Healing Sanctuary

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Recommended Citation
DOI: 10.58809/CAZU3702
Available at: https://scholars.fhsu.edu/theses/3213

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Thesis: Healing Sanctuary

Author: Kammy Downs

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Date: 10-25-2022
Healing Sanctuary

Kammy Downs
MFA Thesis Exhibition
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Professor of Art History and Humanities, Member

Linda Ganstrom, MFA
Professor of Ceramics, Member

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Professor of Philosophy, Member

MFA Thesis Exhibition / Graduate Catalog
Kammy Kennelley Downs
Master of Fine Arts Degree
Fort Hays State University
Hays, Kansas
2022

Tessa Zimmerman, Catalog Designer
Kammy Downs, Photographer

This catalog submitted to the Graduate School in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of Master of Fine Arts.
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Biography

Raised in rural South-Central Kansas, Kammy Downs enjoyed a supportive childhood that allowed exploration of creative pursuits and nature. Her mother and grandmothers were strong, creative, female mentors. Her mom was an exceptional seamstress who designed her own clothing and taught Downs to sew at an early age. Her grandpa’s carpentry shop smelled of fresh cut wood for cabinets, and air boats. He made each family member their own kayak. Her dad’s shop was filled with his handiwork from hunting arrows, fishing lures to bench made knives. He crafted a knife just for her. This environment laid a strong foundation for Downs’ creative feminist identity reflected in her art practice and fueled a passion for promoting arts in the community.

As a child, Downs’ father instilled in her a respect for nature. She remembers, “Dad pointed out that nature was dangerous and beautiful at the same time.” Her parents were skilled hunters and craftsmen that sought to care for the environment. They took only what was needed for food and left the land as it was found. The many hours playing along lakes and rivers of Kansas and Missouri provided a creative, spiritual space for Downs.

Plants represent beauty and healing for Downs. Through an experience of health issues that were spiraling downward with each visit to the medical doctor she found herself seeking natural solutions. This long journey has led her to believe that healing is individual and that living closer to nature will optimize the healing response to herbal and homeopathic remedies. Downs has become proficient at the art of homeopathic healing and her natural immune system strengthened. Patience is required to personally create optimal health.

Downs attended Bluestem High School in Leon, Kansas, Butler County Community College, and then Emporia State University where she was inspired to teach art. The teaching style of Ruth Markos, Robert Chism, and
Richard Stauffer impacted her passion for developing students artistically. Her value of the art-making process has deepened through the experience of teaching for 35+ years in a variety of institutions from Montessori to public schools in California, Kansas, and Missouri. She has had the privilege of creating several murals with students and writing public art grants, two of which included work with internationally known Kansas artists, Stan Herd and Shin-hee Chin.

The Master of Fine Arts program at Fort Hays State University has affected Downs’ art practice exponentially. As a result, two works, Seedling III and Impress III were accepted into the 2020 Salina Biennial Exhibition fulfilling a long-held goal for her. On top of this, she has gained a Social Practice component called Seeds4HOPE to bring attention to strategies and resources for staying resilient when faced with depression.

Downs plans to continue to participate in social practice work and grant writing to promote arts in her community. She and her husband, Gary, live in Kansas City and have five grown daughters and four grandchildren.
The natural world has hidden wisdom and resources that are disregarded as we misuse our responsibility to care for them. The benefits of being in tune with nature have been traded for a culture that manipulates nature on the altar of expediency, waste, and unquenchable desire. Healing Sanctuary presents a duality. My work speaks about the relationship between the seen and unseen, represented by ten larger-than-life drawings of medicinal herbal plants that have had a profound physical healing effect on me. At the same time, plants, roots, and seeds create visceral metaphors for mental health. Our accomplishments, outlook on life, and behavior mostly grow from the gut-wrenching, dirty work of developing a thought life that serves us. Our mental resilience can be strengthened by “planting” various strategies beneath the surface.

