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Matter under Mind

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Art And Design
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Fine Arts of Studio Art

by

John F. Lause

August 2017

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Keywords: abstract expressionism, surrealism, futurism, process, psychology, mysticism,
religion, alchemy, spirituality, liminality, negativity, chance, C.G. Jung

ABSTRACT

Matter under Mind

by

John F. Lause

The artist discusses the work for his Masters of Fine Arts exhibition, *Mind under Matter*, held at the Tipton Gallery in downtown Johnson City, Tennessee. Exhibition dates were from March 27th through April 5th 2017. 'Matter under Mind' explored the balance of control and non-control within the art-making process. This technique creates an automatic dialogue resulting in abstraction guided by the subconscious. The title 'Matter under Mind' is a slight play on the phrase 'mind over matter' emphasizing how matter/material is manipulated by the mind through the making of artwork, and within the mind's eye or imagination.

The video installation featuring the work was accompanied by a soundscape to bring the viewer deeper into the creative process. The video symbolized the idea of 'solve et coagula' or, dissolve and coagulate, destroy to recreate by revealing how the process of cleaning paint off of a surface creates artwork in itself.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to give my most sincere gratitude to all of the faculty that I've gotten the chance to meet and work with, in particular Professor Andrew Ross for his support and enthusiasm toward my work and vision, along with Professor Mira Gerard for her invaluable advice, insight, and understanding, Professor Patricia Mink for her criticism and guidance, along with Professor Christian Reiben for joining my committee late into my third year offering his perspective, critiques, energy and perspective. I am very fortunate to have been able to meet all of these individuals and others that are a part of the ETSU Art faculty and staff in this phase in my life and development as an artist and person.

I want to give my unending thanks and love to my parents, who have always been there for me and supported me in my pursuit of making art throughout my entire life. I wouldn't have been able to make it this far, or at all, without their love and support. I'm grateful for my father for reminding me to always do my best and to work hard, and to my mother for her unwavering belief in me, always reminding me to never give up no matter how difficult things get.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I've become aware that my art has slowly transformed over time, each step has been a mutation of the previous. Before entering Graduate school, my art was in a noticeable state of change. The images that I was creating had begun to stretch further and further from representation. I had become increasingly interested in natural patterns and repetition, and began seeing abstraction within representation. This led into an exploration into concepts of transformation to describe the experience of the art-making process through my own perspective. To do this, I have utilized observations I've found in the natural world as well as my own psyche as the foundation for my imagery and inspiration. I seek to use my work to peer past an illusion of being trapped within limited time and within a material body. I respond to the breaking down of form into its component parts, the components of which have always fascinated me more than the gestalt of an idea or form. I feel as though every element of the physical world shares these components, and that we are all slight variations of an archetypal form, being expressed through an endless stream of variety.

My process has become largely automatic, driven by emotion and state of mind, along with the dialogue created between myself and the composition. My letting go of complete control over the work is a sort of liberation, and the sacrifice of my own conscious decision-making, and a full expression of my psyche through a more autonomous approach. Art-making has always been a place where I could freely express myself, without any boundaries. Self-expression wasn't something that was reinforced for me growing up, so I used art as a means to release the feelings I felt needed to be suppressed, namely sadness and anger. Negativity has

always been the motivator for my artistic drive. As I've developed as an artist it is the one thing that has remained constant.

Having learned to draw from observation, I found that I could use this ability to take the world around me and deconstruct it, to warp and deform representation. Previously, I would often make a very rough sketch of what I planned on drawing. Subsequently, it became inevitable that any plan in my mind would always change once realized into a physical medium. I became aware of this pattern and began to expect my work to change. During my drawing process, I discovered that once the ink pen was applied over the pencil sketch, most of the transformation occurred. This transformation was through intuitive decisions based on the marks and composition of the sketch. Applying the ink was always the most interesting step of the process; it was the territory in which I put the most trust into my creative impulse. This was where I felt the most freedom, and where the imagery typically stretched the boundaries of representation, but did not yet go beyond them. This pattern has carried over into my current work, where the application of the paint or ink is the liminal space where I'm in tune with my intuition. The annihilation of realism was in a sense a repudiation of myself, my ego trying to imitate the world outside of my imagination. I was trapped and constricted by the limitations of representation. Breaking free of this has allowed me to, almost ecstatically, express myself in ways I had never considered. Through abstraction I have been able to use my work to visually communicate personal psychological states that, for the viewer observing my work, is meant to put their mind into my headspace, smothering them into the disorienting darkness that I submerge myself within to create the work. I believe for most artists, the art-making process is a

means to escape the outside, “real world”. For me it is a sort of escaping from the outside world and into myself.

