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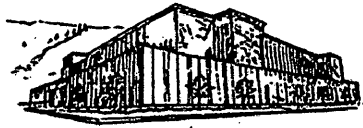
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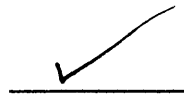
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Strength in Understanding

by

Neely Vacura

B.A. University of South Dakota, 1998

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

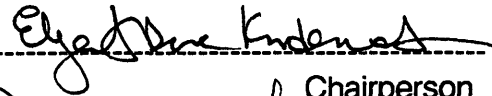
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Master of Arts

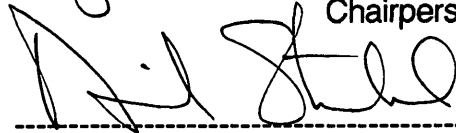
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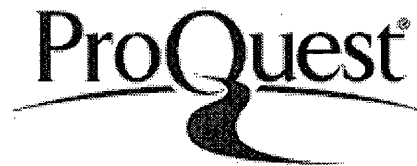


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Strength in Understanding

Director: Elizabeth Dove Kindewater EK

I explore nature with my photography because the world may seem to be a cold disconnected place, but when I explore nature the basic fundamentalness of it makes me realize the world may be something less than alienating, sometimes even inviting, and reaffirming of our basic interconnectedness. This exploration calms my fears and offers a sense of solace. I am searching for hope in what seems to be a bleak picture.

Hope first became visible to me when it became clear that there is a universal appreciation of ineffable views or occurrences; the moments when one is so affected, they forget to breathe and cannot find adequate language to describe them. This moment causes me to question if I am catching a glimpse into the unknown, that beyond which we can see. There is an underlying interconnectedness beyond our visible reality. The possibility of the unknown arouses spiritual beliefs and reminds that the universe is so much bigger than human perception is capable of grasping. As I explore these ideas in my photography, elements of the spiritual appear as I search for my own beliefs, my own place.

The spiritual is seen in the ideals of metaphysics, which in turn, seek to explain the nature of being or reality. This is an integral part of my work. Metaphysics focuses on that beyond which we see, but I live in this world. Nature provides a canvas for inner exploration on my quest for spirituality. These ideals allow me to see in a new way and to appreciate humanity more completely. In trying to explore the nature of being through nature itself, I have found peace of mind and interconnectedness.

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I think I am an existentialist, but I don't want to be. What I mean by this is that I am searching for purpose and intention for life in my environment and want to reject the idea of falling into despair, although despair is something I see in my photography as I take in the seemingly bleak nature of life. I embrace the idea that no rational explanation can be given as to why things are the way they are; everything is unknown. The focus on the individual is something I am against. I am searching for an interconnectedness, but the sense of alienation and not being connected is something I see in my work. In my thesis work I am trying to move beyond this sense of disconnected alienation and focus on unity, or what connects us.

When I look at humanity today, I feel utterly alone. I glance from car window to window as I move throughout my environment and feel alienated even amongst large groups of people. The focus on the individual grows stronger with each experience. "We are born alone and die alone", as the existentialists say. I continue to dwell on this as I try to immerse myself in nature in order to overcome the idea that as my life continues, I will fall into despair at this lack of connection. According to its definition existentialism says that human beings are totally free and responsible for their acts and that this responsibility is the source of their feelings of dread and anguish¹. In my thesis work, I am looking beyond human acts and delving into human nature.

I explore nature on my quest because the world may seem to be a cold disconnected place, but when I explore nature the basic fundamentalness of it makes me realize the world may be something less than alienating, sometimes even inviting, and reaffirming of our basic interconnectedness. This exploration

¹ Neufeldt, Victoria. ed. Webster's New World Dictionary. New York. 1988.

calms my fears and offers a sense of solace. I am searching for hope in what seems to be a bleak picture. I began this pursuit at a very young age.

I grew up in a small Midwestern community. As a farm kid, my only interaction with the outside world and with children my age was Sunday school, Sunday service, and week-long Bible school in the summer. My life may have seemed outwardly drenched in religion, but my memories of these days are full of observing the cliques, fights, and the trials of fitting-in. From a very early age, certain kids played with certain kids, and the others were weeded out. The term “popular” came in to play in first grade. I knew that an interconnectedness of people existed, but I was becoming cynical as I witnessed the back stabbing actions of my mean- spirited peers, so my quest for understanding human interaction began.

Photography has been my means for observing human interaction as well as understanding my reality for as long as I can remember. As a child, I was fortunate enough to have a family vacation every summer. We covered a large portion of the U. S. through the years. I constantly photographed the new and different landscapes and people we encountered in order to overcome my shyness and sheltered upbringing. My photographs allowed me to freeze particular moments and feelings in order to take them with me and experience them more completely. I realized looking through these photographs that no matter the apparent differences and my cynical childhood perspective, there is an “interconnectedness” among people.

