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Interspace Encounters: Parkview Gardens

Madeline Marak

Washington University in St. Louis, mmarak@wustl.edu

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Washington University in St. Louis

Graduate School of Art

Interspace Encounters: Parkview Gardens

Madeline Marak

A thesis presented to the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts of
Washington University in St. Louis in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

Graduate Committee

Richard Kruger | Thesis and Studio Advisor
Lisa Bulawsky | Studio Advisor
Jennifer Colten-Schmidt | Committee Member
Christine Abbot | Committee Member

Abstract

The undertaking to render an experience tangible reveals the inadequacy of the techniques and technologies of representation to transcribe the perception of ubiquitous, yet unnoticed, spaces in the urban environment. The work of Madeline Marak contemplates overlooked and forgotten spaces that are unnoticed by busy, preoccupied minds. The work advocates for slowing down... considering... and being present. This thesis refers to writer Rebecca Solnit and her anthologies on the subjects of walking, wandering, and getting lost to advocate for activities that preoccupy the mind and facilitate freethinking. The humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan is quoted in argument for a direct engagement with a space. Marak's work mirrors the desire to express the felt experience of being in a space that is neither fully human-constructed nor fully natural, negotiating the margin between what we experience and what we think to know of a space. The theorists Georges Perec and John Berger, as well as the artist Uta Barth, are referenced to expound on the act of seeing; contemplating what we look at and how we see. Marak uses the mediums of photography and painting to investigate a perceived experience. Artist Richard Diebenkorn and collaboration Peter Fischli and David Weiss work similarly to Marak by translating the experience of a place into images. Ultimately, the representations function separately from the experience in that they cultivate patience and consider the banality of everydayness to affirm the practice of noticing the unnoticed.

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Introduction

Present, perceptive, engaged with my surroundings, noticing the unnoticed, thinking about what most don't think of, and going where most don't think to go, my work promotes awareness. It acknowledges the overlooked and connects to the unconsidered. This thesis delineates the ways in which I conduct my practice of slowing down and seeing. Walking through my neighborhood, I explore the in-between spaces of the urban environment. Imaging the space between two buildings where concrete and grass mingle brings awareness to moments of the urban landscape that are hidden in plain sight. While photographing, immersed in the space, I experience with intentionality. This thesis attests for experience as a true way to perceive the interspaces of the urban environment.

The work mirrors the desire to find comprehensive forms of order within visual perception. In trying to describe the experience of perception, information is lost in the translation. This thesis asserts the limits of representing a perceptual experience. Photographs and paintings come together in varied arrangements to invoke the experience of being outside in an interspace. Photography's spurious objectivity reveals the artifice of the medium. Likewise, painting's inability to retain life-like details distances the represented from the experience. The scattered arrangement of the photographs and paintings presents an abstraction of my process of looking, recording, seeing, and describing an overlooked space. The work depicts the unseen, gives voice to the unconsidered, and scrutinizes the inexplicable within the dynamic space of the urban environment.

Walking

Walking out into the world, onto the land, experiencing it in real time is the way that I negotiate my relationship with the outdoor spaces in my daily life. Walking, for me, has a way of showing me things I would usually overlook. Walking focuses on the here and now; it creates a sense of urgency for what is underfoot. There is value in slowing down. Walking validates the land and the land validates walking. Walking—aware of nothing other than being knowingly aware of my surroundings—is essentially the foundation of my practice.

Walking connects my body to an external world while focusing my mind inward. I walk without a determined path or sequence. The decisions to turn one way or another happen intuitively and mindlessly like how one doodles while listening to a phone conversation. In this way, the act is akin to wandering—a fluid, aimless activity. When walking, it's not always clear where I will end up or what I will find along the way. It's as if, "the rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts. This creates an odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests that the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it."¹ The land provides a venue for wandering, for thought, and for introspection.

My mind searches for a connection to an experience of place. I pause to investigate a space. I inhabit it in able to contend with it. I notice the elements that act to confine and delineate the space. I notice the smaller parts that make up the whole. I notice

the external forces that shape the space. I collect this information while walking to engage in the practice of reading the particularities of a space.

Walking narrows my scope of discovery. I focus on the three-block area that constitutes my neighborhood. As a result of investigating my immediate surroundings, the spaces depicted in my thesis work happen to reside in the urban residential context. This distinction in itself is consequential, though it is not insignificant. The close proximity of apartment buildings and the alleyways made for easy garbage pick-up create a patchwork of unused green, or semi-green, spaces. I traipse these intermittent spaces, occupying the pockets of my neighborhood where most don't think to go.

