

BUDDHA'S SHELL

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Art

in

The School of Art

by
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B.A., LaGrange College, 1998
May 2002

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ABSTRACT

Photography can be a way of exploring abstract ideas visually. When I make a photograph, I feel as though I am giving the world a glimpse into my thoughts. I want to share the mystery of photography with others. The Buddha's Shell series is part of my journey in discovering who I am as a photographer. This is my first departure away from documentary photography. Instead of using photography as a tool to record specific events and images of time, these images have enabled me to free myself and use the medium to facilitate my imagination.

BUDDHA'S SHELL

When I was very young, I would sneak into my father's briefcase to see what was inside. For a curious young boy, I think that knowing that it was off limits and the fact that it left with him in the morning and returned home with him under his arm each night gave it special importance. I knew that my father would not be very happy if I had gone through his case, but curiosity got the best of me. At my young age I had very little understanding of my father's occupation. I knew he was a doctor, but that was about it.

The briefcase did not let me down. For the most part it was filled with papers with big words I did not understand. The shock came like a flood when I found photos tucked away in a back pocket of the case. The photos were of grotesquely dismantled human faces. Extreme force must have caused the gapping holes in the flesh and tissue. The photos were shot in the same way, close-up on a sky blue background, subject facing forward towards the lens, very shocking, cold, and clinical.

My father would always photograph his work before he began. At the time, I did not comprehend that these photos were records of faces so that he would have an idea of how well the skin and tissue could heal itself. I would see the same faces changed little by little each time I peeked into the briefcase. Becoming less grotesque and a little more human each time. The doctor slowly worked to reconstruct this outer shell into a complete person again.

At the time I had no idea what a lasting impression these photos would have on me. I never spoke to my father about what I saw in my briefcase, but as I grew older my comprehension of the photos became clear. My father, the surgeon, in a small part

was also my father, the artist, and a sculptor of sorts. Once I took one of the photos on the school bus to show my friends. I delighted in their reaction. Their mouths open in horror and wonderment. These photos gave me a view into the human body's ability to survive and heal itself and a fascination with people and how they look. Each person's face is like a finger print, unique, bizarre, and memorable.

The one element that has driven me in my photography is the way that the photographer can distort reality. Often, photographs are seen as a moment in time that is held as a realistic representation of the person, time, and place. Various exposure techniques can distort reality; multiple exposure is one way to achieve this distortion. When any two images that are considered opposites, such as an image of a devil and an angel are merged together, reality is questioned. Is this a representation of good or evil?

Buddha's Shell was brought forth by accident. I was experimenting with multiple exposures in camera. I photographed a male and female in the graduate lab thinking it would be an interesting contrast. [Fig 1]. As printed image appeared, I was as shocked and surprised as the first time I saw my father's briefcase photographs. The first thing that came to mind when I was developing this image was that of Buddha. Just as the statue of Buddha stares in thoughtful meditation, this image was staring at me. The first Buddha photograph that I made brought with it a flood of ideas.

This new discover of "The Buddhas" sparked my departure from my documentary work into this uncharted territory of my imagination of different combinations of Buddha's. Night after night, two faces together became one in the studio. Most often I photograph my subject in a very clinical manner, much like the photos in my father's briefcase. Each is an image of a male and female subject. I

combined people with contrasting features, like beards, and piercings. I selected subjects from different ethnic groups creating striking new Buddha's. I was attempting to use the human face as my palette for creation of a person of that does not exist.

Many times the subjects have some form of relation. For example, father and daughter, married couple, but other subjects are not aware of their pairing. I feel that the photographs will take on their own form in the creating process. I do not know what the reality of each person will look like until the negative is processed and the final print is made. For me, this is where the idea and reality collide. Other times, I feel like I am creating a monster in my laboratory. Each finished photograph takes on a life of it's own. I do not know what others or the viewer might feel as they experience this work. Yet often times the reaction gives me great pleasure. Maybe I am still the child on the bus showing my father's photograph.

In retrospect, my work has been influenced by my studies of the Surrealist ideas of the 1920's and 1930's. The surrealist image was first defined by the poet Andre' Breton in Paris in his Surrealist Manifesto in 1924, as the "chance juxtaposition of two different realities". (Hunter & Jacobus 1992). For me the reality of the human female combined with the human male comes together to produce a very surrealist portrait. I imagine the production of an entirely new form. Using photography in this manner gives the viewer a heightened sense of the reality of the humans photographed; yet the final outcome is a figure that only can have attributes of both. The line between male and female humans is simultaneously distinct and blurred. The manner in which I photographed my subjects also has roots in surrealism. By using multiple exposures in

the camera without manipulation I can only see one subject at a time. The final outcome is not realized until the print has been completed.

