

The Bad News Diner

William Paterson University, Master of Fine Arts Thesis

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Abstract

Thesis Committee: James Blasi, Claudia Goldstein, Eileen Foti

Project Title: Bad News Diner

My thesis project will be the culmination of nearly 10 years of work; a conclusion to a project abandoned because of work responsibilities, motherhood, and Covid. This opportunity to do a graduate thesis is a moment to finish something I started, but also bring to life the one part of the project I never could figure out because of its personal nature. Time and distance has helped me think about how to move forward and I am excited to take this on.

The Robot Series project was always about protection. I had often joked that I functioned in the world much like a robot, distanced from my emotions, a skill I learned through a difficult childhood. In many ways I considered it a superpower, in that it contributed my drive to succeed. I started making the robot series by replacing myself in childhood photos but never published them. It was as much a photoshop experiment as it was a personal statement. From there, a much more whimsical project took shape, and took over. I put aside some of that original intent to explore photography, photoshop and my life long love of both miniatures and dioramas. The joy of the project came as much from sourcing the miniature items as it did from the final project. The process brought such joy. I broke the robot series into different episodes. At first, for nearly two years I did an elaborate (more so

as I continued) scene for every month, publishing on the first of each month on my website and then as a calendar at the end of the year. Some of those images were personal and held deeper meaning and some were just for the pure wonder of the project. This would encompass what I am calling one “set” of these images.

The second set would be “Great Robots in Art History”. As I dove deeper into photoshop I decided to move back to the original intent of the project, and use the robot head to replace the heads of women in famous painting throughout history, often calling on my art history colleagues for suggestions. The results were among my favorite, and most challenging of the series. I learned so much about light and shadow in photoshop, attempting to seamlessly merge the images together. This portion of the project dovetailed into what will eventually be my final set. In each of the scenes from art history I seek to “protect” the female leads in the images with the robot heads. Some were just whimsical images and some were quite serious. There’s humor in all of it but it also was always meant to delve into trauma.

The next two sets were travel, most notable the “Made in China” series. Taken over 21 days of nearly eighty thousand miles of travel in China, this series was among my most exhibited and my most professionally photographed. Another travel set was completed in Iceland and was more focused on the contrast of the robot in stark natural environments. The travel set would be set three.

And this is where things stopped. I had two children, became chair, and we all entered a pandemic. I did all those things nearly at the same time, and my creative process came to a halt, never making it to the final set of images and the original intent of the project: to recreate moments from the childhood that originally inspired the robot as my own protector. A new part of this project will be researching contemporary diorama makers. As I delve into some of that material I am inspired to re-enter the fray even more.

For the final stage of this project I will seek inspiration from the journals I kept from around 8 years old through college. These journals both bear witness and create the narrative of these dioramas. My intent is to embed pieces of the journals into the dioramas in a collage type technique and incorporate them into scenes from those stories. I would also display the photo that is inspiring the diorama if there is one. (I think there should be).

The project will be called “Bad News Diner”. While that may seem random, the origin of this name is actually what I have always called the robot project but never publicized. When I was a child I was required to go to my father’s house every weekend. Very rarely he would stop on the hour-long drive to his house at a diner. I knew if we were going to the diner he was going to tell me something he was upset about, something about me or my life with my mother. I came to associate trips to this diner with bad news and thus the name bad news diner was born. When I began the robot series I purchased the web address badnewsdiner.com and hope to roll in a web component to the project.

What I like about this project is it pulls together graphic design, photography, and 3D diorama making and completes a journey. This feels like an opportune bookend for this moment. My perspective has shifted now that I am a parent myself and this journey has evolved and I seek to reflect that in this final series of images.

1. Introduction and Origins: The Robot Series and The Bad News Diner

“The Bad News Diner” is the culmination of nearly 10 years of work; a conclusion to a project abandoned because of work responsibilities, motherhood, and Covid. I have arrived at a moment to finish something I started and find closure in several meaningful ways. At the same time, it is a moment to bring to life the part of the project I never felt ready to tackle until now. Time and distance have helped me think about how to move forward.

I can only speak about this project in the first person. I am this project and this project is me. The Robot Series was and is about protection and preservation. I have often joked that I functioned in the world much like a robot, distanced from my emotions, a skill I learned throughout a difficult childhood. In many ways I considered it a superpower. The origin of the Robot Series was born out of a small class joke. A student in my 2D design class left a paper cut out of a celebrity mounted and standing on my desk when I entered class. (They had been working on mixed media collages at the time.) The cut out became a talisman for the class, and anyone who needed a boost would keep him for the week. At the end of the semester, I took the cut out to my office and didn't think much of it. The silver robot pencil sharpener had long lived in my office. One day, for no reason, I started a web series in which I photographed and imagined what went on in my office between these two characters when I wasn't there. I have always enjoyed telling stories and found the narrative and visual elements to be amusing and rewarding. The project included photographs, stop motion videos and eventually a photography/narrative book (Section 10, Referenced Images, Image 1). In a surprising series of events, that photography book made its way into a photo book collection at the Cleveland Museum of Art. It was one of the most surprising, and frankly, silly things I have ever done as an artist. Not long after, the book/project spawned an interactive exhibit where I loaned out robots and paper cut out people at the FIGMENT ART FESTIVAL on Governor's Island (Section 10, Referenced Images, assorted images 2).