After experiencing compounded adverse effects of pharmaceuticals, I began using natural remedies. I ended a cycle of fatigue from antibiotic use with Echinacea and Stinging Nettles. In Echinacea and Stinging Nettles, you see the whole plant with roots as a metaphor for systemic healing without harm. The hand-stitched details represent hours of slow hand stitching parallel to the slow disciplined process of healing the natural way. Later, my chiropractor introduced me to homeopathic remedies with no adverse effects. I can get breathing relief quickly with a homeopathic remedy called Bryonia Alba, while Chamomile calms my nerves. In Bryonia Alba, fabric layers depict a renewed health and a new understanding of living in harmony with nature. Chamomile shows the beauty of Turmeric dye to characterize my joy restored. The ten herbs highlighted in Healing Sanctuary were the first ten herbs and homeopathic remedies that introduced to me to the art of natural healing. The pharmaceutical-grade antifungal I was taking at the time created severe depression and thoughts of suicide if I took too much.
at one time. This was a terrifying experience, especially since I was taking care of four little ones at the time and the antifungal dosage was difficult to control. I began using Oregano oil and garlic as natural antifungals without depression.

My art practice involves a slow process which includes creating local plant dyes. The dye process is always a magical experience. It’s as if I am working with inspired plants that “play along” with “a mind of their own.” Once fabrics are dyed, I choose a “back” and “top” piece to combine like quilt making. It is important to combine recycled material with a bit of new fabric to reconcile new with old. I use water-soluble graphite to draw a medicinal plant and its roots to represent the relationship of the seen to the unseen. The fabrics are then stitched together with threads dyed with natural dyes. Many stitches were sewn in tandem with the contour lines of each plant, while other stitches express features or the plant’s energy. I cut away shapes in either the top or back of the fabric so that transparency would be achieved with the lighting in the gallery, as seen in Stinging Nettles. After stitches are completed, I add expressive lines and shapes with Inktense sticks, as seen in Lavender and Green Tea. Two-inch wide strips of earthy green fabric create a broken binding around each artwork to connect the work to quilting as an art form. These ten works have an ephemeral character, as natural dyes will fade quickly. Air easily moves the fabrics creating a sense of being alive and robust.

Concurrent with learning the art of natural healing for my physical body, I was learning natural methods for mental health. Reframing, meditation, and practicing gratefulness have been personally helpful to my mental and spiritual growth. Slow stitching portrays the daily patience required to set new habits. Each stitch is created intuitively without a pattern but, at the same time, very intentional. The natural world is truly a healing place where I feel closer to God. Plants represent beauty and healing to me.
Stinging Nettles

Mix-media, ink, water-soluable graphite, thread, on natural plant dyed muslin overlaid on recycled cotton 88"x30"
Echinacea

Mix-media, ink, water-soluable graphite, thread, on natural plant dyed muslin overlaid on plant dyed cotton
88"x30"
Chamomile

Mix-media, ink, water-soluable graphite, thread, ecoprint silk pieces, on natural plant dyed silk overlaid on recycled muslin 88”x30”
Journey Begins
Mix-media, ink, water-soluable graphite, thread, coffee on recycled muslin
65”x48.5”
Patience II
Mix-media, ink, water-soluable graphite, thread, and muslin on unstretched canvas
62”x22.5”

Pod Life
Mix-media, ink, graphite, thread on unstretched canvas
29.5”x13.5”
Garden Rows
Mix-media, ink, graphite, thread on unstretched canvas 14”x61.5”
Jerusalem Artichoke

Mix-media, ink, graphite, thread & fibers on unstretched canvas
32.5"x49"
Seeds for Hope

Social Practice Art Project
Mix-media, ink, water-soluable graphite, threads on muslin seed shapes and stitched on bleach dyed recycled dust ruffle 237" x 14"
Allium Sativum Seeds
Mix-media, ink, water-soluable graphite, threads on muslin
14.5”x11”
Brassica Rubra Seeds
Mix-media, ink, water-soluable graphite, paint sticks, threads on Bull denim
15”x11”
Impress I
Graphite on Lenox paper
60”x38”
Impress II
Mix-media, ink, pastel, collage of rice papers & fibers, graphite on Lenox paper
60”x38”
Seedlings II
Mix-media, ink, graphite on watercolor paper
23.25”x23.5”