In conclusion, the understanding of Buddha's Shell is to understand the concept of surrealism and how important the thought process of the artist is to bring forward a finished work of art into a personal reality. The work has been brought forward, thought out, and experienced. This is part of my journey of self discovery, but it is up to each viewer to interpret and bring the Buddhas into their own reality and find their own meaning.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13

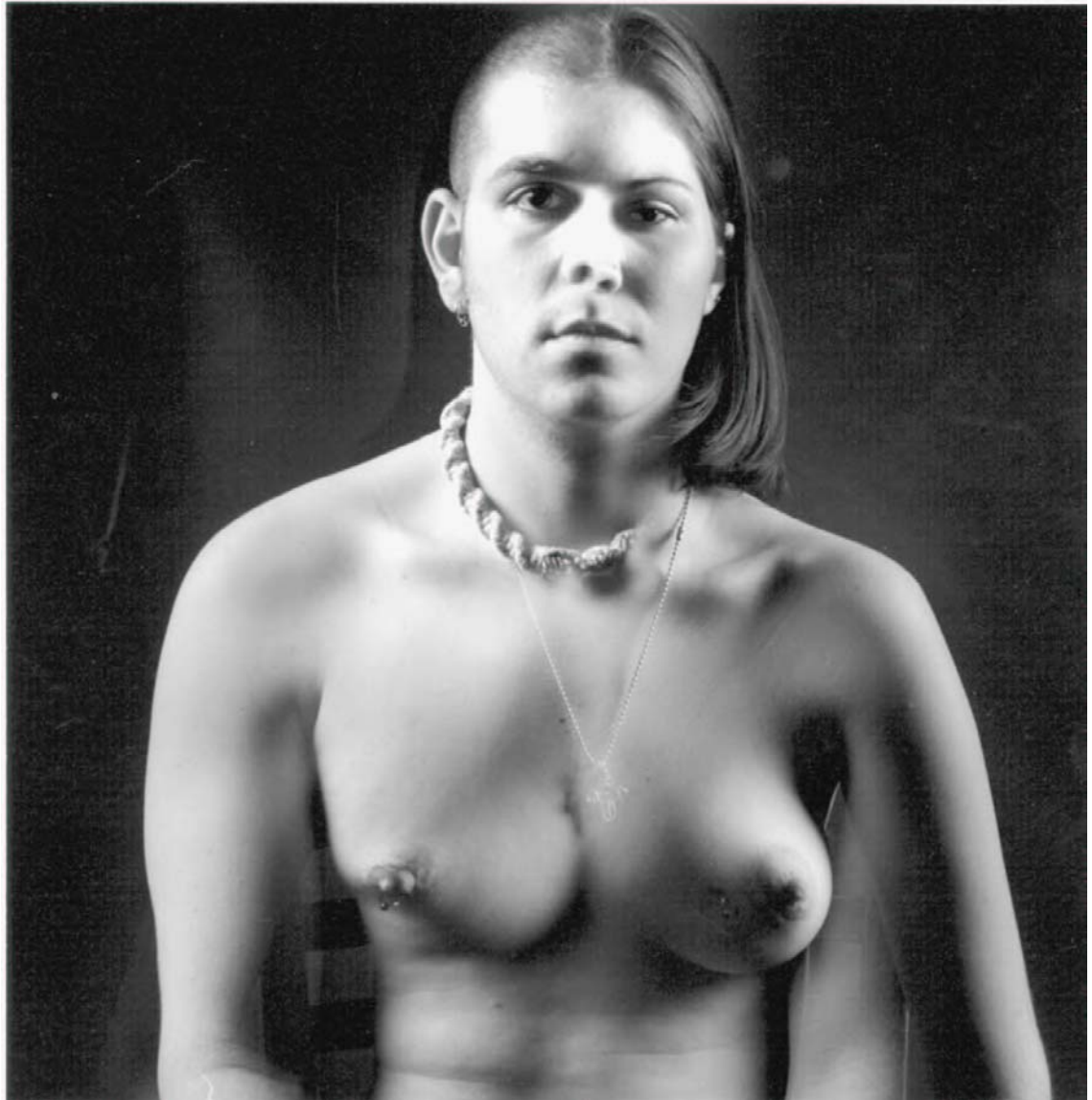


Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20

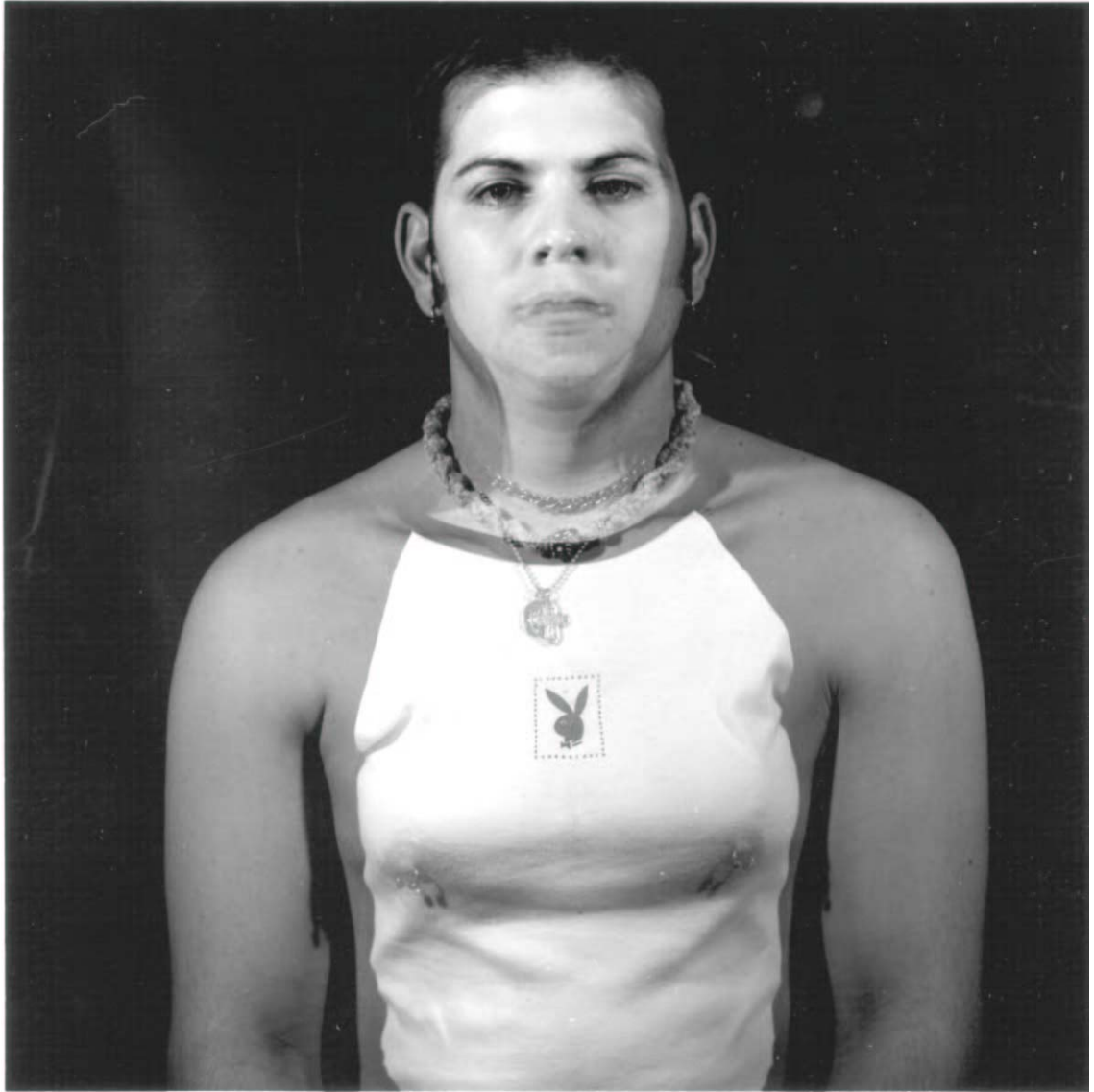


Figure 21

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VITA

Matthew Keating Jones was born November 22, 1970, in Grass Valley, California, to Dr. James Keating Jones and Susan Franklin Jones. He received his bachelor of Fine Arts degree from LaGrange College in LaGrange, Georgia in May of 1998. From 1999 to 2002 he studied at Louisiana State University. Matthew is married to Molly Turner Jones. They have one child, Aulden Keating Jones. Matthew plans on a long explorative career in photography wherever the road may take him. The New Orleans Museum of Modern Art has recently purchased a Buddha's Shell series portrait to their photography collection .