People were tasked with taking photos of the characters from the book all over the island and beyond if they so wished. If they returned the robots, they received a copy of the book. If they kept them, I asked that they kept sharing their photos via a website dedicated to the project. While I was satisfied with the outcomes of this project, I still wanted to explore the life of the Robot and I wanted to weave my own story into it, both as an artist, and personally. I had long been influenced by miniatures and thus the next phase of the project began.

While the next phases of the project are far removed from The Bad News Diner series of my thesis, they were all leading up to this final idea. In the different series before this project, I continue to explore dioramas and miniatures, themes of protection and defense, and skirt around issues of feminism, abuse, and release. Some with humor, and some with subtlety. Only in this final project do I endeavor to tackle the themes head on.

2. Influences

A lifelong fascination with miniature things begun early. My first real memory of this is seeing the dioramas of the bugs at the New York Museum of Natural History. The interesting thing about the bug section is that it's not miniature, but 100x+ scale larger, bringing you directly into their microscopic world. It made one feel bug-sized. This started me on a life-long treasure hunt for this kind of creating. As an adult I dabbled in this kind of work, studying other artists in this space. In the early 2000's I took a trip to The Mini Time Machine, Museum of Miniatures in Tuscon, Arizona¹. I specifically visited this location for its variety. This was not a dollhouse museum, the dioramas were dark and sinister and somewhat deranged. This was my first time seeing dioramas as fine art. The museum showcased the fantastical, the grotesque and the mundane. I particularly liked that many of the dioramas were placed inside the walls, so that the

¹ https://theminutimemachine.org/plan-your-visit/?gad_source=1&qclid=Cj0KCQjwgrO4BhC2ARIsAKQ7zUk3M-P4VFBWu1gWykipeaoAGYPpN8igakN18bcjqicRpMxvqcZB-vlaAtjHEALw_wcB.

viewer investigated them like a painting. The most intriguing among these to me were the simple mundane scenes. While the horror-filled ones certainly caught my eye, the ones displaying simple life on this scale thrilled me and planted the seed that later became a goal in the Robot Series. In the beginning, only once did I fully realize a diorama scene (Section 10, Referenced Images, Image 3, *Unwanted Guests*, November 2014) where I brought to life a real memory. In the scene we can see the full thanksgiving holiday in a realized space. This composition was created towards the end of two years of dabbling in this area and I can see clearly this is where it was all heading now as I work on this thesis.

I have found quite a bit of inspiration in contemporary artists working in miniatures. I was immediately drawn to Andy Acres attention to detail and light. His composition *Art Deco Window 1:16 Scale*² is of particular interest to me. The process of creating this diorama is documented on the artist's website and through that we can see how the composition is created using only three walls, so he can take advantage of the sunlight through the art deco window. We also observe in the scene just an empty room, with moving or furniture boxes. There's a story here he is not telling us. It's this detail that I enjoy the most and want to mimic in my work: excruciating detail, but little else of the story. I want the viewer to imagine what's happening with no external distractions or hints. We can also see Acres clever use of light and material in his *Carnival Tent*. Created with painted masking tape and wood, the effect of the lighting creates a dark mood. Some other details in Acres work that I admire are his use of framing on the outside of his compositions, standard and classic picture frames are used to frame the scenes. There is also the openness of irregular shapes, which hadn't occurred to me until I saw his work.

Abigail Goldman³ is an artist of note to my own personal work. Some of her works are of mundane scenes from everyday life, some mundane scenes in strange locations (underground) and then some gruesome and disturbing scenes. I find inspiration in her

² <https://andyacres.com/art-deco-window-116-scale/>

³ <https://www.hashimotocontemporary.com/artists/91-abigail-goldman/>

depiction of life made horrific, but I am also drawn to her scenes in strange locations. There's a dystopian quality to some of her work that invites the viewer to create a narrative of their own making. Most of her work is highly disturbing, graphic and violent. However, presented in miniature the viewer can digest the horror in a way that doesn't feel overwhelming. In some ways I feel this mirrors the emotional violence of my work. I invite the viewer to make up their own story, but even as you draw closer to the diorama and read the journals inside, you realize the stories are one of personal tragedy and somewhat uncomfortable to read. Goldman's work is far more overt in its depiction of horror than my own, but I feel compelled to look closer. The scenes mirror the voyeuristic way one might look at a train wreck or a tragedy from a distance, or online.

