate to adapt to its environment, in an environment where there is no obvious near sequence, where facts can be accessed at random, where everything is reversible, where the gap between stimulus and response is minimal, and above all where time is short, then the train of thought can be derailed. You'll become a computer yourself: a system responding efficiently and processing information very well, but devoid of deeper thought.¹

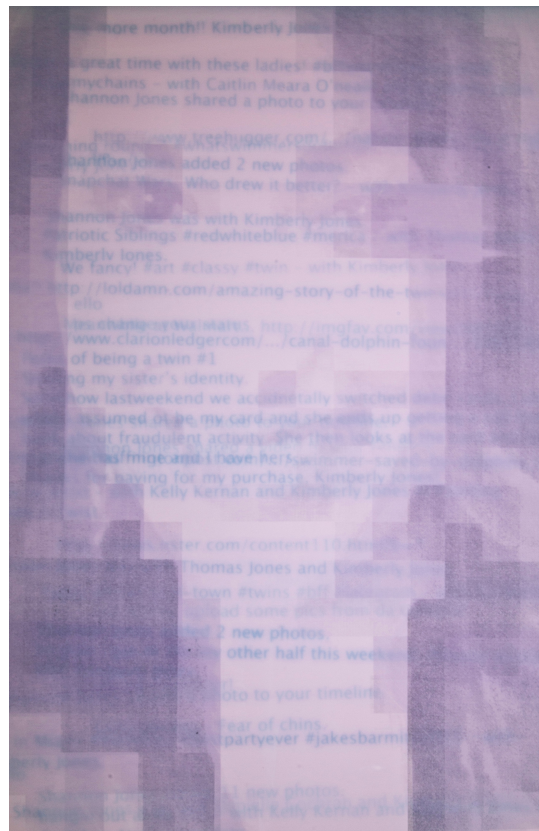


Figure 2: Kimberly Jones, Installation detail of “See Friendship” and Profile Pic #1, 2015.

¹ Susan Greenfield, *Mind Change: How Digital Technologies Are Leaving Their Mark on Our Brains* (New York: Random House, 2015), 13-14.

I feel as if I am constantly searching for something that is beyond my reach. I am often left dissatisfied, depressed even, at the end of the day. I no longer have the comfort of having someone there with me, someone who knows my vulnerabilities and empathizes with me on the most intimate level, someone who thinks and feels identically to me. Since the separation from my twin, something has shifted in my identity. It was inevitable, and I didn't fully understand what I had until it was gone. In an attempt to make up for the void of the separation, we reach out to each other on text, Skype, and other digital platforms. But during the conversations, I often feel as if I am simply talking to myself. I read her text in my own voice. During Skype, I try to imagine what it would be like if she were sitting next to me. It will work for a few minutes, until one of us is distracted by a beep of a text or ring of an email. Then I see past the facade, and find myself merely empathizing with a computer alone in my room. And when we say our good-byes and sign off, I am left more distraught than reassured.

I am grateful to technology for allowing us to communicate in a faster and more convenient manner. However, I am distrustful of the digital interface and the simplified moments of connection it brings. Even though I know these correspondences can't give me what I want, I continuously try to connect with her, in a stubborn attempt to create a more meaningful experience. I constantly alternate between transmitting and receiving modes.² Like an addict, the immediacy and temptation to feel a connection makes me forgetful of my previous frustrations and I always find my way back to the screen. Sherry Turkel, a psychologist at MIT who, for the past 30 years, researched how computers shape people, warns that "technology proposes itself as the architect of our intimacies...

² Greenfield, *Mind Change*, 11.

technology is seductive when what it offers meets our human vulnerabilities... we are very vulnerable indeed. We are lonely but fearful of intimacy.”³ She begins the book by affirming that computers are simply tools, but that we are constantly shaped by the tools we use.⁴

Since her early research in the 1970’s and 80’s, Turkel has been fascinated by how new technology invited people to reconstruct their thought processes. When face to face with a computer, people reflected on who they were into “the mirror of the machine.”⁵ She was awed by how an object provoked intense self-reflection.⁶ In later research, she witnessed a shift in how the computer was used. During the 90’s, as more people had personal computers in their homes, the computer became a portal that enabled people to lead parallel lives in a virtual world. In her book, *Alone Together*, Turkel’s most recent studies are an examination of how digital devices caused a major shift in how we view and interact with one another, as well as how we create and experience our own identity.⁷

Susan Greenfield echo’s Turkel’s warnings. In her book, *Mind Change: How Digital Technologies Are Leaving Their Mark On Our Brains*, Greenfield asserts that digital technologies are dramatically changing the world and, as a result, are changing not only

³ Sherry Turkel, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 1.

⁴ Turkel, *Alone Together*, px.

⁵ Turkel, *Alone Together*, px-pxi.

⁶ Turkel, *Alone Together*, px.

