CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

SECURITY MEASURES

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in Art

By

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Dedication

I have been fortunate to have the unconditional support of my family and friends in this endeavor, as in everything- thank you all so very much for your love and support. It means more than I can ever tell you.

And of course, I must thank the exceptional faculty here at CSU Northridge. I am beyond fortunate to have landed here! To Professor Samantha Fields...I'm not sure the words exist to describe my appreciation!

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ABSTRACT

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I use the patterns of private domestic space and systems that define shared public space to explore ideas of structure, safety and vulnerability.

We seek to know the future and think that given enough data, we can calculate an outcome. Predictability cultivates a sense of stability.

The flip side of this is the withholding of information, ideas, and actions to keep anyone from knowing us well enough to predict our patterns and gaining the upper hand. The same editing mechanisms work in daily life and on the global scale. We are careful about not revealing too much personal data to strangers or on the internet, just as government cannot reveal who is actually on the "No Fly List". Too much information fosters vulnerability

Domestic textile patterns recall family and home: our place of safety. Domestic security naturally expands beyond the home to the national arena. The patterns and

systems become distorted with constant reworking, suggesting an effort to remake the narrative into a more palatable story. Perception and reality are questioned through what is hidden and what is exposed.

My work dissects our attempt to codify safety, the theatre enacted to make us feel secure and the integration of public policy into private life.

Introduction

Safety is one of the most fundamental of human needs. Whether adult or child, individual or society, a basic drive exists that makes us seek safety. We possess a common preference for the familiar and equate the unexpected, uncontrollable or unfamiliar with vulnerability. Rituals and structures are created to make us feel secure. (1) These structures form systems that exercise authority, cultivating predictability and a sense of control. We seek to know the future and think that given enough data, we can calculate an outcome.

The reverse of this is the withholding of information, ideas, and actions to keep anyone from knowing us well enough to predict our patterns and gaining the upper hand. The same editing mechanisms work in daily life and on a global scale. We are careful about not revealing too much personal data to strangers or on the internet, just as government cannot reveal who is actually on the "No Fly List". Too much information fosters vulnerability.

Security Measures is a visual examination of safety from the intimate viewpoint of personal and domestic space to the broad international arena. This body of work looks at the mechanisms and protocols constructed to achieve a feeling of security. Personal awareness of vulnerability, exposure and security along with concepts of authority, structure, and political policies are probed through painting, installation, video and sculptural work.

Interest and Influence

My interest in perceptions of security is rooted in childhood. I learned at an early age that security is a constructed idea and also that perception plays a large role in feeling safe. I have observed a tendency in our culture to try to codify our way out of risk. Real safety is only a rule or law away, and it is the responsibility of authority, from parent to government, to keep their charges safe.

Another major influence in my approach to my work is having come of age in a time of social upheaval. "Question Everything" was the mantra of a generation at the forefront of social revolution. As part of that generation, social activism is an important part of who I am and an integral component of my work. I am compelled to speak out on issues that move me and use a visual vocabulary to articulate my thoughts.

Security Measures is a result of my ongoing interest in constructed realities related to safety. The events of September 11, 2001 have served to increase our willingness to sacrifice personal freedom for security. Coupled with the exponential growth of data collection, digital imaging, social media and the massive amount of information available through our public personas and online activity, I am reminded of Jeremy Bentham's Panoptican. His 1778 writings detailed a plan for efficient institutional architecture could be overseen with minimal manpower. Bentham imagined a circular structure with a central command point at the hub. All cells or stations radiated out along the outer perimeter, partitioned off from each other but always visible to the central point of inspection. The efficiency of his structure hinged on the visibility of all cells and inmate's constant awareness of the possibility of being observed. (2)

Process

Starting with a general concept such as "Safety" my work explores materials and processes related to that idea. Each material that I use has inherent physical properties and cultural or personal associations. For example, a printed document may refer to authority, bureaucracy, mechanical reproduction or authenticity. It is accessible in size and cost, light in weight. It can be scanned, folded, shredded, mailed, or reworked in a multitude of ways as well as containing printed information in text, maps, charts, graphs and images.

There is a constant editing and reconstruction process present in my work. Patterns emerge and become distorted with layering and constant reworking, suggesting an effort to remake the narrative into a more palatable story.

