AURAS:  
THE MANIFESTATION OF NOSTALGIA AND MEMORY IN CARLOS FUENTES THROUGH PRINTMAKING

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**AURAS**

_Auras_ is my study of nostalgia, where it comes from, what constitutes it? Why are we nostalgic? For what are we nostalgic? How do we engage in nostalgia? What is the language of representation? I intend to tackle some of these questions through my analysis and illustration of _Aura_, written by Mexican author, Carlos Fuentes. The story seems to take place within the confines of the widow’s mind. The plot mimics the obsessive, hypnotic quality of nostalgia and memory. Much of my illustrative content and artistic process reflects a personal obsessive nostalgia I have for my grandmother, Carroll Ball, and her life. It is her image, young and old, coupled with the complex and repetitive processes of printmaking that inform my illustration and personal interpretation of _Aura_. Thus, my work grows from the crux of traditional and innovative, age and youth, memory and identification.

The process of memory, unlike a hard drive or a file cabinet, is a synaptic connection between neurons in the brain. Imagination is present as well in the act of remembering, and therefore, we can sometimes be made to believe an imagined version of our past to be real (Radiolab). Each time we remember, we refire those synaptic connections, each time, editing the actual events with an imagined recreation of those events. In understanding the nature of memory this way, the process of remembering can be seen as a constant reimagining of the past. And, in some ways, the more one remembers a past experience, the farther it is to differ from the actual experience (Radiolab). My method of redrawing, re-cutting, and reprinting of images of Carroll reflects this reuse of memory, but it reads with the same hint of obsession seen in the character of Consuelo. My illustrations of _Aura_ convey the storyline in image but they also reflect my personal obsession with my nostalgia for Carroll’s life and history. In this paper, I outline the different ‘auras’ or filters through which I examine nostalgia in Fuentes, illustration, contemporary art, and my own practice.
I. Creation of Nostalgia in Aura

Carlos Fuentes’ novella Aura is a short horror story about a young scholar who accepts a position living at a reclusive widow’s house and translating the memoirs of her dead husband. A few bizarre literary elements modernize the structure of a traditional gothic horror story. Firstly, it is told from the second person perspective; you, the reader, are the protagonist. Secondly, the narrative does not follow a regular progression of time. The verb tenses muddy the narrative structure of time and the dark, surreal interior setting of the widow’s house, further disassociate the story from its classical structure.

The story takes place over the span of five days, beginning when the protagonist, Felipe, responds to a newspaper ad for French scholar. He finds the widow, Consuelo’s, house tucked away in the old part of the city. The door is ajar and stepping inside, he is engulfed in pitch-black darkness. A voice instructs him down the dark corridors to the old woman’s room where he finds her, bed-ridden and surrounded by votive candles, like a living shrine. Upon meeting her niece, Aura, Felipe immediately falls in love with her. Over the next four days, Felipe suspects a stranger connection between Consuelo and her niece. Editing her memoirs, Felipe learns more about the Consuelo’s story, her infertility and her subsequent obsession with preserving her own youth. At night, Felipe meets Aura and they perform bizarre rituals: she washes his feet, they waltz around her room, and have sex under
a large black crucifix. Felipe has re-occurring nightmares that crescendo as the story progresses. Increasingly disoriented, he can no longer recognize his face in the mirror. Ultimately, Felipe stumbles upon a few old photographs lost among in the pages of the memoirs. He recognizes the young Aura in a photograph dated nearly eighty years previously. Standing next to her, he recognizes himself. The story ends in a compelling revulsion when, lying in bed next to Aura, a chink of moonlight illuminating the wrinkly body of Consuelo. The true nature of Aura is unveiled; she is but a projection of Consuelo’s memory.

