

**Pillars of Humanity:  
Reflexive Identity in a Disconnected Society**

By  
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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Digital Art  
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Science

May 2015

## **An Abstract for the Thesis of**

**Marc Caputo for the degree of Bachelor of Science  
in the Department of Digital Art to be taken June 2015**

**Title: PILLARS OF HUMANITY: REFLEXIVE  
IDENTITY IN A DISCONNECTED SOCIETY**

Approved: 

**Professor Andrew Nelson**

This project is a reaction to the age of images and an exploration of personal relationships. After interviewing four subjects, I directly combine text and image to associate the words people say with their body language and physical reactions. Each person shared a highly charged, personal story with me, and I attempted to carry this emotion through the entirety of my piece. My project is a work about humanity and our emotions. It is about the barrier we all construct between ourselves and everyone else, and is intended to be a contribution to academic work in Digital Art.

## **Acknowledgements**

Without the assistance of my advising team, friends and family I could not have completed this project. I would like to thank Professor Andrew Nelson for helping direct me on the correct path for my thesis and then sticking with me despite it being out of his field of study. I would also like to thank Professor Tyrras Warren, for her undying support and unwavering advice. Thank you for listening to my rants and helping me organize my chaotic mind. You created a safe place for me to share my thoughts and ideas and were always available to listen as a mentor and a friend. I am indebted to you. I greatly appreciated your and Mitchel Eisenbrant's help in the construction of my project. It would not have gone as smoothly without either of your assistance. Thank you for sharing your time with me. Finally, I am beyond grateful to my four subjects for opening up to me and for trusting in my discretion. I admire your strength and the patience you had with me. This project would not have been possible without your honesty.

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## **Part I: Finding Inspiration**

This thesis was a long and arduous process filled with many redirections. Every setback, however, became a learning experience that propelled me forward and further inspired me to test the limitations of my project. *The Pillars of Humanity* is a type of procedural art. The project gains its meaning and importance from the process that created it, rather than solely the finished product. With that in mind, I made sure that all my actions were intentional and significant.

I found support across the University of Oregon. As a double major, I began writing my thesis in the study of creativity in the field of Business Administration, but once I started I soon migrated away from Business and towards Digital Art. I combined my original idea of creation and creativity with my passion for image-making to begin this process. I browsed through previous creative theses to see what kinds of things had been done, how the boundaries of the Clark Honors College had been pushed, and I quickly found that no prior students had taken the path I had in mind. Unlike the other Theses, I wanted to create a project that was relatable to all audiences; I sought to create a project that could be understood by someone who lacked an artistic background.

My thesis began as an introspective study of the relationship between photography and identity development. I was interested to discover who was using and producing digital images and how they fused with a person's identity. The underlying issue of this idea was the connection between the user and the camera. The camera acted as an intermediary between the user and the subject,

and when it was placed between two people, it mitigated relationships. It interrupted the conversation by creating a physical barrier and offered a new lens in which to view the world. This disconnection continued to arise with continued research.

### *Research*

I began my search by reading photography theory. I looked for texts and articles that discussed the relationship between 1) photography and culture and 2) photography and the user. I came across *Photography Changes Everything*, a text compiled by Marvin Heiferman, which suggested that photography had five major impacts: photography changes where we go, who we are, and what we want, see and remember.<sup>1</sup> His introduction set the stage for this compilation of articles. He based it around the aforementioned themes in order to discuss the impact of photo making on everyday culture and life. I quickly noticed after further reading that photography could have a variety of impacts on a specific person. I needed to narrow my focus to the individual.

I delved into theory books, and I came across Fred Ritchin's *After Photography*, a text that furthered Heiferman's compiled arguments.<sup>2</sup> The photograph had become a digital artifact, a memory. Due to the Internet, the sharing of images has become rampant, placing a high emphasis on personal image and self-publication. The social photograph has desensitized people to images to the point where they are becoming banal and a part of our everyday lives. A photo

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<sup>1</sup> Heiferman, Marvin. *Photography Changes Everything*. New York: Aperture, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Ritchin, Fred. *After Photography*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009.

could operate as a physical extension of us, yet we rarely notice the impact. This inspired me to take a new direction in my project. I wanted to take images that were embedded with a story, with a personality. I needed to create something personal.

In order to find that personality, I took a comprehensive look at social media and found a podcast by Benjamin Walker. He interviewed Nathan Ferguson, a social media theorist, on the ephemerality of photos in social media in his podcast *Artifacts (2 of 2)*.<sup>3</sup> Ferguson focused his study on Snapchat.<sup>4</sup> Like other social media sites, all images taken with this application are stored forever on the Internet. However, Snapchat retains temporality as the images erase themselves after the designated time frame. This destruction mimics the ephemerality of everyday conversation, and disrupts the traditional notion of the photograph. A photo is no longer an art object or a document of the present, rather it has an ends: communication. Ferguson's comment about an image becoming a tool for communication, similar to other interactions, made me reimagine my project. What if my image was based on a tool for communication? What if my project was an artifact of a conversation?

### *Disconnection*

Completing this research opened my eyes to my environment and I became hyperaware of the actions of others and myself. Initially I observed my friends'

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<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Walker, *Artifacts (2 of 2)*, podcast audio, MP3. 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Snapchat is a phone application that allows users to send photo and video messages to one another. They can include filters, text, and drawings, and are only sent to a selected list of recipients. The sender can select up to a ten second limit to view the message before it is deleted.

dependency on their phones. From then on I made the conscious effort to not use my phone in public, so that I could observe other's behaviors. I found myself sitting in a quiet room, full of people yet completely silent, as everyone stared mindlessly into their phones. I spoke up and asked them what they were doing. What were they infatuated with? A vast majority of the time, my friends were scrolling through social media sites or taking pictures and posting them to Snapchat. They were defining their actions and experiences by the pictures they had taken, needing to encapsulate everything they had just gone through. Rather than living in the physical moment, they were connected online, talking to everyone who was not there. I began to worry that I was doing something wrong until I saw that it was an issue that stretched farther than just my personal relationships. This dependency on the Internet made me feel disconnected from everyone around me; it felt challenging to create meaningful relationships.

### *The Beginning*

I aspired to formally address this issue of disconnection so I searched for artists that dealt with these issues, but little satisfied my craving to learn more. I came across Brooke Singer's *Data Body* (See Appendix, *Figure 1*).<sup>5</sup> In this project she purchased all the information she could find about herself from the Compass database, maintained by National Decision Systems, and built a profile based on what the Internet knew of her. Then, she formatted this data into a portrait of herself. The notion of one's basic information acting as data to identify a person was the exact opposite thing of what I was looking for. Much like Singer,

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<sup>5</sup> Brooke Singer (2001), *Data Body*, (<http://www.bsing.net/databody.pdf>).



rather than focusing on the exterior, I wanted to know more about what truly forms one's identity. Overall, I found little of use, which eventually had the opposite affect than intended. It inspired me. It pushed me further to seek my own answers. I was driven by inherent motivation. Later on, I began to detect similarities between my work and *Rehearsal of Memory*, a multimedia series by Graham Harwood (See Appendix, *Figure II*).<sup>6</sup> He created an interactive program that embodied the lives of people from Ashworth High Security Mental Hospital. By pushing the patient's bodies up against scanners, he constructed portraits of people that were a danger to themselves and to others. When interacting with the program, touching one of the patient's scars would cause a story of pain or self-damage to arise and fill the screen, overlaying on top of the image. Harwood entered the mental space of the patients and made it visible for all viewers, forcing them to confront these people's nightmares. I admired his approach to telling stories and his method for displaying text and image.

Spring of 2014 was a rough transition for me, with a majority of my classmates graduating. I quickly realized that there was still a lot I did not know about the people in my life. Despite being close for years, there was still a distance, and I began to understand it was because we had yet to sit down and have an especially meaningful conversation. I wanted to understand how my close friends operated, much like how I understood people in my immediate sphere of influence. We had yet to share our life-altering experiences with one another - the good and the bad - and I wanted to create art that foster more understanding.

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<sup>6</sup> Graham Harwood, *Rehearsal of Memory*, 1995. Interactive Program.

