

. follow the . connect the . . etc . . .

by

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Submitted to the graduate program in Fine Arts,  
and to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts.

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Chairperson

Committee members: \_\_\_\_\_

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Date defended: \_\_\_\_\_

The Thesis Committee for Rachael Huffman certifies that this is the approved version  
of the follow thesis:

. follow the . connect the . . etc . . .

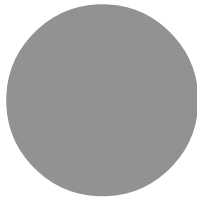
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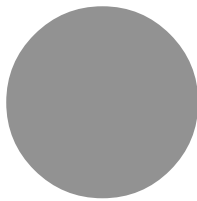


follow the . connect the . . etc . . .

This booklet is the written component of the M.F.A. thesis exhibition by Rachael Huffman. Installed March 4<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008 at the University of Kansas Art & Design Gallery in Lawrence, Kansas. This book aims to define the functions of the decision, elements, and objects at work in the exhibition as well as itself be an extension of some of those ideas.



**Rachael** is slow to get out of bed this morning but knowing it's sunny prompts her to make the most of the day. She gets up and peeks through the blinds to be reassured, but instead she now distinguishes her dream from the reality of another cold, grey day. She stares for a moment remembering the same view of the cul de sac but filled with sun. No, it is empty and cold. It's March in Kansas and this winter has been too long. Disappointed her waking contempt fades and she considers going back to bed, but knowing the day ahead she instead opts for a hot shower. **Standing** under the showerhead she is still for a couple minutes as steam fills the tiny bathroom. Breathing deeply moist air fills her lungs as she starts to mentally prepare for the days task. Refreshed and clean she turns off the shower but again stands still for some time. The air is cooler now and the peppermint shampoo makes her head tingle. Drying off she walks to her computer and plays a mix of high-energy music to keep up the momentum. **Comfortable** in warm clothing and socks she opens the refrigerator to find a bag of spinach and little else. She remembers dreaming of donuts and with summer out of sight she chooses an empty calorie meal and steps outside into the crisp air. As quick as possible she drives to Dunkin Donuts for a blueberry cake donut and a large cinnamon latte. **Returning** to her driveway only minutes later, it's like she never left. The music still playing and what luck that Curtis Mayfield's *Move On Up* greets her at the door with encouraging lyrics – "if you put your mind to it, you can surely do it."- And so she sits down at the computer to write the introduction to her thesis paper.



before there is a line there is a dot. a dot is a precise moment. a dot is the beginning, the start. before a reader can read they must open their eyes. once a dot moves it becomes a dash, line, or word. regardless of how long a line or word may become it wouldn't be without a dot. a dot marks the change from unconscious slumber to conscious response. ● = consciousness. the title of the exhibition, ( . follow the . connect the . . etc . . . ), uses dots to reference the stages of gaining knowledge: consciousness, experience, perception, and cognition. the title assigns a purpose to the space, (to learn through first hand experience). the viewer is invited to interact, observe, think, and experiment... the show is reliant on a person coming into contact with the space, ●, and then again choosing to interact with that space, ●. when the space is vacant it stores potential energy ●

!! Exclamation point decals lead you like footprints toward the Art & Design gallery. As you come to the glass gallery door the title of the exhibition appears to float in mid air. Once through the entrance to the gallery the “!!” veer to the right.



Following the “!!” you hesitate before stepping through a large empty wooden frame that stands perpendicular to the near right wall. Inside the space at waist level three white coat hooks offer the option of adjusting your temperature.



A grey arrow decal highlights one of the hooks suggesting its use. You take off your bulky coat and hang it up. Now able to move more freely you feel welcome to stay awhile.



👁👁 The view to the left is confusing: hammocks, seashells, carpet, a floppy mirror, a water cooler...

