

THREADING BETWEEN WORLDS

By

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Stephanie Rose Renner

April 2008

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The artworks in this series are my accounts of a deaf woman's experience in a world that constantly pulls her back and forth between two very divergent sides. The images on each panel tell stories about my subjective experiences and in narrating them, I chose images that are easy to recognize and to interpret about my life as a deaf woman and the obstacles I often face in reconciling the worlds of the deaf and the hearing. The themes of unity and balance are also present, and speak to both my affinity with quilt making in both traditional and modern styles and my personal history of constantly changing positions between the deaf and hearing worlds.

As a child, I lived in the dorms at a school for the deaf, coming home to my hearing family on the weekends, holidays, and summers. Sewing was one of the skills I developed growing up as a way to pass time by when I was a child at home. Growing up, I learned to make traditional quilts created with strong geometric shapes and certain patterns that arrange the shapes in a finished look of combination. Over time, I gradually forgot all of the traditional techniques in quilt making, but when I began graduate school, I discovered a completely new appreciation for sewing, which led me to new ideas for creating sewn pieces. After studying Fine Arts at Rochester Institute of Technology, I used the knowledge I gained to transform fabric panels made with traditional methods into a new exploration of content, composition, hues, and tool usage. One of the styles I chose to use in my work is comparable to a well-known quilt making association, Gee's Bend, especially in the approach of using personal history to create artistic interpretations. Historically, quilting did not categorize as fine art until the late 1960's when quilt makers started to shift from traditional methods to a fresher and more progressive level. This led to sewn pieces becoming acceptable as art and displayed as such in galleries during the eighties. Inspired by the innovative interpretations of this medium, I wanted to be part of this exploration in my fine art studies while also creating art that communicated what it is like to be a deaf woman in a very big hearing world.

One of the most familiar feelings I included in the pieces is of "isolation" in which I feel like I only fit partly in each world for different reasons. It is common among deaf people to grow up having their hearing measured by doing tests with the school

audiologist every year, and growing up in the “institutionalized” environment of dorm life, in groups and scheduled activities. The “*Constantly Testing*” panel is an example of this, for it is quite uncommon for a hearing person to have their hearing tested every year. I never enjoyed having them done because I knew I was not going to gain my hearing back, as I am always going to be deaf. I felt the tests were pointless. The “*The Run Around*” panel shows the similarity between the two worlds in term of how I face a situation of trying to find communication, For me, these situations occur regularly, and the images address communication barriers I face daily. On the “*Scared in the Dark*” panel, there are 13 nurses and 3 doctors holding a figure down representing me at 9 years old. The doctor did not explain to me on what he was planning to do on me. He was trying to sew up a cut I had on my hand and instead of communicating, the doctor called a couple of nurses to hold me against my will, which scared me. I fought back, because I did not understand what was going on. This was all because there was a lack of communication that led to unnecessary action against me.

Using sewing as the traditional technique, I make the pieces look like paintings consisting of images that define certain personal experiences and ideas. Although I use a machine to sew the pieces, I still look at the process as belonging to the larger tradition of sewing/quilting and craft. As an artistic tool, the machine allows me to use more subtle and sophisticated lines, making them especially vivid and clear. Each panel creates an emotional interpretation of the picture to tell a story. Colors are identical in all of the panels to keep a unity among them in spite of differences in scale. Using a machine has allowed me to experiment with different kinds of stitches and a lot of weight in the lines in a shorter period than as if they were hand-sewn. The lines have different widths sewn to evoke the different qualities of line in drawings. The line and weight give the images depth instead of a flat impression. This in turn permits the experiences to be more illustrative. This particular style was a choice I made merely to show how I see each experience and their impact in both worlds. Each color, use of stitch, weight of lines, recognizable images and scales are created in a way that each panel tells a story of my

different experiences and what is significant for me in dual worlds and living in the between of both worlds.

