

Memento Mori 3: Ribbons on the Memory Wall (1999)

Marc Satterwhite

“This is the third, and probably last, work inspired by a multi-media installation at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art that my wife and I saw in the summer of 1992. The work, entitled *Memento Mori*, was by Karen Finley, a performance artist as well as visual artist and writer. She gained notoriety as one of a group of controversial artists denied funding by the National Endowment for the Arts even though their proposals had received favorable recommendations by the panel charged with evaluating them.

I found *Memento Mori* one of the most moving artistic experiences in my life and was similarly impressed by her book, *Shock Treatment*, a collection of essays and scripts from her performance pieces. She is a passionately articulate person, as well as an inventive artist. If her art is frequently angry and confrontational, it is also an honest reaction to a world in which such anger is all too often justified.

Memento Mori occupied two large rooms at the museum. The first contained a variety of objects that dealt primarily with feminist issues. The second contained pieces about the loss of friends and loved ones, especially—but not exclusively—those lost to AIDS. Every time I try to describe the experience words fail me, in part because art like this exists precisely because words are inadequate to express the necessary depth of emotion. However, I can say it was the only art exhibit that ever moved me, literally, to tears. I was by no means the only visitor that day who was so moved.

Many of the components of the exhibit were designed to encourage interaction with museum visitors. One of these was a simple lattice-work wood wall, next to which was a box of ribbons of many colors. Visitors were encouraged to affix ribbons to the lattice-work in memory of any lost loved ones. I placed one in memory of my mother, Charlou Thomas Satterwhite, who committed suicide in 1983. This work is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Nora Thomas, who died—still young in spirit, despite a long and often difficult life—in 1997 at the age of 90.

Memento Mori 3 is a single-movement work of about thirteen minutes duration, with several sections marked by changes of tempo, tone color, and dynamics. It hopes to capture many, certainly not all, of the emotions one encounters at the death of a loved one. It was written for the Verdehr Trio.”

—MarcSatterwhite

The world premiere of *Memento Mori 3: Ribbons on the Memory Wall* was on February 14, 2003 at the School of Music, University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky.

Marc Satterwhite (born 1954, Amarillo, Texas) is a composer and bassist with an undergraduate degree in double bass from Michigan State University and graduate degrees in composition from Indiana University. He studied double bass with Murray Grodner and Virginia Bodman, and his principal teachers in composition were John Eaton, Eugene O'Brien, Ramon Zupko, and Earle Brown. At Indiana, he was a research assistant to George List, one of the pioneers of the field of ethnomusicology.

At both universities, Satterwhite was the recipient of numerous awards, scholarships, and fellowships both for his composition and bass playing, including Michigan State's annual prize to the outstanding graduating music major. At Indiana he received the university's most prestigious award, the Sweeney Memorial Scholarship, as well as the Dean's Prize for Chamber Music Composition.

Satterwhite has received many commissions and grants and had residencies at the MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, and the Atlantic Center for the Arts. His compositions have been performed in

diverse venues all over the United States, as well as in Australia, Europe, Latin America, England, Japan, South Africa, China, and South Korea. Among the groups and soloists that have performed and recorded his works are the Boston Symphony, the Utah Symphony, the Louisville Orchestra, eighth blackbird, the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, the Core Ensemble, Tales & Scales, the Chicago Chamber Musicians, the London Composers, Ensemble, Percussion Group Falsa, tubist Gene Pokorny, and clarinetist Richard Nunemaker.

Satterwhite began his professional career as an orchestral bassist, and for two years was assistant principal in the Mexico City Philharmonic. Afterwards, he taught double bass, music theory, and composition at Indiana University, Western Michigan University, and Lamar University where he was also the producer and host of a weekly radio show devoted to contemporary music. He has worked with activist groups concerned with Latin American issues, and he is an Amnesty International Freedom Writer.

He is Professor of Composition and Music Theory at the University of Louisville School of Music where he also serves as Director of the Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition program.

Additional information is available at www.marcsatterwhite.com.