I applied this newfound vision to the art I was currently producing and brought what I had learned into the classroom. That term I was taking my first imaging classes led by Alex Krajkowski, a photography graduate teaching fellow (GTF). He encouraged me to expand my horizons while I learned more about photography and how to properly control a camera. Up to that point, I had created art emphasizing the final, polished product. Krajkowski encouraged me to focus more on the process and try to give it importance, and my way of thinking was there forever changed. I was no longer making decisions based solely on aesthetic choices; rather I was determined to make every choice purposeful and contribute to the end goal of the project. That final project was based on me sharing moments with four of my graduating friends (See Appendix, *Figure III*).<sup>7</sup> I filmed them telling me something I did not already know about them, and then I manipulated their image. I placed the camera in between us to emulate the role of technology in separating friends. I played their video on an iPad and used a flatbed scanner to create a high-resolution photo of them speaking. Since the camera was on a tripod with a stationary background, the light from the scanner recorded the image and created bands and lines distorting their faces as they moved while they spoke. The distortions created from the scanner represented the alteration caused by technology in friendships, through cellphones and social media. When the class finally critiqued this project, I was almost in tears because of the emotional connection I had to the piece. Though I did not know it at the time, the emotion from this project that was what inspired the initial stage of my thesis.

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<sup>7</sup> Caputo, Marc. "Emma." Photograph.

The following school year I began working closely with Professors Craig Hickman and Tyrras Warren. I regularly visited their office to discuss developments in my work and to get their advice on my ideas. Hickman pushed me conceptually by encouraging me to analyze various aspects of photography, including line, color, surface, and light, whereas Warren instructed me to begin playing with materials. I experimented with a variety of mediums, getting stuck for some time on incorporating mirrors, until Warren showed me one of her recent projects. It was entitled *Fuck You, (insertnamehere)* (See Appendix, *Figure IV*).<sup>8</sup> In this series, she took submissions from people who wrote to her about the abuse of power. Using her webcam, she then took a picture of herself flipping off the camera and embedded their name into the photo. Embedding the sender's name into the file created a glitched appearance, distorting the image. She posted their submission below the photo in order to preserve anonymity. This series united my scan project with the thesis research I had done previously. That day when I left her office, my project was born.

### *Thesis Proposal*

I wanted to film a conversation with four people, find the crux of the issue they were discussing, and then transform a frame of the video and turn it into an image still. Drawing from my research, I would distort each image with the text from that specific moment of the conversation, literally placing the text they said into the image's data. I would then print them life-sized. The massiveness of the

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<sup>8</sup> Tyrras Warren (February 26, 2015), "(“Fuck you, Embedded.” 89),” *Fuck you, (insertnamehere)*, (<http://fuckyoutyrras.tumblr.com/>).

image would create an overwhelming statement and demand attention from the viewer, which is exactly what I was looking for. I spent the following few days trying to find the missing piece of presenting my thesis project, until one morning I had an epiphany in the shower. I wanted to create four pillars standing at six feet tall to present my images. These circular shapes would imitate the shape of a person and serve as freestanding sculptures. The viewer could independently walk around each piece. On one side I would feature the glitched image, while on the other side I would place the text that distorted the image. This text would be represented in a self-made typeface based on each subject's handwriting. I chose four people because it is an even, balanced number for a series of sculptures. For the sake of my project and symmetry, I wanted the four pillars to be similar and allude to a Greek or Roman temple, referring to the classical notion of the ideal. Although I believe that this project could incorporate more than four subjects, I wanted to feature people at different stages in life. Life has four major phases: adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, and old age.

## **Part II: The Craft**

The subjects are the focal point of this thesis, and framing their vulnerability through their story is what the craft is all about. I selected people who occupied my second sphere of influence, people that were not included in my immediate circle of friends. I chose my boyfriend's cousin, my friend from college, an old family friend, and one of my high school teachers. For the sake of this thesis, their identities and full stories will remain anonymous because who they are was not important; the importance lies with their experiences. These four people represented a range in age and gender. One of the deciding factors in choosing them was based on our personal relationships. I was confident that in the right situation they would feel no hesitation to tell the complete truth. Each of them embodies experiences that are relatable and universal to people of their age group and gender. Because it might result in an inherently biased answer, I strayed away from choosing my relatives. This project's emphasis was on relationships that did not extend ones entire life, which meant they could not be related to me. These four subjects represented a failure in communication. For whatever reason, we had yet to share significant life experiences, and I wanted to learn more about what they reveal to others and what they keep to themselves. To form a closer bond, by understanding and learning something that we had been unable to discuss earlier was a strong influence on this project.

### *The Interviews*

My primary goal in each interview was to be a mediator in the conversation and not a content creator. However, by the end of each conversation it was

apparent that I could not completely detach myself from the situation. Listening to them and guiding them through their own self-truth was my intention, not dissuading them from talking about a certain topic. It became less of a one sided interview and more of a conversation, with me inquiring to learn more without leading them from topic to topic. This allowed me to have a more meaningful conversation, analyze what they said, and find the significance behind every pause and every word they spoke. Before initiating the interview, I sat down with each subject to have a conversation, laying out what was going to happen and how I would be representing them in my project. Only with their explicit permission did I move forward with each step; it was vital to my thesis that they gave me their complete consent. I expressed to them that I would not use their identifiable image or their name. Our conversation would remain completely confidential. The three older subjects tried to convince me to pick something for them to talk about, but after reminding them of my intentions, they came up with topics on their own. My only specifications were that their story must be something I did not already know, it must be something that they do not often share, and most importantly, it must be meaningful to them. With these guidelines, I did not insert my opinion or moral judgment into the process. I created a safe and comfortable environment in order to give the subjects control of what they shared.

Once each subject fully understood the project, I scouted a private location for us to commence the filming process. Although they ranged in duration, I scheduled one hour for each interview. On average, each conversation lasted for 30

minutes, ranging from 12 to 45 minutes. To set up the interview, I began by telling each subject:

Tell me about something that has happened in your life that has greatly affected the person you are today. Share with me something that you normally keep to yourself and don't often share with people outside your immediate circle of friends and family.

Each conversation progressed in a similar fashion. The subject opened by telling me about a specific instance or memory that has stuck with them. When they completed their initial story, I proceeded to ask follow up questions about how it made them feel, what they were thinking, etc. I let the conversation flow naturally. When I would ask for more information I was never met with hostility. They were not overtly formal because I structured each interview like a conversation between two friends. With each question I dug deeper into their psyche. At about the two-thirds mark, the subjects began to completely open up. By that time they were comfortable and addressed me directly, entirely neglecting the camera. They spoke more clearly about ideas and thoughts that often go through their minds and the reasons why they act a particular way. When each interview concluded, I thanked them for their time and gave them a timeline on when they should expect to hear from me again. I also reiterated that if they ever became uncomfortable with the information I was using, they had every right to speak up.

### *Subject Reactions*

Each subject had his or her own distinct reaction to my thesis, yet I found many similarities between each interview. Combined with a short description of

our relationship and without disregarding the subject's trust, a brief synopsis of our conversation is as follows:

#### Boyfriend's Cousin

I first met my boyfriend's cousin, who is 8 years old, last year when my boyfriend introduced me to his extended family. Last December his aunt flew us down to California to surprise her son. We spent a week in Southern California and at Disneyland, during which I became close with him. Since they live in California, I unfortunately could not physically film him. However, his parents mediated the conversation by asking him my questions and following my specific instructions. My boyfriend's cousin began his video with a conversation about his friend lying to him at school. Like most boys his age, he jumped around and fidgeted, unable to sit still. He often lost his train of thought and had to be reminded of what he was talking about in order to stay focused. I chose that particular quote because he kept dwelling on that instance with his classmate, despite it occurring three years prior. His lack of understanding as to why it happened was so frustrating to him that he could not let it go. I found this typical to children his age and his anger was the primary idea he forwarded.

#### College Friend

I have known my friend from college for two years. We met the spring he was graduating from high school, and despite going to different schools we frequently see one another on the weekends. As a 19 year old,



he has faced many transitions in his life, so he began speaking to me about how he was constantly placed in new environments and never felt as though he settled down. He spoke extensively about his transition to college that transformed into a conversation about his relationships with his friends and family, specifically his brother. From there the conversation became more philosophical and he spoke about his inability to share his feelings. Every time he had to express his emotions, he shifted his weight between the toes and balls of his feet. His hands clenched up into loose fists. The major theme behind his stories was his lack of allowing people in and his dependence on keeping things to himself.

### Old Family Friend

My old family friend and I first met in early high school. She used to be close friends with my older brother, but they have since fallen out. We always had a lot in common, but due to their failing relationship I had not seen her in some time, and we had grown apart. She comes from a strict household so she initiated the conversation by speaking about her relationship with her father and how she felt that she could never please him, even at the age of 28. We spoke for the longest time of all the subjects. Throughout the interview, she stood very confidently with a lot of personality. She was not nervous or shy about her feelings or emotions, until one of my questions hit a sensitive topic and she finally let her guard down. She began to talk about how insecure she really was. She ultimately

felt that she put on a front for others, which was her overall underlying issue.