The bizarre story is an allegory of an old mind consumed in its obsession with the past, infused with motifs of sorcery and defamiliarization. The events take place as if in some lucid dream, the dreamscape of Consuelo’s mind. The narrative perspective tied in with the experience of realizing Aura and Consuelo are two personalities of the same character renders a space entangled with “reality and magic” (Wood). The duality of the real and the magical, light and dark, male and female is also indicative of the distinction between history and nostalgia (Hall). Even the rational, scholarly, factual elements of history in the story (the memoirs, the historical scholar) wobble under the presence of those nostalgic elements like the apparition of Aura. Fuentes proposes this distinction as one between objective fact and subjective memory. As EYE Magazine editor John Walters put it, “history is vital but nostalgia is death.” In a way, nostalgia is death for the protagonist as well. The book ends with Felipe entangled in Consuelo’s bed, as a result of his love for Aura, the physical manifestation of Consuelo’s nostalgia. Nostalgia is deadly only by nature of the obsession that it provokes. The study of nostalgia, its purpose in our
culture, and how we engage in nostalgic thought reveals much more presently than historically.

My interpretation of Aura, the story of the strange regression of linear time as one becomes lost in a memory, is? The story reads much like the magical, surreal fiction of a gothic novel; a fantasy credited in the real, as well as a reaction to the romantic. The setting of the novel is important as well. Situated in an old quarter of Mexico City, when Felipe enters the house and shuts out the hum of the outside world, one gets the sense that he has crossed a threshold of time, leaving reality behind. Hidden in the dark and the dust, the reader meets Consuelo, grown strange with age and tradition. The house serves as the space of her memory; everything that surfaces in the dark is the stuff of Consuelo’s nostalgia.

II: THE AESTHETICS OF CONSUELO’S NOSTALGIA

The fantasy and memory entangled in a dark mind of Consuelo first inspired me to look at Francisco de Goya’s etchings and nightmare illustrations. In El Sueño de la Razon Produce Monstruos, Goya represents himself, head resting in sleep on his desk among his drawing materials, his dreams haunted by creatures of fantasy.


The full epitaph reads: “Fantasy abandoned by reason produces impossible monsters; united with her, she is the mother of the arts and the original of their marvels.” 2 Similarly, Fuentes illustrates how the fantasy or nostalgia of Consuelo’s youth, abandoned by reason produces the impossible “monster” of her old age. Consuelo’s use of old medicinal plants and techniques in order to preserve her youth casts her as this impossible monster. In his memoirs, General Llorente writes, “Consuelo, Consuelo, even the devil was an angel once,” illustrating how Consuelo’s nostalgia for her youth, and her occult attempts to preserve it has transformed her into a devil, or one of Goya’s monsters (Fuentes, 49).

Over a hundred years after Goya buries his head in his arms, Harry Clarke and Aubrey Beardsley pick up the tradition of illustrating this nightmare-space. Clarke’s aesthetic was influenced by Beardsley, a prominent figure in the English Decadent Movement (Osier, 49). Both artists’ work is littered with allusions to the occult and printmaking history. Both proponents of the Aestheticism movement in England, Clarke and Beardsley invoke Dada-esque philosophies of “l’art pour l’art.” With regard to lithography, they exemplify the aesthetic dreamscape of the Ukiyo-e tradition of Japanese printmaking that inspired Western art and literature from the turn of the century. Beardsley and Clarke’s iconography is reminiscent of the iconography created by Fuentes.

