

NO END

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Fine Arts

with a

Major in Art in the
College of Graduate Studies
University of Idaho

by

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May 2017

Authorization to Submit Thesis

This thesis of James Mammone, submitted for the degree of a Master of Fine Arts, with a Major in Art and titled "No End," 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

If you are truly locked in and are honest with yourself as an artist, you are a vessel in between different levels of information and function simultaneously within the past, present, and future. The past has already happened and holds the experiences and research that has been digested. The present is the moment of physical creation of the work. The finished work will hold some sort of instinctive sense or visual cue of a clairvoyant vision of future experiences and research that will not be known in that present moment upon completion. In the future, new experiences and information will arrive at the point where you become aware in that present moment that what you envisioned in the past was shaping your future. With a commitment to hone and master my creative spark, and Buddhism to raise my awareness and elevate my discipline as an artist; this pattern will continue to develop and ripen, becoming more evolved and clarified throughout my lifetime.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my beautiful and loving family for all their support. For always letting me be myself.

Lindsay, Thank you. I would not have made it through this experience without you.



J.J.Mamzone, taking you home was the best decision in my life. Your supernatural powers have made me believe there are infinite worlds and dreams to be discovered and realized.

Thank you to my committee for all your offerings, as well as the entire faculty. Everyone helped to bring out the best in me.

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Creative Spark & Genius

The creative spark within is an intrinsic level of consciousness that I believe can be accessed and obtained by anyone individually. When I refer to consciousness I do so from a physicist's point of view called Space-time Theory of Consciousness. "We define consciousness as the process of creating a model of the world using multiple feedback loops in various parameters to accomplish a goal. Human consciousness is a particular type that involves mediating between these feedback loops by simulating the future and evaluating the past" (Kaku 49) . Anyone seeking to discover their own personal spark must find a path that is so unequivocally direct that it neither resides in a place of false modesty or egotistical narcissism, but rather in humility. The creative spark is a system of seen and unseen energy that unleashes an undeniable addiction to actively transform a vision into physical reality. Doing so will enable one to begin the building process of varying levels and degrees of potential ideations.

There are infinite ways that one can practice or utilize to help find their inner creative spark. The most important to begin with is having an open mind. An open mind is the first step towards creative enlightenment. I would define creative enlightenment as a lifelong quest to attempt to arrive at and discover through self awareness the ability to understand with wisdom, the potential of your creative powers; the drive to master them. This can give you a window within yourself so that you can internally evaluate yourself without judgement. This will allow an opportunity to have a strong willed devotion to your craft while simultaneously allowing for a healthy dose of play and spontaneity so that one can begin to transcend the ego and create without any fear.

Having an open mind is being inherently loose to the proposition that anything is possible. Completely embodying the notion that there are no limitations or anchors that exist in any situation. This does not mean you allow yourself to believe anything without some sort of investigation. An open minded person extrapolates upon rationally grounded systems and beliefs that are simple and already possible so that a bridge can be built to carry possibilities places that were once impossible. Doing so without preconceived expectations will allow you to have more insight into your own beliefs, perceptions, concepts, and ideas without ever allowing a seal around them that can't be broken. This will create a more enhanced, balanced, and malleable version of yourself.

Engaging an open mind and being honest internally is perhaps the most important skill one can achieve in pursuit and expansion of their own creative spark. Seeking out your own internal health and well being is paramount to the creative process. Possessing the ability to give an honestly constructive self evaluation that is thorough and objective to your vision will help you see your work more clearly. This objectivity will help you become more aware, focused, and guided when you do decide to showcase the work to a particular group or society as a whole. Discerning criticism will not be able to deter you. The criticism that you do receive that can help better the work will be easy for you to recognize once brought up because you are already so internally connected to the work.

Judgment and the fear of not being good enough is the greatest obstacle to overcome for one venturing to unlock their creative spark. Enabling it from yourself or a critic is almost certainly a guaranteed way to eliminate any authentic creative firepower that you have; it is a philosophy of right or wrong, good or bad. Constructive criticism serves as a useful purpose in trying to helpfully build upon in a practical way.