### High School Teacher

Currently 48 years old, my high school teacher and I have known each other for nine years. I had her as a teacher every year of high school and spent many afternoons after school talking and becoming friends. Since then, we have remained in contact and I occasionally visit her classroom. I selected her as my final subject because now that I was no longer her student I wanted to deconstruct the student-teacher barrier. She was visibly nervous and rocked back and forth when we started. She did not like to be filmed and was worried that I was going to think of her differently. However after once again reassuring her of my purpose, she began to cry and made the courageous decision to share with me something she had never intended, something so personal that only a handful of people in the world knew. For that reason I will keep the rest of our conversation confidential.

### *A Touch of the Hand*

After each interview was completed and I received permission to use the section of the conversation that I wished to use from the subject, I sent them a file for them to turn their handwriting into a typeface. Because it had a strong reputation in the type design industry and for the sake of time, I used the Fontifier website to transition their written text into a typeface that was susceptible to

manipulation. Each subject had to write down each letter, uppercase and lowercase, in addition to all the common symbols in a grid with a clearly marked baseline (See Appendix, *Figure V*).<sup>9</sup><sup>10</sup> When scanned and uploaded, this created a uniform typeface that could be downloaded into a digital font book and used in most programs on the computer.

### *The Glitch*

I shot all video on a tripod with a Canon Rebel XTi DSLR in 1080P HD video.<sup>11</sup> Although I had some idea of the material I was going to use while I was conducting the interview, I re-watched the conversations, focusing on their choice of diction and minute variations in body language. I took notes of particular moments that I found compelling or that the subject found emotional. To narrow it down further, I identified the underlying theme of their whole conversation, so that I would not take something out of context, and found the piece that embodied their respective personality. I transcribed what the subject said so that I could use it later to distort the image.

I chose a couple second-long piece of video that included the chosen text and imported it into Adobe Photoshop. I found the perfect moment that encapsulated each interviewee as a person by using the Import Video File to Layers option. This split a few seconds of the video into approximately 200 still images. After deleting the other layers and masking the figure from the

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<sup>9</sup> The baseline is the imaginary line that most letters sit on. Only a few letters, g, j, p, q, and y descend below this line.

<sup>10</sup> "Template." Fontifier. Fontifier.com.

<sup>11</sup> This is standard formatting for HD video, with dimensions of 920 x 1080.

background, I cropped the image so that it only included the subject from head to toe.<sup>12</sup> The images ranged from 13 to 22 inches tall. I needed to print each image life-size, which quickly became an issue. When Photoshop outputted the video into frame layers, the camera only yielded photos with a resolution of 72 dpi.<sup>13</sup> In printing, it is common to print with a 300 dpi, so the images needed to be adjusted. In order to retain all image quality, I did not resample the image.<sup>14</sup> I would later address this issue. I increased the image in increments by 110% percent repeatedly until it was the proper size. This prevented any pixilation or distortions in the original image.<sup>15</sup>

I saved all files as a PNG file type, and opened each image in the Macintosh application ImageGlitch.<sup>16</sup> This program, similar to TextEdit, allows the user to view and edit the coding, or text, that makes up an image. The distinguishing factor of ImageGlitch is that it allows the user to view how the image is being distorted in real time. The first 15 or so lines of the code are essential to the makeup of any

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<sup>12</sup> A clipping mask allows the user to select a particular aspect of an image. In this instance, I selected the person's body and removed it from the background. The mask did not delete the information, but rather hid it and instead displayed a white background in its place.

<sup>13</sup> DPI stands for dots per inch and is a standard measurement for printing. It tells the computer what quality to make prints and how closely to put dots to one another within a span of one inch.

<sup>14</sup> Resampling is when a user changes the number of pixels in an image to increase or decrease in its size. I did not resample to keep the same number of original pixels to preserve clarity.

<sup>15</sup> Increasing the image size by creating pixels uses the process of interpolation. Smaller increments allow Photoshop to select a smaller batch of more precise information and colors to choose. This gives the program to create this new data from more information, information that is more accurate. However, this process still degrades the image, just not to the same extent as if it were increased by 300%.

<sup>16</sup> PNG is a file format, and unlike JPEG, PNG supports a lossless file format. That means that the image is not compressed and no data is lost.

image, so I did not alter those. Once I had scrolled below that point, I began inserting the transcribed text I selected for each subject. However, before pasting the text, I had to remove all punctuation from the transcription because the symbols would corrupt the image file. I inserted the text in parts and as a whole. I copied and pasted more of the sections I heard them stress with their voice, repeating them as if they reverberated in their mind. Each distortion created a glitch: banded lines, texture and CYMK<sup>17</sup> color distortions, or a simple textured outline. After my initial inclusion of text, I made aesthetic decisions to disrupt the original image further, repeating sections of the text until the entire body was distorted. The beginning lines of the coding related to the head of the image, while the ending lines related to the feet. If I inserted new text above a section that was already distorted, the below section would change, so I had to remain vigilant of every choice.

Once the image distortion was completed, I opened it back up in Photoshop to resize. I adjusted the levels, contrast, saturation, and vibrance, and changed the resolution from 72 to 300 dpi, without resampling.<sup>18</sup> The images were then as long

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<sup>17</sup> CMYK refers to the four basic colors that most printers use when printing: Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, and Black. The printer uses these four colored inks together in different combinations to print most documents. To create other colors and mix pigments, the printer uses a subtractive model, mixing colors subtractively rather than additively.

<sup>18</sup> Levels is a tool that allows the user to adjust the tonal range of an image by viewing and manipulating a histogram. It affects the brightness and contrast of the photo, controlling what the blackest blacks and whitest whites are in the image. Contrast, however, is the difference between black and white. I used the levels to make more of a contrast. Saturation is a tool that allows the user to adjust the richness and dullness of the image. Similar to saturation, vibrance controls the intensity of muted colors I increased the saturation and vibrance to intensify the richness of the colors to make them more vibrant.

as the subjects were tall. I situated each figure on the center of the page and finally added a slight fade on the left and the right side to blend all harsh lines. That way when the image was printed and placed on the pillar, the edges of the figured faded into the stark whiteness on either side.

### *Printing*

Immediately after all the images were completed, I prepared all files for print. Once I completed all the image files, I worked diligently to arrange the texts at proper eye height and converted the chosen texts into the subject's unique handwriting. I used the large format printer, Epson 9900, in the Millrace I building (See Appendix, *Figure VI*). Each print was completed on a 44" role despite the image size being 32" by 72". Each image was 32" wide because half of the circumference of the pole was just less than 32". That way, each print could be properly placed on either side of one another. It took approximately 25 minutes to print each image and five minutes to print each text. To remove the 12" by 72" excess paper, I used the paper cutting tables at the Duck Store (See Appendix, *Figure VII*). I measured and marked a line using a T-square to set a guide to trim the six-foot strips.

### *Construction*

The construction of my thesis was one of the most tedious and difficult parts of the project. To mount each print, I purchased two 12-foot concrete form tubes with a diameter of 20" and cut them in half (See Appendix, *Figure VIII*). These formed the base for my four, six-foot pillars. I arranged each pillar so that

they lay parallel to the ground and used low tack sticky tabs to hold down one side of the print. With the help of Professor Tyrras Warren and Mitchel Eisenbrandt, we applied spray adhesive to the tube in short strokes. We did this in sections to avoid bubbles. As one person sprayed, the other two people held the paper up away from the adhesive. Once we waited about 30 seconds, I put on cotton gloves and slowly massaged the print onto the tube. Once the first half was applied correctly, we flipped the tube over and completed the other side with the same process. We trimmed less than an inch of paper from the top and bottom so we could erect the pillar, and then ensured that all edges were secure to the tube by applying double-sided sticky tape. As soon as the method was perfected and after two poles were completed, Professor Warren left and Eisenbrandt and myself completed the remaining project.

### *Presentation*

I intended for my thesis project to be shown on two separate occasions. Firstly, it is designed to function well in a critic space and defense setting. The Millrace IV building has an open space with white walls and lighting designed for displaying art. My project is to be displayed dispersed throughout the room, so that visitors may interact with the pillars (See Appendix, *Figure IX*). I intend for others to view them from all sides, so I will encourage viewers to walk between them and interact with them as if the subjects were other people in the room. A part of the project is focused on being unable to see the whole thing from one glance; there is a break between the text and image. Although they refer to one another, and each is a part of the other, the relationship is enhanced by not having

a direct, lateral relationship. The second installation for this project will be out in a public space. After my defense, each pole will be coated with a light protectant and they were be transferred to a location that balances between industrial and nature elements; they will be displayed somewhere that is public but not inhabited. I envision them in the courtyard at the old EWEB building that is located near the train tracks in South Eugene. There they will be placed and left for people to confront and interact with them spontaneously.