By contrast Derrick Lin creates mini worlds that mimic very normal everyday life. A crowded subway platform, a balcony, a lunch spot. I'm drawn to his use of everyday objects to create the scene, rather than miniature objects. A pencil becomes a barrier, a book becomes a building for a balcony to hang from. It's a different approach than I use, but I like the unexpected locations a diorama can be placed. There is an isolation to his work that the artist himself explains "I started to pay more attention to topics around loneliness, mental health, and kindness. I strive to depict and spotlight on the kind of thoughts we typically reserve for ourselves."⁴ In this way the work resonates with my own. The journals in my work are the place I reserved for these thoughts, and for so long kept them isolated. Memories were lost and then found again when reading through them for this project. Like Lin, I am taking those reserved thoughts and bringing them forward out of my own mind and into realization.

I want to also call attention to the "Baggage Series" by Mohamad Hafez⁵. Each scene is a space lived in and then abandoned because of war, the former inhabitants now refugees in strange lands with only what they can carry with them. In these presentations the suitcases hold miniature living rooms that give a hint of a life lived and now lost. Much of Hafez's work dives into the trauma of the refugee experience, and of

⁴ <https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2020/03/derrick-lin-office-supply-miniatures/>

⁵ <https://www.mohamadhafez.com/Baggage-Series>

losing a homeland. *The Framed Nostalgia*⁶ series 1-3 captures miniature moments of life, now abandoned but clearly once deeply cared for, as we see the love and care the rooms once held through their intricate decorations and furnishings, now destroyed. We see the hanging laundry, the telephone and lighting, the beautiful patterns of the middle east everywhere, but all covered in soot and ash. A bowl is left out for a street animal to drink water. All the scenes are destroyed, neglected and fallen into disrepair. Again, this harkens to a moment in time before all was lost. In some ways I relate my work to this, as much of the period covered in my work felt like a personal war. I felt like I was armoring myself when going into these scenes, which is why the robot became my avatar. And while this a small war of only my own experience, I felt like a stranger in a strange land no matter where I went. Never having a home of my own or a place of safety. At my mother's I spent nearly all my time alone, living upstairs from my grandparents in an apartment. Nothing there felt like a life was being lived, everything felt transient. We moved around so much as a child I felt nomadic (five moves before I graduated college), and I packed my bag every weekend to go to my father's house. Each week calculating what I would need to take to get through the weekend, only to come back to my mothers, unpack and start the process over again. The baggage series reminded me of this, in that I was either unpacking or packing a bag every week, going to places that never felt like home. I am drawn to Hafez's work because of these themes but also because of how he frames and encases his works. Some in baggage and other in more elaborate and unexpected ways, but the Nostalgia Series is framed in actual picture frames, as if we are looking at a family photo. The dioramas I am presenting for this thesis are very much pulling from this inspiration. I want them to feel like you are looking into a memory, or a photograph.

Gregory Grozos⁷ creates what he calls "detailed miniature worlds" inside of the discarded shells of pocket watches, jewelry, wristwatches, and clocks among other things. Imagine for a moment how small the items must be to create such a composition. Grozos seeks to create works as true to life as possible, creating each

⁶ <https://www.mohamadhafez.com/Framed-Nostalgia-1>

⁷ <https://www.boredpanda.com/detailed-miniature-worlds-antique-pocket-watches-micro-gregory-grozos/>

intricate detail and object inside them. Some are fantastical, like a jack and the beanstalk inspired sky/earth composition in a pocket watch, and some are quite mundane, like a library scene or a dishware cabinet. While the works can have a fantastical steam punk bent to them, using gears as a key component in many of the compositions, some are simple and lovely: a man bringing flowers to a woman, or a ballerina performing onstage. While I don't relate my own work to this I am endlessly inspired by the intricacy and attention to detail in these pieces, each with hundreds of carefully created and placed objects within them.

The work of Aleia Murawski and Samuel Copeland is so wildly outlandish that I cannot help but include it here. The work specifically I want to call attention to is the snail series⁸. The artists create miniature worlds for their pet snails to live in. This is somewhat reminiscent of my robot series, in which I create worlds that this object neither belongs in, nor has the correct scale for. The snail series often takes inspiration from tv and media, putting the snail in a scene that feels familiar to the viewer. "Made from random items that Murawski and Copeland find on walks or driving around, each miniature tells a different story: the skateboarding highschooler, the burnt-out office worker, an alien abduction. Some reflect a nostalgic representation of middle-class suburban America whilst others dark themes of rampant commercialism."⁹ Other than the absurd nature of these images, what drew me to them was the idea of the snail: a creature that carries its home and protection on its back. Again, this is harkening back to the nomadic nature of the life shown in The Bad News Diner dioramas as well as the protective element of the robot shell/snail shell.

