

the Reveal

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with a

Major in Art

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by

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Authorization to Submit Thesis

This thesis of David Janssen, Jr., submitted for the degree of Master of Fine Arts with a Major in Art and titled “the Reveal,” has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates below, is now granted to submit final copies to the College of Graduate Studies for approval.

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Abstract

The connection between people and the relationships we have with each other are the most powerful and moving things that we experience in our life. The relationships you have will make you change yourself, confuse you, inspire you, make you act out in ways you never dreamed of, question things you thought you believed, and help you find strength and meaning in those moments where you are the weakest. The nuance of layers and how much we choose to reveal to each other inspires me. What I decide to tell or show others has always been a hard road to travel in my life. More often than not, I have found myself guarded with relationships as well as in my creative pursuits. Finally opening up my content and methods to more critical engagement has let me make deeper and longer lasting connections with viewers and those people in my life. Cultivating a clearer sense of honesty with the things that I make has ultimately helped me analyze myself and the meaning of my work.

As an artist and designer, I have found that creating a collision of materials and approaches supports the important themes that energize my making. I enjoy the history and expectation intrinsic to media understanding. I often use spray paint and explore graffiti techniques because of its cultural significance, speed, and diversity of colored finishes. As with other materials I work with in my studio practice, I appreciate being able to play with materials against expectations of use while exploiting the voice they are often assumed to have. I have found that creating and understanding the history of materials better, often allows my work to communicate and offer a space for more added interest and conversation. Mixing digital and analog processes has allowed my creative voice to expand and helped immensely with the way I think about navigating surface and the relatability of my work. When the concepts and ideas I have cross different mediums, that's what I believe allows for the experience that I create, to resonate and provoke at a much deeper level. I have always been interested in using influence from appropriated materials in magazine pages, my personal writings and poetry, prints and paintings I have made, digital work and online print media. These appropriated images and texts add another layer and thread of meaning that I have found hits more directly and has a recognizable form, that is often needed to gain traction with readers and viewers.

My techniques and methods of appropriation play a large part to the foundation to much of my creative work.

Implying a range of confused feelings and confrontations, layers of information not only create dynamic conversation within each artwork but within series where motifs repeat. The variety of tensions I discover not only spurs on my practice, but connects well with social tensions viewers encounter in their everyday lives. I deal enthusiastically with what is hidden and revealed through the range of my works, both conceptually and physically. My use of loose layering and often culturally charged color choice creates sense of strong discord that feels all too familiar. Gestures and marks can turn into layers of text and type on pages of my digital work and scanned images that add a contrast to the heartfelt words on the pages next to them. Some artworks that I have made are covered up with redacted marks or gestures. This could be seen as a contradiction when it comes to more traditional ideas of artmaking, but in contemporary terms, this is a device that is quite successful. As viewers, we often react faster to what is easily recognizable and I enjoy offering layered moments in my work that you have to spend more time to decipher visually and conceptually.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank Professor Matthew Zivich. Zivich was my major professor during my undergraduate studies. He was the most honest, challenging, and thoughtful professor I've ever had. His lessons, methods and instruction changed the way I see everything. I am forever grateful to have been his student. The respect and admiration I have for his passion and expressed understanding of art and design is insurmountable. I want to thank Professor Phillip Hanson, for his mentorship, guidance, and belief that I could. He spent time after class to introduce me to different artists, books, materials and help me find opportunities to show my work when I didn't believe enough in myself. I am so thankful for his friendship and respect. Thank you to Anne Acker. Anne was the Director of Counseling Services at SVSU. The time I spent talking with her about my personal struggles changed me forever. I will be forever thankful for her true guidance and patience. To all my Saginaw Valley State University professors; Hideki Kihata, Andrea Ondish, Tom Canale, Barron Hirsch, and Mike Mosher for all of your lessons, challenges, resources, and one-on-one discussions. They each challenged me in different ways and some of the fondest memories I have were learning from all of them. I would also like to give Professor J. Blake Johnson a special acknowledgement for telling me about the University of Idaho when I was thinking about continuing my education.

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Dedication

I want to thank my family. My mom, my dad and my sisters.
You are my motivation to do better in everything I do. You've all sacrificed to help me chase
my dreams and I will never forget that.

I want to thank my best friends Christopher and Christine Black.
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PINK

Often the most immediate reaction I get from my work is an intense response driven by a desired understanding of my use of pink. This simple color can provoke anger and anxiety as easily as joy. As an artist, in order to ensure that a viewer will sustain their viewing experience and consider my concept beyond a surface layer, I have to be in full awareness of how I use it above and beyond any other color or material. I use pink to express a sense of vulnerability; it represents passion, love, lust, anger, jealousy, and confusion no matter how gendered a viewer's assumptions of it may be. Perhaps because red has such high intensity symbolic use, through the addition of any dilution of white it becomes my most sincere color hook. My expressions with it offer a more nuanced, emotional awareness if one is willing to read beyond their first impression of it. Within the range of its sometimes saturated, high-keyed, or its fluorescent glory, pink becomes vehicle for attraction (fig. 2).

The explorations of pink have become a truly interesting ground to project the voice within my text pieces. As seen in my first example (fig.1), pairing pinks (and other colors) against such heavy statements allow that powerful contrast to linger in the way those statements have made their marks in me. As in many of my other works, using pink becomes a way to defuse or intensify areas in a painting and with my more editorial oriented work, it adds moments of emphasis in a page layout and a way to dislodge the harmony in a photograph.

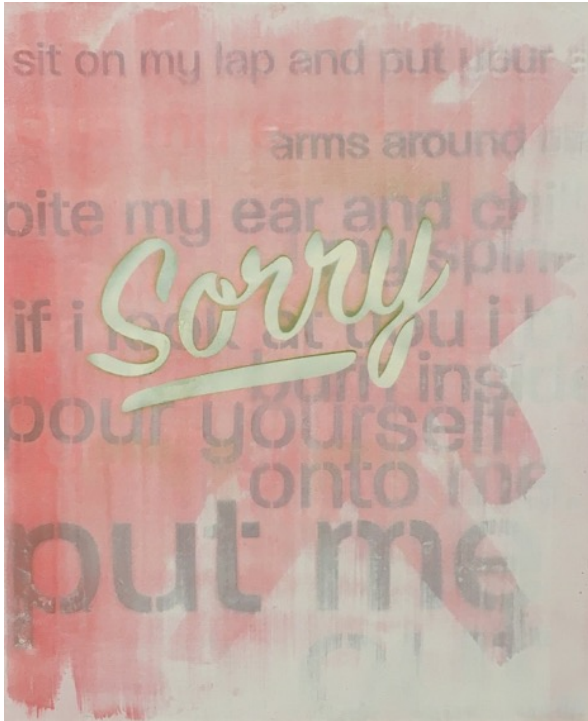


fig. 1

I like the fact that people have opinions about its use and ask me why I use it so much. The answer is never really simple for me as to why I use it. Somedays, I hate it because of how easily it takes the attention away from the other parts of my works. Somedays, I really love that characteristic and the way it calls attention to my work unlike any other color I have spent time with.

