An Incomplete Reality:

Crafting Intimate Relationships with Place through Fragmented Environments

A Thesis

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by

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Authorization to Submit Thesis

This thesis of Devon Mozdierz, submitted for the degree of Master of Fine Arts with a Major in Art and titled "*An Incomplete Reality: Crafting Intimate Relationships with Place through Fragmented Environments*," 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

Ruins have always functioned as a source of inspiration for the artist. As historian Christopher Woodward explains, "The artist is inevitably at odds with the archaeologist. In the latter discipline the scattered fragments of stone are parts of a jigsaw, or clues to a puzzle to which there is only one answer… to the artist, by contrast, any answer which is imaginative is correct" (Woodward 30). I create fictional narratives that abstract elements of the New England landscape and merge them with the expansive horizons of the Inland Northwest. In doing so my paintings and monotypes function as prosceniums that allow the viewer to build an intimate relationship with the imagery by enacting his or her own personal history plays upon it.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my parents Joe and Tori, and to my sister Jess for their

constant support. I would also like to thank my Uncle Mark for encouraging me to embrace

the offbeat gems in this world.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Defining a place and understanding an environment are two separate objectives. The cartographer seeks to pinpoint—the artist seeks to understand. As poet Gary Snyder notes, "a place exists because of its stories" thus signifying the importance of a poetic perspective (Snyder 44). To truly understand and connect to a particular landscape, we need to build a relationship with it. We must craft experiences over time that are uniquely our own. Place is not just a section of land, for the individual place is a cultivated and intimate personal history. As a painter and printmaker, I make work that functions as a catalyst for this intimate experience. By merging the landscape with worn objects I create fictional narratives that become a stage for the viewer to indulge in. It is in this indulgence that the viewer is able to craft a personal relationship with the work. Part of what makes these landscapes fictional is that I combine elements of the New England landscape with those of the Inland Northwest. In doing so, I remove specificity and allow for a range of interpretation through ambiguity. It is in the unknown that the imagination is prompted to question, indulge, and thus craft stories.

 This fascination with narrative is the product of my childhood, which took place next to a former town that was converted into a historic state park and flood plain. In my youth, I stumbled through old cellar holes, clambered up barbed-wire fences, and fantasized about the people that once lived in these spaces, which fostered in me an extensive understanding of the place I grew up in. During my undergraduate studies, I was introduced to the writing of Joseph Campbell and his theory of the monomyth. The short-hand version of this theory is that all myths and stories follow a very similar structure in which the hero gets a call to action and must commence on a journey. To do this, they must cross some sort of threshold and

enter an unknown circumstance or environment and it is in that environment that they face great challenges. Ultimately, what the hero returns with is a sense of enlightenment and appreciation for the place they return to. Campbell's theories on myth and story served to embellish my already growing interest in narrative. In Campbell's eyes, myths are not only stories dedicated to Greek Gods, but they also pertain to our day-to-day lives. Arguably, any story holds true to mythic themes, if for no other reason than to communicate an ideal.

For me, the significance of mythic structure exists in the power of story and its ability to build culture and understanding of place. Campbell explains that "the standard path of mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation—initiation—return:* which might be name the nuclear unit of the monomyth" (Campbell 31). To synopsize the monomyth, the hero gets a call to adventure—in order to embark on that adventure a threshold must be crossed. The crossing of the threshold marks the hero's entry into the unknown—it is here that great challenges are faced. After facing great challenges, the journey brings the hero back home. What the hero is left with is not treasure but knowledge and understanding—or the "boons of the gods" (Campbell 31). It is this knowledge that allows for either personal or communal enrichment. While there are no figures in my narratives, there are fragments of a society passed. These fragments are personal thresholds that are close to home and then abstracted. In their mystery, they prompt questions and begin a narrative journey for their audience.

Due to the narrative nature of my work, it seems appropriate that my thesis should tell the story of my most recent body of work, not simply defend it. Through a combination of abstracted references to my New England home, my exploration of the West, and strong ties

to literature, I craft images that invite the viewer to navigate and enact his or her own plays

upon these stages and create a personal myth of place.

