

This series of softground etchings explores connections between memories and dreams. Throughout my research process, I learned how memory is created, what dreams consist of, and came to represent my own.

Each scene metaphorically references a specific moment from my Oxbow experience, relating to either people whose influence in my life here has been strong, or memories of turning points this semester. This topic is particularly important to me because these experiences occurred at a crucial stage in my development as an artist and person.

Wesley

# Memorable Experiences

Wesley



*Art as a personal exploration.*

*Art is an end to the question 'what is it?' or 'what does it mean?'*

*The meaning of art as it is experienced by the viewer, not the artist.*

*The artist's ideas are not essential to the art as seen by the viewer.*

*The viewer is an artist in the sense that he conceives a given piece of his own way that is unique to him.*

*His own imagination determines what it is, what it means.*

*The viewer does not have to be considered during the conception of the art, but should not be told, then, what to think or how to conceive it or what it means. There is no need for definition.*

*- from Keith Haring's journal.*

This paper looks at the memories I have gained from my time at the Oxbow School in Napa California. I analyze why we have memories and then recount some of the most prominent experiences that I had at the school.

I have considered myself as an artist since I was about ten years old. I went to a middle school for the arts where I learned how to create sculptures, develop pictures, print on plates, and paint on a canvas. Once I became involved with the study of art, I auditioned, and was eventually accepted, in Alexander W. Dreyfoos High School of the Arts. I have been striving to learn how to become a better artist since the beginning of high school. I first heard of Oxbow during my freshman year of high school. I was immediately interested, so I then considered Oxbow as an option for my junior year of high school. I thought about the Oxbow school as a compelling idea, but I never thought I would actually go to Napa California for a semester. My sophomore year I became even more interested in art. Then as sophomore year was coming to an end the question came up again, "should I go to Oxbow?" I realized that if I ever want to become a serious artist I would have to accept change to achieve my goals. I applied and was accepted. I decided that I would probably never have another opportunity like this ever again, so I decided to attend the school. During summer I spent hours trying to perfect my summer assignments, hoping to impress all the teachers and students upon presentation. I became very eager and curious of what it would be like going to school there. I was never very nervous to leave my parents or, my home, I was more nervous of the fact that I might leave for Oxbow without ever finding what I came to Oxbow to find. I arrived at Oxbow on Wednesday morning, I introduced myself to my dorm mates and their parents then settled in and began realizing the adventure I was about to embark on.

During my time at Oxbow, I have had a lot of memorable experiences. These experiences have helped me grow as an individual, both as a social being and a learner. While I think of Oxbow as one of the best times of my life, not all of my memories are particularly happy. I have had moments of unexplainable joy and fun, moments of meaningful conversations with friends, and moments of suffering. I have enjoyed skateboarding for most of my life and I carried that with me to Oxbow. On a Saturday morning two friends and I went out to skateboard at this local park. I was dropping in on a ramp and my board slipped out from under me and I moved my growth plates in my wrist and broke a bone. A week later I had surgery on it and was on really strong painkillers which restricting me from being able to leave my room and work in the studios. I eventually healed six weeks after the day I broke my wrist. I still questioned how it would of been if I never decide to leave that morning, but truthfully I don't regret it. I have had the opportunity to focus more on my art and less on other physical activities.

Another very life changing experience I have had here is my relationship with my girlfriend, Joanna. We have a well-built relationship; we have been dating for two and half months. I have spent a good portion of my Oxbow experience bonding with her; she has helped influence art ideas, changed me socially, and has taught me to be more compatible. An unforgettable memory we shared together was during the first couple weeks we arrived at Oxbow, I didn't know her that well. Joanna, a couple, I went to the bowling alley on a Saturday night. That night we pretended as if we were a couple just to be funny to the other couple. We bought each other fake rings, went into the photo booth, got massages, and played games in the arcade. I felt as if we were in an actual relationship and it felt normal. That night held lots of humor and unforgettable moments. Eventually I started dating her. It was weird to think about how in the past that the day we went to the bowling alley together we were actually on our first date, but little did we know that in the future we were going to relive being a happy couple again.