The color is synonymous with a large range of different emotions and symbols. Love, attraction, lust, anger, celebrations, mourning, trust, Valentine's Day, "gender reveal" parties that expectant parents have, and the infamous Victoria's Secret casual and athletic wear are a what come to mind. I am more aware of the branding and marketing towards women that it is also synonymous with because of the time I have spent with magazines while making collages. The color like many others, can change our mood. Pink as hue, for me, has only ever really been synonymous with female or feminine. My understanding of it has to do with my formative experiences, practice as a painter and being surrounded by strong women my entire life who loved the color and wore variations of it regularly.

As I have reflected about pink, I have realized that I have been surrounded by it for a majority of my life and remember how upset it has made me and people around me. Early memories of pink in my life start with the differences in toys and games when my sisters were born. I also remember vividly, my grandfather getting upset that my Mother let me play with sister's toys. I wore a pink shirt to school when I was about 10 years old and getting made fun of because I was a boy wearing pink. I remember the embarrassment I felt because I was deemed "different" that day. Kids in my classes questioned my sexuality because of my choice of t-shirt color, at ten years old. Everyone seemed upset about a simple choice I made about how I presented myself that day. All the women I have ever dated owned things that were pink and some didn't even like the color, but because of the limited options in clothing/products, they often bought the pink thing. As I got older, I started to understand more about the way we present ourselves and how that affects all these nuanced things when other people look at you (what we reveal).

I am learning more and more about how to navigate these complexities within each formal choice I make, like color. Nothing could seem simpler and more difficult than that. At times, pink has been a personally soothing and seductive color. I am affected by it more than other colors. There is a warmth I feel when I see pink or any of its variations. That feeling I have when I see it is sometimes upsetting and other times really heartwarming. Something I enjoy most is how intense and almost celebratory the color can become by using neon or fluorescent versions of the color.

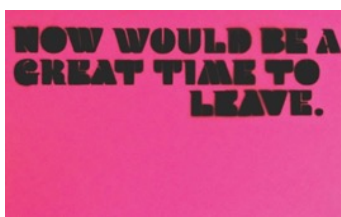


fig. 2



fig. 3

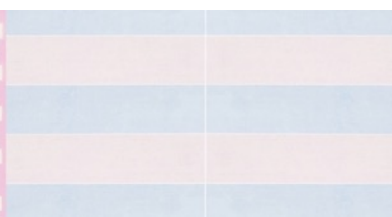


fig. 4

Agnes Martin's paintings challenged me emotionally, when I first came across them. Even though she does not use text or any sort of representational imagery, the colors used evoked a reaction and an effect in me. Her use of grids, stripes and pink hues were influential to my work because of how difficult it was for me to initially understand the choices she made.

When I was first becoming aware of abstract painting, Agnes Martin was one of many artists whose work I looked at and couldn't understand. As in the detail image from her work *Untitled 8*, from 1974 (fig.4) her use of pink is much more subdued than mine but I feel, still attracts and infers an emotion or memory. By looking and searching, it makes it easier for me to be introspective and consider ways to think about what is necessary for impact and resonance when trying to communicate an idea by way of making my work. I enjoy seeking out resources for artists whose work I have a hard connecting with too. Similarly, to Martin's paintings, I remember seeing work by Keltie Ferris or Amy Sillman and thinking they were just interesting exercises in painting. They didn't seem to be about anything and I believe this is common of first views of most abstract painting. Looking closer and trying to ask myself as to why these things are made or what would call someone to makes something like that puts things on a different level of understanding for myself. I've come to understand that pink can stand in place to represent much grander concepts in the lives we lead. Like many colors, pink has a psychological impact on us and resonance in our memories.

X

Similar to the use of pink, the **X** carries much meaning personally. **X** can become a symbol of love and its cancellation in my work just as pink can trigger emotion, so can **X**. My attention was brought to this visual icon/letterform when I first started exploring security envelopes in my collage work. As another easily read mark of visual disruption, I became increasingly more aware of the symbols' metaphorical significance and useful applications. Before I started researching the meanings and origins of **X**, I would spend time in my studio just making the mark on surfaces (fig. 5). It became similar to a compulsion or fixation, but it felt right. I was not questioning myself for doing it or making it over and over. There was something about this that I needed to understand. I was using it as a placeholder or footnote for a collage element or other mark I would make later. Then I felt a shift when attempting to start a painting and **X** became a mark of frustration and called me back to my first moments of learning how to do graffiti tags with my friends. **X** was a gesture that meant I was there. I existed in that moment, I was present.

It was one of the first marks I ever made with spray paint when I helped my dad tear down a wall. He wanted me to put an **X** on the wall that we were going to tear down. Contractors often use this to signify importance of an area in construction zone or an area that will be destructed. A mark of selection. Metal fencing when I moved into a much more urban environment cast **X** shaped shadows on sidewalks I traveled on. A shadow of structure, barrier and separation. We cross paths in life with people we never thought we'd meet or wish we didn't. **X** is a stable element in my work, that becomes is confident and alluring. Most often, the **X** is used to signify the crossing out or cancelation of other markings or text in my work (fig.6) but I also romanticize other notions of it. The **X** became a visual device for "the reveal." There is a lot of meaning and symbolism for me in the **X**. To help explain this a bit more, I created a short list below of other representations of it that might be more familiar.



fig. 5



fig. 6

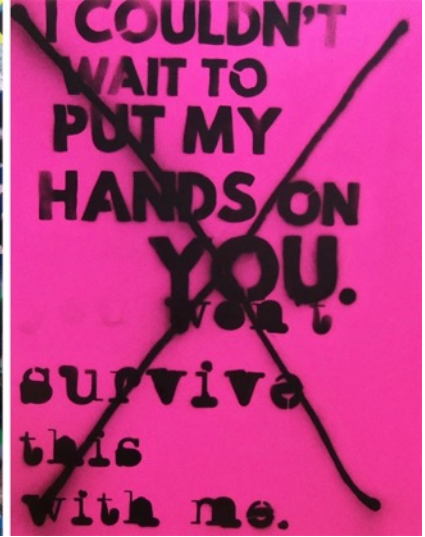


fig. 7

In **XOXO** the **X** could mean either kiss or hug.