CHAPTER 2

MATTER UNDER MIND; THE WORK

The body of work that I created for *Matter under Mind* is the result of the culmination of processes and material that I had been experimenting with during my three years in graduate school. Every piece in the exhibition was created from my exploration with mono-type printmaking. I became fascinated with mono-type printing, and saw my method as a combination of drawing, painting, and printmaking. This technique allowed me to explore my ideas of balancing control and non-control with my material. The process itself involved applying acrylic paint onto plexiglass, and subsequently pressing the plexiglass onto paper by hand. The process itself was quick due to the fast drying time of the acrylic paint, which prevented me from overthinking my imagery. This new process was liberating, and allowed me to create expressive marks and gestures that felt more true to myself and my emotions, fast and frantic expressive marks that seemed to flow out of me naturally and organically. These pieces are mirrors of my mind and my soul. All of the work is aesthetically connected by the lack of color, and focus on the relationship between black and white. This created strong contrast that flattened the images while also creating an illusion of depth without any mid-tone variation. The pieces were meant to be experienced as one organic whole, where some of the work acted to encapsulate the viewer. The work itself is abstract and expressive, and has a surreal visual quality. I wanted to create

forms that contained recognizable elements found in nature while not depicting anything literally. This ambiguity allowed my work to contain multiple interpretations and ideas without being contained by specificity. For example, Figure 1: *Tunnel* can be interpreted in various ways. The idea of a tunnel isn't specific, and acts metaphorically to describe its appearance and possible function; a tunnel is a portal, and this piece can act as a portal of understanding my work in this exhibition as a whole. *Tunnel* is an eye, a vulva, a gateway into my mind and soul. Every piece in the exhibition was cut out from the original paper it was created on. Many of the pieces were printed on separate pieces of paper and subsequently collaged together to create a new composition. Collaging my work was a way for me to escape the rigid borders of the traditional picture-plane, freeing the forms from their borders. To set up my work, it needed to respond to the gallery space, which involved me doing most of the collage work in the gallery itself. An important factor of this body of work is that it has the ability to adapt to whatever environment it is displayed in. The nature of this work allows me to reconfigure it differently each time it's shown. It felt more like organizing the bones of a once living creature to understand its physiology. The pieces themselves are complete, however they're ability to be rearranged gives them a certain static life.



Figure 1: Tunnel

CHAPTER 3

ALCHEMY AND MYSTICISM

The term 'Nigredo' meaning blackness, was originally an alchemical term used to describe the process of decomposition. It was believed by alchemists as a first step toward reaching the seemingly unattainable Philosopher's Stone. The alchemists attempted to put this idea into action through a process of extensively cooking and therefore cleansing all of their alchemical ingredients, consequently creating a uniform black matter. This term eventually found its way as a metaphor for the 16th – century poem, "The Dark Night of the Soul," written by the Spanish Roman Catholic mystic, St. John of the Cross. This poem details the experience of confronting oneself, confronting the negative aspects of their ego and psyche, what Carl Jung called, the shadow. I feel as if my mind is stuck within this state of putrefaction, and the art making process is the act of emptying myself of this negativity. In psychological terms, according to Nigel Hamilton in his, *The Alchemical Process of Transformation*:

"From a psychological standpoint, this stage is experienced as entering a dark and chaotic unconscious inner world. St John of the Cross has referred to this as the first of two dark nights, the dark night of the mind, which is an encounter with the darker aspects of our self (that which Jung called "the shadow"). At first nothing appears to make sense, indeed all the therapist can do at this stage of the process is to be fully present and empathize with the client, who in the process of articulating their experience, facilitates it further.

The therapeutic setting, i.e. the therapy room, becomes the hermetically sealed vessel and

the inner chaos that the client enters into is negative by the reactions of opposing forces struggling against each other. That is to say the client's own psyche reveals its submerged inner conflicts to the conscious mind. As the client begins to experience the inner world to be more real, the process intensifies (the fire increases) and often anger, fear, frustration, and a desire to "escape from it all" is experienced."

The description of the alchemical stage of Nigredo by Dr. Ian Irvine in his talk, 'Alchemy and the Imagination,' could be used as a metaphorical interpretation of my work when he describes this stage as, "an undifferentiated soul/substance state, a state of conflict, of moral confusion and psychic distress. It was also associated with the planet Saturn, the 'melancholy humour' (black bile) and the heavy metal lead. In some cases even the prime material (prima materia) was symbolized in terms of 'lead'. The raven also figures prominently during the Nigredo, as do images of melancholy 'vapours'."

There is often a very serpentine quality within all of my work. It has remained entirely unconscious to me until the past several years. I've always had a fear of snakes, and would frequently have nightmares of my childhood backyard being covered in them. The mere sight of a snake would make my stomach turn, almost as if I could feel one coiled up inside my stomach. This fear would also arise whenever I would swallow, the fear of a snake rising up from my stomach, up my throat and out of my mouth. Over time, my fear of snakes has subtly yet consistently turned into fascination. For me, the serpent represents the flow of time and the motion of growth in nature and consciousness. Carl Jung also references the serpent, and associates it with the unconscious; "The snake, as a chthonic and at the same time a spiritual being, symbolizes the unconscious" (Jung, 363). He continues to elaborate on its symbolism:

“More especially the threat to one’s inmost self from dragons and serpents points to the danger of the newly acquired consciousness being swallowed up again by the instinctive psyche, the unconscious. The lower vertebrates have from earliest times been favourite symbols of the collective psychic substratum, which is localized anatomically in the subcortical centres, the cerebellum and the spinal cord. These organs constitute the snake. Snake-dreams usually occur, therefore, when the conscious mind is deviating from its instinctual basis.” (Jung, 166)

In my piece, *Figure 2: Slithering Through the Excrement of Time*, I’ve used abstraction to evoke imagery that represents the idea of serpentine movement without rendering anything literally.