3. Robot Set One: The monthly series

Transitioning to my own work, I started making what would become The Robot Series by replacing myself in childhood photos with the robot image. I photographed the robot

⁸ <https://www.aleia.net/>

⁹ <https://www.designboom.com/design/aleia-murawski-sam-copeland-miniature-worlds-pet-snails-01-16-2020/>

in various positions and then photoshopped him over images of myself in various childhood photographs. I never published or shared this work as it was more of an experiment in photoshop skills than anything else. The original image I used was the first Christmas after my parent's divorced which is the scene you will see represented in The Bad News Diner piece known as *The Beginning* (Section 10, Referenced Images, Image 8). I have used this photo in several ways over the years because it just felt so important. There is nothing false about this image, everyone in it is clearly miserable and we are not pretending otherwise. I've thought long about who took this photo, and what the circumstances are that led to it not only being taken but printed and kept (Section 10, Referenced Images, Image 4). Eventually I put this experiment aside and forgot about this image for quite some time.

From there, a much more whimsical project took shape, and subsequently took over. I put aside some of that original personal intent to explore photography, photoshop and my life-long love of miniatures and dioramas. The joy of the project came as much from sourcing the miniature items as it did from the creating. I tediously scouted out objects to create my scenes. The process brought such joy. I broke the robot series into different episodes. At first, for nearly two years (2013 and 2014) I did an elaborate scene for every month. I would publish the image on the first of each month on my website and social media. This eventually became a calendar that I printed and gave out to anyone who enjoyed the series. While some of those images were personal they weren't overtly so. Some were just for the pure wonder of the project. This project was continuous for two years, with no breaks as I produced a new image every month.

4. Robot Set Two: Great Robots in Art History

After two years I was ready to move away from the Robot Series as it existed. I wanted to really challenge my abilities in Photoshop and get back to the original intent of the project: protection of girls and women. What I called "*Great Robots in Art History*" is the unexpected next stop. As I dove deeper into photoshop I began to use the robot head to replace the heads of women in famous paintings throughout history, often

calling on my art history colleagues for suggestions. Technically it was my most challenging of the series. Mimicking light and shadow in photoshop, attempting to seamlessly merge a photograph and a classical painting was time consuming, and maniacal. I became quite obsessed with Photoshop's (pre-AI) ability to create the illusions of brush strokes. I spent hours on lighting angles, shadows and worked pixel by pixel to weave them together. I took hundreds of my own photos of the robot from different angles to capture images that could be woven into the painting. Some of these were more successful than the others, and the series took over three years to finish. As with much of this project, there's humor in many aspects of it, but also trauma. At this time, personally, I was also going through a transformation of sorts. Not coincidentally my artwork reflected my own commitment to sorting through my own trauma. As I am protecting the women in the paintings, I am also taking off my own robot mask in my own life and working through some of the themes that will come up again in *The Bad News Diner*. After three years of working on this project, and myself, I found that it was time to finish. After revisiting these images over and over I came to a place of peace that they would never be perfect but that I would choose to love what had been accomplished technically and artistically. I published the images on my website and social media. The response was quite unexpected, as many people felt this was my best series of all, and I eventually put them together in a small calendar for those who expressed interest. At the tail end of this series I was asked to donate some of my work to an art auction, which in turn forced me to think about these pieces in a non-digital sense. It felt only right to frame them in antique and ornate frames which I sourced from garage sales and other antique shops. I spray painted all the frames white, which will come up again in *The Bad News Diner*, so that the frame did not distract from the image. I donated what I felt like were the three most successful images to the auction (Section 10, Referenced Images, assorted Images 5) where they were taken home by an anonymous collector I'll never know. This was the conclusion of the Great Robots in Art History project.

5. Robot Set Three: Made in China and beyond

In 2015, I traveled to China with 16 students and couldn't resist the idea of bringing the robot along for the ride. The "*Made in China*" series was captured over 21 days and nearly eighty thousand miles of travel in China. This series was more a classical photography project rather than a personal project. The travel series was a way for me to explore more spontaneous photographs of the robot, without planning and pre-made sets. It also became a collaboration with the students on the trip, who were eager to help me capture images. The most successful images from this China series see the robots stark mechanical appearance against the enormity of the landscapes of China, in particular the images from Tiananmen Square and the Great Wall of China (Section 10, Referenced Images, assorted Images 6). These themes also come up in additional travel series I completed in Iceland as well as Turkey where we again see the stark contrast of the robot in awe inspiring natural environments (Section 10, Referenced Images, assorted Images 7). This set sits apart in that I was not exploring personal themes, rather working on my photography skills and craft and the idea of spontaneous photography.

6. Robot Set Four: The Bad News Diner

And this is where things stopped. I had two children, became chair of the art department, and the world entered a global pandemic. With all those things happening nearly at the same time, my creative process came to a halt, never making it to the final set of images and the original intent of the project: to recreate moments from childhood that originally inspired the robot as protector.

The Bad News Diner: Realized

For the final stage of this project, I seek inspiration from the journals I kept from 1986 through 1994, as an 8-year-old girl through my departure for college as an 18-year-old woman. These journals bear witness and create the narrative of these dioramas. I have embedded pieces of the journals into the dioramas in a collage-type

technique and incorporated them into scenes from those stories. Some of the journal entries will be literal writings about the scenes in question and some will be frivolous. The viewer can choose to look closely and read the disjointed pages or simply make up a story of their own. I have chosen the pages somewhat randomly so they encompass the entirety of the timeline and cannot be read straight through, leaving room for interpretation. Each diorama is “wallpapered” with the journal pages so that the scenes live inside them. In this way the diorama allows the viewer to literally be inside my head. More on process and results in Section 7: Processes and Outcomes.