⁷ Turkel, *Alone Together*, pxi.

our lifestyles but also our identities and inner thoughts in unprecedented ways.⁸ The mind is created for adaptation, allowing us to learn from experiences. She explains that the brain has “superlative adaptability.... [that] allows [humans] to occupy more ecological niches than any other species.”⁹ ‘Mind Change’, is a term she coined that describes the inner conditions of our being.¹⁰ Greenfield defines the mind as personalization of the brain or a physicality that can be molded depending on the environment. She asserts that there are many good aspects of the virtual world but is concerned that society is not considering fully the unprecedented impact on the brain. She states that, “mechanization will somehow rob us of all the less tangible but most basic features that we hold dear about our species, namely, our emotions.”¹¹ Stemming from her primary research on the brain and dementia, she noticed similar activity patterns between brains affected by dementia and the brain of individuals who spend prolonged amounts of time on their digital devices. When technology causes the brain to rewire, there is a decline in ability to learn from one’s surroundings. She has also found similarities between excessive technology use and other conditions, such as obesity, reckless gambling, schizophrenia, and aggression.¹²

⁸ Greenfield, *Mind Change*, 2.

⁹ Greenfield, *Mind Change*, 3.

¹⁰ Greenfield, *Mind Change*, 271.

¹¹ Greenfield, *Mind Change*, 264.

¹² “Susan Greenfield: Mind Change: How Digital Technologies Are Leaving Their Mark On Our Brains, interview by Diane Remm, *The Diane Remm Show*. WAMU 88.5 FM. NPR, 16 Feb. 2015.

In an interview with Diane Remm on National Public Radio, Greenfield explained that a generation of depression, hardships with interpersonal relationships, multi personality disorder, and volatile or aggressive personalities are the results of nurturing a life in front of the screen.¹³ Digital devices are affecting lifestyle, culture, and personal aspirations that Greenfield views as the three central building blocks of identity. She expressed concern that there is no sensor online. Body language is what allows us to know who to share secrets with and who not to confide in, but online we post without filters. The key elements that establish a rapport between two people, including “eye contact, voice modulation, body language perception, and physical contact” are flattened through a Skype video or non existent in a text message, making it harder to empathize with the person on the other side.¹⁴ We are ‘sleepwalking’ into the digital world. Greenfield is concerned that most people see technology as an end in and of itself and rely on it because otherwise one might not exist, rather than recognizing a digital device as a tool. If our younger and future generations are left free with devices, there is a likelihood that they won’t be able to develop a strong sense of identity.¹⁵

Since digital technologies are here to stay, Greenfield advocates that we must adapt by being informed about both the benefits and the drawbacks. Digital technologies affect the mind, and therefore identity, a solution that begins with the individual is the best course of action. In learning how to balance screen life and real life as well as proactively establishing a sense of individuality away from the screen, many issues can

¹³ “Susan Greenfield”, *The Diane Remm Show*. NPR, 16 Feb. 2015.

¹⁴ Greenfield, *Mind Change*, 37.

¹⁵ “Susan Greenfield”, *The Diane Remm Show*. NPR, 16 Feb. 2015.

be resolved. This should also coincide with a shift in societal thought that will be the result of further and more intensive sociological and psychological research in order to work towards a better future.¹⁶

Turkel and Greenfield's warnings echo my need to reevaluate my dependency on digital devices for connection. My work is an attempt to sift through my experiences and confront my anxiety of separation. These issues are something that will always be with me, but by understanding how the digital world is specifically affecting the communication with someone who can be considered my "true equal", I will be able to better cope with the inevitable.¹⁷

¹⁶ Greenfield, *Mind Change*, 269-270.

¹⁷ Susan Diduk, "Twins, Ancestors and Socio-Economic Change in Kedjom Society." *Man, New Series*, Vol. 28, No. 3., September 1993. Accessed March 28, 2014. <http://www.jstore.org/stable/2804239>. 551-553.

Doppelganger

Not many people understand what it's like
to have an identical someone.

A shadow
there with you,
Always.

Born two parts of a whole,
We are mirror-images.

"Mirror-image twins" means that if the egg would have split hours to a day later, we
would be conjoined.

We are

half of a whole person.

I am right handed, she is left handed.

I am an artist, she is a scientist.

Two parts of a whole.



Figure 3: Kimberly Jones, *Cling*, Archival Ink Jet Print , 2015.

Artistic Inspiration

Both the scientific and metaphorical qualities of twins have intrigued the masses. Twins are a biological anomaly that stems from the fertilized egg splitting into two identical halves.¹⁸ Science has concluded that twins' DNA is virtually 100% the same.¹⁹ This biological bond gives twins a connection that is beyond most people's understanding. There is a fascination with the double, and this often causes twins to be conceptualized as the other.²⁰ The twin phenomenon has a complex place in cultural imagination.

For this body of work, I draw from inspiration from both artist twins as well as artists who are not twins, yet have taken it upon themselves to try to make sense of identical entities in their work.

Twins:

In studying artist who are twins, I have discovered that they use connectivity as a starting point for their visual language. The artists either embrace the idea of being considered "one" or push away from the idea and try to make themselves two distinct beings. In both cases, the work contains themes of similarity, differences, and the other.

¹⁸ Peter Miller, "Twins." *National Geographic*. January 2012. Accessed March 28, 2014. <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2012/01/twins/miller-text>.

¹⁹"Twin Lives," *Our America with Lisa Ling*, Opera Winfrey Network (Chicago, IL: OWN, November 13, 2011).

²⁰ Diduk, "Twins, Ancestors and Socio-Economic Change." *Man*, Vol. 28, No. 3. Sep., 1993: 551-553.

The Starn Twins, Jerome and Joel-Peter Witken, and the Mangano sisters are twin artists whose work I relate to.