With each series within this body of work, another layer of the concept is revealed. Each piece leads to several more, excavating deeper into the overarching concept.

Exposure and Vulnerability

The first avenue I chose to talk about safety was through exposure and vulnerability. The materials used in *Exposed* 2009 (fig.1) and other pieces in this series are undergarments known as "granny panties". These are sturdy cotton, high coverage, practical garments, meant to be hidden from view. Many bear a floral print reminiscent of little girl's panties. All reference to sensuality or sexuality are absent from these panties in their usual context. In this series, I recontextualize the panties by exposing them to focused public scrutiny or reconstruct them to challenge the notion of mature women needing to repress their sexuality. *Girly* 2009 (fig. 2) sports rows of lace ruffles, referencing the sexualization of little girls at the same time as the infantilization of older women. *Safety* 2010 (fig. 3) uses hundreds of safety pins in a chaotic and frenzied application that bind the garment closed and render it impossible to wear. The excessive overuse of the safety mechanism suggests a desperate attempt to achieve real safety. This series concluded with the creation and printing of my own patterns to replace the childish florals typically used.

Concealing or Revealing

Floral patterns recall domestic space and the safety of hearth and home. The next series in this body of work delves further into the idea of pattern as structure, starting with the intimacy of private domestic space, then evolving to shared public space. The process of editing to preserve privacy and publishing to create a public face is the driving force behind this series of paintings.

The background grid in *Disclaimer* 2010 (fig. 4) brings to mind the X-Y axis and authority of the information contained in a graph. The base unit of the overlying pattern is a simplified floral resembling an asterisk, the common notation of a footnote or disclaimer in a document. The pattern breaks free of the structural framework, running rampant across the charted surface and creating an advanced guard of asterisks.

It Is What It Is 2010 (fig. 5) uses a simple floral pattern that floats to the surface in some areas and submerges beneath layers of paint in others. The vigorous reworking of the surface makes it hard to determine what is being hidden and what is revealed. Multiple layers applied and removed simultaneously divulge and conceal bits of the history of the surface. The pattern becomes distorted through the application and scraping away of paint, destabilizing the underlying structure. *Good Neighbors* 2010 (fig. 6) hints at narrative with fragments of a nostalgic cabbage rose textile pattern showing through layers of vigorous application and removal of paint. Text is scraped into the paint, barely decipherable and further compromising the integrity of the floral pattern.

The final painting in this series, *49 CFR* 2011 (fig. 7), widens the definition of "domestic" beyond the home to the national stage. Sections of legal disclaimer

transferred directly from printed documents compete with color and pattern on the surface of the panel. The source document, Title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations (49 CFR), spells out the consequences for divulging sensitive security information. The domestic pattern neutralizes the content of the documents, weakening their authority while the combination of domestic and official mimics the integration of public policy into everyday life.

Security Theater

The airport is the place where ordinary people come face to face with the idea of real harm (terrorism) and the expectations placed on government to accomplish the impossible task of making us safe. My current work examines our attempt to codify safety and the theatre enacted to make us feel secured. *~~Redacted~~ 2011* (fig. 8) is based on a Transportation Security Administration training manual improperly published on a government website and now available on Wiki leaks.(4) The original redactions were done digitally and easily removed, exposing all of the hidden information and leaving a thin box indicating the previously concealed area.   The manual and other government documents were sent through a thermal printing fax machine. This piece is constructed from the fax cartridges bearing the negative images of the training manual, radiation readings from airport scanners around the country, charts, graphs and air transport related maps. The fax machine is emblematic of the bureaucratic office as well as creating an additional copy of this sensitive material, further violating the security of the information and referencing the scanning methods in use at airports.

The piece tends to redact the space it occupies, obscuring it with a large black mark. The material of the fax cartridge alternately hides and reveals the imprinted information according to the light. The delicacy of the cartridge ribbon contrasts with the weight of National Security and the promise of consequences for allowing controlled information out into the world.