Why is this project known as the “Bad News Diner”? After my parent’s divorce at aged 4 I was required to go to my father’s house every weekend. Very rarely he would stop on the hour-long drive to his house at a diner. I knew if we were going to the diner, he was going to tell me something he was upset about, something about me or my life with my mother that he disapproved of. Often it would be about my appearance: my weight, my clothes, my cleanliness. I came to dread these trips because I knew what they meant. In one journal in the diner diorama I write “My father asked me to go to the diner. This cannot be good. I am scared.” I came to associate trips to this diner with bad news and thus the name Bad News Diner was born. When I began the robot series I purchased the web address badnewsdiner.com and hope to roll in a web component to the project once it is complete.

This project pulls together many of my artistic interests: graphic design, photography, and 3D diorama making; completing a journey for me. This is a bookend moment in my life and my work. My perspective has shifted now that I am a parent myself and this journey has evolved as I’ve created it. As I progressed through the project an interesting new perspective took shape. I read through the journals for the first time in many years, realizing I had forgotten many details, while others have stayed quite vivid. Some trauma lost to me and others leaving a lifelong mark. The most interesting outcome was when I reached the end of the journals. In the high school journals the tone changes, I am no longer scared and alone, but fiercely independent. I am fighting back in so many ways and declaring my space. I am refusing time at my father’s, often going and leaving

in the same day when things turn bad. I am also working hard to go to college. I knew at some point around 15 that college was my escape route, and I changed a great many things about my life to make that happen. I spent those years singularly dedicated to this mission, and in the journals when I get into Mount Holyoke College I can tell that I taste freedom. The tone changes to one of hope. Often when reading the journals I feel as though I am floating above them, I do not feel the pain of them anymore and I think it's because of these moments of transition. When I receive a full scholarship to Mount Holyoke I write with jubilation in the journal: I had done it, I had found a way out. I know at that moment I don't need to depend on my father to pay for school, and that I can choose this for myself. I felt such pride in that girl reading those journals. So while the topics in this project are very dark: abandonment, shame, and trauma... in the end there is triumph.

Each scene is a glimpse into memory, both literally and figuratively. I've separated these into beginning, middle and end, narrowing down the scenes to the most emblematic of the time frame.

"The Beginning" (Section 10, Referenced Images, Image 8)

The scene is Christmas, 1981, the first year after my parents divorced and the first time we had to split the holiday with each parent (Section 10, Referenced Images, Image 4). The original photo shows just a small piece of this scene. It is not a happy holiday and we are all clearly unhappy with our set of circumstances. In the diorama I've expanded on the scene from memory to re-envision the entire early 80's living room. In this moment I believe my father is taking a snapshot of my brother, mother and I in front of the Christmas tree just before we must leave with him to celebrate with his side of the family. I've discussed this photo with my mother because I always found it amusing. Why would anyone take a photo of three miserable people? She said she was particularly upset because it was her first holiday alone, as she would have normally been invited to my father's for the holiday, and her first holiday without us. This is the first of many years of splitting holidays. This will become commonplace, but here in this moment, it is all new, and we are all upset by it. This marks the beginning of my new

reality. I am too young to have journaled at this point in my memory, barely old enough to even read or write. As we approach the next diorama “The middle” I am writing prolifically about the years between the two scenes and how all our feelings evolved about our circumstances.

“The Middle” (Section 10, Referenced Images, Image 9)

The namesake of the project, this scene is from the Bad News Diner. The original name of the diner is lost to me. This moment is the first of many moments where my value was determined by physical appearance. The irony that my father would take me out to eat to berate me about my eating habits and physical appearance was never lost on me and I wrote about it in my journal, laughing and crying all at once at the irony.

I chose the Bad News Diner as the title of this project because this is one of the primary times when I would assume my robot identity. I became quite adept at disassociating from my emotions during the years encompassed by these journals. I would pretend to be a robot in my head where nothing emotional could reach me. I had a visualization I would focus on to remove myself from the situation. I realize now it was a form of meditation as well.