### **Part III: Critique**

The four figures stand as stoic pillars, united together by their commonalities in form and design. Although each one has its own personality, they fuse together to form a series entitled *Pillars of Humanity: Reflexive Identity in a Disconnected Society*. As the title suggests, each pillar represents an instinctive internal process of self-reflection. It highlights how these people are thinking back on their own actions, or within themselves, in order to let others in. One's social identity is built through this internal process. It depends primarily on how a person reflects on their own experiences in addition to what they choose to share with others.

Erected at six feet tall, each pillar stands firm and grounded (See Appendix, *Figure X and XIII*). Viewers cannot see the entirety of the object without walking all the way around it; both sides cannot be fully visible at the same time. When they interact with it in this way, they see how the image fades to white, text appears, and the image fades back to full opacity. These smooth transitions pair the text and image together, showing their association. When the viewer approaches the object, they immediately notice how the figure fills the entirety of the space. Its form, although it originally appears foreign, gains familiarity as the overall shape is understood to be human. They stand at the height of a normal person, taking up the same amount of space as a person, and directly confront the viewer as one unified display. No one subject is identifiable; each retains its anonymity.

When approaching the pillar, one sees all the vivid details. From this perspective the pillar seems unusual, as the overall shape of the body is completely

absent. Although some elements, like the hands, are still visible, their context in reference to the rest of the body is lost (See Appendix, *Figure XI, XII, XIV - XVI*). The image appears hand drawn. With specs of multicolored pixels, the quality of the line seems as if it were composed of smeared graphite. The jaggedness of the harsh horizontal lines cut through the image, slicing it into pieces. This horizontal motion helps the viewer's eye navigate down the figure and then in a circular motion around the pillar. The colors are bright and vibrant, but there are only four present: cyan, magenta, yellow and black. This color spectrum clearly connotes the CMYK color model used in printers, referencing the coding and data that make up an image. The simplicity of the color, however, is a bit distracting since it does not contrast clearly with the blank white background. The vacuum of space isolates the figure, and the disconnection between positive and negative space further defamiliarizes the image.

As the eye moves around the pillar, it encounters the text. The text flows with the surface of the piece and is placed towards the top, near average eye-level height of 60". It is clear that each typeface is specifically chosen for its respective piece, and it gives each pillar its own personality. Each typeface functions well with the text's content. The text is highly charged and the emotionality of the words fits well with the hand drawn quality of the type (See Appendix, *Figure XVII - XX*). This brings forth the illusion that the speaker handwrote the text. Despite the obvious handwritten quality of the type, it is still controlled by a set of rules, as is any typeface. This gives it regularity in letterform that is not normally present in handwriting. However there are still some irregularities and roughness along the

edges of the type. Nevertheless, it clearly functions as a unique style of handwriting and has its own character. Any other typeface in this context would not make sense. If it were displayed in a highly structured sans serif or serif type, then it would feel discordant and juxtapose the image.<sup>19</sup> The text would then feel cold and detached. It would retain an overtly formal and structured quality and not have the natural flow that is normally associated with a person's hand. The two sides of the pillar would be counterproductive and create a state of conflict.

Although the figure and the text are on opposite sides of the pillar, they clearly function well together. The motion of the viewer walking around the piece unites the two sides, implying that the subject is the author of the written text. If they were placed on the same side, the relationship would be too direct. The viewer would focus on trying to read the text while comprehending the image. This format allows the mind to pause in between each section and concentrate on one piece at a time. Each side relies on the other; without one side the other could not exist. Just as a circle is a continuous line, the project has a consistent message. Both sides are equal. There is no hierarchy of space. The lack of direction and explanation encourages the viewer to have their own personal experience with the pillars. There is no defined starting or ending point. The viewers search for their own answers and they communicate with the piece on their own terms. They eventually understand that the text transformed the image from its original and recognizable form, though it is not clear exactly how.

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<sup>19</sup> A serif is a small projecting feature at the end of a stroke in a letterform. A serif typeface has this feature on every letter whereas a sans serif does not.

As a series, the pillars stand together as a cohesive unit. They are evenly placed around the room and interact through the movement of the viewer. However, this interaction is rendered meaningless without the presence of people. Each pillar stands isolated by the emptiness around it. Similar to the relationship between text and image, it is only through interaction that the pillars come to life. Physical movement and the occupation of space activate each personal story. When combined together they form a diverse depiction of humanity. All coming from subjects with different backgrounds, they represent a unique emotion or point in life. The generality of the text makes the emotions more objective and induces the viewer to confront their own feelings. As they identify what they are seeing, they also come to understand their relationship to the text. Each pillar stimulates the memory of the viewer, conjuring specific conversations to the forefront of the viewer's mind based on emotional cues. Much like the messages on each pillar, this does not come easily to the viewer, as each is a complex sentiment. It is only through interaction and careful contemplation that the message of the project emerges and a personal connection to the piece is formed.

Interaction is crucial. Without it, human bonds cannot be strengthened and communication will fail. As people are required to activate the pillars, relationships also depend on interaction. The viewer has to enter the mental space of each subject in order to understand the project's message; empathy is necessary. Rather than clearly communicating what is going on inside one's mind, people create barriers and keep others out. Without content and emotion, relationships are nothing but empty tubes. The illegibility of the image and the

indirect relationship between text and image reflects the role of technology in society. Having a large influence on people, technology can cause a breakdown of form and function. Today people use technology as a means of communication, but it cannot replace face-to-face interaction. These pillars directly address this issue. In this instance, technology was used to glitch the physical appearance of a person, leaving only an ambiguous message and a hollow shell. This distortion alludes to the data manipulation that was required to make this effect. An image's coding is made up of the most basic elements: letters, symbols, and numbers. Only when these characters are in a specific order does one see an image that replicates the real world. In this project, however, a personal moment is being used to affect a person's physical appearance. This reversal questions the factors go into understanding how people create self-image and ultimately develop one's identity. The viewer is forced to judge the pillars to analyze them, and therefore the viewer decides the subject's identity. Hiding personal experiences from others causes people to lose their individuality. When describing others, people often refer to physical attributes. A person is tall, short, blonde or brunette. The pillars strip this away and leave only emotion and memory.

This thesis project could be stronger if each subject reflected on one specific instance or memory. There could be less generality and vagueness in order to retain the viewer's interest but also stray from becoming cliché. Although each sentiment feels relatable, some lack specificity. Something feels left out of every interaction and it is only through physical conversation with the subject that the entire context is revealed. Although this issue is unavoidable, it brings up the issue

of privacy. The images that people choose to share with others reflect how they view themselves. This has become especially apparent in social media websites as emphasis is placed on the photos themselves. The pillars help deconstruct this boundary between the public and private by sharing less visual information than what is normally shared online and contrasting it with more textual information; each pillar emphasizes what is most important. Images are becoming a primary tool for communication, and it is only through the disruption of the glitch that this notion is forgotten and the viewer focuses on the text image-relationship. Although the image dominates the room and takes up considerably more space than the text, it is not presented in a familiar way. This forces the viewer to find a new means of understanding and directs them to the words.

The photo, a literal portrait, operates as a physical extension of each subject; a photograph is a memory fragment of a specific instant. However, despite this dichotomy, both text and image operate as artifacts of communication and interaction.

Overall, *Pillars of Humanity* utilizes image distortion to disrupt social identity and reimagine human relationships. It de-familiarizes the human form to force the viewer to enter the mental space of each subject and truly listen to his or her story. By not giving the viewer all the information and keeping them at a distance, each pillar parallels real life relationships and replicates the inability to be completely open and honest with others. Image and text work in unison to be a primary tool for communication. Their relationship, disrupted by technology, creates new layers of meaning and breaks down the barriers that are upheld to

keep others out. It is through interaction that the viewer realizes the subject's vulnerability and underlying story. Yet it is through the stories that the viewer begins to appreciate the formulation of one's social identity.