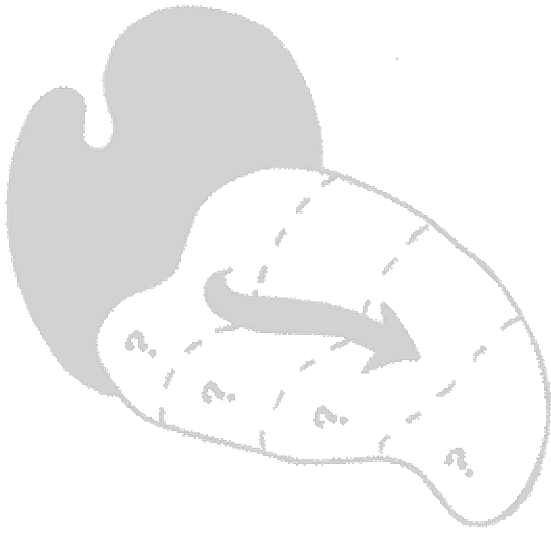
... so you return your eyes to the wall closest to you.



A couple steps forward at eye level rest a pair of altered safety goggles, each on their own shelf. Unsure if you can touch them you look around; no one is there except a gallery guard whose attention is absorbed in a book. Looking back at the goggles you notice a decal on the wall of a hand reaching for them, implying interaction. You bravely pick up the black goggles noticing two small pinholes. As you put the blacked-out pinhole goggles on you watch as the two holes merge into one small hole to see through.



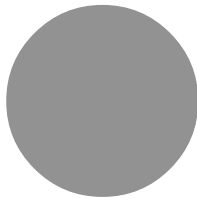




**Waking** up a little earlier this morning Rachael peeks through the blinds and this time sees a blue sky. Feeling good that she has started her thesis paper she is eager to continue and get it done before the weather is consistently pleasant. This morning she decides to skip the shower and treat herself to the best breakfast in town, Milton's. Stepping outside in her winter coat she realizes it may be

unnecessary; it's not windy and the air isn't that cold. In her car she heads downtown reviewing what was accomplished yesterday and all that still needs to be done. As she reaches the door of the local restaurant she thinks to herself; "this may be the first time I've eaten here alone". Excited at the idea of a first experience a smile breaks the pursed lips. **Greeted** by friendly staff she is seated and a server is there almost immediately. Without hesitation she orders the days special: a ham and Swiss cheese biscuit with scrambled eggs, country potatoes, grapes, and a latte. Having no one to talk to the volume of her own voice can't muffle the surrounding noises. She is able to hear everything; people talking and eating, plates and silverware clanking in the kitchen, the hiss of the espresso machine, doors opening and closing, and the bass of music set just low enough it is hard to make out the song. Within minutes her breakfast and latte appear at the table. **Taking** a bite of the eggs the spongy texture is warm and plain. It's really the warmth of the eggs that make them good she concludes. What the eggs lack in flavor the potatoes make up with salt and spicy-heat. Combining the eggs and potatoes into one bite she is certain this is how they should be eaten. The biscuit is thick, buttery, and very filling. She eats slowly saving the grapes for last. Amazed at the complexity of grapes: hard, crisp, juicy, bitter, sour, and sweet, she enjoys them one by one. Overhearing some of the servers talking about the up-coming lunch specials and soup of the day, (clam chowder), she is reminded of her days as a server in Yosemite National Park.

(follow the)



dots are rarely static. dots change effortlessly with time. it is easy to move a dot, no matter the size. shifting eyes, blinking, head movement, physical re-orientation, walking, swinging... are just a few ways to make a dot move. the eye adjusts to change in light, and shadows continue to morph unnoticed. side vision stabilizes front vision creating the view of a stationary space when the perspective of that space changes, as it moves through the space. conscious experience is following a dot. by following a dot, stationary dots become animated.

