



**A response to Katrina Craig's *It Washes Over***

**Flux Gallery, 2-9 February, 2018**

**By Olenka Skrypnyk  
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I sat down with artist Katrina Craig to discuss her exhibition, *It Washes Over* and to talk about her practice. Craig's work explores heartbreak and trauma through the objects we hold onto. Using donated items Craig creates work that embody and personify memories, grief, and trauma.<sup>1</sup> Before our conversation I had insecurities regarding talking to a stranger—the artist—about trauma and heartbreak, worrying that it may be awkward. Early in our conversation I realized that my apprehension to talk about difficult emotions was exactly the point. Craig's work centres around the difficult conversations we don't have and the objects that are tied to those moments we don't share with others. By turning those objects into art, Craig asks us to be open to these difficult discussions.<sup>2</sup>

Walking through *It Washes Over* I was struck by the physicality of these works, from the placement and size of the forms to the tactile and labour-intensive process of weaving. Three sculptural pieces, which Craig refers to as forms, lay on the floor. Nets of wire create human shapes which are covered by woven paper and other material which have been donated to the artist.<sup>3</sup> In the work *Anal Pleasure and Health by Jack Morin a Token of the Acceptance of Sexuality from a Family Member Shifted to a Memorial of Life* it seems as if the form's human figure is completely covered by the woven pages of a book. The physicality of the work goes beyond the form's composition. The viewer's own body is affected while interacting with the work. In trying to read the small text of the book, the viewer must look closer to see the wire figure crouched on its side, hidden underneath.

How Craig relates her work to the body makes sense knowing that she completed a fashion and textile degree at NSCAD University in Halifax. Craig's interest in fashion lies within the ways we conceptualize ourselves through the clothes we wear and how we want people to perceive us through them. Since graduating, Craig's work has shifted from clothing and into textiles, where she is still concerned with moving conceptualizations of self, away from the mind and back into the bodies we occupy. The forms in *It Washes Over* reveal what emotional and/or conceptual trauma can look like when materialized. In *Baseball T-shirt A Disintegrating Reminder of the Person Who Used to Wear It*, the tapestry is made of said t-shirt. In my conversation with Craig, we discussed how vulnerable objects can make us feel yet somehow we still display them in public. The donor wore the shirt consistently even though it was a token of their pain. It is like the trope of a crime novel, hide your pain in plain sight and no-one will find it. The forms in this exhibition become material manifestations of pain which was felt, a pain which the viewer can see but not fully know. Craig's work considers how we feel memories through objects, not how we articulate them. It is as if these materials we have touched, looked at, or felt during times of heartbreak and trauma transform into continuations of our own bodies and in turn become embodied definitions of the self.

Craig is drawn to weaving because of its limitations and the need to structure her life around it. It is laborious; the repetitive motions cannot be rushed and are time-consuming. Weavers are limited by their body as it begins to ache from those actions and life becomes

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<sup>1</sup> *It Washes Over* artist statement, Flux Gallery/aceartinc., February 2018, p.1

<sup>2</sup> This piece is the result of a conversation between the author and artist, February 8, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Craig has not yet needed to advertise this project to receive the items, having received enough material from friends and acquaintances wanting to donate their items and stories to the project.

structured by this pattern of time. It is even structured through the physical space the loom occupies. Craig compares the time it takes to create her works to the time that emotions occupy. After Craig received the material for *Anal Pleasure and Health*...she waited a year to start working on the piece. Giving these objects time is a form of respect between the artist and the donor, and therefore the process is integral to the work. The time involved in the act of weaving is a continuation of this respect.

Weaving evokes metaphors which helped me to better understand the work. The physical act of weaving hides sections of the materials used while creating a new visual object. Thus weaving reveals where public and hidden spaces and narratives intersect. Weaving also acts as a metaphor for healing. If pain feels like being torn apart and unravelling, then Craig does the work of physically taking apart a vulnerable object and then weaving it back together into something new, something healed. If these objects are tactile definitions of the self, then transforming them into new art pieces heals the trauma that has been felt through them. Craig facilitates the process of healing that her donors may not be able to do on their own. It is evident in the work how much care has been put into them by how Craig has unofficially been calling these forms her "friends."

Reflecting on the exhibition *It Washes Over* and on my conversation with Craig it seems as if we need to reflect on the ways in which we communicate with one another. Pain can be isolating; it can make us feel as if no-one understand us. I was limiting my own potential of understanding the work because of my insecurities to talk to others about pain. But Craig's work is material evidence that others have felt similarly and are just as vulnerable as you. By not using her own but others' objects of heartbreak as a tool, Craig furthers the position that sharing our vulnerabilities can be helpful in healing and connecting to others. Vulnerability seems especially possible for those who entrust their stories in the compassionate hands of Katrina Craig.

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Olenka Skrypnyk is a recent graduate of the University of Winnipeg, where she attained an Honours in the History of Art.

## Bibliography

Craig, Katrina. Conversation with Olenka Skrypnyk. February 8, 2018.

Craig, Katrina. "It Washes Over," artist statement, Flux Gallery/aceartinc., February 2018.