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2 “Francisco Goya, Los Capricios, caption from the “Prado” etching version, plate 43, “La fantasia abandonada de la razon, produce monstruos imposible: unida con ella, es madre de las artes y origne de sus marabillas.” Goya’s etching is often read as a social critique of the corruption of Spanish society and the ridicule it inspires.
Aura is prefaced with an epitaph from historian, Jules Michelet, who writes that man hunts and kills, "El hombre caza y lucha/ La mujer intriga y sueña". She intrigues and dreams, has the second sight, is nostalgic. Out of context, the attribution of intrigue, fantasy, and dreamscape. She references the fantasy of gothic literature, the occult, folk, tradition, and in is thus read currently through a pejorative lens. The depiction of the female can be ascribed to the content of the movements, both literary and artistic, which disidentified with the industrial revolution and the commodification of the material world. The man, the protagonist, the scholar represent a world where “ideas are the prime currency” (Crow). The dichotomy outlined in the beginning quote outlines the tradition in art and literature of man as rational, woman as mythical: idea/craft, Father Time/Mother Nature. “The goddesses of myth have two faces: the mother, creator, on one side and the seductive, the devourer, and the destroyer of death on the other hand” (Wood). This mythology or iconography speaks to my aesthetic and the motifs frequented by Clarke.

An avid gothic illustrator, Harry Clarke was famous for perfecting the illustration of the horror story. He illustrated numerous Edgar Allen Poe stories, as well as Goethe’s Faust. His affinity for and articulation of the bizarre and macabre first drew me to associate Clarke’s style with Fuentes’ dark lyrical tone. Original drafts of my prints were conceived in the creepy and meticulous style of Clarke’s original illustrations for Ligeia.

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3 The full epitaph reads: “El hombre caza y lucha/ La mujer intriga y sueña. Es la madre de la fantasía, de los dioses/ Posee la segunda visión, las alas que le permiten volar hacia el infinito del deseo y de la imaginación... Los dioses son como los hombres: nacen y mueren sobre el pecho de una mujer...”
The flattened graphic style, binary color scheme show Clarke’s familiarity with the Japanese woodblock printing style called Ukiyo-e⁴. Ukiyo-e, which means literally “the floating world,” kick started Art Nouveau and inspired graphic design composition, particularly lithographic broadsheet design, in the beginning of the twentieth century⁵. The Ukiyo-e style print is renowned for its influence on European Impressionism, but it is also, lesser known for its place in the period of

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⁴ John Osier elaborates on the aesthetic shifts in Clarke’s work with respect to biographical events, in *The Macabre Visions of Harry Clarke*

Meiji restoration in Japan during which open foreign policy with Europe influenced Japanese culture, art and architecture (Arrowsmith, 2). This style of printmaking occupies the interstitial discourse between east and west, much like the interstitial cultural space between the western French scholar and the old, indigenous fantasy of Consuelo.

Clarke’s use of religious female iconography fits hand-in-hand with the flattened, dark dreamspace of the house, and the references to Santería and Black Masses in the Fuentes. Occult imagery is present throughout Aura. Consuelo is presented as a human shrine, lying in a bed surrounded by candles. Eroticism runs parallel to references to the occult in both Fuentes and Clarke. For example, the scene where Aura seduces Felipe is set in a dark bedroom bare, except for a large black crucifix. In his illustrations of Goethe’s Faust, Clarke employs a mixture of prurient and religious images. The sweeping parade of creatures, penises, demons, goats, and devils across the sky of the print evoke “phantasmagoric images conjured as if from a fever dream,” much like Goya’s nightmarish creatures (Osier, 54). Beardsely was famous for his Victorian erotic illustrations. Both Beardsley and Clarke exemplify how the occult intertwines with the erotic, and their combination serves as a fundamental element of gothic graphics and illustration. Yet, while Clarke and Beardsley have influenced my aesthetic choices, they were but points of

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6 The Meiji period in Japanese culture represents a cultural shift that occurred when Japan’s embargo was removed in 1853. The influx of Western technology, like photography, influenced the aesthetics of the second half of the Ukiyo-e period. Arrowsmith references the this cross-cultural influence further in his discussion of Ukiyo-e’s influence on Modern imagist poetry on pp 32-34.

departure for a deeper artistic critique of Fuentes, nostalgia, and innovative image making.