“The End” (Section 10, Referenced Images, Image 10)

There are several layers to this scene, but it is among the most important in all my memories. Many moments had led up to this one: this is the last day I would spend at my father’s house and the last time we would ever have a conversation. I am around 16 or 17, looking in the mirror, deciding about what to do next while my father looms outside the door. A closer look reveals a small bottle of nasal spray on the bathroom counter. Throughout the many years I had to go to my father’s house on the weekends I developed a series of nervous tics. They ranged from benign ones I could hide, to audible ones like sniffing my nose. It was the sniffing that drove my father and stepmother crazy. For over 10 years they would regularly give me nasal spray to alleviate the sniffing. There was a seemingly endless supply of nasal sprays because my stepmother was a nurse. I would then take the nasal spray into the bathroom and

spray it into the sink. I did this for a couple of reasons: first, I knew that my anxiety was causing me to have these tics as they got worse the more they talked about it (and I only did them on the weekends during my visits, never at home at my mother's house), and two, I simply hated the feeling of nasal spray. Regardless, I never actually used the nasal spray but rather sprayed it into the bathroom sink for many years. On this last day at his house, my nervous tics came roaring back. I wasn't going there very frequently at this point, fights and conflicts were escalating as I was getting older and more able to defend myself. I frequently had to be picked up by my mother because I wouldn't make it through an entire weekend, and sometimes only made it through a few hours before conflict began. Often walking out of his house and asking to be picked up from the road after calling from a pay phone. These were dramatic times, only made more dramatic by being a teenager and asserting my will where I had often felt trapped. The fighting could be about several things: his obsession with my physical appearance and desire for me to be thin, him assigning me chores (like cleaning his bathroom) even though I didn't live in the house, or him counting the cookies in the cookie jar to discover I had taken some (in the night while eating secretly) and declared this in front of everyone (this actually happened). There was always something and I was reaching the age where I knew the end was in sight (leaving for college) and I was tired of it all. The desire to make this person want to love and father me had long gone many years earlier. My mother had settled into a long-term relationship with her now-wife, and my life at home had calmed down. While still chaotic and untraditional, I was safe there. So, on this day, we come upon a reckoning. The scene here is the moment of choice. I looked in the mirror, knowing he was outside the door; as I was going through the motions of spraying the nasal spray in the sink I saw myself in the mirror and thought "what in the world am I doing? Why was I still going through this charade?" Something took over in that moment and I took the nasal spray from the bathroom, opened the door and declared that I had never used it once in my whole life, and that my sniffing was because everyone in that house was driving me insane. I threw the nasal spray as hard as I could across the living room, walked directly to the front door and kept walking. I walked what felt like miles to a pay phone. My father did not come after me. They let me walk alone out that door and out of their lives. I would never enter that house again. My mother would come

and pick me up on the side of the road and take me home. Other than a few required events (college graduation, some funerals) this was the last time I saw or spoke to my father. I walked out of that door and out of his life quite completely. And thus, the title, “The End”.

7. Process and Outcomes

The process for creating the dioramas began with what I referred to as “wallpapering”. I sorted through my childhood journals from 1989-1994. I wanted a collection that included both events that inspired the dioramas as well as mundane everyday life. I originally began writing in the journals to process all that was happening, a form of my own therapy, and a way to say “this happened” to myself. In this way, I wouldn’t doubt my own recollections when others tried to sugar coat them. The journals are at once tragically sad and somewhat funny. The usual writings of a young girl in silly handwriting about friends and boys sprinkled in with deeply troubling messages of fear. Fear of my brother’s mental health and suicide ideation, fear of being alone at night so often at such a young age, fear of being told I was fat and disappointing by my father over and over. It’s all in these journals. There is a deep and troubling theme of not being believed throughout. I am frequently going over the details of events where I am not believed or are secret. The writing moves from simplistic in writing style and penmanship to more detailed and sophisticated as I move through time. Important milestones are key in the pages I chose, and in some instances, in the pages I did not choose. A great deal of one of the journals was dedicated to the realization and the moments that led to me understanding that my mother was gay. These moments did not feel like they belonged in the project, as they are outside of what these three dioramas are about. Those moments, while deeply difficult for me to understand so young, were not ones I felt the need to protect myself against. Moments of protection center almost entirely around my father and so these dioramas also center on him.

With the journal pages chosen I applied them safely and permanently to the walls of the diorama. We were able to adhere a glue to each piece using a larger template to create

sheets from the journal pages. I covered all the interior walls and ceiling in these pages to create the effect of being inside the journals themselves. I spent a great deal of time thinking and looking at how to treat the outside of the dioramas. My ideal intention would be to inset them into a wall (like at the Mini Time Machine Museum I had seen so long ago), so they disappear from the physical space. Given the limitations of the gallery this was not possible. After contemplating whether to cover them in black cloth, paint them black, or insert a glass shield in the front of them I realized the most obvious solution was to paint the exterior white. This will allow them to blend into the walls of the gallery, adjacent to my original vision. I also am drawn to whiteness as memory. The whiteness representing the dulling of ones surrounding as their mind wanders. In this case I am inviting the viewer to fixate on the small details in the dioramas, to lean closer with no external distraction. The exterior of the box should feel inconsequential.