Our class was assigned to write a statement that describes what we live for. I rushed to finish mine the night before it was due. The next morning we arrived at a park, we hiked up a

hill. Then one by one each of us silently walk down the path, two minutes apart from each other. I was the second to last person to go and i waited about five minutes after the last person went so I didn't know exactly where to go, I tried not to become very concerned about that fact I had no clue where I was going and just let my mind wonder. When I went out on that solo hike I became aware and conscious of my surroundings, I started to register sounds, sights, and feelings that I didn't perceive before I started the hike. I was able to venture out onto my own path during the hike and explore, it felt very peaceful and relaxing. I was the last person to reach the destination, which didn't bother me; I quietly walked over to a branch and sat down on it. Then after five minutes of silence we started reading our "What I live for statements", there would be times that another person wouldn't get up and read their statements, but it seem to not disturb anyone, everyone seemed really patient. I was nervous to read mine but I assumed everyone else was nervous too. I was thinking to myself, when should I go? What should I say? Finally I decided to stand up and read mine. I was shivering but it wasn't cold out and halfway through that paper I closed my book and went mute. I knew what I was reading wasn't true, I started tearing up and mumbling, I was saying exactly what I felt, which was just how much how many I appreciate the people in my life and how sometimes i take them for granted. I don't exactly remember what I said because I was caught up with all these powerful emotions. I started asking myself so many questions: Why am I crying? What do I live for? What am I feeling? It was unexplainable. I hadn't cried in a long time and I couldn't comprehend what I was feeling. It was influential in a way because I wasn't crying over greed or contentment; it was something that my body wasn't used to. Later that day I tried to recollect my feelings and emotions, to rewrite my "What I live for statement". I still don't know exactly what I live for but I have came to acceptance that my life the way it is now satisfies me and my needs which is good enough. This experience was very pleasurable, I was able to cry in front of my peer and not feel embarrassed or ashamed, also it made me realize what I take for granted in life.

How does your memory work? "Memory is our ability to encode, store, retain and subsequently recall information and past experiences in the human brain. In general terms as the use of past experience to affect or influence current behavior. Memory what we remember, and gives us the capability to learn and adapt from previous experiences as well as to build relationships. It is the ability to remember past experiences, and the power or process of recalling to mind previously learned facts, experiences, impressions, skills and habits. It is the store of things learned and retained from our activity or experience, as evidenced by modification of structure or behavior" (The Human Memory, 2010). Neurons communicate through synaptic connections that interact with each other when certain neurotransmitters are present. Neurons only open a line of communication with each other when they receive stimulation from several of the same neurotransmitters at once. The connections between neurons and memory, is that neurons determines how a memory is formed. The persistent strengthening of these activated connections between neurons is called long-term potentiation (LTP). LTP is the most recognized cellular mechanism to explain memory because it can alter the strength between brain cell connections. If this strength is maintained, a memory can be formed and can be easily remember. LTP happens when nerve cells communicate to one another at an elevated rate without increased stimulation from neurotransmitters. Neurons gain the ability to become strengthened or permanently enhanced. This is the first steps to creating a memory. When you need to recall a memory the hippocampus and other parts of a brain work together to rebuild memory. When I think back on a memory I don't remember every detail of it, I remember little sections of it and a brain fills in the unfilled spaces. To remember something your brain has to process it in a certain