We make gestures across written or drawn information on paper to signify the cancelling out of information or the unwanted choices, dates, items, and what we've accomplished or finished.

An **X** in math, represents the unknown variable in most math equations and depending on its use, can represent the multiplication function.

Being prompted to sign your name near **X**'s for legal documents is common.

X became a symbol for my punk rock friends in the hardcore scene in high school.

When I remember they would have **X**'s on their hands to signify being "straight edge," meaning they didn't drink alcohol, smoke anything. **X** was about abstaining for them.

This **X** was done in permanent marker either by them or a friend.

"Cross my heart" is an idiom that people might share when one is trying to convince the other of a statement or story shared that is truthful. This is similar to the religious gesture of making a cross movement with your hands across your chest.

X gets used to abbreviate Christ in the word Christmas (**X**mas).

X is used in place of eyes of dead cartoon characters. Artist KAWS uses this as a trope in many of his paintings, sculptures and collectable figures (fig. 8).



fig. 8

X is the roman numeral for ten. Ten is used as a slang term for someone's physical attraction, being a ten means the most attractive. "She's/He's a ten."

"You're a perfect ten."

When making a "pinky promise" you interlock pinky fingers making an **X**.

"Fingers Crossed" is an expression meaning to wish luck to someone or hoping that things will go in your favor.

XXX on alcohol and moonshine bottles traditionally represents the number of times distilled or strength of the drink.

XXX as rating for adult films/explicit content.

X became a coding system that I used when working at clubs. I would have to make an X on patron's hands if they were under the legal age to get served at the bar.

X is transfixed to the over-arching themes and its observation into the relationship between myself as artist and my viewer. **X** can represent myself as a person and all those meaningful relationships that I've had and will continue to have (**X** as the unknown). I believe there is a lot of power in that **X** as a letter, symbol and mark in my work and that power I feel is because of its many associated meanings.

The **X** stands in place for meaning and at the same time can be perceived as just a pattern element in my work. Depending on what a viewer brings to the work, one of the many definitions might spring forward in your mind and if none of them do, I still believe the mark will stand out because of the purity of its gesture. The varied contradictions in **X**'s many meanings is the one of the most conceptually interesting things about it. Presence and absence, power and weakness. It's recognizable and its structure can be understood to express the many meanings.

SECURITY AND CANCELATION

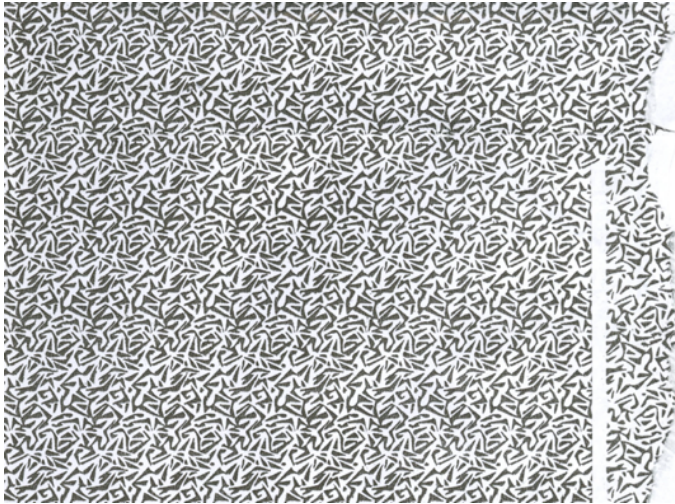


fig. 9

My attraction to the interior patterns of security envelopes (one common style fig.9) and the overall shape of an expanded/ripped open envelope has developed over the last several years and has influenced my artistic practice. The attraction is linked to my understanding of patterning, repetition, and how that can create a feeling of structure/flatness in the same way minimalist and hard-edge paintings have achieved that.

Security envelope patterns are designed to keep information safe. Although the attempt to keep information safe is shallow when I think of how easy it is to open. I am interested in the things that helps us maintain peace of mind, that keeps us all feeling safe. Security envelopes are meant to do that. They give us a false sense of security and peace of mind. These envelopes become a supportive metaphor for this concept of *the reveal* that drives most of my work. These envelopes create that moments of deciding what is needs to be revealed and what needs to be concealed. We make fast, aggressive scribbles to cover up writings, images, and other things that we want to keep hidden from the view of others (sometimes by using an **X**). This act of concealing and crossing out information helps us to feel safe and a sense of ownership. When I use similar marks while making, the work quickly becomes reminiscent of the gestural abstract paintings, made famous by the abstract expressionist movement and the rich history of post-war painting that first excited me when learning how to paint. Making marks like I do has become some of the fastest ways for me to make a gesture and build a surface that can intrigue or upset. Surfaces that are layered in a variety of different ways are a

staple to what you will see in many of my works. When I choose to use patterning or a conglomeration of Xs, it is my effort to make the assimilation between the security of patterns and my free hand marks. The contrast between handmade and stenciled is threaded to my understanding of graphic design and gestural painting (fig. 10). It is in that assimilation where I have found that both my interest in patterning and Xs are related because of their common intention of concealment.



fig. 10



fig.11

Achromatic imagery in popular print media is used to further reveal formal qualities of the object being photographed and creates a heightened, more stylized sense of subject/object or figure-ground relationships. These black and white images often expose the photographers control of lighting/contrast in the image and displays the true power of form without the support of color and hue. The figure, in most print media, is used to highlight the merchandise and gets used as an object to attract attention. At times when choosing to discard a full color palette, I aim to make connections between that flat structure of pattern and the stability one might feel from the female form on the magazine page because it is so common to see

women's bodies used in this way. For me, the over exposure of the "ideal" female form becomes so banal and taking those images and mixing them with the patterns inside the envelopes transforms the everyday material to become exciting and thought provoking. The contradiction and thread between the content of the image and the pattern creates intrigue when the open envelope reveals pattern but also still conceals the form/identity of the women by way of overlapping the collaged material.



fig.12

The majority of images I appropriate are from print media, ranging from fashion magazines to newspapers, from popular women's and men's lifestyle magazines to other popular printed material. I have become more sensitive to how these images of highly sexualized and edited women have slightly warped my ideas about what I find visually attractive about a woman. I find it alarming how comfortable I had become with accepting the way that women are used in the media to sell products. When looking for images of plus sized models or women of color, I have to look for less available magazines sources-- this searching is further unsettling. When considering the collaged structure of these security works, I hope the viewer will too challenge their own dealing with marketed concealment, societal censorship, and the availability of images that continue to perpetuate a false sense of beauty and a manufactured social acceptance of a woman's visualized value.