III: Literary Nostalgia

My illustrations are my visual analysis of Aura. The symbology in Aura articulates erotic and supernatural motifs that I adopted in my illustrations. Fuentes uses the color green in Aura’s eyes and dress to signify lust. Green is appropriate for the description of Aura, as she exists as a projection of Consuelo’s youth. John Cull surmises that green along with Consuelo’s rabbit symbolizes fecundity, and therefore Aura and youth. Twice, Fuentes suggests that Consuelo’s pet white pet rabbit morphs into Aura, a metaphor made all the more explicit when considering that both the rabbit and Aura signify fecundity. The shade plants that Consuelo cultivates are a folkloric symbol of her projection of Aura. The symbols of lust and magic are particularly significant to articulating Consuelo’s nostalgic tendencies. Fuentes’ cultivation of these motifs throughout of the novel is a metaphor for process of nostalgia. By literary nature, a motif is an idea, image, or word repeated and reprinted throughout a text. Through repetition of symbols of fantasy and lust become descriptive of the process of memory and nostalgia for youth.

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8 John Cull explains the folkloric meanings behind each of the shade plants that Aura cultivates in Aura. The plants include Belladona, Hendane, and deadly Nightshade. Cull explains the mysticism and uses (sometimes narcotic, sometimes menstrual) surrounding each of the plants in western folklore.

9 Further research into the historical medicinal and believed magical uses of these plants can be found in Culpeper’s Color Herbal. Ed. David Potterton. New York: Sterling, 1983. Based on Nicolas Culpeper. The Complete Herbal. 1649.
In analyzing Fuentes, I also referred to his contemporary, the poet Octavio Paz, specifically his lyrical explanation of memory in the poem, “Olvido” or “Forgotten.” The poem begins like a hypnotist beginning a trance, “close your eyes and lose yourself in the shadows.” Speaking directly to you, Paz uses the imperative verb tense to urge us to “send yourself down to the shadows/drown yourself in your skin,” get lost in your own body and mind (lines 1-2). The deeper the poem explores itself, the more cosmic the imagery becomes:

Lose yourself in your self, infinity
In your infinite being,
Sea losing itself in another sea:
Forget yourself and forget me.

As the title, “Olvido” (“Forgotten”), suggests, this retraction into oneself represents the effect of memory and nostalgia. Much in the same way, Consuelo and Aura’s relationship, the duality of self, the apparition of youth and their reconciliation, are conjured up in Paz’s words. It is in this personal account of nostalgia, the intimate and the isolated, that I could fathom the reality of my grandmother’s struggle with Alzheimer’s.

Like Paz, Fuentes uses strategic verb tense in order to distort the sense of time in the linear sense, and signal nostalgia. The first part of Aura is written in the future tense. However, by the final chapter, only the present tense is used,

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11 The imperative is used in Spanish as the verbal conjugation denoting commands. It is a corrupted form of the subjective tense.
12 L. 19 – 22.
reflecting how the reader and the protagonist are pulled back from any projected realities into the present moment. The shift from future to present tense presupposes the conclusion of the story. It acts as a sort of inverted foreshadowing, propelling other literary details to hint at the supernatural conclusion of the story. For example, when Consuelo first interviews Felipe, she asks him for his profile, to see if it is ‘good enough’. Later on, Felipe recognizes himself in the old photograph of Consuelo and her husband. The character’s transformation into General Llorente is propelled by the shift from the ephemerality of the future tense to the captivation of the present tense. The use of tenses also serves as a verbal indicator of the true nature of Consuelo and her niece. The illusion of their separate identities fades in the startling chink of moonlight that represents reality in the dark house. In Aura, Señora Consuelo’s conjured apparition of herself seduces Felipe- but from his perspective, the narrator, the final synthesis of Aura and Consuelo is revealed through the inverted verb tense. The coded second person narrative structure, allows for the protagonist, and eventually us to experience Consuelo’s memory.