Chapter 2: The New England Landscape

"Fluent in mobility, we try haltingly to learn the alphabet of place"

—John Daniel

The landscape—particularly our understanding and interpretation of it—is central to my work. As a New Hampshire native, I had the good fortune to grow up in a fairly unique environment in the town of Weare. To put into perspective the town's size, a few years ago the local gossip was that we finally got our first traffic light. One hundred years ago, the small size of the town would never have been predicted by its inhabitants. In the early 1900s, Weare was one of the most economically successful towns in the state. It had a train station, a toy factory, a dance hall, and a limekiln, making Weare more of city than a small town. In terms of industry, Weare was once wildly successful.

Weare's success was due in part to its location on the Piscataquog River, which powered the textile mils. The town's proximity to the river was—as you may guess—a double-edged sword. The Flood of 1938 was the product of a coastal hurricane. It caused the Piscataquog River to run so high that it washed away much of the town and did severe damage to the towns further down stream. Due to the low elevation of the area, rather than rebuild the devastated town the US Army Corps opted to build a dam and evacuate the area. What is left in its place is loose litany of stone walls, cellar holes, and chimneys that adorn the lake and forest—the bones of society.

This wooded area has since become a state park and a personal playground for me. I had the privilege of watching the landscape change over time—the young and fairly sparse

forest has become dense and overgrown, and the fragments of homes and buildings are now imbedded within the landscape.

2.1 Clough Park in Winter

2.2 Stone Wall in Clough Park

Every year I watched the park flood during the spring melt and fall rains. Gradually, the cellar holes would fill with water, then creep over the stonewalls, submerge the barbed fences and chimneys, and at times the trees themselves disappeared underneath the swelling lake. My family and I would take the kayaks out and float over the submerged town—mapping our way through familiar trees. Strategically placed bottles and tethered ribbons in the branches mapped our way through the river. We watched as mice clung to the treetops and the occasional 70-year-old-soda bottle popped up from the world below.

The unique nature of these experiences in this fragment of a town never left me, and I began to research the concept of ruins and how we respond to them. Environmental historian William Cronon explains that "to acknowledge past human impacts… is not to call into question [a landscape's] wildness, it is rather to celebrate, along with the human past, the

robust ability of wild nature to sustain itself when people give it the freedom it needs to flourish in their midst" (Cronon 38). In other words, remnants of human history are not a black mark on a place's wildness, rather they allow for us to engage in a richer understanding of a places history. I never once considered Clough Park to be less wild because of the prominence of remaining human architecture—if anything it was the opposite. They allowed me to indulge the place's history and create a deeper curiosity about the landscape.

My curiosity of place exists in my artwork by crafting landscapes that function as prosceniums. Christopher Woodward posits, "A ruin is a dialogue between an incomplete reality and the imagination of the spectator" (Woodward 139). This dialogue fueled my exploration of the woods and the ruins within them. It is for this same reason that my artwork functions as a stage.

In viewing my work as a stage, I began to look at the work of set designers Gordon Craig and Robert Edmund Jones. Craig reinvented the stage and his designs used "symbolism rather than description, allusion in preference to imitation" (Bablet 46). Craig's "art was an art of suggestion, of evocation, which gave free play to the audience's imagination" (Bablet 40). In other words, the stage is a tool intended to evoke the emotion of an experience in order to make it believable. I became intrigued with the drawings and etchings of Craig's set designs and how they allude to place, but like my work, suggest a location. If you look at Craig's imagery, it contains structure, but is nondescript—it relies heavily on light and shadow, and positive and negative space. Robert Edmond Jones explains "there is no more reason for a room on a stage to be a reproduction of an actual room than for an actor who plays the part of Napoleon to be Napoleon…" (Jones 25). I view my work in the same light— the validity of the

experience is in the allusion. When the viewer has to work for answers, they are investing in a journey rather than being placed in the destination. It is through this personal investment that the viewer establishes a connection with the piece. Hence, my landscapes reference home and allow for the viewer to make associations to a setting based on what they find viable. As with Craig, my work relies on the 'art of suggestion.'

