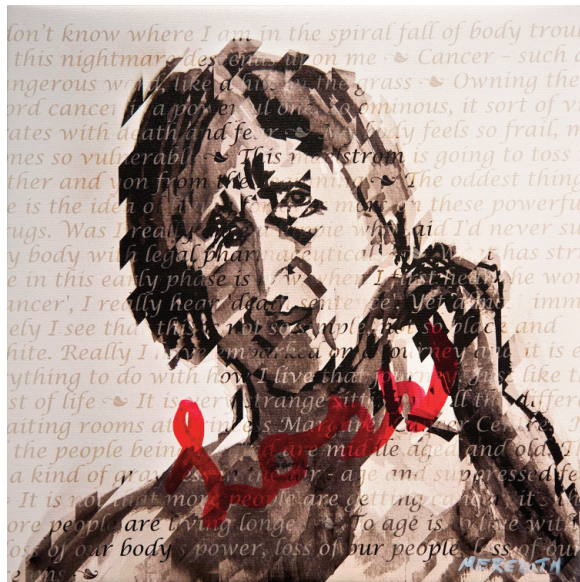


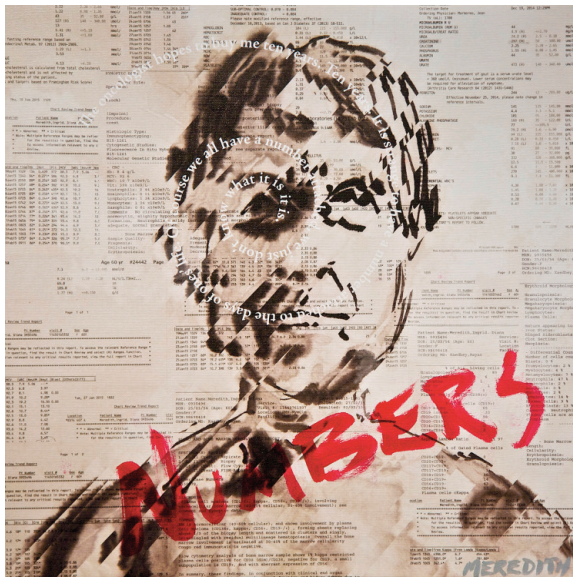
## Mortal Selfies

*Diana Meredith*



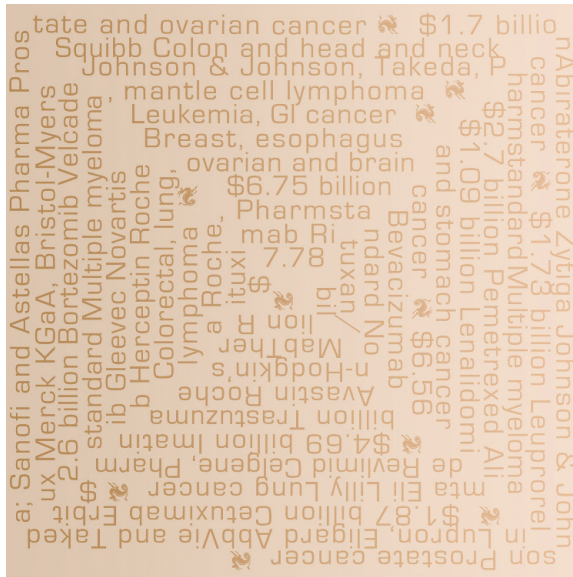
Loss  
20x20 in  
Ink, digital print,  
acrylic paint,  
canvas

*I don't know where I am in the spiral fall of body troubles as this nightmare descends upon me - Cancer - such a dangerous word, like a hiss in the grass - Owning the word cancer is a powerful one. So ominous, it sort of vibrates with death and fear - My body feels so frail, my bones so vulnerable - This maelstrom is going to toss me hither and yon from the beginning - The oddest thing for me is the idea of living for ever more on these powerful drugs. Was I really once a hippie who said I'd never sully my body with legal pharmaceuticals? - What has struck me in this early phase is how when I first hear the word 'cancer', I really hear 'death sentence'. Yet almost immediately I see that this is not so simple, not so black and white. Really I have embarked on a journey and it is everything to do with how I live that journey. Just like the rest of life - It is very strange sitting in all the different waiting rooms at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre. Most of the people being treated are middle aged and old. There is a kind of grayness in the air - age and suppressed fear? - It is not that more people are getting cancer, it's that more people are living longer - To age is to live with loss - loss of our body's power, loss of our people, loss of our dreams -*