Having the threshold to maintain an ability to be able to play and have spontaneity with your ideas and concepts may perhaps be the best litmus test to use to see if your imagination is in proper alignment with the source of your creativity. I have always found a true sense of magic and wonder in artwork that is created by children. If loved and encouraged, a child will create artwork that is authentically created with an open mind that is not judged internally or externally in others. I still haven't quite figured out the age or level that art can become subject to right or wrong. A child who is five years old that draws something most likely won't be judged, but encouraged. However, someone who is twenty-five years old that creates a drawing that appears to be done by a five year old is criticized. This is where it is significant that an artist is working directly from their own creative spark. If art is created to satisfy others or created from a place that is based off criticism of others, even if the criticism is meant to be constructive, the artist's creativity will eventually come to a dead end without the access and awareness of their own spark.

A raging devotion and dedication to attempt to master and harness all the different intangibles with a high level of discipline and work ethic that is focused and steadfast is essential to pull out the creative spark that is inside of you. However, In modern society, especially America, there is continual loop of entertainment, advertising, anger, depression, fear, reliance on drugs, toxicity, and material fillers to remove us from having the discipline to focus. Humans seem not inclined to show a committed focused investigation to find a

distinctive breakthrough that would ignite their creative spark without it being attached to attention, money, fame, awards, or societal expectation.

With the removal of judgement and expectations the creative spark is derived from a place that exceeds the ego. Creating art is having a total understanding and graceful acceptance that you are a part of something larger than you and your work. No matter what you create it is not totally yours to claim. Everyone and everything is always connected to the work in some way. You are not alone as a sole creator. If you have found your spark and stride to create in a way that others haven't, be grateful and humble. The goal should be to help amplify our talents and strengths the best we can to help each other. Not harm each other. Being an art bully is not cool; art bullies are not tough or any different than any other kind of bully. When all the obstacles and barriers are removed one is then able to let their pure creative impulses come to fruition. This level that can be attained during the creative process is something I would refer to as a meditative discipline. Once entered no outside thoughts or distractions can interfere with the creative process. It is simply accepting the vision you have and executing it. Let the viewers deal with it. If you have given everything you have to your work and it is not received well, you should make more.

Opinions are like the weather; they change. Beliefs are like the climate; they change more slowly. The weather and climate are changing at a more rapid pace at a time when there are more opinions and subverted ideological beliefs being thrown around than ever. If you have found yourself and your creative work paradise, avoid the storm.

Genius is a word that can apply to anyone who is true to their unique creative spark and self. It is the force of will and fearlessness of failure to find the answer that is authentic to you. Pursuing it will raise levels of consciousness and awareness. Doing so will hopefully inspire others to do the same. I do not believe that it is something rare. I think most are unaware of their own personal & creative power. I do know that the fuel is burning inside of me to pursue my genius, and that I have been honestly working towards maximizing it ever since I found my creative spark. An integral way in which I have approached refining my creative journey has been through the study and practice of Buddhism.

Buddhism

The more I study and practice Buddhism, the more I discover how much of it is already embedded within me and supports my approach to creating. The evidence in which the components of Buddhism show themselves directly is the fact that the work itself is made. Making the time to create everyday is not an easy task, and cannot be done for you. If I am unable to put a significant amount of focused time and energy into creating on a daily basis that falls on me. Being a Buddhist has given me the tools to not only understand that, but also ways to make sure creation happens.

The main project and reason I am drawn to studying Buddhism is the understanding and elimination of suffering. Known as dukkha in Buddhism. It is paramount that one can clearly understand what dukkha is. Dukkha is a constant experience in one's life in samsara, which is one's continual repetitive cycle of birth and death that arises in each moment from grasping on a self, and nostalgia of experiences. This continuum will keep occurring until one can attain enlightenment. Enlightenment is a state residing in a place that is a perfect polyphony of knowledge, wisdom, and infinite compassion. The realization that there is a clear distinction between pain and suffering, is where the understanding of dukkha lies. Experiencing physical and emotional pain in our lives is the first form of dukkha, which is inevitable and omnipresent. The second form of dukkha is suffering, an addition to the original experience of physical and emotional pain that is totally self afflicted. The second form of dukkha can be overcome. Not having the ability to realize and embody the wisdom/compassion in one's heart/mind in the present moment will sustain suffering. Transforming suffering and its root causes into wisdom and compassion is done through accepting our vulnerabilities and having the insight to see the genesis of them so that they can be eradicated.