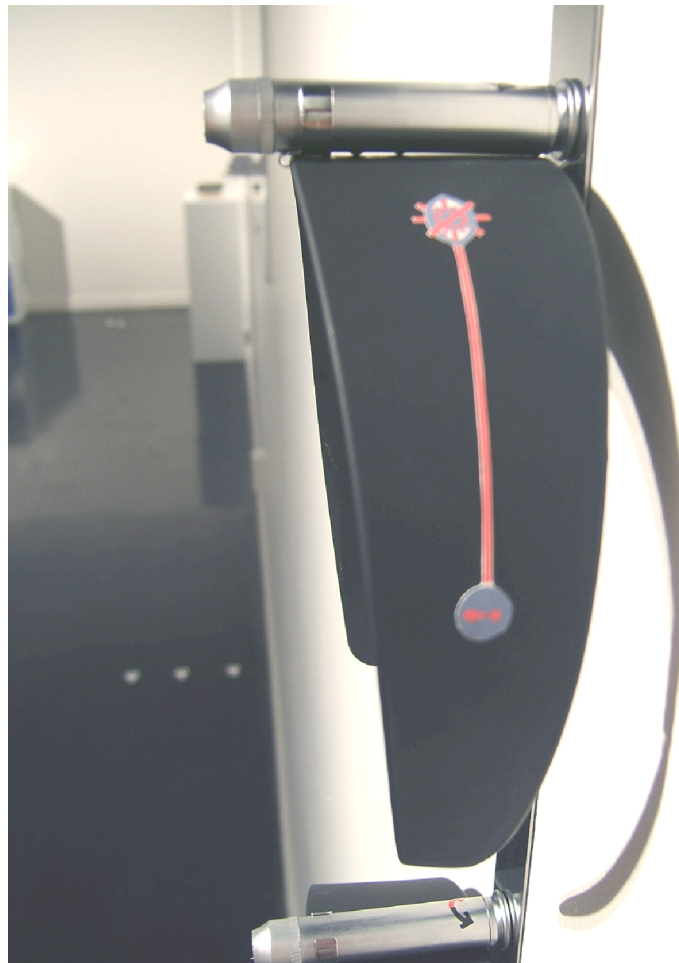
Now that your peripheral vision is blacked-out by the goggles, you are forced to move your head in order to see the surrounding. The pinholes cause your vision to be fuzzy, going in and out of focus as you change your glance. Once you're not the only one in the gallery anymore you put the goggles back on their shelf for the next person. You walk past a set of yellow radio headphones and a little black curtain, both in use by other gallery visitors, to an arrangement of black headbands along the center wall.

Each of the three headbands has a small laser clipped on top. They hang weightless against a narrow piece of polished steel that is attached to the wall. Beside them more decals hide a coded message. Having seen

the decal of a large lowercase *i* you've determined it represents a person, the dot being the head, and the line a body.

Like the goggle instructions this decal has an arrow by the dot suggesting head movement. The same decal of a hand reaching reiterates interaction. You go to grab the headband and

notice a slight resistance before the magnetic attraction from the bottom of the laser is broken. A caution sticker on the headband warns you not to look directly at the laser beam, and a little red and black arrow on the base of the laser informs you to twist it toward the headband, ● causing the laser to stay on ●. Placing the headband in your hair the ● is in front of you. Looking across the gallery you move your head in a circle and watch as the ● draws on the gallery wall.



Less timid now that other people are participating in the exhibit you play with the laser awhile before turning it off and returning it to its steel base. Moving into the center of the room you walk across a grey rectangular carpet toward the hammocks stopping to bend down and pick up the seashell headband.