The places I depict are not destinations. These intermittent spaces are intrinsic to neighborhoods, “that part of the town you don't need to go to, precisely because you're already there.”² Weaving in and out of these contained areas, I enjoy the privacy and muffled sounds that the backs of buildings provide. By slowing down, I allow the intricacies of these overlooked spaces to reveal themselves to me.



Figure 1

Condition of Spaces

In the effort to characterize, but not simplistically categorize, I must take a moment to describe the nature of the spaces that I encounter. They are un-designed remnants of the urban fabric; the gaps between occupied spaces. They contain hardscape and softscape, concrete and grass, built forms and plantings. They are amalgamations of ecological and pedestrian systems—two dynamic and complex networks in and of themselves. They oscillate between human and natural realms, existing between the notion of the parking lot and the green meadow. Liminal in both function and consideration, they are interspaces.

The narrowness of these spaces creates a unique condition. The merging of naturally occurring and constructed elements is evident in the condition of interspaces. Depending on the particular space, the ratio of naturally occurring elements to built elements varies. Both are always present. As I walk, I read the land, noticing both



Figure 2

the natural and constructed elements. I notice an internal organization that occurs between these elements. The way that grass grows in the cracked segments of concrete, the way that a fence has to circumnavigate the roots of a tree, and how those roots grow around that fence impels a correlative relationship. Both the natural and constructed contend with the other. They seem not to be in opposition, but rather to simply exist side by side. This gives interspaces a condition of being acted upon. The structure of them, the elements within them, the aesthetic of them have all been enacted atop these spaces. The cycle of development on a parcel of land: construction, demolition, leveling, and rebuilding, emanates from the center of the lot and spills out onto the undeveloped perimeter. Since the interspaces of the urban environment most often have not been diagrammatically designed, their compositions are a product of circumstances. The interwoven configuration of built and un-built systems give interspaces their happenstance quality.

Experience

To get a sense of the condition of interspaces, I encounter the spaces first-hand. A space is primarily understood through the experience of it. “In the act of moving, space, and its attributes are directly experienced.”³ Our notion of space: how we read a space, how we feel in a space, or how we respond to a space is reliant on being there. To understand even an abstract sense of space, “such ideas develop out of movement—out of the direct experiencing of space through movement.”⁴ By revisiting and re-experiencing

the same spaces in my neighborhood many times, I have forged an intimate relationship with these unconsidered and unappreciated spaces.

Being present in a space engenders a dialogical negotiation, a reciprocal engagement. Not only am I approaching a space, but the space also offers something up to me as the explorer. “We experience the sensuous world only by rendering ourselves vulnerable to that world. Sensory perception is this ongoing interweavement: the terrain enters into us only to the extent that we allow ourselves to be taken up *within* that terrain.”⁵ The body is essential to our perception. To know a space, its limitations within confining structures or its varied topographical levels, is to inhabit that space. “The experience of landscape spaces is never simply and alone an aesthetic one but is more deeply experienced as a lived-upon topological field, a highly situated network of relationships and associations.”⁶ Moving through a space on foot engenders a direct connection to the subject in question.

Experiencing the interspaces, contemplating the undetermined elements, I collect images as reference of an engagement with my surroundings. Delaying judgments, expectations, and biases, my mind and body move through interspaces responding to what the space offers. The work contains a quality of “being there” that is a product of direct observation.

Photography

I employ photography to translate the physical into the visual. Photography records details more readily than most mediums. The medium comes closest to capturing

information with specificity analogous to what our eyes see. The medium is, however, an artifice. Translating stimuli of an experienced space to the two-dimensional field of an image involves a reduction of information into shapes, light, and color. Photography's spurious relationship to the experience of an interspace adherently conveys the limits of representation. The still image is a simulation of the complexities of a space, a flattened transcription of the richness of the experience. Photography demonstrates the desire to concretize in order to clarify. The process of transcribing an experience of an interspace to a tangible representation results in inadequacies due to the limits of techniques and technologies to replicate the perception of a space.

Contemplating photography's process of translating perceptible visual information to a flat image is important not only to a conversation about representation, but also involves the consideration of our attention to images. The writings by Vilém Flusser in *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* attest to the abstraction of information within the world when transformed to two-dimensions. "Images signify—mainly—something 'out there' in space and time that they have to make comprehensible to us as abstractions (as reductions of the four dimensions of space and time to the two surface dimensions)."⁷ Photography mediates between the world and our perception.

