

## RISE, SALLY, RISE

*Rise, Sally, Rise*  
*Dry out your eyes*  
*Turn to the East*  
*Turn to the West*  
*Turn to the one that you love best.*

It all started in an old Puritan graveyard in southern New Hampshire. It started there in a town called Peterborough during a two-month artist residency in which I had the glorious leisure to wander with no explicit purpose. And so I wandered with mounting frequency, stepping between rigid slate gravestones that leaned at awkward angles, thin and proper. Their ordered arrangement in stately rows called to mind church pews dotted with upright parishioners, so stiff they would lurch slightly to one side or the other. I imagined gravity two or three centuries back having the same effect on the living as it now had on these silent markers.

The engravings are what struck me next. Direct references to the presence of a corpse "Here Lies the Body of," drawings of disembodied faces gouged out with precision, outsized wings emerging from the base of their skulls. Words like "Relict" and "Consort" that I had to look up in the dictionary. Family arrangements of Mother, Father, son and daughter - and almost always a miniature stone, sometimes two or three, with a poignantly abbreviated date span "Died 1792, age 2 weeks, 3 days, 4 hours." Unmarried "Misses" were often buried with their families, right next to the graves of infant children, designated with the same "Daughter of" label. This placement and identifying text struck me as insulting, a consignment to perpetual childhood despite clearly adult date spans. And then there were stones that stood alone, separate from the family rows that prevailed. In my wandering speculation about the former lives of these graveyard residents, these isolated stones became my focus. Lacking the reference of a familial designation, who had they lived with? What had they done? Who had they loved? I spent more time with these graves, as if their loneliness demanded my attention.

Really it started with one particular gravestone, a modest and modern one by comparison. Sitting in a cemetery that included markers for the recently buried, this stone stopped me dead in my tracks. It was older, and totally alone - out of kilter with the closest row. Mary and Rose, born a year apart, died 15 years apart. Buried together, one stone, one plot, no apparent family connection; compared to the older Puritan graves I'd been perusing, not an interesting stone at all.

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But yet I photographed it more than the others. I draped it with cloth and rubbed the unadorned text with oil crayons. I returned at different times to catch it in a different light, always looking over my shoulder to see if anyone was disturbed by my attention. I prowled the rest of the cemetery, looking for possible family connections. When no clues emerged, I decided it was time to visit the town library.

Peterborough's library had a separate locked room upstairs for town records and microfiche. I secured the key, and started to browse. There was a whole row of town registry books that listed, along with property sales and unpaid taxes, the deaths each year. It was not difficult to find Rose Broderick. In a cryptic schematic, the record listed her profession as seamstress, and stated her exact day of death in Peterborough, who her parents had been, and that she was born in Ireland. Mary was more difficult. I could find no record of her death, no mention of her at all in the town records. Next I turned to newspaper microfiche and looked up the death notice for Rose. There was a whole article, in fact, and here is where I finally located Mary. "Rose Broderick survived a sister, Mary Fitzpatrick, who died in Greenwich Village, New York, in 1941.

Damn! Here I had been feeling self conscious about outing two dearly departed souls, and they were just sisters. Because, you see, I had imagined a romance. In my solitary and speculative wanderings, I had all the time been looking for romance. Not for myself, exactly, but some hint of it for the hundreds of single women about who's lives these stones seemed so silent. Some romantic reference point from the past, some hint of how I might have wished to have been buried, had I been formerly dead. And now this hope was mocked by one short newspaper obituary, one reference not to "longtime companion" or "dearly departed friend," but to the sister who left home for the big city, who died there before achieving old age. What was I doing spending all this time buried in cemeteries and dusty library records, searching for futile traces of the dead? At this artist colony, I was supposed to be making art.