2.3 *The Steps: First Mood,* Gordon Craig
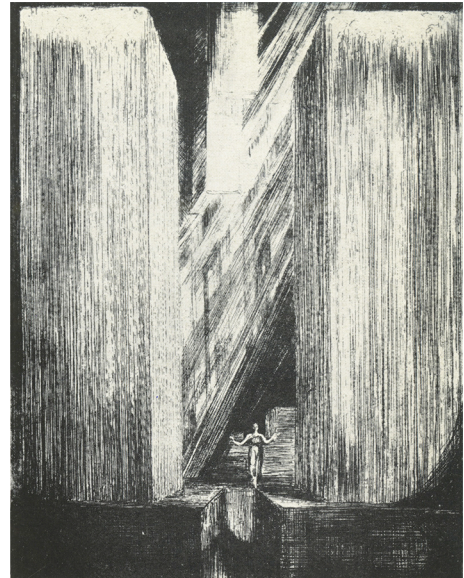
2.4 *Scene 'Hell',* Gordon Craig

Chapter 3: Literature as Inspiration

My love for the washed out and overgrown town of North Weare is due in part to the fact that while growing up and exploring that area, I was able to impose my own narratives upon the landscape. With a long-standing focus on imagined narrative, it makes sense that another critical component to my work would be literature. James Galvin, Milan Kundera, Jim Harrison, William Kittredge, Barry Lopez, and Mary Clearman Blew are among the list of authors whose work I have sought out as points of reference for my studio practice. Joseph Campbell often references larger cultural myths, but he explains that the significance of myth is not exclusive to the well known stories—it is equally relevant to the small and personal: "Dream is the personalized myth, myth the depersonalized dream; both myth and dream are symbolic in the same general way of the dynamics of the psyche…" (Campbell 20). In other words, myth and narrative are just as important on an individual level as they are on a group level. They help us create our own personal history and understanding of a place. Naturally, then, story as myth has become a catalyst for my own work.

A thread that is shared among the writers I have mentioned is that they are all place based—their writing seeks to define and better understand the environments that they are in. While technically a series of essays, Mary Clearman Blew's work *Bone Deep in Landscape* is equally a narrative. She writes "narrative is a way of bringing our split vision of the world back into focus. It closes the distance between story and storyteller…" (Blew 175). Blew's goal is to establish a culture of writers in Idaho, and she does this by interweaving history and story to craft a setting: "to find the words for the place where we live, and we'll be better for joining the circle" (Blew 167). Similarly, my work remains ambiguous, with elements of familiar

landscape as a way of allowing the viewer to enter the space, navigate it on their own terms and craft their own intimate understanding of it. An example of this would be my works *Strung Sense of Place* and *Site Marker,* which are both appropriations from landscapes that are familiar to me and woven with story. Like Blew, I am hoping to activate an understanding of place through narrative and history. *Strung Sense of Place* is derived from the New England landscape through the marsh-like setting and color palette, and the scale of the painting makes it feel intimate. Yet, the work in many ways feels large scale—in looking at the horizon one has to question if they are facing trees or mountains. At the same time the wired posts are ambiguous in their function because of their scale. This piece references Jame's Galvin's poem "Dear Miss. Emily" through the iconography of the hoop and in that it, like the poem, addresses "far flung situations" (Galvin poets.org). At the same time, the work is inspired through William Kittredge's notion of finding "a new story for us to inhabit" and how finding a new story is possible through the creation of these 'far flung situations.'

3.1 *Strung Sense of Place*

3.2 *Site Marker*

Chapter 4: Mythologizing the Landscape

Stone walls and fences function as metaphors for thresholds and barriers. As a young girl, one of my earliest memories was crossing the threshold of the old stone wall in my back yard which took me into the woods of the Weare, marking my journey into the unknown.