My security patterned works are about what we keep safe, hidden, secure, the parts of ourselves that are “for your eyes only” and also the frustration of not being able to connect (fig.12). I have collected security envelopes and patterns because of my visual attraction to patterns and because they are so readily available. These patterns become like static and in the quick instances where the window of the envelope is opened that that can reveal intimate moments of vulnerability (fig.13). The various security envelope patterns become a way I set up this analogy for the concept of “the reveal.” The notion of what is secret/important and what we reveal or confess has had me really reflecting on my past and asking others about these intimate moments. The feelings that we keep from another and the way we hold back what we say or express become like patterns to keep our feelings “safe.” I was inspired by the repetition of these instances when making the series of security collages and the paintings where silhouettes are present.



fig.13

I have become aware of the subjects in my life that make me feel frustrated, hesitant and agitated by. The content and origin of the photographic material multiplied by the original purpose of those envelopes patterns creates an impactful combination. I have maintained the original scale of the materials in which they are produced and this also makes them

communicate in a more authentic, intimate sense. The connection offered in these series of collages arises from realization one makes when the source medium is understood.

another AGAIN

In the summer of 2016, I found myself looking through old journals and reminiscing about how I worked through and survived some incredibly difficult times. This sparked the idea of creating a book. In an attempt to help me better understand my making, I thought it would just be a monograph of my work with some personal writing about my experiences in the studio. As I started developing the idea of a monograph, it quickly evolved into something so different than I ever could have imagined. As I gathered writings, collages, sketches, and other material from past journal and memo books, with all that material in front of me, I was looking for informative ideas or notes that I could use to flavor the work I was making but then I started to read my old journals. I was struck by how disconnected I felt when reading entries from years past. Most of the writing was hard for me to read because of how hurtful it was and also because of how inebriated my handwriting was. The monograph idea dissolved and I decided before the fall of 2016, that I would create a book that was based around some true experiences of mine that were from the past journals and writings that I made several years ago. I wanted this book to contain a narrative unlike other things that I have read. All the writings and text inside this book would be based off experiences I had and would be supported with appropriate visuals that I would create. I wrote in and kept journals because this was a coping mechanism that I learned when I was younger and was re-iterated as I began college. When I go through bad or good times, it doesn't change my habit of writing or drawing. As I got more serious about art and design, the journals were a tool to help me clear my mind and put down ideas I had.

The journal entries that I found shocking were from when I began to see a mental health counselor during my undergraduate journey. I was getting into trouble with all of my relationships I had at the time. Before I entered college and during my undergraduate years, I had experienced what my counselor Anne described to me as “an above average” amount of loss and trauma in my life (deaths of family members, suicides of friends, physical abuse, etc.) and was also in several tumultuous relationships. This all combined for a not so enjoyable few years while trying to maintain focus for my future while in college. The events that happened to me were all adding up and were negatively affecting my health and just about every other part of my life. One of many tasks that my counselor wanted me to do, after

moments of grief or strife in my day, was to continue to journal and sketch like I had always done, but instead write about the traumatic event. I would write after I came down from my anger or anxieties. I would bring these notes and journals into our sessions together and I would read them out loud to her. Not knowing this at the time, but keeping these journals would be one of the better decisions I have made. Several years later, these writings would inspire some of the statements of my stenciled works and provided the main narrative and poems for my book, *another AGAIN*. The title of the book came from a passage in the work and I felt it was a way to hint at the idea of repetition and variation of experiences that we tell ourselves that we will not repeat.

The main narrative of *another AGAIN* (marked with a bold **X** in the corner of the pages the narrative threads through), is a reflection of a few days where I was living in my anger and I was asked by my counselor to put myself into the similar headspace and try to recount what had happened. Going to counseling became an informative time for me, I still think about that time often, what is now almost 8 years ago. Combining my writings from that time and creating visuals that could help influence the interpretation of the text has allowed me to express a part of my life that I often feel separated from but also still tied to at times.

Using images from magazines and other things I have made or enhanced helps bring a familiarity to the book when the texts gets discorded (fig.15). Similar to the security collages, the images of the women in the images become a placeholder for anyone, for person. The women are often nameless in these magazines and are seen as an object to attract and point to something else for the possible consumer. Figurative work, like the photos and advertisements in magazines quickly become about ownership and I see them as being confrontational to the viewer. When I've paired the appropriated images with my text, the pages then have a possibility of anchoring themselves to a person that the reader might know and create intrigue of who the writings might be aimed towards.



fig. 14 original scan from a Playboy Magazine



fig. 15 a spread from *another AGAIN*

Images, like the ones I use for collage and highlighted in my book, have cast negativity to the relationships I have had with women. I have had to try to convince past girlfriends that I was attracted to them, when they would point to these kinds of images (fig. 14) and say that they wish they looked like the models. This comparison of self to others would always turn in on itself, which created more pressure on them to look a certain way for everyone else, which made them think that is what I wanted too, even though I would vocalize the opposite. This kind of thing would become cyclical, always rearing its head in conversation about beauty and the applied social standards that society places upon the women of the world. I can't imagine the pressure and complete contradiction that must be faced when hearing songs on popular radio about not changing because you're beautiful the way you are and then reading headlines of magazines, social media posts, or other text that tell you to lose weight and how to become

a more beautiful version of yourself. I have seen the power of these contradictions first hand, growing up with two sisters.

To make this book impactful, it had to become more confrontational than I had initially anticipated. But to also open up the conversations within it to a broader audience, pages had to allow space for self-reflection. In my various rounds of editing and reorganizing pages, I honestly agonized on ways to provide a sense of empathy. It is a challenge to share an experience that has to withhold clear narrative to be an authentic voice of troubled relations and still express vulnerability of someone desiring another person to spend some time in their shoes. This book had to be confessional yet still maintain a solid pace between the other writings. Creating a strong main narrative that would be supported by images and the conjunction of layout overall was also challenging because as the book progresses, the typographic choices and layout starts to unravel. These design decisions create a space for the reader to consider the point of view and stability of the narrator. Giving this work the opportunity to connect more broadly really started once I began to edit out names from the original writings.

The first few drafts of *another AGAIN* were more linear in construction and order; of having words that were directly supported by images and vice-versa (fig.16) The vision that I had for the experience of having this book in your hand changed as I designed it and further made more definitive choices about the overall theme. In its final state, viewers are met with words and images that seem disjointed until there is more revealed in subsequent pages. Having to alter the book's orientation at times, to clearly understand what is on the pages (fig.21) creates tension and becomes a way to disrupt expectations. There are nods to previous pages and text that won't be illuminated by images until read further (fig.22).