There was another project that engaged me, a more art-like activity, one involving my camera and an available pool of willing models - the other artists and writers. It was an idea that came out of this unordinary relaxed period, a purely visual idea with no clear concept. It came to me while walking in a dense New Hampshire woods one day - an image of heads spinning slowly, caught in stop action moments by my camera. I staged at least 12 of these series, churning out slides by the dozens in carefully incremented poses. I called them my Spinning slides, and told my models

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it would turn into something someday. This is what I had to show for my artist residency period - dozens of disembodied heads, dozens of close up slides of gravestone epitaphs, and a bundle of cloth gravestone rubbings. This is what I created away from my usual studio, my computer, my electronic equipment, my STUFF.

My solo work up to this point had involved a mesh of technologies: photographic projections, sculptural structures, sound, text, kinetic elements, video. Several pieces grew out of research I did for several years about late nineteenth and early 20th century expertise on women. I was particularly attracted to theories of deviancy expressed by experts like sexologists, psychologists, religious leaders, journalists, and even fiction writers. *Dark Bride* involves sound and images that I structured like pulp fiction from the 1950's. The specific novel that inspired me was one written by a journalist who loitered in Greenwich Village to study lesbians. His chapter headings went something like this: *The Tough-Minded Blonde Had a Secret, The World, the Flesh and the She-Devil, Trapped in a Phantom Dream House, and The Girl Who Ran Away from Her Bosom.*

Broken Record and Pure similarly were inspired by archaic yet familiar voices of expertise about lesbians - in relation to a 1950's exercise record in **Broken Record**, and the fragments of a psychologist's case history in **Pure**. For each of these visual narratives, I juxtaposed voices of questionable expertise with that of my leading character. I imagined a young lesbian in the 1940's struggling to find her own words, to type her own text, when all that was available were these dubious forms of expertise about a life deemed abhorrent. But in an ironic twist, these same words offered substantiation of her existence and the welcome certainty that she wasn't the only lesbian in the world. The language of categories and perversions and case histories became her anchor in the silence of an identity that had been previously unspeakable. To accompany this visual schematic of a novel, I included the sounds of this young lesbian's struggles to find her own words - soft thumping footsteps, the pecking of typewriter keys, a crumpling of rejected sheets, whispered and passionate fragments of love poetry. She was caught in a strange tension, this mid-century dyke, caught between the pathologizing of psychology and religion, and an embryonic community of support, most notably the place in New York City where pervert outsiders came together: Greenwich Village.

Upstairs in the locked archive room at the Peterborough town library, I suddenly remembered my sculptural novel. Mary Ann Fitzpatrick's flight to Greenwich Village, her burial with a maiden

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name after her body was returned to Peterborough, her burial with her sister Rose, my disappointment with the revelation of their sibling relationship - all suddenly shifted. Young women of that time who fled their towns of birth, fled their families, fled to urban centers like New York City, and to specific Bohemian locals like Greenwich Village, were not normal. It was not normal for single women to leave their home towns, their parents even, to go live alone far away. They usually had good reason, reasons not so different from my own at one time, reasons that were hinted at in the oblique language of journalism and epitaphs.

In the next month, I continued to regularly peruse graveyards in Peterborough and surrounding towns. With my taste for epitaphial sleuthing at the library somewhat thwarted, I moved on to less scholarly speculation. Lingering at the gravestone of Miss Olive Hills, for example, buried alone at the north end of the Hancock cemetery, I imagined that really she should have been interred right next to Miss Miriam Woods at the south end. Two terribly upright slate tablets, jutting at slightly different angles, but in an unmistakable intimacy at right angles to their unmistakably adjacent and invisible bodily remains.

This work is really about resurrection. My imagined epitaphs are a way of rescuing unknowable memories, of looking back to girlhood and forward to old age. I think about what women who have died in other centuries have "bequeathed" us, what we will in turn bequeath future women and girls. The traditional jump rope rhyme *Rise Sally Rise* suggests both the resurrection of past lives, and the creative play and future speculation of young girls in their games. "Dry out your eyes" references grief in a kind of hopeful and charged exhortation. And "Turn to the East, Turn to the West, Turn to the one that you love best" gives the women of our past a kind of freedom they never had.