Seedlings III
Mix-media, ink, graphite, fabric on Lenox paper mounted on canvas
24”x24”
Passion Fruit
Mix-media, ink, water-soluable graphite, threads, natural plant dyed muslin, silk, organza on linen 52"x39"
Pulsatilla
Mix-media, ink, water-soluable graphite, thread, ecoprint silk pieces, on natural plant dyed silk overlaid on recycled muslin 88”x30”
Bryonia Alba

Mix-media, ink, water-soluble graphite, thread, ecoprint silk pieces, on natural plant dyed cotton overlaid on recycled drape fabric 88”x30”
Works Not Photographed

**Pulsatilla**
Mix-media, ink, water-soluble graphite, thread, Eco print silk pieces, on natural plant dyed silk overlaid on recycled muslin
88”x30”

**Bryonia Alba**
Mix-media, ink, water-soluble graphite, thread, ecoprint silk pieces, on natural plant dyed cotton overlaid on recycled drape fabric
88”x30”

**Lavender**
Mix-media, water-soluble graphite, thread, on natural plant dyed silk with natural plant dyed silk organza inserts overlaid on ink drawing on cotton voile
88”x30”

**Peppermint**
Mix-media, ink, water-soluble graphite, thread, on natural plant dyed cotton overlaid on recycled drape fabric
88”x30”

**Garlic**
mix-media, ink, water-soluble graphite, and thread on plant dyed cotton voile, overlaid with pieced plant dyed organza and embroidery
88”x30”
Works Not Photographed Cont.

Elderberry
mix-media, ink, water-soluble graphite, and thread on plant dyed cotton voile, overlaid with pieced plant dyed organza and embroidery
88”x30”

Green Tea
mix-media, ink, water-soluble graphite, and thread on cotton voile, overlaid with pieced plant dyed organza, and Tobacco cotton, and embroidery
88”x30”
Curriculum Vitae

Education
2022 MFA Drawing, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS (expected December 2022)

2013 Digital Arts & Design Certificate, University California Riverside Ext., Riverside, CA

1983 Bachelor of Science in Art Education, Emporia State University, Emporia, KS

1981 Associate of Arts, Butler County Community College, El Dorado, KS

(Noting honors at Butler Community College, Emporia State, and Fort Hays State)

Teaching Experience
2019 - 20 Graduate Teaching Assistant, drawing, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS

1986 – 2019 K-12 Art Instructor: Kansas City Missouri Public Schools, KCMO; Liberal High School, Liberal, KS; The Grove School, Redlands, CA; Trinity Learning Center, Redlands, CA; Liberty Academy, Harper, KS; Arrowhead Christian Academy, Redlands, CA

Other Experience
2016 - 18 Chief Executive Officer, Arkansas City Area Chamber of Commerce, Ark City, KS

2014 - 16 Arts Director, Arkansas City Area Arts Council, Arkansas City, KS
Exhibitions
2022 Out of Nothing - Exnihilio Gallery online