Figure 2: Slithering Through the Excrement of Time, 2017

The physical structure of the spinal column itself is serpentine, and from it all of our limbs grow forth, like branches. The form of the serpent, not the animal itself, has become a

continuous visual symbol throughout all of my artwork. I even find the physical structure of the brain looks as though a serpentine form had lay nestled within it.

I've found that both alchemists and artists alike sought methods of projecting the unconscious. The alchemists had a variety of ways in which they achieved trance-like states to extract images from their subconscious and unconscious territories of their mind, from staring into a fire to their experimentation with their alchemical instruments. 13th century philosopher Raymond Lully describes his visions much like how they appear in my mind, and how they manifest into the work that I create, when he writes, "...the course of nature is turned about, so that without spiritual exaltation you can see certain fugitive spirits condensed in the air in the shape of diverse monsters, beasts, and men, which move like the clouds hither and thither (Hamilton, 3). and in Arthur Edward Waite's translation of Philalethe's *Introitus Apertus*, Lully describes,

"The substance of the vessel will exhibit a great variety of forms; it will become liquid and again coagulate a hundred times a day; sometimes it will present the appearance of fishes' eyes and then again of tiny silver trees with twigs and leaves. Whenever you look at it you will have cause for astonishment, particularly when you see it all divides into beautiful but very minute grains of silver, like the ray of the sun. This is the whole tincture... (Hamilton, 3)."

The images that arise from my use of automatic mark-making are a result from the combination of my own conscious marks and the material itself, the resulting imagery is a reflection of this balance and dialogue between spontaneity and uncertainty; this becomes a projection of my mind through the material. The images often evoke familiar organic forms that appear as if they are in a process of transformation, of becoming something but not quite anything at all. Some images

resemble trees, serpents, mountains, eyes, anthropomorphic figures, bones, and heaps or nests of organic matter like in my triptych seen in *Figure 3: Three Husks*.



Figure 3: Three Husks

The underlying foundation from which my will to make artwork comes from are the negative sides of my emotions and psyche - a negative lens. This has never been a choice for me, it has always been a perspective that has grown immensely in my life. I see myself living and understanding my life 'via negativa'. Via negativa is a concept that derives from an apophatic theology, which is Latin for "negative way," or, "way of denial." This is a method of contemplating the essence of what God is not; "...a multidimensional and non-linear meditation on disparate experiences such as darkness, nothingness, silence, pain and suffering, letting go, receptivity, and letting be (303, S. Valle, Halling)." I feel as though my mind works through this way of thinking, and I translate this idea into how I interpret my idea of what the concept of God or Godhead could be, all things in my perceivable reality, through this negative lens. These contain the aspects that drive me to create art as a sort of purging of these feelings. The aesthetic

of my work is a direct reflection of the psychological states that I enter while not only in the art-making process, but also the negative energy that the will to make art derives from. I see all of my work as an outpouring of expression and have always found a cathartic solace whenever I enter the creative process, along with the art-making process itself. This experience is like an outpour of a thick, deep black tar-like substance that cannot be seen but only felt until it is made into something exterior from myself. The release of this psychological weight feels like the dumping of sludge that in effect, creates a feeling of weightlessness in my mind and body. This is why I have always made art, and continue to do so. By channeling and filtering the negative aspects of my mind, I feel as though it cleanses my psyche, spirit or soul. It is, in essence, an exorcism. From the viewer, I ultimately seek an empathetic response, a felt sense of my psyche. This comes from a desire to reach out and display emotions that otherwise cannot be articulated through words. I have always struggled with trying to explain verbally this negativity that resides within myself. The motivation to show my work to the viewer arises from a desire to use my artwork to infect the viewer's mind with my emotions, for them to get a glimpse into the landscape of my psyche. My goal isn't to make imagery that pleases the viewer. I liken my creative process along with what drives me to create art to Aleister Crowley's account of a 'personalized' abyss, in which he, for himself, named Choronzon, the manifestation of all negativity that dwells in the 'Abyss,' who described it as,

“...empty of being it is filled with all possible forms, each equally inane, each therefore evil in the only true sense of the word—that is, meaningless but malignant, in so far as it craves to become real. These forms swirl senselessly into haphazard heaps like dust devils, and each such chance aggregation asserts itself to be an individual and shrieks, "I am I!" though aware all the time that its elements have no true bond; so that the slightest

disturbance dissipates the delusion just as a horseman, meeting a dust devil, brings it in showers of sand to the earth (Crowley, *The Vision & the Voice*).”

