

### ***Silent Witness Series, 2009–present***

The *Silent Witness* series currently features twelve photographs and three hanging fabric Norens. The works are artifacts of community events that took place in the sacred space of St. Patrick - St. Anthony Church and events in relation to Merrimack College. Bits and pieces of floral matter are the subject of this work—the “silent witnesses”—which lend their stories to a conversation about memory. The series’ process utilizes time and asks viewers to question their interpretations of their memories. More importantly, it questions how memory is retold and shared.

This series is both conceptual and process-oriented. It began with my desire to communicate the concept of “community”—specifically the St. Patrick - St. Anthony Church community in downtown Hartford, Connecticut. This parish is very diverse, energetic and welcoming to all.

I decided to document this community for a period of one year. I began in October 2009 and continued until October 2010. After an event, I would visit the sacred space thinking about what had taken place. Many of the event’s artifacts would be gone except for the floral arrangements—they usually remained. As a result, I chose to use them as “witnesses” to the events. Various floral arrangements are routinely placed in the altar space. They all have meaning and could be seen as descriptive storytellers (i.e. a funeral, a wedding, All Saint’s Day, Christmas, etc.). As each arrangement’s utility was completed (this could take as long as a week), I would visit and pick a few flowers to bring back to my studio. I reinterpreted the arrangement using a digital scanner, letting geometry, color, texture, or even the “divine” inspire my images. By choosing to re-document the events, I was creating and also adding to their memory.

In the fall of 2016, the process continued as I documented events sponsored by Merrimack College in North Andover, Massachusetts. With these new pieces, I adapted the presentation format and created hanging Japanese Norens (fabric doors) between two spaces. This new hanging format allowed me to explore the concepts of inclusion/exclusion and public/private spaces when we create memories.

Since many of us also use language when sharing memories, within each piece I chose to include a list of the flowers used (both their Latin and common names), the event’s location and date, as well as the arrangement’s use. By doing this, both the image and text “describe” the community event—just as a documentary photograph would—thereby adding to the conversation of its memory.

In the fall of 2016, I exhibited the twelve framed photographs at the Clare Gallery at the Franciscan Center for Urban Ministry in Hartford, Connecticut. This gallery is located in a Roman Catholic urban center and is associated with the parish I had initially documented. It was interesting to hear the viewers’ comments, since some of the events evoked personal memories. Many viewers were attracted to the work based on aesthetics, but many more made associations based on the dates and events that were documented, i.e. remembering a loved one on All Soul’s Day, feeling nostalgic about the Christmas celebration, or remembering a relative’s or friend’s funeral.

The series (including the new Japanese Norens) then moved to the McCoy Gallery at Merrimack College in the spring of 2017. Wishing to add more three-dimensional content and further play with the question of memory, four “fresh cut” floral sculptures were installed and then allowed to “die” over the duration of the exhibition. I invited floral designer, John Bizis, to create the sculptures. John has been the Sanctuary Décor Coordinator for St. Patrick - St. Anthony Church for several

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years. He regularly studies the liturgy to help guide him with his creations. He believes designing floral arrangements for sacred events heightens the meaning of the liturgy, adding to understanding and memory.

After installing the work, something unexpected happened, which I believe enhanced the exhibition: It became both a visual and olfactory experience. At the beginning of the exhibition, the aroma of the fresh cut flowers was intensely pleasant. But as the arrangements began to fade, visitors noticed the presence of an organic odor suggesting decay. The floral sculptures continually changed as they “died.” Bits and pieces fell to the floor, parts of flowers dried out, the colors of the arrangements paled. Viewers’ experiences and memories of the exhibition were intensified by experiencing both visual and olfactory sensations—marking time and memory in different ways.

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