The physical space in each diorama was created from memory. Furniture and details pulled from these moments in time could never be exact, but I sourced as many items as possible that stand out from my memory of each moment displayed in the dioramas. Some of it is inconsequential like plants and tables, and some of it is critical. And then there are items so strange they had to be created by me. There is an almost impossibly small box of nasal spray on the bathroom counter in “The End”. This detail is imperative to the moment and had to be made as it was impossible to find. Other small details feel important: what I was eating in the diner, the lighting and signs in the diner, the flooring in the bathroom, the tv stand in the living room/Christmas scene. These all stand out in my memory as key to these moments and so they were sourced from miniature creators online, and some created by myself. These items are secondary to the action happening within them. They set the moment, but the placement of the robots is what I want the viewer to think about critically.

In the bathroom scene the silver robot (always me) is looking at themselves in the mirror, making a decision that changes everything, while the black robot (always my father) looms outside the door. In the Christmas scene the two red robots (my brother and mother always) are posed with the silver robot capturing the moment in the picture

that inspired this diorama. The viewer is the photographer here, as I have no memory of who took this photo but can only assume it was my father. In the diner scene, the black and silver robots are at the table, the food untouched, having a dreaded meal together.

8. Conclusion

What an unexpected journey this project has taken me on. Truly a journey through space and time, revisiting moments and places in my memory I had not thought about in this level of detail in some time. My most poignant conclusion from this project is a sense of closure and pride. I feel distanced from the girl in these pieces because in so many ways I have freed her. Through a lifelong process of becoming a person outside of these traumas, she has been freed, and I feel by creating these pieces I am also freeing her. It was a delight to dive back into the robot series, to feel like I finished it. The covid/motherhood halt to this project was jarringly sudden, and to be able to revisit something that truly brought me joy has been just that: a joy. I also feel freed as an adult from the journals. I carried them throughout my life from house to house, life stage to life stage, knowing someday I wanted to do something creative with them. I once thought about burning them just to be unburdened by their presence. I am so glad I kept them and realized a creative vision for their use. They feel important and integral to this project. They bore witness to a large part of my life, and a large part of who I am. I am infinitely thankful to have been able to create something personally important with them.

I'm letting her go now: the robot, and the girl, are free.

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Referenced Images

1. Cover photo for referenced photo book



2. Introduction and assorted photos and instructions for installation at FIGMENT

Charge to the account of _____ \$ _____

WESTERN UNION 1306

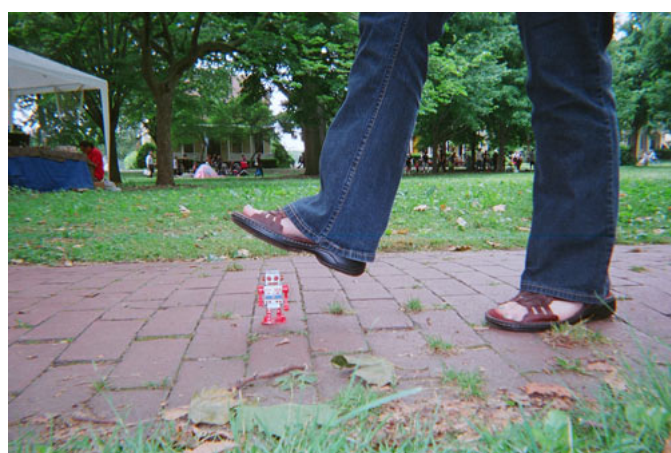
A. N. WILLIAMS NEWCOMB CARLTON J. G. WILLEVER
PRESIDENT CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT

Send the following telegram subject to the terms on back hereof, which are hereby agreed to

WANT A REPLY?
"Answer by WESTERN UNION"
or similar phrases may be
included without charge.

June, 2011

PCMD has escaped office with allies. Stop.
RPS in pursuit. Stop.
Last known location: Governors Island, NYC. Stop.
Most recent sightings follow this transmission.
Stop.



MAKE YOUR OWN PAPER CUT OUT MATT DAMON!