In order to end dukkha one must be able to comprehend the idea of anatta as reality. Anatta is a term that means no-self. This leads to the concept of anicca, which means that there is no fixed, stable individual being. This arrives from a matrix of interconnected causes and conditions. This vast web is called pratyasamutpada, also referred to as Interdependent Co-Arising. The realization that there is no self is an acceptance that existence on any level is a result of a sum of infinite changing parts that leads to each specific moment of time, at all times within every last corner and edge in the Universe/Multiverse. This knowledge is supreme in our quest of understanding and eliminating

dukkha. Failing to be aware of these concepts can cause formations of mental projections that mistake interpretations for reality. These interpretations can lead to us forming the idea that dualism of self and other exists, which in Buddhism it does not exist. If we cannot comprehend that our experience is a sum of infinite changing parts, we will not be aware that there is no self. This creates a need for a grasping of reality that is soaked in dukkha, becoming an endless cycle of rebirth of a lived experience of pain, grief, and death within Samsara. If approached and practiced in a focused, honest, and pragmatic sense, I personally find that creating your own path as a Buddhist can offer an ultimate form of engagement not only with oneself, but also with the vast Universe/Multiverse in which we are a microscopic part of. This phenomenal experience of being a human being is of great value and limitless possibilities. This is because of the infinite potential of our minds ability to not only unlock our imagination, but the ability to transform the world by radically reimagining it through an awakened mind, referred to as bodhicitta. At the apex of this transformation is where I believe there is an opportunity to not just create art, but to establish it as a visual template that can breakthrough preconceptions and witness the here and now in a way that is more subtle and variant.

It is of supreme importance to establish that in Buddhism there is absolutely no notion of an external entity that is judging our actions, deciding if they should result in some form of punishment or reward. Buddhism points to karma for answers. Karma can best be understood by looking at your present circumstances to reveal your past. To know your future, look within what is in your mind. You are the architect of your future. An action connected with compassion, love, and wisdom will result in happiness. An action connected with anger, ignorance, ill-will, and greed will consequently produce some form of suffering. Karma ties together with the Buddhist theory of causation, which stems from the belief that causation is always functioning at both the micro and macro events of all events, at all times within the universe/multiverse. An ocean of causal conditions are continuously forming and flowing, allowing for effects to arise. These effects give new upshots the opportunity to arise, but are neither predetermined or accidental. Reality is always interdependently constructed from this infinite ocean of causes and conditions.

Using Buddhist meditation as a tool to arrive at unlocking my imagination, and reimagining what reality has the potential to be has been a vital component that is a foundation of my work. To give an understanding of a doctrinal sense of Buddhist meditation,

it is important to note again that it is a way of exposing and uprooting the causes of dukkha with the aim of eliminating it and becoming awakened. In truth, meditation is a word that has become a less whole substitute for the original term bhāṅvāna, which means development or culture. Pertaining to mental development or mental culture. It is not about being removed from society or the world. It's aim is to generate a position that is of mental health, tranquility and equilibrium. The three forms of Buddhist Meditation, Sound Mindfulness, Sound Concentration, and Sound Effort, when practiced in tandem can lead to the understanding and elimination of dukkha.

Sound Effort is the training to develop habits of mind that support wholesome states of mind to exist. This is done by carefully paying attention to the quality of each moment that is arising and catching ourselves when ignorance, greed, and ill-will begin to arise. Subsequently, disarming it by letting go of it before it can become destructive. Then we can replace ignorance/ill-will with sound thoughts and skillful feelings. Sound Mindfulness is having possession of a mind that is trained in ethical practice that is aware of the impermanent nature of one's moment to moment experience. This awareness gives insight into the complexities of the conditions that accounts for each moment as it emerges and dissolves. Leading to a mind that is more open and relaxed to create an opportunity for harmlessness and renunciation to be present, rather than emotions and impulses that are destructive. Sound Concentration is having the capacity to stabilize the mind. Having it become so focused that is a mind of one-pointedness, generating an ability that can attend to the true nature of what has appeared.

Each day I attempt to cultivate these elements of Buddhism that I have presented and utilize them as fuel towards my Art practice. The pragmatic implementation of Buddhism lays a foundation of ideas and ethical reasons to go into the infinite scope of resources that enter into my ongoing creative metamorphosis. Taking all the resources of information and building new relationships with it through the practice of Buddhism I aspire to create work having the mind of Bodhicitta, which means healthy mind. Visually I am trying to capture the ideal of a Bodhisattva. A Bodhisattva is motivated by compassion, has achieved Bodhicitta, and is completely able to reach nibbana(Nirvana) but chooses not to in an attempt to save suffering beings. Nirvana is the final goal of Buddhism. It is the extinction of desire, hatred, and illusion. The cessation of continuity and becoming. Nirvana is no annihilation of self, because there is no self to annihilate. It is the annihilation of the illusion, of the false idea of self. Nirvana is neither negative or positive. The ideas of negative and positive are