The ability to decode, analyze, and contemplate the representation of a photograph relies on our attention and awareness. In this, Flusser's text points to an essential role of how images function in this thesis:

The significance of images is on the surface. One can take them in at a single glance yet this remains superficial. If one wishes to deepen the significance, i.e. to reconstruct the abstracted dimensions, one has to allow one's gaze to wander over the surface feeling the way as one goes. This wandering over the surface of the image is called 'scanning'... The significance of the image as revealed in the process of scanning therefore represents a synthesis of two intentions: one manifested in the

image and the other belonging to the observer... While wandering over the surface of the image, one's gaze takes in one element after another and produces temporal relationships between them.⁸

I photograph interspaces in my neighborhood to engage in the act of “scanning” and “observing”.

Photography allows for unpacking complex components of the physical realm when it is suspended in the format of a representation; an inscription of the space, of “being there”. According to Flusser, “the world is not immediately accessible to [humans] and therefore images are needed to make it comprehensible.”⁹ Acting as a



Figure 3

quotation, the image references its original source.

Photography has a trajectory in performing as documentation because of the medium’s ability to retain detailed information. The art historian Lucy Lippard agrees in photography’s ability to exhibit a sense of “being there”. She acknowledges that “though we no longer see photography as ‘truth,’ and Photoshop has made lies easy, it [photography] still implies

first-hand experience like no other medium, and works in the gap between art and life.”¹⁰

The photo has an analogous relationship to the world, but it is not an unobstructed portal to the world.

An image is only as informative as the viewer is receptive. The desire to look at images, as well as make them, is a desire to unpack something complex. The photograph captures the moments of my exploration within a fixed field. The ephemeral becomes concretized. That which was a moment in time is stopped... frozen as an object to allow for contemplation. The image that results contains information of the interspace and of my own interaction. Flusser explains that though we created images to “orient” ourselves in the world, “instead of representing the world, [photographs] obscure it”.¹¹ The photograph as a stand in for an experience of a space is a visual paradox in that photographs are not objective records; they contain information of their own making. Photography is a tool for understanding the way that we look and what we choose to look at. The photo is not simply a container of detailed information about a subject, it contains information about how to look, how to see, where to look, and what is worthy of viewing.

Seeing

In an effort to describe the nature of my encounters, a conversation about seeing pertinent. I use the lens of my camera as a tool to focus my eye and frame my mind on the act of seeing. The act of seeing while moving through a space is not linear, but rather irregular or fragmented. When walking, we stop...look...start again...look back...look forward. Our focus is always shifting and reassessing. My eyes scan the terrain until

something motivates me to stop and look. “Space is what arrests our gaze, what our sight stumbles over; the obstacle, bricks, an angle, a vanishing point.”¹² When walking, we see groupings of images as we move through a space; clusters of thoughts that don’t quite add up.

The images in my work seem to exist within a similar space, perhaps on the same street or same city block. They don’t, however, merge together to create a singular scene. Instead, the images are cropped, zoomed-in, fragmented, and arranged. The viewer is provided only a limited view of the space captured. The whole however isn’t truly the sum of its parts. Each image is descriptive of the essence of the interspaces, the felt connection with the space, instead of an overall image of the site.

The fragments ultimately are the product of a process of looking, a duration of searching, and a selection of images captured by the frame of the camera lens. The grid-based arrangements reinforce the construction of the images and the fragmented way in which we see and understand the world around us. We cannot focus our vision clearly all at once. We see in isolation, one moment at a time. The lens, the frame, and the viewfinder are devices that further fragment our vision. “Art is a framing device for visual and social experience, and even photographic art forms cannot dispense altogether with the frame.”¹³ The frame is a scaffold that influences what we see and what we know.

One very skilled observer, Georges Perec, forms his writing as a practice in seeing. He questions our ability to truly understand how and why we see. He writes, “Note down what you can see. Anything worthy of note going on? Do you know how to see what's worthy of note? Is there anything that strikes you? Nothing strikes you. You

don't know how to see.”¹⁴ For Perec, *viewing* is an idle passage of time and *seeing* is a purposeful act. In his book *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger comments on the movement of our eye when we see; “we never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves. Our vision is continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are.”¹⁵ The world presents itself wholly to us—we choose what to see.