# Appendix I

Figure I

Not too long ago, I was on the telephone calling the State of Pennsylvania's Department of Commissions, Elections and Legislation trying to buy some voter registration data for a project. Surprised that a human voice responded after the second ring, I made my request. She answered "It is available, Honey. You can have it all: name, address, gender, date of birth, ethnicity, the party affiliation, affiliation for last ten years...". The only item that was off limits was a person's telephone number. Data came at a cost of \$20 per thousand records. I balked (I felt required to balk at something) and asked if, in the name of research, I could get a discount. I was transferred from person to person, until I ended up speaking with the man directly below the Director. When I asked for a discount, he declared, "I am the Data Caretaker. You'll have to speak with the Director. He is the Data Owner." This is where my search ended. Today, data is something we take seriously: we collect it, we organize it and we take good care of it. Many people want it and others own it-- and it is almost always for sale. And it is this data--of different origins, types and qualities--that has become the perfect material for painting contemporary portraits. What is a portrait after all but a representation of the individual for public consumption? Everyday worldwide databases recreate my image with increased resolution documenting my every move and working to define future ones.

data body

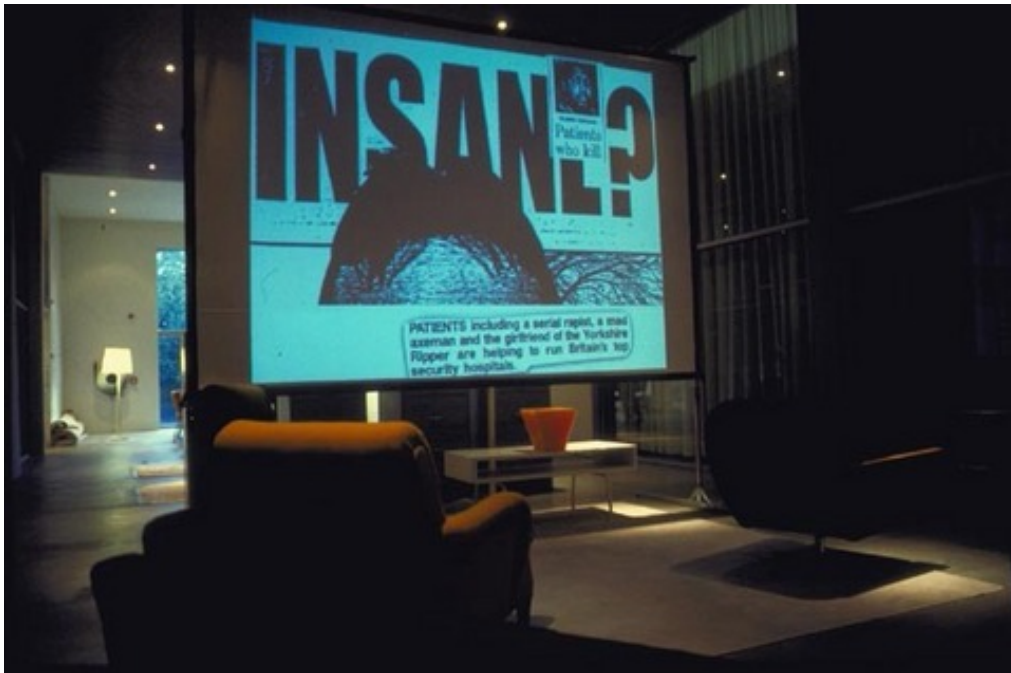
Portrait of BROOKE SINGER  
by the Compass database  
maintained by National Decision Systems

Companies nationwide pay to use this database to help with marketing, sales, and retail site selections. This database is an amalgamation of Census and consumer data. The above profile consists of probable facts about my consumer habits and lifestyle choices. Data was gathered on 06/13/01. To see what you look like in a similar system, visit YOU ARE WHERE YOU LIVE at <http://www.fallschurh.daritas.com/YAWYL/Default.wjsp?System=WL>. And while online, go to [www.bsing.net](http://www.bsing.net) for related projects by Brooke Singer and the technology and art collective, TnA. Text written Summer 2001 by Brooke Singer.

Singer, Brooke. (2001), *Data Body*, (<http://www.bsing.net/databody.pdf>).



Figure II



Harwood, Graham. *Rehearsal of Memory*, 1995. Interactive Program.

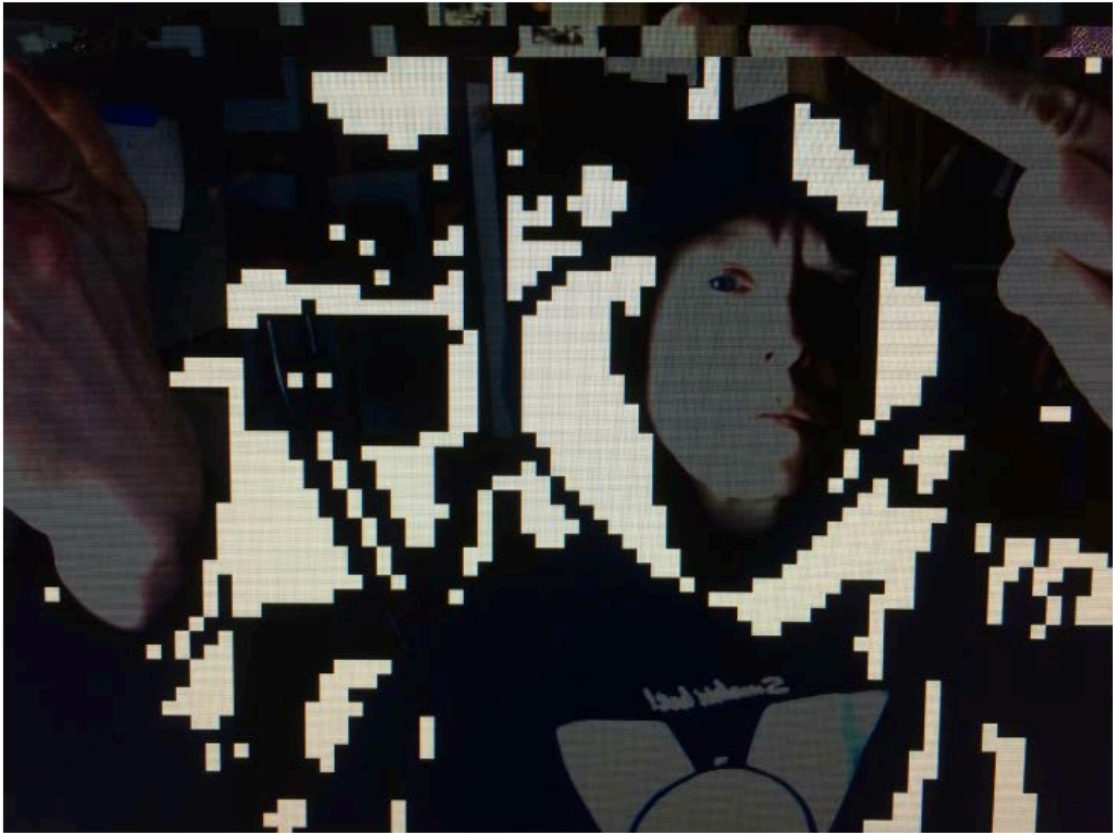
Figure III



Caputo, Marc. "Emma." Photograph.

Figure IV

26 Feb





"Fuck you, Embedded." 89

TSM: fuck you (insertnamehere), for excluding trans women from feminism. Fuck you more for using feminism to attack the trans community. You are the dipshit asshats of the feminist world. We don't need enemies with fucking friends like you.

Warren, Tyrras. (February 26, 2015), ("Fuck you, Embedded." 89)," *Fuck you, (insertnamehere)*, (<http://fuckyoutyrras.tumblr.com/>).

