

Everyday is different and special. It could potentially be your last. Every ritual is special and different (even if it's the same ritual). That makes everyday a ritual. But rituals can also be more specific and concrete: updating a blog once a week, going to every single Grateful Dead concert in '68, watching Scooby-Doo every rainy day during the summer. What is ritual? What is the difference between ritual and routine? What are my rituals?

Routine is the same thing every single day without really thinking about it:

- Wake up at 8am
- Get dressed
- Brush teeth after getting dressed
- Frosted flakes and cranberry juice for breakfast
- Working in the studio from 9am to 11:45am

There's this beige-suburban-mom-robot quality to routine. Yet, when you really think about it, routine started out as ritual. Everything is a step-by-step process that we teach ourselves until we have it memorized and can do it without thinking about it.

Ritual is very meditated yet exciting:

- I am going to fill 18 jars with dirt
- Every jar of dirt is going to be filled with dirt from different locations in Napa
- I will walk for ten to fifteen minutes every day to a new location to get new dirt
- The walk will get me out of the studio and give me time to meditate
- Before I go on my walk, I will pack my orange backpack with:
  - One glass jar filled with warm water and two drops of lavender oil
  - One trowel
  - The Country Between Us* by Carolyn Forché
  - One piece of paper
  - One pen
  - One audio recorder
- I will arrive at a suitable spot
- I will sit on the ground with my backpack on my right side
- I will take out the jar of dirt and pour the water over the patch of dirt I would like to dig up
- I will read "Photograph Of My Room" by Carolyn Forché to the patch of dirt
- I will take the trowel, dig up the dirt, and place it in the jar
- I will write down a wish for the day and place my wish in the jar of dirt
- I will then place everything back in my backpack and walk back to school

Childhood is odd yet completely precious. It holds this time that lets us create and explore this world of make-believe. Katie's little sister, Beans, holds true to this way of

being. Once, she asked Katie to bring home some milk. Instead of drinking the milk like, Katie thought she would, Beans poured it into a Tupperware container that contained a tooth. Without a word, Beans sealed the container and left the room. Even as adults, we do things for rituals sake, yet we learn how to explain them to ourselves. My mother puts on six or seven different silver bracelets every morning. She wears them because each was given to her by a different friend whom she loves and who love her. The bracelets to her represent this force-field of love that protects her.

There's this fine line between childhood and adulthood: being a teenager. During this time we "come of age". The term "coming of age" means becoming a man or woman in most cultures (or becoming ready to bear children). What are some rituals surrounding coming of age for girls? There are many that are more famous, but the one I grew up hearing about the most is the Red Tent ritual. In the Bible, Jacob's (the brother of Joseph) tribe has this tent where women go when they are menstruating and giving birth, hence the name Red Tent. According the stories I've been told about the Red Tent, the men of the tribe stand around and guard the tent while the women are in it. Now, I'm not religious, but I've grown up going to mother-daughter workshops run by a family friend where this story is told. At the workshop itself, there is a red tent set up in the corner filled with blankets, pillows, books, and lamps with red shades. It was a place of safety and comfort where late nights were spent talking about body image and sex. No judgment was passed there.

In Judaism, there's a ritual called Bat Mitzvah. When a girl turns twelve, she goes through a ceremony where she reads from the Torah and are given their rabbi. After the ritual, she becomes responsible for her actions and following Jewish laws, and is able to marry. It's weird to think that even though she's considered a woman and is a woman, she still can't take care of herself (in America at least). Isn't that the biggest responsibility? If she does marry around this age and is only aloud to bear children and stay at home, how is she supposed to learn anything? I know this paper is about ritual, but I think being deemed a woman at such a young age is ridiculous.

Back to coming of age rituals: According to *The Circle of Life* by David Cohen, Kau women in Sudan are "cicatrized with welts that mark transitions in her age and social status...At pubescences, a Kau girl receives an initial set of scarification welts from her navel to her breasts." (93). The scarification process continues until she weans her first child. Though it's starting to fall away, scarification used to be a big custom in most of Africa. Not only was it used to decorate the body and show ones' social status, it also helped different tribes differentiate each other ([www.ezakwantu.com](http://www.ezakwantu.com)).

The reason I got into researching rituals is because of voodoo. That was my jumping off point for the entire project. Even though I've researched voodoo quite a bit, I still feel like I know nothing. When I was looking into Louisiana Voodoo on Wikipedia, I came across this quote: True rituals are held "behind closed doors" as a showy ritual would be considered disrespectful to the spirits (Ravitz). There's something that really speaks to me about this. As a society, the modern world has this obsession with seeing everything. On top of that, it seems that the bigger and more money that's put into something the more impressive it is. I like looking at new things (always refreshing my Tumblr feed and looking for new artists on Cargo Collective), but I have a hard time understanding our obsession with "more, bigger, crazier". It may be impressive or lucrative, but it won't last forever. Also, I feel like the more someone tries to show off

their wealth, the more sucked into this shallow world of bad vibes. It becomes all they care about.

