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Foreword

We are here, addressing the obvious. Anyone reading this, present and future, will know precisely of the life-altering global tribulation of our current moment. Those words are no longer needed. The Undergraduate Visual Arts Majors of this year, the year 2020, humbly offer instead, a debriefing.

When calamity enveloped all, it became necessary to seek solace in the small. New ground was found in the persistence of the individual, trudging forward, pressing, generating. Disruption precipitated a fervor, a need to *do* something—after all, newfound time became the only dependable thing in the foreseeable future. Between anxiety and uncertainty, we found a crucial liminal space where spontaneous creative production was still possible. This catalogue, paired with the online exhibition, is the evidence of the existence of that crucial liminal space, and of those slippery moments where we reminded one another: even while apart, we were in no way alone.

We, alongside the rest of humanity, faced the effects of a massive reconfiguration. We re-found our creative community, turning towards alternative expressions of physicality in art, alternative ways to consider our relationship to the world at large, alternative modes of being. Across a radically diverse range of individual backgrounds and practices, our longing, efforts, and digitized collaborations solidified our dedication to our entanglement.

Our gathering is a space of contradictions, just like our time. We sought refuge in technology more than ever, striving for the realization of our end-of-times fantasies. Simultaneously, we hastened the rate at which we turned inwards, becoming vacuums of reevaluation, reflexivity, reckoning. The natural emerged as a common thread, our shared provocation. In both our daily and artistic lives, we were confronted with the destabilization of all that we deem nature/natural/normal. The urgency of this moment revealed that the outdated boundaries between us and nature (or us and everything else) were a site of inescapable complexity. Tossing and turning within this nebulous web, we grounded ourselves in our personal and ecological fates—political ecologies within our societies, biological ecologies within nature. Old distinctions synthesized as we waded through the mud for solutions. After all, what is the new normal, if not change?

Time paused. We’ve looked at ourselves in the mirror, scrutinized the veins in our hands, counted the splintered rings of fallen trees, gazed upon the faces and ghosts of our families, counted the fleeting pixels on our screens—hell, we stared deep into the old familiar void. Some honed in on the tenderness, intimacy, and vulnerability of the tangible, the minuscule, the mundane. Others unabashedly unleashed torrents of images into the aggressively pulsing WorldWideWeb. Some of us raved at the thought of an exponentially approaching apocalypse, while others retreated, burying ourselves in the temporary ash of that phoenix called Hope. Mostly we spent our days reconciling the shifting permutations of both options.

What if all of this wasn’t a temporary obstacle to hurdle, but an urgent call to push responsibly towards a long-term shift—a more considerate amalgam of community, physicality, virtuality, and nature. From now on, we would have access to ever-expanding forms of reproductive and digital consumption, while being tasked with regenerating our dematerializing physical communities. And so, through words and images, we—apart-but-together—have laid bare our ways of artistic being, our methods for existence, our musings, our accomplishments, our hopes, our dreams, our fears—from before now, during now, and with commitment towards the post-now (something we once called the future).

— Amanda Ba
Alyssa Gengos works in drawing, printmaking, textiles, and sculpture. She wanders through questions of femininity and tradition; memory, intimacy, and fixation drive her practice. Raised in the same Los Angeles suburbs used as the backdrop for Hollywood’s Golden Age westerns, Gengos feels at home in the cinematic realm. Inspired by the craft skills her parents instilled in her, including sewing and woodworking, she attempts to reimagine the creation and propagation of myths in a contemporary context.

Gengos performs music under the moniker Kythira; her music and art are intertwined, using the same visual and verbal languages. Both are rooted in diaristic practice, which she has continually engaged with from a young age.
An introduction to the hybrid woman:

She is aware of the precariousness of her own identity. This gives her permission to occupy, more comfortably and more productively, the liminal space that is what Ien Ang would call in-between-ness—for Ang, hybridity is a welcome respite from the boundaries that children of the diaspora are often confined within. The self-generated idealization of her far-away “foreign” childhood hometown is often glaring, and the hybrid woman finds herself at once escaping to and challenging her possibly-confabulated halcyon memories, the psychic remembrances of an apparent “motherland”. (One gazes at her homelands with weary lucidity and any illusory pane shatters.) Straddling boundaries and cultures and selves, she grinds violently, pleasurably, painfully to produce the necessary amount of friction….

