

# **Imagine That You Close Your Eyes**

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by

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**Authorization to Submit Thesis**

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### **Abstract**

In my creative research, I don't seek to define what my artwork will depict when I begin, but rather I seek to be present through it. How I define space is often gestural and suggestive of an expanse that exists outside of our everyday understanding. It is the thing of which there are no words to describe. Consider this suggestion: imagine that you close your eyes. This phrase distills the essence of creation by way of limiting it to the cognitive form. By asking the viewer to confront the contradictory act of attempting something that is seemingly impossible, I am leaving them suspended in a space that is full of potential. The same can be said for asking someone to hug the air. There is something to be considered in the vacant space created in the shell of their body and arms. It is up to the individual to imagine who or what could occupy that space. My work is an open invitation for the audience to consider the roles of form, memory and introspection and how we as creative beings can use them to reconcile that which we know to exist but are unable to define.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my Grandpa Jerry who \_\_\_\_\_

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### **I am Interested in the Ephemeral Experience of the Making.**

You see a cat. Its eyes are moving erratically as if reading sentences that have no directional logic. Cats can't read. It's a laser—the ones that kids used to get into trouble for bringing to school. They could have blinded someone. The cat pounces. It thinks it's caught the little light, but somehow, it's ended up on top of its paw. The cat pauses for a moment as if it's



Figure 1: Gestation phase of *Making Friends*

seeking to understand the strange phenomenon. The light moves and the cat continues the chase.

Like the cat, I find myself always seeking to capture the elusive light, but never with the intention of fully defining it. The ephemeral experience of the pursuit is something

that drives my work. Both in life and in my art practice, I often find myself in challenging situations that instigate numerous questions that aren't limited by one answer, but instead, tend to generate even more unknowns. These moments tend to generate an overwhelming feeling which will sometimes result in a decision to not venture into uncomfortable territories. It is important to note this because I believe this fear to be a mark of my generation and those that follow and so it appears as a natural residue in my creative process. It seems that everything we do as a society is to seek comfort, security and a definitive knowing<sup>1</sup>. Situations that often require risk and introspection seem daunting. We shy away from any opportunity to feel comfortable existing in a difficult space. Much of what I do in my art

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<sup>1</sup> One could say that it has been this way since the beginning when man discovered fire and has been accelerated forward by the industrial revolution., however, I would say that it's only as of late that technology has progressed to a point where more and more people have access to this comfort and have to work less to get it. I believe that some of this is due in part to the advent of the television and credit cards.



practice is an attempt to feel comfortable sitting in the space that exists before I arrive at a conclusion and asking that my audience do that with me.

Much of my work starts in uncertainty, not having a designated destination or outcome. I rely heavily on my intuitive capacity to find opportunity for creating work. Every decision made is prefaced with apprehension and thoughts of “I don’t know if this will work, but...”. I used to see these quick claims as a weakness, an indicator of my ineptitude as an artist, but I started I started to tune into my apprehension and shifting them into a force that propels making.



Figure 2: *a Friend*

This acceptance of possibility has become such a dominant presence that it leads me to seek out ways to create the feeling of this experience for my viewers. This is visible in the early gestations of my work *Making Friends*. This project is rooted in my enjoyment of working with clay as a medium, but also with my frustration of working with a medium that required more time, energy and failure than what I was willing to give. I wanted to be able to have an

intuitive experience with the material with little to no opportunity for disruption. With this in mind, I decided I would try to simplify the act of working with clay. I decided that the simplest form I could work with was a slab and I quickly found that I could create sort of amorphous forms that were at the same time aesthetically pleasing. The pleasure came through the process and the surprise of how this intuitive act would turn out. These objects felt like physical representations of this experience and embodied the relationship I have to the work, and though this is something that I personally was aware of, I felt there was a need to explore and express my relationship to the artwork further for the benefit of the viewer. I wanted to suspend the moment. The result was a “faux”cumentary, a fake documentary that related this idea and feeling.

The idea for my video *Making Friends* was partially put in motion by a documentary called *Ferrets: Pursuit of Excellence* a documentary film about people who breed, raise and show ferrets. I was intrigued by how these people built their lives around the ferrets and the emotional attachment they had to the animals. I found their stories endearing and relatable but sometimes sad and uncomfortable. I recognized that there was a residual power of influence to the documentary and the fact that it has been over ten years since I first watched the film and I still think about it to this day is a testament to its influence on my life and the work that I produce. It struck a chord with me that I have been seeking to untangle over the years.



Figure 3: the Creator

With *Ferrets: Pursuit of Excellence* and my own strange desire to nurture *Making Friends* in mind, I decided I would create my own performative story of obsession and care. I developed



Figure 4: video still from *Ferrets: Pursuit of Excellence*

a character called The Creator who is the caretaker and the one responsible for bringing the Friends to life. In constructing this narrative, I wasn't seeking to tell a clear, linear story, but rather I was seeking to recreate the feeling of that tension, that vibratory essence that holds our interest and prefaces the end result.

