

# Creative Work: Drowning

**Artist:** Courtney Hockett

**Faculty Mentor:** Brandon Sanderson

**Affiliation:** University of North Carolina at Pembroke

**Dimensions:** 9"x12"

**Medium:** Zinc Etching, Aquatint, Watercolor

**Artist Statement:** *Drowning, flash fiction and print, was created as a result of researching how to incorporate creative literacy in visual arts using a cross curricular approach. During my studies, I experimented with the writing technique of flash fiction and focused on creating a story that included aspects of magic realism that worked cohesively with the use of extreme detail. I then analyzed the story's contents and chose a memorable scene to illustrate. I used my previous knowledge in the field of printmaking to create a print that acted as a narrative producing an image that portrayed a magical feel through movement and color. The story and print was created in a way that allows each piece to stand alone and the reader/viewer can still understand the content.*

That Saturday night marked one week since taking on the responsibility of opening and closing the museum alone. The facility could only afford to hire around half a dozen employees at the time, so when one of them quit I was eager to step up in the intern world and take on more important responsibilities (at least until a replacement was found).

Two endless hours of trying to balance the weekly finance sheet had passed and I was about to go insane if I had to sit through another second of trying to decipher that calculating machine. Even though all the museum's electronic devices were outdated they all still worked, so the staff opted each year to not upgrade in hopes to save some money. It also didn't help that ever since flipping the closed sign earlier that night a low rumble had been echoing throughout the museum, ricocheting from room to room.

Woosh, swoosh, whoosh.

Flustered about the whole situation, I decided to take a break from the mind-numbing task of counting numbers and re-do my nightly shut-down routine. I needed to reassure myself that I had turned off every possible light and device there was within sight. So

I grabbed the keys out of the storage cabinet and headed out of the office.

My first stop was the turtle room. I crawled into the interactive sand dune exhibit and squeezed in the children's play room to make sure the baby sea turtle video hadn't been left on and wasn't still playing – that bubble-screened television was notorious for turning on and off when it pleased. It was just as I had left it earlier, so I popped out the other side of the faux dune and into Swamp Hall. I slowly walked towards the entrance way and listened for the sound.

Woosh, swoosh, whoosh.

I had already blown it twice earlier that week. One night I didn't shut the safe all the way leaving the zipper bag of cash register money out in plain view. Then, two mornings later I forgot to clean up the left over shrimp after the tank feeding and a group of kids decided it would be a great idea to rip apart their meat filled shells and stick their lifeless bodies to the surrounding glass displays. Determined to just get the week over with and finally get some rest, I continued down the hall passing the vintage taxidermied swamp animals glaring back with their marble eyes, and entered



the saltwater touch tank.

I grabbed the railing beside me and used my other hand to caress the wall as I felt for a light switch. Then I cautiously walked down the ramp and listened for the wave cassette in case a volunteer had forgot to turn it off after leaving for the night. Only the filtration pump could be heard, buzzing vigorously as it rotated gallons of salt water throughout the aquatic ecosystem.

The spotlights illuminated the room allowing me to see just enough to walk around yet not disturb the mischievous horseshoe crabs who were finally settled in their beds for the night. The faint sound of hermit crabs tapping with their feet lingered throughout the entrance hall as they marched around the tank scrounging for food. I walked down to the bottom of the platform and hung the front half of my body over the marble ledge – pink

and purple ripples fled the surface as the water reflected my dress.

Glued to the center of the coral rocks was a stranded sea star. I stretched my arm out as far as it would go to pluck him off to safety. Just as I grabbed his leg, a passing puffer fish accidentally brushed against the submerged sleeves of my dress and burst through the surface. My muscles twisted into a pretzel and a wave a bumps covered my arms from the icy water which now soaked everything from my elbows down.

I could hear the filtration pump buzzing as it forced more water back into the touch tank, and then it hit me. I was so caught up in the bureaucracy of my new title that I had neglected a room in the museum when completing the shut-down routine. The Dry Aquarium was the easiest to close considering it was just an oversized, walk-in diorama. There was only one task for that exhibit – turn off the underwater simulator machine.

Woosh, swoosh, whoosh.

I jogged back up the stairs and power-walked down the main hallway. All I could think about was how long the underwater simulator must've been playing the music and lights for – six, maybe seven hours.

I began to run; jotting through the halls, leaping from exhibit to exhibit. I kept imagining the duct tape melting away as the machine's loose chord wires entangled themselves together creating an electrical circuit.

I ran past the Dry Aquarium sign, towards the passageway, and ripped open the entrance drapes. Then, I tripped over a loose board on the land bridge and toppled off the side fifty feet above the bottom of the indoor sea.

The same rumble that had been taunting me all night was now louder than ever as I glided backwards, watching the lights on the simulator machine go up and down with the rhythm of the waves. The bodies of fiberglass fish swam around me like marionette dolls, translucent strings suspending them in their eternal home.

I reached for help from a nearby manta ray as I fell past him feet first, but he swayed away as I toppled by. Tired of constantly feeling as though I was drowning, I relaxed my body and embraced the gentle giants as they swam around me, their bodies morphing into a tie-dye swirl as I fell deeper into the abyss. For the first time in days, I finally had a moment to relax.