

# **Drawing Under Construction**

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in partial fulfillment of  
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Master of Fine Arts  
Drawing and Sculpture

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## Abstract

The thesis, *Drawing Under Construction* navigates notions of invisible labor, repetition, and endurance. I explore aspects of labor and movement through the use of drawing, installation, performance, and video. Unseen work, an exercise of emotional control, is central to this investigation, transforming notions of invisibility and visibility into tools to explore three concepts; "Unfolding the Line," "The Line Under Construction," and "Locating the Line." It is through these three areas of study that I further analyze "my hand" versus "the universal hand" and "my body" versus "the universal body" and create a system where my body and work live in an expansive and fluctuating ecosystem in constant evolution.

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## **Drawing Under Construction**

Growing up, I had a tremendous desire to be awake all the time. My parents had a challenging time putting me to bed at night or keeping me asleep late into the morning. I remember having the urge to see every single thing happening around me, even when sick, I would not miss a day of school. Over time, I developed strategies to ease that energy. At the age of nine, I started to train for speed walking and track and field. Lasting ten years, the consistency of this practice kept me moving and tied my body to routines of extreme order and repetition. A sense of linearity was imprinted in my muscle memory, moving from point A to point B with a particular goal became an obsession. In addition to this linearity, I also desired the judgment that coincided with the competition. My coach would tell me training was painful, so the competition was painless, a statement I never understood until much later. The physical pain attached to training and competing was always present in me yet rarely visible to the audience. Later on, my failed career as a professional athlete brought me to negotiate life in unexpected ways. When moving to the United States at the age of eighteen, it was my integration into the workforce that would uphold my place in society as an adult.

Combining the sense of repetition learned during my years of training, with the sense of efficiency learned while attempting to become an indispensable worker, has allowed me to question and produce artworks that present notions of invisible labor, repetition, and endurance. This thesis navigates different attempts to break away from the identity of my gendered, immigrant body, and create distinctions between “my hand” versus “the hand” and “my body” versus “the body”. The following sections explore these inquiries; *Unfolding the Line*, exploring *The Line Under Construction*, and *Locating the Line*.

## Unfolding the Line

William Kentridge said, "To write like Beckett, one must be Beckett"<sup>1</sup>. In an interview published by the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in 2014, Kentridge explains his thinking process and how he makes sense of the world using drawing, theater, and filmmaking. He recalls ideas about uncertainty, and the importance of recognizing one's voice in the process of creating new narratives, "...In the activity of making the work, there is a sense that if you spend a day or two days drawing an object or an image, there is a substitute towards that object embodied in the human labor of making a drawing..."<sup>2</sup> I looked to this quote when considering my own voice and the urge to understand the drawn line in relationship to labor. If the drawn line is the only way I have to inform labor, how do I do it? Do I represent the labor of others? Or do I perform labor myself? In different attempts, I present the hand as the tool to sketch, the pencil as an extension of the body, and the body as the tool to draw.

Considering ideas about the hand as the tool to sketch, I made the experimental film *Fingers*, 2020 (Images 1 and 2). In this film, I toggle between drawing a line in  $\frac{3}{4}$  framing and extreme close-ups of my hand performing the motions of drawing. Utilizing a wax pencil to record the marks of my fingers, I highlight the focal point of the subconscious hand and the various pressures of my fingers and attempt to disregard the mechanisms of my internal autopilot. The video served as a self-reflexive object of study, where I was interested in the specificity of my mark-making, abstracted and viewed in the third-person. Through this action, I considered for the first time "my hand" versus "the hand" and worked to blur the identity of the body and distance any notion of its visible labor.

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<sup>1</sup> Louisiana Channel. *Louisiana Channel*. Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, October 14, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G11wOmxoJ6U>. 00:30:24 - min 00:21:42

<sup>2</sup> Douglas, Laura. "https://Vimeo.com/57792798," 2013. <https://vimeo.com/57792798>



Image 1. *Fingers*, 2020, Still Image from Video (min 00:04:07), Duration 00:06:24 min, Video by Andres Ramirez.