She is hybrid in another sense, too—she is woman and animal—to her their roles are one and the same. It does not matter if the animals in her images truly exist or not, just as it does not matter if she herself—or anyone else in the images—truly exists or not. Sometimes things are more coherent when they are hallucinatory. But in these dreams/hallucinations, she cannot survive without surrendering her own human animacy, and the animal aptly assumes the surrogate position. They express for her, when her own behaviors of feminine stoicism betray her, or do not suffice. The fantastical outward projection of the zodiac beast, or the intimately internalized household pet, morph into her deepest shame and joys, and vice versa.

In the end, the image the hybrid woman produces is, essentially, a synecdoche for the world she exists within. The forms that catalyze each image originate from the real (hybrid) world and are further heterogenized with her impulse towards the subconscious, with her desire to lessen the distinction between her own actions and certain so-called “animalistic” tendencies—and so, the image becomes the world she did not yet realize she (I) was living in.
I create sanctuaries for contemplation. Through restoring and amplifying awareness of the richness within our physical world, I hope to convey a sense of awe through a distinctly contemporary lens.

My most recent painting harmonizes panels relating to my skin and qualities of the sky and water into a single frame. It consists of eighteen 8” x 10” panels resting on three shallow wooden shelves against a neutral toned, wool covered support. Nine panels refer to parts of my skin ranging from my inner thigh, to areola, to belly button wrinkle. Nine more panels refer to the blue we see when H2O refracts light under states of being a solid, liquid, and gas in the form of ice, deep waters, and clouds. Together, the panels form a self-portrait that highlights the physically evident diversity of the skin’s exterior and the metaphorically subtle and fluid qualities of one’s interior.

This piece draws from a larger, ongoing project called Skin Series. Using just ink, rollers, a metal plate, a printmaking press, and some blankets, I create works that are neither colors nor images, but “resonances” that feel like very particular parts of my skin. The areas I choose tend to be surprising; not exactly “skin-toned”, yet clearly depicting what they describe. The process for arriving at each print is sometimes very intentional, at times totally unexpected, and often figured out along the way.

I enjoy the process of making Skin Series because the way each panel is conceived metaphorically speak to the way we create ourselves. While we go about our daily lives in accordance to a vague intention, or a clear one, there are unexpected events along the way that end up influencing, or even defining, the moments that make up our lives and the parts we remember.

I arrive here with the attempt to just describe, to make ever more evident the richness of the everyday and the universal.
With the dawn of a new century, the tendrils of technology crept into our homes and pockets and twisted themselves around our ankles, beginning a new age of contest against nature. As complex webs of interdependence were simultaneously created and destroyed, the order was lost. The eye that saw this, saw it through a crystal screen, cracking at the edges. Before it lay two worlds—the physical and the digital—and the eye wondered if both could prevail.

My work as an artist is from the perspective of this eye. It looks through windows into digital places that are both strange and familiar, beautiful and perverted. Worlds that are indelibly marked by fantasy yet tethered to the physical reality we inhabit. Harnessing the capabilities of technology, this dichotomy is brought to life in surreal, dream-like videos, collages, and animations. Using these mediums I strive to discover this mythological universe of different worlds and characters: a future post-apocalypse, where nature and technology have hybridized.

The worlds are revealed slowly through a process of consumption and destruction. When a piece is finalized, it will be a mystery to both the viewer and myself how many steps it took for these worlds to manifest. It will have been photographed, collaged, printed, cut out, glued together, and re-photographed so many times that even I lose track. I create a video of a character that was wandering around in my dreamscape. I screenshot that video, and overlay, saturate, and mirror the stills until a new texture emerges. That texture becomes the surface of a rock, on which the second-generation of the original character perches, as she receives a message on her Nokia phone from a distant star. On it goes—each temporal vision re-processes itself into the next iteration.

Through this deeply instinctive process, I am trying to crack my subconscious, a link in the complex web of the collective unconscious. On this journey, I am motivated by my love of the natural world, and the deep urgency I feel for its survival. I spent most of my childhood by the ocean in Australia, where the most ancient coral reef in the world bleaches year after year, each time worse. Later I went on to work as an ocean conservation activist, and had the opportunity to travel to the Maldives to do research. As I was scuba diving on one of the most isolated coral reefs in the world, I felt inexplicable amounts of pain and hope. Pain, because here too the reef was bleaching, and more and more plastic washed up on the beaches every day. But hope, because as I was using technology to breathe underwater, studying some of the oldest organisms on earth, I felt that this technology was not apart from nature but a derivative of it. I felt hope for a future where humanity, nature, and technology exist in symbiosis.