Stone walls and fences have become icons in my work in recent years. An overt example of this would be the painting *Weare, NH, 1938* that depicts a stone wall receding off into the watery and tempestuous horizon. The work is inspired by the Flood of 1938 which washed away much of what is now my hometown. At the same time, it recalls my personal experiences watching the same river periodically flood every spring. With the winter melt and spring rain the of the Piscataquog water gradually rise and fill in the cellar holes, cover the ground, and leave the fine lines of the stone walls to jet off into the expanding lake. Eventually, everything, including the trees, would be completely submerged.

While combining history and memory, the stone wall in *Weare, NH, 1938* also implies a boundary that is symbolic of the threshold by presenting a dichotomy—the order of the man-made, and the chaos of the environment itself. The distant horizon, vibrant color palette, and ephemeral sky further evoke a sense of mystery thus alluding to a grand narrative. It is by removing components that are typical to the New England environment, such as the dense forest, and embellishing other areas such as the horizon, that the specificity is removed and the viewer is able to build his or her own unique relationship with the scene. At the same time, the process of adding and subtracting heightens the importance of what is left within the image. In the case of *Weare, NH, 1938* it is the relationship between the ruins and the landscape. The dialogue between these two forces opens the work up to notions of history,

mortality, and possibility. In its openness the imagery becomes both accessible and personal—there are fragments that are specific enough for anyone to latch onto without being derivative of any one thing.

4.1 *Weare, NH, 1938*

The importance of crafting an image that maintains accessible ambiguity takes me back to the myth. As Campbell explains, myth is in many ways an established culture. My intimate understanding of the landscape I call home is the result of my exploration and myth making of that place. It is the stories and imaginative journeys I embarked on that prompted in me a deep curiosity for setting. Writer William Kittredge explains "In the American West we are struggling to revise our dominant mythology, and to find a new story to inhabit" (Kittredge 65). That said, the suggestive imagery of man-made markers that appear historic, forgotten, and vaguely familiar invite the viewer to create a new narrative. Myths are a way of creating ethics and culture through story. By that logic, it makes sense that imagery that prompts suggestive questions in the viewer would be an effective catalyst for story.

Kittredge urges us to look at our relationship to place through our history with it and to craft a new ideology of it (Kittredge 65). While I am not out create the next great American myth, I am interested in prompting my viewers to craft their own personal myths.

Again, consider the painting *Weare, NH, 1938* and relate it to the writing of Campbell. The outcome of the hero's journey is that the hero returns back home from his, but is changed through experience—he or she has come full circle. Ruins present a similar circumstance for the viewer, as does the concept of the flood. The stone wall becomes a threshold that the viewer must traverse and follow off into the murky horizon on his or her own journey. The wall also presents the element of time—the inevitability of things returning back to the earth from which they came. The flood has unavoidable biblical connotations, but there are greater implications—renewal after chaos. It is just as much a rebirth as it is a tragedy.

Chapter 5: An Exploration of the Monotyping Process

Much of the mystical, and thus mythical elements of my work sparks from my exploration in the art of monotyping. My first year of graduate school presented me with the challenge of finding a strong artistic direction—this is something one discovers through exploration, not something that one assigns oneself. Seeking input, I contacted Darryl Furtkamp, a professor from my undergraduate school whose sensibilities paralleled mine. The conversation shifted to the discussion of the recent earthquake that had occurred in New Hampshire earlier that day. Jokingly, this prompted us to invent a limerick on earthquakes, which we took turns inventing line by line. The significance of having to respond to each other's on-the-spot line making forced us to think and respond differently than we would have otherwise. Eventually the discussion became serious again and we turned this limerick exchange over to the project of making collaborative work. I had mentioned that I wanted to explore monotyping, but there was no one at the University of Idaho actively working in the field. Darryl suggested that to remedy this we could begin an exchange of in-process monotypes. So, we began the journey of sending work back and forth in the mail; layer by layer complex imagery emerged from the most basic marks. The initial intent was that I would gain an understanding of how the process works, and I did. What was far more exciting was that we discovered that the work was of artistic consequence, prompting us to continue the exchange—which is ongoing—and helping to spark my own sense of direction.