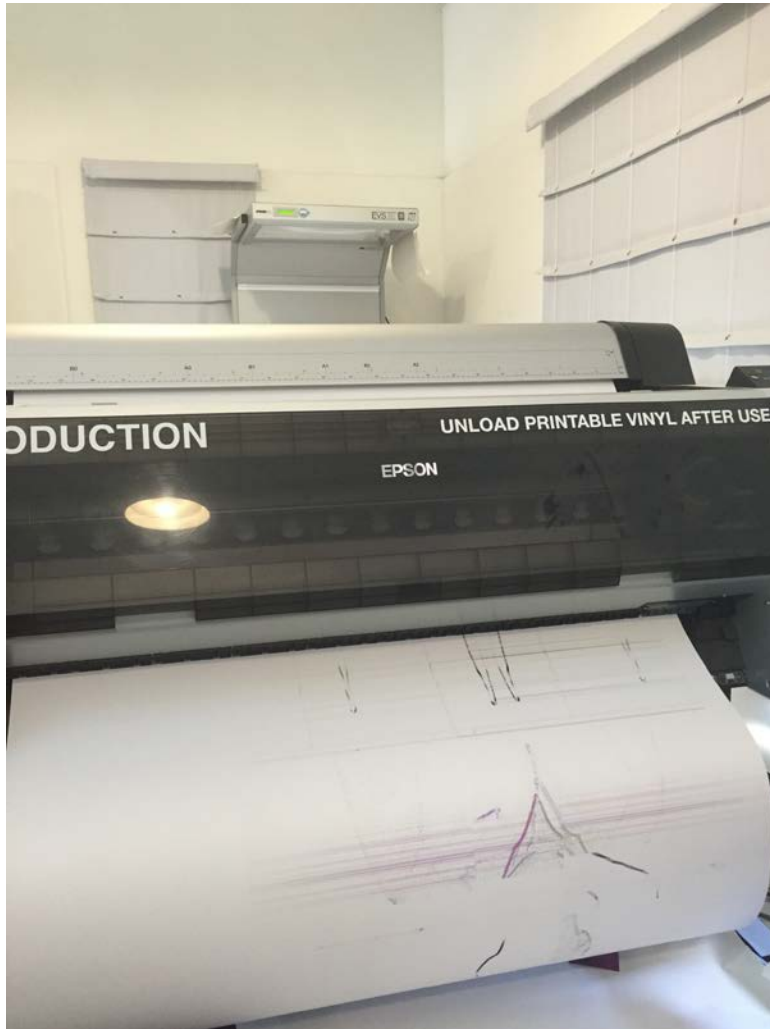
Figure V

 <a href="http://www.fontifier.com">www.fontifier.com</a>											
// Your own handwriting on your computer!											
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	
L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	
W	X	Y	Z	&	!	?	\$	¢	£	€	
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	
l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	
w	x	y	z	.	,	:	;	-	'	"	
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“Template.” Fontifier. Fontifier.com.

## Appendix II

*Figure VI*



Caputo, Marc. "Pillars of Humanity," 2015. Lightweight fiber tubes, 72" x 20".

*Figure VII*



Caputo, Marc. "Pillars of Humanity," 2015. Lightweight fiber tubes, 72" x 20".



Figure VIII



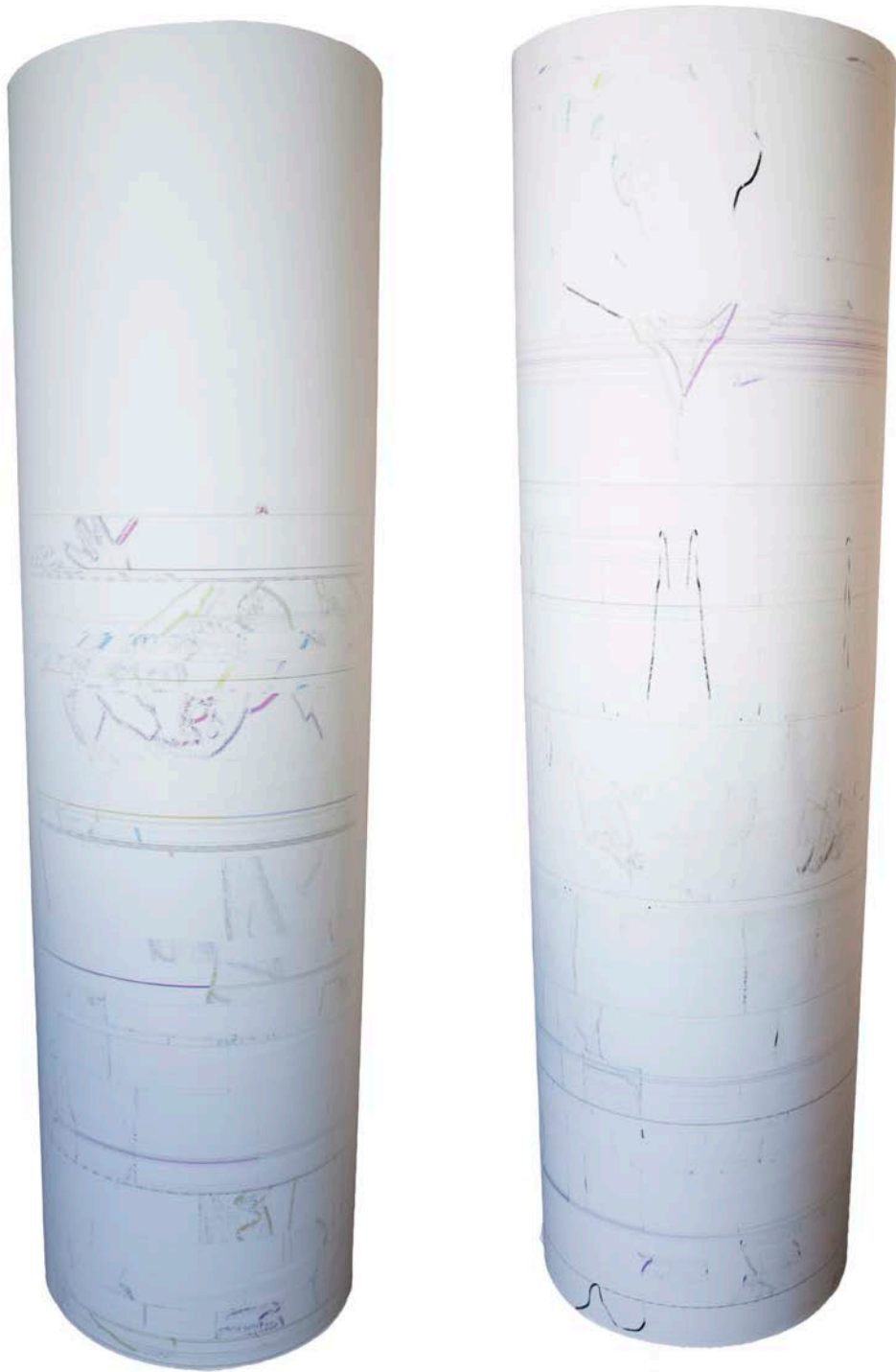
Caputo, Marc. "Pillars of Humanity," 2015. Lightweight fiber tubes, 72" x 20".

*Figure IX*



Caputo, Marc. "Pillars of Humanity," 2015. Lightweight fiber tubes, 72" x 20".

*Figure X*



Caputo, Marc. "Pillars of Humanity," 2015. Lightweight fiber tubes, 72" x 20".



*Figure XI*



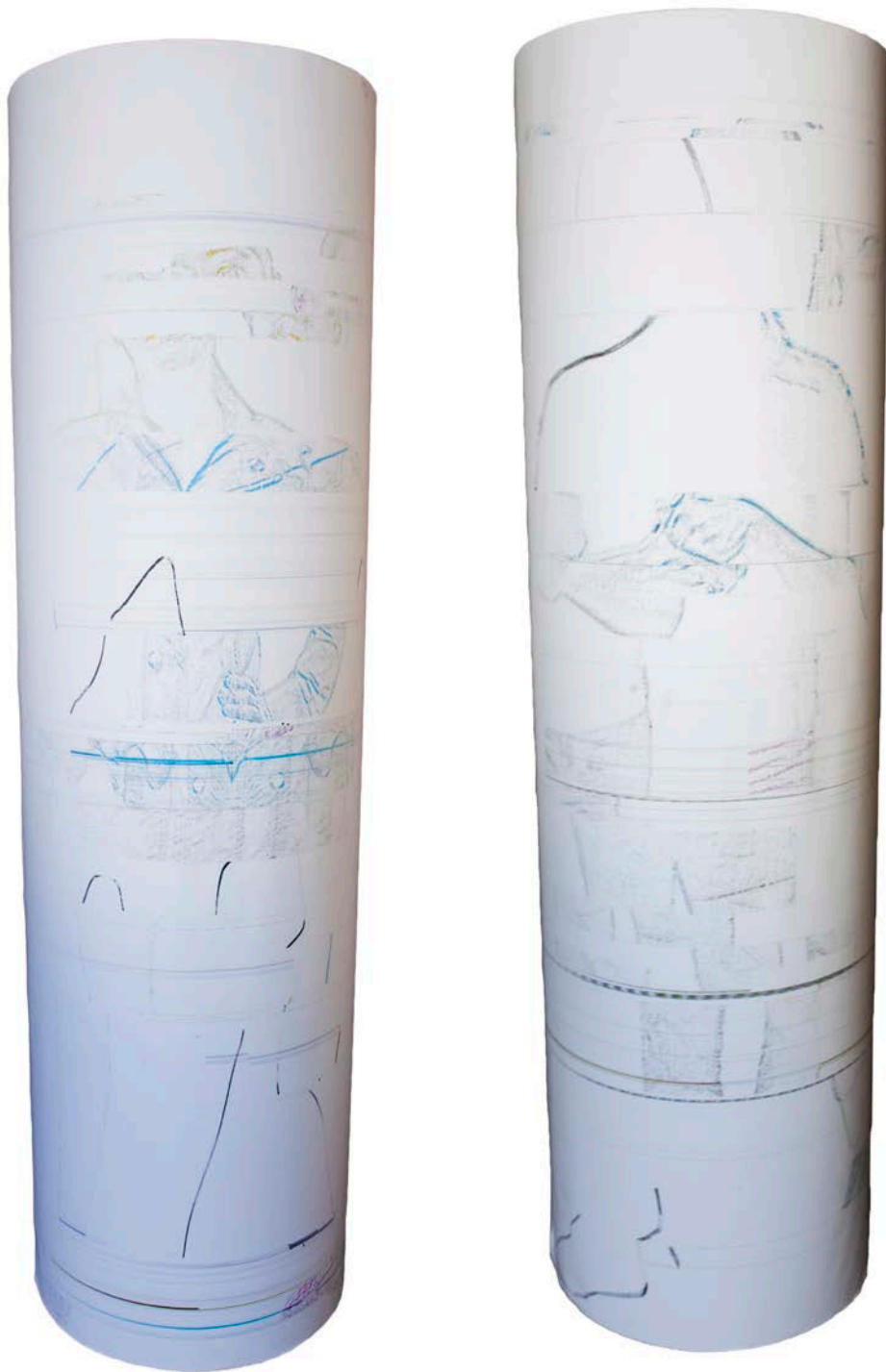
Caputo, Marc. "Pillars of Humanity," 2015. Lightweight fiber tubes, 72" x 20".