The process of making art has allowed me to delve into my psyche and imagination, entering a space that feels separate yet contained by the outside world where the fundamental aspects of time seem to change. This space that I enter is like that of a liminal state, where ideas fluctuate without any definitive and fixed form. This entering of an alternate state of consciousness can be compared to ideas found within the traditions of Zen Buddhism. “Zen,” meaning meditation, is also accompanied by the development, understanding, and use of one’s intuition. I’ve found that much of my inspiration comes from similar themes found within the concepts of wabi and sabi, which, “...are used to express a sense of rusticity, melancholy, loneliness, naturalness, and age, so that a misshapen, worn peasant’s jar is considered more beautiful than a pristine, carefully crafted dish. While the latter pleases the senses, the former stimulates the mind and emotions to contemplate the essence of reality (www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/zen/hd_zen.htm).”

I feel as if making art and exploring the imagination, questioning “truths,” is like manipulating and working between what is believed to be real and unreal. For me, the concept of the void is a theme that I confront in my work, and is something that I believe can be interpreted differently depending on who is perceiving it. In my interpretation, the void is pregnant with all possible forms, filled with boundless potential energy, yet it is nothing specific. I see the material world much like a veil of specificity that works to hide the transformative nature of matter. I also find the words of Yves Klein inspiring when he speaks of his transition from monochrome to the immaterial; “The Void is the free space in which cosmic energy is diffused and the basis of all

communication. In order to achieve the mastery of language, the monochrome painter took possession of the ultimate reality – immaterial reality.” (Restany, 150).

Each piece of my work is like the peeling away of shells that act as false representations of ideas at an attempt to reach a purer image, like the Kelipah in Kabbalistic mysticism, which translates to “peel” or “shell,” concealing the fruit, and are understood as evil (Schochet, 147). I see them as veils that prevent being able to see the larger picture. Diving into the art-making state of mind for me is an indulgence in my own negativity, and the resulting artwork is like an exorcism of negative emotion and energy

I believe that art making is a form of magic itself because it involves manifesting an immaterial idea into the material world, creating a literal object regardless of its dimension in space, it is a transformative process. Taking the immaterial nature of the idea, and attempting to realize it in a physical form, is an alchemical process involving the chemical processes of mind and the material utilization of the tools, which are used to manifest the idea. The alchemical term, “solve et coagula,” means that to create, one must destroy, dissolving the body to build up the spirit. I believe that the act of creation involves a certain level of destruction regardless of what the art is, because there are always elements that are left behind, changed and/or manipulated through the filtering of the idea into realization. Working with abstraction implies the destruction of representational form, partially by taking what is recognizable and deconstructing, reconstructing and reinterpreting it, redefining its context.

CHAPTER 4

THE CREATIVE PROCESS: CONNECTIONS WITH THE PSYCHE, SURREALISM, AUTOMATISM, LIMINALITY, AND ACTION PAINTING

In the broader context of art history, I've found that my work shares several notable characteristics with the Surrealists of the 20th century. I share their interest in uncovering elements of the subconscious, exploring dream imagery, and their interest in various psychological states and disorders. Andre Breton, in his 1924 Manifesto of Surrealism, defined surrealism in the context of automatism as, "psychic automatism in its pure state" according to "actual functioning of thought... in the absence of any control exercised by reason" (Conley, pp. 129–143). Surrealist artwork, however, wasn't completely absent of control. The process involved the copulation of the outside world/reality, with the inner world/dreams and the psyche. This combination, according to Breton, creates a "future resolution of these two states... which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality (Conley, 129–143)."

Although I have taken private art lessons as a child, and have always centered my concentration in art throughout school, I have always felt like an 'outsider' artist. I never had an affinity toward the art world growing up, nor had I been exposed to it until my undergraduate studies in college. Artists and 'Art' itself hadn't been what inspired me to follow the artist's path; it was an inspiration from within, from the cathartic liberation the art-making process provided me, especially in dealing with depression. Showing my artwork to others is a very revealing

experience, and is often uncomfortable. The automatic, intuitive, and abstract nature of the imagery becomes a frighteningly honest and accurate self-portrait of my mental state. In a sense I share the same fascination the Surrealists had with the art of the mentally ill 'outsider artists'.

The automatic process that I utilize isn't wholly without reason and/or direction. Working with a certain material such as acrylic paint, which dries relatively quickly, requires me to make fast decisions. Overthinking my decision making with imagery has been a particular obstacle for me, and this process has allowed me to break free of over-analyzation that used to hinder my creative output and slow me down. I've discovered a technique to create imagery that feels like a more honest reflection of myself, capturing forms and shapes that I had always been attracted to, without relying on realistic representation of a particular thing. The resulting imagery is like an outpouring of a personalized visual language that is ultimately meant to be felt and experienced instead of communicated through spoken dialogue. This non-verbal communication is what I use to illustrate not only the mind-state that I enter in the process of art-making, but also the pre-existing psychological landscape that it required to be created. Capturing the remnants of fleeting ideas, fossilized in time in my attempt to capture them, knowing the imagery is an incomplete shell of the idea - a cluster of moments in time to capture the fading image of a memory and/or feeling.