Through layered, interlocked and repeated segments of video, I continually activate viewers' attention in a space of speculation and anticipation, but never give the satisfaction of a story's end—or even a full sense of character or plot. In doing this, my aim was to bring an awareness to the experience of having purpose and how the perceptions and roles we play as active characters helps to facilitate a sense of purpose that gives life value and meaning. Likewise, I think this value and desire for a sense of purpose is something that drives creativity. The world is full of problems that requires creative energy to find solutions and I believe it is this need for creative solutions that fulfills a sense of purpose.

## I am interested in expectations of seemingly vacant<sup>2</sup> spaces.

When \_\_\_\_\_ move, they carry \_\_\_\_\_ energy from one place to another. This is called \_\_\_\_\_ or a(n) \_\_\_\_\_. A \_\_\_\_\_ is one example of a(n) \_\_\_\_\_, although it does not last very long. \_\_\_\_\_ are also involved in \_\_\_\_\_ all the \_\_\_\_\_ that you use, from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ and from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

Have you heard of the terms \_\_\_\_\_ energy and \_\_\_\_\_ energy? \_\_\_\_\_ means energy that is stored somehow for use in the future. A \_\_\_\_\_ at the top of a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ has \_\_\_\_\_ energy, because it has the \_\_\_\_\_ (or \_\_\_\_\_) to \_\_\_\_\_ down the \_\_\_\_\_ in the future. When it's \_\_\_\_\_ down the \_\_\_\_\_, its \_\_\_\_\_ energy is gradually converted into \_\_\_\_\_ energy (the energy something has because it's \_\_\_\_\_).

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are like \_\_\_\_\_ energy and \_\_\_\_\_ energy. When \_\_\_\_\_ gathers in one place, it has the \_\_\_\_\_ to do something in the future. \_\_\_\_\_ stored in a \_\_\_\_\_ is an example of \_\_\_\_\_ potential energy. You can use the energy in the \_\_\_\_\_ to power a \_\_\_\_\_, for example. When you \_\_\_\_\_ on a \_\_\_\_\_, the \_\_\_\_\_ inside begins to supply \_\_\_\_\_ energy to the \_\_\_\_\_, making it give off \_\_\_\_\_. All the time the \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_ on, energy is flowing from the \_\_\_\_\_ to the \_\_\_\_\_. Over time, the energy stored in the \_\_\_\_\_ is gradually turned into \_\_\_\_\_ (and \_\_\_\_\_) in the \_\_\_\_\_. <sup>3</sup> (Woodford)

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<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup> electrons, electrical, current electricity, electric current, lightning, electric current, Electric currents, powering, electrical appliances, washing machines, flashlights, telephones, MP3 players, Potential, kinetic, Potential energy, car, hill, potential, potential, ability, roll, hill, rolling hill, potential, kinetic energy, moving, Static electricity, current electricity, potential, kinetic, electricity, potential, Electricity, battery, electrical, battery, flashlight, switch, flashlight, battery, electrical, lamp, light, light, switched, battery, lamp, battery light, heat, lamp

What can be observed and said about space that is seen as empty or not occupied? In outer space it creates a vacuum. In large cities someone or something will likely try occupying it. On fill-in-the-blank tests, students will attempt to find the singular answer that their instructor is looking for. In news rooms and movie sets, they use green screen to hold space for the setting and context of the shot. My video piece *Back to You* relies on the existence of



Figure 5: video stills from *Back to You*

unoccupied space. The work exists in an uncanny setting that allows for viewers to observe the vacancy and invites them to fill it with their own context and/or imagery.

From an early age, I recall seeing the news anchor and feeling they were almost part of the family. For a time in the morning and a time in

the evening, they too occupied the living room space, providing opportunity for formation of thought, opinions and sometimes conversation. Their presence was a source of comfort. And like many people from my past, I can still recall the faces and some of the of their names. Tom, Dan, Shelly. The big fatherly figure who delivered the sports. The pretty blond lady with the shiny white teeth who talked about the weather. And while there is a familiarity there, there is still so much that I don't know about these people. There are holes and gaps. Vacant spaces. Spaces that I occupy with my own conjectures. Happily married. Kids. Dogs. White picket fence. Things that they themselves might be trying to project as possessing. These are people and platforms that are meant to give us the stories and fill in the gaps but they, being humans themselves, are filled with holes but they have somehow become people that we feel we know and trust. It seems that the more structure we create for ourselves, the more potential there is for vacant spaces to appear.