The Starn Twins:

The Starn twins push the boundaries of photography. Their collaborative work revolves around the idea of the dualism and repetition found in both human culture and nature.²¹ In one of the Starn's series, *Blot Out the Sun*, they explore the symmetry and asymmetry of the natural world through the use photographic methods. The investigations are translated into large scale pieces on transparent material. Their piece *Blot Out The Sun 1* consists of two eerie silhouettes of trees placed next to each other. At first



Figure 4: Starn Twins, *Blot Out The Sun 1*, 1998.

²¹ Paul Richard. "It Takes Two: The Starn Twins' Eerily Singular Vision." *The Washington Post*, April 17, 2005. Accessed March 28, 2014. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A56475-2005Apr15.html?nav=rss_artsandliving/museums.

glance, they appear identical, both are dark while the background is a light color. The branches of the trees hold no leaves. Upon closer inspection, slight differences begin to arise in the formation and width of the branches. The piece comments on the duality of nature, while simultaneously questioning the camera's ability to duplicate nature and the post processing reproduction of those images. The Starn twins' work seems to be a conscious exploration of the double, being double themselves, and exploring what it means to be a double in nature and in art. My work is also an exploration of what it means to be doubled, and I work in mediums that have a duplicable nature.



Figure 5: Kimberly Jones, *In The Field*, Archival Ink Jet Print, 2015.

Jerome and Joel-Peter Witkin:

Jerome and Joel-Peter Witkin are identical twins that led separate lives for 50 years without communicating. Each became a master at their chosen practice; Jerome Witkin is a painter and Joel-Peter Witkin is a photographer. Several threads of similarities run through their work, including stylistic approach and the surreal and psychological concepts that are apparent. The story of the brothers reinforces notions about a shared twin vision while questioning the genetic pre-disposition of creativity.

Jerome creates large scale paintings, often dealing with psychological themes and apocalyptic undertones. Jerome works through narrative, often using figural repetition as a way to move his viewers through time. The works often reference dreams and there are strong allusions to the psychological other.²² In a theatrical manner, his painted personas are slightly distorted with subtle differences in body gesture or expression. In many works, the same figure is repeated on the canvas or throughout multiple panels. This act of duplication seems to stem from him being a double.

Joel-Peter creates elaborately staged work that primarily involves people who are considered social pariahs. Similar to how Jerome lays paint on a canvas, Joel scratches and manipulates the surface of his images, giving them an ephemeral quality. His images are also lit in a theatrical manner. His works are highly narrative, and he explores the idea of performance or becoming another personality for either an audience or for the camera. The subjects are transformed with props and costumes in such a way that their oddities or deformities become secondary to the narrative. The idea that an indi-

²² Aline Smithson. "Twin Visions: Joel-Peter Witkin and Jerome Witkin." *Lenscratch*. April 8, 2014. Accessed April 14, 2014.

vidual has another self that they reveal from time to time perhaps stems from his subconscious understanding of a duplicate self in his twin brother.

I am drawn to their work primarily because of the similarities they share, despite their extensive separation. My work also depends on the general understanding of twins as the other, or thought of as a physical metaphor of the various selves each individual has.



Figure 6: Jerome Witkin, *Subway: A Marriage*, Oil on Canvas, 1981-83.



Figure 7: Joel-Peter Witkin, *Siamese Twins, Los Angeles*, Gelatin silver print, 1988.



Figure 8: Kimberly Jones, *In Dreams, She is Near*, Archival Ink Jet Print, 2015.

The Mangano Twins:

I am also inspired by the twin performances artist Gabriella and Silvana Mangano. The sisters create performance-videos that address the interrelations between their identical bodies, space, and time. The spaces they choose to perform in are specific and each architecture or landscape enhances the meaning of the piece. Throughout the performance, their bodies transform to become extensions of the sculptural form and of one another. Sometimes their gestures are synchronized, as if the twins share one con

sciousness, while others are individually responsive to external elements. The twins embrace the idea of twinning and the reflection of the self in its double. Their performances affirm the idea that the singular, interpersonal connection which twins must experience is one that can't be known to others and leaves the viewer wanting to know more.²³

Each of my series has a performative aspect that is dependent upon my twin sister. In my photographic images, I reenact childhood memories of our closeness. My transparency work considers the performance of the self online and the reception of that virtual presentation by someone close to that person. In my video piece, I am reacting viscerally to my mirrored reflection. The Mangano twins have been a strong influence to my work as a whole.



Figure 9: Gabriella Mangano and Silvana Mangano, film still from *if...so...then*, 2006.

²³ Carrie Miller. "Cool Hunter Predictions: Gabriella & Silvana Mangano." *Art Collector* 55 (January - March 2011). Accessed March 28, 2014. <http://www.artcollector.net.au/CoolhunterpredictionsGabriellaSilvanaMangano>.



Figure 10: Kimberly Jones, film still from *This Is My Attempt To Hold On*, 2015.

Non-Twins:

I also draw inspiration from non-twin artists, including Diane Arbus and Kelli Connell, who are interested in the idea of dualism or the coming together of two halves to create a whole. I have discovered that non-twins approach twins in the fantastical sense and are often drawn to the idea of re-occurrence and the second self through the repetition of the human figure.