This interconnectedness became apparent to me while on a family

vacation in Glacier Park. A van drove up beside us in the gravel pullout. A group of Amish men hopped out and excitedly began speaking another language and pointing things out to one another. I realized they were as awed by the surroundings as I was, and that we as complete strangers, had that in common.



Amishmen . 1990

It became clear that there is a universal appreciation of ineffable views or occurrences; the moments when one is so affected, they forget to breathe and cannot find adequate language to describe them. This moment caused me to question if I were catching a glimpse into the unknown, that beyond which we can see. As my family vacation wound down that day at Glacier, we stopped to admire the lake. My eyes traveled over the lake and up to the dramatic hues in

the clouds. Levels began to appear in this ethereal image, as the typical horizon line shifted, and my perception was changed by this ineffable glimpse. I realized there is more than one way to “see”.



Flathead Lake. 1990

I believe there is an underlying interconnectedness beyond our visible reality. The possibility of the unknown arouses spiritual beliefs and reminds us that the universe is so much bigger than human perception is capable of grasping. As I explored these ideas in my photography, elements of the spiritual appeared as I searched for my own beliefs, my own place.

I have been searching for my own place or how exactly I interconnect in this world for as long as I can remember. Interaction with children my age was my first hint at the lack of connection among people. School was the setting of my early human interaction, as with most kids. It was also upon entering school that I became obsessed with the thought of interconnection. I flowed through school easily, participating, but never really belonging. It was not until I entered college level that I became more of an individual and began to speak out as a feminist. I also found photography helped my voice along. I was obsessed with writing at this time. I wrote about how hard it is to be a middle class, white woman in our society, and took it very seriously. Writing was a tool for me to express my angst and anger at the predetermined role that seemed already carved out for me.

I then saw the ridiculousness of my plight, in that so many have to struggle and fight for the basic necessities of life. From that perspective, I really did not have anything to complain about. My story began to appear more clearly and intimately in my photos. My thinking had moved outside of myself. I was now interested in how my concerns affected others and their opinions. By using visual metaphors for society's expectations for women, my story became much more universal and easily shared.



Shy Curl . 1997



Sisters with Veils. 2000

It did not matter the circumstance of the viewer because the fundamental feminist ideas formed a connection that enabled my voice to be heard and

understood. Each viewer could add a bit of his or her own perspective to the photo, and make part of it their own. I changed my story telling method to photography, and it has been so ever since.

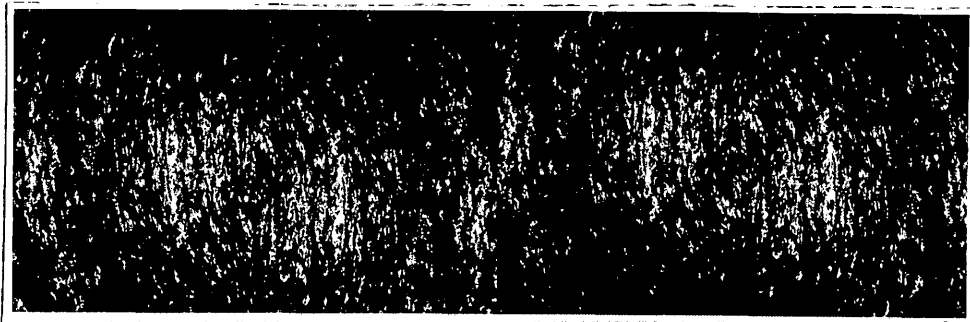
My major focus in choosing photography was searching for and questioning my role in society as a woman. I found myself succumbing to certain stereotypical womens' behaviors such as losing arguments and forgoing my strengths and beliefs and was embarrassed by this. I was determined not to become my mother or like the other women whom I thought gave up their hopes and dreams in order to get married, have kids, and be a wife. I used models to portray the ideals I felt society forces upon women. I dressed them in frills, lace, make-up and veils to express my cynicism.

Looking back through these images I found myself searching for something more, something beyond feminism. The images contain easily relatable issues for women, such as the idea of preparing oneself to meet societies expectations with hair, make-up, and dress, but I was looking for something more. I was searching for that innate quality that is neither male nor female. I was searching for the moment when the pure fact of existing is what matters, the "interconnectedness". These ideas go beyond my early days of structured religion. The ideas of the unknown (that which is unattainable by man) and metaphysics offer these possibilities visually.

Theosophy

Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian were also interested in these ideals of the unknown and the spiritual, as well as Theosophy. Theosophy

interprets the spiritual as being formless in a physical, but not an absolute sense. Mondrian spoke of higher ethereal planes penetrating the physical world on whose surface the spiritual is thus reflected.² Kandinsky and Mondrian believed the penetration of the surface of visible reality will lead to abstract art. These ideas are important to my work as I attempt to capture the spiritual in nature. By spiritual, I am referring to catching a glimpse of that which is beyond us, the light reflected just so, that it takes your breath away, calms you, and you become aware of your heartbeat. You become one with nature and you realize this moment has happened to many more living beings than just yourself; and as such you are interconnected.