Figure 6: *Back to You* installation in Prichard Gallery

In *Back to You*, I rely on the inherent potential of a green screen to provide opportunity for conjecture. I want viewers to quickly question this space and the unfilled potential of filling it. This holds true for the video itself as well as for its viewing in the *Asterisks* exhibition as a physical backdrop installed in the gallery (as seen in Figure 6). The artist as actor in the video (previously seen as the creator in *Making Friends*), speaks minimally throughout the 20 minute video but often gestures to starting her news cast by attempting “Good Evening.” This repeats organically but also through looped and cut video building an agitation or potential connective energy between the viewer. This layered experience of trying to understand the reasoning for held time and abstract space is not rewarded by the artist through a concluded statement, yet the artist still suggests for the viewer to “stay” and watch/seek further. In addition, she gestures towards the blank page in front of her, which is reminiscent of the pile of crumpled up sheets set directly beside the pedestal on the floor. Through this 4-D & 3-D connection, the viewer is welcome to consider further about the potential of space or understanding. Space held and reiterated in *Back to You* allows the viewer to confront their expectations and explore memory as placeholder.



Figure 7: *Airlooms*

As mentioned previously, when we see vacant spaces, there is often an expectation for something to occupy it. This idea of expectation is something that I explore further in my work, *Airlooms*, which is made up of photographs with a pinwheel structure. As a thing that exists in the world, pinwheels are mostly decorative in their existence, occupying planters and flowerbeds, their movement is fueled by the wind, their shiny wings sometimes deterrents for thieving birds. Because of the speed of their rotation, I imagine that manufacturers of this novelty product would see it pointless to add imagery, but for my purposes, I wanted to utilize the photograph as relics of memories. We are all aware of the function of a pinwheel which I think is implied by its presence, so I chose to use it as a surface to further implicate the simultaneous movement yet static presence of memory.

What can be said by the placement of still imagery on a form that exists to move? This contradiction is about further engaging the viewer in considering their innate willingness to follow expectations without ever questioning them. When we see pinwheels, we tend to have an urge to blow on them. I witnessed multiple people during the opening reception attempting to use their own breath to make them spin, however, when I crafted them, I was less concerned with their function and was more concerned about the implications of their physical presence. The immobility of the pinwheels is counter to our expectations of them, so when someone is confronted with an experience that challenges their expectation, they are provided with an opportunity to consider the implications and to mentally proceed in their own choosing.



Figure 8: detail of *Airlooms*

### **I am Interested in Defining Energy**

The word energy seems to surface often when I am thinking about and producing work. When we hear the word in passing, we tend to think about the tangible energy that we see and consume every day. It comes in various forms from the food we ingest, to the petrol we provide for our cars, it's all around us. We even see it in the form of how we feel after a run or in the flight formations of geese as they make their way north and south each year. But what about the more subtle energy<sup>5</sup>, the kind that exists in our periphery but that still plays a highly involved role in our day to day lives? It can't be accessed through the flip of a switch or the turn of a key but must be actively observed and considered through our senses. This notion is often considered and characterized throughout my work. Much like the creatures who live in crevices on rocky beaches unaware of the moons influence on the rising and receding tides, my art practice isn't about being specifically driven, but rather about being openly aware to the nuanced forces that guide and influence our connection to energy.

I find so much variance in the way energy can be defined and I think that if I knew exactly how to define it, I would no longer feel a need to create artwork, let alone ask questions. If we are being realistic, it's nearly impossible to fully define something. Even definitions give way to more questions in that they are full of words that often need more defining. Sometimes in my research, as a way to understand how something is defined, I do definition experiments where I look up a definition of a word or phrase that I feel I don't fully understand and/or seems significant and then in that definition I seek out another word that I don't fully understand and I continue this process to see where it takes me. Let's try it with the word ENERGY.

---

<sup>5</sup> Ambience in the form of textures, sounds, lighting, tone, mood, atmosphere.



## en·er·gy

/ˈenərjē/ 

*noun*

1. the strength and vitality required for sustained physical or mental activity.  
"changes in the levels of vitamins can affect energy and well-being"  
*synonyms:* vitality, vigor, life, liveliness, animation, vivacity, spirit, spiritedness, verve, enthusiasm, zest, vibrancy, spark, sparkle, effervescence, ebullience, exuberance, buoyancy, sprightliness; [More](#)
2. power derived from the utilization of physical or chemical resources, especially to provide light and heat or to work machines.