Diane Arbus:

Diane Arbus is one of the most prominent female photographers of the 20th century. Arbus wrote: "Individuals [are] all different, all wanting different things, all knowing

different things, all loving different things, all looking different... That is what I love: the differentness.”²⁴ She identified with the outsider status of her subjects. Arbus’s photograph, *Identical Twins, Roselle, New Jersey* (Figure) is haunting; two identical beings stare straight at the viewer. It is Arbus’ attention to detail which made the image iconic. A description of the photograph created by the Art Institute of Chicago lists the striking similarities of “the matching homemade dresses, the lace stockings bunched below the knees, and the barely discernible difference in each girl’s presentation before the camera. Such details reinforce the uncanny suggestion of two thoroughly identical individuals.”²⁵ At first glance, the photograph enhances the twin’s sameness. Then, through the awareness of sameness comes the revelation of the slight differences. The girls’ facial features are not exactly the same. Their headbands and hairdos, their positions, the way their clothes fall on their body are all subtle differences enhanced by the slight misalignment and asymmetries of the photograph. The right handed twin is slightly closer to the right edge of the frame than the left handed twin is closer to the left side of the frame. There are noticeable imperfections in background. The “photograph [of the twins] shows how sameness mutates into difference by means of the flaw at both the levels of biology and of photography, all in the context of a subject matter thematizing the aberration of identicalness.” This image reinforces Arbus’s understanding that photography is something that reproduces a subject into a mutated representation of that subject, or what Arbus has called, “the gap between intention and effect.” One can conclude from

²⁴ James N. Wood, Teri J. Edelstein, and Sally Ruth May. *The Art Institute of Chicago: The Essential Guide*, Revised edition: April 2003, (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago Museum Shop, April 2003), 297.

²⁵ James N. Wood, Teri J. Edelstein, and Sally Ruth May. *The Art Institute of Chicago: The Essential Guide*, 297.

the image of the two girls that they are the product of both biological and cultural influences.²⁶ In this photograph, Arbus reinforces the classification of twins as the other. Likewise, I rely on visual similarities and the allure of twin curios to pull my viewers in. However, my work is not a documentation intended to reinforce biological abnormalities or a study of “the other.” Instead, I use sameness to indicate physical and mental synchronization, while the differences in the two figures reveal that something is off. The repetition of subtle inconsistencies throughout the series point towards a narration of longing and loneliness.



Figure 11: Diane Arbus, *Identical Twins, Roselle, New Jersey*, 1967.

²⁶ Carol Armstrong. “Biology, Destiny, Photography: Difference According to Diane Arbus.” *October 66* (1993): 28-54. Accessed April 9, 2014.



Figure 12: Kimberly Jones, *Nourishment*, Archival Ink Jet, 2015.

Kelli Connell:

Photographer Kelli Connell works in a way that is reminiscent of Francesca Woodman and other female photographers engaged in examining the self. Connell's photos stem from her personal experiences, yet she uses her friend as a stand in for herself. Her images capture a moment of intersection that exist between fact and fiction.²⁷ In "Double Life", Connell photographs her model repeatedly, and merges two images together in Photoshop to lead her viewers into believing that they are witnessing

²⁷ Kelli Connell, interview by Dawoud Bey, *Kelli Connell: Double Life*. (Seattle: Decode Books, 2011).

the interaction between two people. Through the act of performance, the images become meditations on the concept of the self/other relationships. The idea of twinning is heavily explored in Connell's work.²⁸ In a sense, Connell's images are self portraits; her model is a sort of imaginary twin existing in casual scenes that are informed by Connell's own experiences.²⁹ The identity created through the images is fluid; a single individual shifting into various characters under different circumstances, yet all retaining an likeness. A "fractured or mutable identity" is formed.³⁰ When talking about using a single model for all of her images, Connell states that "an image can be a relationship about two people, and as an image about multiple [characteristics] or sides of the self. Neither interpretations are straightforward."³¹

Her work simply but elegantly depicts human connection. The images function on multiple levels where "chemistry, body language, subtle visual cues" give the viewer insight into what kind of relationship exists between the two figures. Susan Bright, an author and curator, points out in the forward of Connell's book that "we mirror physically, intellectually, and emotionally, with those we are intimate with in order to connect."³²

Similar to Connell's work, my work explores the idea of becoming the other. In my images, I play the role of both myself and my sister in most of the images, imagining and recreating memories from the past. Connell also uses digital manipulation to place

²⁸ Susan Bright, *Kelli Connell: Double Life*. (Seattle: Decode Books, 2011), 2.

²⁹ Bright, *Double Life*, 3.

³⁰ Bright, *Double Life*, 3

³¹ Connell, Kelli. *Kelli Connell: Double Life*. By Dawoud Bey.

³² Bright, *Double Life*, 3.

the two figures together. When asked about the digital manipulation, Kelli Connell stated that, “like clones... [my work] lie as documents but tell truth as images.”³³



Figure 13: Kelli Connell, *Bed and Breakfast*, Archival Ink Jet Print, 2008.

All of these artists are muses for my project, guiding me both in my aesthetic approach and investigation of my duplicated subject matter.

³³ Connell, Kelli. *Kelli Connell: Double Life*. By Dawoud Bey.



Figure 14: Kimberly Jones, *Do You Remember?*, Archival Ink Jet Print, 2015.

Twin Connection

Not many people understand what it's like

To have an identical someone.

A shadow

there with you

Always.