Heartbeat. 2003

Formal Issues

Upon the discovery of the spiritual in my images I realized through the history of my work that no matter the contextual idea, underlying basic design elements have played a large role in helping me to portray these ideas in my photography. Balance has always been a part of my imagery in my past series. In the composition, I organized the space into halves and thirds as well as used high contrast to accent the light. Dualities also played a large role in each piece, such as contrasting innocent purity with sexual tension in my feminist

²The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985. Abbeville Press New York. 1986.

oriented pieces or with the attempted intermingling of human form and all consuming nature in the series that followed.

In this next series I placed an ambiguous form amidst the sand dunes. Originally, my idea was to portray my overwhelming feeling of being alienated in this out of control world. However, studying the interaction of a figure with the natural elements brought me back to a fundamental thought: The ambiguous form reacting and interacting with the elements portrays my life. My striving to have things go my way and the momentary relaxation when I give up trying to gain control were reflected in every wind whip of the white cloth. The figure trying to protect themselves from the elements with a closed off stance, does not allow a viewer to get too close, or to relate. The figure also cannot meld with the environment. They are a solitary form in this alien world.



Strength of Being . 2001

Nature provided a glimpse of the spiritual that day. At this point, I found I could depict man's struggle to interact with nature through a man made object and my work moved closer to that innate quality which is neither male nor

female, but more so about existing. I feel this quality can be found throughout humanity; thus making my work more relatable. I chose a twenty- five foot chain. The chain accompanied me on my travels as I explored the lonely mysticism of the ocean and the ethereal light reflections of nearby waters. The fact that it was a man-made object was appealing to me. It originated from the earth, was altered by man, and will return to the earth. This idea directly reflected my facing death and dying issues which have plagued me since my youth when I realized no matter my actions, death was imminent. Also, it gave me the feeling of interconnectedness with humanity in that no one lives forever, everyone is forced to forfeit control eventually.



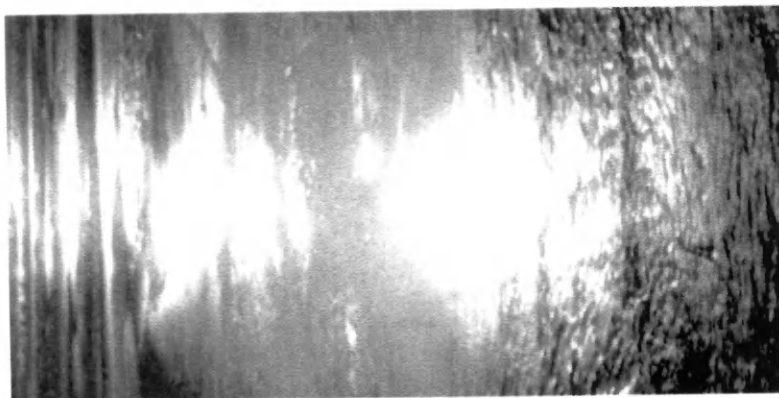
Exploring the Unknown . 2001



Ethereal Destination . 2001

Alchemy

Death is an entity that frightens me. The idea of having absolutely no control over this fact of life is terrifying. As I looked back through history in my readings I realized this fear connects me to humanity. People have feared death for a long, long time. No one wants to forfeit control; Alchemy is proof of that. Alchemy is an ancient form of chemistry that attempted to quench this fear. The main focus of alchemy was the unattainable goal of immortality. Recipes were made and gold utensils were created. Those who ate from them were believed to live longer. The study of alchemy has affected my work in the idea of transmutation. In the process of transmutation one object has the possibility with interaction to become a completely new and different object. The natural environment is constantly changing and transmuting: my current work reflects this as rocks become water and water melts into sky. Man-made elements directly affect this process, but in my images, I focus on the idea that transmutation would occur whether man was there, or not. This idea provides a sense of interconnection in that our minute presence is not going to alter the basic functioning of the universe, which is bigger than I could ever imagine. There are so many happenings going on beyond our visible reality.



Ice gaze . 2002

Influences

The author Carlos Castaneda and his studies of the metaphysical have showed me ideas beyond anything my perception of visible reality had previously held. He journeys deep into a world of mystical sensation and perception in his studies, to learn to see beyond the surface realities of life. In A Separate Reality, Castaneda is in a trance state as he observes the face of Don Juan;

The strange, luminous object in front of me had to be don Juan's face; there was a familiarity to it; yet it had no resemblance to what I would call don Juan's "real" face. What I was looking at was a round object which had a luminosity of its own. Every part in it moved. I perceived a contained, undulatory, rhythmical flow; it was as if the flowing was enclosed within itself, never moving beyond its limits, and yet the object in front of my eyes was oozing with movement at any place on its surface. The thought occurred to me was that it oozed life.³

He sees the interconnectedness that exists among humankind. All people and things are made up of energy, which is referred to as light. Light is used in my work with this idea in mind. His research, under the guidance of the shaman don Juan, has helped me to realize the universe and our existence may be so much bigger than previously thought. Also, it created the possibility of various views of perception and various realities.