With this knowledge, I look to the future and into myself. I am the eye that explores a world that existed before it and will exist without it. It is both real physical matter, and ethereal fantasy. When people join me on this journey, I ask them if they want this world to exist.
Young lady, if you cannot weep,
Fill your diary to the very brim with pipe dreams, with foolery, with woes and chimeras. Make a new one: paste over a two hundred-year-old book, spending a moment with each weathered page. Stick a thorn in its side, hold its trembling hand, bow your head. Now fill this one, too.

My dear, if you still cannot,
Don your best suit like the finest of dandies and take yourself to dinner. Ride the train downtown, have a pastry and make a self-portrait in the old booth on Houston Street. Tomorrow, dress your friends to the nines and play pretend: it’s the late 19th century and they must be documented. Photograph them on black backdrop, kiss them each on the cheek.

If, despite your efforts, still sapped of tears,
Forsake your phone: without blinking, toss it out the window. Take a portrait of your grandmother from her good side, now her bad, and sit down with her to lunch. Have one too many glasses of champagne (you’ll be forgiven) and as the bubbles rise to your head, allow yourself to laugh. Take a nap, trapeze on home.

When, at last, you meet weeping head-on,
Write a sorry little poem on your typewriter — yelp, write another, and another still. Hold a puppet show for no audience, deface an old etching, look yourself in the sorrow-eye. Light a menorah, balance the lit candelabra on your head, write a letter and send it overseas. Sleep with a dagger under your pillow. Take one thousand photographs, hang the prints on all the walls. Spin until dizzy, spin until spent. Forge on.
I see light and dark
floating in space
where is the mystery
the bodily touch
of luminous
objects
and foreign
I touch
and only
I dream
the shape of shadows
and disappearing.
blue
vulnerable
in a dense
underwater
I feel
hopeful
a smooth
hug
the shell.
falling
to the core
where
overflowing my dreams

I dream
elemental
unmoving
resting
with the ends of my soft bristles
silence.
the shape of colors
blending
isolated
mercurial
reflection
hope
light
warm
to soften
slow
movements
the beginning

I touch

DAHEE KWON
After a particularly bad asthma exacerbation in January and February of 2020, I decided to let the disease that causes me so much stress bleed into my work. I did not know that soon after, we would begin social distancing, school would close, New York City would lock down, etc. I did not know we would be going through a pandemic because of a respiratory illness. So much of art, for myself and for plenty of artists I am friendly with, is wondering how my work fits into the grand scheme of things. It has been really difficult since starting this project to go back and engage this same theme amidst the pandemic. All the fears I personally used to have of getting sick were no longer just background fears. Everyone was afraid. It’s all anyone was talking about. It’s all we do now, is prepare to hopefully not get sick. I could not work with the subject matter of illness any longer if I was going to get any real work done. I am thankful for this earlier work. So much of my life has been focused on simply breathing and whether or not my airways were clear. This work is more overtly personal than some other projects I’ve chosen. For now this project is over but not finished.
DIANE KIM

We are the narrators of our own lives. We decide the parameters for how much we experience, who we interact with, and the knowledge we consume.

But what happens when you are asked to narrate a scene that leaves out key information, and one that you are entirely unfamiliar with? Through panels and borders, I set distinct scenes on an unreliable timeline, and place the responsibility of an explanation outside of my verdict as the artist. My art invites the viewer to piece together an intelligible plot which makes the most sense to them through a journey of personal justification. I force the viewer to be anyone but themselves - a detective, a cartographer, a director perhaps. Due to assorted experiences, the results of what people conclude the story is often varies. Triptychs are often used to present a fairytale-like beginning, middle, and end of a story. By denying this clear rhythm, I am challenging how stories are constructed.
I started dreaming of shapeshifting long before I dreamt of being an artist. As a child, I would spend hours of my day slipping in and out of forms in my mind, replacing my body with the more interesting ones I saw around me. I still do this often. I can feel myself metamorphose, my old figure melting, like the caterpillar that must become goo before it becomes a butterfly. There is something inherently vulnerable about letting go; my own temporary goo feels exposed and so I imagine myself in a cocoon, or an egg, or some third space that is safe and dark and warm. And then I am changing again and here is a new shape just for me. I am the fructification of a honey fungus and I can feel my mycelium reaching miles among a network of buried roots. I am the detritus at the bottom of some murky pond, the remnants of other past bodies heavy in still water. Sometimes my new hosts are things unknown to me, new primordial forms that I can’t name, but they can often feel less strange than the one I try to leave behind.