method: First your brain consciously registers the memory; this is called 'encoding'. Next, the brain must consolidate the memory and the last step is called retrieval. Retrieval is the process of getting something back from somewhere; in this case it's retrieving its information from the memory network (BBC, 2014). The human brain is hugely interconnected but three major components can be identified: the cerebrum, the cerebellum and the brainstem (The Human Memory, 2010). Inside the medial temporal lobe is the region of the brain known as the limbic system, which includes the hippocampus, the amygdala, the cingulate gyrus, the thalamus, the hypothalamus, the epithalamus, the mammillary body and other organs, many of which are related to the processing of memory. "Memory is located not in one particular place in the brain but is instead a brain-wide process in which several different areas of the brain act together with one another. Each element of a memory (sights, sounds, words, emotions) is encoded in the same part of the brain that originally created that fragment (visual cortex, motor cortex, language area, etc) and retrieval of a memory effectively reactivates the neural patterns generated during encoding. Encoding is the critical first step to creating a new memory. It allows the aware or conscious item of interest to be converted into a construct that can be stored within the brain, and then recalled later from short-term or long-term memory. Encoding is also involved in distributed memory, which ensures that even if part of the brain is damaged, some parts of an experience may still remain. Neither is memory a single unitary process but there are different types of memories, short-term and long-term memories are encoded and stored in different ways and in different parts of the brain. Fundamentally, memory represents change" (The Human Memory, 2010). Habits, ideologies, hopes, and our fears are influenced by what we remember in our past. We remember because the connections between our brains neurons change; each experience primes the brain for the next experience, so that the physical stuff we're made of reflects our history."

Why is art important to me? I have always been very interested in the study of art; I have been going to an art school since sixth grade. Most of my life revolves around the subject of art; art holds the most meaning to me in my life. I am constantly drawing in my sketchbook for concepts and ideas for my next piece of art. Art is one of my many talents, but it is probably the talent I'm best at. I really enjoy making art that is personal to me, because I get to tell a story to the viewer in the way that I present it. The products of my art contain memories from the past or versions of my future. I get my inspiration for art from other artist, moments in my life, world (economical, social, environmental, racial, political, and geographical) problems, or my dreams. Dreams are proven to increase your creativity, solve problems, find life purpose, and obtain accurate personal guidance. Your dreams hold your deep secrets and hidden feelings. Scientist predicts that your dreams consist of scenes that happened in your past or scenes that are going to occur in the future. The other meaning towards your dreams can be interpreted by symbols or logos that commonly occur in your dreams. Every detail, even the minutest element in your dream is important to the purpose between each dream. I feel as if when I create a piece of art I want the viewer to be able to perceive the piece anyway they want. And my art is not always about me, but I take consideration towards to viewer and how they convey the piece of art. I have also learned to appreciate art regardless of which form it comes in, conceptual art is a very sensitive topic and argument at Oxbow. Before I came to Oxbow I thought I can consider myself a good artist because I can draw a proportional human body, accurate perspective, and realistic shadows and shading, but I learn to realize that art come in all forms and you can't judge that artist with regards to other viewers opinions. Art making is the main reason I came to the

Oxbow school in the first place, I am trying to create an amazing portfolio for my sending school and colleges to see.

*Everything changes, everything is always different. All of these variables merging, interacting, destroying each other, building new forms, ideas, "realities", is one of the constant change and, as we label it, 'growth'*

-from Keith Haring's Journal.

I have faced many difficult challenges since I arrived at Oxbow; I have had trouble writing papers, managing my time, making art, getting along with my peers, and satisfying myself. I hold myself to high standards for my work so that I can be proud of myself when I am done. However, I am never truly satisfied which bothers me because I hoped to come to Oxbow to make seemingly good art. My goal was to come here create an amazing portfolio for college and potentially get an idea for which college I would want to go to. One struggle I have faced is how I should approach my art making. I have undergone change during this experience. I generally think more about how much art I am making than the quality of the artwork and I want that to change. I want to focus more on the details of my pieces and take more time on them. Oxbow helped me do that. I once redid a plate six times for my printmaking project so that I could make it look just right. So, in a way, I think I got all that I could have out of my Oxbow experience. My teachers overachieved my expectations and I made friends that I expect to know the rest of my life. I came to Oxbow to do art, which I did, but I also made unforgettable relationships with the community that it holds.

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