A touchstone in my artistic exploration has been the artist Nathan Oliveira who has crafted the most personally compelling and haunting monoprints and paintings that I have seen. For Oliveira, "merging the act of painting with that of printing, in a single process,

monotype gave… the ability to generate images in a process of continuous revisions" (Eitner 9). Similar, was the experience of the exchange between Darryl Furtkamp and me. He would send me the first pull and its ghost image. I would be forced to analyze and respond to these marks, which I myself could never have predicted. I would then make my mark on the Plexiglas plate, run it through the press, and mail it back to him in NH. This not only gave me an extensive understanding of the monotyping process, but it also fostered in me a new appreciation of the unknown and uncontrollable. What the process of monotyping allowed for me was that "Continuous repainting on the plate and reimpressions on paper, effacements and resurrections, each contributing changes, spelled the successive stages in the evolution of a pictorial idea that in the usual painting process would have been obliterated by the final image" (Eitner, 9). My love of the ambiguous structure and mystical landscape emerged through this exploration of ink.

5.1 *Pier Site 1*, Nathan Oliveira

5.2 *The Real World Goes like This,* Darryl Furtkamp, Devon Mozdierz

As the collaborative work with Darryl evolved, my independent work followed suit. I began to play with the veiling of ink as a way of creating luminous skies, and with the deconstruction of ink with solvent as a way of capturing chaos, movement and energy. Perhaps the work that best shows this is the piece *Caught in the Webs of a Log Jam.* This monotype, like *Weare, NH, 1984,* is based upon my findings in the woods of Weare. The work itself is the product of layers upon layers of ink, multiple passes through the press, and subtle embellishment of the image through Prismacolor pencils. The bubble-like marks in the sky are the result of solvent being misted and flung across the inked Plexiglas, and then veiled underneath thin layers of ink that have been manipulated through various brayer passes and transparency mediums. The stone wall is the product of primarily one blanket of ink that was applied and then lifted away and pushed around through aggressive mark-making.

In its nature, the process of monotyping is expressive. The outcome is the product of guided chance and the marks are final and at best are obscured but seldom removed. The unforgiving immediacy of this process was pivotal for me in that it revitalized my paintings. My earlier paintings appeared labored. I relied on heavy, aggressive brushwork to capture form, yet I seldom used a wide range of color or expressive marks to capture an environment. Like Oliveira, "each contributing change spelled the successive stages in the evolution of a pictorial idea that in the usual painting process would have been obliterated by the final image" (Eitner 9). If you follow my introduction of the printmaking process into my studio practice and parallel it with the development of my paintings, there is a sharp turn. The work becomes lighter, fresher, and like the prints there are areas of tight refinement embedded within an ephemeral landscape. Such transition becomes evident in the painting *Entangled in*

the Webs of a Log Jam, which is the partner to the print *Caught in the Webs of a Log Jam*. The

brushwork in this painting is loser, more expressive, and the composition is distinctively

different from earlier paintings that were formulaic in composition and monochromatic in

color palette. The viewer is forced low into a murky landscape and the eye is led back into the

distance, not only through the use of a light horizon, but also through the drastic perspective

of the wall.

5.3 *Caught in the Webs of a Log Jam*

Chapter 6: In Ruins

I have always appreciated the factual history of the stone walls, cellar holes, fences and chimneys that I found in the woods—but historic facts were not why these ruins were so magical. The interest in the forgotten was the history imagined. Historian Christopher Woodward explains, "the artist is inevitably at odds with the archaeologist. In the latter discipline the scattered fragments of stone are parts of a jigsaw, or clues to a puzzle to which there is only one answer, as in a science laboratory' to the artist, by contrast, any answer which is imaginative is correct" (Woodward, 30). In other words, the ruin is a validation of the imaginative—it prompts a journey and that in and of itself is correct. Take for example the painting *There is a Line that you Follow*. This painting shows a pivotal shift in my work for several reasons. First, the application of paint is directly inspired by the print *Infinite Divide*. Rather than solely rely on building layers of paint on top of one another, I began to explore a reductive quality of painting by lifting away layers. As with the monotypes in which I would ink the plate and lift areas away to create values of light and dark. I then applied a similar process with the panel. By lifting out areas, the luminosity of the canvas was able to show through at the same time I glazed down other areas such as the sky to create a greater and more complex sense of depth.

