

MY LIFE AS SISTINA SMILES

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
The requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY  
Department of Fine Arts

MAY 2009

To the faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the thesis of  
HEATHER LOSEY MCGEACHY find it satisfactory and recommend that it be  
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# MY LIFE AS SISTINA SMILES

## Abstract

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May 2009

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In *My Life as Sistina Smiles*, I explore virtual experiences and their relationship to my physical life. I am infatuated with the patterns and structures that form our existence and how those patterns exist as layers stacked like paper creating a flat image of reality for us to view. The concept of layering is used to unify both my digital and physical works.

In my virtual works, each layer of an image has been presented for view. Some of the works include more distance between the imagery so that it is possible to view a single layer along with the entire constructed image.

In my physical works, the images are sandwiched together, allowing the viewer only glimpses of each layers construction. The sandwiching of the images in clear acrylic sheets, allows light to pass through the layers and create duplicate projected image on the white acrylic backing.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

"What's left of the old farmhouse stands alone on top of a ridge. From a distance I knew something was wrong with it. A broken down white picket fence surrounded it, and added to the desolation and loneliness. I made my way on an overgrown path littered with broken bottles and debris. I saw something glittering in the afternoon sun. Its' flash blinded me for a moment and I walked closer. Then I saw the body. It was mangled and chopped into meat, putrefying in the heat of the day. There were gnaw marks from animals, probably wild dogs. The glittering buckle from a gun holster was still attached to the body of this female wanderer. Must have been some sort of animal that killed her, no human would leave a weapon. Suddenly alarmed I scanned the area around the farmhouse. And I saw the rest of them. Hanging from the bare beams of the farmhouse, were the remains of five bodies hooked onto chains. All of the heads had been removed and there was dried blood everywhere. Weapons and strips of clothing hung from the chunks of flesh. Some of the remains were swinging lightly in the breeze, the chains tinkled like wind chimes. I had to collect their weapons and anything else of value, but it was difficult to get close to them. Sometimes I wish I'd lose my eyeglasses so I could see the world through a nice blur of color. What would have done this?"

~excerpt from February 27,2009, <http://gamerdiaries.blogspot.com/>

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PHYSICAL

I am born into a physical world. I am filled with anticipation at this new world to explore. My physical attributes have been chosen for me. My name has been chosen for me: Heather Ann Losey. I have no memory of other worlds. This is where the training begins. I have to learn how to move around and communicate.

After many years of growth, I become aware of my physical appearance. I choose the perfect hair color and clothing, but my body style is predefined in my construction. Various skills that I wish to possess may or may not be within my abilities. I must constantly try out different activities to determine what I might be good at. Skills I possess must be perfected so as to succeed in the tasks set before me. There will be many quests as well as many rewards. There will be many found objects as well as new friends. Most importantly, there will be existence.

There is often death, destruction and war. I have only lived this one life and have not yet died. I have despaired at the killings around me. It is depressing to see violence performed on other physical beings, but I have become quite good at overlooking death. I am distanced from war and destruction as I see it only in fleeting imagery.

I have accumulated many skills along with tools, books, titles, memories, photos, pets, friends and professions. My life is simple and extraordinary in its' physical focus. I explore. Around me I see the pattern of life, replicating, duplicating, running, merging, interacting and growing.

I spend much of my time experiencing the world. I sit by the cool stream to admire the birds, and feel the wind race as it plays around the trees. The sky moves over the world.

I have traveled to only a few lands as movement here is slow and complex. Some paths are blocked to me as they are guarded by enemies. I am always in a hurry, time is of the essence. I will not live forever. I forget almost every conversation, name, past experience and location as my memory can not hold onto all of the data. The world changes constantly, it can not be replayed.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE VIRTUAL

I have awoken into a virtual world. I am filled with anticipation at this new world to explore. I carefully select the physical attributes of my person. I choose the perfect hair color, body style and clothing. I search through the various skills and professions choosing those I wish to possess. I also choose a name: Sistina Smiles. I have awakened to over 67 new worlds. Within these worlds I have lived the lives of many named selves, both male and female. I have traveled many lands, time periods and universes.

When the construct of my being has been finished, I am shown the new world. This is where the training begins. I have to learn how to move around and communicate. My chosen skills must be perfected so as to succeed in the tasks set before me. There will be many quests as well as many rewards. There will be many found objects as well as new friends. Most importantly, there will be existence.

There is often death, destruction and war. I have killed many enemies and I have died over 411 times. It is depressing to perform violence on other representations, but I have become quite good at killing. I watch death before me and feel a strange sadness.

I have accumulated many skills along with weapons, maps, potions, commendations, titles, levels, screen shots, pets, friends, memories and professions. My life is simple and extraordinary in its' visual focus. I explore. Around me I see the pattern of life, replicating, running, merging, interacting and growing.



I spend much of my time experiencing the world through sight and sound. I sit by streams to admire birds, and watch the wind play on the trees. The skies move over the worlds.

In some worlds I have the ability to fly, in others I can teleport to known locations. Some paths are blocked to me until I've completed some task or achieved a particular goal. I am never in a hurry, time means nothing here. I will live forever. I can recall every conversation and name, as my lives are recorded and re-playable.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### TOGETHER

I love to paint. I am infatuated with the blending of brush strokes. The act of painting reveals the true nature of reality. I use painting to understand and interpret my environment. I document the environments of my virtual experiences so that I may understand their meaning. When, or more importantly, how, will my virtual and physical lives merge together? And what will that mean? All experiences become memories and lessons that shape me. I look fondly at experiences that hold mystery, a special event, or an object of beauty. My dreams are layered with existences from all worlds. As I observe the worlds so carefully, I see that all things growing form a pattern. I see this pattern everywhere and am comforted to unveil this underlying structure to the universe. The patterns are transparent and layered upon each other, appearing as one flat layer from the top. In my mind I turn the world on its side to see each layer of pattern. I am infatuated with how the light travels through each layer, collecting aspects from each one and depositing the completed picture on every surface it touches. I am reminded of stained glass windows and the feeling of awe I experience when looking at them.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE MFA EXHIBIT**

The series of paintings I created for the Master of Fine Art thesis exhibit, exist in worlds that are both physical and virtual. The subject matter comes from the journal of my virtual lives, which exists at <http://gamerdiaries.blogspot.com/>. The paintings exist as documentation of my virtual experiences which help me to gain understanding of my existence and how experiences change who I am. The installation of physical works hung on the museum walls, correlate directly to the installation of virtual works placed in a virtual version of the museum. The physical and virtual works can be compared, contrasted and eventually merged. The exhibit is not an answer, but a step in the merging process.

The physical works are digital paintings. Digital paint is necessary to keep the layering aspect intact. I printed individual layers of each image onto transparent material. I then layered the transparent material in clear acrylic sheets. The use of clear materials allows light to pass through each layer and project a finished image onto a white acrylic backing.

The virtual works are the same images as used in the printed physical paintings. These works maintain all of their individual layers, some layers have more distance between them to allow virtual beings to walk between the layers. Displaying the virtual and physical works together, allows comparisons to be made between the physical and virtual counterparts. The images are the same files, existing in different formats. They are the same works, just as I am the same person in my physical format, or virtual format.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **THE END (THE FUTURE)**

My virtual explorations continue to shape me. These experiences become new layers of my created self. I look with great anticipation at the future where my virtual and physical lives will exist without an interface. There will be no doorways to walk through for access into worlds. My experience of existence will no longer be distanced. How many lives will I live in that timeless space? How many deaths?