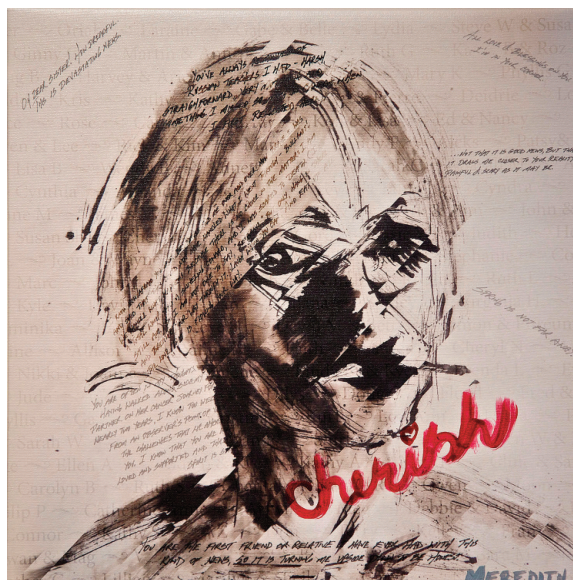


*Numbers*  
20x20 in  
Ink, digital print,  
acrylic paint,  
canvas

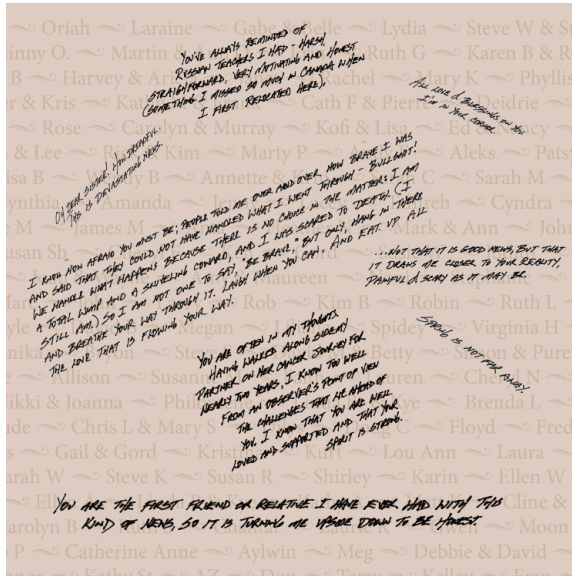




Chemo  
 Text  
 Top 10 best selling  
 cancer drugs of 2013  
 Data source:  
 Wikipedia -  
 Chemotherapy



Cherish  
 20x20 in  
 Ink, digital print,  
 acrylic paint, canvas



We learned that “The personal is political” from the feminists of the 1970s and 1980s. I count myself among them. My artwork is informed and shaped by using personal experiences, especially of the body, as sources for my artwork. *Mortal Selfies* is a first investigation of my recent experience of multiple myeloma, bone marrow cancer.

Each image begins with a photo I took of myself—the contemporary “selfie,” which is used, in turn, as the photo reference for an ink drawing. The image is then brought into the computer and visually fractured. The fractured image reflects the experience of cancer diagnosis, treatment, and identity in a variety of ways. Myeloma is a disease of the blood cells; tiny pieces of self that have frac-

tured from the integrated body and have turned on it. Contemporary cancer treatment involves a massive use of pharmaceuticals—those fractured pieces of biochemical science targeted at particular cells. Finally, identity as a cancer patient embraces a multiplicity of fractured identities. Donning the iconic hospital gown and moving through the rituals of medical testing and oncology clinics, as well as ingesting the futuristic drugs of chemotherapy, advance one through a series of constructed identities. At the same time, the high tech of cancer science is counterpoised against the personal sensations of the diseased body and the flood of community support. These different kinds of identities fracture together to construct new facets of identity.

Before I went to graduate school at age 57, I would not have included text in a work of art. My initial art training took place within the framework of Modernism, which espoused form over content. The visuals needed to speak for themselves and language was a separate entity that had no place in visual art. The ideas behind Contemporary Art changed my thinking on the use of text. I realized that text was both a visual element as well as a site of meaning.

The four pieces that make up *Mortal Selfies* explore different aspects of the personal and public text that surrounds us in contemporary European-American society. *Loss* looks at the diary—a site of personal reflection and private exploration. *Numbers* reflects the experience of the modern cancer patient in treatment. Frequently, at times daily, blood tests tell the cancer narrative far more

sharply than that out-moded measure, “How do you feel?” Creatinine levels, kappa light chain proteins and hemoglobin are some of the numbers that define my treatment plan. At the same time the numbers of prognosis inevitably raise the spectre of mortality on a profound level. The third piece in the series, *Chemo*, investigates the pharmaceutical industry. While the miracle of chemotherapy cannot be denied, the high price of cancer drugs does beg the question, “Who is making all that money?” The series ends with *Cherish*, a homage to the outpouring of love, support and wisdom that has come my way since my diagnosis. I use hand written text to reflect the personal nature of these emails. Finally, each piece is defaced with that most illicit of public texts—graffiti.

Through text in various forms, fractured ink paintings and the dance between the manipulations of digital processes and the materiality of analog, I have found a visual form to encompass the early stages of cancer diagnosis, treatment and identity in contemporary, urban Canadian society.

**Diana Meredith**

works as an independent artist, writer and critical thinker. Second wave feminist ideas about embodiment inform her art practice.

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