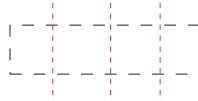
Step 1: Cut Out
Matt Damon



Step 2: Cut out this strip
for the backing stand



Step 3: Fold your strip
along these red lines

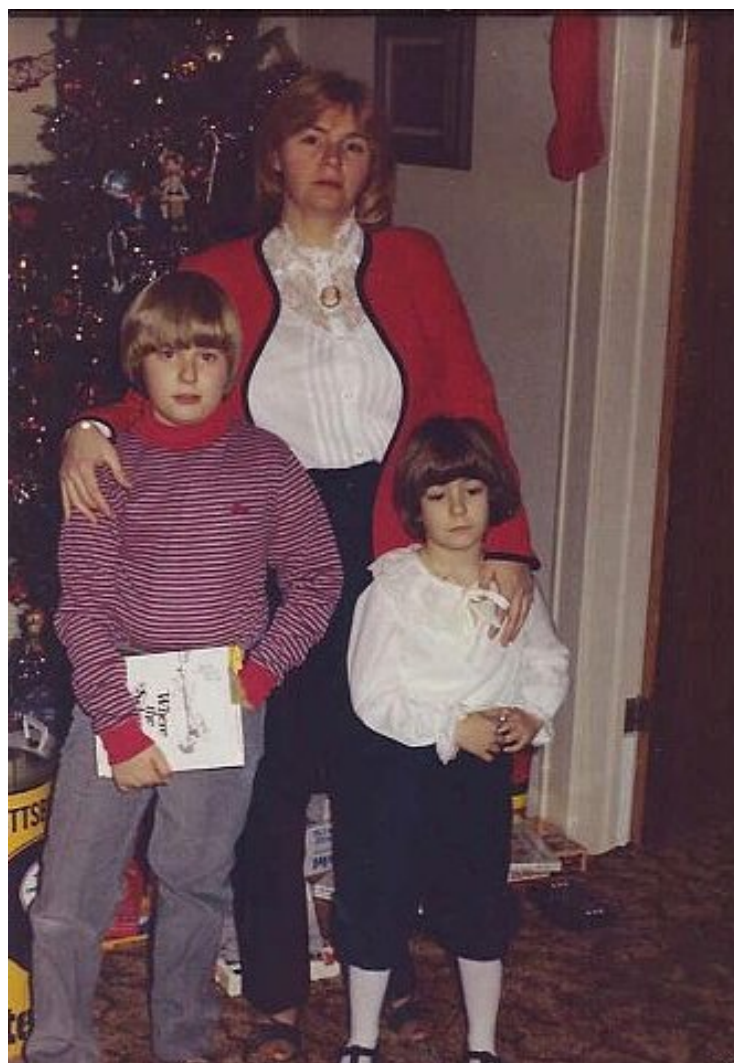


Step 4: Use glue, rubber
cement or tape to apply
stand to the bottom
of the back of PCMD.
Let Dry.

3. Unwanted Guests



4.Original Christmas Photo



5. Great Robots in Art History samples







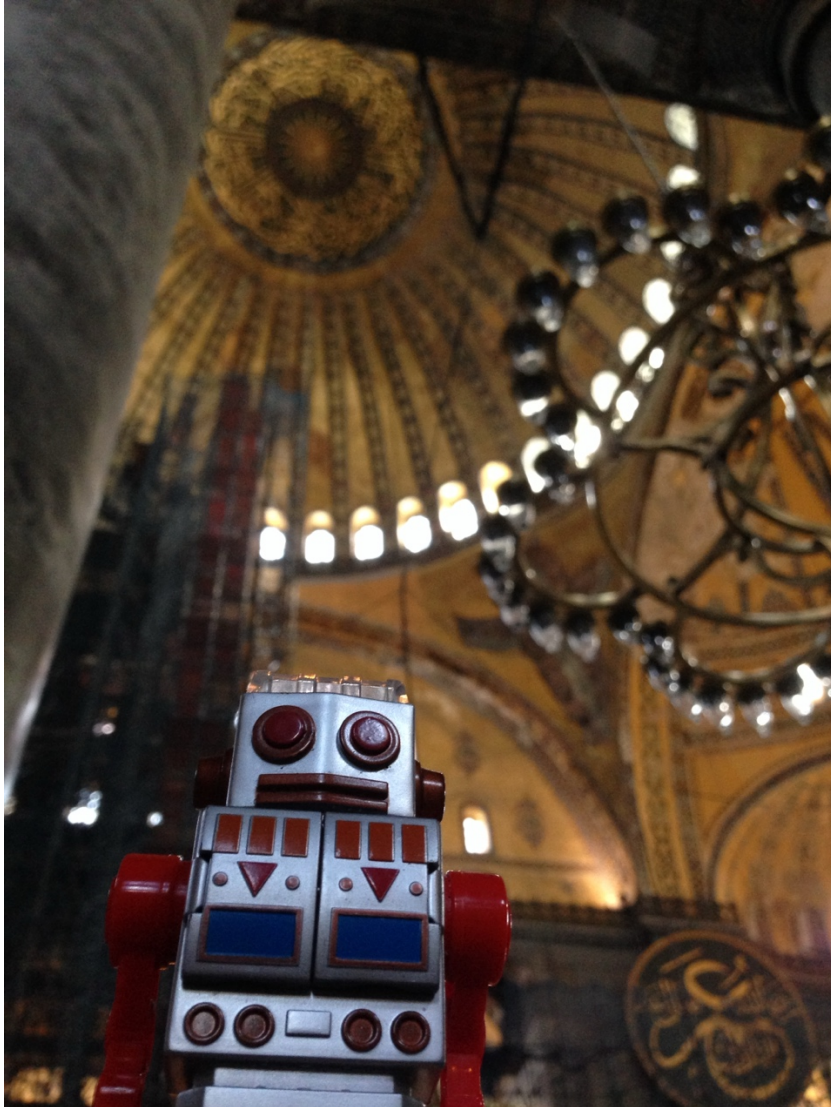
6.Travel Robots: China





7.Travel Robots Iceland and Turkey





8. The Bad News Diner: The beginning.



9. The Bad News Diner: The middle.



10. The Bad News Diner: The end.