Image 2. *Fingers*, 2020, Still Image from Video (min 00:02:06), Duration 00:06:24 min, Video by Andres Ramirez.

Alongside the notions of “my hand” vs. “the hand”, I began to explore the pencil as an extension of the body. In November 2018, I traveled to Guatemala to conduct research at Trama Textiles<sup>3</sup>, a Cooperative designed to sustain an independent economy for female weavers in the city of Quetzaltenango. Initially, my intention was to gain knowledge about weaving practices, but during my residency, I began to use the pencil as a “recording tool” and realized my interest in drawing more than weaving. With labor in mind, I witnessed the value of this ancient technique and found it very challenging to replicate - I was determined not to represent the labor of the women, but to observe my own reactions in response to their repetitive movements. I made a series of drawings that illustrated the movement of my hands in unison, each one holding a pencil, synchronized with the movements of the weaver’s hands. I learned not to weave, but witnessed the impeccable work ethic and endurance of the women, sitting multiple hours a day to finish a single textile. The gestural drawings (Images 3 and 4) I produced in the company of these women were not the record of their impeccable labor and endurance, but a glimpse of my hand following their movements.

Upon my return from Guatemala and throughout 2019, I continued to make daily drawings that began to carefully pay attention to the muscle memory of my hands versus the actions and movements of others. In later drawings, I detached my sight entirely from the mark, and focused on the spontaneous movement of my hand through the passage of time, not focusing on the end result (Image 5 and 6). Through this process, I started to identify different manifestations of unfolding the line and the act of revealing it. This allowed me to study the variety of marks produced by the movements of my hands, and to reconcile their inherent muscle memory. For example, Image 5, reflects a repetitive movement with no sign of beginning or

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<sup>3</sup> <https://tramatextiles.org/>

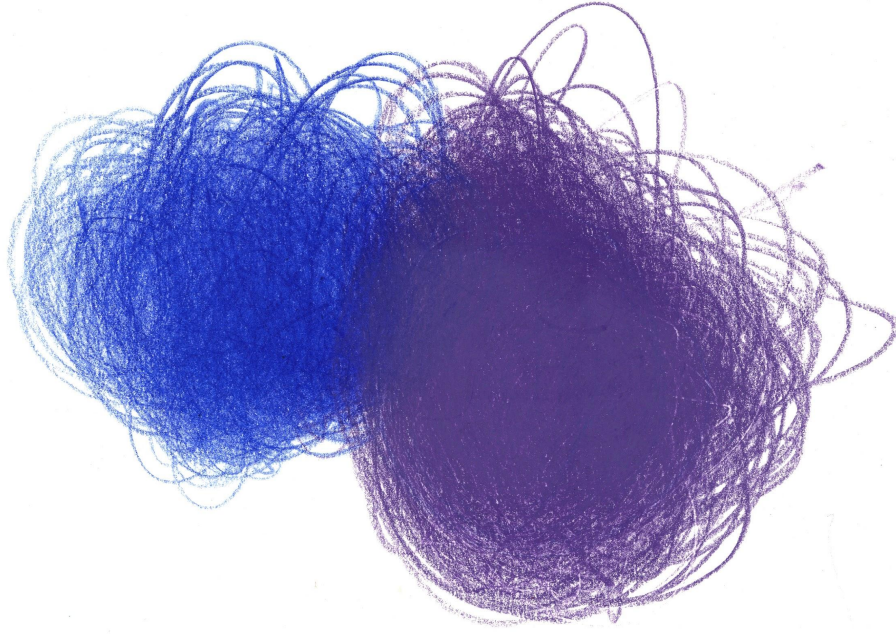


Image 3. *Oralia Spooling*, 2018, Color Pencil on Paper, 11" x 14"