The entire story is told from a second person perspective, so that in reading the story, you are reenacting movements and thoughts of the protagonist. You see the ad in the newspaper. You pick up on the bizarre coincidences around Consuelo’s house. You fail to recognize your face in the mirror. In this way, you fall prey to the same sense of hypnosis as the protagonist when he first sets his eyes on the beautiful Aura. Fuentes’ use of this personal, second person narrative structure creates the sense of the ensnarement that the protagonist feels in the dark house. The protagonist and the reader are fused into the same entity, so that the reader is
forced to identify with the protagonist. Felipe’s actions, feeling his way along the
dark corridor or helping the widow back to her bed, are actions that ‘you,’ the
reader, are compelled to indulge in. Felipe’s actions, feelings, even nightmares
become your actions, feelings, and nightmares. It is almost as if the book is trying to
hypnotize the reader as well, and therein lies the charm and horror of the novella.

Analyzing the intimate narrative structure of Aura encouraged my artistic
investigation of nostalgia. The second person narrative structure allows Fuentes to
project the character’s personal nostalgic obsession onto the reader. This projected
nostalgic aura compelled my personal nostalgia. Like the obligation behind the use
of the indicative verb tense, led me to inquire about my grandmother’s youth. I
scrutinizing the recent pictures I have collected of Carroll in hopes of finding a
younger aura of her hidden beneath her wrinkles. I scrutinize her young
photographs in hopes of seeing a shadow of myself.

IV: ORIGINS OF NOSTALGIA

Nostalgia for the beauty and youth that Aura represents compels both
Consuelo and Felipe. The reader too must consider the lust for this memory of
youth; what compels our nostalgia? Why are we nostalgic? What are the origins of
nostalgia? Linda Hutcheon theorizes on the significance of nostalgia in her essay
“Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern.” She defines nostalgia in many forms,
exploring the necessity for what was originally a medical term coined to describe a
condition of extreme, even lethal, “homesickness.” The term’s meaning and connotation shifted since its inception in 1688 in Switzerland. According to Hutcheon, the nature of the shift was from “spatial to temporal,” from physical to psychological, from the longing for a place to the longing for a time (Hutcheon). Proust and Kant also refer to nostalgia as a sadness felt when unable to return to a previous time. Unlike a spatial nostalgia, or homesickness, one cannot go against the linear force of time, and thus the longing for the ideal, the past, and lost time becomes an obsession of the present.

Nostalgia’s purpose in our cultural psychology has captivated artist, writers, and theorists. Why are we nostalgic? Why obsess over the “good old days”? Where does this nostalgia manifest itself? Irene Pennacchioni alludes to nostalgia as a direct longing for childhood, realized through social quirks such as the prevalence of the comic strip. Nostalgia manifests itself in popular culture, the trendiness of retro fashions and vintage commodities depict the value of nostalgia in our culture. Inspecting the origins of nostalgia exposes a reaction to our presently deconstructed, postmodern world and its institutions. Nostalgia is a reaction to the lack of history, specifically in the speedy, over-saturated, consumerist society. Lee Quinby writes that our nostalgia helps us to evade the “technological apocalypse” of today, which Hutcheon endorses with the question: “How else do you account for

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14 Young Swiss doctor backstory.
15 Proust citations
16 Hutcheon argues, “More recently, it has been argued that the appeal of the comic strip in French culture today is nostalgia for childhood.” See Irène Pennacchioni, La Nostalgie en images: une sociologie du récit dessiné (Paris: Librairie des Méridiens, 1982).
the return of the fountain pen... in the age of the computer when we have all but forgotten how to write?” (Hutcheon)

But nostalgia is simpler than this. Nostalgia is just a longing for a selective past, a past crystallized as the ideal, unchanging and predictable. Memories refer to an unobtainable utopia, all the more desirable in the face of the unpredictable, chaotic present (Hutcheon). The yearning for a past utopia is a very modern, almost colonial notion of nostalgic thought. By remembering ourselves in a ‘simpler time,’ we colonize previous versions of ourselves. As the idiom goes, one’s vision is 20/20 in hindsight, the past is clear, simple, devoid of stress, and thus desirable. Thus, the process of hindsight reframing our memories in through the lens of the complex, and stressful present, we fetishize our memories. Nostalgia indulges our ‘grass-is-always-greener’ complex, obsessively leaving us wanting what we cannot have. For example, Consuelo’s infertility causes her obsession for a child and youth. Likewise, Felipe wants Aura, but she is unobtainable as well because she does not exist, is simply a conjuration of the widow. Aura embodies an unrealizable desire for the past, or nostalgia.