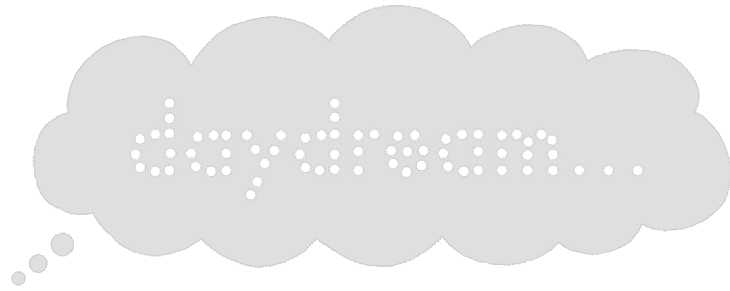


Decals on the short white stand suggest picking up the altered object with two hands. On the inside of the headband a sticker of an ear designates left from right and inside the seashells stickers of blurred lines reference sound waves. With the seashells distorting your hearing you take a seat on one of the hammocks.

Sitting in the hammock with your feet on the floor you rock yourself and watch the other gallery goers. One of the girls is lying on her back on the carpet using an air cushion as a pillow and swinging the floppy mirror. The other participant is trying out some white-opaque goggles that you hadn't noticed yet.



Together the seashells and hammock make you feel very calm and relaxed. You are entertained by the distorted reflections in the mirror and the moving shadows and reflections that the gallery lights cast off the mirror and onto the wall. Getting up you place the heavy shells back on their stand and walk toward four white, open-faced, stacked cubbies next to the hammock you were just sitting in.



**At** Milton's Rachael

indulges in the memory of a favorite place, Sierra Point. Only a 45 minute steep hike from the front of her cabin was the reward of the best view in the park. Lying on the sun-exposed rock her gaze travels across the valley floor, able to see four huge waterfalls. In attempt to hold onto the memory she closes her eyes for a moment. The sound of roaring falls, near and distant, and the smell of sun-baked pine needles are missed. Opening her eyes she lets out a sigh, and finishes her latte. **Sunshine** pouring in the storefront windows prompts her to get going. Stepping outside she breathes easy and the cool air wakens any exposed skin. Crossing the street she is not ready to go home and decides to stop into Aimee's, a small coffee shop. The smell of bacon and the sound of sizzling hash browns heighten the contrast from outside to inside. **She** orders an herbal tea so she can stay awhile and soak up the atmosphere. She appreciates the humble honesty in the exposed disorganization of the place. Comprised of odds and ends, the people here seem to be as different as the collection of chairs. Sitting quietly drinking tea at a small table she chuckles as parts of different conversations merge into nonsense:

"I swear my alarms on." - -

- - "No woman can tell me what to do."

" She couldn't win at 100 pounds so I don't know what she'll do not."

- - "Outta here Jack?" - - - - - "Yeah, see ya Dave." - -

" ... well, look at formula one."

"We're a one and a half coffee bean place here." - - -

**With** so much to take in she remembers why her art attempts to focus on one sense at a time. Leaving the shop she wishes she could stay all day, feeling like such experiences are the real movies.

(connect the)

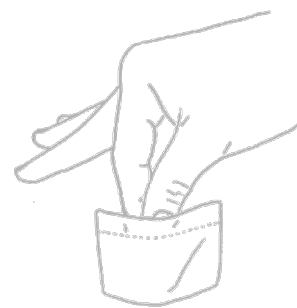


memory is necessary when connecting dots. dots describe dashes and lines more than they describe themselves. speed and repetition are the quickest ways to connect dots. a fast moving dot appears as a line, and a dot that moves, (or is moved); in the same way over and over illustrates an inherent quality of that motion. An active link between the brain and eye connects dot; allowing dimensional dots to draw perceived lines.

At the top of the stand a marble sits on a silver golf tee like a precious gem. Each cubby seems to offer a different option. From one angle a decal of a grey cloud contains the word daydream, and just below in separate cubbies a black eye mask and blanket encourage sleeping. Looking back at the hammock you notice the pillow and blanket match and that the stand is facing the hammock. Confused how all the parts in the show connect; you ponder what you have experienced. Most of the works have affected your perception of the gallery. The seashells distorted your auditory perception of the space.. but the daydream would.. maybe make you.. consider an imagined space?? Intrigued you continue investigating the details of the marble stand.