It was when I started working in ceramics that I truly became a shapeshifter. The clay body is open, ready for transformation into infinite forms with the help of my willing hands. Energy moves between us, filling the spaces between the clay molecules with as much magic as I can find inside myself. I work in an intuitive and tactile way, not thinking too much and feeling a lot. I think of my hands as a cocoon, a protected and nurturing space for transformation. The second cocoon is the kiln, a sweltering 2100 degrees that would turn flesh to ash, but changes the molecular composition of the clay, vitrifying and immortalizing it.

My ceramics are my bodies, as real to me as the one I was born into. It feels so sweet to be a vessel, bringing water to the lips of my friends, or to be the incarnation of a dream, or a gaping mouth full of teeth. These clay figures allow me to see the openness of all beings, that our boundaries are not as solid as we think, but permeable, melting with the forms around us into larger tangled ecologies. They help me to love the weirdness of my own form. Now in the strange and isolating world of Covid-19, where we are all learning about the permeability of our edges, these clay bodies keep me from ever feeling alone and for that I am very grateful.
My interest lies in the underlying structure of things—whether social, physical, or psychological. Through the process of making, I question how much of what we interact with is intentional or accidental, how much of our lives are constructed and how much of it is outside our control, and how much we are affected by the unseen structures in our lives. Much of my artwork is created in a state of questioning these relationships and in the process of trying to understand them. My subjects are loosely constructed around my curiosities of the moment as I search for questions and answers.

The resulting atmosphere of my artworks tend to exist in a sense of eeriness or moments of dissonance about them. The eeriness in my work is present to invoke the viewer to question the subject: What is it about the image that makes me feel this way? What is peculiar about its context? What is the image? The dissonance arises from moments of calm and chaos, the knowable and unpredictable. I am interested in exploring subjects from new perspectives, both literally and figuratively.

My practice is a mix of drawings, photography and prints that touch upon some segment of these themes. I view artmaking as a process of understanding and questioning, and the resulting work as a conversation with the people who see them. I am drawn to art as the creation of a space where different states of mind, what we feel and what we think collide.
I look for the critical and spiritual potential in craft. I explore the non-deterministic outcomes that technology produces, instances where tools are subverted by chance, by my intuition and spirituality, guided by color and energy to create divergent organic forms and dream-like states. From working with technical and material processes, my techniques emerge anew but are descendants of an alchemic source. As a maker, and one who investigates the meaning of materials, I also feel I advocate for the essential role of the craftsperson. In addition to looking at materials and processes, I find a spiritual splendor in the making that transcends the material itself. Being critical of the consumption of craft, I would like to challenge the idea that it can’t be fine art. In my work, I engage with familiar forms which can take on an infinite number of appearances. These forms—stars, rudimentary silhouettes, bursts, pyramids, crystals—defy the need for context yet, when they are sculpted using unexpected materials, our understanding of them expands. The mapping from the perfect shape in your head to the real, manifested object is where my focus lies.

What does it mean for the perfectly abstract to become real and physical? In my quilted works, I create the effect of decalcomania and soft sculptural elements through a technique I developed, one that involves melting store-bought plastic sponges and meshes—substrates that distort the quilts’ surfaces. Color application comes from “iron-on” sublimation papers, a set of vintage “fab’Uprint” crafting kits leftover in my childhood home from the 1980s. These materials produce a vibrancy unachievable through ink-jet printing. I apply my knowledge of crafts to expand the definitions of what it means to make a quilt.

