Àine Virginia McCambridge White
St. Mary's Project 2017-2018

Artist Statement

Take Two Twins

"Twins by a Twin", my fall semester work, originally stemmed from my experience of growing up as an identical twin combined with my personal interest in photography. I've always been hyper aware of the fact that I am an identical twin; and as any twin knows, this means a lifetime of being compared to your "other half". But are we halves of the same entity, or two separate independent beings? For a long as I can remember people have compared me and my sister, Madeline, on our looks, our interests, our personalities - aspects of our lives that make up our individual identities – which has sometimes been a difficult way to grow up. For example, I've felt inferior when comparisons place her at the center of attention, and superior when those roles have been reversed. Feeling this sense of inescapable comparison has been problematic because I've found myself hiding my accomplishments and my shortcomings in order to avoid hurting my sister's feelings or to protect my own.

The question we are asked most often is "what is it like to be a twin?" This is a very difficult question to answer, because to answer I must separate from myself to critically analyze myself; I must examine innate parts of who I am through a magnified lens. Imagine having to explain who you are... nothing—no answer—would or even could carry the right and precise meaning. Putting into words such a large part of my identity is difficult, and in the end I usually just say something like, "It's cool. I always have a buddy, and it's nice to have a built-in best friend, someone I know I can trust. But it can also be super frustrating…"

Throughout my life people have either commented on how much alike my sister and I look or pointed out our differences: my cheeks are chubbier, her face is rounder; I have a freckle, she does not. These, in retrospect, are interesting experiences because the comments rarely mention our personality differences—people always comment on out *outward* appearance. Are our personalities really that much less interesting than our looks? Does being a twin supersede all other aspects of self and identity? And how has this constant, inescapable, incomplete sense of comparison affected different aspects of my life? Do other sets of twins experience these phenomena as well? And how do these comparison-experiences shape individual personalities?

Perhaps the most obvious way my twin-hood, and the associated comparisons, have affected my individual personality is through my love and passion for photography. My interest in photography developed at a young age, because my sister and I were constantly being photographed. Being in front of the camera so often, I eventually developed an interest in how the camera actually worked; what were its capacities and potentials, what kinds of images might I capture from behind its lens. Having been photographed at events like weddings and family hootenannys, I have a collection of images—aesthetic objects—that catalogue different stages of my life for memory and appreciation; not merely a two dimensional print, but rather an object of aesthetic interest that embodies a personal and familial history. Photographs can be used to decorate a room, to show something visually, and to act as a keepsake, but more important—at least for me—is the photograph's capacity to capture a moment in time, to represent a particular yet removed experience, to memorialize an event.

Photographic images have a large variety of capacities. This is one of the big things that influenced me to do my SMP in photography. I specifically chose the Polaroid as my photographic medium because their inability to be duplicated fascinated me so much. In a world

where there are literally trillions of digital photos taken every year it is fascinating that these individual images cannot be exactly duplicated. When trying to create a copy of a polaroid image, your options are to take a photo of the photo, or scan it onto a computer. While both of these options will create a copy, it will not be an exact duplicate of the original image in the same way a digital image would be. In duplication, there is always degradation. Similarly, I realized identical twins, besides having identical DNA, actually have a lot of differences. From physical differences like fingerprints and height, to psychological differences like personality and interests, identical twins develop distinct identities.

Take, for example, the differences between my sister and myself. We are identical twins, we have identical DNA, for all intents and purposes we could be called duplicates. With our outward genetic similarities, like our identical facial structures and hair color, being so easily recognizable there are still so many differences that become clear and evident after only a brief time spent with us. So when deciding to do a project about twins I wanted to try to provide a visual answer to the question ***what is it like to be a twin?***

At the start of the project, my goal was to visually capture the differences between other sets of twins. I chose to separate myself from the project initially in order to create an objective look at the visual differences of the twins. I began my exploration by confronting notions of uniqueness and duplication. I thought that by looking at these conceptions and the way they develop in various sets of twins I would be able to create images that objectively capture the essence of each individual. I wanted to create an unbiased story. I sought out other twins as subject matter; first Audrey and Julia Higham, then Anna and Maria Duke. I planned to manipulate the subjects' poses, which would be paired with their individual choices like attire,

hairdo, and stance, in order to emphasize their differences visually. To achieve this, I started researching other photographers who had worked with twins as my starting point.