Most of the experience of a space is perceived in the periphery of our vision. The artist Uta Barth uses the blurred image as a visual metaphor for the acquisition of perception. For Barth, the blurred photograph presents the viewer with the space between perception and representation. In her *Ground/Field* series the foreground focus is absent, leaving the viewer with blurred background images of unoccupied outdoor spaces. The images “quite literally inhabit the space between the viewer and the piece hanging on the wall.”¹⁶ By removing the foreground information, the focus shifts to our perception and our vision. We consider our relationship to the image, to the frame, and what lies



Figure 4



Figure 5

beyond the frame. Barth's photographs contain a different type of information from a typical photograph; they illustrate the way that we consume images instead of merely disseminating illustrative information. Barth says that with the *Ground/Field* series, "certain expectations are unfulfilled: expectations of what a photograph normally depicts, of how we are supposed to read the space in the image, of how a picture normally presents itself on the wall...Everything is pointing to one's own activity of looking, to an awareness and sort of hyper-consciousness of visual perception,"¹⁷ Removing the subject of the image allows the viewer to consider his or her own act of viewing. The conflation of subject and object creates a dynamic that reverts our inquisition of the image inwardly to consider our own vision.

Barth is commenting on the "problematic aspects encountered in the production of imagery"¹⁸. She uses the medium to show that our eye is much better at capturing and experiencing imagery than the photograph. My use of multiple images with the inclusion of painting to describe a perceptual experience also comments on the inability for the medium of photography to fully perform as a document or container of information. My work, however, is unlike Barth's in that the subject of photograph does describe a particular place. The emphasis in Barth's work is an interest in pictures of the world, a desire to explore the medium of photography, its mechanics, and its inner workings to make pictures. My interest is to use images to describe the world, the condition of interspaces, in which I wander.

The images in my work reference my initial encounter, the source of my investigation, and a record of my movement through specific spaces. The photographs document my placement of the camera and my engagement with the space. The various

angles and perspectives of the camera lens signify an act of looking and searching. The images replicate how the eye moves through a passage of space, collecting snapshots as visual vestige.

Representation and Translation- Painting, Arranging, and Abstracting

In the endeavor of translating the physical into the visual, painting has always been a preferred medium in my practice. I think as a painter. Even while photographing, I compose an image in an additive way. Painting is a practice and a meditation, not dissimilar to walking. It is a study of the indeterminate properties of paint. Every painting session is a new experience. Each encounter involving painting's viscous medium, a flat surface, and the manipulation of a tool reveals new discoveries. James Elkin writes "[Paintings] are about that beautiful moment when the dull oil paste, squeezed from the lead tube, becomes a new substance that is neither liquid, solid, cream, wax, varnish, or vaseline; and they are about the body's turning against itself, and within itself, to make shapes that the eye cannot recognize as human marks."¹⁹ I agree with Elkin in that painting is a tactile engagement in which the body is preoccupied in the process of pushing paint on a surface. Paint is a technique in exploring the inexplicable while also providing a record of that exploration. It's a platform for exploring and provides a notation of that endeavor.