6.1 *There is a Line that You Follow*

6.2 *Infinite Divide*

The subject matter in *There is a Line that you Follow* parallels the print *Infinite Divide*. The intent with both pieces was to pull away from the direct representation of the stone wall and barbed wire fence. Relying on the expansive, abandoned landscape and impressive—almost imposing—white horizon and saturated sky it is clear that the space is uninhabited. The fence-like structure confirms that there was a human presence at one point—however, the form's ambiguity makes it hard to define when that might have been.

It is at this point necessary to discuss a departure from the specific title of "fence." Certainly, when looking at work such as *There is a Line that you Follow* it is hard not to use the term fence—but unlike a real fence, these structures in their unique form lack ability to function as such. They are fence-like, but the scale is ambiguous and details such as the hoops make them more symbolic than specific. In removing the functionality, the images open themselves up to a mystical interpretation. Consider again Nathan Oliveira and a work from his *Site Series* such as *Western Site, XL*. His work is about abstracting the familiar and was "the product of Oliveira's distillation of his environment into his art. The sources are as divers as radio transmitters in the hills above the campus and the wood structure for the bonfire made before the yearly football game between Stanford and the University of California, Berkeley"

(Johnson 18). One could argue that this exploration is similar to that of Kittredge and his goal to find a new myth to inhabit. It is taking the familiar function and redefining it, "only after re-imagining our myths can we coherently remodel… our laws, and hope to keep   our society in a realistic relationship to what is actual" (Kittredge 64). In abstraction there is discovery.

Like Oliveira, I consider the familiar as a point of departure. Fences with the leftover barbed wire coils have been adapted and manipulated in work such as *Site Marker* and *Strung Sense of Place.* Like Oliveira's paintings and prints, "however abstracted they are, they are not abstractions. There is a ground with gravity. There are light sources and there is recession in space." (Johnson 19).

My recent work such as *Site Marker* signifies a shift in the style of paint application as well as format. This is due in part to the fact that over the summer I revisited another influence of mine and began to reread his gallery booklets. Ben Frank Moss, who—like me—has been spending the years traveling back and forth from New Hampshire to Spokane, Washington, which is relatively close to Moscow, Idaho. Moss is known for his abstract landscapes that have gradually decreased in scale over the years. I gravitated to his ink and graphite abstract landscapes, which he refers to as "mythical landscapes." It resonated with me because of the preciseness of his abstraction- the imagery clearly evokes landscape without directly representing it. While looking at one of his books I began to also consider Moss's painting. I admit that the paintings do not move me like his ink drawings do, but the powerful brush mark and palette knife work mixed with aggressive and confident color land his work well into the realm of the non-representational. In observing Moss's application of paint, it struck me that I could push my color and brushwork farther as well. Though stylistically

different, Moss's work is like Oliveira's in that there remains "a ground with gravity. There are light sources and there is recession in space" (Johnson 19). I began to play with the expressive mark and apply thicker layers of paint—this transition is first evident in the work *Site Marker.* Compositionally it is inspired by the simplicity of Oliveira's figure painting—the centralized form—while the paint application is primarily influenced by Ben Frank Moss's work.

6.3 *Landscape Reflection No. 64,* Ben Frank Moss

6.4 *Cardinal North 34,* Ben Frank Moss

Compare Ben Frank Moss's work *Landscape Reflection No. 64* to *Site Marker.* At only 8 inches tall, Moss's work is a variation of smooth continuous strokes and hard edge, soft approachable blues and abrupt reds. Moss explains that his work "holds in tension two opposing forces that can even seem to be a contradiction: weight and weightlessness, sound and silence, absence and presence, darkness and light…. I cannot account for being possessed by or a witness to this 'In-Between.' Words cannot describe such a mystical state" (Moss 8). The use of abrupt color, abstracted marks in ink, and conflicting lines in relation to the consistent and grounding horizon make for this in-between. I began to play with how

aggressive brushwork and contrasting colors could create a better sense of movement and time. At the same time I wanted to use these bold marks to differentiate the landscape from the preciseness of the structures I rendered as a way of defining the two separate forces. The result is that the manmade structures appear resilient, but fleeting in the expressive landscape that surrounds them.