Figure 9: energy definition

## vi·tal·i·ty

/vīˈtælədē/ 

*noun*

- the state of being strong and active; energy.  
"changes that will give renewed vitality to our democracy"  
*synonyms:* liveliness, life, energy, spirit, vivacity, exuberance, buoyancy, bounce, elan, verve, vim, pep, brio, zest, sparkle, dynamism, passion, fire, vigor, drive, punch; get-up-and-go  
"the bright weather has revived my vitality"
- the power giving continuance of life, present in all living things.  
"the vitality of seeds"

Figure 10: vitality definition

## thing

/ˈTHɪŋ/ 

*noun*

1. an object that one need not, cannot, or does not wish to give a specific name to.  
"look at that metal rail thing over there"  
*synonyms:* object, article, item, artifact, commodity; [More](#)
2. an inanimate material object as distinct from a living sentient being.  
"I'm not a thing, not a work of art to be cherished"

Figure 11: thing definition

When I begin to see words occur more than once, I like to search for them.

# ob·ject

*noun*

/ˈɒbjekt/ 

1. a material thing that can be seen and touched.  
"he was dragging a large object"  
*synonyms:* thing, article, item, device, gadget, entity; [More](#)
2. a person or thing to which a specified action or feeling is directed.  
"disease became the **object** of investigation"  
*synonyms:* target, butt, focus, recipient, victim  
"he spent five years as the object of a frenzied manhunt"

Figure 12: object definition

Here we see the word “thing” appearing again, twice, so let’s back track to that definition and choose another word.

# be·ing

/ˈbiːɪŋ/ 


1. present participle of *be*.

*noun*

1. existence.  
"the railroad **brought** many towns **into being**"  
*synonyms:* existence, living, life, reality, actuality  
"she is warmed by his very being"
2. the nature or essence of a person.  
"sometimes one aspect of our being has been developed at the expense of the others"  
*synonyms:* soul, spirit, nature, essence, inner being, inner self, psyche; [More](#)

Figure 13: being definition

# es·sence

/ˈesəns/ 

*noun*

the intrinsic nature or indispensable quality of something, especially something abstract, that determines its character.


"conflict is the essence of drama"

*synonyms:* quintessence, soul, spirit, nature; [More](#)

- **PHILOSOPHY**  
a property or group of properties of something without which it would not exist or be what it is.  
plural noun: essences
- an extract or concentrate obtained from a particular plant or other matter and used for flavoring or scent.  
*synonyms:* extract, concentrate, distillate, elixir, decoction, juice, tincture; [More](#)

Figure 14: essence definition

# qual·i·ty

/ˈkwælədē/ 

*noun*

1. the standard of something as measured against other things of a similar kind; the degree of excellence of something.  
"an improvement in product quality"  
*synonyms:* standard, grade, class, caliber, condition, character, nature, form, rank, value, level;  
More
2. a distinctive attribute or characteristic possessed by someone or something.  
"he shows strong leadership qualities"  
*synonyms:* feature, trait, attribute, characteristic, point, aspect, facet, side, property  
"her good qualities"

Figure 15: quality definition

# char·ac·ter·is·tic

/ˌker(ə)ktəˈrɪstɪk/ 

*adjective*

1. typical of a particular person, place, or thing.  
"large farms are characteristic of this area"  
*synonyms:* typical, usual, normal, predictable, habitual; More

*noun*

1. a feature or quality belonging typically to a person, place, or thing and serving to identify it.  
"inherited characteristics such as blood groups"  
*synonyms:* attribute, feature, quality, essential quality, property, trait, aspect, element, facet;  
More
2. **MATHEMATICS**  
the whole number or integral part of a logarithm, which gives the order of magnitude of the original number.

Figure 16: characteristic definition

Despite my attempts to navigate these definitions I've come to a poignant observation: I don't seek to define my work, but rather I seek to experience through it. Having realized that any attempt to fully understand something can often be robbing the moment of a magic that can only be experienced through intuition. This word search experiment is an example of that. I am choosing to actively experience a single part of the whole through the continual search of definitions. The words are conduits for further inquiry and discovery. Often times when I do this experiment, certain words will naturally start to resurface. So, instead of directly defining

what I mean when I say energy, I will give an example of it so that we might be on the same page when viewing and considering my work.

Subtle energy isn't that far removed from the tangible energy we consume every day, in fact, I find it useful to look at the way more tangible forms of energy function to better understand the subtler side. Let's consider life (biological) energy, which much (if not all) is powered by light and more specifically the sun. I imagine there are creatures in the deepest parts of the ocean that would beg to differ, but it isn't too far of a stretch to conceive of the notion that particles and debris that were once touched and energized by the sun have made their way down to the depths where those creatures reside, thus providing them the nutrients they need to sustain themselves. Not to mention that beneath the surface of our planet there are great amounts of intensely hot magma (a glowing hot liquid rock) that provides thermal energy (heat) that escapes from beneath the surface into the open air and into the depths of the ocean, providing a source of energy for organisms to grow that then become a source of energy for other organisms and so on. Again, we are dealing in very broad and vague terms, but this is necessary in light of what I am attempting to communicate in my work.<sup>6</sup> As humans, we aren't so far removed from the creatures that live in the dark depths of the ocean in that we too are touched by the seemingly inanimate; the stuff that we are incapable of seeing, but we experience through its residue every day.