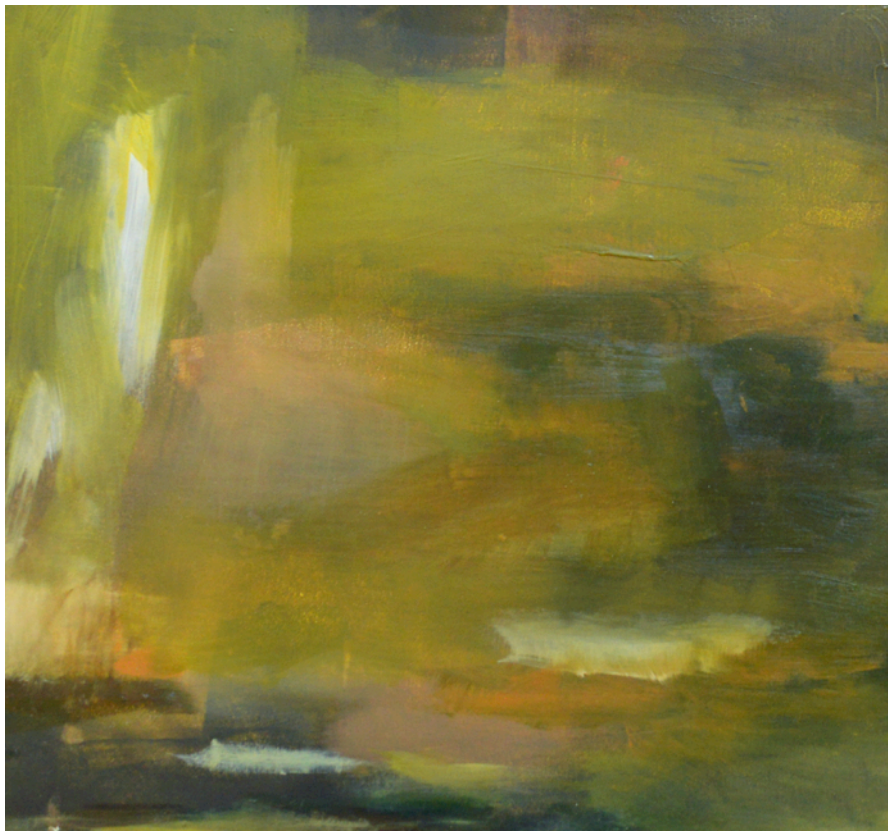


Figure 6

Just as the photographs are a record of my perception of an interspace, the painted panels give record of a negotiation with the material. While painting, my mind is immersed in the process of making. It is not always clear what my actions will produce, but within the process of adding and subtracting paint I contend with the nature of spaces that I encounter. Traces of additions, edits, and re-arrangements of color and shapes are marked on the surface. What results is not so much a legible discovery, but rather a notation of investigation. “Paint is a cast made of the painter’s movements, a portrait of the painter’s body and thoughts.”²⁰ I give evidence of this act of translating a physical space to pictorial space within the painted surface.

One might expect to find opportunities in the painting that was unavailable in the photograph. The paintings neither complete nor vie with the photographs. They offer a different type of perception, one that doesn’t complete the photograph, but adds to the

perception of the space. The paintings do not relay more information, but possibly represent the same information in a different form. The paintings offer little to no indication about where the images were taken, the time of day, the type of weather, or what lies outside of the image frame. The paintings, like the photographs, demonstrate the limits of visual representations, the limits of describing. The limits of conveying the details of an experience presented to our perception.

The arrangement of the panels on the wall communicates a desire to piece together my fragmented understanding of the space. The scattered arrangement of multiple panels suggests a process of sifting or sorting, repositioning, and negotiating multiple images before arriving at the select few. The various depths at which the panels extend from the wall simulate the movement of focusing in and out of a viewfinder. The negative spaces of blank wall trapped between the panels serve as a redaction from the overall composition. Perhaps a portion of information was lost from the overall experience, or perhaps the empty spaces provide the opportunity where the experience is most manifest within the viewer.

The images are grouped with criteria that create a constituency of spaces. The images are linked based on similar materials within the observed spaces. Gravel, concrete, grass, pebbles, and barren dirt are repeated themes within most of the images. Images with similar textural details are paired together allowing the eye to stitch them together. Another mode of arranging connects geometric shapes to continue the perspective of space. Where the edge of one image stops, the other image picks up. The geometries of the spaces align to represent the process of moving through these interspaces, walking, and snapping photos.

The images are not in full, but rather zoomed-in, segmented, and abstracted. Only a limited view of the interspace is captured. The abstraction excludes characteristics that locate these images in a particular geographic region. Without signs, specific architectural details, people, or cars, there is very little information to place the images in a geographic area or specific culture. The images, however, are not generalized. It is clear that the images are excerpts from specific experienced places. More information does not help to characterize the spaces more. The redaction of information through cropping is an effort to translate the underlying structure of the space. Represented as parts and abstractions of a whole, the interspaces begin to read as any space and every space.

The abstract, geometric paintings of Richard Diebenkorn similarly have an abstracted internal organization based on an experience of the land. His deconstructed and reconstructed urban landscapes contain an overall spatial organization. Topographies of



the land are reduced to planar representations within a picture plane in his *Ocean Park* series. His attention to geometries of spaces and the overall painterly approach to organizing space link our work together. Looking through the lens of my camera, I too reduce urban topographies to shapes.

Diebenkorn was inspired to create *Ocean Park* series while in

Figure 7

between studios in Santa Monica in 1967. His interim studio was very narrow with no windows. “This space, along with his dissatisfaction with the directness of representation, absorbed himself in the geometries of abstraction, and of space.”²¹ His move to Santa Monica was a return to the West Coast after spending some time in Europe absorbed by the paintings of Henri Matisse. He was most

interested in the way that Matisse took figurative information of the three dimensional realm and translated it into abstracted two-dimensional forms.

Diebenkorn perhaps felt trapped between the realms of figurative and abstract painting.

After visiting Europe, he returned to a subject matter he was very familiar with, the land.

This new series was a turning point in the way that Diebenkorn organized the pictorial space

of a painting as a negotiation with the physical space he observed; “...the Ocean Park

paintings posit a new relationship between the physical plane of the picture and the illusion of space beyond it—between surface and view”²² The reduction of abstracted forms was fueled by the process of looking and recording, seeing and describing.