Like most of my work, I didn't want this book to become a one-time read by giving opportunities to be rewarded by finding the layers of meaning I have crafted within the pages every time you read it. I realized as I made decisions about page layout and aesthetic choices, that the reader has opportunities to question the state of mind and experience of the person who put this together or who the contributor(s) may or may not be. This book is

autobiographical; leaving out the names of people from the original sources of writings was a way to open up the interpretation for others when they read it now.

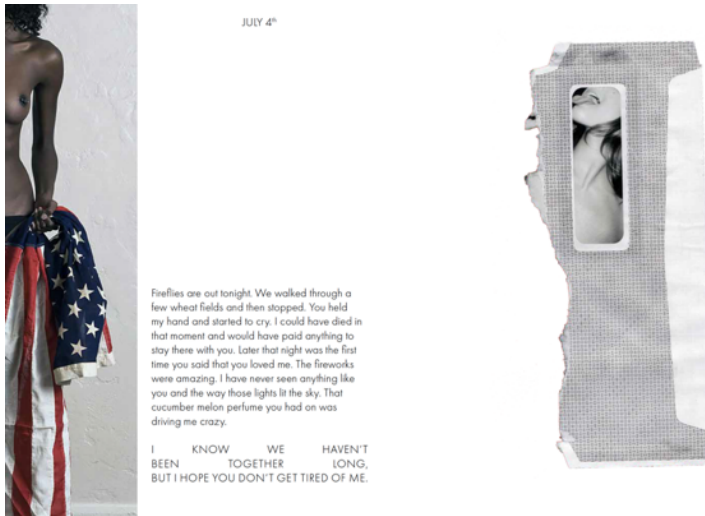


fig. 16

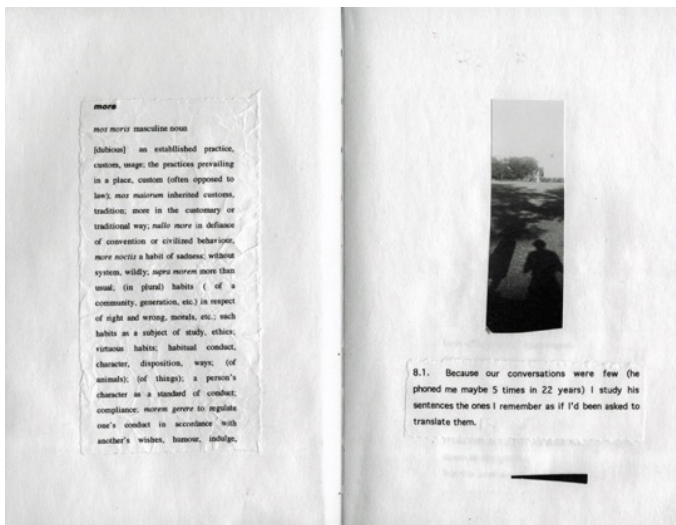


fig. 17 a spread from *Nox* by Anne Carson

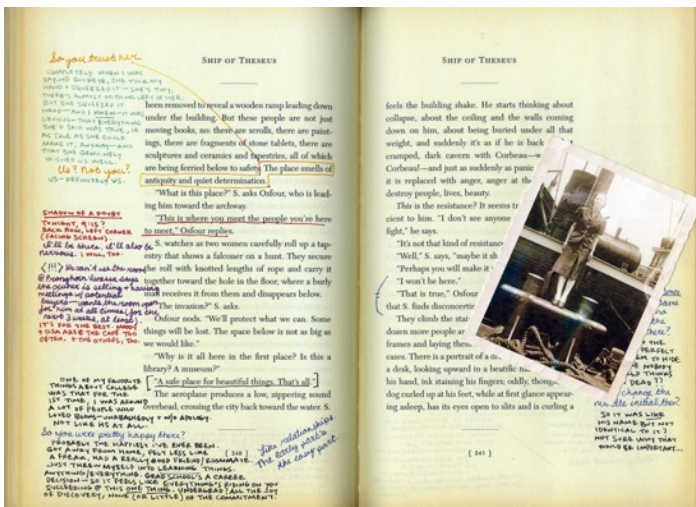


fig. 18 a spread from *S.* by Doug Dorst and J. J. Abrams



fig. 19 a spread from *Redheaded Peckerwood* by Christian Patterson

The books that were the most inspirational to my making of my book were *Nox* by Anne Carson, *S.* by Doug Dorst and J. J. Abrams, and *Redheaded Peckerwood* by Christian Patterson. Each of those books stand out to me because they each created an experience by the words on the pages, the packaging, the pace, the overall design and the way those stories had different ways to experience or interpret the information that was given. There is a grander sense of gratification when I discover books that develop these layers of meaning and interaction that you have to engage in. I celebrate these moments of engagement and challenge in others work and it's something I do my best to create in the things that I make.

The most challenging and memorable artworks I have experienced all have a lingering sense of questioning and room for dissection in my mind. I wanted this book to be memorable in a similar way. I know the separation between the gallery space where my work is often viewed and the private experience of this book will be important for a more concrete connection overall with those that get this book in hand. Creating an opportunity for a more private experience outside of the gallery or online viewing was a concern of mine because I am worried about that disconnection in the experience of looking at artwork. I've experienced looking at paintings in books and I know how that experience is so much different when you see it in person. I believe the writing and images will be relatable to others and possibly become a catalyst for conversation about traumatic relationships and alarming experiences that are not often shared.