combative, and are within the realm of duality. The absolute truth is that there is nothing absolute in this world we live on within the Universe/Multiverse that carries it. Everything is relative, conditioned, and impermanent. I have been working on accessing the present moment the best I can to relationally reimagine reality in a very radical way. Pursuing Buddhist doctrines more will only sharpen my senses as an artist, and give me deeper insight to what it is that I am actually doing, instead of what I am trying to do. Creating artwork within a process that is engaged with the meaning of Buddhist Theory of Causation, Buddhist Meditation, and seeing a reality that is formed by karma that is free of self, suffering, is non-dualistic, and promotes an ideal that all lifeforms can flourish is my ethos.

Creative Process

From the time I began drawing or creating environments, I have never had any obstacles in terms of creativity flowing in the form of ideas, concepts, or visualizations. I am extremely fortunate that I did not reach a level of awareness to fully comprehend that I was supposed to live my life through a discipline of exercised creativity until I was 23 years old. It gave me a chance to work out all kinds of doubts, fears, insecurities, and foolish behavior to put me in a position to try and unravel the creative spark inside of me. It has been a creatively fueled life since I opened that window. I am now always engrossed to a certain degree in creating an artwork of some form.

It is one thing to accept and act upon creative energy in an honest way, but having to articulate the how and why when the creation itself is made of an infinite number of complexities and conditions can become a more monumental task than creating the work itself. Challenging yourself to articulate your work internally will only propel your overall development as an artist. Perhaps in the future when the biological world and technological world coalesce into one unified existence this can all be done seamlessly without effort. Technology will possibly evolve a level of consciousness that can tap into biological consciousness and can pull all of what is in your mind out into the world as it happens. Scary and beautiful thought.

Being an American in the 21st century is a surreal experience. An unprecedented unlimited amount of information and data is now available at our fingertips. Technology has revealed new realities, changing us all to a certain degree. It has made me different. Technology already has and will continue to provide us the opportunity to see ourselves in the Universe/Multiverse in different new ways. I accept it. I try my best using Buddhism as a tool to navigate through technology, data, and information to try and determine what is useful for me to become a more sound Buddhist and artist.

The development of acquiring knowledge on any level is always being delicately dipped into my creative stream. Particular fields of study are boundless in empire, and if I am honestly working on becoming creatively enlightened it is important that I concentrate on that purpose by using my knowledge in the most relevant way. Being aware enough to recognize that my field of study is creating through the use of imagination makes it easy to not get lost in the numerous components that are involved in making my work. Using my life experiences, books, articles, the internet, documentaries, videos, movies, music, visual art,

or interviews. All information holds the same weight in terms of where the hierarchy exists in my work. For example, if there happened to be a lion in a painting or an installation I created and it was established visually as the most prominent form of hierarchy in the work it would not matter whether or not I personally encountered a lion in the African savannah or just read a short article in a National Geographic magazine about lions mating rituals. A two page article or a picture can be just as profound as say, a near death experience. It is not necessary to become an expert in everything I consume. I try and learn some simple things about topics that I am interested in. I then open the gates to my creative mind and let everything I have consumed and experienced gently move in. General topics that are of interest are neuroscience, physics, technology, biology, wildlife, geo-engineering, human potential, and the manipulation of nature.

When I begin to create a new work I start with one idea. I know full well that it is just a starting point and I don't have any end vision. I work in layers both visually and conceptually at a very disciplined methodical pace. This methodical pace I consider to be disciplined because of the passion I have for it and the time, energy, and sacrifices it takes me to honor that passion and level of quality I am pursuing. The time and level of focus to precision and detail that I employ helps to clear my mind for new avenues to come into being that ultimately connects with my original idea.

No End -The Work - Intention & The Viewer

The work I created and presented for my thesis show is an ongoing attempt to hone and master my creative spark through both painting and installation. As two forces of conversation, two rooms were used to showcase both avenues of my progression and express the connectivity of my internal and external critical engagement with this spark.