The *Ocean Park* series is unique to the breadth of abstract painters working in his time because of the relationship between the surface and the view. Unlike some of the abstract painters of his time, the geometric abstraction of the *Ocean Park* series are not



Figure 8

arbitrary marks created through a formal, aesthetic investigation of lines and forms. “That the ultimate inspiration for the *Ocean Park* paintings is in real experience, no matter how indirectly referred to, is one of their great sources of strength. It gives them their strongly felt quality,”²³ Though it’s not likely to trace Diebenkorn’s process systematically, the series derived from an investigation of physical space within a lived experience.

Though Diebenkorn uses the land as reference, he in no way is creating landscape paintings in the traditional sense. This is a component that also relates Diebenkorn and my work together. My work further distances itself from the trajectory of landscape representation with the use of zoomed-in images, multiple camera angles, blurred images, and fragmented arrangements. Instead of photographing a vast scene with a singular vantage point located on a horizon and shot from a wide angle on a tripod, the images are isolated snapshots taken in passing. They do not add up to a larger, grander view. The denial of deep space keeps the work from reading as “landscape”. Landscape representations, both photography and painting, connote depictions of vast vistas of land remotely located in an overly naturalistic place. A new word is needed; “Because ‘landscape’ is used by so many different people for such a variety of purposes, it is inevitably an ambiguous term.”²⁴ The word landscape omits the everyday, the vernacular. My work does not represent ubiquitous icons of exploration, discovery, and triumph. In representing interspaces, I question the function of representations. Can they ever truly replace or symbolize the original? Perhaps their true function is separate from creating a likeness for the original. In landscape representation, the artist communicates a particular statement about the land depicted. My work communicates how artists depict, how we represent and translate an experience.

Everyday/Real

Interspaces lie outside of our attention in our everyday lives. Everydayness involves the intersection of humans and physical space. The interspaces of the built environment are both ordinary and human. They are forgotten spaces of human consciousness. A practice of noticing the unnoticed is rooted in the discussion of the “everyday”. In art discourse “the rise of the everyday in contemporary art is usually understood in terms of a desire to bring these uneventful and overlooked aspects of lived experience into visibility.”²⁵ Presenting the passed-over and uncovering the hidden is a practice well suited for the repetitive and meticulous processes of art. The desire to access the realm of the everyday is a search for an actual, felt connection with the phenomena that surrounds us.

To understand an experience of human-made spaces, a connection with the everyday is an access point. The banality of interspaces locates them within the sector of life that we glaze past as citizens of a fast-paced world. We focus on destinations, places of value, and places we need to go. “The human world is not defined simply by the historical, by the culture, by totality or society as a whole, or by ideological and political super-structures. It is defined by this intermediate and mediating level: everyday life.”²⁶ The vernacular spaces in which we encounter everyday are ubiquitous spaces in our minds. They become overlooked, banal, and unseen because of their ubiquity.

Interspaces are everywhere and mostly contain the same elements; concrete sidewalks, planting beds, carports, or areas of grass. They are seemingly familiar and known. Striving for an understanding on a poetic level, a de-familiarization of the

familiar is called for. To see a space for its poetics, we have to leave our biases behind. “By virtue of its freshness and its own peculiar activity, can make what is familiar into what is strange...If looked at through the thousand windows of fancy, the world is in a state of constant change.”²⁷ Approaching an interspace with an open mind, I access the familiar with a scrutinizing eye. Each venture outside offers a new set of variables to captivate my eyes and my camera lens no matter how many times I have visited the same interspace.

Many artists use everydayness as an index to create art. The artistic collaboration of Peter Fischli and David Weiss give voice to the mundane images of our constructed world. In the series *Visible World*, the pair set out to create a visual archive of images collected while traveling to well-known destinations. Presented as a vast archive of backlit images, *Visible World* presents a stream of images that act as an archive of places they traveled. “The arrangement of images is broadly chronological, with sequences of



Figure 9

orangey sunsets or snow-capped mountains, punctuated by groups of famous world sites. Both the anonymous and the recognizable are given equal billing in this visual encyclopedia of the world.”²⁸ Some of the locations are well-known views such as the New York skyline, Sydney Harbor, or the Pyramids. Others are ambiguous, non-descript spaces that surround known locations. Presenting them all in the same format flattens the hierarchy of images. Placing an image of a well-known location next to a non-location gives a presence and voice to the unconsidered spaces we move through.