*Figure XII*



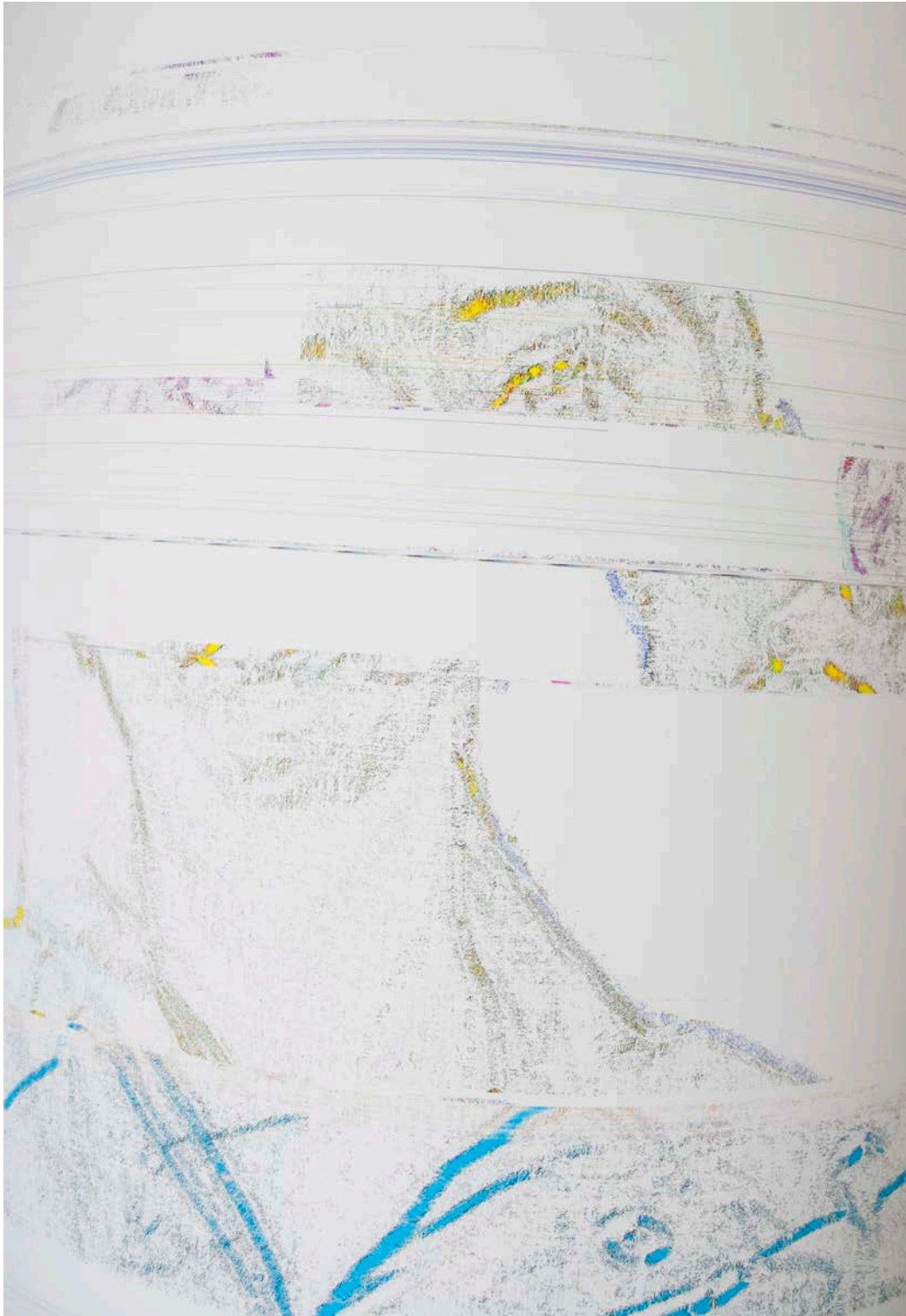
Caputo, Marc. "Pillars of Humanity," 2015. Lightweight fiber tubes, 72" x 20".

*Figure XIII*



Caputo, Marc. "Pillars of Humanity," 2015. Lightweight fiber tubes, 72" x 20".

*Figure XIV*



Caputo, Marc. "Pillars of Humanity," 2015. Lightweight fiber tubes, 72" x 20".

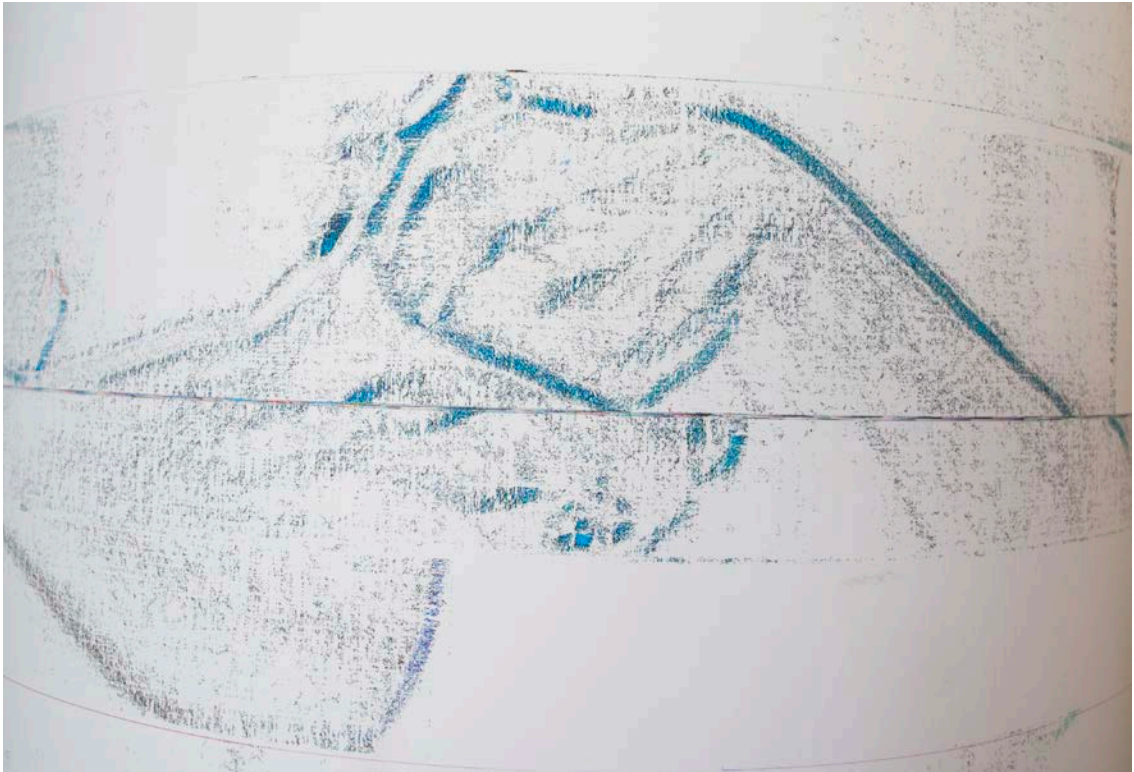


*Figure XV*



Caputo, Marc. "Pillars of Humanity," 2015. Lightweight fiber tubes, 72" x 20".