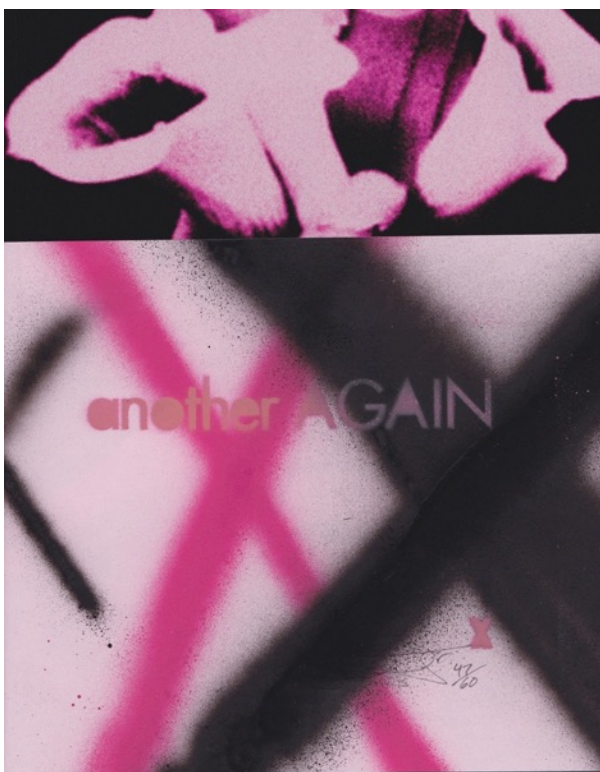


fig. 20

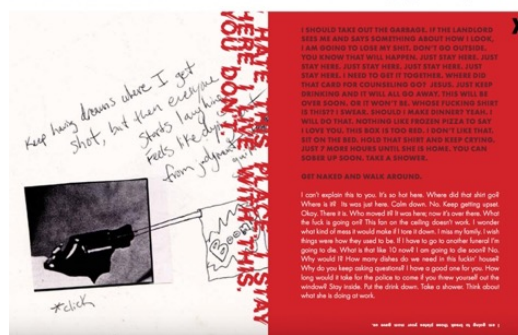
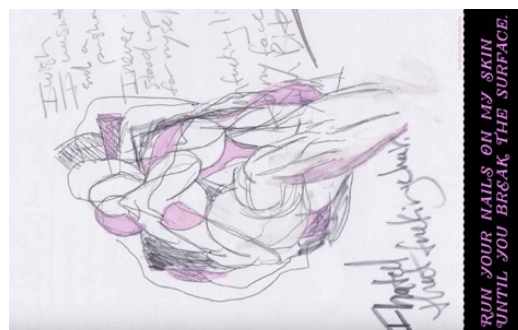


fig. 21 (top)

fig. 22 (bottom)

When it came to the packaging and the finalized look of this book I wanted to keep it more representational of a popular magazine or a high-end fashion magazines. Putting a custom paper sleeve over the front and back cover becomes similar to the blinders you'll see over

adult magazines and evokes this “for your eyes only” kind of direction (fig. 20). By packaging this book in this way, I hope to get the viewers to make a connection between other publications that are not readily viewable. Adding a new layer to the book reiterates my ideas of revealing and concealing an experience. After the paper sleeve is put on and all the other inserted ephemera goes into the book, it is then placed inside a plastic sleeve that is sealed with a price sticker I designed. I want the potential patrons to be enticed and only showing a small bit of the cover lets me craft another “reveal” moment. The physical experience of *another AGAIN* echoes the aesthetics and themes of my current creative work because of the use of multi-layered narrative, color interactions, and the visual offerings that it contains. This finished work does contain mature themes and I believe it communicates in a similar way to the experience that is made in other publications and independently published art books. Keeping the number of printed copies down to a limited edition helps this book step into the realm of art object along with all the hand applied transformations to some of the pages.

CONFRONTATIONS AND SILHOUETTES

I believe artists create things out of a personal concern for making a deeper connection to the world. The concern is often set up by some kind of strife in the artist's life and this strife comes from a personal experience, a longing for resolve, an attempt to understand or an offering for reflection. In my opinion, the greatest works of art make a viewer more aware of one's self, by carving out the mental space for reflection on something that may not initially be understood.

Francis Bacon's Portrait of Henrietta Moraes (fig. 23) is a work that resonated with me before I knew anything about the artist or the painting. I remember where I was when I saw it and how much it challenged me at the time. The saturation of the color and the rapid brushwork was what initially struck me about that painting. There was a story present without any words. This work is more to me than a classic figure-ground painting and for a long time, I couldn't articulate why. Now, as the years have gone by, I have learned more about Bacon as a man, how he lived, worked, and that painting's significance. This work truly feels like a confrontation between me and the figure within it.

That idea of a work feeling confrontational really appealed to me because I actually felt an emotional response when seeing it. In comparison to my work, the big things I realized only after long reflection of Bacon's work, was that he arrives at the figure in his work through both image references and live models that would sit for him. The figure or implied figure in my work comes from the appropriated images and the words that are said/thought/received between myself and surroundings.

There is a massive amount of emotional weight that is carried by both my work and the work of Bacon's, even though our chosen mediums and overall expression differ. Bacon's life and background is vastly different from mine but I believe the concerns within our making are similar and the emotional content has the opportunity to create conversation in the same ways.



fig. 23

Figurative painting has become too expected for me now, this is one of the reasons why I appropriate images and arrive at figure painting through collage. I had made a series of paintings that were of silhouettes of women taking their clothes off (based off collaged images), but all their identities were obscured by security patterns and created with various mediums and several pink colors (fig. 10). The idea for those works were some of the first instances of “the reveal,” which became a real catalyst for the work I am still making now. Those paintings could definitely be considered figurative and after creating those six works (fig. 11), I was excited about trying something larger and possibly getting a male figure present in my work. After creating the security collages and the silhouette series, I tried to make the leap with those ideas into a much larger painting. I prepped a large wood panel, projected a security pattern onto the surface, and then used two different hues of pink to then start filling in the pattern by hand (fig. 24).



fig. 24

The security collages all had some figurative element and when starting this new, larger painting, I wanted to push myself to consider getting two figures on this surface. I ended up finding an image of a man and woman in the midst of taking their clothes off in an advertisement for Trojan brand condoms. What was interesting to me about the image was that those two figures became one, when just considering the silhouette and outer edge of them both. That form became very ambiguous and I had planned to put a pattern of **X**s inside that shape created by the silhouette, similar to the treatment I had given the silhouetted forms in the paintings I had did previously. I then scanned that image from the advertisement and tried to create a digital rendering of what the silhouettes would look like by washing out the other visual cues (fig. 25).



fig. 25

I projected the above shape of those two figures and as the weeks went by, working on this painting, I started layering the Xs in a way to get the figures to become even more ambiguous than they already were. In the winter of 2015, I took a break from working on this painting after using spray paints, oil paint, oil sticks, latex house paint and acrylics (fig.26).



fig. 26

Months went by and this work hung on my studio wall. I looked at it every day for months and could never quite make my mind up about it. Was I finished? Is the contrast of patterns visually overwhelming? I couldn't seem to figure out why I felt so strange when looking at it. As I write this now and in reflecting about the making of this I understand why I felt so on the fence about its concept and form overall. I was trying to further understand these intimate moments that we have with others by not actually reflecting on my own. I tried to use the

patterns to flatten an experience that should never feel as such. Using the repetitious security patterns and Xs that I used prior as metaphor for safety and understanding to trying to sum up an experience with someone that is as dynamic as revealing your bare body to someone else just didn't work. The silhouettes didn't connect in the way that I wanted to because of how built up the patterns were, the forms became lost and so did its meaning. There was clearly a struggle present on the surface with free handed gestures and stenciled marks but those applications did not help support my idea for what I wanted this work to become. I feel as though I was seduced by a new idea of multiple figuration and bombardment of pattern so much so that I lost the initial vision for what I wanted to achieve with this work. I wanted a clearer sense of figure and an intimate experience that could be relatable to others but the subtly I wanted was completely lost because of the patterns and colors.