Through my experimentation with varying levels of control and non-control with the material during the art-making process, I have been able to mimic the push and pull of order and disorder found throughout the natural world. The resulting imagery is a static visual representation of the chaotic processes that were used to make it. I want my work to imitate this idea of chaos that Ovid described in his *Metamorphoses*, "a rude and undeveloped mass, that nothing made except a ponderous weight; and all discordant elements confused, were there

congested in a shapeless heap." For me, control always seems to spiral into unpredictable outcomes; the more attempts at controlling something, the more problems arise therefore creating chaotic circumstances that create opportunities for control and order to exist; in many ways this is an extension of myself.

An additional psychological angle and state of mind that I seek to capture and visualize shares many similarities to what is called the, "liminal," state. My work seeks to represent organic motion, the transformation of physicality through time. What Arnold Van Gennep calls a, "neutral zone," where time and space are transforming, where the physical, "wavers between two worlds." It is the representation of being trapped within the liminal, where the state before becomes a distant memory, an illusion, and the future state is uncertain and may never manifest. I find myself in this 'neutral zone' while in the process of art-making. The work emphasizes the representation of myself beyond my outward physical appearance, the death of my identity as a human being. The art-making process is also a reflection of a transitory experience, as Van Gennep stated, "... life itself seems to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and to be reborn. It is to act and to cease, to wait and rest, and then to begin acting again, but in a different way. And there are always new thresholds to cross..." (van Gennep, 189-90).

I consider my art-making process as an endless state of becoming, of existing in a perpetual liminal state of being, very similar to J-F. Lyotard's description of Postmodernity as,

"...the nascent state, the state of a permanent 'becoming' (The Postmodern Condition, 1979) he basically admitted its innate liminal character; and those artworks that seek to address this condition (both deliberately or not) are probably best recognised for their aesthetics (or anti-aesthetics)... paintings seem to be painfully 'hanged' by their own guts with indescribable forms, unidentifiable colours and freaky techniques; videos cry out for

any structure, even a hint of a narrative. Their ‘becomingness’ is the only existence they know and it comes invariably as disquieting or even disturbing for the audience. Not without a reason the primitive societies considered the liminal states as dangerous, unclean (Turner); and those affected were isolated ‘pro publico bono’.
(skonieczna.wordpress.com).”

This concept of a liminal realm of confronting the self, along with the annihilation of one’s identity influences another aspect of my work. I use a dark palette, mostly consisting of black ink or acrylic, to represent the infinite and the unknown, the untrodden territory of yet-to-be-known, along with the reality of uncertainty, which also plays a vital role within the process of making the work itself.

As I have begun to work in a much larger scale, I have increasingly used more movement of my body to create my imagery. The art-making process has become more intimate and engaging. The act of moving the brush has become a sort of attack on whatever surface that I’m dealing with. Within the middle of making, I feel as if I am fighting myself and the material attempting to create a harmonic balance. The experience of making these larger works can be compared to the abstract expressionist artist that began the idea and process of “action painting” such as Jackson Pollock and Robert Motherwell. Not only through the process, but particularly Pollock’s interest in the psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung’s theories of the mind and the subconscious. For Pollock and other action painters, Jung provided “a perspective for viewing art as a particular form of cognition that took place through a dialectic interplay of the unconscious and the generic on the one hand, and the conscious and the individual on the other”
(www.jstor.org/stable/1483227)

CHAPTER 5

FUTURISM & ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

One of the most important elements of my work is time; working with and against time, the perceived warping of time through the art-making process, and the transformations that occur in the physical world over time. I make use of repetition within my mark-making partly to create an illusion of natural pattern and movement. Much of my work is concerned with representing aspects of transformation that happen in nature such as embryonic development, larval metamorphoses like those found in the life cycles of moths and butterflies, geological shifts and changes throughout time, weather patterns, and the endless motion of the material world, outside of perceptible time. The idea that nothing is ever still, and all things are changing at varying levels of speed throughout time is another aspect within my work. I use these observations to work as a metaphor to convey the transformations of the form of ideas through my creative process.

My fascination with time parallels the artists that were a part of the Futurist movement in the early 20th century had also made similar observations concerning repetition as a means to capture an impression of visual movement. Unlike the Futurists who were concerned with destroying notions of the past as they looked forward to a new dawn of the future brought about by technology and speed, my concern and relevance to them is capturing the illusion of movement. The futurists particular fascination with motion is described in their Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto, “Indeed, all things move, all things run, all things are rapidly changing. A profile is never motionless before our eyes, but constantly appears and disappears... moving

objects constantly multiply themselves, change shape, succeeding one another, like rapid vibrations, in the space which they traverse (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1nq4q3>).”