Figure 15: Kimberly Jones, *I Miss You*, Archival Ink Jet Print, 2015.

Nancy Segal, an evolutionary psychologist and behavioral geneticist has made the observation, “Its perception of similarities that triggers an attraction and a liking between people and twins feel this immediately.”³⁴



Figure 16: Kimberly Jones, *Stay Near Me*, Archival Ink Jet Print, 2015.

³⁴ “Twin Lives.” *Our America with Lisa Ling*, Opera Winfrey Network.

Photography

I gravitated towards photography because I find it a challenging medium. My perception of a scene and the sensor of the camera need to align in order to create an image; the camera and I must have a synonymous view. This series exists as photographs because photography is heavily reliant upon the principal of duplication. Originally intended to perfectly replicate nature, the camera captures a clone of a scene through the use of mirrors. Susan Bright has stated that “photography is a transmutable medium - its ability to multiply itself has always been its greatest strength.”³⁵ A photographic image, particularly a digital one, can be easily duplicated many times in the printing process.

Most of my photographic work can be described as intimate re-creations. I photograph myself and then myself playing the role of my sister. I then overlay the images in Photoshop, making it ambiguous if I am duplicated or if my twin sister appears in the image. I am reenacting and reinterpreting memories from our childhood together. In becoming my double, I take on Shannon’s identity by parting my hair from the right side to the left, or holding something in my left hand as opposed to my right. I am reinventing our twin-ship and reimagining our closeness. It comes full circle, by mirroring myself, I am mirroring my twin, who is a mirror image of me.

Working primarily with a muted color palette, the work retains a soft, ethereal quality that references a dreamworld. In my reenactments, I am attempting to rekindle the connection I had while growing up. In each of the images, I have pixelated one of

³⁵ Holfelt, Miranda, and Siegel, Elizabeth., *Playing with Pictures: The Art of Victorian Photocollage*, The Art Institute of Chicago, 2010.

the figures to various degrees. In some images, the pixilation is more pronounced than others. There is a lack of clarity of the figure in most of the images, and essential information for recognizing identity, such as eyes, hands, facial features, is purposely obscured. The pixilation is meant to be disturbing to the viewer, indicating an interrupted or falsified connection. The parts of each image that are obscured are the body parts that are affected the most when communicating online - the face, mouth, hands, and eyes. Online, the lack of haptic sense affects the degree of comprehension.³⁶ In each image, there is a compositional dividing line between the two figures.

None of the images are meant to appear completely natural and realistic. They are the product of my imagination and digital outputting. Some appear more staged and theatrical while others seem to occur in a more convincing setting. The staged images are very orderly, and the viewer can tell that the space was purposely created. This harkens back to my childhood photographs, where our mom would dress us and pose us. They also serves as testimony of my mental state. My recreated scenes of the two of us together are dramatic, unrealistic, and an attempt to create “a perfect world,” however something is always off. When I sleep at night, my consciousness shifts back and forth between us in my dreams. I’ll end up with her fading away, and me being left alone. Even the images that do not seem as staged are heavily considered. There is a reference to awakening, or my conscious thought of her through engaging the viewer with eye contact or a gesture of reaching. Twinship is a subconscious connection, so the push and pull between the two approaches in image making create a flow between the cognizant and sublime.

³⁶ “Susan Greenfield”, *The Diane Remm Show*. NPR, 16 Feb. 2015.

In each image, I am playing a role, similar to how I feel when I read a text from Shannon, or when I'm pretending she is there with me during a Skype conversation. This act is a delusional one. By physically taking on her persona, I can imagine she is near in hope that it will rekindle a connection. In the staged images, props have considerable meaning. Twins often invent their own language to communicate to each other growing up. The article, *The Relationship Between Twin Language, Twins'*, that appears in *Twin Research & Human Genetics* academic journal defines twin language:

"Twin language is defined as a language that is unique to each pair of twins, cannot be understood by others including their parents, and is used between twins exclusively in specific situations (e.g., during play, in bed before going to sleep, during meals)".³⁷

The props are how we speak to each other, even now. They are things that have a strong symbolic meaning that we both understand. Since we were little, we would designate a meaning for an object of importance, such as a favorite toy or a natural object as a means of communicating with each other. As we have grown, the meaning grew as well, often taking on multiple meanings. One example of the symbols is the whale. When we were little, whales were our favorite animal. To us, they were majestic creatures who reigned the aquatic world. By age seven, we had thoroughly researched the animals, learning the names, characteristics, and habitats of each kind. From our whale encyclopedia book, we traced pictures, learning how to draw each one. As a seven year old, whales were the embodiment of beauty, wonder, and knowledge. As we grew older, we seriously considered marine biology as a career. The whale shifted to become a

³⁷ Hayashi, Chisato, Hiroshi Mikami, Reiko Nishihara, Chiho Maeda, and Kazuo Hayakawa. 2014. "The Relationship Between Twin Language, Twins' Close Ties, and Social Competence." *Twin Research & Human Genetics* 17, no. 1: 27-37. Accessed January 12, 2015.

symbol of aspiration. Now, when we text, we send the whale emoticon to each other. It now reads as a symbol of longing. The emoticon will often follow a text stating “I miss you!”.