After this painting was in and out of my studio for about a year, I finally got some redemption. I ended up painting over the "finished" version and used the visual structures that were there to create a work that was about pattern, repetition, and in many ways, supported a better sense of communication and control of what is revealed. Below are a few process images (fig. 27 and 28) and the final work as it is completed now (fig. 29).



fig. 27



fig. 28



fig. 29

Using text to finally complete this work was the first time I had introduced the stenciled text to a surface that wasn't just flat colored paper (fig. 30). "YOU ONLY KNOW WHAT I WANT YOU TO" was from a confessional writing that I had done years ago after getting done arguing with a close friend of mine. That statement stood out to me because of all the miscommunication that I had with them years ago and I was having similar conversations with friends while in the early versions of this painting. Painting over top of the original work and keeping some of the original elements present (security pattern in the underpainting) helped me to better understand exactly what I felt was wrong with the work. The more haphazard style of marking making on its surface was mostly created with spray paint to

create an even more vibrant pattern that allows the text become a secondary experience. It's difficult for me to decide when a work is finished. I evolve works weaker works by destroying them, paintings over them, ripping them up, and asking myself about what more they could become.

Figuration is such a challenge for me and I feel more rewarded when changing other existing images. Currently, I am interested in photographer's interpretations of figures instead of most painters' representation of figures. Thinking and reflecting about this, my admitted bias against most figure painting is because of the amount of looking at works by artists Alice Neel, Phillip Pearlstein and Kerry James Marshall. They are a few figurative painters whose work I actually get excited to look at. I have difficulty getting excited about contemporary figure painters because of my love of Francis Bacon's work and how they are still so powerful and relevant to me as an artist today. He is the bar that I compare most other figure painters to. Many contemporary figurative works I have seen looks similar to Bacon's and in my opinion, doesn't offer anything different than he already has. I am hopeful for the moment where a new figurative artists' work takes me by surprise and breaks down my built-up expectation of what figurative work should communicate.

THE STENCILED VOICE

People say some pretty awful shit to each other. The power of those kinds of statements have resonated deeper in me than the positive words, in the past. It's easy for me to reflect on the negative things I have said to others and the harsh words that have been said to me. I believe that when we insult or put each other down, it is because we are deeply hurt and are looking for a reaction or connection. Negative emotions have created a heavy fog in mind and have only led me into intense moments of confusion and reaction in the past. Things aren't always what they seem both in conversation and life and there are a lot of moments in my work that support this idea. A crucial part of the process of making my work is the reflection of past events. Making the work with text has helped me move past those moments and breaking down those words so I can make amends. Something that I truly understand now is that we say things, act and react because we believe we are correct.

I initially was inspired to experiment with type and words because of my appreciation of work by artists Glenn Ligon, Richard Prince, Tracey Emin, and Barbra Kruger. I was also heavily influenced by graphic designers who experimented with type and form in the 1990s, specifically Neville Brody and David Carson. I was getting to a point with my security collages and other work where I felt a shift coming. The excitement and relief from making wasn't really there for me and I was looking through old journals and sketchbooks and realized the potential of how those words might be used in my work. I kept looking at these generic stencils that I had in my studio and it got me thinking about Glenn Ligon's massive stenciled works and Christopher Wool's large silkscreened works. Ligon uses oil sticks and the same stencil in repetition over a surface, from top to bottom (fig. 30). As the statement gets repeated, it also gets more difficult to read because the stencil he is using get more and more worn out and the detail of the letterforms become more illegible. The text that he often pulls from to make the stenciled statements, are excerpts from literature and poems that are often expressive of racial inequalities, stories of slavery, and more contemporary events. I truly believe the legibility and illegibility of Ligon's stenciled work communicate the frustration and the expression of immediacy in getting the words on to the surface for the viewer to connect. The stenciled voice becomes recognizable and open to interpretation.

The work of those artists and designers I've mentioned helped to re-affirm my ideas of how I would express the statements that I wanted to make in my paintings, works on paper and my book. They have all found a way to take words and their meanings and transform them in a way that asks for questioning and reaction amongst those that experience it. The analogue and digital process that I am drawn to is heavily influenced by those artists and designers that blur the lines between graphic and fine art.

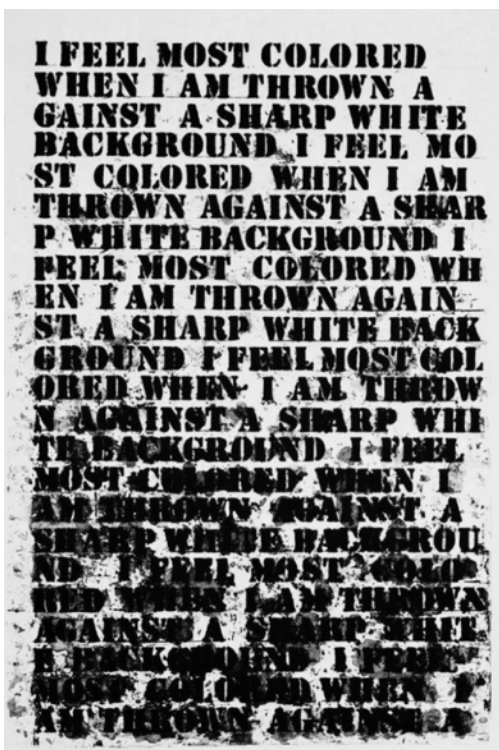


fig. 30

My research and exploration into typography and the use of text in contemporary art was more informative than I could have imagined. I've attended a letterpress workshop (work produced is fig 31.) at the Hamilton Wood Type and Printing Museum in Two Rivers, Wisconsin alongside of professor Dave Gottwald. I have made my own digital typefaces by blending together wood type specimens from books and other sourced images of type, to then make a stenciled painting (fig.32). I've made stencils directly from handwriting off of notes that were given to me by ex-girlfriends and close friends. I have even purchased my own collection of wood type, printed with it, and created digital typefaces of those wood types that maintain all the great character of the prints. I've given true voice through type and the

compositional decisions I've made on the surfaces of my work. My reflection of old writings, love notes, text messages, saved emails, voice recordings, letters I've collected, poems, things I've wrote down after eavesdropping on arguments and random conversations of strangers, and other sources led me to ask questions. How would you make an impact with these words through your work? How will your expression be DIFFERENT? Who will care? Will it be relevant and offer something different that others haven't? Is this relatable? How do you feel about trading in imagery for text? How about pairing image with text? These were questions that I wanted to figure out the answers to in my making and questions that I will continue to ask myself as I continue to create work both with text and any other medium I choose.