It would be impossible for me to mention the relevance of Abstract Expressionism without the addressing some of the ideas that were being explored by the German Expressionists. In particular, I find a connection with the Norwegian artist Edvar Munch’s aesthetic approach to his work, where his, “linear forms and flat areas sweep through the compositions, forcing landscapes and human figures to conform to their self-willed movement, giving the psychic content of the picture a heightened emotional impact on the beholder. Natural forms are compressed or attenuated, distorted into sweeping rhythms in the interest of emotional emphasis.” (Kuhn, 5). I’d like to think my work to be an abstracted extension of the effect Munch was striving to achieve through his representational works. Like the Expressionists, my work isn’t concerned with outer reality, but with my inner vision. A defining quality of the German Expressionists can also be used to define elements of my work such as, “a self-conscious rebelliousness... a sense of seeking for new ways of expressing visually the things of the spirit...” and, “the validity of the artist’s personal emotional response to his subject.” (Kuhn, 7). The German Expressionists also shared the interest in depicting the “inner” world of the mind versus the “outer” physical world by attempting to create a new artistic language free from the limitations of traditional naturalistic representation (Kuhn, 22).

Many artists in the early 20th century sought to use their art to explore and reveal new dimensions in perception, and held a strong value in the power of insight into the natural world to perceive reality behind appearances (Elgar, 89). The idea that art can be used to unveil hidden vistas of reality, especially considering the ‘hidden’ personal perspectives of each individual, is an idea that I believe supports the will for an individual to create art, because it is revealing to

others a personal perspective, a reality that others cannot see because it exists within the mind of the individual.

The organic quality of my work shares characteristics found in what has been labeled as biomorphic abstraction. Artists such as Constantin Brancusi, Jean Arp, and Andre Masson are but a few artists whose work was considered strongly ‘biomorphic’ (<http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/b/biomorphic>). Biomorphic abstraction was not a specific art movement, but a reoccurring visual quality that had manifested in various forms of Abstract Expressionism and Surrealism. The consistent biomorphic aesthetic in my work also follows a similar path of abstraction that various abstract artists experienced in their art-making careers. The work of artists such as Pablo Picasso, Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, and Yves Klein share a gradual deconstruction of representation similar to my own artistic development. A particular leitmotif Kandinsky develops in his *On the Spiritual in Art*, is the importance of inner necessity, the “artistic conscience that leads every conscientious artist to search for the mode of expression best suited to him...” utilizing the intuitive inner voice to distance the imagery further and further away from the imitation of reality (Hahl-Koch, 174). Kandinsky elaborates his vision of form in his *On the Spiritual in Art*:

“Externally – delimitation; internally – external expression of the internal... You have to let form affect you... Form is very important, but only as a means, so it is at the same time not important at all. form can be faultless, dazzling, and yet worthless, because it is empty. So, long live form, and down with form! [...] Just put your ear to your heart and listen! [...] The ear has to capture what is necessary to it. this necessity comprises beauty and truth. For that reason there is neither a single beauty nor a single truth. There are as many of each as there are souls in the world.” (Hahl-Koch, 174).

It was the process of deconstructing representational form that attracted me to Mondrian's work. It was Mondrian's ability to see linear rhythm beneath natural forms, and his journey into abstraction that I find the most relatable, which can be seen in his series of Tree paintings, "between the first Tree, markedly expressionist, and to the last, progressively schematized, there is all the distance that separates reality from its quintessence, form seen from form imagined..." (Elgar, 46).

Mark Rothko touches on the idea of the plastic process in art making and the importance of self-expression, that there is a, "biological necessity for self-expression," (Rothko, 14). The plasticity Rothko mentions is basically the definite properties of art that change from point to point like the evolution of a species, which are, "constantly rearranged," and, "...grows logically, definitely, step by step from the exhibition of one set of characteristics to another, always related to its past equipment, and bearing at the same time the promise of the future.." (Rothko, 14). I believe that through my creative process, I unconsciously practice what Rothko mentions when he describes the, "organic continuity of art in relation to its own laws;" that, "For any organic substance, art must always be in a state of flux, the tempo being slow or fast. But it must move (Rothko, 14)." Rothko also describes the effect of large artwork upon the viewer, an effect that I also attempt to achieve with my larger pieces, as they are meant to, "absorb, envelop the viewer," where the viewer is, "meant to enter it, to sink into its atmosphere of mist and light or to draw it around us like a coat – or a skin (Selz, 10)." I see my work like, "silent paintings with their enormous, [beautiful], opaque surfaces are mirrors, reflecting what the viewer brings with him... they can even be said to deal directly with human emotions, desires, relationships, for they are mirrors of our fantasy and serve as echoes of our experience. (Selz, 10)"