I find these symbols necessary to include because of the significance they play in my relationship to my twin sister. The ambiguity is essential; if the viewer understands fully what the props mean, then they will no longer be the symbols that characterize our twin language. However, it is important for me to have the viewer recognize that there is a significance to the objects. In order to allow the viewers some insight, some props reoccur throughout several images, allowing the viewers to draw visual connections between them and create their own interpretations of what they could mean.

Included within the self narrative are a few images of Shannon and I together. These photographs are meant to be a grounding point for the rest of the series. It may be difficult for my viewers to distinguish which images include my twin and which images depict me alone. In the twin images, there is no pixilation, giving the viewer a visual difference to consider.

Reverie

The dreams will come sometimes.

When my mind is quiet.

And she will be there with me.



Figure 17: Kimberly Jones, *Don't Forget Me*, Archival Ink Jet Print, 2015

Video & Installation

In my video piece, *This Is My Attempt To Hold On*, I interact with my reflection in a way that attempts the in-person closeness I long for. The piece is both obsessive and absurd; I treat my reflection as if it were my sister. In G. Thomas Courser's biography, *Identity, Identically, and Life Writing: Telling (the Silent) Twins Apart*, he asserts that 'twins have an intimate lifelong mirror in which to reflect - and home to express - their sense of individuality.'³⁸ My performance is a literal interpretation of this idea. In real life, Shannon mirrors me anatomically and psychologically. I respond to my reflection in a visceral manner that is both physically and visually impulsive. I consistently attempt to connect to my "double." The figure in the mirror is responsive enough to keep me captivated, yet it remains elusive. Frustration arises into a climax before the illusion is shattered and I find myself alone once again. A recorded monologue that details personal experiences in a poetic, stream-of-consciousness manner, is the only sound available. The video exists not to illustrate the poem, but to contextualize it with a visual metaphor.

Similar to the photographic work, the video references themes of the performance of self online, and how this splinters one's identity and causes a fragmentation in connection. The performance parallels my limitations of connection in the virtual world and the mirror can be read as a screen. The figure, composed of a flattened refraction of color and light, appears to exist in three-dimensional form. It is misleading and decep-

³⁸ G. Thomas Courser. *Identity, Identically, and Life Writing: Telling (The Silent) Twins Apart; Autobiographies of Identical Twins*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003). 243-60.

tive, similar to how a seemingly trustworthy profile of a person on social media can have false or misleading information about who that person really is.

Aesthetically, my piece has a surreal quality to it. The background and costuming are minimal, meant to indicate a mental space rather than a specific physical location. The video seemingly takes place somewhere between a reality and a dream world. In some moments, I appear cognizant of my actions, while in other instances, my actions are repetitious and reflexive. This push and pull between the conscious and subconscious is something that is consistent throughout my work.

The video serves as a record of a performance. Capturing the performance on camera, allows it to exist in a duplicatable or repeatable form. It is important that the performance is able to be repeated, just as many of my actions and thoughts are repeated by my biological clone.

The piece was projected into an separate room created by movable gallery walls. Aside from the wall containing the projection, the remaining walls were painted black to create a darkened enclosure. A bed was placed in a corner of the room, facing the video. The bed is a sacred item of comfort and intimacy; it is where mind and body connect during sleep. It is a space that is shared with those which we most cherish. To me, it is also a place of discomfort and disturbance. I lay in bed when I am upset or feeling detached, and I often find myself perturbed when I become aware of how often use my phone or computer while in bed. By projecting the video into a bedroom-like space, the dreamy quality of the video is enhanced. In a way, the viewer becomes an intruder, observing a private act. They are able to peer briefly into my mind and imagine what it might be like to have a twin.



Figure 18: Kimberly Jones, still frame from *This Is My Attempt To Hold On*, 2015.



Figure 19: Kimberly Jones, installation shot of *This Is My Attempt To Hold On*, 2015.

Transparency

In another exploration of my identity crisis, I have screen printed images onto plexiglas panels. My loss is manifested in a physical way by obscuring online profile pictures of my twin sister.

“The possibility of online identity management allows for distortion... an exaggerated version of the real self.”³⁹ Screens are a ubiquitous part of everyday life. Online interactions are fleeting and identities are purposely altered and expunged. When compared to the complications of in person, tactile communication, the option to keep one’s emotions concealed behind a screen while being collectively reassured seems to be the amenable choice; however, this is causing a shift in the nature of personal relationships.⁴⁰ Susan Greenfield claims that, “by relying on Facebook to satisfy [a] need for approval... users long desperately for others to notice and to interact with them.”⁴¹ The Facebook identity is an implicit one, where users are constructed with “likes” rather than a life narrative. Research has revealed that “identity portrayed on Facebook is ... a deliberately constructed, socially desirable self to which individuals aspire but which they have not yet been able to achieve.”⁴² On social networks, people are reduced to their profiles. You simply get small bits of information through a new profile picture, a status, or what the person might comment on. When I interact with Shan

³⁹ Greenfield, *Mind Change*, 117.

⁴⁰ Greenfield, *Mind Change*, 39.

⁴¹ Greenfield, *Mind Change*, 113.

⁴² Greenfield, *Mind Change*, 116-117.

non, I feel as if I'm simply getting a fragment of her. Her full persona isn't there. I have to imagine the rest. I am recreating her image using the fragments of images and statuses I find of her on Facebook. In taking her images out of context and physically working with them, I give them a new meaning. The process of creation is meditative; I pull ephemeral fragments of her and examine them, allowing her essence to pervade my mind.

