

# **ENCHANTMENT AND SECURITY IN HOLY MATRIMONY**

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# ENCHANTMENT AND SECURITY IN HOLY MATRIMONY

## HONORS THESIS

Presented to the Honors Committee of  
Texas State University-San Marcos  
In Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements  
For Graduation in the Mitte Honors Program

By

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San Marcos, Texas

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Photo by Brianne Corn  
Image of *Her Innocence Lost in the Plan*  
2007

## Acknowledgements

For Mom and Daniel

Special Thanks to:

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Once upon a time...



Photo by Brianne Corn  
Image of *Michelle's Fairytale* (installation)  
2007



Photo by Brianne Corn  
Image of *A Dream That Her Heart Wished* (installation)  
2007



Photo by Brianne Corn  
Image of *A Dream That Her Heart Wished* (bodice)  
2007



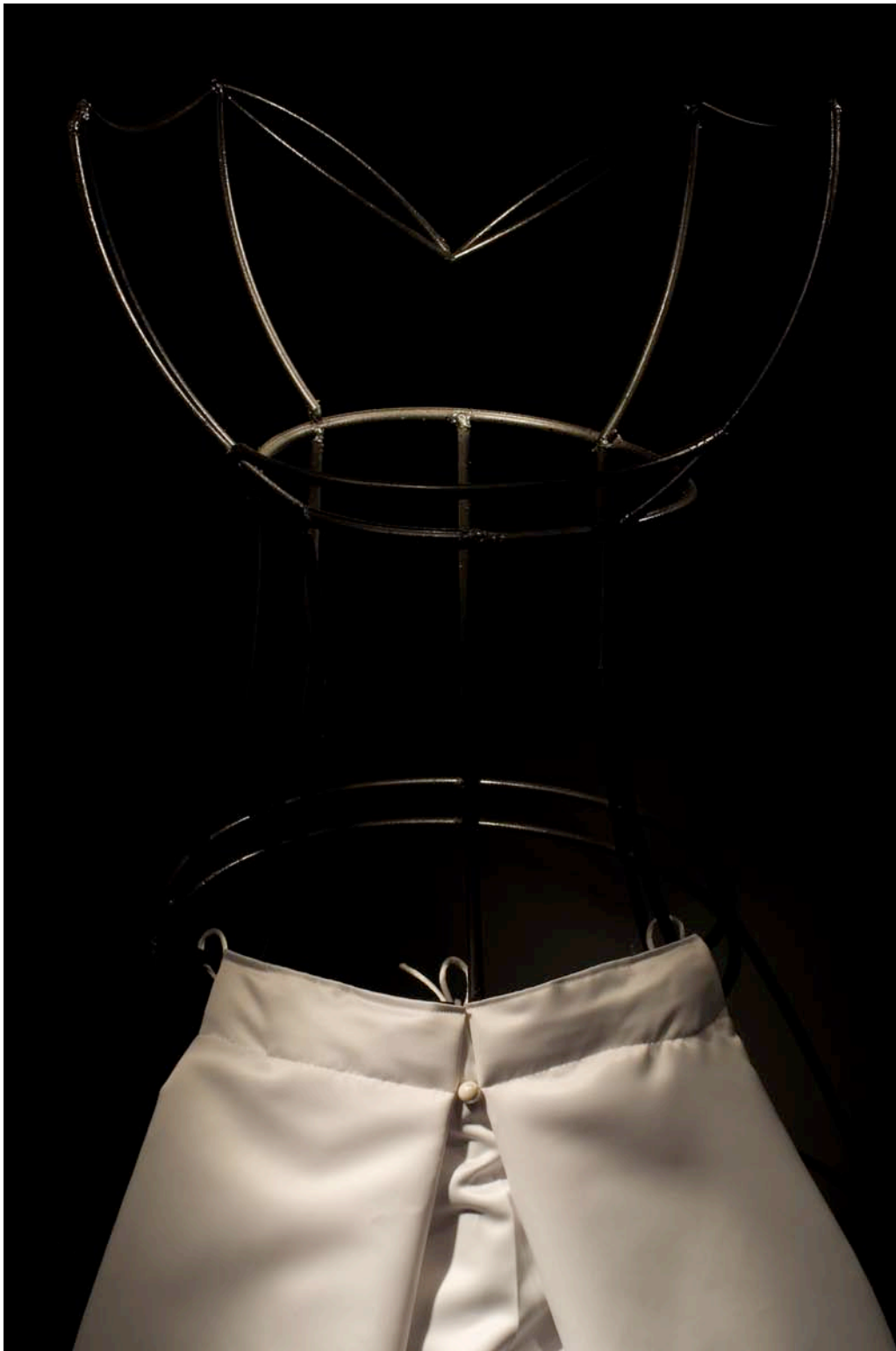


Photo by Brianne Corn  
Image of *Her Innocence Lost in the Plan* (bodice and top of train)  
2007



Photo by Brianne Corn  
Image of *Her Innocence Lost in the Plan* (installation)  
2007



Photo by Brianne Corn  
Image of *Her Innocence Lost in the Plan* (inside bustle)  
2007



Photo by Brianne Corn  
Image of *Preserving Her Fairytale* (installation)  
2007

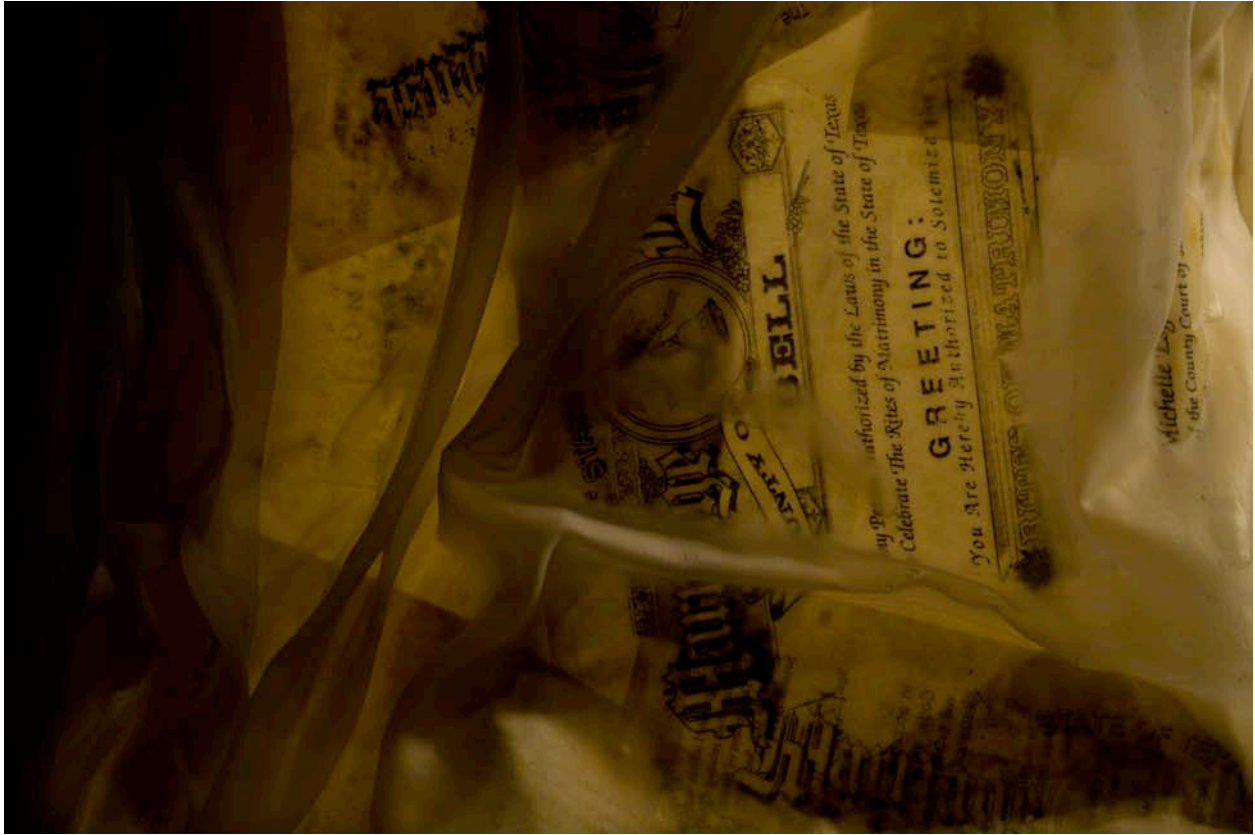


Photo by Brianne Corn  
Image of *Preserving Her Fairytale* (detail of marriage certificate)  
2007



Photo by Brianne Corn  
Image of *Preserving Her Fairytale* (bodice)  
2007



## **MICHELLE'S FAIRYTALE**

Once upon a time, in a land far far away (90miles north of San Marcos, better known as Belton, TX), lived a young girl (not a princess) named Michelle, awaiting her knight in shining armor upon his valiant steed eager to ask for her hand in marriage. Instead, she met Daniel...on the bus. He was to rescue her from the tortures of her evil step-mother and step-sister. But they weren't evil, just dramatic. She dreamt of one enchanted evening underneath the stars with all to watch; she would waltz down the aisle in her dazzling Vera Wang wedding gown. Instead, a Justice of the Peace. She wanted to be whisked away to a beautiful castle in a whole new world. They moved to Georgia. Though her life didn't mirror those Disney-esque fairy tales after which her fantasies were modeled, it was her own fairy tale. She loved her prince ever so dearly. Together they had a child, and they should have lived happily ever after. Though one tragic day, his shining armor fell.

The years passed, and then unexpectedly, the girl found love once again with an un-anticipated knight in dented armor. But through the terrors of the wretched US Government bureaucracy, and its evil red tape of healthcare guidelines, the princess was torn, between her love, the hopes to marry again, and the security of health care. She chose to remain in a state of longing. Longing for that lost fantasy, longing for a new fantasy and that beautiful gown she'd never wear.

## STATEMENT OF INTENT

I never wore my wedding dress. I never will. However, I was, once upon a time, married, but I didn't have a wedding. On July 26, 2003, my husband died, and I swore that I could never love again. By the same time the next year, I decided that I would never marry again. Then I fell in love. I grew confused, yet I stood by my decision to never wed again...but why? The loss of my husband and the relationships I've had since then, cause me to question what seems to be the innate drive of women to marry. I am not a cynic regarding the institution of marriage, but I have in these past four years come to recognize a clash of contemporary views of marriage and my traditional, yet naïve, fairy tale fantasies of weddings.

I wish to create a body of work that tackles this issue. I want to create an installation of sculptural wedding dresses that represent these clashing views of marriage, their role in my life, and marriage in general. The façade of the dress will take the shape of three fantastical wedding gowns. The fabrication of each will represent the challenges that have stripped me of any hope, or desire, of finding a new husband. These are sculptures of dresses that one can never wear, just as my actual wedding dress is piece of art that I will never wear. This installation will seem to idolize weddings, but it actually addresses challenges to the institution of marriage that I face.

The installation will have three dresses in the very close intimate setting of a small enclosed room. The dresses will be slightly larger than life size. I will place them in close proximity of each other allowing the audience to flow through them. What I hope to feel when I walk through the dresses is the way I felt as a child walking through a clothing store- a place where everything is larger than life, extremely valuable, and of



course, not to be touched; a place where I hid between dresses, fantasizing about one day growing up, big enough to wear them. What I want to create in my installation is that childlike nostalgia of being surrounded by fabric, but encompass the wedding dresses' slightly off kilter somber undertones addressing issues in marriage.

## **PROGRESSION OF THE DRESSES**

### **Dress 1: “Preserving Her Fairytale”**

The intention of the first dress was to create a sculptural wedding dress composed of copies of my wedding certificate draped over a steel frame. I wanted to have a hoop skirt frame and a corset bodice (southern belle meets Cinderella) for two reasons: fantasy and confinement (figure 3). I have admired the style of the hoop skirt dress since childhood, because it seemed to carry an air of extravagance and prestige. I wanted a conflict to occur between the elation I gave to hoop skirt dresses, the glamour of corsets, and their stigma of confinement.

First I began construction of the frame. I used half-inch steel round rod for the base (the “legs”) of the frame, and for the rest quarter-inch round rod was used. I welded the frame to resemble a hoop skirt dress. Next, I sewed a layer of sheer white chiffon over the frame so that I could adhere a layer of wedding certificate copies onto it. I chose to use fabric rather than chicken wire, commonly used for the “skinning” process, for this step so the metal frame would show through when lit. In the final step, I dipped the paper into polyurethane to adhere it to the fabric.

During the first critiques of the finished product, different angles as to what the dress symbolized were discussed. Roger Colombik (Professor of Sculpture, Texas State Department of Art and Design) commented to my sculpture class that the, “wedding certificate is such a loaded image...is it just a piece of paper?.. (Figure 4)What power does a piece of paper have over us...why?” This struck me. I had not considered how a wedding certificate would read to the viewer. This comment opened my eyes to the variety of interpretations a simple wedding certificate could have for the viewer. I did not address the issues of displaying massive amounts of photocopied wedding certificates

and how they would read to a diverse audience. I only had in mind what *my* wedding certificate meant to *me*. It represented my marriage to my late husband. It is one of the only things that I have left to show that I actually married this man; a man who is now non-existent, except for on paper. This certificate is proof that our marriage existed, that he existed.

Other critiques arose about the composition of the piece. Once the wedding certificate layer was applied, I noticed that the gestalt form of the frame's figure had disappeared underneath the paper layer. This revealed the frame's disproportioned shape. The paper clung too tight to the "hoops" as well. This bothered me.

I decided to add another layer of the white chiffon so that the sculpture would appear more dress-like and to mask the long torso. Having fabric in its raw form draped over the figure clashed with the aesthetic of the photocopies' stiffness, so I coated the fabric with a mixture of paraffin and beeswax then draped it onto the sculpture. I manipulated the waxed fabric with a heat gun and paint brush to shape it, and I added layers of wax directly onto the revealed wedding certificates on the front of the dress to unify the piece.

After this step, it became apparent that I needed to make a clear decision about the sculpture. Neal Wilson, (Professor of Painting, Texas State Art and Design) my honors thesis supervisor, informed me that the sculpture was "riding the fence" between a sculptural approach and a realistic approach to rendering a wedding dress. I needed to either shift the dress's appearance toward a more deconstructed style by revealing the frame underneath or define its shape with more detail. I added more folds to the bust area of the dress moving toward a more dress-like appearance. I thought about adding larger

pieces of gathered fabric onto the hips and/or wrapping more around the torso to mask its exaggerated length, thus giving the dress a more decorative surface. Upon many hours of speculation about this problem (and adding, and subtracting, and manipulating the waxed fabric), the sculpture could develop no further. The torso was too long, and it was the problem which weakened the entire composition. I decided to work on the next dress until inspiration struck me or to see where the next dress would direct the idea of the series as a whole. I wanted to depict a flowing princessy appearance for the dress's style in conjunction with a feeling of it being captured in time. I did not, however, successfully create the flowing "Cinderella" dress and decided that that look would be more appropriate for the intentions of Dress 2.

I created an image that represented my lost fairytale marriage and preserved it. I feel that I was successful in that aspect. I did not realize this was the full intention of the piece until I reevaluated the dress after starting the creative process of Dress 2. Polyurethane captured the sense of preservation of my past, which I still fear to let go of and am restrained by its complications. The wax formed a hard shell-like surface, yet is brittle to the touch, symbolizing the "shell" I shield myself with against future prospective relationships. This dress signifies the inhibitions that block, restrain, and protect me from falling in love again and the petrifying fate of matrimony. It also addresses the fact that maybe I cannot let go of losing the person who was supposed to be my, as fairy tales put it, "one and only". This dress is about preservation-- self preservation.

## **Dress 2: “A Dream That Her Heart Wished”**

The intention of the second dress was to create my “dream-dress”. My dream dress is modeled after Audrey Hepburn’s wedding dress in the last scene of the movie *Funny Face* as well as Edgar Degas’ ballerina tutu dresses (Figures 1 and 2).

The construction of this dress began in the same manner as the first. I used half-inch round rod for the base and quarter-inch round rod for the rest of the frame. Proportionally, this frame was much more successful. I kept the image of Degas’ ballerina dresses in mind while making the “corset” top for this frame. I remembered the proportions of the last dress, and exaggerated the hips’ width on this frame so they would not appear as flat, when viewed from the front, as the first (Figure 5).

The fabrication of this piece was more like that of sewing a dress than the construction of Dress 1. I created a pattern directly onto the frame with the same sheer chiffon fabric as Dress 1, lightly stitched it together, and then pinned it onto the frame. I intended to make two whole dresses, one plain, and one with imagery of dollar bills on it. The dollar bills would symbolize the money factor keeping me from marrying again. I made one pattern of the whole dress, as described above, and one similar of only the bodice. I pinned it to the frame giving it a slightly deconstructed look (Figure 6).

In discussing the “deconstructed look” with Professor Wilson, he reminded me again of the dilemma I had with Dress 1. He liked the idea of the deconstructed look, but I needed to create a balance between sculpture and reality. Which did I want: A dress or a sculpture of a dress? He informed me that the dress in its current state just looked unfinished or not completely thought through. I informed him, “Well, I’m not all that put together and thought out!” I added five gathered layers of tulle wrapped around the waist

of the frame in three sections for the tutu effect. This way I can add as many or as few layers of skirt as I choose in the future. I also pinned on the bodice and used five straight pins with red tips as buttons on the back of the “corset” (Figure 7). I chose these to one, add color; and two, show the “in the making/ unfulfilled” nature of the dress. This parallels my life and how my dreams of marrying again will forever remain unfulfilled.

As for the imagery, I realized that I did not need to force all my ideas into one project. I should stretch out the ideas amongst many projects to allow myself to work through each idea individually, and if the ideas overlap within projects, a more comprehensive cohesive body of work will result. Therefore, I decided to use the imagery of dollar bills on the next dress, if relevance allowed.

Although this dress represents my unattainable dream dress, and such a melancholy theme, the sculpture itself makes me smile. I still feel like a little girl when I see it. It makes me giddy! I want to crawl underneath it and stare at the ceiling through it as if I were in a store clothing rack. In fact, I do crawl underneath it (and so do others, I’ve heard). This dress evokes an emotion of childlike nostalgia just as I hoped it would.

### **Dress 3: “Her Innocence Lost in the Plan”**

The intention of the third sculpture was to address the foundation of marriage, i.e. the structure of relationships and the commercial aspects of self-help books and wedding magazines. A whole industry exists solely for the purpose of re-shaping marital life-- meaning that it exists for monetary gain by manipulating people’s views of weddings and marriages. This varies from advertisements pushing expensive wedding dresses, cakes, and table toppers, to self-help books selling the how-tos for finding the right man, selecting the best groom for you, and achieving marital success.

The approach to designing this dress came from a more analytical /compositional perspective than the other two. I made two large voluminous dresses and wanted a sleeker silhouette on this third for compositional variety. I sketched a long sleek dress that fishtailed at the bottom, and a long train draping onto the floor behind it (Figure 8).

I used steel rods for this dress as I did with the others. I used the same chiffon fabric for the lining of the train and a thick satin type taffeta material for the top layer. I used five yards of each fabric, which I cut to the desired length and added the leftover fabric to the side of the train for more width and to give the end of the train a fanned shape. On the underside of the train, in the seams, I tied loops of satin cord for the four-point bustle. I also used this same cord to attach the train to the small of the back of the frame.

For the imagery of the third dress, I intended to use photocopies of wedding magazines and self-help books (or dollar bills). I chose these images because they signify the commodity aspect of weddings. This imagery would be on the underside of the train,



so that it would be like the hidden foundation of marriage covered by the beauty of a pure white train.

After completion of the frame, I decided not to cover it with fabric like Dress 1 and Dress 2. More fabric was unnecessary because it would not add to the overall concept of the piece. I painted it black and constructed only a train for the dress. The whiteness of the train would highlight the parts of the dark frame it touched.

Professor Wilson told me to paint the frame white for aesthetic reasons, which it would get lost in the dark room, and it needed to stand out. I disagreed...many times (Figure 9). We decided to see the frame after lighting it, and then change the color if the black paint did not work. I was right (thank God!). We eventually lit the dress from above, directly onto the frame. The lighting gave the dark frame enough contrast from the walls and the mirror it stood in front of (Figure 10).

I researched the history of wedding dress trains and diagrams of the proper train bustle. The train was an accessory to the wedding dress symbolizing social status. The more wealth the bride's family had the more fabric they could afford (Leanna). This concept was perfect for the theme of this dress. A bustle was basically used to hold the train up and away from the floor so that the bride could move easily after the ceremony (Leanna). I used a four looped French Bustle, but added more loops so in the future, I could change the appearance of the bustle.

In making this dress, I revisited the importance of stepping away from the work to really analyze its progress and to attend to the direction in which the piece led itself. I did not need the fabric over the frame nor did I need to paint the frame white. I was able to stick to my plan of having a dark frame, like the other two dresses, and a white accent

of fabric as the focus, but did not have to follow my sketch exactly just because it showed my original intent. I eliminated the photocopy idea. Photocopies of any material would be too much of a distraction and unnecessary decoration. The heavy, solid white train was powerful enough. I did not need, nor want, any blatant imagery to guide an audience.

This dress was the most successful of the three sculptures due to the construction of the frame being most appealing, and the dress's construction best portrayed my original intentions. The frame symbolized the bare structure of marriage. The bustled train gathered behind it stressed the huge impact money consequently has on my decision to marry again.

## **INSTALLATION PROCESS**

## **Preparation of the Room**

To prepare the room I painted the stark white walls a deep neutral grey so the dresses' color would stand out against it (figure11). I wanted the dresses to appear as if they're floating off the ground in a dreamlike state. I made wooden boxes to cover all the outlets and light switches and painted them grey as well. The room needed to be as dark as possible and one uniform color.

The mirrors were Plexiglas mirror with a backing glued onto them for support. I originally intended to hang the mirrors on the wall, but once I stood them up and leaned them against the wall, their size was perfect for reflecting the dresses like a soon-to-be bride in a bridal shop.

In lighting the dresses, we discovered that “less” really is “more”-- effective that is. Lighting the dresses from underneath, but the dresses began to resemble gimmicky fiber optic lit flowers in a display case (which I adored as a child, but it was not the look I intended). With cool lighting from underneath, and warm from above, the dresses resembled jewelry box ballerina dancers. I loved that look, but it still was not the dream-like optical sensation I was striving for (Figure12). I lit the dresses directly above and avoided having any light on the walls. Once I hit the dimmer switch down a few notches, the magic happened (Figure 13). The dresses were floating.

## Music

I grew up watching fantastical movies like *The Wizard of OZ* and Disney versions of *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and my personal favorite, *Beauty and the Beast*, all of which have soundtracks with themes that provoke dreaming of other worlds or marrying princes, and happy endings. All of which directly correlated with the concept of my installation. While sewing these dresses, I watched these movies, and when the opening scene of *Cinderella* played, I sang along, with her and her accompanying mice, to the lyrics of “A dream is a wish your heart makes”. Then it struck me, “That’s what I’ll play during the installation!” I chose music based on the lyrics conveying the necessity of dreaming and wishing, because that’s what I do. I daydream and I wish for that perfect life painted in the cartoons I watched as a child. I was worried that the music might be too cheesy and over the top, but when I played it softly in the dimly lit room, I felt that magical tingly, and slightly eerie, sensation of being in a dream just as I hoped that I would.

### List of Music in Order Played:

1. *A Dream Is A Wish Your Heart Makes* (Cinderella)
2. *When You Wish Upon a Star* (Pinocchio)
3. *So This Is Love* (Cinderella)
4. *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* (The Wizard of OZ)

## **PRESENTATION**

## **Presentation and Discussion**

The presentation opened with Professor Neal Wilson introducing me to the audience. Next, I read “Michelle’s Fairytale” which I believed was the best way to set the tone of the installation. Then I directed the audience to visit the installation a few people at a time so as not to interrupt the mood of the scene. After everyone had a chance to view the installation (some more than once), we gathered into the room where we discussed the effect of the installation and my inspirations to create it.

What I felt was the most relevant part of the discussion was when Roger Colombik pointed out the importance of artwork standing on its own without the artist’s statement and/or fairytale present. I made a comment referencing his first critique of Dress addressing the issue of what a wedding certificate means to different people. From there we discussed that what determines artwork successful is its ability to engage an audience’s attention without ever knowing the artist, her inspirations for the art, as well as her personal and artistic background. This concept not only applied to the wedding certificates or each individual dress, but the installation as a whole.

### **Audience Response to Final Installation**

I believe that this installation was a success for two main reasons: One, I loved it. Two, so did others. I felt that the audience responded well. Every person had a story to tell me. The dresses, the music, the atmosphere, or the concept evoked some sort of emotion in him/her. I enjoyed listening to other people's interpretations of the installation, because they were so different than my own. Their interpretations were coming from their backgrounds, which made each analysis personal and eye opening. I was pleased that my installation caused people to want to share their, very personal, thoughts. I found that some people really enjoyed going into the installation with no one else present, so they could experience it alone surrounded by the darkness and music, and the mood that the combination created. It was very pleasing to hear that people were drawn to visit the installation more than once, and that they can appreciate the mood that I was trying to create.



## **APPENDIX**



Figure 1.



Figure 2.

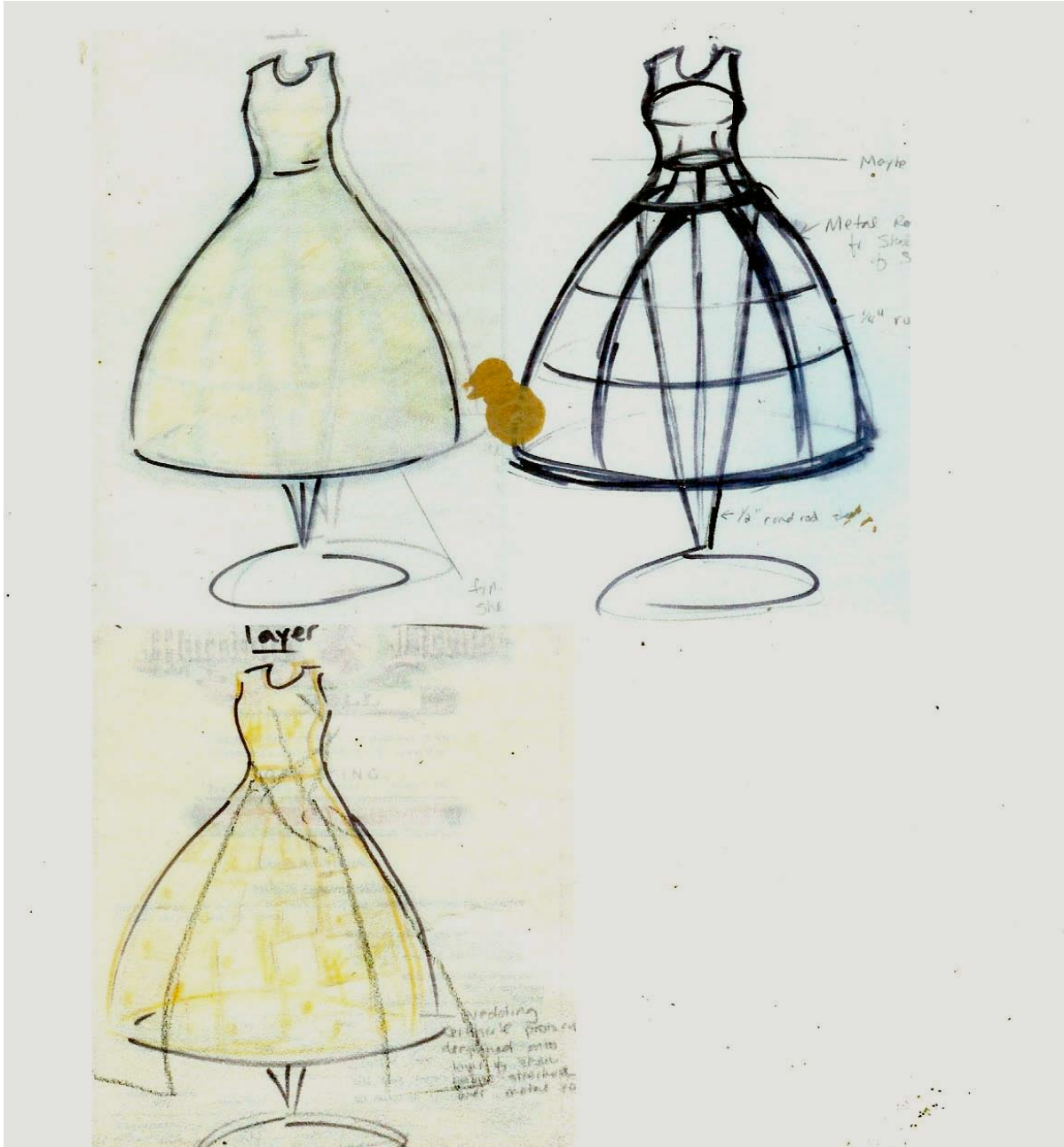


Figure 3.



The STATE OF TEXAS

2000 1888

# Marriage License

COUNTY OF  
**BELL**

To Any Person Authorized by the Laws of the State of Texas  
To Celebrate The Rites of Matrimony in the State of Texas

**GREETING:**  
You Are Hereby Authorized to Solemize the

**rites of MATRIMONY**

Between  
**Daniel Keith Methvin**  
and  
**Michelle Esguerra Wilson**

and make due return to the Clerk of the County Court of said County within thirty days thereafter  
certifying your action under this License.

Witness my official signature and seal of  
office at office in Belton, Texas, this, the  
15th, day of June, A.D. 2000 at 10:21am.  
(Military Warvet)

Vada Sutton, Clerk County Court  
Bell County, Texas  
By K. Taylor Deputy

Thereby certify that on the 15TH day of JUNE at 12:15 P.m. A.D. 2000  
I united in Marriage the parties above named.  
Witness my hand this 15TH day of JUNE A.D. 2000

Signature of person performing ceremony  
Bill Cooke  
**BILL COOKE JUSTICE OF THE PEACE**  
Please Print Name and Title of person performing ceremony  
301 PRIEST DR KILLEEN TX 76541  
Please Print Address of person performing ceremony

Ceremony Performed in BELL County, Texas

Returned and filed for record the 26 day of June 2000  
and recorded the 26 day of June 2000  
in Book 149 Page 237 Marriage Records of Bell County.  
By M. Evans Deputy Vada Sutton, County Clerk

Figure 4.

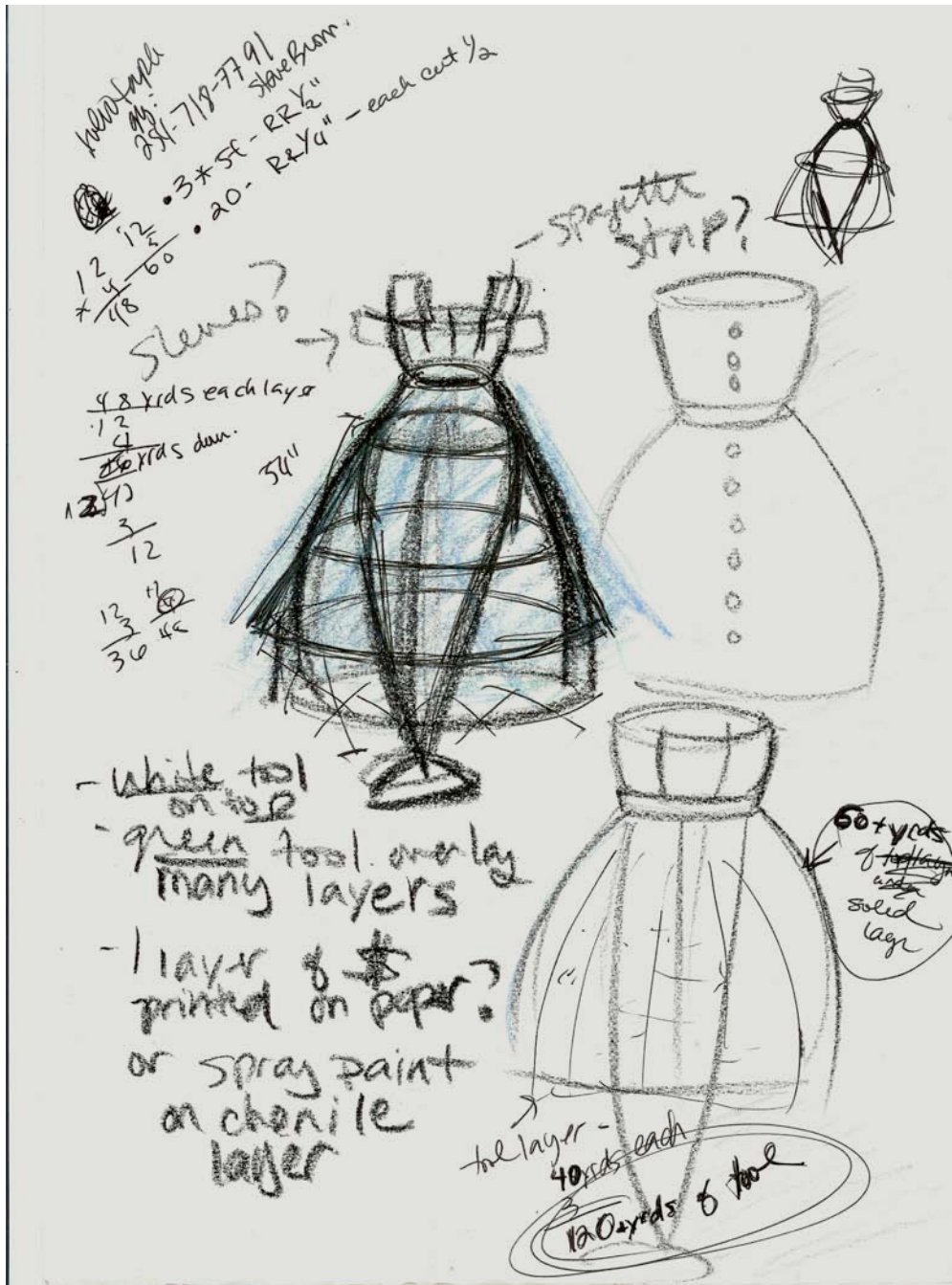


Figure 5.



Figure 6.



Photo by Brianne Corn

Figure 7.





Figure 8.



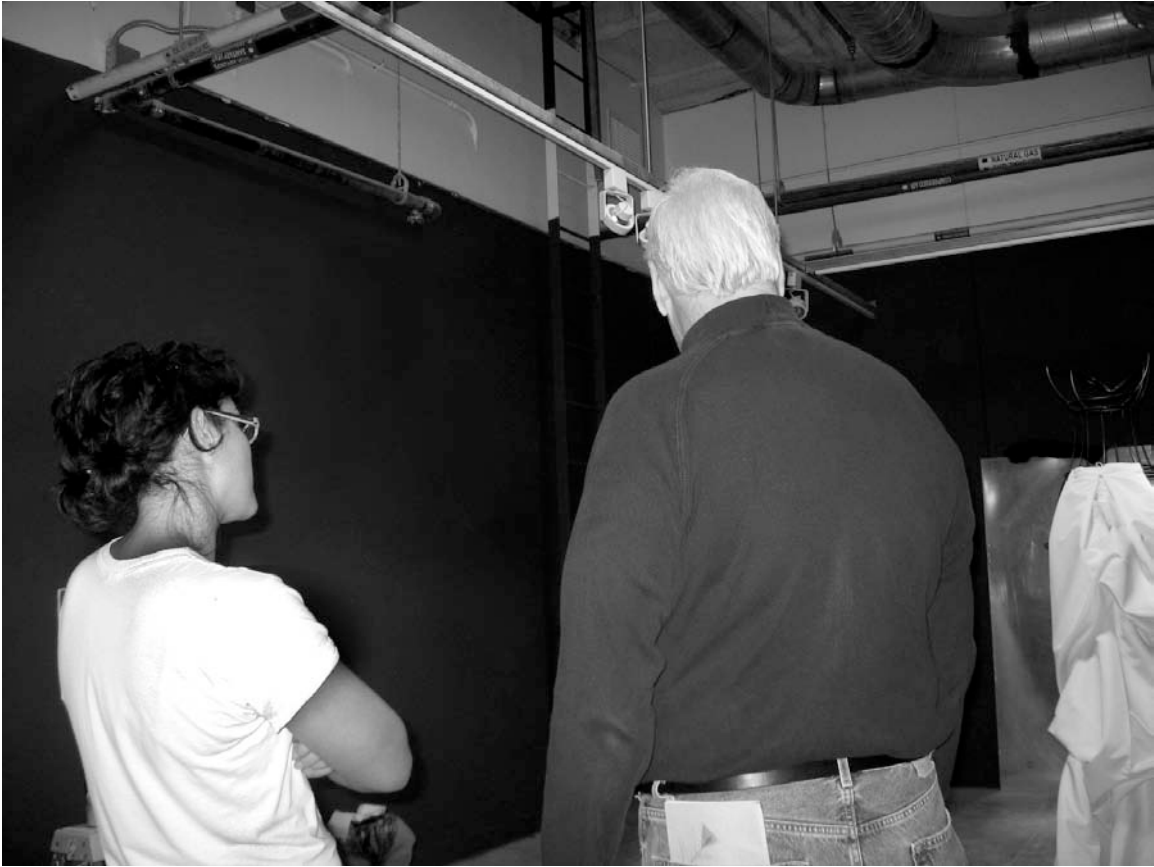


Figure 9.



Figure 10.



Figure 11.



Photo by Brianne Corn

Figure 12.



Figure 13.

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So This Is Love. Cinderella. Track. 4

When You Wish Upon A Star. Pinocchio. Track 6.

...The End