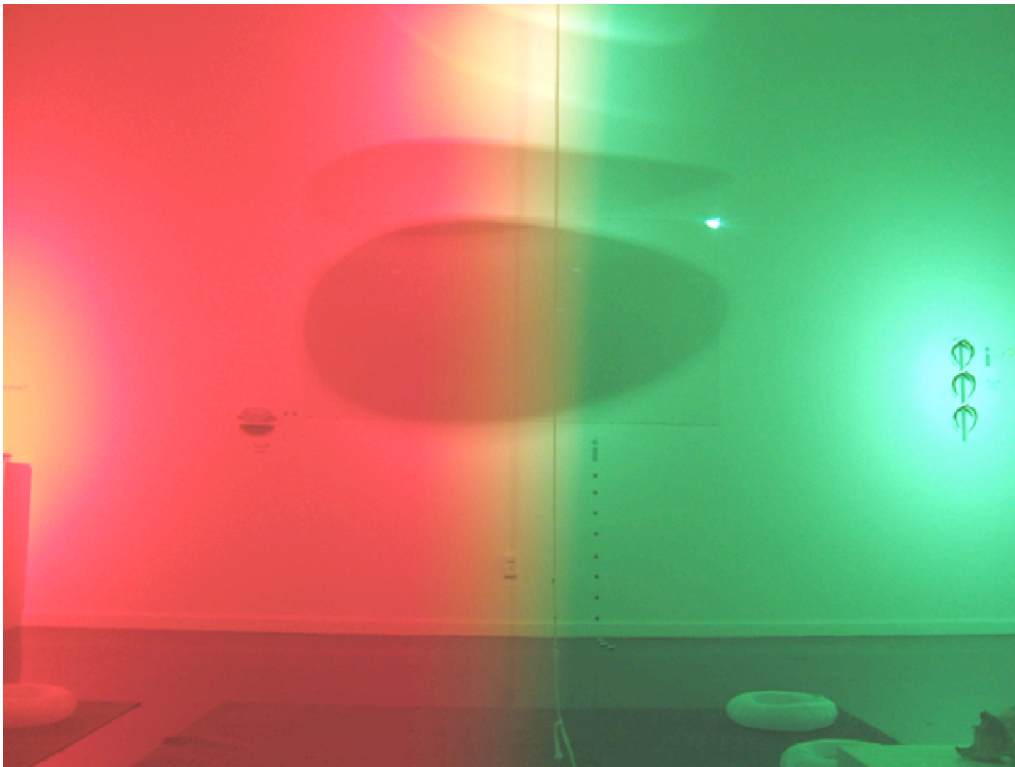


From a second angle the stand showcases marbles. A decal on the top cubby matches the perspective of the ceiling and illustrates a hand holding a marble. Inside the decal of the marble the perspective of the gallery is tiny, rounded, and upside-down. Below an open-faced cubby holds a fishbowl of marbles. Next to the marble bowl a decal of a hand going into a little pocket suggests taking one. Picking one of the marbles up you look through it and see an opposite image of what is in front of you. Taking note that image you see through the marble changes based on how close or far the marble is from your eye. Slipping the marble in your pocket you look into the top cubby where a set of three red and green lenses lay flat.





One lens is red/green, placing it in front of your eyes the colors overlap creating a purplish brown cast on your view. Second you try the lens that is similar to the previous but the middle is transparent, red/clear/green. You find that looking through this lens the colors don't overlap but are faint. Last you try the lens that is stripped red-green/red-green resting it on your nose you expect to see stripes but instead the result is a split view, red/green.