Chapter 7: On the Horizon

"Let us begin with a simple line,

Drawn as a child would draw it,

To indicate the horizon"

-James Galvin

A reoccurring theme in my landscape work is the distant and often hazy horizon. The horizon connotes a sense of the infinite and of possibility in the viewer. In that sense, it functions as tool which encourages the viewer to commence on a journey. Any landscape painter will tell you that there are three critical components to capture a landscape—a foreground, middle ground, and background. Playing with the horizon directs the viewer into the painting as the artist sees fit. If we look at works such as *There is a Line that you Follow* or *Collapse*, there is a soft, and distant horizon and the fence structures bring you back into that space. My work deals with the narrative through journey and how ruinous structures prompt these journeys for the viewer through their sense of mysticism. The distant, high horizon and ephemeral skies escort the viewer back into the work and encourage a journey. Conversely, a low horizon forces the information to the forefront of the painting. Poet and novelist James Galvin explains, "More real than the horizon, which is less than line, which is visible abstraction, a ration. The line ravishes the page with implications Of white earth, white sky!" (Galvin 1). What the horizon does for the viewer is prompt possibility. Its location on the page directs the viewer back into space and convinces them of the illusion of three-dimensional space through a two-dimensional plane.

7.1 *Collapse*

James Galvin begins his novel *Fencing the Sky* by quoting Ralph Waldo Emerson, noting, "life is a mixture of power and form and will not bear the excess of either" (Galvin 1). Galvin's writing is a constant allusion to this mixture, and like Galvin's writing, I play on this mixture in my work. The expansive horizon, the tempestuous clouds and harsh, unadulterated color evoke the sense of power of land, while man made structures are forced to interact within it. Consider the painting *Collapse*, in the foreground the viewer is faced with a fallen structure of some kind, and these forms lead the viewer's eye back to a distant horizon and fleeting sky. While the structure dominates much of the foreground, the desolate expanse of land evokes a sense of frailty. While there is structure and form, the horizon reminds the viewer of its impermanence.

Chapter 8: X0

"The difference between death and the Eternal Present is about as far as one Eyelash

from the next, not wished upon. Rainbows are not forms or stories, are they? They are not

doors ajar so much as far—flung situations without true beginnings

Or any ends"

-James Galvin

Just as the horizon invites a viewer to travel into a work, structures further help

the audience members to enter the picture plane. The fence has implications as a threshold,

just as much it functions as a tool that, through One or Two point perspective, can lead a

viewer back into space. Within my recent body of paintings and prints, X's and O's have

become an integral part of my iconography. The XO forms first appear in the monotyping

collaboration with Darryl Furtkamp. Darryl had been using XO figures prior to the exchange

and he pointed me in the direction of the literature which he appropriated the forms from. In

reading the work of James Galvin and Milan Kundera I discovered that they both referenced

the XO themes, and I began to incorporate the XO forms into my independent work because I

found that they functioned a metaphor of mythic structure. As Campbell explains, "Religions,

philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science

and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth"

(Campbell 3). Struck by that sentence and its implications of how myth shapes us, I began to

search for a way to translate the "ring of myth" into my work.

In the printmaking exchange, Darryl suggested I look at several authors, one of them

being Milan Kundera. Having enjoyed *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Furtkamp

encouraged me to read Kundera's work *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. Initially, the literary component was intended to influence the collaborative work—but the work resonated and it carried over into my personal studio practice. One theme that is addressed in the novel is the symbolism and metaphor of the ring. Kundera writes, "And the girl started laughing and stamping her feet harder so that she rose a few centimeters above the pavement, pulling the others up after her, and a moment later not one of them were touching the ground, yes they were soaring over Wenceslaus Square, their dancing ring resembled a great wreath flying off..." (Kundera 94). I was so struck by the image of a ring of people floating above the city singing, "love is at work it is tireless" and the immediacy of the answer that it provided for me—to utilize an actual ring and to suspend it in the landscape (Kundera 95). This allowed for the direct connotation to the ring of myth through ambiguous means.