Several ideas and the work that Yves Klein began to make with his ‘live paintbrushes’ seen in his Anthropometry series I’ve found relatable. Klein described that he, through observing the lifeless imprint created living things, a sense of void-ness and a loss of identity when he wrote, “Nice 1947 - The time of the encounter with the nothingness of personality. I execute alongside my monochrome effort some imprints of hands, feet, and plants... (Restany, 88)” Like Klein, I have always been fascinated by human anatomy, and the structures that it consists of. Klein had also become aware of this fascination with parts of the body when he stated, “...I very soon realized that it was the block of the body, meaning the trunk and even a portion of the thighs, that fascinated me. (Restany, 90)” I believe that I have been able to become aware of the shapes that consist of muscular and bone structure that I have always intrigued me, and have been able to create abstract imagery that has the ability to evoke or reference anatomical various structures. It’s Klein’s general interest in the immaterial permanence of the flesh that I find the most relatable and captivating. By meditating on this idea, my mind forms abstract imagery of organic forms constantly moving and flowing into one another.

The struggle to bring forth imagery from my mind into physicality is an informative process, and a process of transformation in itself. One of my goals with this process and the resulting imagery that speaks to emotion, to give expression where language falls short. To me, language has both simplified and made more complicated our world and our reality; I believe that the objectification and classification of our physical world has caused language to run into paradoxes when it cannot explain particular aspects of experience, aspects through which I believe art can be utilized to broaden the understanding.

A goal for me is to use art and the creative process to “destroy” realistic representation into indistinguishable forms as a symbolic annihilation of what I believe to be true. To me, the

universe observed through the temporary human lens is much like sacrifice, as it is limited to the human perspective and an idea further explored by the late 19th/early 20th century French intellectual and literary figure, Georges Bataille on destroying the ‘object,’ or destroying the identity and transforming the nature an object, through the context of the Surrealists:

“... The character of current painting — destruction, apocalypse of objects — is not put clearly into relief, is not highlighted in the lineage of sacrifice. Yet, what the surrealist painter wishes to see on the canvas where he assembles his images does not differ fundamentally from what the Aztec crowd came to see at the base of a pyramid where a victim's heart was to be torn out. In either case the flash of destruction is anticipated...

...What we have been waiting for all our lives is this disordering of the order that suffocates us. Some object should be destroyed in this disordering (destroyed as an object and, if possible, as something "separate"). We gravitate to the negation of that limit of death, which fascinates like light. For the disordering of the object — the destruction — is only worthwhile insofar as it disorders us, insofar as it disorders the subject at the same time. We cannot ourselves (the subject) directly lift the obstacle that "separates" us. But we can, if we lift the obstacle that separates the object (the victim of the sacrifice), participate in this denial of all separation. What attracts us in the destroyed object (in the very moment of destruction) is its power to call into question — and to undermine — the solidity of the subject. Thus the purpose of the trap is to destroy us as an object (insofar as we remain enclosed — and fooled — in our enigmatic isolation)

(http://supervert.com/elibrary/georges_bataille/cruel_practice_of_art).

This concept of destroying the recognizable arises from my process of letting go of complete control over the direction of my work, and allowing my subconscious to speak more

freely; creating a dialogue with material and chance. I have been able to focus on form itself, detached from literalness. I have been able to break away from images of the body and classical representation, in the process of creating a technique to express my psyche. It's my personal belief that all physicality, all the forms found in nature are reflections and fractals of each other, and that there is an underlying archetypal structure that is, like abstraction, free of time, and ever-flowing. I believe that through creating ambiguity in form through my black and white mono-types, my imagery has the ability to move within the mind of the viewer, to shift and transform into various things.

CHAPTER 6

CONTEMPORARY FIGURES

In my current body of work, I'm not consciously thinking or responding to contemporary trends, my influences, or even the history of art. I'm driven by emotion and the dialogue between myself and the marks being made. This state of mind is frantic and reactionary, almost primal. I believe that many artists are able to tap into a collective unconscious, especially with emotionally driven work. Therefore, similarities arise, of which I am able to see a commonality between myself and other artists who share similar aesthetic choices and driven by similar emotions and impulses. My experimentation with ink wash paintings acted as a stepping stone toward learning how to let go of my control over an image. This process led to my current mono-type paintings which combine automatic gestural action and chance. Both of these processes share similarities with the autonomous action-painting style developed by Jackson Pollock's drip paintings (www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/jackson-pollock). Although I admire Pollock's ingenuity, I found his wife, Lee Krasner's work more relatable and appealing, in particular through the visual similarities it shares with my own work. Like Krasner, my earlier work was primarily influenced by a combination of Realism and Surrealism. And much like Krasner, my work has now developed into a rhythmic abstraction (www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/486683). I find strong similarities with my mono-prints and her work entitled, *Night Creatures*; "One imagines that hidden within the thicket of

Krasner's swirling black-and-white paint strokes are menacing eyes, heads, and even entire figures surrounded by dense foliage. (www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/486683).”