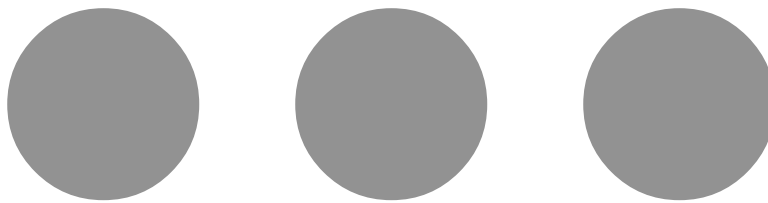


Bewildered you look at the lens again and try to understand how it works.. maybe because both eyes see the same thing.. half red/half green?? More people enter the gallery and with only ten minutes before class you put the lenses back. You walk up to a large framed piece of plexi-glass that is propped against the left wall. Next to the glass decals of “?????” and “!!!!” are placed next to a small shelf that holds four dry-erase markers and one eraser. Visitors have written and drawn comments in response to the show on the transparent surface. Running out of time you continue to wander along the left wall of the gallery where three students are gathered.

**Finally**, Rachael finds herself at the end of the yearlong thesis endeavor. It's painful for her to attach words to ideas until she absolutely has to. She has put off the naming of her work as long as she can allow it, all the way till the end of the paper. In effort to hone what it is that must be said she reflects on the development of the project. She recalls her first confirmations as broad yet defining; "I don't want there to be any representations and the work will be reliant on a viewer." In communicating to her committee the experience she wanted to create for people again her claim was all-inclusive and vague; "I want the viewer to first be confused and then over a period of time, five seconds, fifteen minutes, three hours, or four days gain some kind of understanding." When asked about the types of emotions she wanted to warrant there seemed to be only one answer; "I want people to feel giddy. I want them to feel like they entered a different frame of thinking." Uhh, and then there was the period of a couple months that were the hardest. During this time she had abandoned making objects all together. No longer having drawings as tokens of her creative progress she was lucky to have one scribbled sentence at the end of a day to distinguish it from the next. She remembers how warped time became when conceptualizing was the focus of her practice, uhh. It was after failing to meet three or four self-imposed commitment dates, after the allotted week of installing the show, after the doors were opened on the first day that Rachael finally realized the work never ends but continues to change. Once she understood the exhibition as progressive work there was a sense of relief, of course it can still change, but also a new commitment, the work's not over, it just beginning. Now she appreciates how much time she spent in the space talking with drawing classes, strangers, friends, and at night alone. She learned the most by watching people interact with the exhibition. Noticing the difference between the idea, concrete and whole, and the idea in motion, flexible and in parts.



(etc)

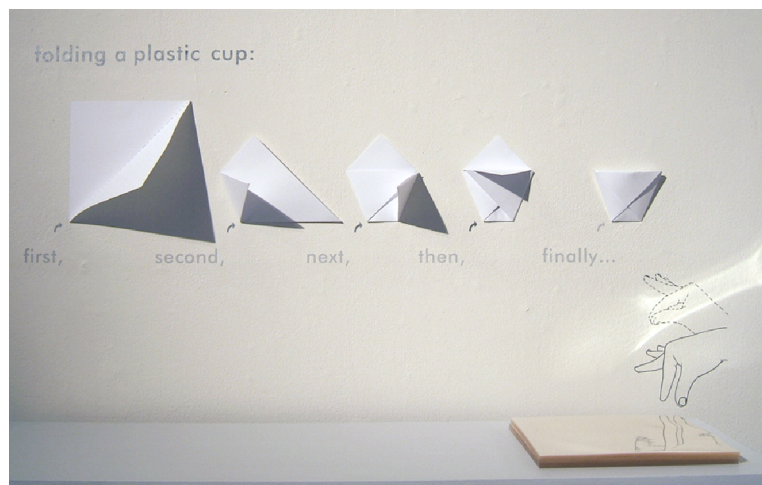


dots are different. dots can be added or subtracted to make new dots. by thinking about dots more dots are realized. of all the dots few are seen and fewer described. inevitably dots escape definition preferring the freedom of infinite understandings.