~~Redacted~~ V2 2011 (fig.10) contains the redacted portions removed from the fax cartridge and applied to document size glass, referencing transparency (and lack of) as

well as exposing the viewer to the hazard of the raw edged glass precariously balanced on a narrow display shelf running along the perimeter of the room. The work surrounds the viewer but from a seemingly polite distance. Each section of redacted text is lifted from the fax cartridge with adhesive and transferred to the corresponding position on the sections of glass, replicating the thirty pages with sensitive information.

Redacted spawned several derivative pieces including a video projection layering portions of edited documents with the clips of the original work, corresponding to TSA's approach to Layers of Security.

The production of the *Redacted* pieces created stacks of additional printed documents. When fed through a cross cut shredder, the documents are rendered unreadable and the resulting scraps resemble the petals of flowers. Using the shredded documents, wallpaper and acrylic paint, *Encroachment* (fig. 11) subverts the authority of this sensitive document by making it into a decorative, useless and illegible image. The merging with actual and painted wall paper pattern reminiscent of domestic space speaks to blending of national security into routine existence.

Containment uses The Patriot Act of 2002 (HR3162), a natural expansion of resource material. The three hundred page document was shredded and reformed into pieces of serving ware, seemingly repurposing the document, while further integrating a major government security measure into daily life. The serving pieces only appear functional, but are not safe for use with edible goods.

The thought of security measures infiltrating daily life and our private sanctums inspired *Preemptive* (fig.12). A laser cut Homeland Security logo created a highly detailed mold for casting soap. Vanilla scented shea butter soap creates pleasant but

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generic wafer-like discs suggestive of hotel toiletries and travel; the kind guests often

bring home for personal use. The cleansing properties refer back to safety while the

intimate use of rubbing it on the body with a lingering scent further integrate it into the

everyday.

The Homeland Security logo appears again in *Insidious* (fig. 13). At first glance,

the screen printed border on the institutional grade towels appears to be a border found on

the common domestic type: a medallion entwined in flourishing vines. Closer inspection

reveals the stamp of Homeland Security. A common commercial dispenser holds the

towels, meant to be installed in a public space near the other utilitarian components such

as light switches, thermostats or outlets underscoring how seamless the integration of

security protocols have become. The piece is often overlooked, even in rooms without

any practical need for a towel dispenser.

The Panoptican Revisited

The blurring of public and private is undergoing a major transformation. Cameras are inexpensive and ever present: commonly integrated into phones and computers, web cams monitor public spaces such as intersections, beaches, highways, public buildings, commerce and travel centers. We are aware of the existence of these cameras and give them little thought. Social media makes it easy for us to post spontaneous images and information. Photos can be uploaded to internet sites such as Twitter and Facebook with little more than the click of a button. Smartphone applications make it easy to track the movements of our friends while informing the world of our own whereabouts, preferences and dislikes.

Airport screening methods now include pat downs or scanning technology that can see through the clothes of the traveler. The ACLU refers to backscatter x-ray technology as "Virtual Strip Searches". (5) Yet there has been little significant opposition to these processes. Internet providers, search engines, ecommerce sites constantly collect information freely given. This information is complied by data aggregators and sold for marketing, employment, background checks and law enforcement as well as being culled for criminal purposes. (6)

I am interested in our acceptance and even complicity in the constant encroachments into our privacy. We are creating our own E-version of Jeremy Bentham's Panoptican: a virtual place where we are constantly aware of the possibility of being observed. In *Discipline and Punish*, philosopher Michel Foucault observes the Panoptican is not to be thought of as a building, but as a mechanism of power. (7) This

seems especially true for us in the Information Age, where our visibility consists of the

glut of information about us.

Conclusion

My final piece as an MFA candidate *Photo Op* 2012 (fig. 14, 15) plays into this willingness to pose and document our movements. The 8' x 10' Step and Repeat uses logos from Homeland Security, social media giants Twitter and Facebook, search engine and advertising giant Google and CSU Northridge to create the pattern for a publicity photo backdrop complete with red carpet and velvet rope. This piece was installed in the entryway to the CSUN Art Galleries for the 2012 Graduate Thesis Show, where at the opening reception, guests were able to tweet or message their photos to Twitter's cloud based repository, where the data and images are compiled and published, available to anyone who searches for #securitymeasures. Tweets from my username @securitymeasure are posted to the Facebook community "Security Measures", which is an open access community where anyone can post images and comments.