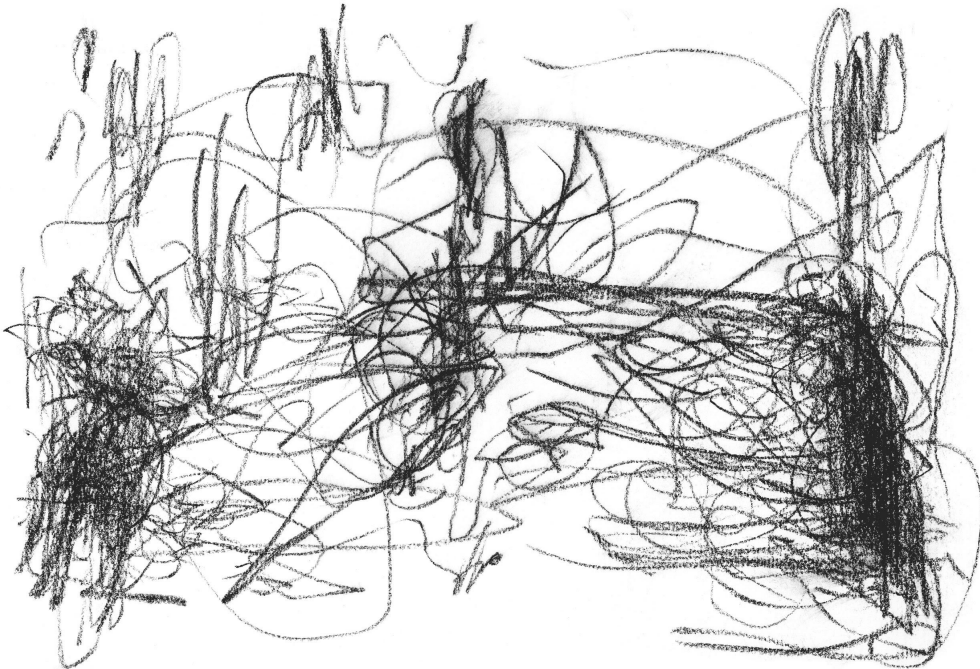


Image 4. *Oralia Weaving*, 2018, Color Pencil on Paper, 11" x 14"





Image 5. *Untitled*, 2019, graphite on paper, 11" x 14"

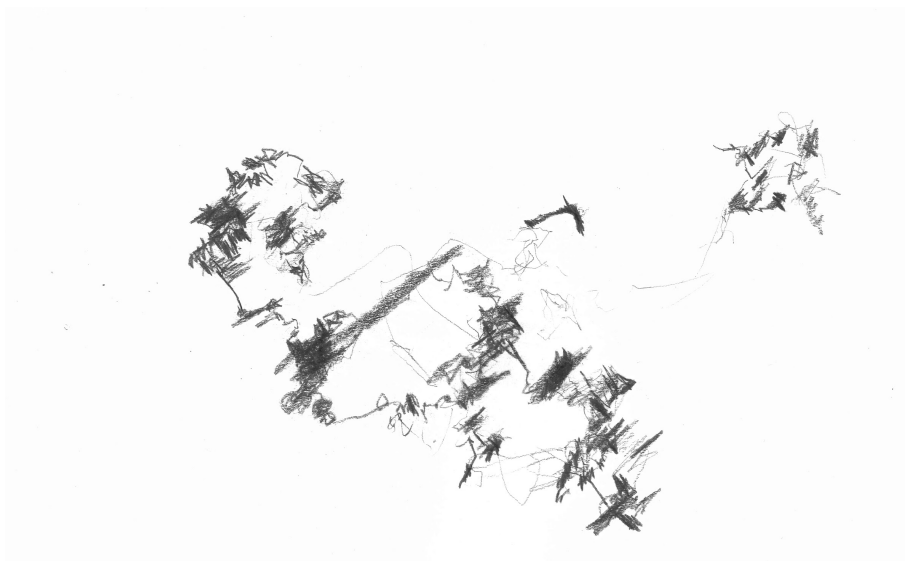


Image 6. *Untitled*, 2019, graphite on paper, 11" x 14"

