

2002

# Wash

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WASH

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 Arts

in

The School of Art

by

Karin Eberhardt Watts  
B.A., Nicholls State University, 1994  
May 2002

*Dedicated to my mother,  
for keeping me afloat.*

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## ABSTRACT

In this body of work, *Wash*, I translate the negative aspects of life in a positive, vibrant way. The physical and psychological sensations of life supply me with an intuitive frame of reference providing a point of departure for visual expression. Digital scanning and imaging techniques allow me to develop an immediate intimacy with the organic and inorganic objects, while I methodically examine, alter and reconfigure their forms. Graphic elements suggest symbolic interpretation from eastern studies and are sometimes enhanced with letterforms and photographic images representing the difficult articulation of thoughts. I synchronize this re-orchestration with the deciphering and close examination of my relationships and myself. Both focus on my quest for balance and harmony, critical to success in art as well as life.

## INTRODUCTION

Life is pain. I suddenly awoke one morning understanding the meaning of this concept.

So I began searching for a way to not necessarily to remove the pains of life, but to comprehend the composition or structure of it all - myself, my environment, and the variables therein, both controlled and uncontrolled. Looking to naturally occurring cycles for enlightenment, I realize there is beauty in everything - it merely depends on one's perspective. Even if pain seems negative at first and appears harmful, if it is either self-inflicted or a result of an outside factor, an inherent beauty that balances the pain is simply waiting to be discovered. Only once the full picture is revealed can peace result. This inherent balance, or need for balance, can be seen in Eastern religion and philosophy, specifically Taoism. I have come to believe that without pain there is no joy, or rather, no understanding of joy. Therefore since pain cannot be avoided, I have amplified its positive side in this body of work. I seek to find beauty in everything. By facing the natural waves and cycles of life stripped down to the core, I am cleansed - *Wash*.

## MY PATH, MY PROCESS

The work began by noting the cycles of nature and its reflection upon me. My heightened awareness led to an introspection and synchronization of myself within the sensuous patterns and intricate textures of my environment. By absorbing the world around me, my vision cleared and the fog lifted. I found the strongest inspiration occurred when I stopped searching for answers and began gazing into the sky, noting clouds illuminated by the sun and the moonlight, feeling the warmth of dappled sunlight and rays shining through trees, watching leaves sprout and wither only to sprout again the following season. I felt the ambiguous delicacy of feathers and studied the intricate veins of flower petals. I quieted myself and listened to morning songs of cardinals and blue jays and tuned in to rushing and dripping and softly flowing water. But most importantly, I let the wind gently flow through me as it passed around me.

My work explores the asymmetrical balance and tension of relationships. As we interact with people, we selectively reveal and conceal our minds and bodies with others. The physical and psychological sensations of this analytical introspection supply me with an intuitive frame of reference providing a point of departure for visual expression. In this personal quest of comprehension, my traditional diary is not able to contain all that I have to release. The spoken or written word does not completely express my intentions,



articulate my questions, sufficiently relieve any tension, or offer any enlightened understanding. In order to balance myself, I developed a process and discovered a way to deal with the day-to-day emotional roller coaster of life.