Identical Twins, Roselle, N.J. 1967, Diane Arbus, 1967

One photographer whose work interested me was Diane Arbus. Her work focuses on marginalized people. It was her photograph titled "Identical Twins, Roselle, N.J. 1967" that caught my attention; two sisters stand side by side, staring directly into the camera, holding hands, and dressed exactly the same. Upon first glance, they are identical; the only differences between these two individuals are their facial expressions: The twin on the left has a slight droop to her eyelids and the corners of her mouth are turned downward while her sister's eyes are more alert and her mouth has a slight smirk to it. Arbus, whose work has often focused on the strange and the different, used this portrait of the identical twins to express that there is much more than what meets the eye when it comes to two things that appear to be exactly the same. The facial expressions mentioned above work to express this because there is an implication of feeling created through their facial expressions: the twin on the left was likely feeling less pleased to be in front of the camera than her sister was at the moment when the shutter went off.

Another common theme in Arbus's work is an awareness of and attention towards otherness, not belonging and feeling like an outsider, in the subjects. However, it turns out, the otherness

was in some cases, discovered by Arbus herself and in other cases, imposed upon the subjects by Arbus. In "Identical Twins, Roselle, N.J. 1967" Arbus created the "ghostly" effect of the image by posing the girls against a white wall close enough together that at first glance it looks as though they are conjoined. The girls' father stated in an interview that the photograph looks nothing like any other photograph of the girls.

Julia and Audrey, Aine White, 2017

Mary Ellen Mark was as a portrait photographer who created images that could capture the essence of a person or persons. Because the subject is very aware of the camera in portraiture the photographer must take control of the situation by giving the subject(s) instructions and moving the subject(s) around. However, Mark emphasized the importance of letting the subjects act naturally. There is a thin line between being too controlling and being in control. In the photograph *Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy*, the interaction between the ventriloquist and his Dummy was natural. It was the first thing that put Edgar at ease and that comfort is apparent in the image. The idea of letting the subjects act naturally was definitely a goal of my shoots while simultaneously being one of the biggest struggles I faced. How does a photographer make someone act naturally while also giving them instructions?
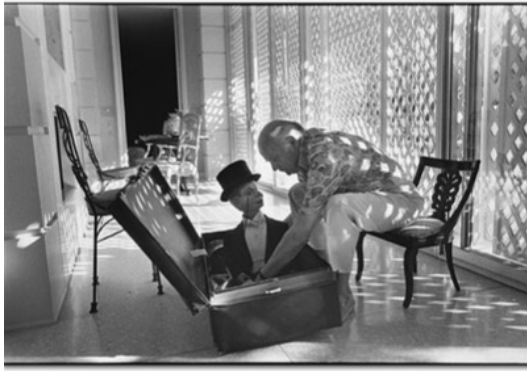
Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, Mary Ellen Mark, 1978

In Mary Ellen Mark's photograph titled *Craig Scarmardo and Cheyloh Mather at the Boerne Rodeo*, Mark had instructed the boys to look at the camera. She did not however instruct the boys on how to stand and pose; that they did naturally. As a result, viewers of the image get a sense of the boys: they were close to each other – friends or possibly brothers, they intended to seem macho, and they were skilled bull riders. This is clear through the proximity of the boys to each other, their confident poses and their bold facial expressions.

Scarmardo and Cheyloh Mather at the Boerne Rodeo, Mary Ellen Mark, 1992

In my project I wanted the images to represent the twin's individual personalities. Instead of posing the girls where their sameness was very evident as Arbus had, I wanted the focus to be on their differences. In the photo *Julia and Audrey*, I framed them on the sidewalk of the street right

outside of their home. I had them stand next to each other and smile, hoping each girl's choice of outfit and natural smiling pose would highlight their differences. Audrey, on the right, was wearing a white shirt paired with black dress shorts under a grey cardigan, while Julia, on the left, was wearing a grey pullover paired with white athletic shorts. Audrey slouched her shoulders and tilted her head inwards, slightly towards her sister; Julia stood up straight and kept her head straight. These are things the two girls did naturally without any instruction from me. While I was somewhat successful in my goal of portraying the twins' differences, I believed the intention could have been pushed farther to make their differences more apparent.