With the help of Christopher Shaw, Hutcheon highlights the irony of how “nostalgia requires the availability of evidence of the past” (Hutcheon). Shaw attributes these objects, images, and texts from the past, these “powerful talismans” to the creation and sustainability of nostalgia17. Because these artifacts provide a point of comparison between their past and the future in which we experience them

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today. They are thus nebulas for nostalgic thought, thoughts about mortality and the passage of time. A baby picture is an easy example of this memento mori effect, a reminder of mortality. As we consider our faces represented realistically as children, we consider how things were and the denial of the potentials or trajectories after that moment.

Anselm Kiefer’s prints made between 1993 and 1999 use woodcut to address the ideas of ‘talismans’ and these possible trajectories. After traveling to Mexico in the mid nineties, Kiefer was inspired by poet Octavio Paz to create a series of prints named after a line of Paz’s poetry: “Traigo todos los Indios en mi Mano” (‘I carry all the Indies in my hand’). The figure in the center of Ich halte alle Indien in meiner Hand is Kiefer. The title is reminiscent of the fetishization of memory, being able to pocket the uncontainable. However, Kiefer’s self portrait stands at the center of concentric circles which “are not the clean circles of the mathematician but refer to concepts of space and time... they allude to the passage of life, from the nurturing womb to a tree trunk’s rings of age” (Hyman, 33). The circles represent the different trajectories of possible paths. The rings represent age and the passage of time. Hyman goes on to claim that the Kiefer’s use of woodcut is an intentional reference to the alchemical. Kiefer was influenced by ideas in Renaissance medicine, alchemy, the Four Humors, and the Vitruvian Man. Through Kiefer’s images, the “Mystic and the Artist become one” (Hyman, 33). By associating his work within the mystical,

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18 Many of the prints Kiefer made during this period were influenced by Paz, including a whole series of sunflowers which reference Paz's poem "Blanco"
Kiefer’s work takes on the same values of the nostalgic talisman, the icon of memory.

My use of images of Carroll engages the visual language of this nostalgic ‘talisman’ or shrine. The circular composition of my prints reflects the same motifs of age, life cycles, and the passage of time. Kiefer particular choice in printed media references the high contrast between light and dark because woodblock prints lack variation in tonality and can discharge heavy black marks on the page. Like Kiefer, Fuentes explores these cosmic binaries, light and dark, man and woman. Thus, my adoption of the stark black and white woodblock print illustrates Fuentes use of binary and thematic symmetry in *Aura*.

![Image of Anne Carroll Marshall, 1940s. Delaware.](image_url)

Additionally, while I do not engage in the same dialogue of self-portraiture that Kiefer does, my appropriation of Carroll’s face attempts a “linking of consciousness” in the same way Hyman claims Kiefer attempts to link his own

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portrait with that of another printmaker, and Kiefer’s inspiration, Robert Fludd. The use of Carroll’s face also immortalizes her as forever youthful, however it also stands as a brutal reminder of the passage of time. Printed matter similarly procures the same nostalgic reaction, “testifying to Time’s relentless melt” by freezing a moment or thought in physical reality (Sontag, On Plato). My photographs of Carroll are anchors in the shifting sands of memory. They are also an attempt to identify with Carroll, to seek an emotional link beyond our shared DNA. The photograph is an important weapon with which to fend of the failure of memory, or in Carroll’s case the onset of dementia.20

