

Julie Comnick  
Statement of Plans

“WANTED: discarded violins – irreparable condition.” So reads the subject line of recent ads I have placed on FreeCycle™ and craigslist™. My goal is to collect approximately 150 violins, or enough to constitute a very large pile. It is with these sought-after violins that I plan to spend the next eighteen months, as the inspiration and subject matter for a new body of work.

As the only child of a piano teacher, I was instructed at an early age to choose one instrument and stick with it. At age eight I selected the violin, and at eighteen I put it down. The ten years between were fraught with accomplishment and ambivalence as I excelled at an instrument I didn't feel particularly passionate about. Since then, the violin has shown up in a recurring dream: in one version I stand frozen on stage when I forget the piece I had memorized for a recital; in another, the pages on the music stand at the recital are blank. The violin has reappeared periodically in my paintings, and its image has become central to my personal iconography.

We are all haunted by our unrealized pursuits, and anxiety is the material of our collective nightmares. I am interested in iconography as a social construct, and what images endure in our collective memory. How does personal observation inform common experience? How are images tied to memory and social consciousness? And what is the role of pictorial representation in visual culture?

After collecting the violins I intend to place them in a pile and burn them, as the source material for a painting and video project. Certainly the collection and handling of so many used instruments will influence the direction of the project, but my expectation is that I will produce three large-scale oil paintings depicting the pile of violins in three stages: at dusk, the pile of violins will be illuminated by the setting sun; at nightfall, the pile of violins will be ablaze; and at dawn, the charred remains of the violins will smolder. A time-based element in the form of video will document the duration of the pile from dusk to dawn, time-lapsed to approximately thirty minutes. Time is important to both the paintings and the video; the representation of time in the paintings is allegorical, whereas the time-lapse video is a direct experience of the event. A soundtrack for the video will be a recording of myself playing repetitive exercises on the violin. An exhibition of this project will include the paintings alongside a projection of the video.

From the parable of the burning bush to the tradition of burning books, burning is a symbolic act, if sometimes a regrettable one. While the violin is personally significant to me, it is culturally symbolic to a generation that, due to circumstances such as increased technology and reduced public funding for the arts, is less likely to learn to play an instrument in school, seldom attends the symphony, and is unlikely to pass values of musical heritage onto their children. By observing the stages of the violins' incineration through painting (painting itself is perceived as an obsolete tradition) and video (a new

technology), I invite the viewer to consider what makes the instrument precious in his or her own experience, and the impact of its loss.

The creation of my project involves preparatory work that would not necessarily be included in an exhibition. I plan to make small preparatory paintings of piles of different objects at various times of day; reminiscent of Monet's *Haystacks*, these studies will inform the color scheme and light source of the large-scale paintings. During the burning I will take still photographs to use as references for the oil paintings. And, to re-familiarize myself with the instrument after an eighteen-year hiatus, I will take bi-weekly violin lessons for the duration of the project.

This project departs from and expands upon my previous work in several ways. My recent paintings have been more literal interpretations of specific sociopolitical themes, whereas this new project returns to my earlier interests in metaphor and allegory. My past work has been figurative, and in this project the figure is omitted; implied rather than depicted, the absence of the figure emphasizes the viewer's own relationship to the objects. This is my first project that includes a video component, acknowledging the role of the source photograph and the process of staging reference material that has long been important to my work. Also, in contrast to my past work this project immerses me more personally and fully into my subject matter and process.