Virginia Woolf also saw life in a unique light. Her ideas on purpose and intention went far beyond the societal norms of her time. These ideas altered my interpretation of reality. In the early 1900's, she maintained a sense of

³ Castaneda, Carlos. A Separate Reality. Simon and Schuster. 1971. pp.192

identity and individuality in her work that was unheard of for a woman. She had a unique sense of perception that some viewed as insanity. Her noncompliance with the rules and expectations of society in her personal life and work is admirable. She also possessed an underlying brilliance that went beyond male and female. She spoke of human nature and her unique take on life in her diary:

The Times has a queer article upon a railway smash, in which it says that the war has taught us a proper sense of proportion with respect to human life. I have always thought we priced it absurdly high; but I never thought the Times would say so.⁴

Woolf possessed a way of observing life without fully participating. She seemed to have lived half in reality and half beyond. Her peerings into the soul of humankind from this perspective have led me to believe what I recognize as reality may not always be. Reality is different for each soul that experiences it. The natural world holds a calming solution to this dilemma. The indescribable awe of the unexplainable beyond is shared among humankind. This is why I attempt to capture the spiritual in the natural world.

The photographers Minor White and Ansel Adams have always been major artistic influences for me in their attempts to capture the spiritual in the natural world. Their work also uses the design element of deep contrast which accents the transcendental nature of light. This creates a mystical quality that transforms the everyday into something more. There is the hint of the ethereal as man catches a sacred moment in nature. The works of both have been major guiding forces as I venture out into nature to try to capture a glimpse of what is the spiritual to me.

⁴ Bell, Anne Olivier. The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol.1. Penguin Books. 1977. pp.7

Minor White spoke in depth about “interconnectedness” in his work. He said that “no matter what role we are in- photographer, beholder, critic- inducing silence for seeing in ourselves, we are given to see from a sacred place. From that place the sacredness of everything may be seen”.⁵ I am looking for that sacred place in my work, as an experience or feeling. White also talked about an image or sequence that holds the mirror to the man scares the fearful and stimulates the joyous. “Sometimes a spiritual one sees his Self”. I feel that my use of the known to the seemingly unrecognized in landscape will allow a viewer to take the time to feel and “see”.



Recognized to Unrecognized Immersion. 2003

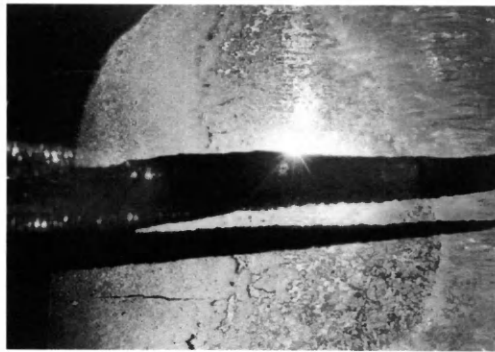
This idea was prevalent in *Recognized to Unrecognized Immersion*. By

placing an abstract idea of water with a realistic view lets a viewer see two

⁵ Hall, James Baker. Rites and Passages. Aperture Foundation, Inc. 1978. pp. 4

perspectives of an entity they thought they knew. This may cause questioning of environment along with a fuller appreciation of experience.

I realize Minor White's quote "so like you these images have become they have usurped reality" is the most pertinent to my work. Photography has allowed me to tell my story, in my way, and share it with others, all the while intensifying the interconnection.



Minor White. *Easter Sunday*. 1963

Ansel Adams revered the natural world. His work includes majesty, haunting light, and drama in each piece. In his childhood, Adams did not really fit in. Upon his graduation, he set out to the once family vacation destination, Yosemite, and found himself. His exploration of the wilderness with his camera led to the salvation of that wilderness through the Sierra Club, which he helped found. He worked tirelessly to preserve the wilderness that he loved by capturing his experience in these mystical places on film. Upon his death, a mountain peak in the wilderness area was named for him in recognition of his work and sharing his love of the otherwise unknown area. I feel personally influenced by his story and also motivated that the images he initially captured for himself ultimately touched so many. Ansel Adams captured a spiritual

dimension in nature with his life work; this sense of the spiritual experience is also important to my work.

The spiritual experience is at times shown in my work by using the universally accepted ideas of time and space. Time is shown by the use of line and the splitting of images into pieces to slow down its flow as time continues one moment into the next. This idea is portrayed in my piece *3:04-6*.