In my prints and sculptures, such as Lucky Green Dice, Analog and Digital Impressions Series, and Prize-Inside Stacking Blocks, planes and shapes that are laser cut or casted in the architectural model scale begin to interrelate in such confounding and conflicting ways that the spatial dimensions implied by each cannot be reconciled with one another. Continuing the tradition of craftspeople—ornamental framers, mirror makers, statuary and metal workers—who’ve inspired me since I was a young artist, I want to make my own expertise and skills available to others, and, more generally, be a resource for my peers regarding technical and material knowledge.
Over the last year, I have moved from working in abstract figuration to some kind of abstracted post-figuration: where limbs fall, a new a-human line is found. Formally, this new world festers in flat space and is made of creatures that mourn Humanness. They are not made of skin but find their bodies in the gaseous murk of a radioactive, turpentine sludge, dealing with the forgotten signs and symbols of Nature from what might be the future. This first loosening of the body in the haze of the eco-apocalyptical was instigated by a class I took on Ecocritical studies, where I discovered the work of environmental philosophers at the forefront of our present ecological reckoning. What resonated with me most was the writing of Timothy Morton and specifically his concept of “Dark Ecology”, which seeks to reconfigure our relationship with the natural world as one that is dark and mysterious and still profoundly complex, interconnected and fragile.

Since then, I have been working from inside this dark and delicate space. From within it a figure has risen and much of my world has been in its orbit since. I call it florm. Florm was birthed from a toxic murk, growing out of a petroleum-slicked puddle. In defiance, it ruptured from the surface of the earth. Like a tree, it has strong legs in the ground. Like a mountain, its head surges in hot air, holding two circles to see, two eyes to project into, or maybe just the last signs of Humanness. Big arms swerve out in a hug or embrace, or is it a great crushing? With violence bound in tenderness, florm stands totemic as a portal, a portrait, a window reflecting. Florm keeps a flower, maybe the last flower on earth… or is it a hallucination? Or does its insides expel from within it like the vomitus flesh of an octopus corpse? I find this florm turning in my brain, using my body as a way to manifest infinitely in the world, its liquid limbs holding never-ending liquid lives.

It was my grandparents who taught me making first. They taught me their mediums and tried to make me work fast. On my father’s side my grandmother made portraits. She gave people long bodies and slender hands and placed them in flat no-space. When I was young I was scared of her paintings because the figures looked like ghosts, but I would grow to love them in the way they seemed to float off the wall, inhabiting surreal domestic space. My grandfather would teach me to sculpt with unfired clay on little wire armatures. I would make a small dog and he would make horses that had strong, pulsing muscles, teeming with voluptuousness—I always thought there was something sensual about them.

On my mother’s side, my grandmother taught me to sew and silkscreen in her lab, where I would make purses and glue the beachglass we collected all summer onto whatever I could find. My grandfather painted waves all his life. We would spend the summer side by side, listening to rusty classical from a radio stream lost in the wind. He taught me how to let acrylic drip, droop and dry to come back to drip, droop some more. It is from him where I developed my way in oil, working in thin washes in alternating cycles of revealing and concealing again, so that a body has to find its way through the layers, pulsing through waves of pigment, like watching a surfer in the break.

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Two lesbian monk parrots taught me about grief.

Jodi is a green monk parrot who came to live at a wildlife sanctuary after being abandoned by a string of owners. Monk parrots mate for life and the separation caused her to become vicious and to pluck almost all of her feathers out. It wasn't until a wild blue monk parrot was rescued for a broken wing and paired in Jodi's sanctuary that the two bonded. Jodi became happy. Her feathers grew back. Perhaps the two fell in love.

Witnessing this miraculous character growth resonated with me since my dad died of cancer just a month earlier. I could sympathize for the hurt Jodi felt over loss and happy to witness Jodi—who would snap her beak at anyone through her cage—find healing from a new cage mate. Jodi's new mate was not only rare for the blue color, but also for surviving a cat attack—4 out of 5 birds attacked by cats perish even if they manage to escape. The feel good story and the surrounding coincidences intrigued me during a time when I needed to feel good and to be intrigued. My earliest collages and paintings are homages to the story of Jodi and the Blue Monk. This work was hopeful—life adapts and survives in ever-changing environments.

Overtime, my attention shifted from Jodi and the Blue Monk to the world the Blue Monk had come from. A world comprised of escaped pets thousands of miles from their indigenous habitats and building homes on top suburban Long Island landscapes. These highly intellectual and social creatures now serve as allegories for the human experience: loss, redemption and feeling alien within your own community.