I utilize the characteristics of forming a Facebook identity to inform my process in creating the transparent panels. I begin by sifting through images on my sister's personal Facebook profile. I pull a profile image of her, isolate her, pixelate parts of the image. In each image, I am drawn to certain elements she is displaying online; with some, I am attracted to her actions while in others she is reinforcing parts of her personality through her outfit, expression, or pose. In Photoshop, I digitally remove the background, enlarge the image, and selectively choose which color layer remains. I then turn the image into greyscale and bitmap it for the screen printing process. I print the images onto large sheets of plexiglass using transparent CMYK variations. The colors are printing colors, mimicking what a "print" would be of the Facebook image. The color of each panel are selected by merging two colors of the CMKY colors palette of the images (for example: Cyan and Black, or Cyan Magenta and Black). With this process, I create variant shades of each. For each panel, the two colors exist as twins - similar but subtly different. One color can be viewed by looking at the front of the plexiglass, while the other can be seen clearer from the back.

Each panel is hung with space between to allow the viewers to experience each layer, as well as view a conglomeration of all the layers from a certain vantage

point. On the wall, behind the panels of plexiglass, a lightbox illuminates the “screens” from behind, reminiscent of the backlit screens of our digital devices. On the translucent panel of plexiglass are statuses, existing in Facebook blue, which I copied off of Shannon’s profile. The images are hung to become less obscure as they go back in space - the initial image nearly indiscernible as a human form, while ending with a nearly complete portrait. Both the prints on the wall and the screen prints are created using CMKY inks, allowing a dialogue to exist between the two pieces of work. In some, a figure is barely noticeable. In others, a face, leg, or eye might be apparent. Each panel is a transparent fragment; none of the images give you the full context of who this person might be. Installed, the thin, ephemeral transparencies come to life within the space. The plexiglass reflects the outside world, bodies of the individuals walking in-between them, and the photographic work upon the walls, further obscuring and recontextualizing the information on them.

With this piece, I am also toying with the idea of privacy. Revealing personal information is now a part of setting up a social networking profile. By taking her images and statuses without her approval, I am questioning the boundless accessibility we give others when we post information online. Susan Greenfield asserts that “privacy is the other side of the coin to our identity.... We have secrets, memories, and hopes to which no one can have access.... It is a kind of inner narrative that, until now, has provided each individual with his or her own way of linking past, present and future.”⁴³ I am taking from Shannon’s public and digital self to create a re-interpreted identity in a physical realm.

⁴³ Greenfield, *Mind Change*, 40.

This transparency project has a relationship to Nikki S. Lee's *Layers* work. Nikki S. Lee primarily works with identity. For her series, *Layers*, she investigates her personal identity through the perception of others from various cultures.⁴⁴ Lee traveled to different cities around the world and in each city, she had three street artists draw a portrait of her on translucent paper. She then layered the drawings onto each other and photographed them over a Lightbox. The resulting image is distorted and questions perception. Lee stated:

"I recognize the difference between the "I" that I perceive and the "I" that others perceive. I think I am shy but others think I am outgoing. So who am I? How do I understand this gap? To understand others sincerely might mean to understand this gap?"⁴⁵

Similarly, my work questions the gap between the perception and understanding of a person. As I become more aware of my twinship and the positive and negative effects digital technology have on it, I am always left with the question: Who am I?



Figure 20: Nikki S. Lee, *Layers, Istanbul 1, 2, 3*. 2007

⁴⁴ Aileen Smithson, "Nikki S. Lee", *Lenscratch*, November 26, 2008. Accessed November 12, 2014. <http://lenscratch.com/2008/11/nikki-s-lee/>

⁴⁵ Smithson, "Nikki S. Lee." Accessed November 12, 2014.



Figure 21: Kimberly Jones, installation shot of “*See Friendship*”, *Profile Pic #1, Profile Pic #2, Profile Pic #3, Profile Pic #4, Profile Pic #5*, 2015.

Reflections

The final piece created was titled, *Reflections*. I wrote lines upon the mirror from the monologue created and recited for my video piece. The mirror was placed as an intermediary between the bedroom space where the video was being projected and the photographs. Three layers of text overlapped each other. The first layer repeated the phrase, "This is my attempt to hold on". The second layer consisted of fragments about my and my sister's shared experiences. The last layer contained lines of despair and disconnection. The creation of this piece mirrors the process of creating the work. At first, I started the project as an attempt to hold onto something that I knew was slipping away from me. It was a frantic act of denial. As the project grew, I questioned my identity, reenacting and tracing my past as I reminisced moments that characterized my and my sister's childhood relationship. Finally, as I started to come to terms with myself, depression and acceptance began to settle in.

In the presentation of my show, I have considered that the majority of my audience will be non-twins. I am giving the viewers a glimpse into the life of a twin and to put the bond that twins share under the looking glass. By exploring my identity as a twin in relation to digital connection, I have become progressively conscious of how the technology I use to connect to my twin is reshaping our identities. By working with myself as the subject of my exploration, I hope to bridge the gap between the twin experience and the human experience. I want my work to express my desire for a deeper connection. As Shannon and I continue grow in our separate lives, I do not foresee a return to our childhood closeness. I will continue to long for and reach out. There is no resolve.