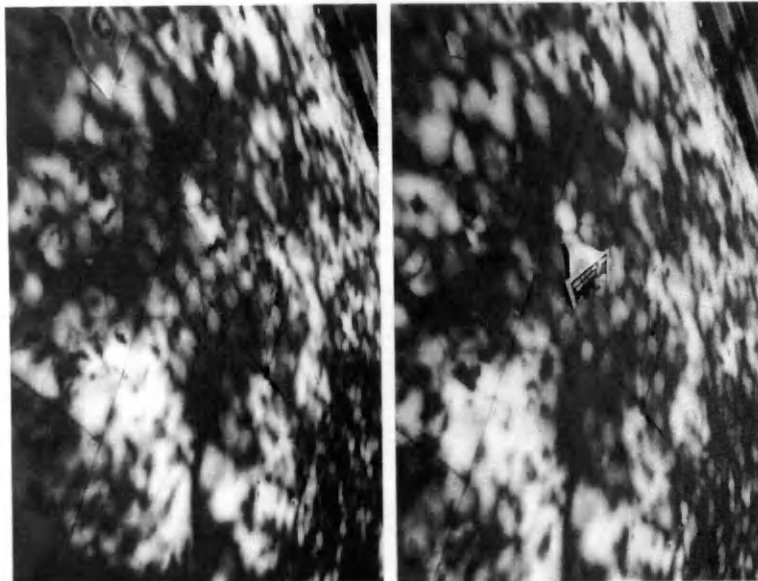


3:04-6, 2003

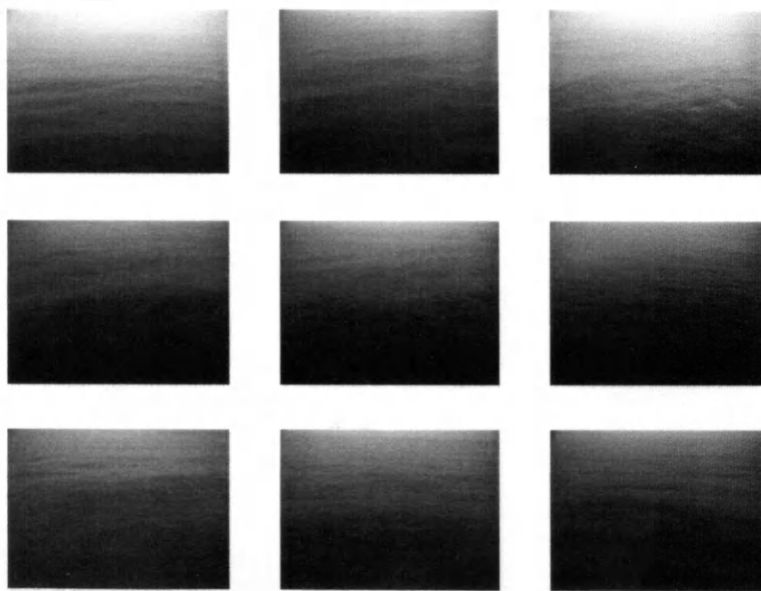
I am also trying to better understand the idea of the unknown, or get closer to it, by splitting the images into pieces. Through time and space shifts, I am realizing

the complexity; the many parts of an experience or the many pieces of a whole. By suggesting a slight shift in time, or breaking down the flow, I am trying to gain control. I am also creating an either / or situation which reminds me there will always be an unknown, but it allows me to explore access to it and how time and space interact to form my reality.

Eve Sonnamen and Robbert Flick have both been influential photographers for me in their notions of time and space. They have transformed my understanding of how time and space interact to form the world we live in. Eve Sonnamen plays with the idea that a spatial shift can suggest a temporal shift and vice versa. Robbert Flick, on the other hand, divides the whole into pieces in order to better understand. His piece "Ocean 2" was particularly influential in my beginning studies of water. It portrays the rhythmic line and depth of water, while capturing the light in each division.



Eve Sonnamen. *Newspaper, New York*. 1980



Robbert Flick. *Ocean 2*. 1981

Metaphysics

The spiritual is seen in the ideals of metaphysics, which in turn, seek to explain the nature of being or reality and the origin of the universe. This is an integral part of my work. The metaphysical is that beyond the physical or material; incorporeal; or transcendental. Metaphysics focuses on that beyond which we see; but I cannot explain my reality by itself, since I exist within the limits of visible reality. Therefore I choose to use the natural world in symbolic ways to express the ideals of metaphysics. I focus on capturing the lack of separation between the metaphysical and the physical world, but am bound to the use of light and the ineffable qualities of nature to do so because a separation does exist. In other words, certain aspects are unexplainable and too far beyond my control to even attempt to capture. I am trying to explore the nature of being through the very essence of nature itself.