V: Production of Nostalgia

With regards to the digital nature of image production and consumption today, nostalgia is latent. The Internet facilitates the resurfacing of images, texts, and other historical culture previously left out of the history canon. “Like it or not, the Internet ensures that blurred versions of these histories and images will continue to be repeated and recycled throughout the future” (Walters). While the torrent of information on the Internet may recycle the rhetoric of past cultures, the constraints of a two-dimensional, thirteen-inch browser window is predisposed to misrepresent. Much of media viewed through a LED screen, falsely intensifies the

20 Commonly, dementia attacks the short term memory, however, long term memories remain intact. The way that reminiscing over her past and her youth are a poetic manifestation of nostalgia for Carroll. Her memories revive her.
color of the image, while hazy old photographs create a sepia-drenched version of the imagined past. The discrepancy between the content and its representation in the information age is articulated in my process of image-making. I replace my hand with the laser cutter within the traditional practice of woodblock printmaking; the process “introduced steps to make the artist’s hand an instrument of mechanical reproduction” (Suzuki). This creates a multistep process through which the original image or memory is modified through the auras of creative reproduction. I filter my memory of my grandmother through a photographic lens, hand-drawn reproduction, digitalization of scanning and rasterizing, and finally inversion when the image is transferred from the woodblock to paper.

The process of drawing, coupled with digital manipulation of the image and mechanical carving of the printing block is my particular synthesized innovative process of remembering.

The process of carving blocks on an epilogue lasercutter, and 3 out of 4 finished blocks. 2012.
The combination of digital technology and tradition introduced a reevaluation of print and printed materials. The way graphic design started to mesh with fine art can be traced through histories of innovative and newly implemented technologies such as the Xerox machine, inkjet printers, and image editing software. Artists like Wade Guyton and Kelly Walker have explicitly employed the use of B-grade image making technologies to challenge ideas of mass-production as well as critique elitism in the fine art world. For example *Untitled*, Guyton and Walker use inkjet printers to print on gypsum board and canvas, altering the connotations of simple printed matter, much in the same way a family photograph printed on canvas evokes an elevated level of class than a postcard-size, or Facebook version\(^{21}\). The value ascribed to the traditional practice is also a factor of nostalgia. While the presence of the machine in contemporary printmaker’s work updates and contextualizes their prints, the language of tradition still denotes meaning. By incorporating digital media, they embrace innovation. However, my prints are situated firmly in the realm of the art object simply because they are physical. Materiality is valuable, especially in a nostalgic sense. In other words, a photograph would never have become so fetishized without its physicality.

Today the mantras of graphic design, like those of history of art, are distilled from the historical traditions of print and bookmaking. Initially, the tradition of printmaking, whether broadsheets or propaganda posters, “aligned with artistic interest in social and political causes and movements” (Suzuki). The need for

posters arise from a need for public and governmental decrees, as well as private and commercial advertising. These one-page 'broadsheets' were published for immediate consumption and generally distributed freely. They were popular as home decoration as illustrators and graphic designers were better able to flex their creative muscles in advertisement campaigns. Nearly one hundred years later, Swiss graphic design emerged as the pinnacle of graphic design, resonating with the popularity of the Minimalist art movement and reinventing the minimal as practical. Swiss design championed dogmas of graphic design such as symmetry, correct kerning, and most importantly the Grid.

These canons of design solidified the identity of graphic design and left deep impressions on the production and practice of graphic design that followed. The canon of current graphic design is but a compilation of a long history of innovated design dogmas. The format of this paper is a manifestation of textual consumption that references the histories and traditions of printmaking, book design, publishing and illustration. These histories have been challenged, and reworked to create a design rhetoric that “simultaneously relies on and explodes tradition” (Suzuki).