The art pieces here are inspired from my experiences of living in a hearing dominated community in Montana after having lived in a large deaf community for a long time in the east coast. When I first moved to Bozeman, I felt shut out by the communication barriers, but over time living here has challenged me to step back and develop my perspective on another level, and analyze what the differences, similarities, and new feelings I developed in my time at MSU. Those experiences have motivated me to create individual panels based on experiences throughout childhood to the present to symbolize the communication barriers I deal with daily, ranging from a simple 'hello' to engaging in a conversation in different forms such as gestures, writing, and reading lips and the emphasis of information received with misunderstanding both ways.



Image 1 – Which Black Hole?



Image 2 – *Which Black Hole*, detail



Image 3 – *Which Black Hole?*, detail



Image 4 – *Which Black Hole?*, detail

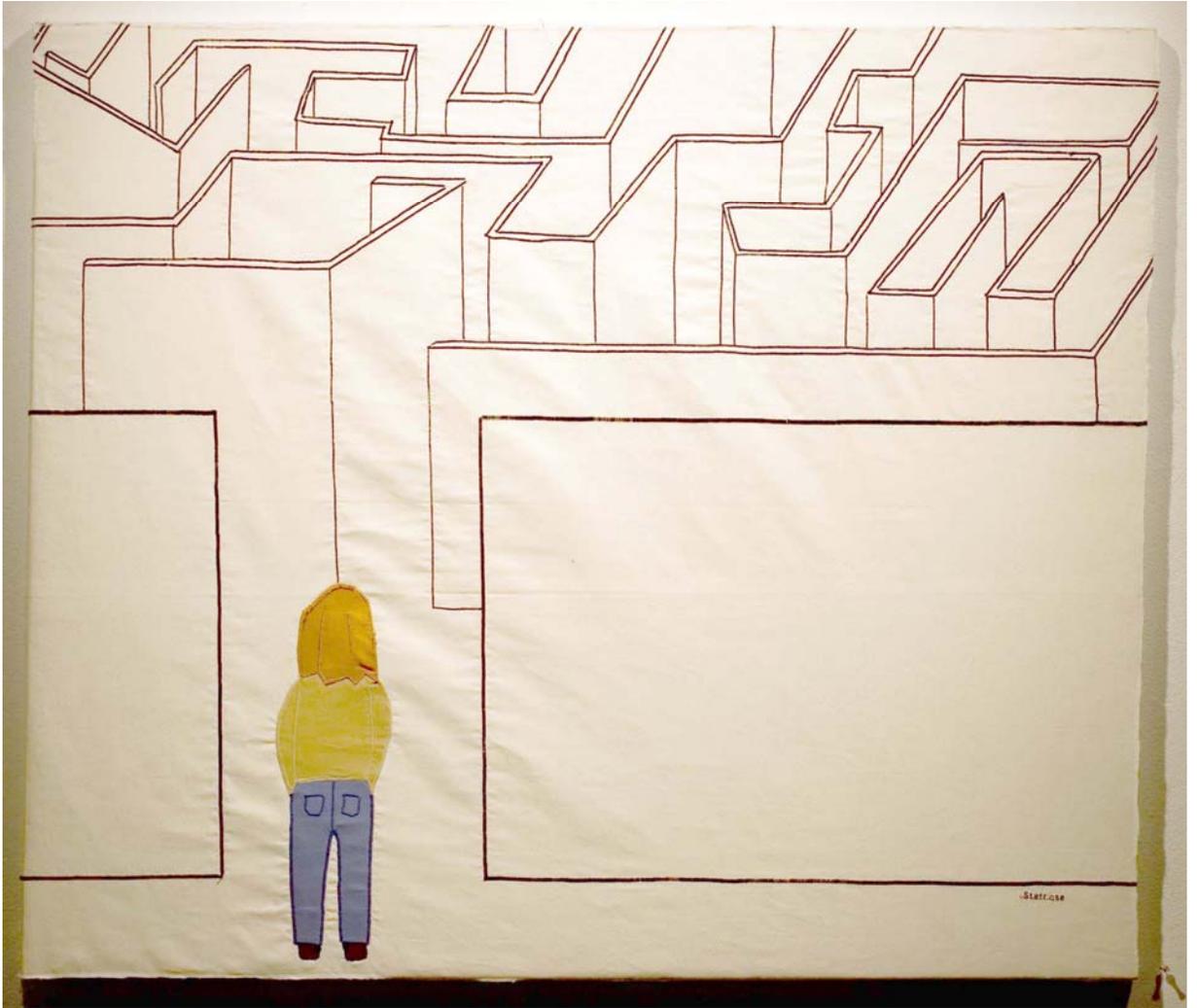
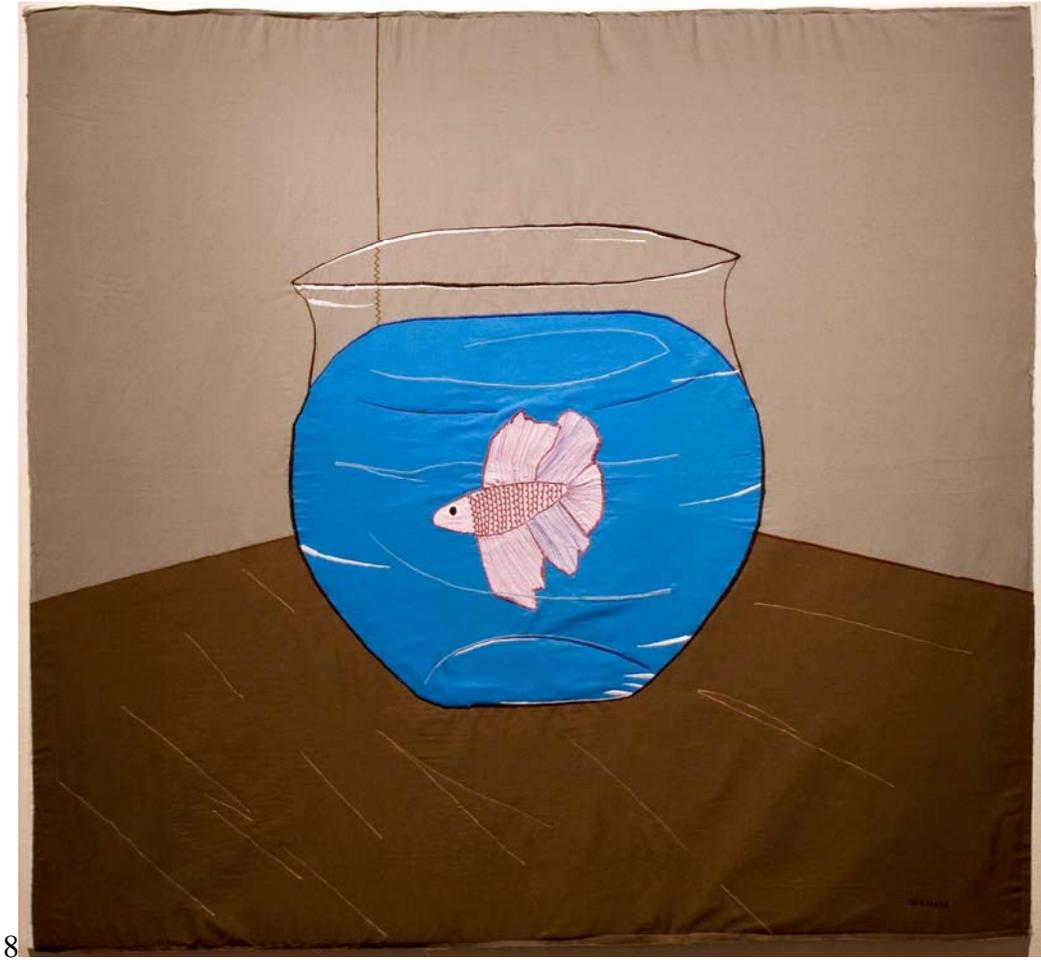


Image 5 – *Finding the Way*



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Image 6 – *Living like a Beta Fish*