The quote above gave me this idea of recording sounds from my Dream Suit ritual (explained below) instead of using images or film to make the listener really focus and create their own version of the ritual.

While my jumping off point for the project was voodoo, I found myself drawn farther and farther out into the sea of ritual. I found that in this sea, there was an island composed of rituals that famous artists, writers, poets, and filmmakers created for themselves in order to get their work done. I found a lot of inspiration for my own rituals while reading this. When I first opened the book, I stumbled upon an image of Benjamin Franklin's daily schedule. Two things caught my attention while skimming through his schedule: he asked himself two questions every day. In the morning, he would ask himself: What good shall I do today? And at night, before going to sleep, he would ask himself: What good have I done today? (Currey). This discovery gave me the idea that what a lot of ritual is meditation and self-reflection. That's true for coming of age rituals, at least. The child who is going through the ritual thinks about what it means to be a child and what it means to be an adult. I know that this should be in the coming of age paragraph, but this is relevant to artists and creators: one becomes an adult by responsibility. By being an artist (or film maker, writer, musician, poet, etc.), there's this sense of responsibility to the work. If you want to create for a living, you have to find a way to fund yourself. This means taking the responsibility to write grant proposals and selling work.

Reflecting back on my life pre-Oxbow, I've realized that I have created many rituals. Some of the oldest date back to elementary school, while others are more recent. My favorite of all these rituals is the oldest: indoor picnics with grilled cheese sandwiches. It all started one Sunday afternoon in mid-January when I told my mom that I wanted to go on a picnic. Seeing as I was a youngin', I didn't quite grasp the fact that outside picnics weren't possible during the winter because of all the snow. But my mother didn't want me disappointed due to the weather, so we had an indoor picnic with grilled cheese sandwiches (on 500 grain and seed bread), English Breakfast tea (with milk and sugar) and M&M's for dessert. My mom packed the whole lunch up in my grandmothers picnic basket set with its metal containers and blue-grey plates. She grabbed the red and white checker table cloth and spread it out in a patch of sunshine. We've repeated this ritual at least once every winter since then. The food and spot of sunshine vary, but it's still the same: grilled cheese, tea, M&M's, picnic set, table cloth.

There's this sense of comfort from the repetition in this ritual. It happens every year, yet it's not over done. The sacredness of this ritual is nostalgia. At first, it was for fun, but the heart of this ritual has grown into "for old times sake" and "like when you were little". I don't mind that. In fact, I think that it's part of the beauty. It gives me this chance to remember what it's like to have only five or six years under my belt: school is a thing, but home is an even bigger thing. I am closer to the ground. There are glow-in-the-dark stars on my ceiling and everything that I'm not supposed to be doing is blamed on the Invisible Man (yet everyone seems to know that the Invisible Man is really the five/six year old with indigo ink on her hands). Like I said, it was a simpler time. A time without responsibility. Time unconsciously spent in the third dimension (Third Dimension: a place Slade made up to describe a sense of freedom that comes with

vacations or mental health days).

The second ritual is one between my uncle, Brian, and I. For as long as I can remember, my uncle has set off fireworks whenever he has the chance. When I was about eight, he started visiting, with his wife, every Fourth of July. We have our own private show that he conducts then after that we go to the local fireworks show. When I turned eleven, he asked me to help him set the pre-show fireworks off. Ever since then, I've been helping him with fireworks, even when it's not the Fourth of July. The year after that, we discovered Sky Lanterns (the itty bitty hot air balloons without the basket). We added them to our repertoire in order to impress the rest of the family. Every once and awhile, some of my other cousins try to get in on the lighting of the fireworks and sky lanterns, but he always shoos them away. It's just the two of us. There's this certain quite ceremony that we go through: setting up the fireworks then working together to set them off. The sky lantern requires patience that only the two of us have some times. It's made out of this thin paper that makes sure the heat is trapped but it can't weigh down the lantern itself. Because it's so fragile, we have to work together and be aware of what we're doing, even though not many words are exchanged. My uncle has his own sons, yet they're too hyped up, and I've never been really close with my actual dad because he gets nervous around small children. Brian became my stand in dad and having me help him with the fireworks was his way of showing me his affection for me.

The pre-Oxbow, and actually pre-high school ritual, was series of things I would do every night before or during a big snow storm. In New England, especially Connecticut because they don't really salt or plow the roads, snow days happen many times each winter. The night before school, if it was snowing hard or the weather man said that a lot of snow would fall over night or the next day, my friends and I would call each other and consult on whether the snow day rituals were worth doing. If they were, we would all put our pajamas inside out and backwards and walk around the dining room table backwards twice. We would then put an orange in the freezer, flush an ice-cube down the toilet, and place a spoon under our pillow when we went to sleep. I'm not sure how many times I did this, but I know that it "worked" at least 60 percent of the time. It didn't really matter if it worked or not, at least for me. I did it because it was so precise in the way things were done. There was something exciting about it. Pajamas, orange, ice-cube, spoon, bed. It was also exciting because I wasn't the only one. There was this collective in my friends who talked to their friends who talked to their friends. It gave us this hope that the next day would give us a little respite before continuing on in boring middle school.