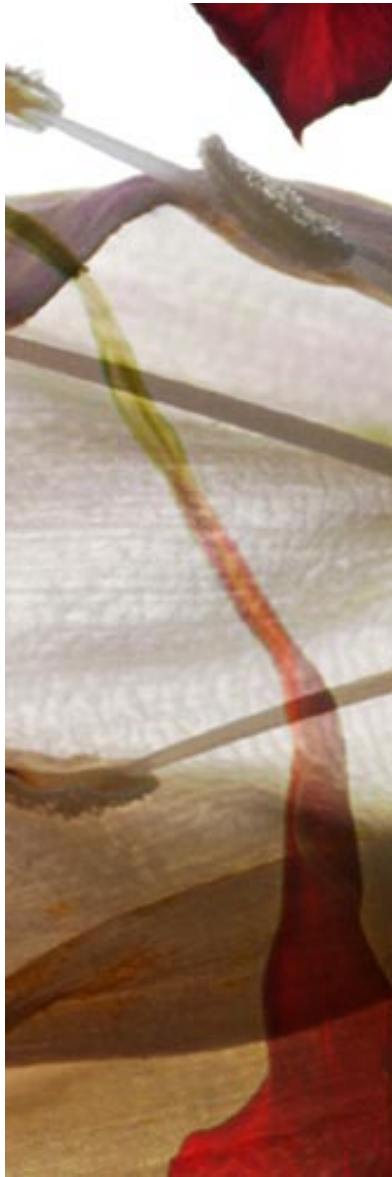
With keen awareness of the balance and tension created between the organic and inorganic forms in my art, my vehicle of expression naturally utilizes my graphic design sensibilities. The two-dimensional work started with chance arrangement of organic objects from my environment. Digital scanning and imaging techniques allowed me to develop an immediate intimacy with the objects while methodically examining, altering and reconfiguring their forms. By passing light through these organic objects and breaking them down into their most basic cellular make-up, I synchronize their re-orchestration with the deciphering and close examination of myself. Petals, stamens, stems, leaves and vines in multiple stages of deterioration or change are utilized for their lyrical beauty of pure form and represent various human sensations. Graphic elements, such as lines and circles, and typography form a language familiar to me as a designer. Used as compositional organizers, they also suggest symbolic interpretation from eastern studies. Legible text is often small, as though whispered and translucent, representing thoughts not yet come to fruition because of the difficult articulation of them. Words, letterforms and alphanumeric symbols shed light into the initial artistic purpose

of some pieces, yet are intentionally vague providing the viewer a foundation to imbue meaning for themselves. By incorporating my own skin, hair, and film negatives, I have directly placed my environment and myself within each piece. Color holds emotional interpretation, sometimes vibrant and startling while at other times, soothing and delicate. Negative space supplies formal breathing space between the elements and functions as the work's essential balancing principle.

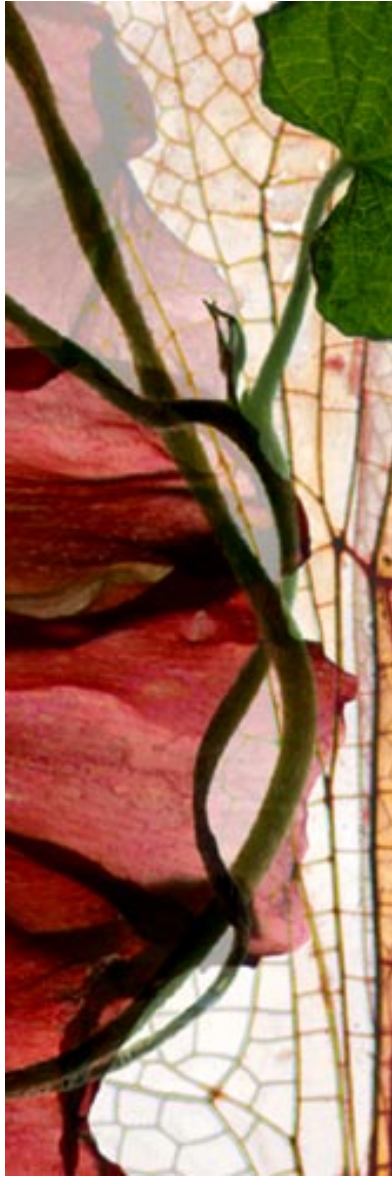
Whereas the wall pieces were created in and for a specific moment, the sculptural work encompasses my general interest in the form and nature of life itself. The three figurative pieces are made of calfskin molded into the form of my body. Suspended side by side before the viewer, each is illuminated with a multi-layered digital video. The two outermost pieces depict a fast-paced city environment and the mindless, cyclical motions therein. Metaphysical nomenclature is superimposed presenting the viewer with a compromising and opposing viewpoint on the nature of human existence. Motion-oriented and saturated, these skins sit in judgment of the viewer, or perhaps they themselves are waiting to be judged or justified. In contrast, the center skin is projected with simpler organic imagery representing the comfort and peace one may find upon ethical validation - cleansed, enlightened, pure, ideal, even if only for a fleeting moment.