I continue in my thesis work to explore the landscape and focus primarily on water. The feeling of being overwhelmed by my minute existence in the

presence of water bonds me to man kind. Water is the essence, as well as the origin of life. As I admire the flowing ripples racing through time and space, I seem to step past time and space limitations. In this trance-state, the mystical attributes of water appear. The lines create a surface that reminds one of a reality, or part of one they might recall. I choose to "bleed- out" the image with white light or darkness in order to leave only traces of something I thought I once knew. By combining the recognized with the now almost unrecognizable, I have visually created the feeling I have while observing water- the feeling of moving in and out to the brink of my perceived reality.

Photography has opened my mind to a new way of being. I have unexpectedly become fascinated with the study of philosophy on my quest for understanding and have come so much closer to grasping what I believe in, each time I peer through my lens.

Existentialism and Unity

The rejection of existentialism has also become important. I am searching for purpose and intention for life in my environment, and reject the idea of falling into despair. I embrace the idea that no rational explanation can be given for why things are the way they are; everything is unknown. Unity is important in my work as I search for visual reminders of interconnectedness, which seems to include elements beyond the purely physical. Therefore a sense of belief is necessary on my part. I am searching for an interconnectedness, but the sense of alienation and not being connected is a common issue I continue to see in my work. With my thesis work, I am attempting to move beyond the sense of disconnected alienation and focusing

on unity, or what connects us.

Thesis Exhibition: Nature of Being

Every piece in the exhibition "Nature of Being" is interconnected in its larger theme of confronting alienation amongst humanity and rejecting existentialism. The pieces vary in their underlying themes which I have used as mechanisms to remind us that underneath this perceived sense of reality, unity exists. The pieces are also interconnected in their presentation. The majority of the exhibition was hung with fishing line from an eyelet above eye level in order to appear light and impermanent. Plexiglass encases some of the images that I am trying to control in some way; others are beyond my control and therefore left raw, such as *Transmutation*.

Nature creates a foreboding setting for me to try to mimic our struggle to survive within its dignified beauty. The scene may be perceived as empty and harsh, but upon further exploration, glimmers of hope are evident. Among the pixels of my large-scale, seemingly bleak black and white digital prints, are hints of color. The addition of this warmth was a random event. By forfeiting a small bit of control in my process, scanning the black and white image in a color format provided an unknown result. This lack of control put me in the proper perspective for the issues I am dealing with and helped me to come to terms with the fact that I have no control over these issues. Random bits of color add a sense of hope as does the drifting light in the more ethereal prints, such as *2nd Perspective: Solace*. In my thesis exhibition I am striving to state that although one can be overcome with a sense of alienation in a harsh environment, it is these feelings of struggle that interconnect us all and offer my

fears a sense of solace.

In my thesis work I continue to incorporate the basic design elements found throughout the history of my photography. Balance plays a large part in the imagery. In many compositions, I organized the space into halves and thirds. I used high contrast to play up the pure, ethereal nature of light. A digital format was used for its abilities to distort and remove from reality, through large scale format as well as pixelization. Dualities are also incorporated, as seen in the piece *Duality*.