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<sup>6</sup> The vast and endless potential nature of energy and how it gives purpose and meaning to every "thing" in all of their forms.

### **I am interested in peripheral visual noise.**

The humming of the fridge or the gradation of snow melting on a dampened lawn—these are some of the unseen energies that we are in interaction with every day. Whether we know it or not, these active states around us influence our day to day lives. Through these observations I find it grounding to recognize that everything that we can conceive of has an energy that gives it life and through this recognition, I can see that everything is connected. We are all objects that are coexisting, and our presence is in constant interaction with others. This is important to recognize because whether contained in a physical object or a fleeting thought, connective energy exists that motivates us to be curious, to ask questions and to take action towards engaging with potential discoveries. We can conceive of energies' precarious existence, but the way that we perceive the energy is often hard to describe since it is forever in a state of flux. It's like dark matter. We feel that we know this invisible thing to exist through the discrepancies that occur in our observations of other matter, like the rate at which stars are moving.

“Now when astronomers look carefully at a galaxy, they can measure how fast the stars within it are moving. The motions of the stars are the result of the gravitational forces from all the other matter in the galaxy. But here is the key problem: When astronomers add up all the matter in all the stars and gas and dust visible with all different kinds of telescopes, it doesn't total nearly enough to explain the motions they observe. The stars are moving around much faster than they should be! In other words, all the matter we can see is not enough to produce the gravity that is pulling things around. This problem shows up over and over again almost wherever we look in the universe. Not only do stars in galaxies move around faster than expected, but galaxies within groups of galaxies do too. In all cases, there must be something else there, something we can't see, something dark.

This mismatch between what we see and what we know must be there may seem very mysterious, but it is not hard to imagine. You know that people can't float in mid-air, so if you saw what looked like a man doing just that, you would know right away that there must be wires holding him up, even if you couldn't see them.” (NASA)

By bouncing things off of other things and seeing how they come back to us we can start to find another dimensional truth. As you can see, the folks at NASA are dealing with the unseeable, but the way that they observe it is through its influence on other forms of matter. This

unseen force is an influential part of the existence and purpose of everything and this is an idea that I explore in my work *A Noiseless Patient Spider*<sup>7</sup>.



Figure 17: video stills from *A Noiseless Patient Spider*

This past winter ended in a fury of snow. The landscape was transformed by a thick, white blanket that resulted in new shapes and forms. In the winter of 2019, I walked past a hole in the snow that was formed by the underground warmth of a sewer grate. I walked by several times, sometimes stopping to admire the way the snow fell in front of the organically crafted dark space. The hole and how it interacted with the falling snow had an energy to it that kept my attention and so one day I decided I needed to collect it. Upon looking at it isolated in video format, the image and experience started to take on a new life. I somehow started to relate to the new creation. For me, this combination of imagery was a distillation of a feeling that accompanies the overwhelming thoughts of the infinite.

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<sup>7</sup> Title taken from a Walt Whitman poem that compares the experience of a spider to that of his soul.

**I am sincerely interested in the**

**BULLSHIT on top of**

**BULLSHIT on top of**

**BULLSHIT<sup>8</sup>**

I say this in the most endearing way possible<sup>9</sup>. There is a ton of it in the world. Mountains. We have social media platforms that have assisted in the perpetuation and structural integrity of these phony massive mounds. What is their value and what role does it play in our day to day lives? Perhaps it is simply a surface from which to bounce off and make determinations about the value of other things. Or perhaps like other forms of shit, it's simply a byproduct, but useful all the same in that it can be used as fertilizer, providing nutrients to various plants and organisms. I am curious though about the more abstract bullshit. What's the relevance it holds in the day to day lives. Does it too have the potential to provide nutrients to us in ways that we might not fully comprehend? Think of the piles of junk mail that accumulate every month. I want to believe that it is something more than a taker up of space and a waster up of valuable resources. What does its presence represent? These materials go back to "old fashioned" ways of doing things, before we had Facebook, LinkedIn, email, Twitter, etc. back to when people would read information printed on paper. I feel a need to reconcile the reality of its existence.

One morning while enjoying breakfast, I made a discovery in a pamphlet I received in the mail from a local realty office. I had (and still have) no intention of purchasing a home in the area, but either because of curiosity stemming from my childhood interest in these pamphlets of available homes, or my cynical thoughts about how and why such a thing would come into my possession, I started to flip through it and discovered the brief descriptions of the realtors. I was struck by the short, simple and reassuring quality they had, how they crafted their words to show that the person from who you are seeking realty services is a down to earth, decent human being who understands your needs. I felt as if I was reading some sort of domesticated

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<sup>8</sup> Continue reading before judging my use of the word.