fig. 31

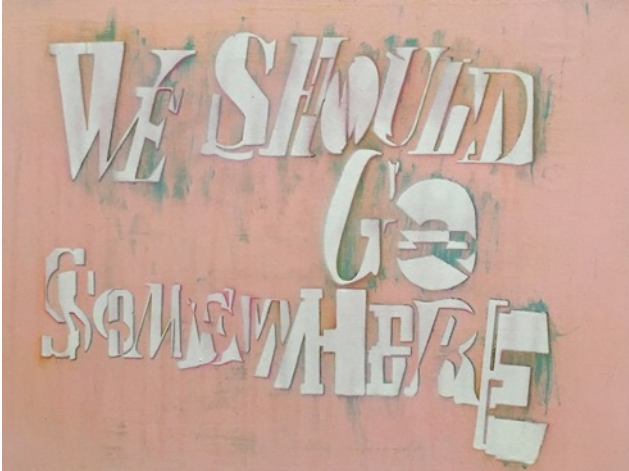


fig. 32

The text based work I make, is driven by my ideas of multiplying my awareness of typeface and font choice with the words of influence that I have kept over the years. Shedding a creative light on these emotional moments and negative things that were said to me led to some interesting results. Creating stencils (by way of laser cutting, previously cut by hand) to eventually be used to spray words onto 2-d / 3-d surfaces is in line with some graffiti influenced artists and traditional sign makers. Challenging my chosen media is enjoyable and flipping the context of what is expected with the form is something that keeps me interested in making the work with the content that I do. The stencil/spray paint technique is typically used for temporary actions, it's speed and its ability to create legible letters on surfaces (making a sign, signifying parking for an event, ownership of objects, other things like this). Images and words can be made quickly with simple means, but can have a truly lasting influence on us. The work with text speaks to the temporary/quick method of the medium but the permanence and long-lasting effect words can have.

Conceptually speaking, the idea for my text-based pieces came from the question I had about what it might look like if I could wrangle up all the most memorable things that someone has said to me or that I have heard people say to each other, if that was physical object, what would that look like? Would these statements be singular? Or are they ganged up onto each other or paired in ways because of the resonance they have within me? Trying to find a way to create the spray-painted works without them coming across too immature was something that I felt like I had a break through with, as soon as I started assigning different typographic

voices to the statements I have collected over time. I have always been attracted to the way posters of all kinds and how they can communicate so clearly but still call your attention. The letterpress posters of the Colby Printing Company (1948-2012) were inspirational to me because of the consideration given to the typographic hierarchy that builds interest and combination of brightly colored paper that the type is printed on (fig. 33 is a great example). When I paint with stencils directly to the fluorescent colored paper, this is similar in many ways to silk-screen processes (fig. 34). My understanding of wood type and letterpress printing are largely influential when I configure words and type digitally. I can create greater impact and make better compositional choices of placement and letter-spacing on screen because of the experience I have of setting type by hand on a press bed.



fig.33

fig. 34

My affinity to spray paint and graffiti has to do with my experience and understanding of its form, self-expression, speed, and all the negative connotation that it carries. Spray paint has let me further understand the memory of words and the physical resonance of things that are said, how quick a statement is made, how quick it can be covered up or washed away because of time and our sometimes-fleeting sentimentality. The text and the way I use spray paint separates itself from some of the “tags” or “bombed” pieces on walls that is common to see in urban environments and I am not claiming or representing anything but the words that allude to a story and to the moments that we find ourselves in.

Layer different finishes of spray paint, but in the same hue can create subtle and dramatic surface variations which then makes room for content and the gaps for the viewer to fill. The subtly in the surface transitions of my work is something that I have built in hopes to get the

viewer to look harder and stay in the presence of my work longer. Challenging the viewer, the contradictory statements and forms are only successful after giving them recognizable moments within my work. Breaking perceptions down and being as loud or subtle as I want with my work is something I love about making. Creating these moments of connection from nothing but raw materials is what I enjoy the most about making artwork. Being conscious in the many moments of absolute freedom in the act of creating things keeps me coming back, time and time again, with new things to say and offer others.

UNDERSTANDING THROUGH OTHER

I wish people were better connected; awareness leads to understanding of others. We are not culturally as empathetic as I wish we were. We hide the way we feel about things because of a fear or conflict that we try to avoid when we reveal our feelings to each other. I think this is because fear and conflict makes us look at our self and this can often be uncomfortable. My work with type and statements is the most direct way I have found to get the confrontation across. I hope to build empathy or at least a version of it, with those who experience the things that I make, by challenging those with the content and formal qualities that run throughout everything I make. In my past, I haven't always felt like creating things that could maintain a curiosity or beg for a reaction. I had made things because firstly, I loved certain styles and genres of art because they were challenging to my understanding of the world and myself as an artist. I studied art history and was constantly feeding my need to look at and experience work. Trying to make things similar to those things I loved, so I could further understand those artists and times in which I wasn't alive to live through. I created in response to artwork that I saw, enjoyed and work that left me wanting more variation.

When I became more conceptually engaged with my work and focused on my creative development, I noticed a lack of empathy within more conceptual driven artwork that I made and the work of others that I revered. At first, I thought that my life experience wasn't fruitful enough to make from or didn't resonate with others. Jokingly, I thought it was because I am a straight, white male from the mid-west. The work I made didn't connect because it wasn't really about anything except my passion of understanding of art the formal and expressive qualities. Now, looking back at that time I realized something profound about myself as an artist. It wasn't that my life experience wasn't interesting enough to make work about or inspired by, it was that I was scared to make about it. Making artwork from based from my own life and experiences would ask of me to become more responsible for my past and more critical of myself. I would have to become empathetic toward myself, my experience and ask how to best communicate with others through my work.

By using self-reflection as a tool, I started to pull from experiences and residual feelings that I have about the relationships that I have with others and my impact on others/their impact on

me. I found a great sense of understanding in myself when I became aware of why it is important to me to make artwork. The work I make is an offering and an invitation to have truly honest conversations or self-reflection. I hope it creates an understanding that we are often confused and hurt, but still responsible for the way we inflict our emotions on others. My work is about that longing for connection with others, that seeking for the true common ground between us all.

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