*Figure XVI*



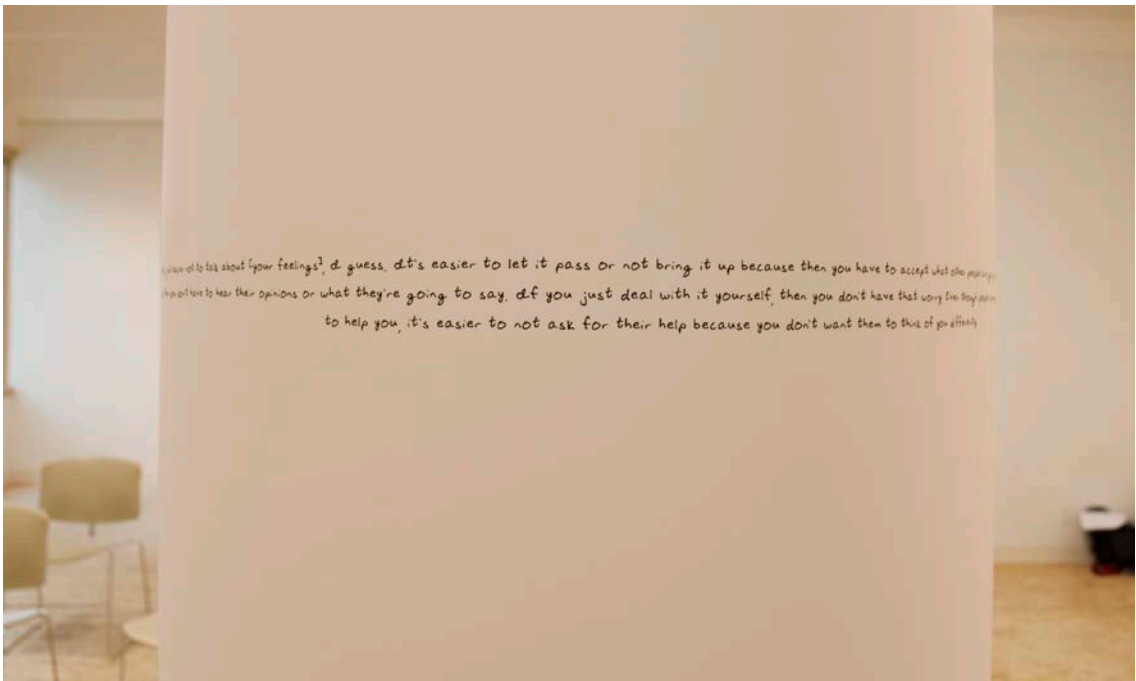
Caputo, Marc. "Pillars of Humanity," 2015. Lightweight fiber tubes, 72" x 20".

Figure XVII



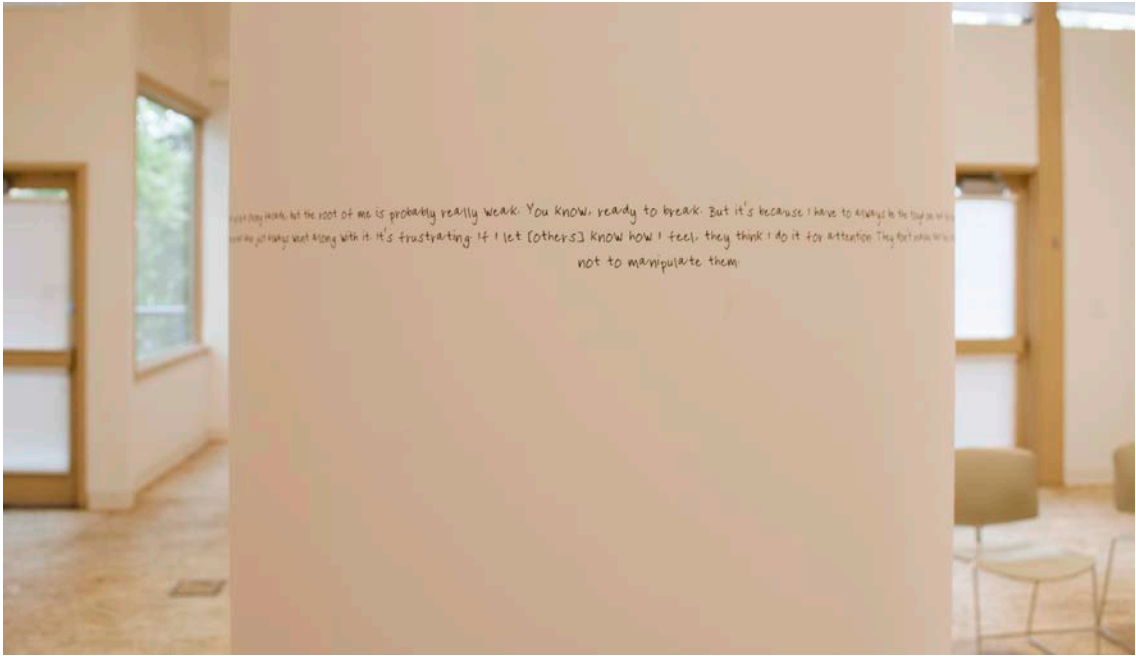
Caputo, Marc. "Pillars of Humanity," 2015. Lightweight fiber tubes, 72" x 20".

Figure XVIII



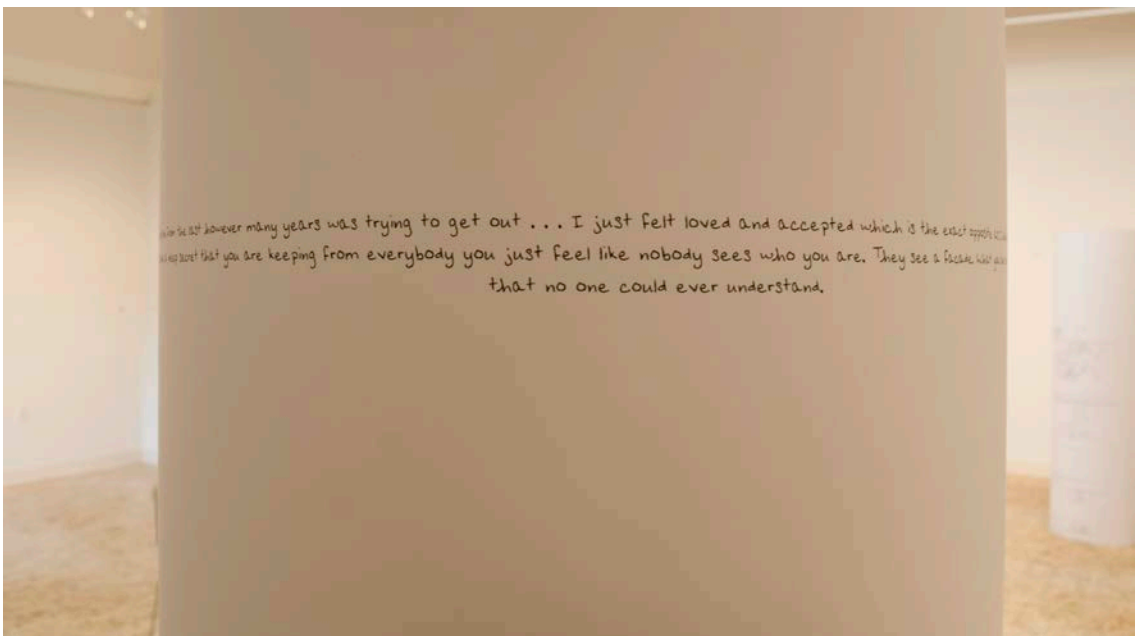
Caputo, Marc. "Pillars of Humanity," 2015. Lightweight fiber tubes, 72" x 20".

*Figure XIX*



Caputo, Marc. "Pillars of Humanity," 2015. Lightweight fiber tubes, 72" x 20".

*Figure XX*



Caputo, Marc. "Pillars of Humanity," 2015. Lightweight fiber tubes, 72" x 20".



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(<http://toe.prx.org/2014/01/artifacts-2-of-2/>).

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