My work, like the first sentence, balances humor and melancholy. Is the humorous expression of the missing dog a message to find light in any situation? Is the missing poster a naïve and desperate attempt to return to something long lost? Did the dog, now missing, usually scare the cat away from the parrots?

I work in mixed media, sculpture, painting, and drawing. Each piece embodies imagery from a single song that speaks to me and my personal experiences. I then incorporate poignant elements from the complementary music video (if there is one). One of my most intricate pieces, “Spring Day” is a mixed media sculpture that has a storyboard format. There are five charcoal drawings embedded into the windows of a steam train, showing a girl reluctant to let the train fly through time.

Much of my work has a consistent whimsical quality, playing around with color, line, composition, and the scale of the subjects. For each piece, I have the song playing on repeat as I work, immersing myself in the mindset that I need to translate onto the paper—call it “image training,” if you will. Piecing together bits of memories, I actualize the past.

Over the course of the year, I have been putting together a playlist of songs. The songs are especially important to me when I am feeling heartbroken, nostalgic, or off-kilter. The narratives that arise nod at slippery Freudian moments from my past, my childhood. This body of art aims to show the world how I create a harmonious blend of the things that mean the most to me into one language, a visual language that speaks to music, art, and the past/present/future.
Examining relationships among queer social spaces, consumption, and identity-building through print, sculpture, and mixed media, my work explores what being physically intimate looks like in the 21st century as a toast to queerness and its history.

Central to my work are gay bars and social spaces (online & physical) as locales that encourage sexual express and queer sexual exploration comfortably and openly. Through my work, I explore the gay bar’s relationship to shared queer identity, expression, and lifestyle, as gay spaces boosted my confidence in developing, articulating, and living a queer life.

I remember fully coming to terms with my queerness the day of the Pulse Nightclub shooting of June 2016 in Orlando. The massacre felt incredibly personal; it was an act of hate against queer people that not only threatened one of our only community spaces—the gay bar—but our very bodies and lives. I attribute my obsession with “the gay bar” to associations to experiences like these and to the general legacy and role of gay bars in the American LGBT liberation movement and queer life in general. From before Stonewall to Pulse Orlando, the gay bar in the US—much more than a nightclub—is a landmark queer social space of consumption, expression and identity-building.
Growing up along one of the busiest land border crossings in the world was more than simply living in a duality. It meant embodying an uncomfortable and convoluted mixture of meanings, textures, images, soundscapes, and most importantly, languages. Navigating through the world between Tijuana and San Diego always felt to me like sewing: bringing the thread of my reality and crossing it over with a simple transnational stitch. The longer I inhabited this space, the more crossing became a matter of finding the materiality of two languages which, with time, I learned to reimagine and record.

My fascination for cords is therefore both linguistic (the cord in a record) and material: word and thread, present in active texts. I am drawn to the way in which textiles create space through their surfaces, colors, patterns and beauty, but also to the reality they embody; the textility of their making. Textiles are records of reality, just as fibers are modes of signification that weave absences, stitch gaps, knot knots, and embed notes in knots.

To approach fibers as text is to listen to the dictation of the material in order to give shape to the languages and concepts that seem paralyzing before they exist spatially. My process of working with material consists of gestural and formal repetition; it is about paying attention to how things fall and hang. Cords—gravity, weight, verticality.

Working mostly with natural fibers, paper, and occasionally cement, I try to keep things tonally and texturally tethered to each other. Just as threads dictate time when they are woven, they can be unraveled, hence I give great consideration to the relationship between cords and language, fibers and memory. I am interested in the connection between threads and meaning—both multilayered and encoded, both capable of being dismembered, rearranged, unraveled, and put back together. Is it possible to create form from void; from the unraveled and unwoven? In my practice, I attempt to answer this question by following my threads into a dis-membering of language that I must re-member in order to remember.
I like thinking about how art can represent ideas in a way that is accessible and easily understandable. I am inspired by Ed Ruscha and Stuart Hall. My hope is that my art can be the window in which the viewer can see my thought process.