Fischli and Weiss are concerned with the unconsidered. This is the common thread within theirs and my work. In an interview Weiss commented, “When you go to the Pyramids and you're standing there, you already know them exactly, because you've already seen them from most of the angles possible.”²⁹ Knowing this, Fischli and Weiss still have the impulse to document for themselves the phenomena of standing before the Pyramids and taking a photo. They approach not only the Pyramids, but also everyday destinations and non-destinations in the same manner. In the series *Settlements*, *Agglomeration* (figure 10), Fischli and Weiss gathered images of the urban and pedestrian world to create a visual archive as well. Though we see pedestrian images of streets, buildings, sidewalks, and traffic lights everyday, capturing it before your eyes makes the unseen seen. It makes the everyday experience one to negotiate to derive at



Figure 10

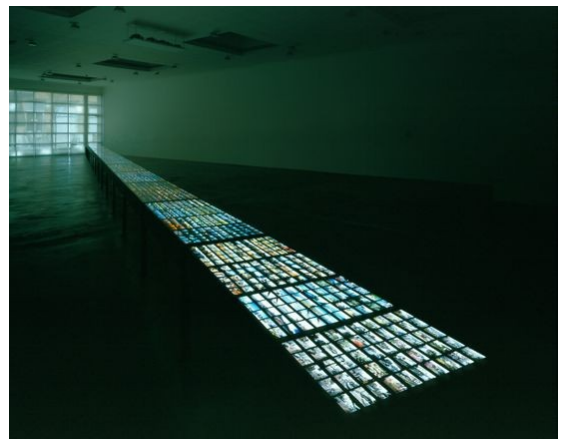


Figure 11

some incite of the poetics of a human experience. The spaces of everydayness offer many opportunities to scrutinize the inexplicable.

The desire to understand the environment in which I live is a desire to access the indeterminate nature of experiencing an interspace. A dynamic system of human-made and organic matter, the interspaces, are enigmatic. With each new encounter, on a different day, at a different time, in a different season, the poetics of the spaces change. They are always in flux. Not only atmospheric conditions, but also human conditions vary the state of an interspace. This is the driving force that keeps my practice outside, keeps me walking and looking. For these spaces, the “inscrutability of things is part of what makes them prosaic.”³⁰ The undetermined dynamics that shape interspaces drives the work to question where these spaces exist within society and in a consciousness of human everyday life.



Figure 12

Conclusion

Contemplating the experience of an unnoticed space that at first glance seems simple and stagnant is an act that requires enjoyment of the journey and not the destination, since the investigation of a sensory engagement doesn't often result in determinate answers. Solnit writes, "To calculate on the unforeseen is perhaps exactly the paradoxical operation that life most requires of us."³¹ Even though striving to determine the indeterminate or concretizing visual perception in representation doesn't yield a quantifiable outcome, it is human nature to strive to determine. It is the curiosities of life that keep us searching.

This thesis has only begun to investigate the ways in which we perceive the world and the limits of describing our perception. In exploring overlooked interspaces of the urban environment, I make an argument for a not commonly practiced activity in a not commonly trafficked space. The work slows down to focus on being present in a space at a particular time. I have established that being sensitive to the awareness of an unnoticed space holds a value in and of itself, but I have yet to explore how being a keen observer effects the perception of a space. What do we gain from noticing? What do we lose by not noticing? Perhaps awareness bridges the gap between humans and nature, dissolving the nature/culture binary. Perhaps slowing down allows the mind to be more perceptive, more reflexive, and more accepting. Perhaps the purpose of opening ones self up to the intricacies of a space is to gain patience. With the over-stimulated world we live in, patience is a less practiced skill. The question of what do we gain by slowing down, by being aware, by noticing the overlooked is a question of what do you gain in having

patience. Perhaps the work instills a practice of slowing down and noticing that in turn has an effect outside of the gallery walls. The work holds still all of the inexplicable stimuli of the interspaces to incite a slower and more careful viewing of ubiquitous spaces. That which we think we know, in actuality, has many unknowable parts. Standing before an object that is unknown or unclear, the process of trying to understand through scrutiny and investigation arrests your attention and captivates your body within that space and that time. Just as objects in a museum have mysterious and undetermined qualities, interspaces are indeterminate spaces within the urban environment that provide a platform for discovery within a space engendering the contemplation of perception.