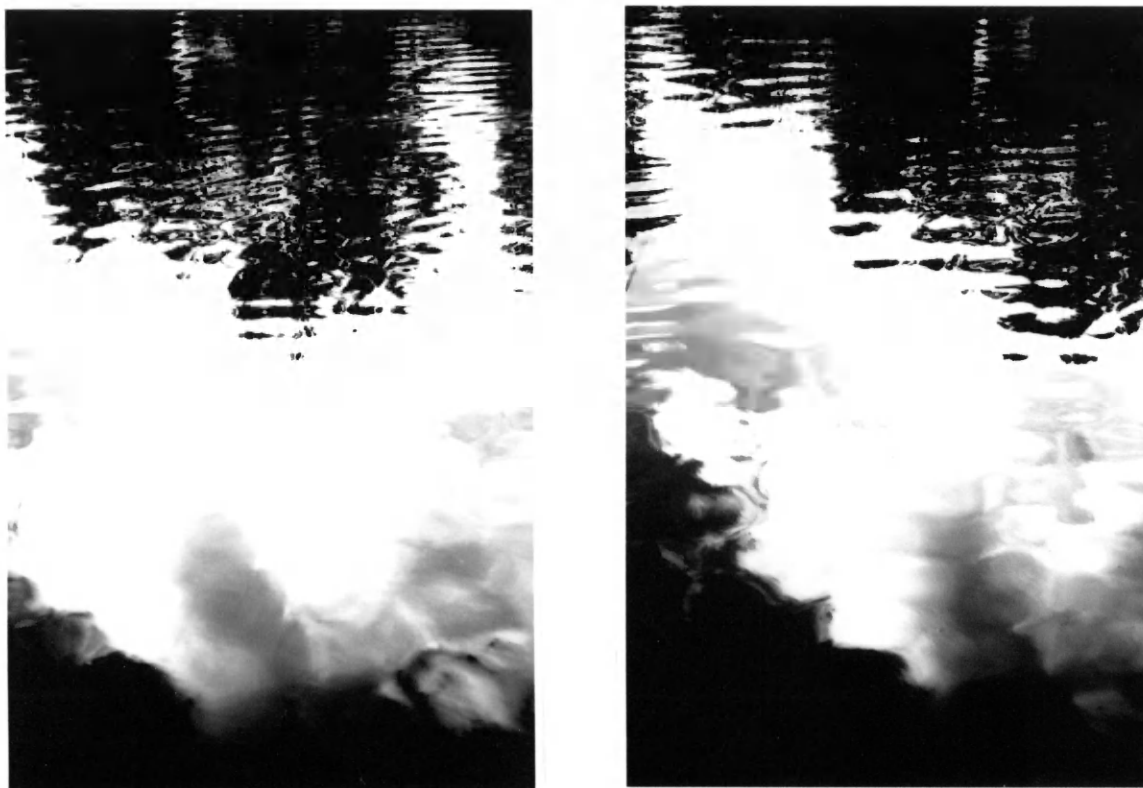
Dualities are evident in the stark line drawn down the center of this piece. This symbolizes the idea of movement through life from light to dark, good to evil, feminine to masculine, and young to old. In *Duality*, I am confronting my fear of this "out of my control" flow of life, which ultimately ends in death, and the idea of surrendering this control. The large format of this piece makes the overwhelming nature of this thought more evident. The horizon line in this piece, as well as others in this exhibition, has shifted since my earlier work. This is evident when comparing *Flathead Lake 1990* to *Duality*. This gives me a sense of hope in that I am gaining some sense of control; I can see what is immediately before me.



Duality. 48" x72". 2003

In *Transmutation*, I am dealing with the idea of total loss of control and being comfortable with that loss. Transmutation is defined as changing one thing into another. The images were hung without framing with magnets attached to large nails pushing the images out from the wall. This piece is open to constant change as it subtly mimics water from its precarious perch away from the wall. In this piece light melts into water which blends with sky. A viewer may recognize the idea of reflection, then realize the blending of these known

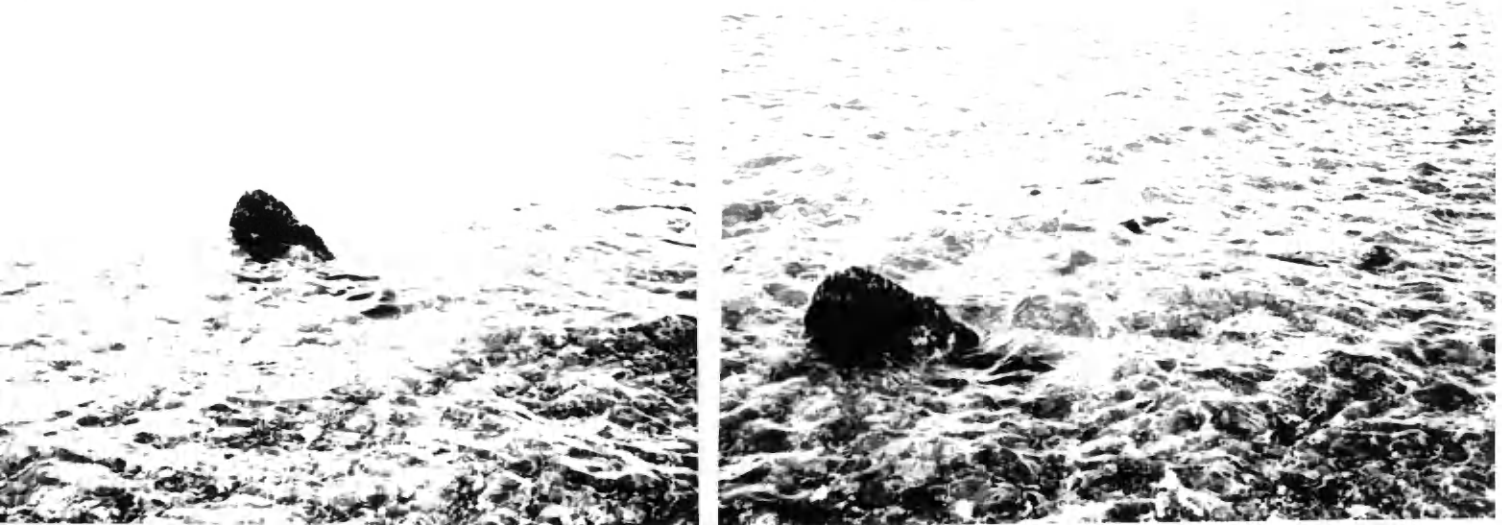
entities becomes a new experience. I have left this piece hanging free from the top, as to move freely with a breeze from the gallery entrance, or ripple slightly as viewers walk by. Duality is also found in this piece as the impermanence of its presentation contrasts with the permanence of the idea of transmutation and reminds of our own ever changing environment.