The first room is a series of six panels of paintings on wood that form a united piece (see figures 1-6). Although they will suggest to a viewer a sense that they are a thread narrative due to the rhythmic visual language and color themes carried throughout, they are not unified to address a specific world view or linear narrative. Instead, the paintings directly go back to my practice of Buddhism and having the ability to reimagine the world through an awakened mind. The juxtaposition of realism, childlike imagery, complex symbols, and vibrant colors directly orchestrate an invocation of radical thought; encompassing multiple layers, ideas, visions and memories to create environments and systems of prosperity that create a sense of curiosity and mystery for the viewer.

I intentionally leave the viewer with the responsibility to decide if they truly want to lock in an engage with each of the paintings face to face. I feel as the artist, I am only able to articulate myself from the perspective of a viewer who is truly able to become so focused in looking and internally processing the painting through an open mind. If they are unable to slow down enough to honestly do this, at best we could only reach some sort of middle space that effectively is useless. For example, if there were a disagreement between two people over whether or not the earth is flat or a sphere, shaking hands on a compromise for a square will just create more problems and tension. Now, a scientific reality and experiences within art may seem like a bad comparison, but I see this as the same concept fundamentally.

The viewer is not a blank slate. They are a human beings who will enter the room with their own experiences, memories, and ideas. Unfortunately, they will also carry their own assumptions, judgements, ideas, prejudices, and personal baggage. My intention is to see if the paintings are able to challenge them to let go of all that during their viewing and begin to let new formations in their mind arise at that present moment that allows them to dip into their own mind-stream; so that they can formulate their own past, present, and future that is of fresh virgin territory and in turn could produce their own creative spark.

The second room externalizes my own creative expression of the paintings in the first room (see figures 7-16). The output of this installation is driven from the image collisions and energy I dealt with when composing the paintings. However, the installation is not a direct recreation of the initial spark that produced the paintings. Since a creative spark constantly moves forward, so too does the expression that builds from my paintings to my installation work.

Upon entering, multiple materials are now incorporated into the new mental formations that have been created in the viewer so they can become grounded in the environment that I have constructed. The color painted on wood in the installation connects material and color from the wood panels of the paintings; setting the tone that not only are you in a safe space to project your own mental formations, but it is now a responsibility to interact with the area in a calm fluidity because of its delicacy. The installation is setup in a way that the viewer can navigate comfortably through the space to view it from many perspectives that allows them to get as close as they want to any of the materials or objects. The ability to become so immersed in the installation gives the recognition and awareness that although the space has been radically reimagined it has been executed in a way that is so detailed that even one misstep or subtle action could destroy the space and actually kill life that is in that space. This realization will hopefully permeate within the viewer so upon leaving the hand manipulated environment they will head back into the world carrying with them a certainty that there is a harmony to be had.



Figures 1 & 2 (top): Images of the room with paintings from *No End*. Acrylic on wood panel. 2 ft. x 2 ft.
Figure 3 (bottom): Image of the room with paintings from *No End*. Acrylic on wood panel. 4 ft. x 2 ft.