<sup>9</sup> Truly.

Haiku. Initially, I was struck by the realtors very short autobiographies and how they were meant to be a bridge between the realtor and consumers, something to fill the space between, to make it a verifiable human interaction. I then started to read the information about the properties that were being sold. They left me with an uncanny feeling, almost of nostalgia. *Latah Realty* seeks to explore this format of communication by appropriating information from the mailer and reconfiguring it into a new form. I wanted to show that there is something more to the distribution of this shiny and modestly colored handouts than just junk mail, that it could be recycled and turned into something new that could serve as commentary on the values of home buyers in rural north Idaho... or it could become what it always was, another pile of bullshit.



Being a native  
Of the Palouse and  
Latah County  
Carol understands  
The attraction to

Our area and is  
Committed to providing  
You professional  
Service for your real  
Estate needs with  
Confidence and efficiency.

Figure 18: *Latah Realty*





Figure 19: video stills from *Imagine That You Close Your Eyes*

Much in the way that *Latah Realty* seeks complexity in the simple, *Imagine That You Close Your Eyes* functions as a visual and verbal offering that has the potential to actively hold viewers in a much vaster contemplative space.

This work also has the ability to take on many forms, which is suggestive of the phrases capacity to prompt differing states of thought. So far, I have explored it in the form of hand drawn and photocopied material (Figure 20) as well as video (Figure 19). Each version attempts to physically engage the viewer through the dissipation of the title phrase. In doing this, I am assisting in the process of contemplating what it means to close our eyes. It's asking that we consider our shared experience of discovery by sitting in a space that exists before engaging in the activity.

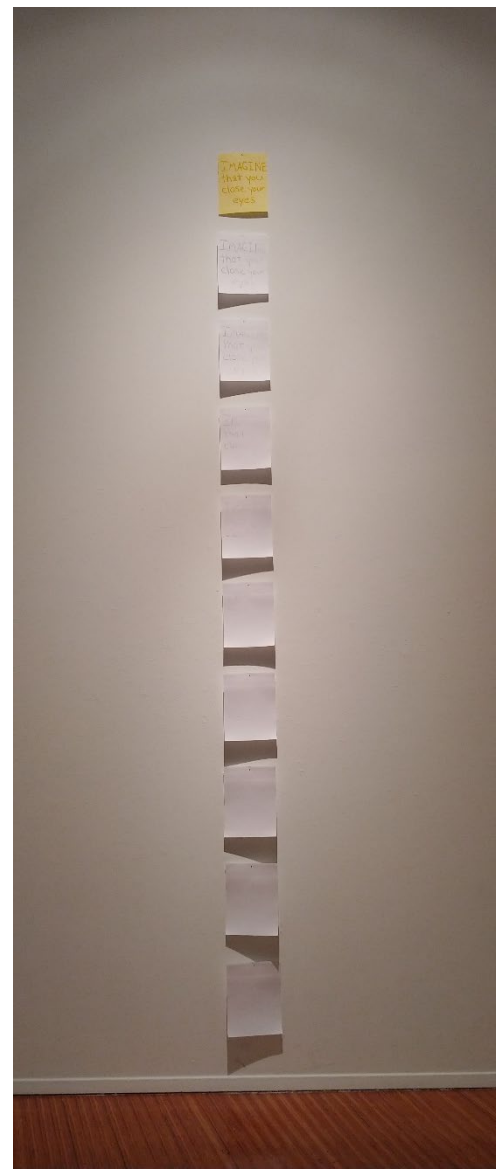


Figure 20: *ITCYE*

**I am interested in the opposite of definition. (or defining borders/boundaries)**

What can be viewed through a vague lens and to what end? Like the timid dog who must first sniff your person before you have permission to show it affection, what must we cautiously approach before we are given the ability to seek further connection? My mechanical pencil drawings explore this. From the outset, my goal in creating this now ongoing series of value field drawings was to challenge myself to commit to a seemingly mundane task in an attempt to trick into existence the notion of nothingness, to attempt to reveal it by making it more visually tangible through layered mark-making. This explorative pursuit isn't about getting to the bottom of something or to creating a fully realized depiction of something, but rather to simply experience the act of doing. With this work, the act of pursuit gives me purpose and



Figure 21: *Window Thing*

when we see the things that were seemingly fruitless come back into play, it's usually a sign that we are on the right track.

I see the generative and reoccurring nature of past experiences all the time in my own work. For example, the essence of black and white photographs I've taken of grass, trees and leaves is here being mimicked in the mechanical pencil drawings. My original attempts with these drawings have no conscious attachment to the photographs.