I find one of the most important aspects of art is that regardless of how similar the concept or idea, each individual has their own specific approach to addressing whatever it may be. Each artist adds to the broader picture of human experience and the human mind in perceiving reality, and therefore, as artists, we're able to expand what can be seen for ourselves and others. There are countless artists working now that continue to approach concepts from the past, and interpreting them in a contemporary sense. Considering that I am not actively responding to any particular group at the moment, there are few artists that I have come across that I feel communicate similar ideas through their own subjective approach.

I feel that my work also communicates a similar idea to the work of Charles Seliger, from a phrase he found to describe his work, “I found a wonderful phrase ... which I think states the nature of my painting in a most exact way: ‘The Structure of Becoming,’ two aspects of my work, so clear to me ... My paintings are always concerned with the most minute relationships and structure yet always remain in flux, in a state of becoming, never (in spite of the intensity and detail) to arrive at a final and recognizable form.” — Charles Seliger, journal entry, December 1, 1980.

I find the work of Johan Van Mullen very relatable aesthetically and conceptually. Johan was self-taught, and whose practice has grown out of drawing. His current work consists primarily of painterly and abstracted portraiture consisting of a variety of expressive brushstrokes. The energy and psychological weight of his paintings resonate with me. I can relate to Van Mullen's approach to his process when he describes it within an interview with Hilde Van Canneyt on her art blog Interviews with Contemporary Artists, “I always have the feeling that

already exists in the painting energy and feelings. You know you will make it, if you do not know in advance what you will make. The only thing you can actually do in advance, the format and choose the colors. I see the painting, however, purely as energy (hildevanconeyt.blogspot.be).” In an interview with Romain Genard, Genard uses a quote by the Irish-born expressionist Francis Bacon to describe the heavy use of the brushstroke, “It is common that the tension is completely changed just by the way a brush stroke goes. It engenders a form other than the form you are making, which is why pictures will always be chess subjected to chance and chance, accident, unconscious. It is a question of accepting or refusing it. A new truth, unbearable, arises: we are free.” (boumbang.com/johan-van-mullem).

Pablo Tomek is a contemporary French artist that I have recently discovered through my research in process based art. Tomek has become recognized for his mark-making/hand style, and is associated with graffiti culture, belonging to the Parisian collective Peace and Love (<http://www.widewalls.ch/artist/tomek/>). Although I wouldn't say that I identify with graffiti culture, I do appreciate Tomek's approach to his gallery work. Tomek focuses on the composition and shape of letters instead of the legibility of the words to create his paintings, capturing the nature of the artists' hand (<http://www.widewalls.ch/artist/tomek/>), much like how I focus on shape and composition to create abstractions that often reference organic forms found in nature. Much of the work for my exhibition involves mono-type prints made by painting directly onto plexiglass. While working through the process, I discovered that when a painted piece of plexiglass faces a light source, it creates a powerful visual quality. Also while cleaning the paint off of the plexiglass, I began to notice that the mark making created by cleaning the paint off could also stand as a strong image. Through research I discovered that this concept has also been explored by Tomek in his series, 'Accident'. For this series he used tools intended for

cleaning to paint with. According to Tomek this series is, "...an alloy where colors appear as a reflection and where the line evokes wild uncontrolled gesture... (<http://pablotopek.com>)."

CHAPTER 7

VIDEO & SOUND INSTALLATION

Along with the two-dimensional works, I have explored using video and sound to bring the viewer deeper into my mind and creative process. The video/sound piece depicts the process of taking away paint from a surface, revealing a process that is usually never seen. The video itself is flipped and mirrored to give the effect of a constantly moving mandala. For me, the video symbolizes the idea of 'solve et coagula' or, dissolve and coagulate, destroy to recreate.

I feel that my visual artwork contains a sound, and that it was my job to excavate them. The sound that I created to accompany the video is influenced by my interest in noise music, dark ambient, and power electronics. I've always appreciated the ambient sounds produced by nature, both organic and human-made. I see a sort of chaotic structure to it as a whole, while music is taking sound and applying a specific structure. I've been most influenced by contemporary noise musicians who take direct influence by the experimentations of noise artists from the early 20th century, in particular from the Dada movement and John Cage. The sounds that emanated from the Dada movement could be considered anti-music, as explained by Daniel Barbiero,

“Dada's own music was descended from the Futurists' arte dei rumori--"art of noises." ...the noise music of Cabaret Voltaire was based on "life itself...a kind of return to nature," a direct action that "could at least give you a toothache." ... Dada's bruitism implied a music negated by non-music, but this negative non-music in turn would be negated by being thrust into the musical context. Call it the Dada dialectic of sound <http://www.furious.com/perfect/dadamusic.html> ()”

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

Throughout the past three years in graduate school, I have been able to evolve and mature as an artist by delving deeper into my creative process. I've been able to become more conscious of my own artistic practice, and have developed a technique to further my exploration in balancing control and non-control with my material and direction of my work, which has subsequently created a new foundation for more work to develop. I see this exhibition as a step toward furthering my creative visions. My goal from here is to expand and integrate my visual work with sound and video to create immersive experiences for the viewer, eventually entering the realm of performance pieces for a more encapsulating sensory experience.

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