Image 7 – *Living like a Beta Fish*, detail



Image 8 – *Out in the Country*



Image 9 – *In The City*



Image 10 – *In the City*, detail

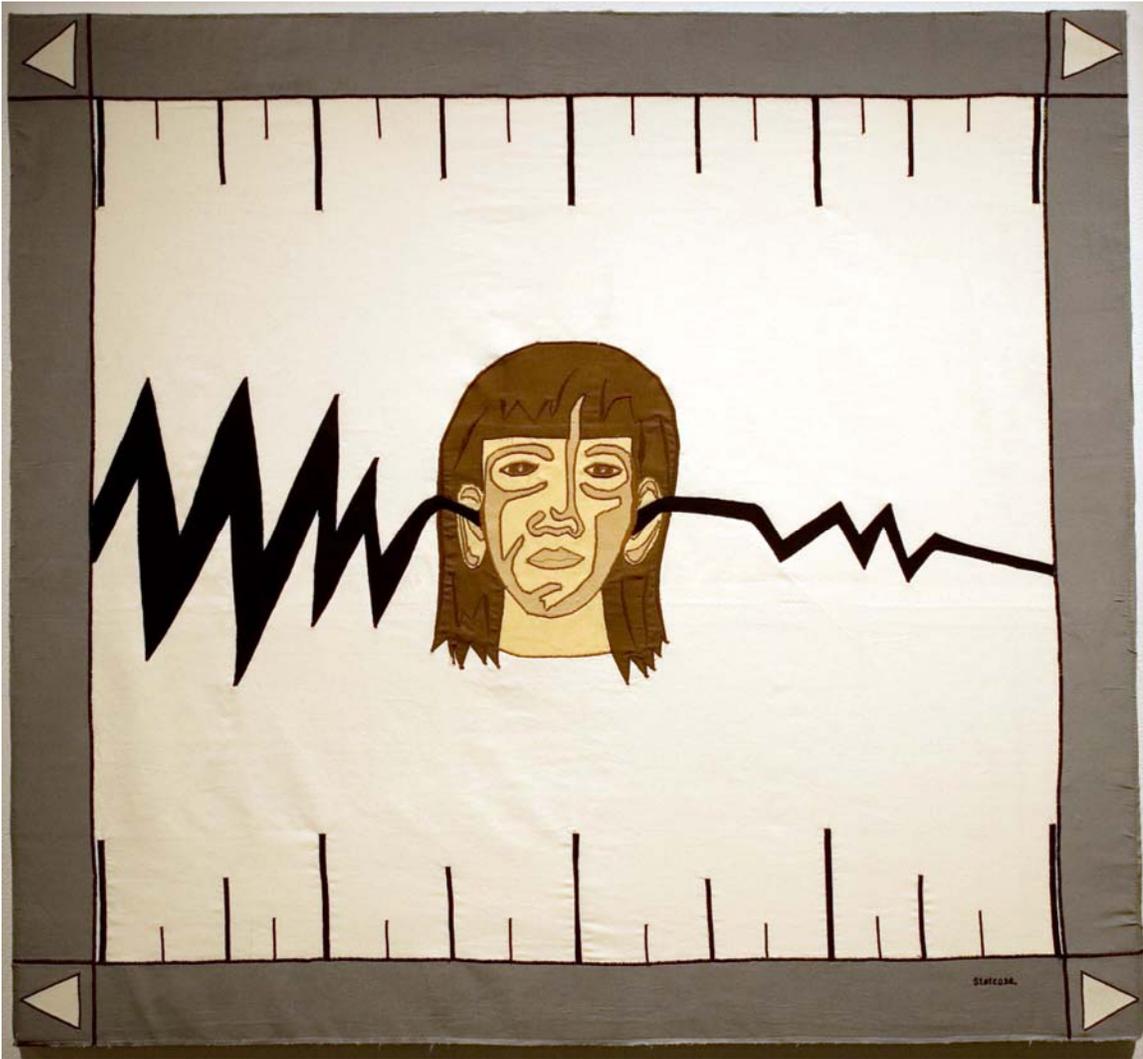


Image 11 – *Constantly Testing*

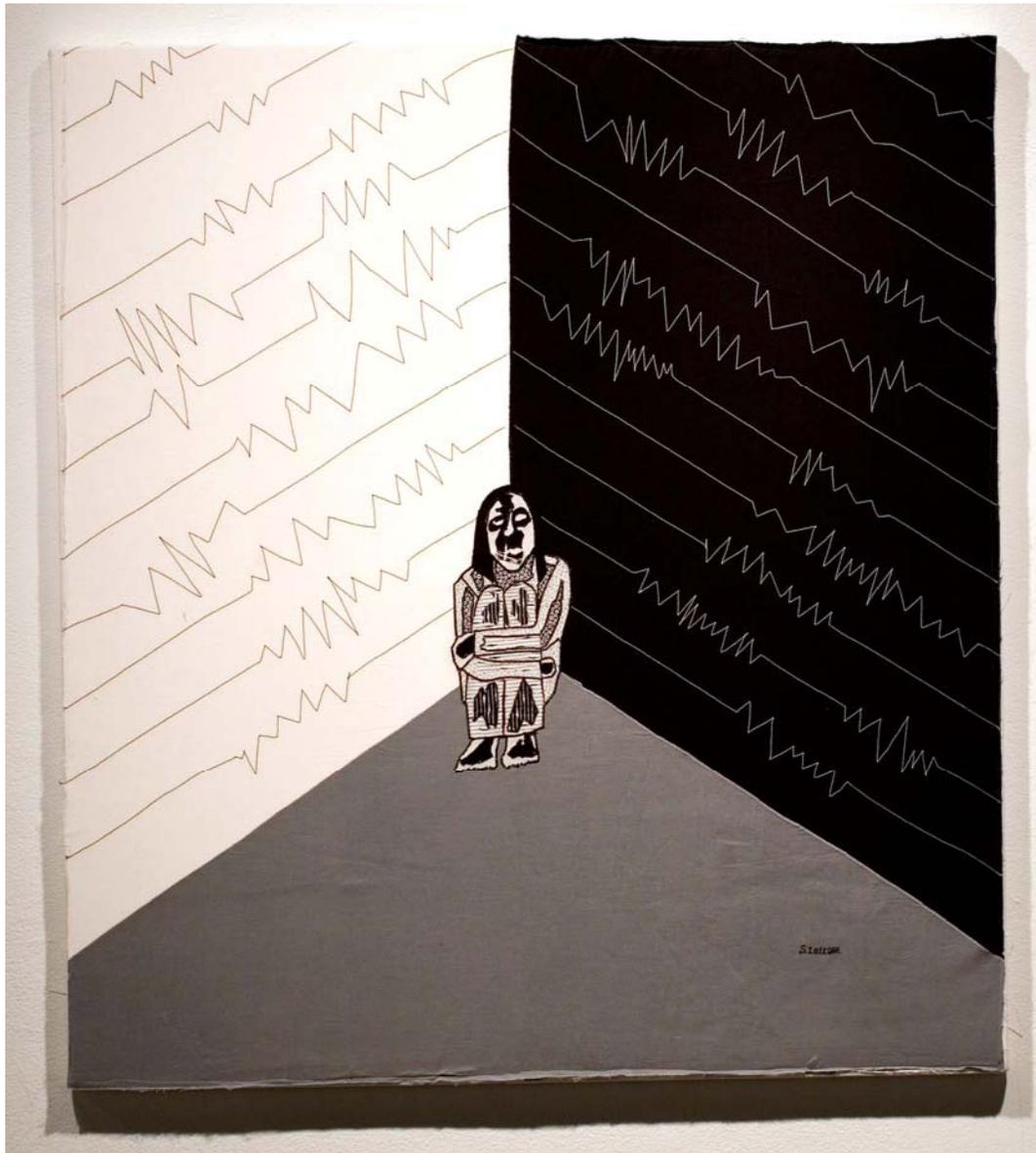


Image 12 – *Backed into a Corner*



Image 13 – *Scared in the Dark*



Image 14 – *Scared in the Dark*, detail



Image 15 – *Scared in the Dark*, detail



Image 16 – *The Run Around*



Image 17 – *The Run Around*, detail



Image 18 – *Didn't You Hear Me Yelling?*



Image 19 – *Didn't You Hear Me Yelling?*, detail



Image 20 – *Installation View 1*



Image 21 – *Installation View 2*



Image 22 – detail



Image 23 – *Installation View 3*



Image 24 – *Installation View 4*



Image 25 – *Installation View 5*