## CONCLUSION

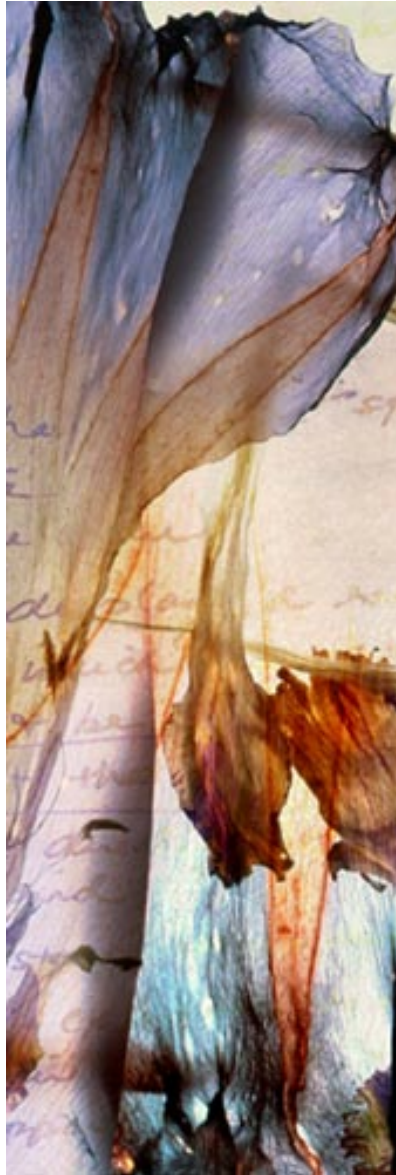
This body of work is complete in fulfilling its initial purpose. As a tool, I zoomed in and cropped the scope of my graduate studies into a visual language that conveys the negative aspects of life in a positive, vibrant way. Each piece takes on a new life by personally inspiring the viewer through its honest, optimistic approach. The interwoven symbolism cannot hold the same meaning for the viewer as for the artist, nor is this my intention. Ideally, the viewer will feel the tension between the forms. By recognizing the repeating cycles of nature and understanding the lyrical beauty of life, they will instinctively relate to this body of work's sensual nature. Although this engaging introspective juggle may often reach for the jugular, it further propels the meditative transcendence of *Wash*.



718 [blood]



719 [flight]



730 [stained]



731 [bird]



805ii [caress]