Around the same time that I was looking at Kundera, I read Galvin's work "Dear Miss Emily" which dissects the perception of the common signature accompaniment of XOXO and what these letters signify. They are not so much hugs and kisses as they are "Far flung situations without true beginnings or any endings" (Galvin poets.org). In reading this I began to think about the XO and what they function as symbolically. The X can be a crossing, a barrier, a warning, even a destination. The O acts as a symbol of continuation, coming full circle, and a metaphor for life itself.

I started to play with how the XO symbols could function within my work as fragments of manmade objects in place of the actual ruin. The monotype *Infinite Divide* is the first piece in which these two symbols were incorporated into my work. On the left there is a thin hoop placed within the trees. To the right, X's that lead off into a distant, soft horizon. It

is in this piece that I also began to play with adding subtle pops of saturated color to create a greater sense of narrative. Rather than leave the hoops and X's earth tones, reds and blues are incorporated to make them more symbolic than functional— the color gives a sense of eerie whimsy.

The XOs are separated—the O dominating the left and the X the right. The intent behind their location was that by separating them, it would better reflect each force while, at the same time, encouraging the viewer to navigate into the distant and soft horizon. In doing so, the forms help prompt the viewer to embark on the journey that they are representative of. Over the course of the year, I began to think about how to change the significance of these forms through their placement within a composition. Working opposite sides of the picture plane allows for an expansive middle that is glorified. In contrast, the importance of the objects themselves is subdued.

I again went back to Nathan Oliveira and was struck this time by his figurative paintings rather than his monotypes. His figures are central and powerful—they spilt the verticality of the picture plane while also separating themselves from the background though contrasting color.

8.1 *Standing Man with Stick,* Nathan Oliveira

8.2 *Taut Between Worlds*

In the above painting, the figure contrasts from the background though occasional pops of color and otherwise, blends in with the surrounding greys. It was this realization that prompted the creation of the painting *Taut Between Worlds*. The painting fuses where I grew up with the imagery of the hoop. A large hoop dips gently into the water of a marsh, and rather than use an X to buttress the hoop, I instead implemented a stone wall and a low horizon. The wall functions in a way that is similar to the X, it is a barrier, but is strongly out-shadowed by the towering, even imposing hoop. The colors are warm reds and yellows, with much of the painting being monochromatic. This choice of color was through the study of Oliveira's work whose colors are often limited. In doing so, the viewer gets a sense of time on two levels—one through the use of warm colors that evoke a New England sunset (or sunrise). Second, it also gives it a stronger experiential component. The color is saturated and limited in a way that conjures the memory of a place rather than a direct representation of one. This use of color works with the precarious nature of the hoop, making the image all the more surreal.

The hoop thus functions as a symbol of continuation by traversing memory. Moreover, the placement between air and water implies crossing between worlds, allowing for the metaphor of the X to exist without the direct representation.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

I began my thesis quoting Gary Snyder who explains that a "place exists because if it's stories" (Snyder 44). My artistic practice has been an in-depth exploration of how place is defined through story. As explained by Christopher Woodward, "for the artist any answer that is imaginative is correct" (Woodward 31). Though he refers specifically to ruins, my work capitalizes on the interaction of ruins in the wild and how together those forces prompt a more intimate understanding of place for the viewer. In some works, the ruins exist in an expansive open environment that is indicative of the Inland Northwest, in others the structures are nestled into intimate surroundings that speak to rural New England. Frequently, the forms that exist within my paintings and monotypes are abstracted from the familiar, forcing the viewer to question their function. It is in abstracting these ruins and combining elements of the eastern and western landscape my paintings and monotypes hold a sense of uncanny familiarity. They are relatable, but not specific. The balance between man made and natural, specific and ambiguous, create a stage rather than a real environment. It is on this stage that the viewer is able to enact his or her own personal history plays and in doing so, the landscape is mythologized through the viewer's stories that allow for "these places to exist" (Snyder 44).

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