The drawings started out small, essentially as little doodles in my notebook and later

developed into varied shapes and sizes. Eventually the scale became great and resulted in a large gray field as seen in *On Being Whole and Incomplete* and *Window Thing*. Due to the scale and material nature of some of the work, as the artist, when I look at these, I feel a sense of contemplation. Some of the drawings ended up paired with domestic items like side tables and valences, pointing to this energetic thingness that exists in these settings. When I think



Figure 22: *Collaborative Drawing*

back on my grandparents' home, I think fondly on some of their possessions, such as the spoons my grandfather collected from his travels, or the ceramic form of a tree with all the little separate woodland creatures that were housed within the tree my grandmother had on the side table in their living room. After my grandfather passed away, my aunt gifted me the spoons my grandfather had collected. There were no words that I could communicate to express how I felt when holding them again. The moment was an unspeakable transference of energy, of thingness and of feeling. The memory of these objects sits with me today. When I think back

on them, I get sentimental. With these drawings and pairings, I am attempting to distill something similar to the feeling of that thingness that lays beneath the surface of words like unspeakable, energy and sentimental.

By presenting these seemingly ambiguous drawing alongside seemingly lived with domestic objects, I began to understand for myself what I was seeking to suggest about the potentials of perceived space, but I wasn't sure about how it might be understood by others. As mentioned previously, our human connections are important, and I desired to not lose them with this work. Connections validate and verify our presence in the world and helps us to determine what is and isn't real. They keep us grounded. With this in mind, I wanted to invite others into

the complicated process of feeling connected to something not fully know yet in view.

To build from this drawing practice and explore this possibility of connection, I decided to ask people to do a sort of collaboration with me. The initial project took place in the hallway of the graduate art studios during our open house in Spring 2018. On the wall was a large, blank piece of paper and beside it was a smaller paper with a prompt. The prompt requested that they draw, write, create anything on the large piece of paper using the mechanical pencils provided. They could create anything they wanted as well as react to what others before them created. The results were varied in regard to who interacted and how they chose to interact. There was a little a girl who drew a princess dancing with her servant and just above that someone drew what I have deemed the “obligatory penis drawings” that will always inevitably show up when the opportunity presents itself. I then went over the top of everyone else’s drawings with my attempt at creating nothingness.

Through this layered process I made some discoveries. As I was drawing nothing, things that were drawn lightly began to disappear and truly become nothing. Technically they are still there (as nothing always is), however, my drawing over the top of them, despite my attempts to be delicate, rendered them unperceivable. Alternatively, things that were drawn with a heavier hand tended to stand out more and become darker as I drew. There is a significance to these observations in that in my attempt to create nothing, I was in fact able to render somethings into a form of nothingness and the things that remained became something more. They became a part of an energetic web. They became integrated with the nothingness and, in effect, started to point to the thingness that is so often talked about in the realm of the indescribable.

Although I can never truly know thingness, I can poke and prod at it in an attempt to. I am also not really certain if I want to truly know it. Perhaps its main function is to simply exist so that we will continue to ask questions because asking questions always leaves us open to the potential for growth and continuation. This is a key aspect to my practice. Everything I create has the potential to flow into, evolve, influence and/or intersect with the next thing. The work that I create becomes a kinetic power of sorts that will always have the potential to show up and give energy to new work.