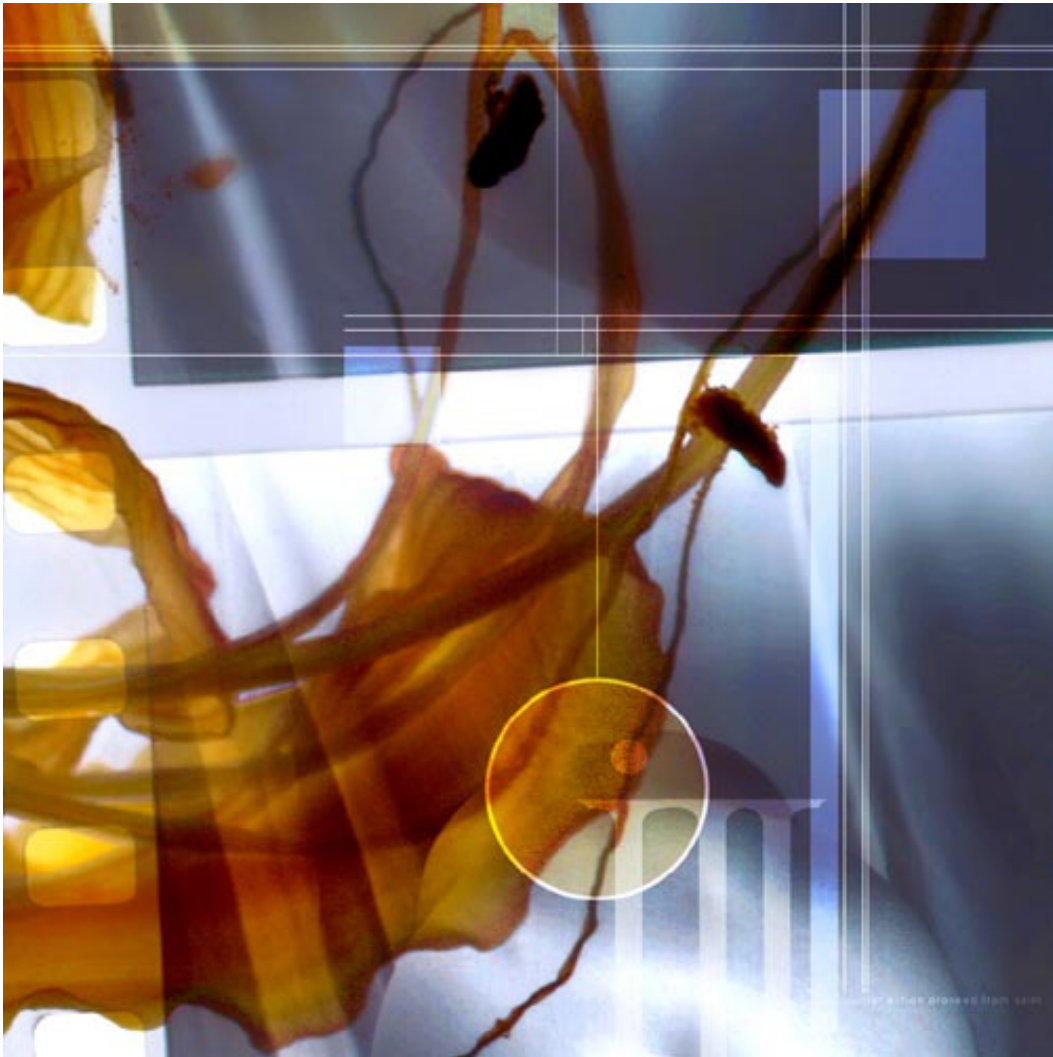




828 [restrain]



912.14 [formula]



915ii [calm]



916 [fire]



916ii [inSide]



922.24 [bitch]



925.103 [free]



1013 [center]





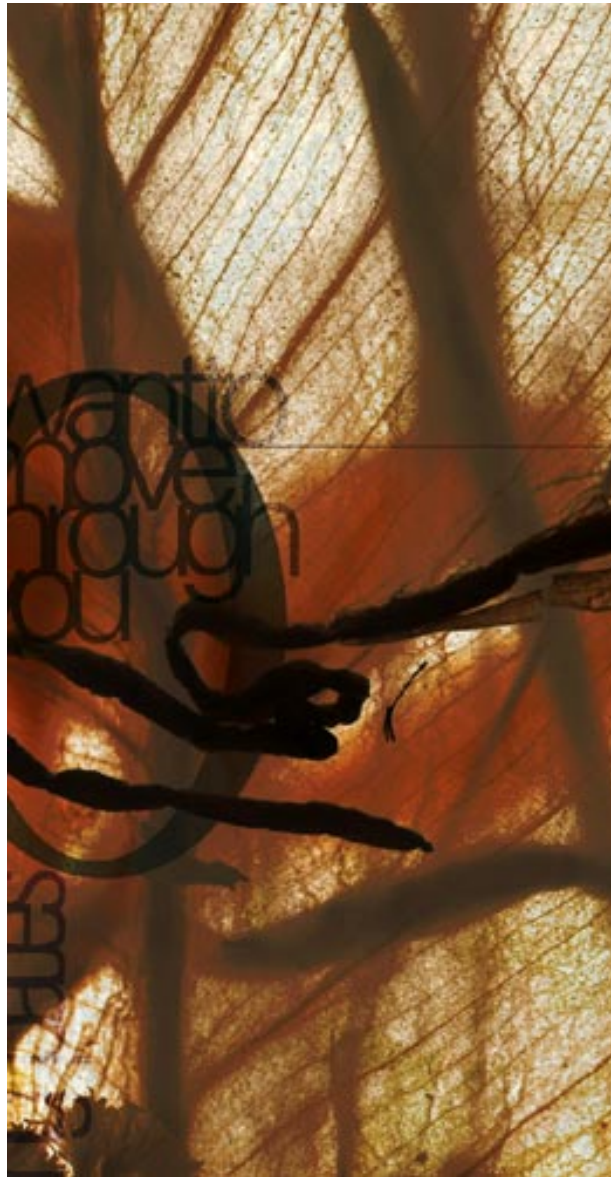
1026 [wind]



1111 [bulletproof]



1120.1205 [reveal]



1207 [motion]



Sculpture



Sculpture: Close-up 1



Sculpture: Close-up 2

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## VITA

Karin Eberhardt Watts was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, on August 25, 1970. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in graphic design from Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, Louisiana, in December 1994.

Karin is currently a full-time Instructor of graphic design at Nicholls State University. She resides on Bayou Lafourche in Thibodaux, Louisiana.