Transmutation. 42" x59" diptych. 2003

In *Isolation Through Time*, I am confronting the rejection of existentialism as I search for purpose and intention for life in my environment. I am studying the idea of the focus on the individual, and how to move beyond this. Time and space shifts are important here and the influence of Sonneman and Flick are evident. Time is shown by the splitting of images into pieces to slow down its flow as time continues one moment into the next. I am also trying

to better understand the idea of the unknown or get closer to it by splitting the images into pieces. By breaking down the flow, I am trying to gain control. In this either/or situation I am reminded there will always be an unknown, but I am allowed to explore access to it and how time and space interact to form my reality.



Isolation Through Time. 16"X20" triptych. 2003

In this piece, the passage of time creates a cynical plight. We are born alone and die alone, but as this "spiritual plane" penetrates the water, as Mondrian spoke of, something more is evident. As a viewer looks over my exhibition and moves from piece to piece, they may realize we all are flowing through time seemingly isolated, but this unites us.

In *Choice*, temporal and spatial shifts are also important as they suggest movement toward a destination. Destination is a common motivator among humanity as we flow through life reaching toward goals and moving beyond strife. I chose a smaller format to confront the viewer as they are asked to make a rather intimate decision. Dualities are prevalent as a viewer chooses between immediate to unknown, or foreboding to comfort, it is all up to choice.



Choice. 35"X24". 2003

Recognized to Unrecognized Immersion mimics the feeling I have when observing water of moving in and out to the brink of perceived reality. I often use diptychs to suggest time and space shifts, but here four pieces are hung together in order to interact with one another. A viewer will recognize the flowing nature of one piece and notice the surreal light and line of a more abstract perspective and possibly combine the recognized and the

unrecognized into a new more complete way of seeing. Also, *Piece 1* is hung away from the wall, with ample room for a viewer to move between the pieces in order to control the flow of the viewer and force the interaction of the four pieces.



Summary: A Sense of Belief

My thesis exploration has taught me that I am still an existentialist, and I still don't want to be. I have learned that what I recognize as reality may not always be. Reality is different for each soul that experiences it. The natural world holds a calming solution to this dilemma. Also, certain glimmers I found in nature have given me hope. The indescribable awe of the unexplainable beyond is shared among humankind. This is why I attempt to capture the spiritual in the natural world.

As I flow through my environment, I continue to search for purpose and interconnection amongst humanity. While grasping for reason and understanding, I have come to accept that there is a random nature to life. I have even come to terms with the possibility that no rational explanation can be given why things are the way they are; everything is unknown. I want to reject the idea of falling into despair and realize this may be beyond my control. Although, despair is something I see in my photography as I take in the seemingly bleak nature of life, a sense of belief will allow me to keep searching.

Carlos Castaneda spent his life trying to "see" the interconnectedness that exists among humankind. I am also looking for that connecting thread with my imagery. I am searching for an interconnectedness, but the sense of alienation and not being connected is something I see in my work. In my thesis work I am trying to move beyond this sense of disconnected alienation and focus on unity, or what connects us. I feel I was successful in my effort.

I choose to explore nature on my quest because the world may seem to

be a cold disconnected place, but when I explore nature the basic fundamentalness of it makes me realize the world may be something less than alienating, sometimes even inviting, and reaffirming of our basic interconnectedness. This exploration calms my fears and offers a sense of solace. I am searching for hope in what seems to be a bleak picture.

Hope first became visible to me when it became clear that there is a universal appreciation of ineffable views or occurrences; the moments when one is so affected, they forget to breathe and cannot find adequate language to describe them. This moment caused me to question if I were catching a glimpse into the unknown, that beyond which we can see. There is an underlying interconnectedness beyond our visible reality. The possibility of the unknown arouses spiritual beliefs and reminds that the universe is so much bigger than human perception is capable of grasping. As I explored these ideas in my photography, elements of the spiritual appeared as I searched for my own beliefs, my own place.

Minor White's quote "so like you these images have become they have usurped reality" overcomes me when I examine my thesis work. I catch strong glimpses of my own beliefs and the sense that I have unknowingly created my own spiritual place.

The spiritual is seen in the ideals of metaphysics, which in turn, seek to explain the nature of being or reality and the origin of the universe. This has been an integral part of my work. Metaphysics focuses on that beyond which we see, but I live in this world. Nature has provided me a canvas for inner

exploration on my quest for spirituality. These ideals have allowed me to see in a new way and to appreciate humanity more completely. In trying to explore the nature of being though nature itself, I have found peace of mind and interconnectedness.

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