I try to use mediums that facilitate clarity. I am currently working in oil painting. This is a process that allows for invention of representational spaces. It allows me to have creative freedom in representing ideas about representational systems. Currently I am interested in mathematical symbols as part of a representational system. For example, what does “3” represent? It represents the idea of “three-ness”, but that is clearly undefined, or at least up for debate. But more than that, it can represent different ideas in different cultures. It’s a sacred number to Christianity, but add a “1” in front, and it becomes a bad number. Imaginary numbers, noted by placing “i” in front of numbers, are quite literally imaginary: that is, they don’t technically exist. However, they are used in explaining very real physical phenomenon.

I draw inspiration from my background in mathematics. Math is the system that people invented in order to explain the world. It is a system that is supposedly based in irrefutable logic, and is the basis for most of science and engineering. Its clarity is what I strive for in my art. I try to make art that is as easily followed as math is supposed to be. However, I have also learned that math is not clear-cut and cold, but requires humanity and creativity to fully understand.

Art is similar. Artists try to communicate ideas that, to them, seem clear and easily understood, but fail to see that their art-historical and cultural background makes their message unclear to those that cannot relate. How does one break cultural history and experience when communicating in the arts? How can we as artists communicate ideas in a way that is easy to understand by everyone, thus bringing art to a wider audience? Can we remove the need for formal education from art-making? Is there a universal language? Hopefully through my art, we can think about and understand for ourselves what that language is.
My fascination in “process” stems from my experience, one that involves a whole ordeal of “process,” such as immigrating from South Korea to the States, but most importantly, a captivating “process” in which I have discovered art as a way to love the incomplete me who is still looping through something long, arduous, and mysterious.

I am particularly fascinated by the process of nature, how spontaneously yet methodically nature unravels itself. I am attracted to the scenes of nature that are being worn out by air, rain, storm, mosses and molds; and the moments in which waves crash into rocks, breaking away in small droplets, and lightnings fade away in the sky, flashing, then flickering.

And I aspire to capture this “process,” both consciously and subconsciously. I work with charcoal, graphite, and ink, but I invite dust, dirt, and water. I work on the floor, dancing around time and gravity, letting these agents of nature catch the splatters and splashes of my marks as I attempt to fossilize the ongoingness of this process.

However, more recently I have gotten keen on the ways we have altered this natural process, and my investigation of our manipulation is initiated through the eyes of animals. I am exploring the metaphorical relationship we have with these sentient entities of nature, how we have domesticated and exploited them, and how in today’s society, we are no longer so much different from them.

But I am not sure whether my art stands as an advocate for the environment or mother nature, since there is no ultimate destination or conclusion that I want to propose. Personally, my art is another process of creating, imitating, and recording what I have observed in nature, and it is ultimately completed when my careful intentions behind each mark-making cross over with nature’s chance.
Just shy of two months ago, I found myself sitting on a flight to Los Angeles for what I expected to be a slightly extended spring break at home. Now, when I thought we would be preparing ourselves to bid farewell to communities and structures we have worked within for the better part of four years, I sit alone, staring off across the other edge of the continent, dead opposite my now-vacant apartment on 129th Street. I missed out on any sort of goodbye—even the premature ones. I wrote in my journal after realizing I would not return to the city in the coming months: “New York feels like an on-again, off-again relationship that I was planning on breaking off for good, but it beat me to the punch, completely off-guard.” Now, I start clean. I am living at home, which is not really home after all (rather, the apartment my mother moved to last year), and spending most of my time in my bedroom that is not really my bedroom, fantasizing every night in a bed that is strangely foreign, despite being more comfortable than the only mattress I ever owned in New York.

It seems like I have been making art at an average distance of 10 feet from this new bed at all times. Making art in the company of my mother; making art in a space where I would have never thought to make art before. We have all been working at a distance from others, and some of us in total solitude. We have been stripped of physical meeting spaces and studios—places which force us to move and congregate (and give rise to the corporeality of art in general). When our inhabitable worlds have shrunk down to the size of mere blocks, every cut, pop, click, swish, press, scan, every mutter and every thought has felt monumental. We may have found ourselves creating to comfort, to record, or just to keep ourselves moving. This catalog, in particular, serves the purpose to record what we accomplished in our theses, as well as to acknowledge these abrupt challenges we faced and continue to face. It does not replace what we expected to be our last two months of working in preparation for our final exhibition. Whatever our reasons for art making in this time may be, whatever solace or stress we have felt in the process, we have created—and that is all we could have hoped to do.

— Alyssa Gengos

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