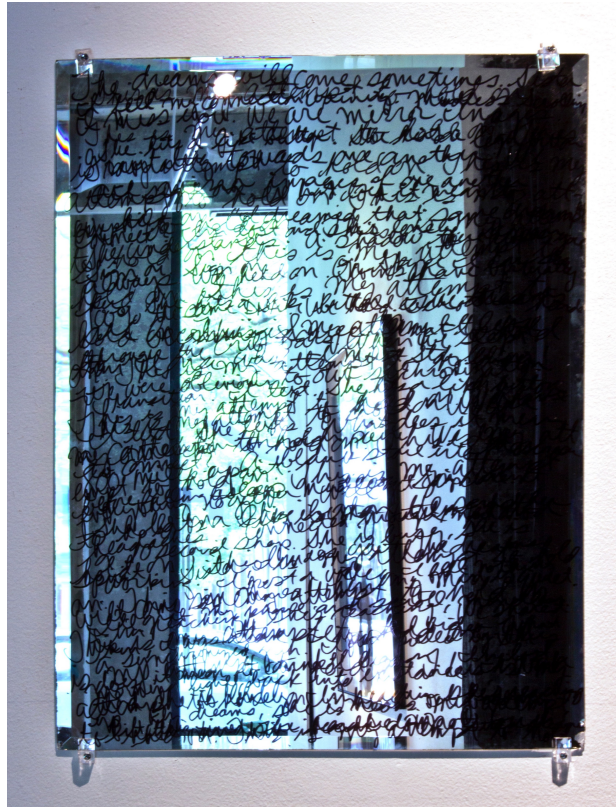


Figure 22: Kimberly Jones, installation shot of *Reflections*, 2015.

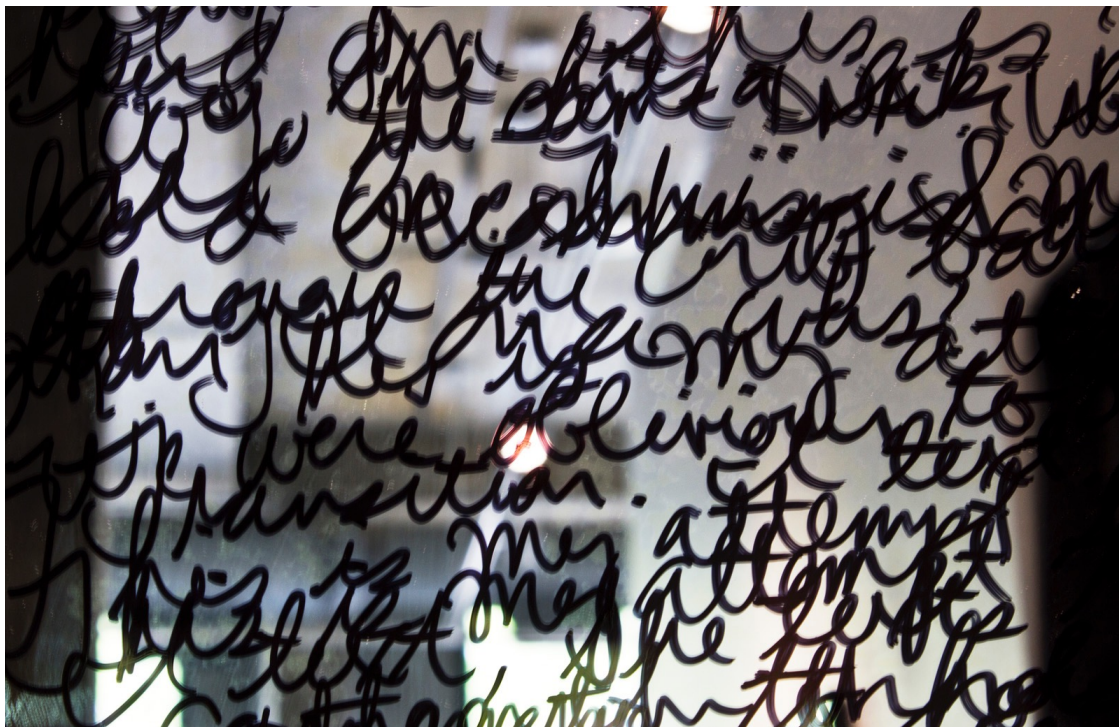


Figure 23: Kimberly Jones, detail of *Reflections*, 2015.

This is my attempt to hold on.

I am lost
and she is lonely.

She's reaching.

I'm reaching.

Constantly gravitating towards one another.



Figure 24: Kimberly Jones, still frame of *This Is My Attempt To Hold On*, 2015.

But this time, our hands do not touch.



Figure 25: Kimberly Jones, *Don't Let Go*, Archival Ink Jet Print, 2015.

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Vita

Admist a hurricane in the summer of 1989, Kimberly Renee' Jones, was born in tandem with her sister, Shannon Lee Jones. The two grew, passionate in both art and science. They were one soul. Then a day came in which they must separate; Shannon continued the path of a scientist, while Kim sought comfort in artwork. Occasionally they reconnect in person, but most of the time they must resort to a few fleeting moments in a virtual space. These moments are never enough, leaving an unsatisfiable yearning.

Kim explores her heartache and subconscious connections in a visual manner. She earned her B.F.A. in Studio Art from Texas Christian University in 2011 and M.F.A. in Studio Art from Louisiana State University in 2015.