Anna Throwing a Frisbee, Aine White, 2017

From here, I worked with another set of twins, Anna and Maria Duke. This time my goal was to show different ways the twins completed various tasks like throwing a Frisbee, a favorite shared hobby of the two girls. However, unable to go outside, the setting of the images was indoors, which made for an odd Frisbee-throwing environment. In addition, the indoor-setting meant limited lighting equipment, and some images, like this one, appeared quite dark and overall unsuccessful.

The results of both shoots were unsatisfying images that did not capture the goal of the project. Reflecting, I realized my motivation for this project was personal, a part of me. So why

was I taking photographs of other twins for such a personal project? I decided to look at the project with a personal eye; what makes *me* different from Madeline? Part of my curiosity for this project was how those differences come about.

Psychologists often use identical twins to conduct studies on human development because their identical DNA and developmental differences, taken together, highlight the individuality that evolves over a set of twins respective lives—their distinct personalities, interests, values, and choices. What is it about Madeline and I that is so different? And how can I graphically capture those differences with polaroid's?

I knew I had to refocus and start over so I decided to do a shoot with my sister. She was heading to an EDM Rave, something she thoroughly enjoys but I normally would *not* take part in. When shooting photographs of my sister and myself I attempted Mary Ellen Mark's technique of letting the subject act naturally. As the photographer I chose when and where I would shoot then I'd let Madeline do the rest. For the photographs of myself I allowed my sister to make the decisions. Mary Ellen Mark was always striving to create something new. She found inspiration from so many things and used these to create her incredible body of work. Even though all of the images are created by her, each series differs greatly from one another and each provides viewers with a new insight and a new perspective. She was very patient and hardworking and this is something that inspires me. Regardless of the number of pictures I take I must continue to work to find the moments that Mary Ellen Mark was so often able to capture.

Madeline's choice of outfit, hairstyle, and poses during the EDM shoot and in the resulting photographs achieved my goal of displaying individuality because I had successfully been able to capture aspects of her individual personality; these images in the polaroid format portrayed the

underlying theme of individuality. Part of the success of these photos was due to my comfort

with Madeline, which lent a willingness to get up-close and personal with her during the shoot.

Madeline Prepping for Rave, Aine White, 2017

From here I decided that I would take a large quantity of polaroid pictures whose content

displays the differences between my sister and myself. With a large quantity of photos, I would

be able to show a lot of the qualities that make up our differences. I went shooting with an eye

for capturing mid-moment actions in order to highlight those differences. For example, I took a

lot of different photos of Madeline eating, and asked her to do the same for me. In addition, I

asked for several photos of me working out at the gym, because that is an activity I do for stress

relief that she does not. The photos of Madeline's choice of a stress relieving activity are of her

watching Netflix on her computer while lying in bed. To push these differences further, when

displaying the photographs on the wall, I tried to pair images of me working out parallel to the

images of her lying in bed. Other pictures I took included scenes of each of us doing homework,

driving our cars, and spending time with friends. I displayed the work in 3 groups: a section of

me on the left, a section of Madeline on the right, and in between a section of the two of us

together. While some of the opposing images were easy for viewers to connect visually, others

were not as clear, because the placement of the photographs did not allow the connections to come across straightforwardly.

Twins by a Twin, Aine White, 2017

For the spring semester I worked to connect the polaroids. The new images I took are similar to the old ones: candid and posed photographs of the two of us interacting and participating in our individual daily lives. In addition, I created a large variety of digital graphic designs and diagrams that connect the images to each other with digitally drawn lines and arrows. In addition, the photographs are connected by other digital lines and arrows to stamped fingerprints that corresponded to each of us.