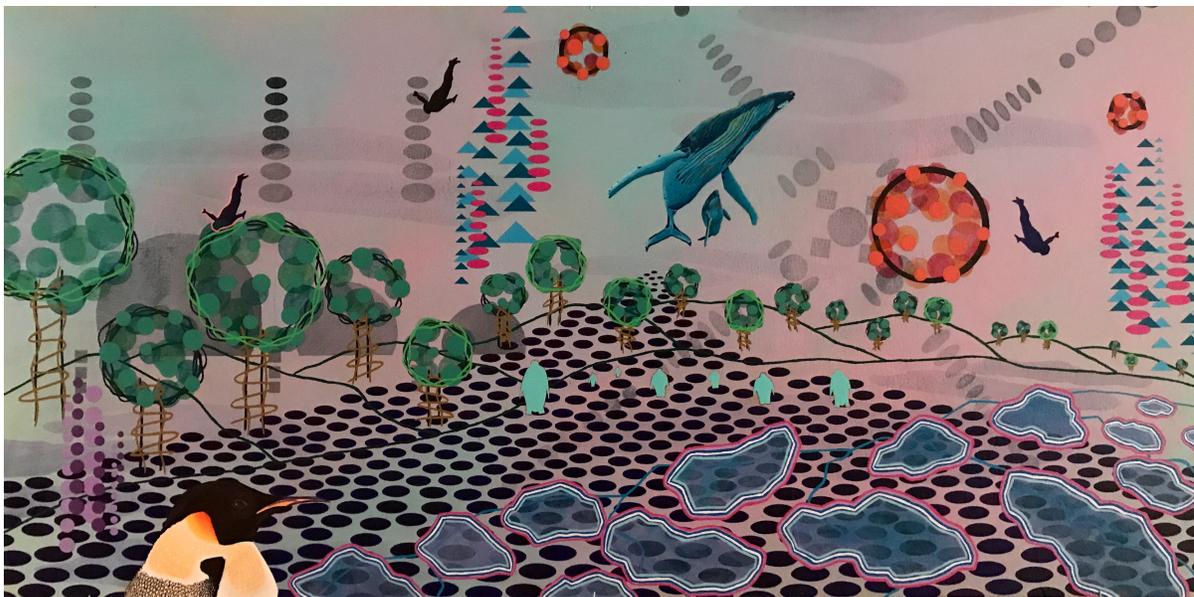
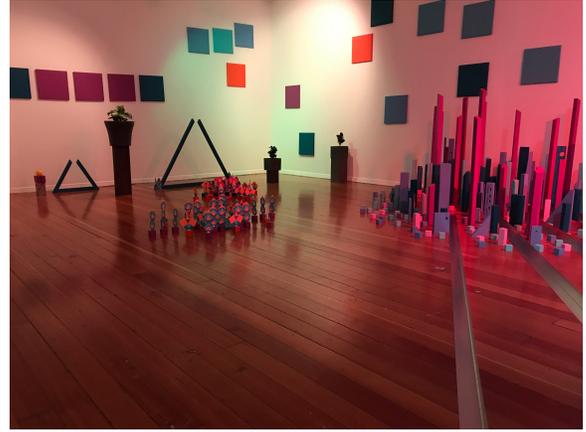
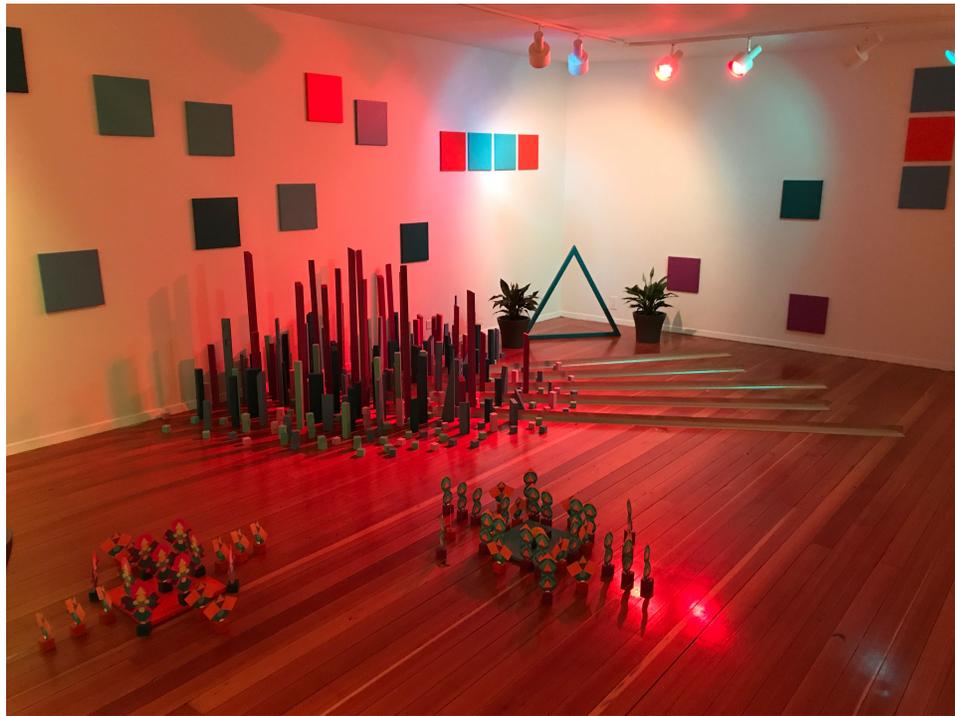


Figure 4 (top): Image of the room with paintings from *No End*. Acrylic on wood panel. 4 ft. x 2 ft.

Figure 5 & 6 (bottom): Images of the room with paintings from *No End*. Acrylic on wood panel. 2 ft. x 2 ft.



Figures 7-11: Images of the room with mixed-media installation from *No End*.



Figures 12-16: Images of the room with mixed-media installation from *No End*.

Conclusion

Intentions and thoughts become manifestations of physical realities, and the happenings of the collective Universe/Multiverse is rapidly bending and twisting towards them.

Happiness.

Works Cited

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