End Notes

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- ² Perec, Georges. *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. Translated and Edited by John Sturrock. London, England: Penguin Books, 1997. pg. 57.
- ³ Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. UM Press: Minneapolis. 1977. pg. 52
- ⁴ *ibid.*
- ⁵ Abram, David. *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2010. pg 58.
- ⁶ Corner, James, and Alison Bick Hirsch. "Representation and Landscape". *The Landscape Imagination: Collected Essays of James Corner, 1990-2010*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2014. pg 147.
- ⁷ Flusser, Vilém. *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*. Translated by Anthony Matthews. London: Reaktion Books, 2000. pg 8.
- ⁸ *ibid*
- ⁹ Flusser, 9
- ¹⁰ Lippard, Lucy R. *Undermining: A Wild Ride in Words and Images through Land Use Politics in the Changing West*. London: New Press, 2014. pg 167.
- ¹¹ Flusser, 10.
- ¹² Perec, 81
- ¹³ Lippard, 167
- ¹⁴ Perec, 50.
- ¹⁵ Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: British Broadcasting Corps, 1972. pg 9.
- ¹⁶ Conkelton, Sheryl. Interview. "Uta Barth". *Journal of Contemporary Art*. online source. <<http://www.jca-online.com/barth.html>>
- ¹⁷ Conkelton
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- ¹⁹ Elkins, James. *What Painting Is: How to Think about Oil Painting, Using the Language of Alchemy*. New York: Routledge, 1999. pg 16.
- ²⁰ Elkin, 5.
- ²¹ Flam, Jack. *Richard Diebenkorn; The Ocean Park Paintings*. New York, NY: Hizzoli Int. Pub, 1992. pg. 8.
- ²² Flam, 21
- ²³ Flam, 34
- ²⁴ Meinig, D. W. *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979. pg. 2
- ²⁵ Johnstone, Stephen "Introduction: Recent Art and the Everyday". Ed. Stephen Johnstone. *The Everyday*. London: Whitechapel, 2008. pg 12.
- ²⁶ Lefebvre, Henri. "Clearing the Ground, 1961". Edited. by Stephen Johnstone. *The Everyday*. London: Whitechapel, 2008. Pg 32.
- ²⁷ Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Translated by M. Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969. pg 134
- ²⁸ "Fischli & Weiss Flowers & Questions. A Retrospective." Tate Modern. Accessed March 28, 2016. <http://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-modern>.
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- ³⁰ Král, Petr. *In Search of the Essence of Place*. Translated by Christopher Moncrieff. London: Pushkin Press, 2012. pg 86.
- ³¹ Solnit, Rebecca. *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. New York: Viking, 2005. pg 6

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Image Citation

Figure 1. Madeline Marak, *Interspace Encounter: Wandering No.1*, 2016. Inkjet print and oil paint on polystyrene. 24in x 24in.

Figure 2. Madeline Marak, *Landscape Encounter: 733 Back Alleyway No.3*, 2015. Inkjet print and oil paint on panel. 14in x 60in.

Figure 3. Madeline Marak, *Interspace Encounter: Parkview Gardens (Detail)*, 2016. Inkjet print and oil paint on panel. 164in x 72in.

Figure 4. Uta Barth, *Ground #5*, 1992-1993. Chromatic print on panel. 29.5 x 27.5 inches. Reproduced from Smith, Elizabeth A.T. "At The Edge of the Decipherable: Recent Photographs By Uta Barth". Uta Barth. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995.

Figure 5. Uta Barth, *Field #7*, 1995. Chromogenic print on panel. 28.75 x 23 inches. Reproduced from Smith, Elizabeth A.T. "At The Edge of the Decipherable: Recent Photographs By Uta Barth". Uta Barth. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995.

Figure 6. Madeline Marak, *Interspace Encounter: Parkview Gardens (Detail)*, 2016. Inkjet print and oil paint on panel. 164in x 72in.

Figure 7. Richard Diebenkorn, *Ocean Park No. 67*, 1973. Oil on canvas. 100 x 81 inches. Collection Steve Martin. Reproduced from Flam, Jack. *Richard Diebenkorn; The Ocean Park Paintings*. New York, NY: Hizzoli Int. Pub, 1992.

Figure 8. Richard Diebenkorn, *Ocean Park No. 39*, 1971. Oil on canvas. 93x 81 inches. 236 x 206 cm. Private Collection New York. Reproduced from Flam, Jack. *Richard Diebenkorn; The Ocean Park Paintings*. New York, NY: Hizzoli Int. Pub, 1992.

Figure 9. Peter Fischli David Weiss, *Visible World (Detail)*, 1986-2001. set of 15 light tables with 3000 photographic slides, 83 x 2805 x 69 cm. Reproduced from <http://www.art-it.asia/>

Figure 10. Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Settlements, Agglomeration*, 1993. Photograph. Courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zürich and Monika Sprüth Philomene Magers, Cologne/Munich/London. Reproduced from <http://www.tate.org/>

Figure 11. Peter Fischli David Weiss, *Visible World (Installation view)*, 1986-2001. set of 15 light tables with 3000 photographic slides, 83 x 2805 x 69 cm. Reproduced from <http://www.art-it.asia/>

Figure 12. Madeline Marak, *Interspace Encounter: Parkview Gardens*, 2016. Inkjet print and oil paint on panel. 164in x 72in.