Graphic design evolves. The vestiges like the term ‘leading’ survive the transformation to the digital era. ‘Leading,’ which originally referred to lead spacers between lines of type on a letterpress still is used in digital typographic jargon. The discipline today is simple the current expression of a long history of ideological design evolution. Just like my DNA is but the existing form of an immense history and compilation of the genes of my ancestors. Perhaps the realization of the vastness of my identity- retrospectively through my DNA is what compels my
nostalgic obsession, my hunt for the youth of Carroll and my attempt to synthesize her habits, mannerisms, and impressions with my identity.

V: INTERSTITIAL NOSTALGIA IN PRINTMAKING

In 1986, April Greiman was asked to design and edit the one hundred and thirty third issue of *Design Quarterly*. The magazine, edited at the time by Mildred Freidman and engineered towards an international audience, was an opportunity for Greiman to exhibit her work and her perspective with respect to graphic design. As one of the only pioneers of digital design as well as one of the first recognized female graphic designers, Greiman’s outlook on the field of graphic design was toward the future. About new technologies, she asked, “Does is make sense?” which was also the title of her issue of *Design Quarterly*\(^2\). The issue consisted of a single page, three by six feet, adorned with a nude life-size self-portrait of Greiman. The images are pixilated and rasterized through an electronic sieve. Her body is surrounded by spirals, an image of the moon, zodiac symbols, and her head sprouting again from her feet. Along the bottom edge of the poster runs a scale, marked by stale physics allusions on the far left side that fizzle out to funny and freer markers of measurement on the far right: “proton, neuron, electron, moron….order, chaos, play dream.” She flouts the dogmas of graphic design and

rules like proper adherence to the design grid, or maintaining the distinction between graphic design and art.

By challenging these rules, Greiman questions their significance and purpose in digital graphic design. The piece challenged the definitions of graphic aesthetics as well as the traditions of the magazine format. Greiman deftly made the switch from the sterile, and classical to the personal and poetic, nonetheless in the digital realm. Because her work occupies the crux of new and old processes of image-making, the intersection of the space between the strict traditions of rules of the grid in graphic design and the boundless digital frontier, Greiman’s issue of Design Quarterly begs the question: “Does it Make Sense?”

Like, John Walters provocatively sums up, “history is vital, but nostalgia is death.” The synthesis of new and old processes of printmaking is essential to its survival, but nostalgia for the past is crippling. Consuelo becomes as a metaphor for this deadly, nostalgic obsession. The initial premise by which she hires Felipe is to edit her husband's metaphors. However, ultimately her obsession with her youth cripples her, and confined to her dark bedroom, she is consumed by nostalgic obsession. Talking about “Does it Make Sense?” Greiman states, “At the heart of hybrid imagery is a recognition that in inventing new technologies, we reinvent ourselves.

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23 Making digital art poetic and personal is a feat all the more significant considering the impersonal connotations associated with digital production processes.
During the final stages of my collective research, study, design, and execution of my piece, Auras, I respond to the nuances wrapped up in Greiman’s question. My process, like my visual language and Fuentes conclusion, is all about the synthesis of new and old. I have incorporated the design elements like the circular composition and stylized shade plants which reference the obsession with life cycles. The faces in the pieces are my grandmother, a juncture of both young and old. Inspired by Greiman’s innovation, I have renounced traditional method of printmaking, and appropriated images of my grandmother by hand, software, laser, and print. The
things we remember most frequently are the most imagined, thus the true, original
memory is repeated, distorted, transformed by my imagination. My artistic process
thus reenacts nostalgia. Ultimately, I express my own nostalgia for my
grandmother’s youth and hope to identify with a past that presupposes my
existence. And thus, as April Greiman states, as a result of such synthesis, “we can
never be sure of who is creating who.”


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24 In an interview with Leon Whiteson. Whiteson, Leon. ”A Designing Woman With Radical Ideas: April Greiman Says Her Graphics Style Is ’an Experiment in Creating ”Hybrid Imagery”"
Works Cited:


