

HISTORY, IDENTITY, ART: VISUALLY EXPRESSING NICODEMUS, KANSAS' IDENTITY

by

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A REPORT

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Abstract

History is embedded in a landscape. History of a community is embedded in the landscape where land was discovered, cultivated, and where people have and continue to thrive and live. Rural communities have this embedded history and culture to look back on and be proud of. However, sadly these communities are suffering from loss of population, jobs, economic stability, and accessibility (Woods 2008). This phenomenon described emphasizes not only a destruction of many communities and their lives, but also the history and culture that is embedded there.

Nicodemus, Kansas is one of these rural communities that has a unique history. This history begins after the Civil War during times of new found freedom and the reality of independence for many former African-American slaves. The residents and descendants of Nicodemus are passionate and proud of their history and see their community identity as embedded in the history and culture.

Nicodemus has experienced loss of population and economic vitality throughout their history. However, their strong connection to the history remains intact. This history has been embedded in their identity. The study argues that art can provide a way of expressing Nicodemus, Kansas's identity.

This study is primarily an art-based investigation into what materials, mediums, and tools of art express Nicodemus, Kansas's identity and history. Art-based research is less concerned with the discovery of truth than with the creation of meaning (Eisner 1981). This approach allows an investigation into how to express Nicodemus's identity. "...visual art is a significant source of information about the social world, including cultural aspects of social life;...identity issues at the....group, and individual levels; and many other issues" (Leavy 2009, 218). Through research methods including historiography, literature review, oral history, and site visits, the outcome of the study is creating artworks, which genuinely express the identity of Nicodemus, Kansas. Through the research and creation of artworks, the identity of Nicodemus, Kansas is expressed visually.

HISTORY

IDENTITY

ART

visually expressing
Nicodemus, Kansas' identity

Leah Edwards
Master's Project and Report

HISTORY, IDENTITY, ART:

visually expressing Nicodemus, Kansas' identity

Leah Edwards | Master's of Landscape Architecture | Professor Katie Kingery-Page | Spring 2014

abstract

History is embedded in a landscape. History of a community is embedded in the landscape where land was inhabited, cultivated, and where people have and continue to thrive. Rural communities have this embedded history and culture to look back. However, these communities are suffering from loss of population, jobs, economic stability, and accessibility (Woods 2008). This phenomenon can destroy not only communities and peoples' lives, but also the history and culture that is embedded in a landscape.

Nicodemus, Kansas a rural communities with an important history. This history begins after the Civil War during times of new found freedom and the reality of independence for many former African-American slaves. The residents and descendants of Nicodemus are passionate and proud of their history and see their community identity as embedded in the history and culture.

Nicodemus has experienced loss of population and economic vitality throughout its history. However, Nicodemans' strong connection to the history remains intact. The study argues that art can provide a way of expressing Nicodemus, Kansas's identity.

This study is primarily an art-based investigation into what materials, mediums, and forms of art can best express the identity and history of Nicodemus, Kansas. Art-based research is less concerned with the discovery of truth than with the creation of meaning (Eisner 1981). "...[V]isual art is a significant source of information about the social world, including cultural aspects of social life" (Leavy 2009, 218). Research methods include historiography, literature review, oral history, reflexive critique and site visits, culminating in the creation of a series of mixed media artworks. Through the research and creation of artworks, the identity of Nicodemus, Kansas is expressed visually.

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History is embedded in a landscape. History of a community is embedded where land was discovered, cultivated, and where people have lived their lives. Communities have this embedded history and culture to look back on and be proud of. However, the loss of population, jobs, economic stability, and accessibility have eroded the identities of rural communities. Richard E. Wood describes the harsh reality of this loss, stating that the destruction of small-town rural America affects about one of every nine Americans (Wood 2008). These people are spread over two-thirds of the American landmass and are experiencing an ongoing threat to a culture and a way of life that in many ways still defines America (Wood 2008). This phenomenon described emphasizes not only a destruction of many communities and their residents, but also the history and culture embedded there. Considering the dilemma in rural communities, two general questions arise: “How can a community take a step, even a small step, to ensure the endurance of their history and culture?” and “How can the pride of a community stay intact, even during times of loss and harsh realities?”

The site chosen for this study is Nicodemus, Kansas. Nicodemus is a community that has experienced loss of population and economic vitality throughout their history. Although the population has dwindled in this small rural community, the residents and descendants of Nicodemus have a strong connection to their history. Arts activist James Bau Graves understands culture as embedded in the identity of a group of people, where the topic of culture engages the passion of a great many people (2005, 126). The passionate community of Nicodemus sees its identity as instilled in its history and culture of the community. The history and culture of a community, as Graves states, is the foundation of the “entire edifice of human expression” (2005, 8). Nicodemus’s past is the expression of who they are as a community, or, in other words, their identity.

This study argues that interpretive art can provide a way of expressing Nicodemus, Kansas’s identity (fig. 1.1). “As a pervasive social product visual art is a significant source of information about the social world, including cultural aspects of social life; economic and political structures; identity issues at the global, national, group, and individual levels;

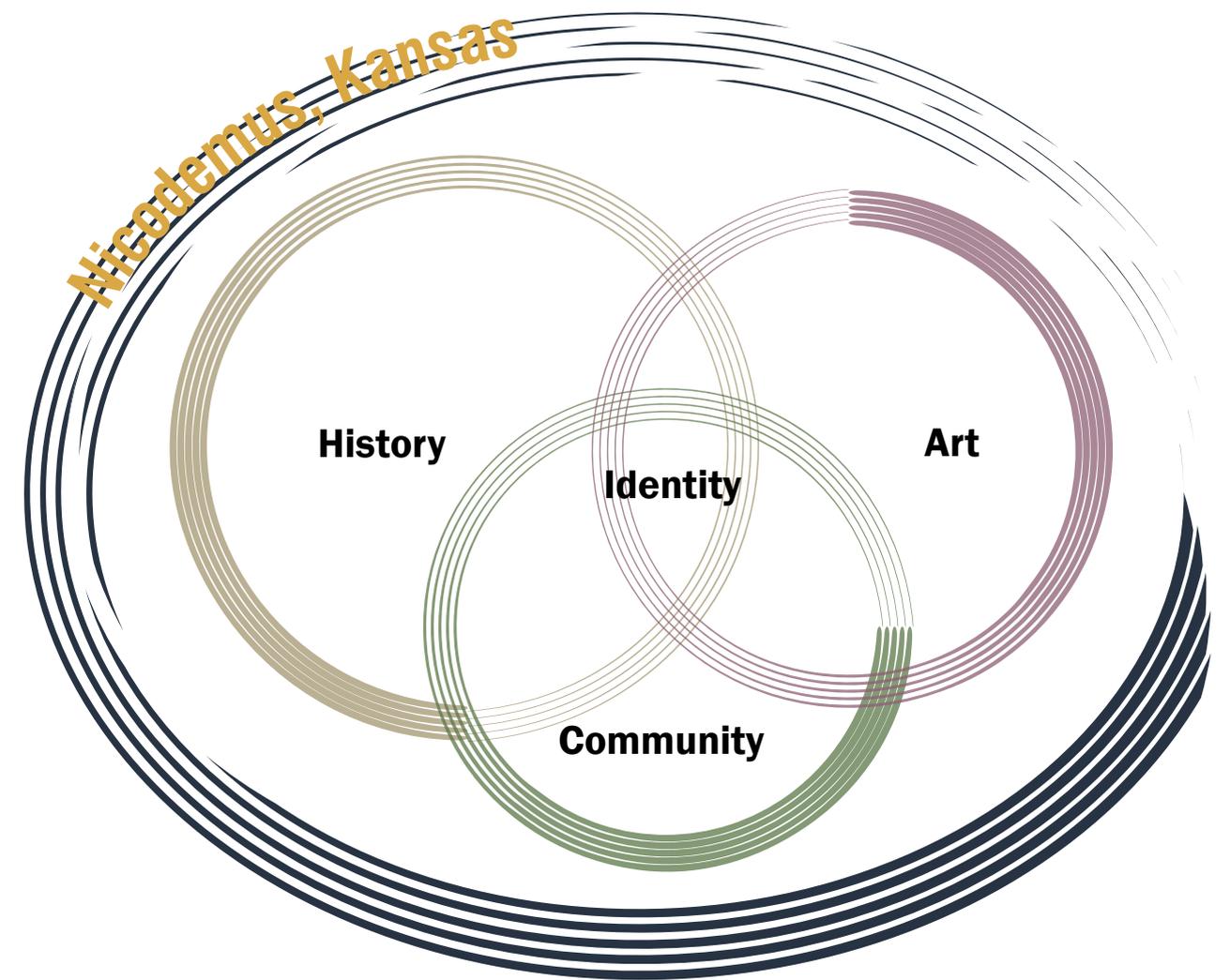


Figure 1.1: Research thesis diagram (by author 2013).

and many other issues” (Leavy 2009, 218). Art is an expansive term that can take on many forms and use many mediums. The purpose of this study is to use art not as a vague and generic expression of the identity of Nicodemus, but to discover specifically what mediums, tools, materials, and experiences genuinely communicate what Nicodemus is to the people who have attachment to the community. The research question for the study is:

What forms, materials, and spatial experiences of public art will best expose the history of Nicodemus, Kansas and capture the sense of pride Nicodemans and descendants of Nicodemans’ have for their place?

Chapter Two introduces the methods of the study. The methods used in this study are primarily qualitative and include arts-based research. The methods include historiography, oral history, site visits, informal interviews with key informants from Nicodemus, and creation of art. Chapter Three describes the history of Nicodemus, Kansas. The understanding of the history is a vital component to the identity of Nicodemus. The stories and events, which occurred in the past,

are what defines Nicodemus today and will lead to uncovering the identity. Chapter Three continues with a synthesis of relevant literature to topics connected to the research question. The topics are:

- Theory Base
 - Theory of Affordances
 - Perception and Relationship to Landscape
- Rural Community
- Cultural Landscapes
- Community Identity
- Community-Based Art

The methodology, history, and literature are the parts of a whole artistic research process, which explores the research question.



Effectively addressing the research question requires careful consideration of methodology. The fundamental terms for determining the methods that best answer the research question are *landscape, history, art, and identity*. Nicodemus, Kansas has a landscape, a history, and an identity. However, the physical landscape of the community does not explicitly show the identity of the community. Art can be the active participant between the landscape, history, and identity. The methods must lead to expressing the identity of Nicodemus through art.

The research and methods for this study are qualitative. Qualitative research views social properties as constructed through interactions between people, rather than having a separate existence (Robson, 2011, 25). There are two different parts to the

methodology: informative and historical data collection and artistic application.

The methods in the informative and historical collection include literature review, historiography, oral history from key informants, and site visits. The primary method in the artistic application is an iterative art application.

The methods chosen are set in a specific process, which effectively lead to the result of expressing the history and identity of Nicodemus through artworks. As Robson states, the main purpose of qualitative research and methods “is understanding” (Robson 2011, 24). The methods chosen help the researcher understand the history and interpret it into art expressing their identity.

informative and historical data collection

Literature Review

Synthesis of theory literature is an important method for this study because of the theoretical and artistic approach to expressing Nicodemus's identity. The theories explored are behavioral and phenomenological and include the theory of affordances and theories of relating to and perceiving a landscape. These theories provide insight into how a person may perceive the environment or landscape along with how they use and manipulate it for their needs.

Understanding the general location and setting of Nicodemus provides insight to its identity. Therefore, the definitions of 'community' and 'rural' are vital to understanding the setting of Nicodemus, Kansas. A literature review discussing a community's culture and history helps to better define these terms.

Embedded in the landscape are the culture and history of a community, especially in Nicodemus. To draw the research question to an even more narrow and attainable goal, another important term defined is identity. Literature relating history and culture to a rural community's identity will provide an operational definition and support relevance of the Nicodemus project. The literature review gathers information on methods used by communities to express an identity through art. Literature focusing on community-based art, or participatory design, as well as the methods specific artists use to create art is important in understanding different approaches to materiality, form, and mediums. As an introduction for the research, the literature review provides insight into how others define and use key ideas and terms relating to this study.

Historiography

The research question asks how Nicodemus's history can be used to express their identity. Therefore, knowledge of the history is a pivotal component to the study. This approach to research is historiography. Historiography is "the interpretation of the historical record of human actions and events, and this records representation as a recognizable narrative" (Deming and Swaffield 2011, 165). The sources of this research are primarily published writings and archived documents, such as books and historic preservation reports. In combination with writings, graphic evidence such as photographs were beneficial to understanding the history.

The overall organization of the historiography is important to the study as well. According to Deming and Swaffield, organization of historical accounts can focus on a place, project, wider landscape, journey, or type of event (Deming and Swaffield 2011, 165). For the research of the history of Nicodemus, the organization comes from the place, landscape, and journey of the people. Gathering information regarding these key features of history is the basis for identifying and expressing Nicodemus's identity through historical research.

Oral History from Key Informants

An oral history is a kind of qualitative interview (Leavy 2011, 9). "Oral history follows an inductive and open-ended interview model. This interview format involves storytelling: the researcher guides a process where each participant narrates his or her story" (Leavy 2011, 9). This study involves interviews with four key informants in an open and informal manner. The informants are Angela Bates, John Ella Holmes, Sharyn Dowdell, and Veryl Switzer (figs. 2.1 - 2.4). All the informants are direct descendants of the original settlers of Nicodemus. Hearing the history from these informants confirms written history and opens a new perspective about Nicodemus. As Leavy states, "Meaning is not 'out there' waiting to be revealed; rather, meaning emerges throughout the collaborative oral history process" (Leavy 2011, 9). Through oral history, there was hope of learning personal perspectives and accounts of the history, which led to a better idea of what Nicodemans see as their identity. Oral history was used as inspiration to draw from in the artistic production.



Figure 2.1: Angela Bates (Sommers).

Angela Bates is a descendant of the settlers of Nicodemus, Kansas. She was raised in California and received a Bachelor's degree in Education from Emporia State University. After a long professional career that moved her all over the country, she moved back to Nicodemus, Kansas in the 1980s. She organized and became the first president of the Nicodemus Historical Society (NHS) in 1988. She continues as the executive director of the NHS along with operating Ernestine's BBQ in Nicodemus.



Figure 2.2: JohnElla Holmes (Kansas State University, 2003).

JohnElla Holmes is a descendant of the settlers of Nicodemus, Kansas. She was born and lived in Nicodemus, Kansas until the age of five. She then lived in Salina, Abilene, and Topeka, Kansas. After she graduated high school in Topeka she married and had a family, eventually moving back to Nicodemus in 1996. She went to school at Fort Hays State University and Kansas State University. She is a professor in American Ethnic Studies at K-State. Her focus is African-American Culture, Race, and sharing the history and stories of Nicodemus.



Figure 2.3: Tree and Township Hall (by author, 2013).

Sharyn Dowdell was born in Leavenworth, Kansas and grew up in Nicodemus, Kansas. She is a descendant of the original settlers of the town. She went to school in Nicodemus and after high school went to the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas. She has lived in many locations all over the country including Denver, Colorado and Oakland, California. Ms. Dowdell and her husband moved back to Nicodemus in 1992 and shortly after she became the town trustee. As a trustee, she oversees the maintenance of streets, water lines, and cemeteries within the township.

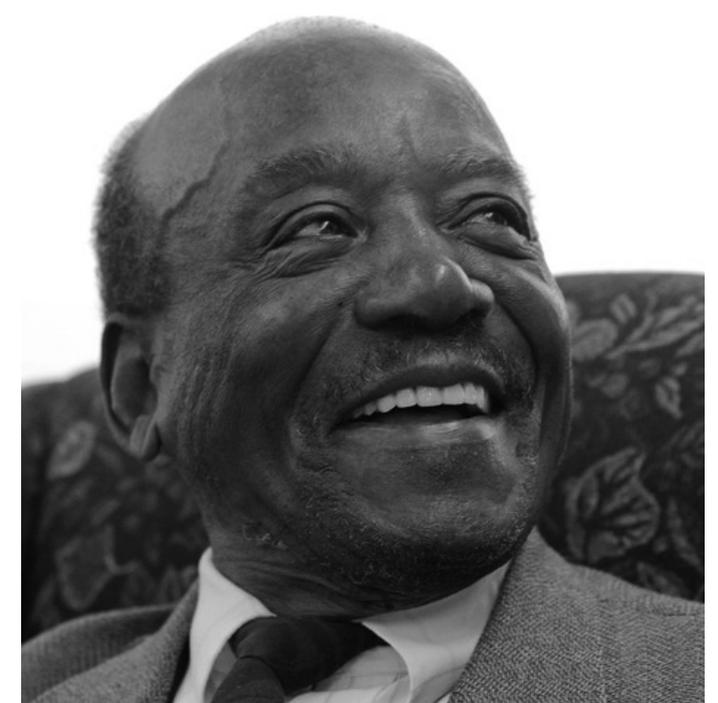


Figure 2.4: Veryl Switzer (K-State Athletics, 2014).

Veryl Switzer was born and raised in Nicodemus and is a direct descendant of the first settlers of Nicodemus, Kansas. In 1950, he was the second black football athlete at Kansas State University to receive a football scholarship. In 1954, he was drafted by the Green Bay Packers to play professional football. Mr. Switzer holds a Bachelor's degree in Physical Education and a Master's of Education from K-State. He worked for Minority Affairs, Student Affairs, Special Services, and as Associate Director of Athletes at K-State until he retired in 1999. He lives in Manhattan, Kansas and enjoys telling stories of Nicodemus and being an educator.

Site Visits

Visiting a site allows the information obtained from reading and listening to become real. During the site visits, data collection through photography, expressive writing, visiting key historic structures, and material collecting occurred. Photographs of the community today compared to historical photographs of Nicodemus provides further understanding of their identity. The perspective of how Nicodemus started and the condition and reality of it presently, create an idea of how the community has evolved over time. This evolution is part of the identity of Nicodemus to be expressed through art. These site photographs are evocative in communicating ideas, images, thoughts, and memories of Nicodemus.

Physically standing outside or inside key historical structures such as School District Number or the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church make the history of Nicodemus tangible (figs. 2.5 - 2.6). Site visits enhanced the understanding and importance of these structures in the development and history of Nicodemus. During the sites visits, natural and man-made material collection occurred to connect to

the site as an outsider looking in. When creating art in the analysis part of the research and during the art production phase, the materials enhanced the artworks created.

In order to understand the site and the history, expressive writing was another method used during and directly after site visits. Writing, using an expressive approach, focuses on the writer as a storyteller (Leavy 2011, 123). In this study, storytelling is a part of the broad idea in expressing an identity through art. Impressionistic writing often, “merges methodological discussions, research findings, and discussion of findings into a narrative piece” (Leavy 2011, 123). Reflecting on observations and oral information through writing contributes to a more open mind in creating artwork open and free of opinions. Being transparent during the research and creating process serves to produce authentic work true to the site, history, and identity of Nicodemus. Site visits to see the reality of the Nicodemus, its current state, and its attention to the history enforced a transparent mindset needed to create credible artworks of identity.



Figure 2.5: Site Visit: School District Number 1 (by author, 2013).



Figure 2.6: Site Visit: A.M.E. Church (by author, 2013).

artistic application

Art-Based Research

Research in the arts is an investigation that has art practice, in the broadest sense of the word, as its subject (Borgdorff 2012). Elliot W. Eisner describes artistic approaches to research as less concerned with the discovery of truth than with the creation of meaning (Eisner 1981). This report uses art as a way of discovery and interpretation to lead to a final product. “The validity of art-based research comes not from a formalized set of procedures but from the product’s persuasiveness of a personal vision” (Eisner 1981, 6). The intent of the art produced is to express the identity of Nicodemus based on information gathered from historical research and oral histories interviews. Art-based research is a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared (Borgdorff 2012). The insights into the history and identity of Nicodemus are expressed through the art created from this project.

Iterative Art Production

The research question is answered by collecting information through literature, historiography, oral history from key informants, site visits, and impressionistic writing, then applying this knowledge through an iterative art production. Connecting and synthesizing the information acquired through these methods leads to the application and creation of artworks expressing Nicodemus’s identity.

Visual interpretation is an emerging form of design investigation informed by theories of identity politics (Deming and Swaffield 2011, 217). Deming and Swaffield quote Cathy Dee stating, “Images can have a range of critical functions including dialogic, hermeneutical, polemical, rhetorical and analytical, and therefore can contribute to theoretical understanding” (Deming and Swaffield 2011, 217). Patricia Leavy’s agrees that visual art is a way of understanding the physical world. “The power of image, and its role in society, cannot be underestimated” (Leavy 2009, 215). The purpose of using art to express identity is to function hermeneutically to the community of Nicodemus, in other words, to interpret the story and history of Nicodemus into something visual that

contributes to a relatable identity.

The art produced followed an iterative process of quick, yet thorough charettes. The goals for the process were to create artworks significant and representative of the history of Nicodemus, Kansas. Therefore, the iterative design process was appropriate to attain these goals. Iterations are a fundamental part of the design process and are a natural feature to a designer’s skills. Iterations are more goal-directed and utilize “heuristic reasoning processes and strategies” (Adams and Atman 1999). The basic steps of an iterative process are designing, creating or modeling, and evaluation (Adams and Atman 1999). The social component of community-based design, or participatory design, adds a deeper level of creating with an iterative process (Simonsen and Hertzum 2012, 10). The steps of an iterative design process and the social experience of community-based design interact off each other. This method can work to produce expressive artworks of the identity.

The iterative process began with exploring a certain feature, physical or abstract, in the history of Nicodemus and exploring concepts of how to interpret the feature into art. The concepts continued to develop by refining

and working through the features and design of the art. The development phase led to the next step in the iterative process, which is making.

In order to receive critical feedback, the process included presentations to committee members and the key informants. The feedback received during these presentations created a response to the art. Assessing these responses drove the re-imagining of the artwork. Re-imagining and rethinking the artwork determined if the process needed to revert to the conceptual step of the iterative process or recreate the piece using the same concept (fig. 2.6).

The iterative process involved multiple steps, which retained a flexible model yet still consisted of a structure to keep the task of creating art consistent. The process permitted the ability to produce multiple works, which were individual pieces portraying many identities of Nicodemus. The openness of the study and methods allowed for as much of a subjective view as possible. Subjectivity and transparency were pivotal to understand the history of a unfamiliar place and yet still create art that is relatable to residents and descendants of Nicodemus on many levels.

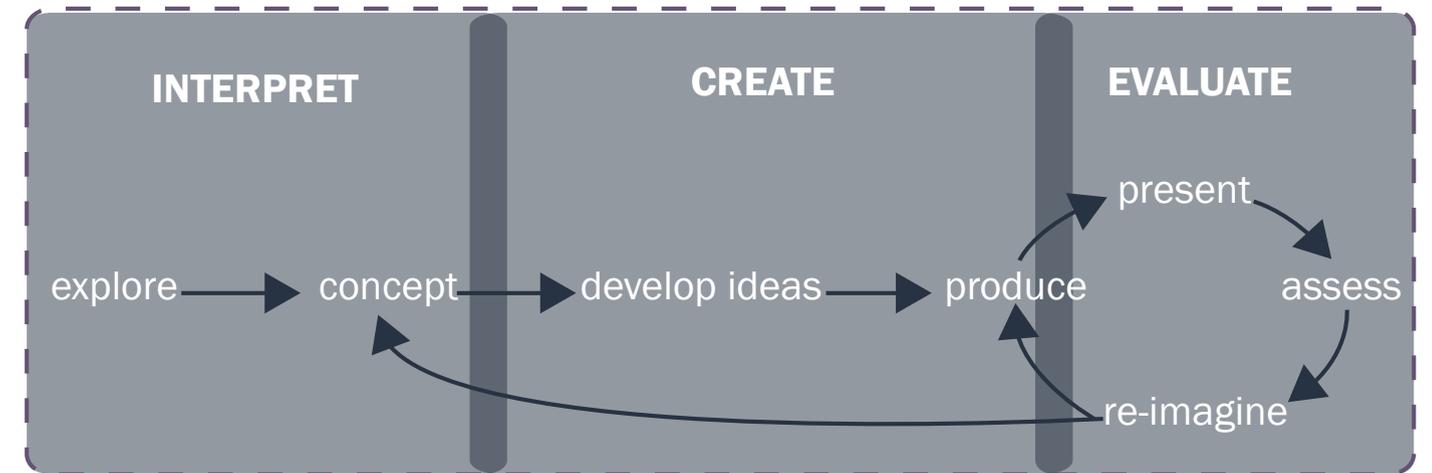


Figure 2.7: Art production process (by author, 2013).

Reflection

The interpretive nature of this study and the creation of artwork set up a reflective mindset. The method of reflection involved the process of asking specific questions about the approach in making the artwork and being critical of the work and its effectiveness.

Reflection followed the creation of the artwork.

Examples of the reflection questions that were considered are:

- Are the materials and mediums used appropriate for expressing the history of Nicodemus?
- What other materials could be used to convey the history?
- Is there an identity or concept that was not expressed which should have?
- Does the artwork as a whole express the history of Nicodemus? Do the key informants think the artwork represents Nicodemus's history and identity?
- Was the iterative process effective in creating the artwork?

- What has been learned from doing research and design this way?
- Can the study be applied in similar sites and design dilemmas?

The reflection method was important to debrief and take a step back from the study. It was a matter of understanding the accomplishments, what was not considered, how effective the process was, and what was learned about Nicodemus, Kansas and about research through art.

Scheduling and Planning

Consideration of time needs for the project was important to the study. The work plan visually explains each method and the time allotted for it (fig. 2.7). The deadlines and gateways determined when to finish one method or step in the process and move on to the next step. The artistic application methodology was a twelve-week process. The amount of time given to this process relates to the significance it holds in the project. Creation of artwork was the main part of the study. Therefore, it had the most significant time without any other methods occurring simultaneously.

Research Workplan

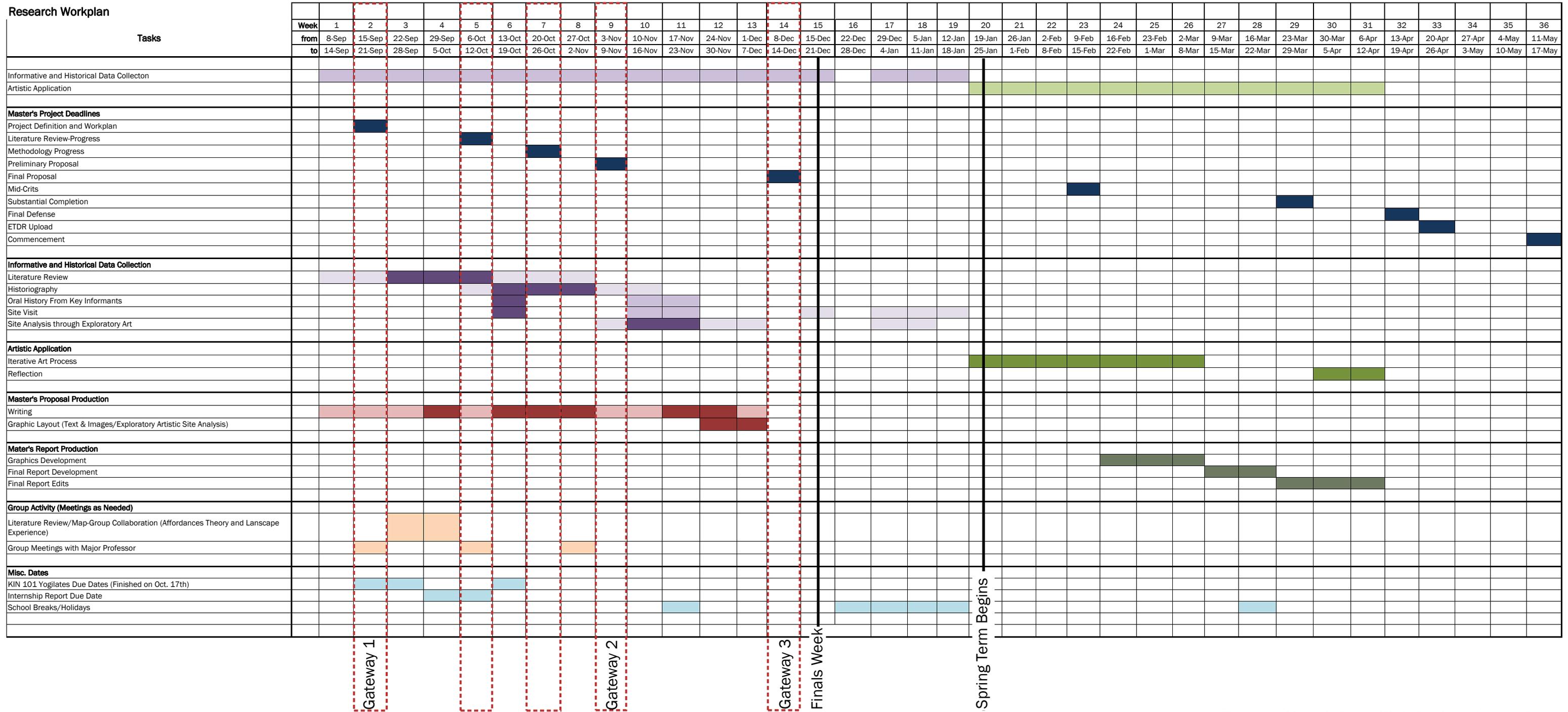


Figure 2.8: Master's Report Workplan (by author, 2013).



history of Nicodemus, Kansas

Nicodemus, Kansas's history begins with the end of the Civil War. After freedom from slavery, many African-Americans were renting land to farm with little money. Many of these African-Americans could not make enough to support their families. Violence in the south for blacks was increasingly common (Kansas Historical Society 2013). These conditions led former slaves to break away from their familiar environment to find better living conditions. The movement of former African-American slaves from the south to the north and west is the "exoduster" movement. The name "exoduster" came from the exodus from Egypt during Biblical times (Kansas Historical Society 2013). Even before the Exoduster movement, the settlers of Nicodemus laid a path for others to migrate from the Southern states (Painter 1976). "Nicodemus was the most important Black settlement in Kansas before the Exodus of 1879" (Painter 1976, 153).

W.R. Hill, a white real estate agent, traveled around the south to promote government lands in Kansas and encourage former slaves to move. Hill and Reverend W.H. Smith led the first group of settlers

from Lexington, Kentucky to Graham County, Kansas arriving on September 17, 1877 (Kansas Historical Society 2013). This first group was about 350 African-Americans including five ministers and Hill. The Nicodemus Town Company formed with Reverend Smith as the president (Bates 2013). Another group of 250 settlers came in the spring of 1878 and the final significant group of settlers came in 1879. The cost to settle was five dollars: two dollars was paid for Hill's services, another two dollars was for land filling services, and one dollar went to the treasury of the Nicodemus Town Company (Northwest Kansas Planning and Development Commission 1976).

The first year at Nicodemus was harsh because of a lack of food and supplies needed to establish and secure the town (Bates 2013). The arrival of the first group was too late in the year to plant crops and they had little money. The community first built small burrows on the side of hills or ravines and later moved into sod dugouts. "They finally built wooden structures after the strident first winter" (Curtis 1996, 434).

The Osage Indian Tribe claimed to have helped with hunting when they first arrived and helped with the



Figure 3.1: Farmers working in a field outside of Nicodemus, Kansas, no date, ca. 1930. (courtesy of Nicodemus Historical Society Collection, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas).

planting of crops the following year (Bates 2013). It took several years to build a town, which could sustain and provide for itself. While building the town, the residents went to nearby Ellis, Kansas and Bogue, Kansas for supplies (Bates 2013).

In 1887, ten years after the initial settlement, Nicodemus was a typical western town with two newspapers, four general stores, two grocery and drug stores, two livery stables, a bank, a law firm, a hotel with a post office, and a physician amongst other professions and practices (Northwest Kansas Planning and Development Commission 1976) (Bates 2013). The Missouri Pacific and Union Pacific railroads were proposed to run through Nicodemus. This led to a prediction and hope of more economic capital with more jobs and an increase in population. However, the Missouri Pacific railroad went south, about five miles, to Bogue, Kansas and the Union Pacific went north to Nebraska (Northwest Kansas Planning and Development Commission 1976). The loss of two railroads is considered by many residents, descendants, and historians as the real deterioration of the many promises and hopes citizens of

Nicodemus had for their community (Northwest Kansas Planning and Development Commission 1976), (Bates 2013).

Nicodemus reached its peak population in 1910 with about 450 people living in the town. By 1920 it had declined to 271 and from there continued to slowly decrease (Northwest Kansas Planning and Development Commission 1976). This decline was attributed to many people moving away to find jobs and economic stability. People felt disheartened and with no jobs available, they left (Bates 2013). Today, about twelve people live in the township.

The town was designated a National Historic Site in 1996 and was dedicated in 1998 (Bates 2013). The National Park Service and residents of Nicodemus work together to preserve five remaining historic structures: St. Francis Hotel (and post office) (1881), African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church (1885), First Baptist Church (1907), Nicodemus School District No. 1 building (1918), and Nicodemus Township Hall (1939). The National Historic Site represents the only remaining all black town established at the end of Reconstruction and during

the “exoduster” movement (U.S. Department of the Interior: National Park Service Nicodemus 2011).

The history of Nicodemus includes stories of courage and strength. When the African-American slaves gained freedom at the end of the war, they were introduced to a world where they were not entirely accepted as equal, freemen, and had to work hard to provide for themselves and their families (figs. 3.1-3.8). The history of Nicodemus, Kansas is an exemplary story of determination, endurance, experience and adventure (Bates 2013). The settlers, former African-American slaves, grew a town out of nothing but an idea for a better life. In the process, they created an extraordinary history.



Figure 3.2: Man repairing windmill on farm, no date, ca. 1940. (courtesy of Nicodemus Historical Society Collection, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas).



Figure 3.3: Woman entering Nicodemus Post Office, no date, ca. 1940. (courtesy of Nicodemus Historical Society Collection, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas).



Figure 3.4: First Baptist Church, no date, ca. 1940. (courtesy of Nicodemus Historical Society Collection, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas).



Figure 3.5: Nicodemus Township Hall, no date, ca. 1940. (courtesy of Nicodemus Historical Society Collection, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas).



Figure 3.6: Gas station in Nicodemus, no date, ca. 1940. (courtesy of Nicodemus Historical Society Collection, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas).



Figure 3.7: Men sitting on front porch, no date, ca. 1930. (courtesy of Nicodemus Historical Society Collection, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas)



Figure 3.8: Two men in tractor, no date, ca. 1930. (courtesy of Nicodemus Historical Society Collection, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas).

synthesis of literature

Theoretical literature underpins the later artistic research of this project. The review, synthesis, and analysis of literature create a concise and informative body of text (fig. 3.9). The literature is broken up into two topic areas: theory base and community significance.

Theory Base

The theory of affordances, as defined by creator James J. Gibson, emphasizes the actions the environment allows or provides for its inhabitants (Gibson 1977). Hugo Letiche and Michael Lissack simplify this definition stating, “Affordances are the dynamic reciprocal relationships between animate persons and their environment” (Letiche and Lissack 2009, 61). Affordances invite participation, action, and response (Letiche and Lissack 2009, 62). The activities of living in a landscape create a perception and interaction in relation to their environment (Letiche and Lissack 2009, 63).

Simon Swaffield states, “one common theme in much contemporary writing...is that landscape provides a useful way or ways of knowing the world” (Swaffield 2005, 4). Affordances allow presence in the environment, or landscape, which in turn leads to an understanding of the world. James Corner agrees stating, “The landscape is itself a text that is open to

interpretation and transformation” (Corner 1991, 131). Corner understands a landscape as not only a physical understanding, but also a cultural concept through which relationships to nature can be understood (Corner 1991). Similar to Swaffield and Corner, Denis E. Cosgrove states, “Landscape is a way of seeing that has its own history, but a history that can be understood only as part of a wider history of economy and society” (Cosgrove 1984, 1).

The history of Nicodemus developed through affordances between people and the landscape or environment. However, as the people built, lived, and worked in Nicodemus, many other affordances surfaced. As time passed, the town and its land afforded children an education and place to worship. Affordances the landscape provided in Nicodemus, Kansas are important in understanding the history and how people lived in the community.

Community Significance

Defining Community

According to Cornelia Flora and Jan Flora, the most common definition of community is a place or location where a group of people interact (Flora and Flora 2008, 13). David E. Proctor believes that the word community is a “feel good” term that can have different meanings for many different people and groups (2005). In order to be more flexible and define community for many types of people, Proctor defines three different perspectives of community (2005, 4). The first perspective of community is “Community as Territory” (2005, 4). Proctor defines this perspective as the physical place with context of location and geography. “Community as Territory” is a formal perspective where the people interact within a locational boundary (2005, 4). Proctor’s third community perspective is “Community as Relational” (2005, 5). In this perspective, the community is a characteristic of the human relationships that occur. Instead of a boundary based on location, the boundary in “Community as Relational” is one of meaningful relationships between people (2005, 5). Proctor’s final perspective of community is “Community as Symbolic” (2005). Communication and language are

fundamental to the understanding of community in this perspective. To explain “Community as Symbolic” further, Proctor uses Mara Adelman and Lawrence Frey’s statement, “Ultimately, community is a social construct, grounded in the symbolic meanings and communicative practices of individuals...” (2005, 7). Proctor reasons that the theory of symbolic form, along with expressive language and communication is a strength that creates motivation rather than merely reflecting (2005, 8). In summation of Proctor’s definition of community, multiple views and characteristics make up a community. Not only is it a physical location and boundary, but there are characteristics of relationships of people and communication that also make up a community.

Defining Rural

Often the term rural is defined using demographic terminology based on population and location (Flora and Flora 2008, 7). The U.S. Census Bureau defines rural as residual space from metropolitan and urban spaces. Janet Fitchen argues the U.S. Census Bureau’s definition creates drawbacks for understanding what rural really is (1991, 247). Most literature struggles to get past using numbers to describe rural communities. Richard E. Wood understands the lack of attention in defining rural because physically it is easy to miss. “When people travel through the countryside, they usually still miss seeing rural America because they tend to cling to interstate highways and larger cities that have grown around well-positioned interstates” (Wood 2008, xi). The lack of description and social characteristics in a rural setting creates a problem in defining a rural community. In order to define what a rural community means there must be an identity based on the perception of the landscape, culture, and history found by the people’s relationships, language, and physical boundaries.

Cultural and Historical Landscapes

Landscapes shaped, changed, or otherwise altered by humans are referred to as cultural landscapes. Richard Longstreth uses the Secretary of Interior's guidelines to define cultural landscapes as, "a geographic area associated with a historic event, activity, or person or exhibiting cultural aesthetic values" (Longstreth 2008, 23). Longstreth believes this is how many people view a cultural and historical landscape. He continues using Carl O. Sauer's work to argue that the idea of cultural and historic landscapes have influenced people just as people influence landscapes. Sauer concluded that a cultural landscape is, "fashioned from a natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent; the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the

result" (Longstreth 2008, 24). Sauer's definition and ultimately his belief allow the natural area to be more active, as more of a tool than simply being static.

J.B. Jackson agreed with this thinking, describing a cultural landscape as, "intricate webs of mental, social, and ecological spaces that help to define human groups and their activities" (Groth and Wilson 2003, 1). These spaces are the mediums of the natural area Sauer described. Jackson was fervent to see the landscape as an area of agency and structure. Human activities influence the landscape and the landscape influences the human activities. The activities are what give a landscape a culture.

Expression of Community Identity

As Liz Wells summarizes, "landscape is a social product; particular landscapes tell us something about cultural histories and attitudes" (Wells 2011, 1). Longstreth, Wilson and Groth, and Wells discuss culture as a product of human intervention, action, and views on a landscape. James Bau Graves and Thomas McEvilley discuss how identity and art are expressions of culture. "...but culture as we have seen, is embedded in group identity, a topic that engages the passion of a great many people" (Graves 2005, 126). Identity is how a community relates to one another and to their environment. It expresses the culture, history, and story of the community (Graves 2005, 126). As culture affords an identity, it also is the foundation supporting the entire edifice of human expression (Graves 2005, 8). This expression, or identity, can be prevalent through art. Thomas McEvilley states, "Art draws into visibility from the depths of intuition a culture's sense of its identity and of its value and place in the world" (McEvilley 1992, 129). The deepest, most meaningful and sensitive part of a community's culture can be best expressed through art. "A culture's visual tradition embodies the image it has of itself" (McEvilley 1992, 129). Through art or other visual mediums, a

community can reflect on their meaning and relate to the identity.

A visual identity can also be an asset to the community's human capital needs. "Human capital is essential to the economic success of communities. Art is associated with increased happiness and civic participation" (Coletta 2012). Coletta lays out what role art plays in the community. "Art can: keep traditions alive and provide a look into the future and make us see our possibilities differently" (Coletta 2012). If not addressed in some way, the culture, history, and landscape of a community becomes stagnant and useless. Through art, these three components of a community are utilized as a reflective, meaningful description of the history and culture along with a tool to envision how the community moves into the future.

Community-Based Art

Authors Cliare Bishop, Nicolas Bourriaud, Nato Thompson, and Pablo Helguera define and discuss community-based art. These authors use community-based art, participatory art, socially engaged art, and collaborative art interchangeably to mean art dependent on interaction and dialogue within a community (Helguera 2011, 2). Similar to Coletta's statement, Helguera sees this art as, "not only dependent on a community for its existence, but such projects are community-building mechanisms" (Helguera 2011, 9). Bishop understands the social aspect to community-based art, "but it is also a symbolic [activity], both [social and symbolic] embedded in the world" (Bishop 2012, 7).

The distinct difference of community-based art from other forms and types of art are the emphasis on social interaction. Pablo Helguera discusses the social intercourse needed for community-based art. He emphasizes the importance of the artist to establish a relationship with the community. "The typical community art project is able to fulfill its purpose of strengthening a community's sense of self by lessening or suspending criticality regarding the form

and content of the product and, often, promoting "feel-good" positive social values" (Helguera 2011, 10). The social component to community-based art allows the art to speak meaningfully and specifically to the community. Without social acknowledgement, the art is just "other" (McEvelley 1992).

Involving the community with dialogue interaction, community-based art also calls for participation with the physical art. Nato Thompson describes social engagement of art as, "...some action on behalf of the viewer in order to complete the work" (Thompson, 2012). While the art can convey many symbols and messages through form and material, the viewer adds to the meanings of the art based on their perception. Helguera uses writing from Jacques Ranciere quoting, "a community of narrators and translators" (Helguera 2011, 13). Helguera explains Ranciere means that participants willingly engage in dialogue from which they "extract enough critical and experiential wealth" therefore claiming some ownership of the experience (Helguera 2011, 10).

Consideration of the site and its influence on art is another component of community-based art.

Socially, community-based art speaks to a collective group of people sharing many of the same views and ideas. The site also influences the composition and creation of art. Miwon Kwon defines site-specific art as an inclusive concept involving location and the symbolization, which is unique to the location, or the identity (Kwon 2002). Similarly, Robert Irwin defines site-specific art as art conceived with the site in mind. The site, according to Irwin, sets the parameters and is the reasoning for the art (Irwin 1985). However, Irwin identifies the problem with site-specific art is the art is still viewed based on the "oeuvre of the artist" (Irwin 1985, 27). Irwin introduces site-determined art as response, which "draws all of its cues (reasons for being) from its surroundings" (Irwin 1985, 27).

"This requires the process to begin with an intimate, hands-on reading of the site. This means sitting, watching, and walking through the site, the surrounding areas (where you will enter from and exit to), the city at large or the country side" (Irwin 1985, 27).

Relevance to Landscape Architecture

Landscape architecture practice calls for an understanding of a community in its place. Landscape architecture involves many activities of the design process in a community setting. These activities often focus upon the design of a place along with how it will effect future growth. While these goals and objectives for a community project are important, it is also crucial to understand and incorporate a community's identity. This understanding comes from insight to the community's history, its relationships, and its culture. Art can be an agent in which the community identity is incorporated during any part of a community design. "Art draws into visibility from the depths of intuition a culture's sense of its identity and of its value and place in the world" (McEvelley 1992, 129).

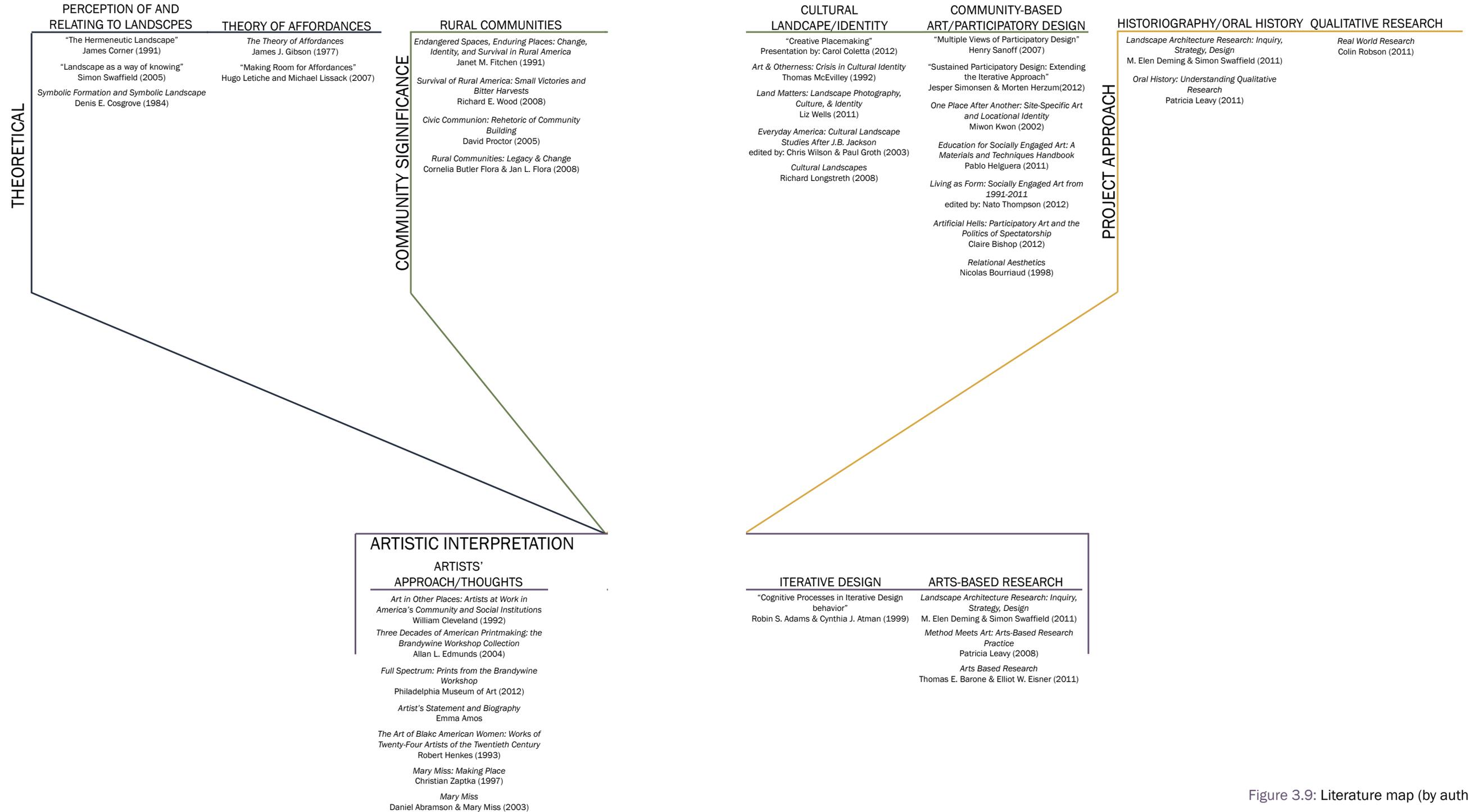


Figure 3.9: Literature map (by author, 2013).



artist's approach

As a precedent for this study, three artists were researched for their approach to art, their methods, and how they incorporate a culture or a community into their work. Allan Edmunds and the Brandywine Workshop focus on providing a facility where underprivileged children, teens, and adults to express themselves artistically. Mary Miss focuses on allowing a viewer to inhabit the art, similar to many components of community-based art. Emma Amos allows the African-American culture to come through in her art work. These artists, and their views on art, guided how the art pieces created for Nicodemus were conceptualized and created by providing thoughts on the meaning and purpose of art within a specific environment or culture.

Allan Edmunds and Brandywine Workshop

Allan Edmunds considers art and the artist to be powerful change agents who have historically stimulated and provided leadership for significant social movements (Cleveland 1992). Edmunds is a master African-American printmaker dedicated to using art as an agent for educating the community on arts in society (fig. 4.1) (Edmunds 2004). During his time as a student at Temple University, he participated in an outreach program called Prints in Progress. This program supported printmaking demonstrations in schools and community centers throughout the region. Similar outreach programs including inner-city workshops that provided similar art education programs inspired Edmunds to open the Brandywine Workshop in 1972 (Langdale and Philadelphia Museum of Art 2012).

“Brandywine Workshop is a visual arts educational institution dedicated to innovative creative processes and creating advanced quality art production” (Edmunds 2004). The Workshop has a three-part mission, which is “to create works of art, to make connections between people from diverse... backgrounds, and to offer community-based educational opportunities” (Langdale and Philadelphia

Museum of Art 2012). The Workshop is located in the heart of downtown Philadelphia where urban blight had been causing injury to the community in the 1970s (Cleveland 1992). Edmunds opened the Workshop with the genesis being to “simply do meaningful work that brought artists and students of diverse cultures and backgrounds together to share and collaborate, and enrich their careers and the lives of others” (Edmunds 2004).

Today, Allan Edmunds and the Brandywine Workshop continue utilizing visual art as a way of expression and activation within a community. The emphasis of educating people on artistic practices and methods as well as providing a place for artists to come and express themselves and their environment is the primary goal of the Workshop presently.

The community-based art component of this study in Nicodemus, Kansas shares similarities to Edmunds and the Brandywine Workshop’s goals. The art created for Nicodemus is meant to utilize their community identity in a visual way to inspire and educate others. The art is an agent to relating the community’s identity and history to visitors, tourists, and the public. Expression of the history, environment, and community is key to opening up their identity to others.

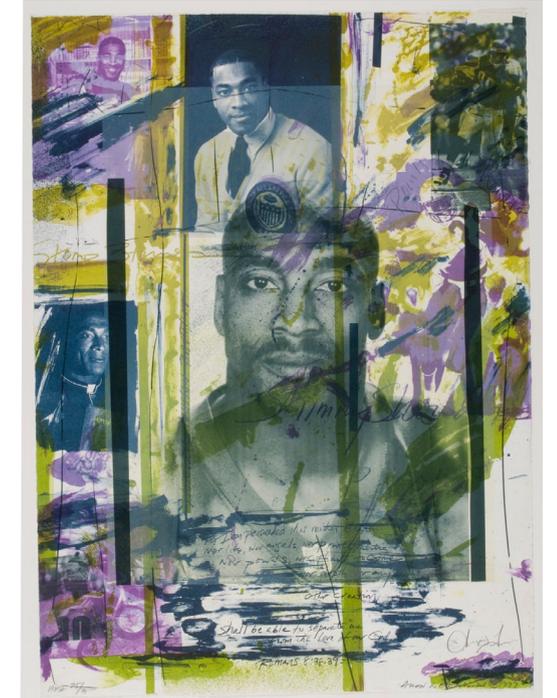


Figure 4.1:
Irving Fryar
Allan L. Edmunds, Published by Brandywine Workshop,
Philadelphia
Color offset lithograph, 1997
29 15/16" x 21 1/16"
Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of the Brandywine Workshop,
Philadelphia, in memory of Anne d'Harnoncourt, 2009
(reproduced with permission by Philadelphia Museum of Art)

Mary Miss

Mary Miss' constructs, or sculptures, "open the possibility for inhabiting the forms themselves..." (Miss et al. 1997, 22). Miss was one of the first public artists to "make the spectator and the spectator's response integral to every work" (Miss 2004). In Miss' work, the spectator inhabits the art because Miss focuses on making environments or places instead of objects or monuments. According to Miss, experience comes from the physical characteristics of the site, the historic or social resonances that are uncovered during a period of research, from a personal relationship that the site conjures up (Miss 2004, 10). Daniel M. Abramson expands on the relationship Miss feels to the sites stating, "Miss' art represents the American landscape as transitory palimpsests, incomplete erasures of earlier time and use" (fig. 4.1) (Miss 2004, 37).

Miss' use of material and pre-existing forms are a literal invite towards the viewer to occupy the space (fig. 4.2). Drawn to existing built forms such as wells, tunnels, and construction sites, she allows the viewer to physically inhabit the space (Miss et al. 1997). The materials Mary Miss uses to create an open and welcoming feel are lightweight materials such as wood, rope, canvases,

and transparent materials such as mesh (Miss et al. 1997). Her art is a glimpse to new possibilities for identifying ourselves, our social relations to others, and ultimately, our place in the American landscape (Miss 2004, 40).

Nicodemus, Kansas has many palimpsests located in its community, which are reminiscent and representative of its history and identity. Similar to Miss' work, the art created for Nicodemus will consider existing structures and forms identifiable to the history. The invitation for an observer to experience Nicodemus' history is important when creating the art.



Figure 4.2:
Mary Miss
Blind Set, 1976
steel, crushed stone, concrete
(courtesy of ARTstor.org)



Figure 4.3:
Mary Miss
V's in a Field, 1969
wood markers
(courtesy of ARTstor.org)

Emma Amos

Emma Amos uses her mediums to argue constructively against the norms in the field of art as well as society. Amos is an African-American postmodernist painter and printmaker. The subjects and intentions within her art are about “skin color, racism, and the privileges of power and of whiteness in the world of art” (“Artist’s Statement”). After receiving her degree in art from Antioch University, she was hired as a designer and weaver. Working with textile led Amos to incorporating and using fabric and textiles in her works. Her prints and paintings incorporate textile as a border, which create motifs resembling African Art as the central message and image in each piece.

Amos’ work and career has largely focused on bringing to light African art and culture. Amos strategically uses cloth, screen print, and gestural strokes or drips of paint to create dense fields of color and texture (fig. 4.4). Along with the textile borders her intention is to connect the image of Africa with North America.

While her concepts of her work are African based and focused on her own cultural background, Amos’ intention is to have many of her work “...connect more than one form of knowledge or experience with the

images with the work” (“Artist Statement”). The work is meant to have different meanings for the different viewers of the work and allowing them to become the artist in a way. As opposed to conventional “white male artists” who have historically dictated what the viewer sees, Amos’ work allows the viewer to become the story and the art (fig. 4.4).

The art created for Nicodemus is similar to Emma Amos’ ideas and materials. The significance of cloth to African culture, as Amos uses, is a medium used in the art created for this study. Also, the idea of letting people become the artist and to create a dialogue for the viewer are key intentions of the art pieces for Nicodemus.



Figure 4.4:
Emma Amos
Family Names, 2001
Paper, fabric, ink, adhesive
30" x 22.75"
(courtesy of ARTstor.org)



Figure 4.5:
Emma Amos
Why We Left the Beach, 1987-2002
acrylic on linen canvas with pieced African fabric borders
84" x 79"
(courtesy of ARTstor.org)

site visit documentation

During the first site visit, Angela Bates verbally shared history of Nicodemus. This visit also explored the community through taking photographs of the site and reflective writing during and after the visit. Reflective writing is simultaneously occurring throughout the study along with sketches. The site visits during the research process opened up a perspective and understanding of how the history and physical community connect and come together.

Expressive Writing

Recording thoughts, ideas, and sketches help to synthesize the information and observations collected. The process of writing using descriptive words and identities of Nicodemus allowed concepts and ideas for the art to surface (figs. 4.6–4.7). Some examples of these are tradition, connection, endurance or strength, and family. Art pieces can communicate these and many other identities.

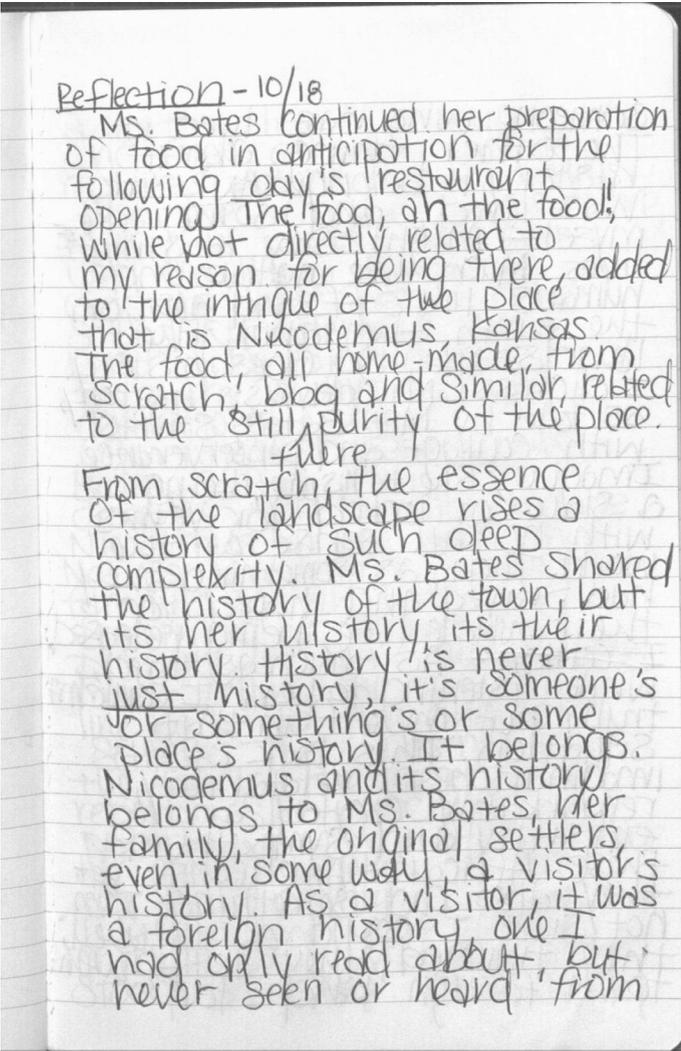


Figure 4.6: Sketchbook entry on October 18, 2013 (by author 2013).

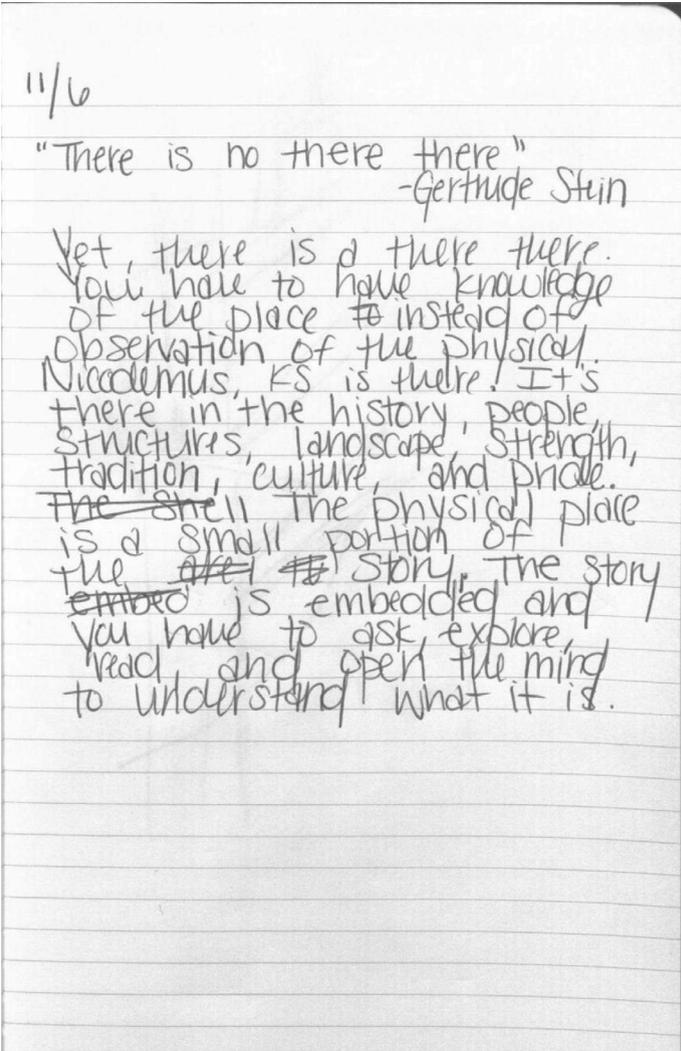


Figure 4.7: Sketchbook entry on November 6, 2013 (by author 2013).

Photographs

Observation of the current condition of Nicodemus was recorded through photographs. The photographs made during the site visits were vital to the imagery being conveyed in the art pieces. Physical and material elements of the community that were documented in the photographs describe the vernacular of the place (figs. 4.8-4.9). Time and history shine through in the photographs showing the use and activity over the years.



Figure 4.8: Nicodemus Historical Society sign (by author 2013).



Figure 4.9: Township Hall (by author 2013).

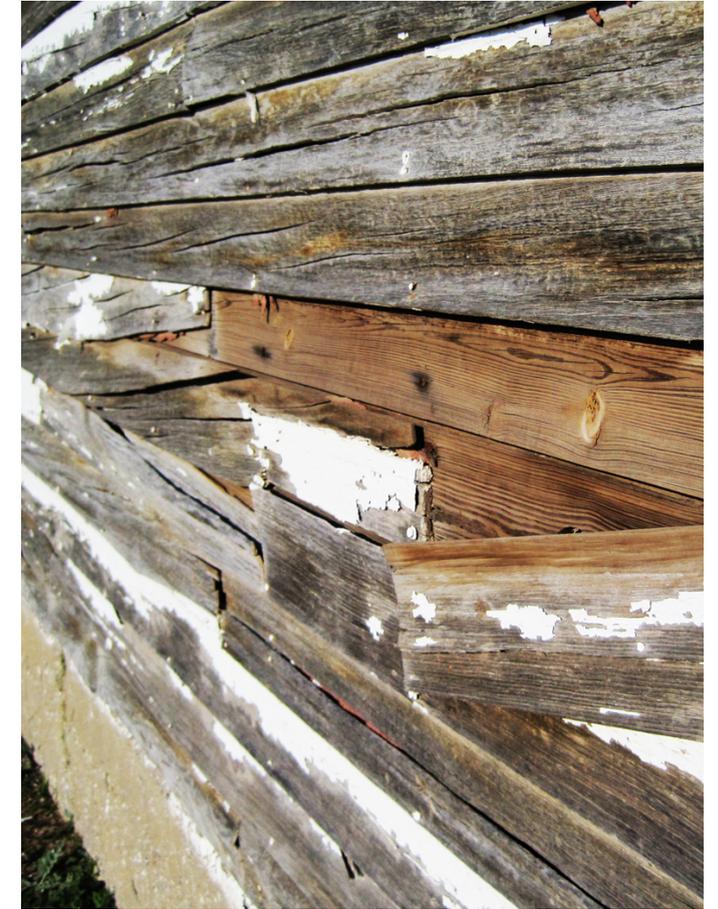


Figure 4.10: Wood siding on Schoolhouse District 1 (by author 2013).



art production

phase 1: exploration

The art production process involved two phases: exploration and focus. The first phase was four weeks and involved exploring materials, mediums, and images that best express Nicodemus's identity and history. The mediums included textile, wood, canvas, image transfers, and screenprinting (figs. 5.1-5.4). Producing and creating as many artworks as possible while thoughtfully considering images, composition, and meaning was the goal of this phase. The following pages include the artworks created during this phase.

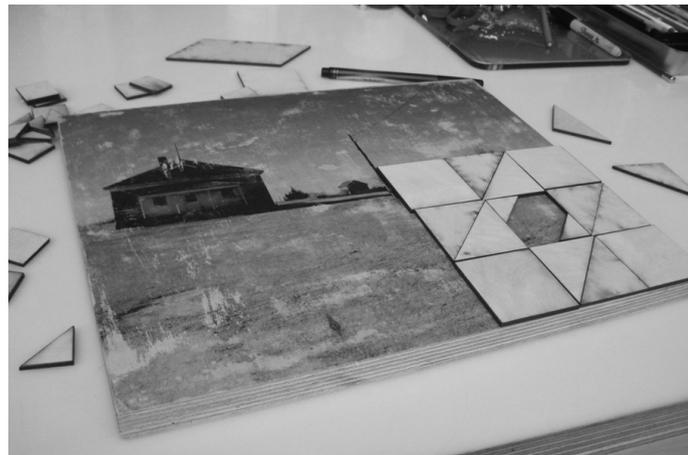


Figure 5.1: Layout process for *Timeline* (by author, 2014).

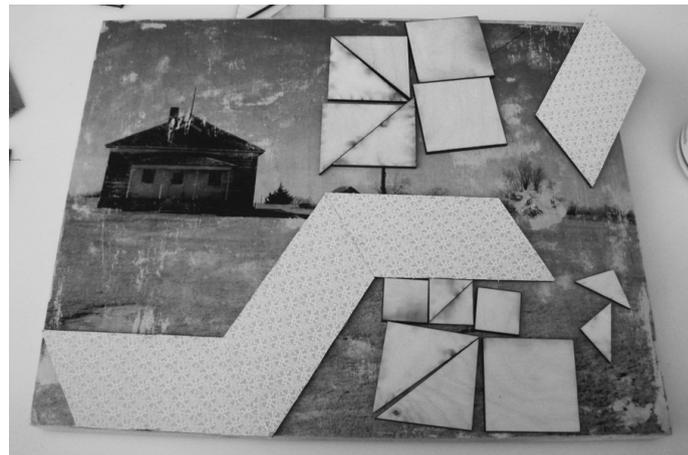


Figure 5.2: Attaching pieces for *Timeline* (by author, 2014).

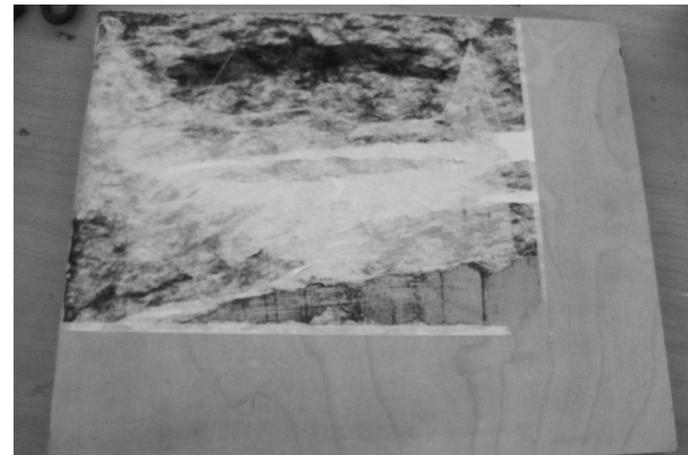


Figure 5.3: Image transfer process for *Lines of History* (by author, 2014).



Figure 5.4: Material image transfer for *Lines of History* (by author, 2014).

Artist Reflection

What is Nicodemus, Kansas? What does the history mean to the community? I found myself coming back to these simple questions at times when I became stuck or needing a fresh take on the art being created. The ability to express Nicodemus in an art piece, or several art pieces became hard to do at times. This difficulty was not because I had no information or inspiration to draw from, but it was the exact opposite. There is a depth of meaning and connection to the community with many beliefs from many people about what the community was, is, and should be. I struggled with doing the history justice. Through the art-based research I was conducting by creating art pieces, I discovered that the smallest interpretation of the history means a lot more than nothing at all (figs. 5.5-5.6).



Figure 5.5:
Timeline, 2014
Photo transfer and textile on wood
13 ¼" x 10 ½"
(by author, 2014)

"They [the settlers] had to have a sense of courage,
adventure, and experience along with the tenacity to
survive when they decided to move from their home."
– Angela Bates



Figure 5.6:
Lines of History, 2014
Photo transfer and textile on wood
13 ¼" x 11 ⅛"



Figure 5.7: Screenprint negative for *Extended Community* (by author, 2014).

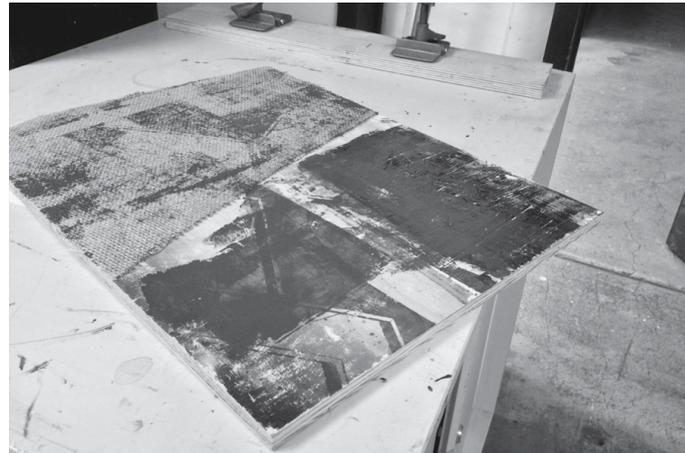


Figure 5.8: Screenprinted outcome for *Extended Community* (by author, 2014).



Figure 5.9: Beginning of image transfer process for *Sign of Age* (by author, 2014).



Figure 5.10: Application of textiles for *Sign of Age* (by author, 2014).

Artist Reflection

I started this art production process with an assortment of materials and ideas. The five pillars, community, religion, commerce, education, and family, stood out to me as strong anchors to start with. However, how to represent these pillars became a struggle while starting to produce. Therefore, I approached the art by using my knowledge of materials and mediums I was comfortable with (figs. 5.7-5.10). As soon as I had produced several pieces, I realized the main concept I wanted to express was layers of deep history and the pieces of a community coming together to support the history and its remnants (figs. 5.11-5.12). After identifying this concept, I created as many pieces as possible, all exploring how to express the basic concept.



Figure 5.11:
Sign of Age, 2014
Screenprint, chipboard, textile on wood
18" x 14"



Figure 5.12: (opposite page)
Extended Community, 2014
Screenprint, chipboard, textile on wood
14" x 18"



Figure 5.13: Image background in *Conerstone* (by author, 2014).

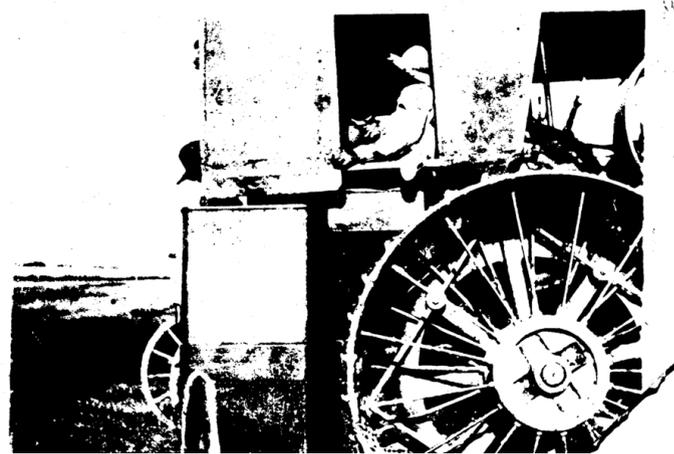


Figure 5.14: Silhouette screenprinted in *Conerstone* (by author, 2014).



Figure 5.15: Image background in *Core and Connection* (by author, 2014).



Figure 5.16: Materials for *Core and Connection* (by author, 2014).

Artist Reflection

As the art production continued, I found that imagery was the important aspect of what I had created. Images convey depth of history, symbolism, and meaning. An image allows a viewer the ability to put themselves into the art piece (figs. 5.13-5.16). The ability of the viewer to become a part of the art piece is a goal of community-based art. I wanted a viewer to feel and understand the history of Nicodemus as well as allow their minds to open to the idea of being a part of the community. The rich vernacular that was captured in site visit photographs added to the sense of being in Nicodemus. The imagery of landscape, material, and age were intentionally chosen because because I believe these give a sense of existing conditions that have endured time and change (figs. 5.17-5.18).



Figure 5.17:
Cornerstone, 2014
 Photo transfer and screenprint on wood
 16" x 14"

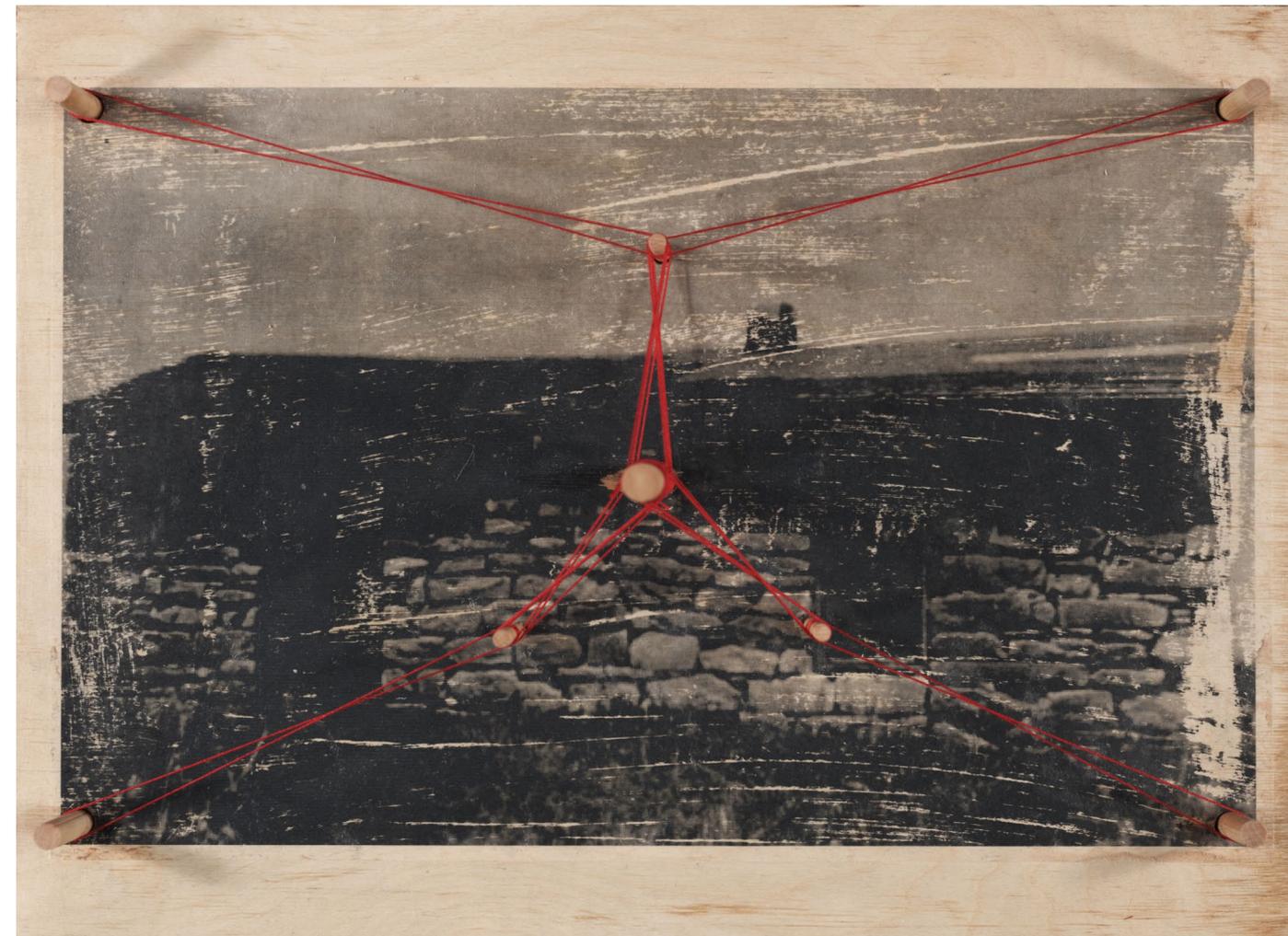


Figure 5.18:
Core and Connection, 2014
 Photo transfer, string, wood dowels on wood
 18" x 13"

"Family. That's something that, everybody knew everybody else. I enjoyed all the people there. I didn't have anyone in that community I felt alienated by. They were all a part of that family."

-Veryl Switzer



Figure 5.19: Transferred background image for *Transparent Background* (by author, 2014).



Figure 5.20: Emulsified screen with silhouette for *Transparent Background* (by author, 2014).

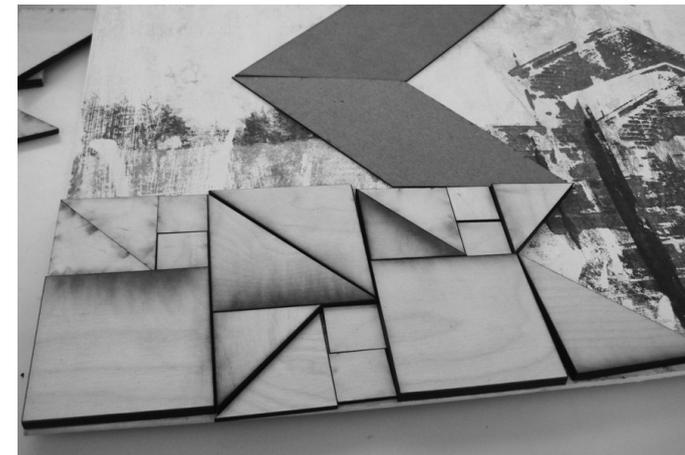


Figure 5.21: Layout process in *Surface of History to Present* (by author, 2014).

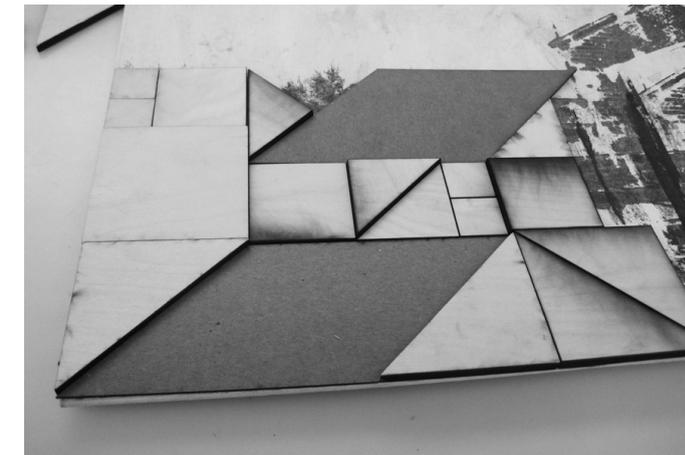


Figure 5.22: Final raw layout in *Surface of History to Present* (by author, 2014).

Artist Reflection

Materiality tells a story as much as imagery does. I chose specific mediums and materials through the exploration phase because I found that they conveyed the simplest ideas (figs. 5.19-5.20). The fabric and quilting patterns symbolized the African-American culture and its traditions. Quilting is a major part of the African-American culture, I believe, because it represents an enduring tradition that can be passed down from generation to generation. Textures allow the art pieces to become tactile and real. Every piece that includes fabric and burlap calls to me to touch and feel the piece (figs. 5.21-5.22). It speaks the sense of touch, smell (in the case of the burlap), and sight. The more the senses are involved in experience of the art piece the better to understand the story or imagery. The photographs of texture pertaining to each historic

site and materiality in Nicodemus was another way of bringing in the tactile response to the art piece. I found it to be a way of bringing Nicodemus alive, even if the physical material wasn't present (figs. 5.23-5.24).



Figure 5.23:
Surface of History to Present, 2014
 Photo transfer, screenprint, textile on wood
 18" x 14"



"It [the history] became more significant as I got older.
 I appreciated it more because I was involved with the
 Homecoming celebration and was living in the town."
 - Sharyn Dowdell

Figure 5.24:
Transparent Background, 2014
 Photo transfer, screenprint, textile on canvas
 18" x 14"



Figure 5.25: Texture photograph for *Support: Religion I* (by author, 2014).

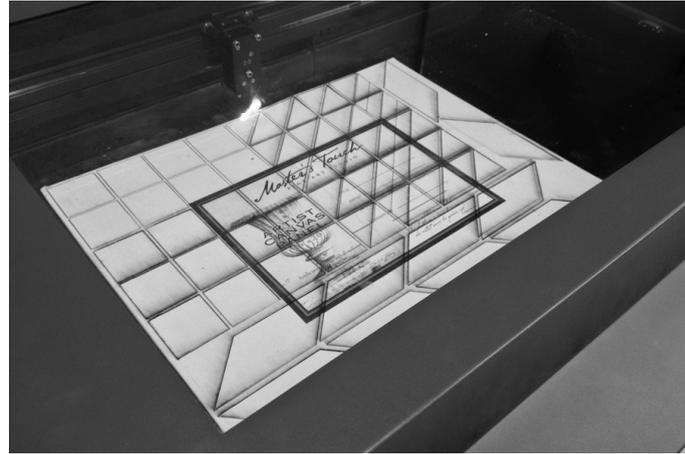


Figure 5.26: Laser cutting canvas for *Support: Religion I* (by author, 2014).

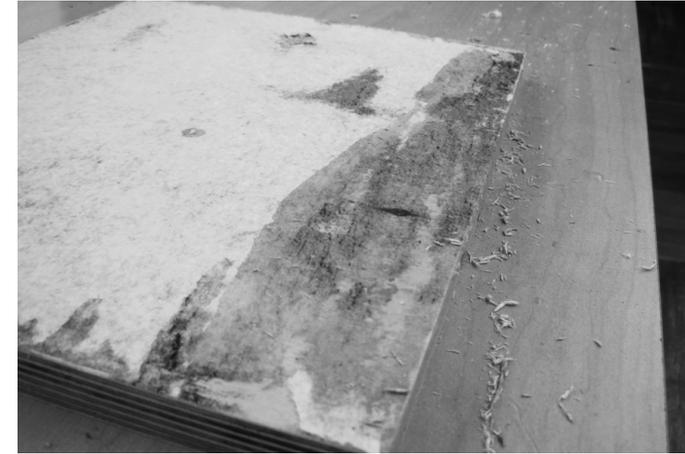


Figure 5.27: Image transfer for *Support: Religion II* (by author, 2014).

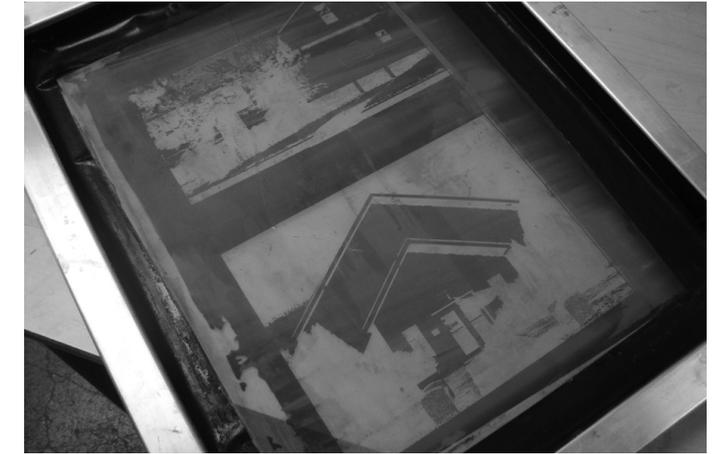


Figure 5.28: Exposed silhouette screen for *Support: Religion I* and *Support: Religion II* (by author, 2014).

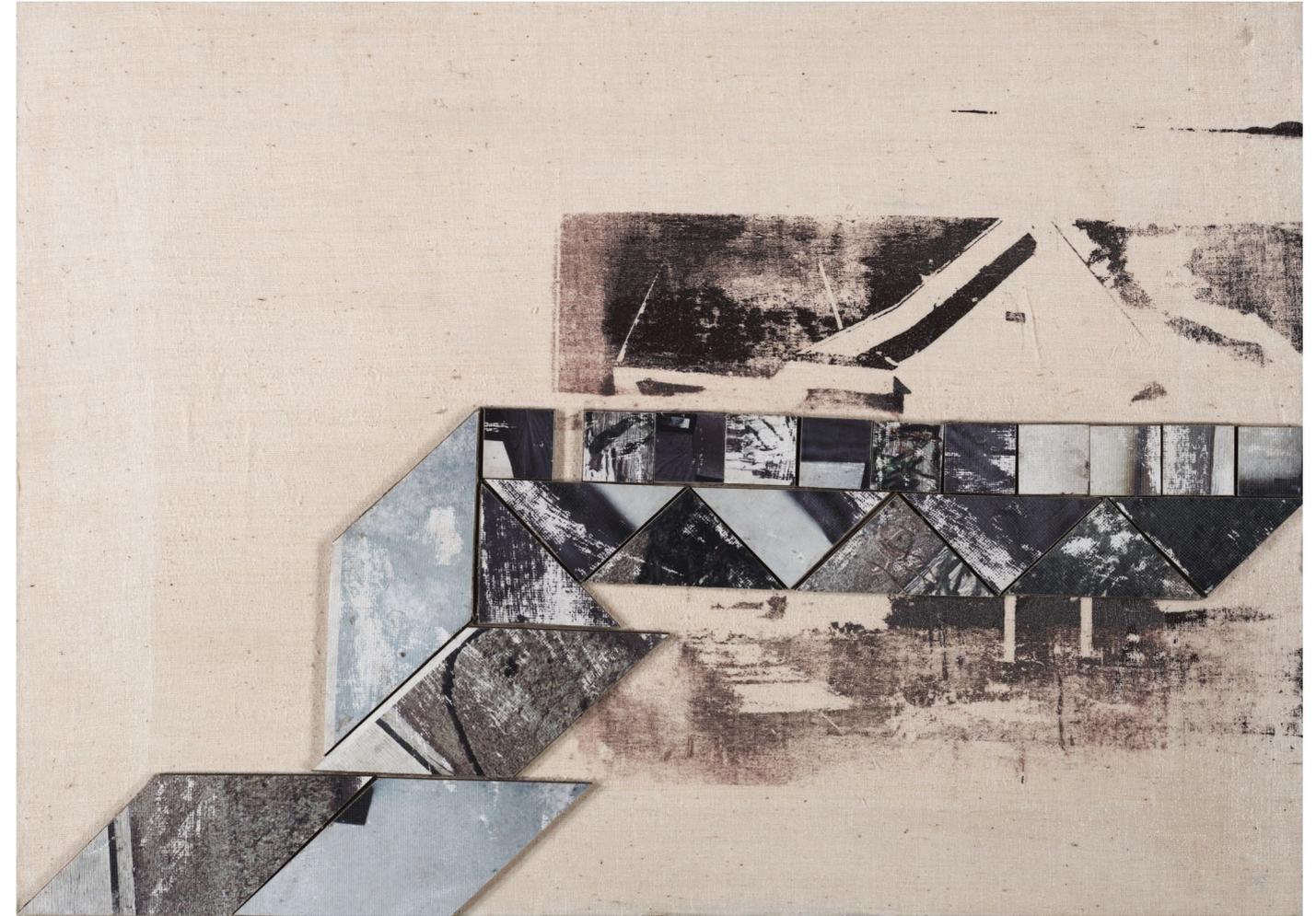
Artist Reflection

There is never one story that provides the answers for everyone. Where one story ends another begins. The depth and layers of each family, each person that is a descendant interlaces with another layer from another family. These layers are so intertwined that it would take longer than this research project to fully understand them. Layers exist in each piece of art (figs. 5.29-5.30). They were intentionally laid out in order to symbolize the deep layers of all the families and descendants of Nicodemus (figs. 5.25-5.28). The pieces of textures in the composition of the some of the art pieces signify how the many families come together and complete the history of Nicodemus as a whole.

The significance of layers in history means that not one history is more important than another. History is shared between many people and it is never one story. It is always a layer of stories and a piece of one story fits with another.



Figure 5.29:
 Support: *Religion I*, 2014
 Photo transfer, screenprint, canvas on wood
 16" x 13 1/2"



"I bought a piece of land and bought some cattle. We had a hog operation as well. ... It [farming] is part of my blood. That ownership made me happy."
 - Veryl Switzer

Figure 5.30:
 Support: *Religion II*, 2014
 Textile, photo transfer, screenprint, canvas on wood
 18" x 13"

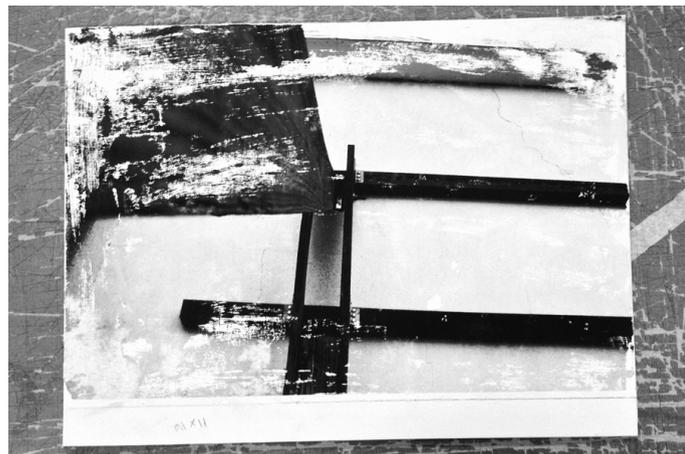


Figure 5.31: Image transfer on canvas for *Support: Education* (by author, 2014).



Figure 5.32: Schoolhouse silhouette for *Support: Education* (by author, 2014).

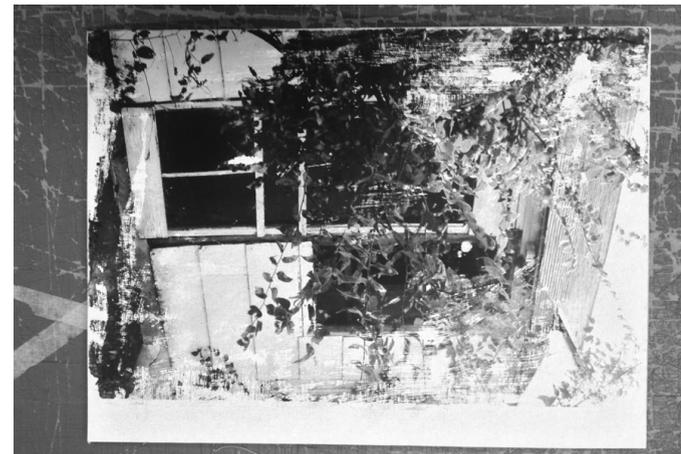


Figure 5.33: Image transfer on canvas for *Support: Community* (by author, 2014).

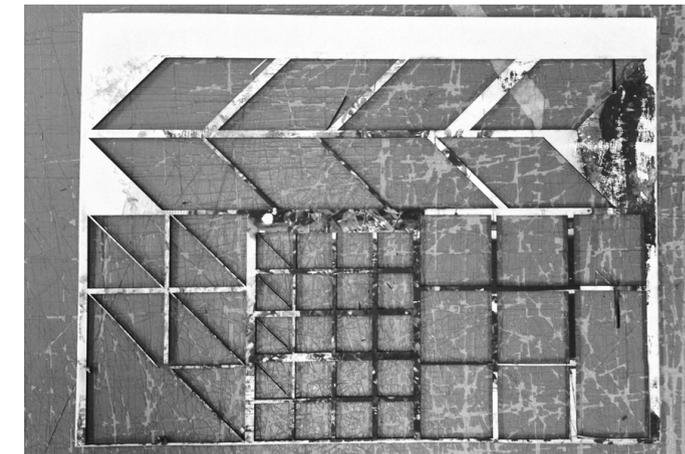


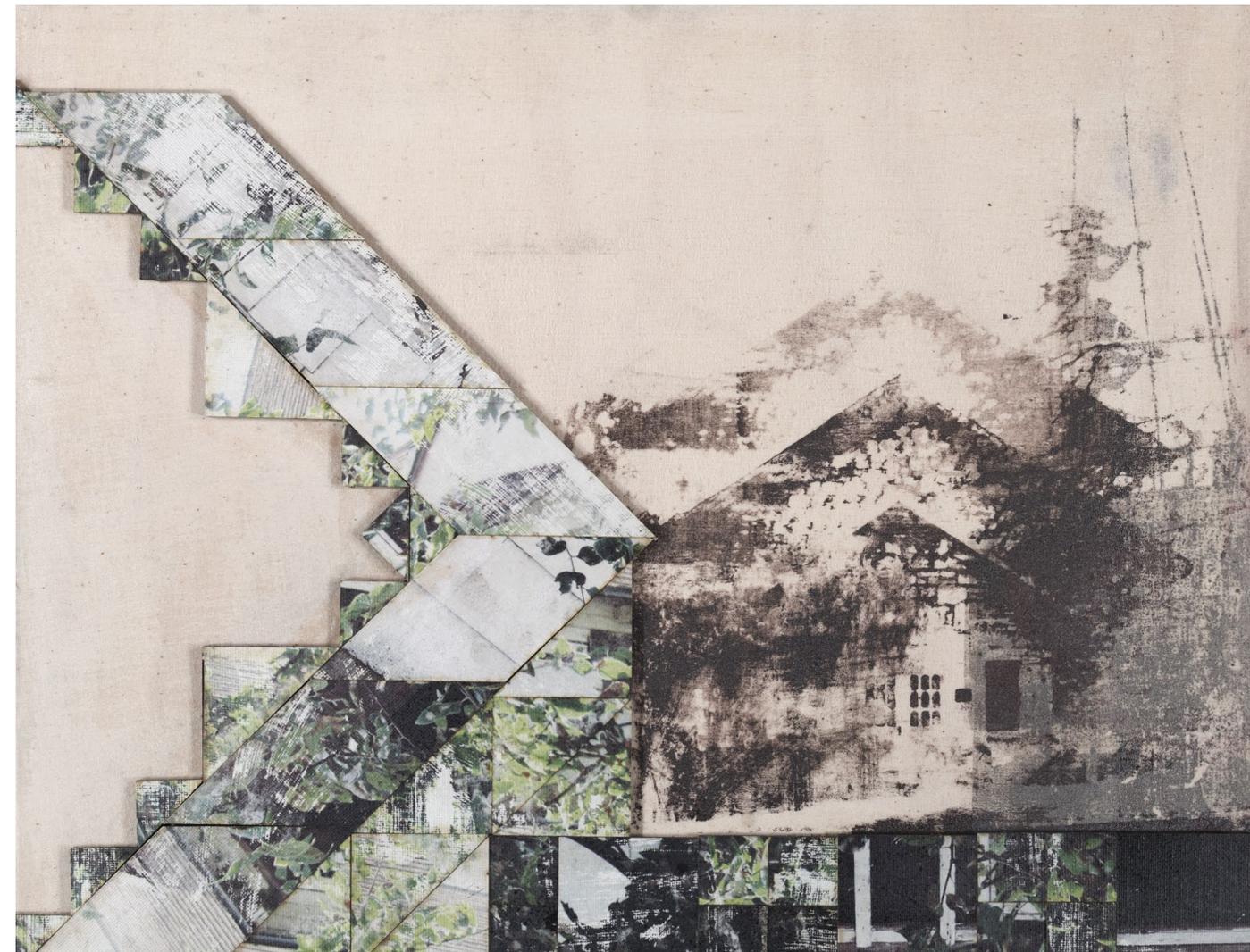
Figure 5.34: Canvas after laser cutting shapes for *Support: Community* (by author, 2014).

Artist Reflection

Symbols are a universal language and for any community there is a symbol of who they are, their identity. The five pillars of Nicodemus are community, religion, commerce, family, and education. The unique part about these five pillars is they each relate to one of the five historic sites. For example, the education pillar relates to the School District Number 1 historic site (figs. 5.31-5.35). Instead of thinking of new symbols for the community, I used what the community had already established as the symbols for the community. The five pillars stand tall and are grounded in the history and community values. The sites have endured time and stand tall along with these pillars. Screenprinting the silhouettes of the sites creates a symbol for the community to relate to and share with visitors (figs. 5.35-5.36).



Figure 5.35:
Support: Education, 2014
 Textile, photo transfer, screenprint, canvas on wood
 18" x 14"



"I remember as a little girl going back to Nicodemus
 as the summer vacation. Seeing family and cousins
 was very exciting."
 - JohnElla Holmes

Figure 5.36:
Support: Community, 2014
 Textile, photo transfer, screenprint, canvas on wood
 18" x 14"

phase 2: focus

The second phase was another four weeks and involved creating a body of art using the mediums explored during phase 1. The mediums which were successful in expressing Nicodemus's identity were photographs, fabric, and serigraphy on wood panels. The five pillars, community, religion, family, commerce, and education, are the most important symbols to draw inspiration from and create with. During the oral history interview with Angela Bates, she mentioned that the five pillars relate to the five historic sites in the community; Township Hall, St. Francis Hotel, A.M.E. Church, School District Number 1, and The Old First Baptist Church. The artworks use silhouettes of the five sites and buildings as symbols for the five pillars. Each site and pillar was made into an individual art piece.

Throughout the research, other key ideas and words were used to describe the identity of the community. These words are tradition, farming/landscape, and people. These three encompassing terms were translated into art pieces as well with quilt patterns representing traditions of the community. The following pages showcase the completed body of work created during the Focus phase of producing.



Figure 5.37: Spray painted tree silhouette for *Depth and Reach* (by author, 2014).

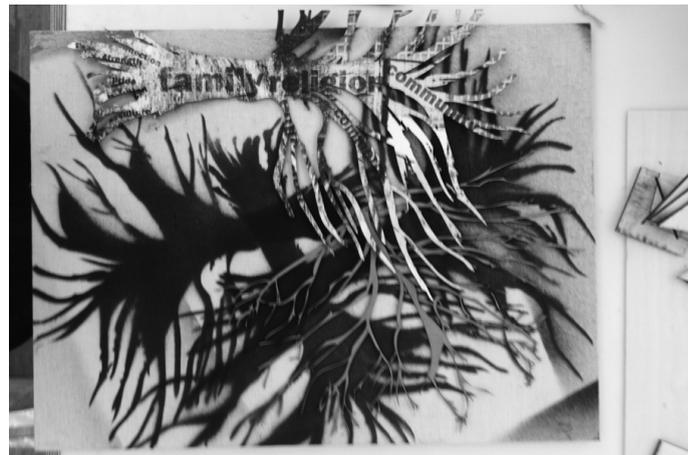


Figure 5.38: Layout and configuration of pieces for *Depth and Reach* (by author, 2014).



Figure 5.39: Testing layouts for *Tradition of Farming* (by author, 2014).



Figure 5.40: Final layout before fabric application for *Tradition of Farming* (by author, 2014).

Artist Reflection

History is in every part of this world, whether it is celebrated or not. For Nicodemus, it is a history with deep roots growing from the past, through the present, and into the future (figs. 5.37-5.40). The branches of this community extend past the physical boundaries of the township, Graham County, Kansas, and the midwest. People all over the country have their branches leading back to the community. Understanding the depth and density of the roots and branches of Nicodemus became an image that I wanted to explore and create. I envisioned so many branches and roots going every which way to resemble the connections that Nicodemus holds (figs. 5.41-5.42). The extension of Nicodemus is something to praise and be proud of because it connects to an astonishing story of strength and courage of the original settlers.



“If I had to describe Nicodemus in one word, without using ‘Nicodemus’, it would be family.”

– Angela Bates

Figure 5.41:
Depth and Reach, 2014
Textile, photograph, chipboard, canvas, spraypaint on wood
18" x 24"



Figure 5.42:
Tradition of Farming, 2014
Textile, photograph, screenprint on wood
24" x 18"



Figure 5.43: Layout option for *Tradition of People* (by author, 2014).



Figure 5.44: Final layout for *Tradition of People* (by author, 2014).



Figure 5.45: Layout option for *Pillar of Education* (by author, 2014).

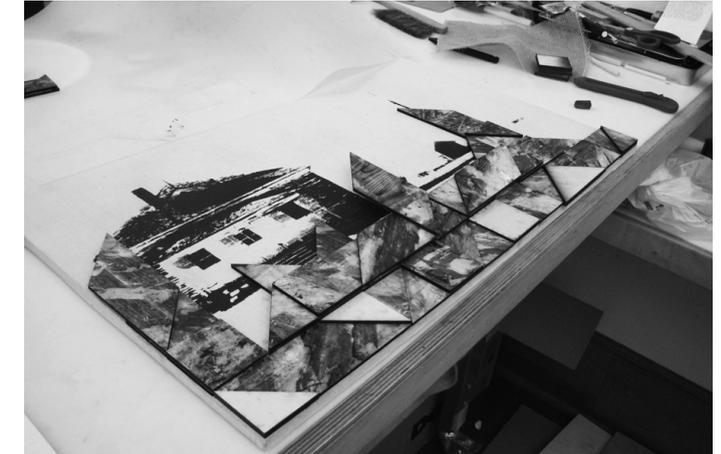


Figure 5.46: Final layout for *Pillar of Education* (by author, 2014).

Artist Reflection

While talking with descendants of Nicodemus during oral history interviews, I found a recurring theme was tradition (figs. 5.43-5.46). Traditions are important to the community as evident of the annual homecoming celebration every summer. I also discovered, through the oral histories, the tradition of storytelling and sharing the history is important. The stories passed along from the settlers and the descendants allow the history to continue to live. The patterns of fabric and photographs in the art pieces represent these traditions (figs. 5.47-5.48). The traditions are an everlasting and consistent occurrence in Nicodemus. Representation of the concept of tradition was a logical image to convey.



“I have one mantra, one saying, which is ‘The Descendants owe it to Nicodemus to come back.’...Owe it to your ancestors to come back’.”

– JohnElla Holmes

Figure 5.47:
Tradition of People, 2014
Textile, photograph, screenprint on wood
24" x 18"



Figure 5.48:
Pillar of Education, 2014
Textile, photo transfer, screenprint, canvas on wood
24" x 18"



Figure 5.49: Prepared base for *Pillar of Religion* (by author, 2014).



Figure 5.50: Layout of pieces for *Pillar of Religion* (by author, 2014).



Figure 5.51: Silhouette of St. Francis Hotel to be screenprinted for *Pillar of Commerce* (by author, 2014).

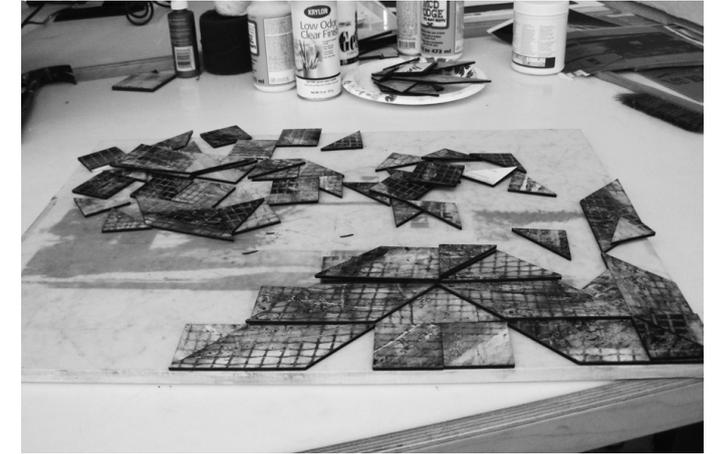


Figure 5.52: Layout of canvas pieces for *Pillar of Commerce* (by author, 2014).

Artist Reflection

In Nicodemus, history lives because of the people. The history lives through the descendants, residents, and settlers. The history also branches out from the deep rooted community to all ends of the world because of people who have ties back to the community. The people are much of the reason why the community, the stories, and the traditions continue on. Conveying people, but not particular families of individuals, in the imagery of the community was a concept for the art pieces (figs 5.49-5.52). The social part of any history, and especially with Nicodemus, is a significant reason why I find history intriguing and important. Meaning comes from the social relationships we sustain in life. The relationships of the people to one another and the people to the rich history of Nicodemus allow the history to propel forward to the future (figs. 5.53-5.54).

“Watchin that sun go down, I was awfully lonely out there, and I could see that sun setting and I’d love to be out there where that sun was setting. But I enjoyed those moments, by myself most of the time.”
– Veryl Switzer

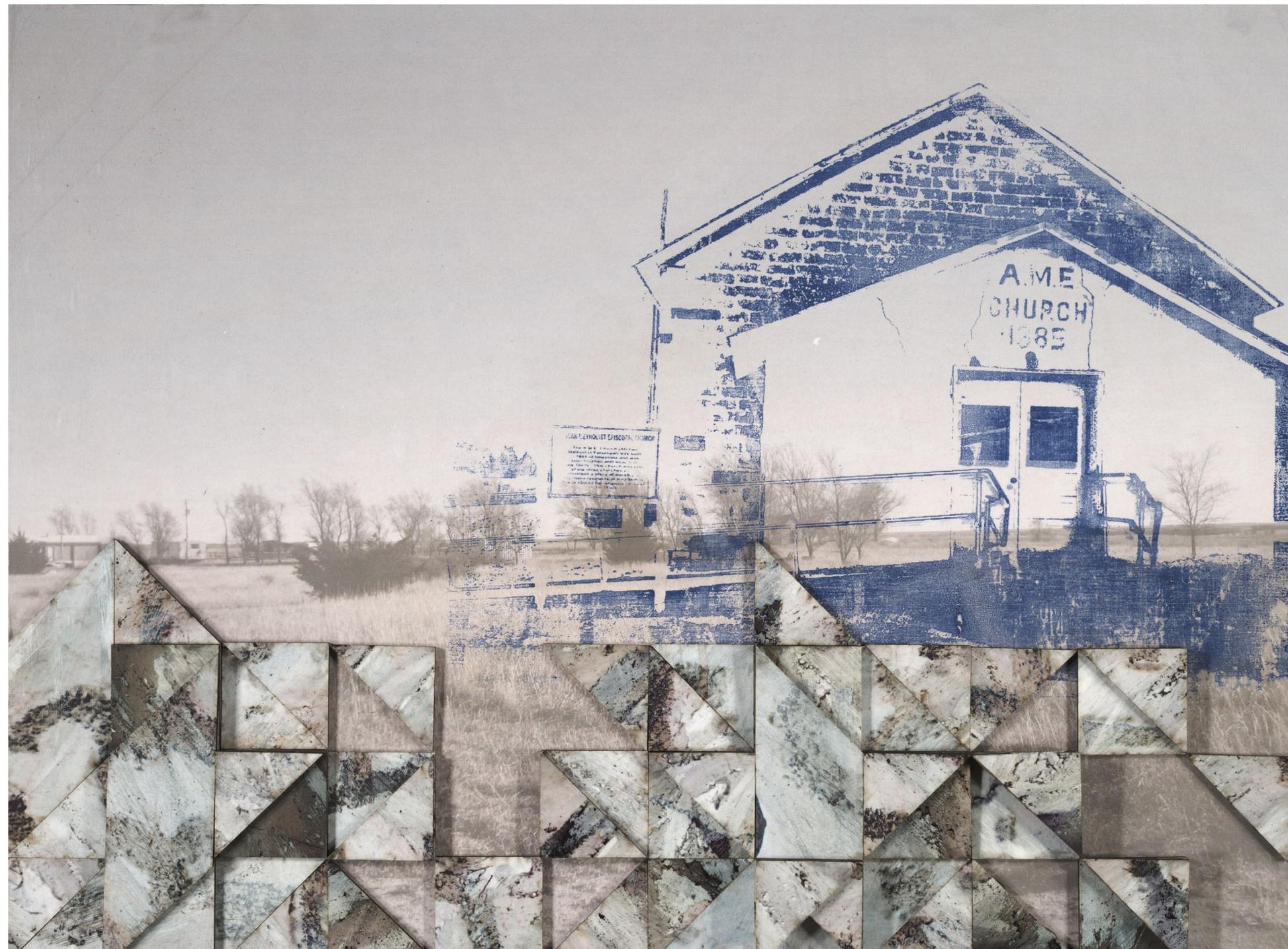


Figure 5.53:
Pillar of Religion, 2014
Photograph, screenprint, photo transfer, canvas on wood
24" x 18"

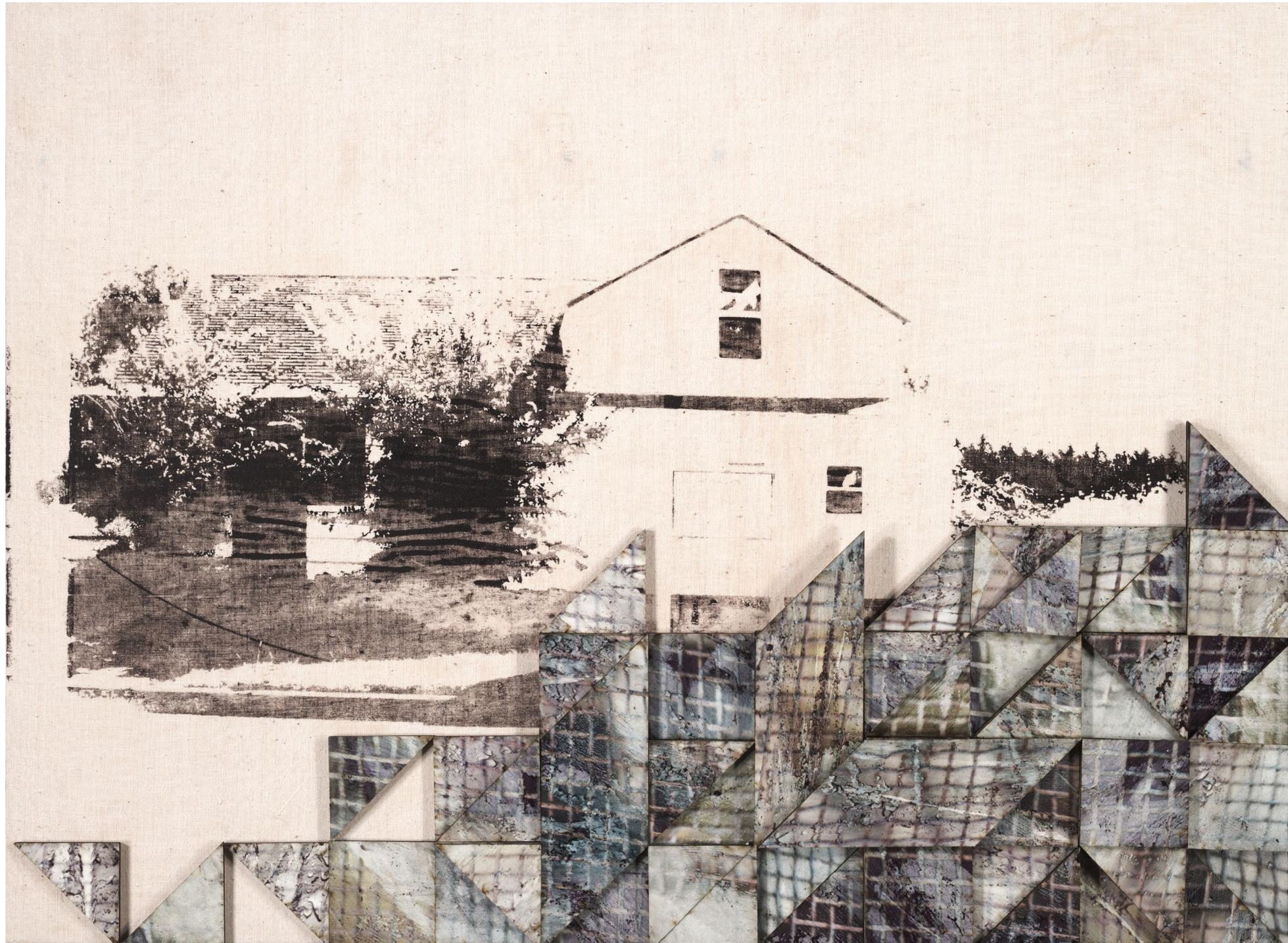


Figure 5.54:
Pillar of Commerce, 2014
Textile, screenprint, photo transfer, canvas on wood
24" x 18"



Figure 5.55: Township Hall screenprinted silhouette for *Pillar of Community* (by author, 2014).



Figure 5.56: Process of layout and composition for *Pillar of Community* (by author, 2014).



Figure 5.57: Image used for canvas pieces *Pillar of Family* (by author, 2014).

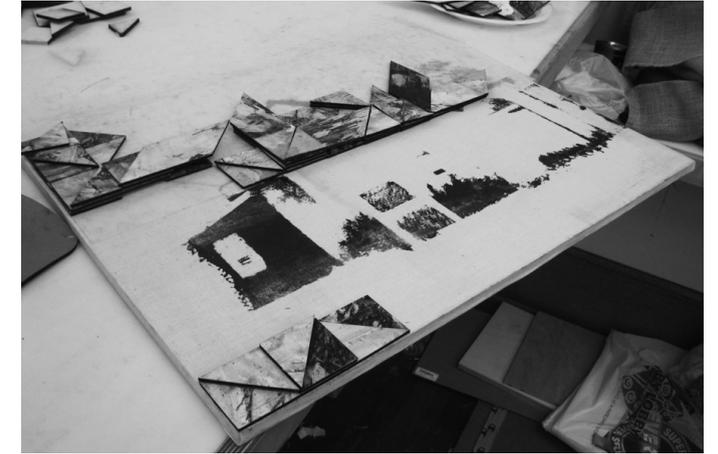


Figure 5.58: Process of gluing pieces of canvas for *Pillar of Family* (by author, 2014).

Artist Reflection

Open skies and wide fields make up the vastness of landscape around Nicodemus. I think of landscape as a canvas where all activity can take place and the world can create art itself (figs. 5.55-5.58). I drew from the infinite landscape of the community and town as a base image for the art pieces. Muslin was also used to allude to the great canvas of landscape. The past occurred within and on the landscape of northwest Kansas. This image of canvas provided possibilities of how to build up layers to express Nicodemus's identity (figs. 5.59-5.60).



“That weekend has just been so important. I strongly believe that if the Emancipation Celebration, which we call “Homecoming”, had not continued we would be gone by now. That celebration was the key to keeping us alive.”

– JohnElla Holmes

Figure 5.59:
Pillar of Community, 2014
Photograph, screenprint, photo transfer, canvas on wood
24" x 18"



Figure 5.60:
Pillar of Family, 2014
Textile, screenprint, photo transfer, canvas on wood
24" x 18"



afterword

To the outsider looking in, Nicodemus, Kansas is a seemingly ordinary, declining rural community. Its appearance blends with the many rural communities of western Kansas. However, if an outsider were to step in, listen to the stories, and investigate the town they would discover that appearances are deceiving. Nicodemus has a deeply embedded identity because of the significant history of the town. It is known as the only remaining African-American town settled west of the Mississippi River before the exoduster movement after the Civil War ended. The community does not only hold an identity for itself, but it is a symbolic beacon of courage, survival, and success for many African-Americans.

Expression of this identity within the community allows the importance and significance of the history to come to the surface. The art created in this study began with the intention of expressing the story

of Nicodemus, Kansas. As the process of creation became more involved, the purpose of the art was to provide an outsider with an introduction into the history. The research informed the art through, oral history interviews, and historiography. The interviews with descendants of the original settlers opened up the history of Nicodemus in a more personal way. Personal stories, histories, and memories are the vessel for community history. As an arts-based research project, the art was thought of as a tie between the personal histories, the community, the visitors, and the artist. Each art piece explored how to speak to each of those subjects. One of the many goals of arts-based research is to provide meaning and insight through an artistic composition or pieces. In this artistic research study of Nicodemus, the history was the medium, the community was the canvas, and the art was the identity made tangible.



Figure 6.1:
The Mind and Nicodemus, 2014
Photograph, serigraphy, spraypaint, Gesso, textile,
canvas on wood
48" x 24"



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appendix a: glossary

affordance: what an object or environment allows you to do

“specific combination of the properties of its substance and its surfaces taken with reference to an animal” (Gibson 1977)

community: a group of people who live and interact based on similar beliefs and values

“a place or location where a group of people interact” (Flora et al. 2008, 13)

community-based art (participatory art):

“an intensive engagement with the people of the site, involving direct communication and interaction over an extended period of time” (Kwon 2002, 82).

cultural landscape: a characteristic of landscape which includes historical and social activities

“a geographic area associated with a historic event, activity, or person or exhibiting cultural aesthetic value” (Longstreth 2008, 23)

“people having as much an effect on the physical environment as it did on them” (Longstreth 2008, 23)

identity: distinct feature or event that sets one location, group of people, or single person apart

iterative design process: a process includes basic steps of designing, creating or modeling, and evaluation (Adams et al. 1999)

public art: art in public space for the public to view and immerse themselves in

rural: outside urban or metropolitan areas; community or location with open landscapes and deep history

“essentially that which is not metropolitan America is rural America” (Fitchen 1991, 246)

appendix b: oral history recordings

Angela Bates and Sharyn Dowdell



JohnElla Holmes



Veryl Switzer