Taken together, my work invites the viewer to critique current perceptions and instruments of security, authority and privacy as well examining our own roles in the shifting landscape of personal privacy and public good.

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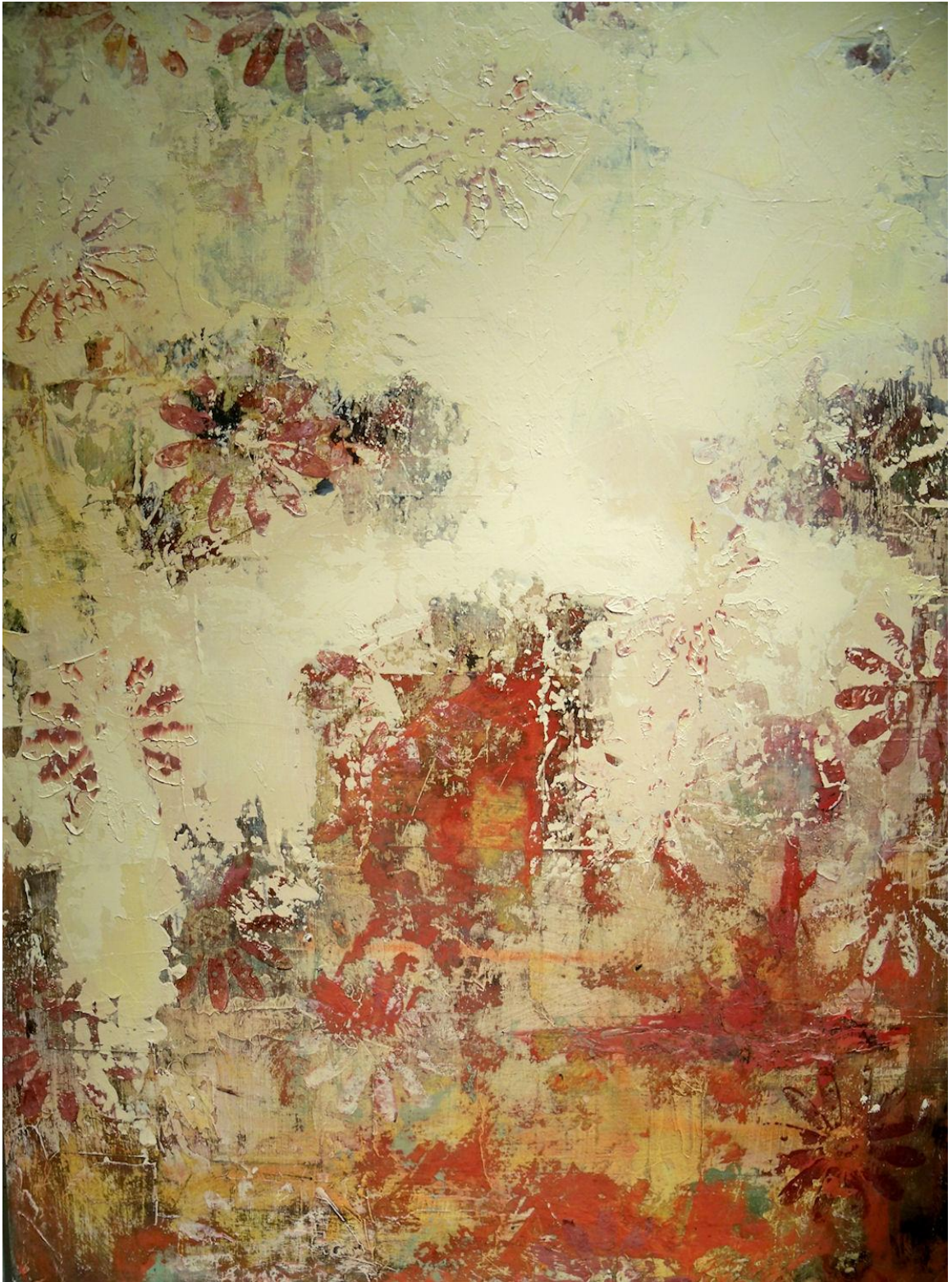(1) Exposed 2009
Cotton underwear on clothesline