2022 Flora & Fauna - Morris Gallery of the NOTO Arts Center, Topeka, KS

2022 Kansas Through the Eyes of the Artist - Carriage Factory Gallery, Newton, KS

2021 November Exhibition - Jones Gallery, Kansas City, MO

2021 October Exhibition - Jones Gallery, Kansas City, MO

2021 Fort Hays State Graduate Student Exhibit - Moss Thornes Gallery, Hays, KS

2020 Artista - Baker Arts Center, Liberal, KS

2020 FHSU Drawing Majors Show, Garden City Community College, Garden City, KS

2020 Feminista, group show, Baker Arts Center, Liberal, KS

2020 51st Annual Smokyhill Art Exhibition, Hays Arts Council, Hays, KS

2020 Salina Biennial: Contemporary Art from the Mountain-Plains Region, Salina Art Center, Salina, KS

2019 Solo Exhibition, One Door North Gallery, Clay-works, McPherson, KS

2019 Selected Shows, Jones Gallery, Kansas City, MO

2018 Fort Hays State University Graduate Student Exhibition, Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg, KS.

2015 Moving Toward Grace Exhibition, Inversion Gallery, Wichita, KS
Curriculum Vitae Continued

Community/Social Practice Projects
2020 Making a Safe Place: A Collaborative Art Project with developmentally disabled adults and college students – Visiting Artist Shin-hee Chin, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS

2019 Collaborative Art Project with developmentally disabled adults and college students, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS

2016 – 2018 Ark City 5th Thursday Art Crawl: integrating business and the arts, Arkansas City, KS

2018 Stan Herd Cherokee Strip Landrush mural restoration, Arkansas City, KS

2017 Ark City Place mural on a business downtown - SEEDS Program, Ark City Arts Council, Arkansas City, KS

2016 Dream Catcher community art and music with visiting artist Shin-hee Chin - SEEDS Program, Ark City Arts Council, Arkansas City, KS

2014 Science Hall mural: student project, Liberal High School, Liberal, KS

Awards/Grants/Fellowships
2019 Graduate Scholarly Experience Grant, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS

2019 - 20 Graduate Teaching Assistantship, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS

2020 Artist Residency and Show, The Red Barn Studio, Lindsborg, KS

2019 Artist Residency and Show, The Red Barn Studio, Lindsborg, KS

2018-21 Earl O. & Winona M. Field Art Scholarship, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS
Curriculum Vitae Continued

2016 V.J. Wilkins Foundation Grant $17,900, “Seeds Artists Mentoring Program”, Arkansas City, KS

2015 V.J. Wilkins Foundation Grant $22,000, “Seeds Artists Mentoring Program”, Arkansas City, KS

2010 University of California approved Design Course, Grove High School, Redlands, CA

2009 & 2013 Studio Drawing: AP course, Grove High School, Redlands, CA; Liberal High School, Liberal, KS

1980 Honors, Warren Hall Coutts Memorial Art Scholarship

1979 Warren Hall Coutts Memorial Art Scholarship

Commissions
2018 Two Exterior Murals, The Rink - Roller Skating, Winfield, KS

Workshops
2021 “Story Boards,” RoamKC, Olathe, KS

2020-21 “Visiting Artist Lectures”, Arts for Social Change club, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS

2019 “Art Slam”, Arts for Social Change club, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS

2019 “Memories” Collage, Workshop, Red Barn Studio, Lindsborg, KS

2017 “Floral Collage workshop”, Mosaic, Winfield, KS

2016 “Silk & Yoga for Relaxation”, Ark City Arts Council, Arkansas City, KS

2015 “Children’s Collage”, Ark City Arts Council, Arkansas City, KS

2015 “Adult and Student Drawing” and “Collage” Workshops, Ark City Arts Council, Arkansas City, KS
Acknowledgements

I owe the greatest gratitude to my Lord Jesus Christ who has given me this time and space within the Master of Fine Arts program to develop my personal art practice. He is the creator of all that I am as well as that of all nature in which I find so much solace. Gary Downs, you have been there in the unseen depths of this journey. You believed in me. You drove me around a lot. Thank you, mom and dad, who have modeled a maker’s life and developed my love for nature. Along the way, my five daughters have given a great deal of optimism and support.

A special THANK YOU goes to Professor Amy Schmeirbach Committee Chair. I greatly appreciate the simplicity in your leadership. You are a respectful, gentle woman of strength that was hand-picked as my guide. God knew what I needed during this time.

Graduate committee members Linda Ganstrom, Erica Bittel, and Eugene Rice thank you for your insightful conversations. Fort Hays State University Art and Design Department, you are a treasure.