**I am interested in the space we define for ourselves.**

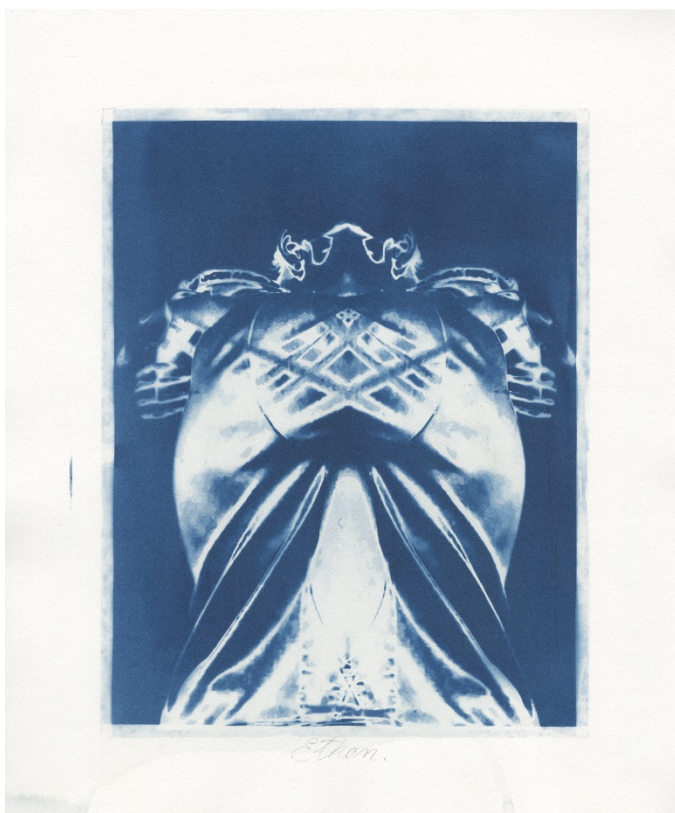


Figure 23: *Ethan, SELF LOVE*

Amongst all of this vacant space and ambient noise we find ourselves wrestling with difficult existential questions. Where is our place amongst the undefinable? Without definition, how do we find grounding? This is different for everyone, but something that shows up often in my own experience is creating space and finding balance through loving ourselves and loving our process. The process of obtaining Self Love is a reoccurring theme in my life in that I have had many experiences both in and outside of my art practice that has challenged me to find strength, and

ultimately, love in who I am and how I choose to be, and so it makes sense that this theme would come out in my work. As most of what I create, the project didn't start with the idea of self-love, but rather it evolved into it. At the time, video was a new media that I was trying out and I was exploring ways of compositing video and imagery and with anything that is new, I wanted to simplify the exploration, so I limited it to myself as the subject. Then the thought came to mind: what if I composited images of myself giving an air hug so as to make it look like I am hugging myself? The results were really pleasing. My awkwardness of performing in front of a camera was redirected into an awkwardness associated with interacting and being present with myself.

A year or so later, I started another body of work titled, *SELF LOVE*, to film others giving air hugs and with further video editing, I started to notice this beautiful symmetry happening and I couldn't help but feel that it was somehow an extension of the person performing the act and so I further distilled it through vectorization and eventually the printing of cyanotypes. I feel that this process was a sort of metaphor for the journey we take in learning to love ourselves.

### I am Interested in the Conceptual Nature of Energy

The rules of energy are universal. We can look at the science of energy to better understand how the conceptual nature of energy relates to the conceptual nature of art. It isn't too far of a stretch to imagine that art is a container for energy. For example, for us to understand, use and see electricity (perhaps with the exception of lightning), we need a few things:

1. Something to create it, like dams, wind farms, solar panels.
2. Something to contain it, like batteries and electrical boxes.
3. Something to transport the energy such as power chords and power lines.
4. Something to make use of the energy like electronics and appliances.

This is a relatively same set of rules for viewing and understanding art:

1. Something to create it (typically the artist(s))
2. Something to contain it usually in the form of materials and space
3. Something to transport and translate it (the viewer).
4. Something to make use of the work such as community/society.

Both electricity and art are manifestations of energy being utilized, with the difference being what they give power to. Electricity provides power to our electronics, appliances, vehicles, etc and art provides power to ideas, thought, community etc.



Figure 24: *Organic Matters #1*

With this in mind, my work is concerned with visualizing the existence of energy through everyday lenses and how in doing so, shows that there are commonalities that connect everything together. In my work, *Organic Matters*, I seek to make this connection by replacing the silhouette of friends and family with the black and white image

of grass. These images on their own have a visual presence to them and by using them as placeholders for the people, I am asking the viewer to not only take in the scene, but to further consider the relationships and connections occurring between the people in the photograph, to

see that there is something happening beyond their actions. Through the compositing of these photographs, I come closer to a personal sense of truth, purpose and meaning in how it relates to outside connections. By relating everyday things like electricity or grass to the conception of art, I can show that things aren't so far removed as we think they are, or rather, things are far more connected than we realize.

Alternatively, when considering this work, we can think about our relationship to grass. Ostensibly, we end up beneath it, but it's not the only place where "we" can be found. We can also be found in photographs and memories, among many other places. Walt Whitman understood this and expressed it in his poem *Song of Myself*.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,  
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,  
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,  
And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,  
Missing me one place search another,  
I stop somewhere waiting for you. (Whitman)

Like things and energy, he is simultaneously within and out of reach.

**I am not interested in conclusions: GENERATIVE STASIS**

Living in the moment is contradictory to our perception of time in that everything is in a constant state of moving forward, so I think it's natural that we would find discomfort in this experience, especially when it's new. It's like getting on a city bus and before you can find a seat, the driver presses on the gas and you find yourself fighting to stand and walk, battling the weight of your body and the grocery bags you have on each arm and having to grip tightly to whatever is near (remember to use hand sanitizer later) and hope that you don't fall into someone's lap (or maybe you do and it's your future spouse (your eyes lock and you feel a good sort of tension and knowing) and you become grateful for the bus driver's abrupt take off and when you really think about it, they are only doing their job and part of that is not falling behind schedule). And anyways, the more you take the bus, the better your reflexes become and before you know it, you're a pro and you purposefully take your time getting to your seat because you take pride in your new-found ability to navigate this physical manifestation of movement, space and time.



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