(2) Girly 2009
Cotton underwear, wire and lace
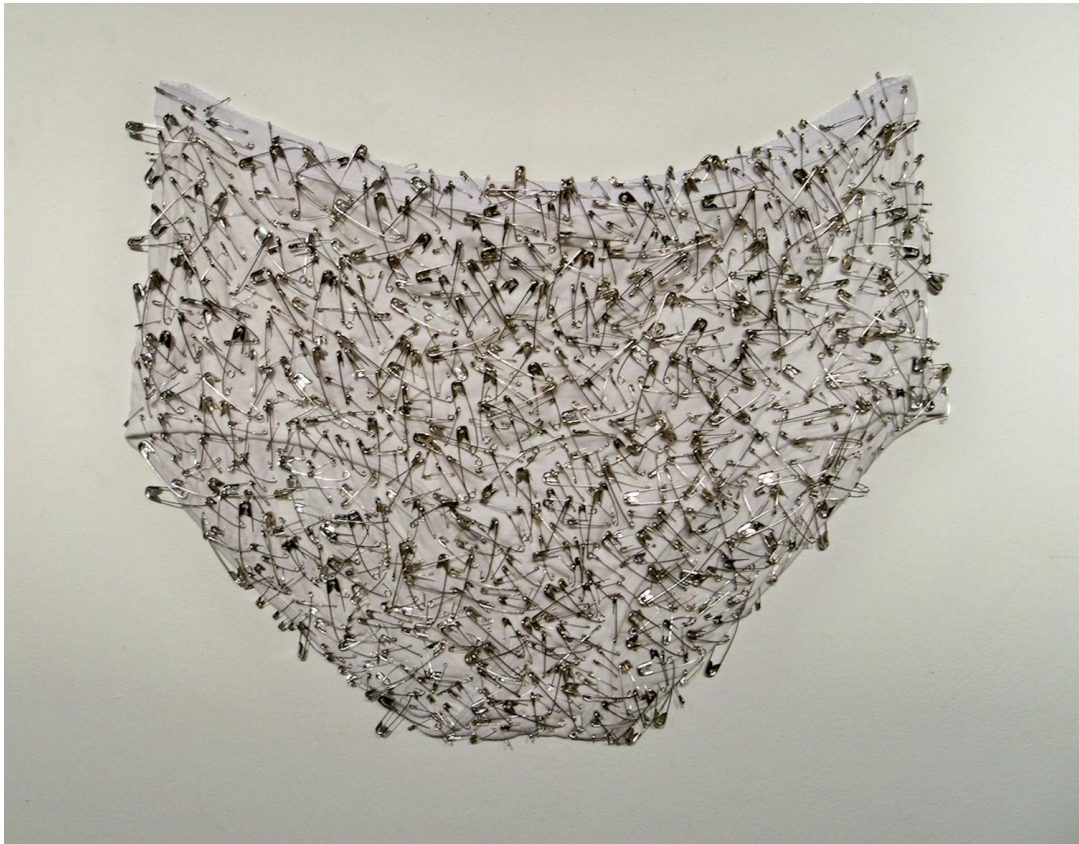
(3) safety 2009
Cotton underwear with safety pins

(4) Disclaimer 2010
Acrylic on panel 42"x36"

(5) It Is What It Is 2010
Acrylic and oil on panel 24"x18"

(6) Good Neighbors 2010
Acrylic, oil and oil pastel on panel 24"x18"

(7) 49 CFR 2011
Acrylic, oil, photocopy transfers, paint stripper, and charcoal 72"x48"

(8) ~~Redacted~~ 2011 Exterior View
Fax cartridge, wood frame

(9) Redacted 2011 Interior View
Fax cartridge, wood frame

(10) Redacted V2 2011
26 pieces of document glass, packing tape, with fax cartridge on wood shelf

(11) Encroachment 2011/12
Acrylic, wall paper and shredded documents 24"x24"

(12) Preemptive 2011/12
Cast vanilla shea butter soap

(13) Insidious 2011/12
Institutional dispenser with screen printed towels

(14) Photo Op 2012 Photoshop sketch of thesis show installation
8'x10' step & repeat with red carpet and velvet ropes