(photo credits: Aaron Padden)

Glancing at each station you are eager to see what they offer. After a girl dispenses water she says in excitement, “It works!” As she takes a drink you walk past her to see the title of this station on the wall, **folding a plastic cup:** Paper instructions, a stack of thin square transparencies, and a flat surface allow you to fold your own plastic cup.





(photo credits: Aaron Padden)

In a hurry you walk over to the other students. This station also has a name, **taste places?**, and step-by-step instructions. On the wall a decal illustrates a tongue that has been divide it into four sections by dotted lines. Inside each section is a question mark, and an arrow describes a path along the tongue.



Curious, you ask the two students, “What does this one do?”

He responds, “Well there are different liquids to try, and I think you are supposed to do them in order, bitter, sour, salty and sweet. It’s pretty crazy I can actually feel different parts of my tongue respond more to the different tastes.”

“Oh, I’ll have to come back for this one.” you say.

On your way out the gallery is now full of students, they must be meeting here for class you conclude. As you leave you notice a drawing on the framed plexi-glass that you overlooked when you were guided into the gallery. At the top it reads, in progress.. On the glass the artist has drawn visual notes in marker. In front of the glass show postcards lay on top of another white stand. Grabbing one you flip it over, and are relieved to see that the show is up for another week.



My creative practice is charged by the fundamental need to understand the nature of time and space, in my terms, through first-hand experience. With a heightened awareness of my senses, I am able to consider the surroundings as a drawing that continuously describes my perceived experience. By conceptualizing space as a drawing it becomes a flat “surface”, translating three-dimensional volumes into two-dimensional qualities. I am sensitive to different types of “surfaces” and keep their definition open in order to account for those I am unaware of. Focusing on the tangible “surfaces” in front of me, my challenge as an artist is in “seeing” peripheral “surfaces” that are often overlooked or out-of-“frame”. To be able to understand what lies in the periphery, one must first determine a center.

Art is reliant on a viewer. This belief is central to the work and made prominent by the interactive dependency of the work; a viewer must participate for a concept to transfer and the art to be realized. As an artist/maker I first examine the position of the viewer/perceiver: noting what spaces are available to ponder, and the factors that affect them. The primary delineation of the viewer’s space is the body’s skin; separating internal spaces from external spaces. Within the two differentiated spaces various types of designations of sub-spaces occur. Space can be: outlined by a horizon, contained by architecture, reached by radio frequencies, named for a particular purpose, described by the range of the arm, the cavity of the mouth, and an imagined space... Factors affecting perception of space could be: time, light, movement, speed, physical perspective, heightened or dulled senses, technology, substance, memory, and the days events...

The viewer assigns meaning to art, “framing” it. This notion is peripheral in the work, hinted at by the use of multiplying dots and a primary school layout that encourage experimentation. As a viewer/perceiver I then analyze the authority of the perceiver/thinker to “frame” the experience: determining what concepts should be communicated, through which language, and by what means. The different components of the exhibition: ( . follow the . connect the . . etc . . . ), act as building blocks that nurture learning. Simple furnishings allow the viewer to become comfortable; therefore, more likely to linger in the space and reflect on their experience. It is important for me to be intentional about my decisions while remaining adaptable to the nature of the work to continuously evolve. I use minimal signage, altered objects, and furniture to create a place of exploration where the viewer can focus on experience and how it is affected by senses, physical position, movement, and a different frame of thought. My work emphasizes the viewing experience, instead of the view; asking the viewer to participate in creating the product. When experiencing my work, I want the participants to feel giddy from exercising the brain, realizing it’s potential to alter the way we see.

I am interested in the objective shared experience; but can only account for my own subjective individual experience. As an artist I continue to find myself in such paradoxes. So, I orient myself by establishing known edges, then place myself in the believed middle, and begin digging: sifting through each layer in attempt to find a core. At the end of the process I find myself dealing with another apparent contradiction. So, I start again, but... this time, with more experience, new concerns, and a larger vocabulary.



(photo credits: Aaron Padden)



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