For my final project, I've decided to create a series of rituals purposely. The first one I started working on almost instantly, was the dirt jar series. Every day, I walk of campus with my orange backpack that holds my supplies: A glass Juice Squeeze bottle, a trowel (also known as a spade or small shovel), some paper (used for writing down wishes), a pen, a bottle of essential oils, and a couple of plastic bags. I walk until I find a spot that feels right. I don't know how I know it's right. Well, actually I do. It's called intuition. I have this feeling in my gut that tells me the dirt has good vibes. At that point in time, I pull out the trowel, bag, bottle, and oil. I place the oil in the bottle and let it sit while I dig up the dirt. I place the dirt in the bag, cut a hole in one of the corners of the bag, then funnel it into the bottle. The funneling part takes the longest, yet it's the best part. It's a repeated movement that takes time and focus that centers me. I have to

concentrate enough to get the dirt into the bottle and not onto my hands, but there's this other part of my brain that is left to sit and contemplate what I'll write down on the piece of paper that I brought along. The wishes tend to reflect on what my day has been like so far and how I would like the rest of my day to go.

I first started doing this ritual for two reasons: I wanted dirt from all different parts of Napa and I didn't want to be on campus all day. As I thought more and more about it, I felt like those were such shallow reasons. I added the wish part to the ritual so I could give myself time to meditate on where I had been, what I had done, what I was going to do, and where I was going next mentally and artistically each day. It's really helpful because it's helped me focus in on what I need to do for the final project and what I need to do for myself.

The second ritual I've started since final project, is getting stuff ready for the creation of the Dream Suit (a suit inspired by Nick Cave's Sound Suits). Everyday, I find myself stooping down several times to collect a couple of leaves that catch my eye. There's this highly personal aspect to this ritual of collecting leaves because I have to find the right ones out of hundreds of others.

When I was first collecting the leaves, I just kept them in this pile on my desk in my room, but then I realized that this wasn't right. Leaving them out would mean having them get crushed into Autumn dust. I proceeded to place them in a small cardboard box. The box filled and I had to find another. I did just that and pretty soon, it too was full. I now have four boxes of leaves in my room, including a box that my mom sent me containing leaves from around our house. I think out of all of the leaves I have, the ones from home are the most special. They are what I've known my entire sixteen year existence; maple, birch, tulip, apple, pine (they're needles, but they still fall when it gets cold).

As the project progressed, it transformed. I made the Dream Suit by sewing two sweaters together, but I found that I wasn't challenged during the process. I became bored with the suit because the ritual that I was going to perform while wearing the suit seemed too easy to bullshit. The performance piece was going to take place in my bedroom at 7pm each night, but no one would be aloud in the room while I was performing and I wasn't going to visually record the ritual. Instead, I was going to record the sound of the ritual. While I was making the suit, I became lazy. I didn't really want to do the ritual each night.

During this time of trying to work on the suit, but not having enough motivation to really explore it, I created this ritual of going for walks to find dirt for my jars and spending time exploring art blogs like [www.booooooom.com/blog/art/](http://www.booooooom.com/blog/art/) and [www.thisiscolossal.com](http://www.thisiscolossal.com) as well as Tumblr. These two rituals combined, helped me find a project that would push and engage me at the same time.

This project is the walnut book. I found the project by stumbling upon several empty walnut shells and a series of images from Tumblr of a walnut with an accordion book inside of it. I took this format and applied my project topic: ritual. I decided that everyday, I would make a book based on my day plus several other books for random thoughts and observations. The books are titled with either dates or words. The words are the jumping off point for each book that isn't a reflection on my day. Each word is heavily thought about and represents each story for me (even if it's in a vague way). I also wanted to use words as well as the dates, so that the viewer would make their own

connections between the words and book itself.

Walnut Book Ritual (step-by-step):

- Cut walnuts in half and clean them out
- Drill a hole in the back of each walnut in order to mount them on the wall
- Cut 1 inch by 7 inch strips of paper
- Fold each strip up into an accordion
- BEGIN WORK
- Contemplate the day so far
- What have I done (physically, artistically) and observed?
- How do I feel about what I've done and observed? What impact do my actions have on myself and others?
- What will happen next?
- Where am I in my head?
- What's going on in my heart?
- Take those reflections and use them to use as inspiration to find the right word for the title
- Use the reflections and title for inspiration when drawing and painting on the books

Why do rituals matter? Rituals are special. They happen for a certain purpose and they tend to repeat, but they never grow old because the experience is always different. The difference lays in the faith of the person who is performing the ritual. Faith is hope: hope in a greater power. Without rituals, we wouldn't have faith. Without faith, the world would be less exciting. There would be a lack of doing because the outcome would be known: either it'll happen or not. Without ritual, there's no sense of chance to make hearts race and palms sweat. There would be no new outcome, only the same black and white that everybody knows.