Mark Lombardi, an American conceptual artist, created complex digital graphic maps that visually display interwoven lines of power. After engaging with some of his works I created graphic designs that had movement based curved lines to create connections. I also spent a large amount of time creating different variations of designs that I borrowed inspiration from Mark Lombardi to create as well as some I created on my own.
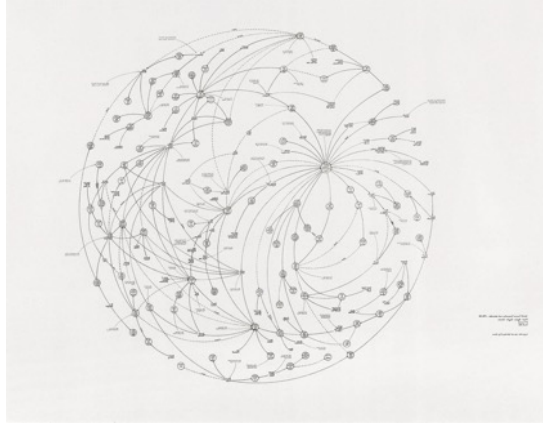
*George W. Bush, Harken Energy and Jackson Stephens, ca 1979–90*, Mark Lombardi, 1999

Reciprocal, Aine White, 2018

In addition, I researched another conceptual artist named John Baldessari. I gathered ideas and inspirations about how to graphically display the images from his graphic works that connect images through repetition. Baldessari's works are of arbitrary, digitally appropriated, and stacked images that create connections. While these aren't directly connecting ideas as Mark Lombardi's graphics create, his works are appropriating graphics containing multiple images and connecting them with similar visual elements. In my graphics, I have created a DNA strand to connect the fingerprints visually based on inspiration from Baldessari works.

Palm Trees and Buildings (with Vikings), John Baldessari, 2001
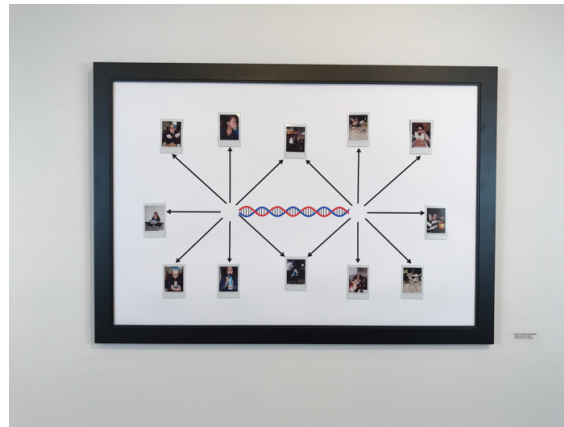
Duplicate, Aine White, 2018

By creating these graphic designs my goal was to tie the project together as a whole. Now the images clearly connect to one another and those connections can be understood based on the content within each image. In addition, these graphics create dynamic visual displays of the images that capture the audience's initial attention. By engaging with the work for a period of time, the audience is able to see the connections made by the designs to understand the aspects of Madeline and myself that make us individuals. The individuality and the small size of the physical object that is a polaroid, forces viewers to thoroughly engage with the work to fully see and understand what is going on in each photo and what the overall piece is trying to say.

Take Two Twins is an investigation into the comparing of twins through polaroid images. At the same time, it was a personal exploration of how to compare my sister and myself through images. I created graphic designs as a futile attempt to analyze and compare the content in each photograph, which are intentionally NOT focusing on appearance. I employed these diagrams in an ironic way because in the long run I don't think it is comparable. Beyond our outward appearances, our differences in personality, and interests construct us as two individuals.

Citations:

Perret, Eric. "Here's How Many Digital Photos Will Be Taken in 2017." *True Stories*, Mylio, 19 Jan. 2017

Winerman, Lea. "A Second Look at Twin Studies." *Monitor on Psychology*, American Psychological Association, Apr. 2004.

Mark, Mary Ellen. *Mary Ellen Mark on the Portrait and the Moment: The Photography Workshop Series*. 2015.

Arbus, Diane. *Diane Arbus*. N.p.: New York: Aperture, 1972 (1988 printing), 1972. *St. Mary's College of Maryland Catalog*, EBSCO*host*.

Segal, David. "Double Exposure." in *The Washington Post*, 2005.