end. The impulse to fill in the page with compacted graphite is a manifestation of emotional control and compulsiveness, concepts related to my frantic relationship to cleanliness. In contrast, Image 6 is more reflexive, the movements are slowed down and present very specific moments of tension, but leave some space to reconnect and breathe. After three months of making these types of drawings on paper, I began approaching the same type of mark-making in a larger and more open field (Image 7). For the project, *Line Across the Field*, filmed in Corsicana, TX, (Image 8), I cut and sewed together one thousand feet of white fabric that was wound around a wooden stick in order to facilitate the unfolding and folding of the line. Using a drone to record my movements, I repeated walks randomly within the camera's frame, or from point A to point B. After several attempts, I started to recognize similar patterns produced by the movements of my body and hand in comparison to the previous drawings made on the paper. This brought me to consider the notions of "the body" vs. "my body". In this iteration, it was important the body wasn't perceived as my body, but as a body moving across an open field of space. The bird's eye view intentionally blurred the body unfolding the line of fabric, and further blurred the boundaries between gender, race, and physical appearance, giving the focal point to the expansion of the white line. I accepted the hand and the body as the drawing tool and recognized the urge to expand those gesture drawings beyond the scale of my body.

In this train of thought and work, I considered Francis Alÿs', *Paradox of Praxis I (Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing)*<sup>4</sup>, 1997, where the artist pushes a block of ice for nine hours in areas of Mexico City until disintegration (Image 09). When I studied this work deeper, I felt a desire to imagine the drawn line, and the mark's inevitable disappearance in order to renegotiate the body's relationship to certain spaces. I started to wonder to what extent, as an

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<sup>4</sup> Delivery, Public. "Public Delivery." *Public Delivery* (blog). Publicdelivery.org, April 1, 2019. <https://publicdelivery.org/about/>.



Image 7. *Gesture Drawing in the Open Field*, 2019, Video Still, 00:01:30 (min 00:01:25), Video by Andres Ramirez



Image 8. *Line Across the Field*, 2020, Video Still, 00:03:30 (min 00:02:10), Video by Andres Ramirez

artist, could I be successful in making the distinction between a hand-made drawing or a body drawing? Scale then became relevant to unfold the moving line and supported my urge to blur the identity of the marking tool, perhaps focusing only on the sublime and not the subject. Through the exercise of working in this larger format, I realized it was not about claiming control over the drawing tools, but perhaps understanding the need to detach myself from the end result. Therefore, I recognized that making visible the invisible in labor was not the only driving force in my movements, but the necessity to make visible the moving body without claiming any identity.



Image 9. Francis Alÿs, *Paradox of Praxis I (Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing)*<sup>5</sup>, 1997

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<sup>5</sup> Delivery, Public. "Public Delivery." *Public Delivery* (blog). Publicdelivery.org, April 1, 2019. <https://publicdelivery.org/about/>.

## The Line Under Construction

In addition to my focus on the body, architectural space became another key component within my work. The question remains, what is the relationship of my body with the drawn line? Drawing Under Construction attempts to understand this relationship more intimately and presents the narrative of the body moving in space using the following elements; “From the Sketch to the Construction Site”, “Intervention in a Site Under Construction”, and “Beneath the Surface”. Each of these studies depart from a utilitarian construction drawing style and go further into ideas of representation of "the body" vs "my body.”

Sketch to the Construction Site, emerges from the studies of Zaha Hadid’s sketches and the transition from the fast-moving gestural drawing to the fully formed renderings of her designed buildings. In particular, the Lois and Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art (CAC), located in Cincinnati<sup>6</sup> in which Hadid was the chosen designer in 1998. The archives of the architectural design and floor plans present three sketches as the departure point, (Image 10).

I compared the early stages of her sketches, with the 3D modeling (Image 11), and the completed building (Image 12), fascinated by the dynamism in each drawing, and Hadid’s ability to transform a fast-moving pencil line into a concrete building. Suddenly, something clicked. I thought of my father’s practice as a contractor and my sister’s as an architect, and I recalled how much technical drawing played a role in both their work and my early creative development. From there, I wondered how I might introduce architectural construction into my next iteration of the line series which brought me to develop the artworks produced between February and June 2019.

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<sup>6</sup> Fiederer, Luke. “AD Classics: Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art / Zaha Hadid Architects.” ArchDaily. ArchDaily, May 7, 2016. <https://www.archdaily.com/786968/ad-classics-rosenthal-center-for-contemporary-art-zaha-hadid-architects-usa>

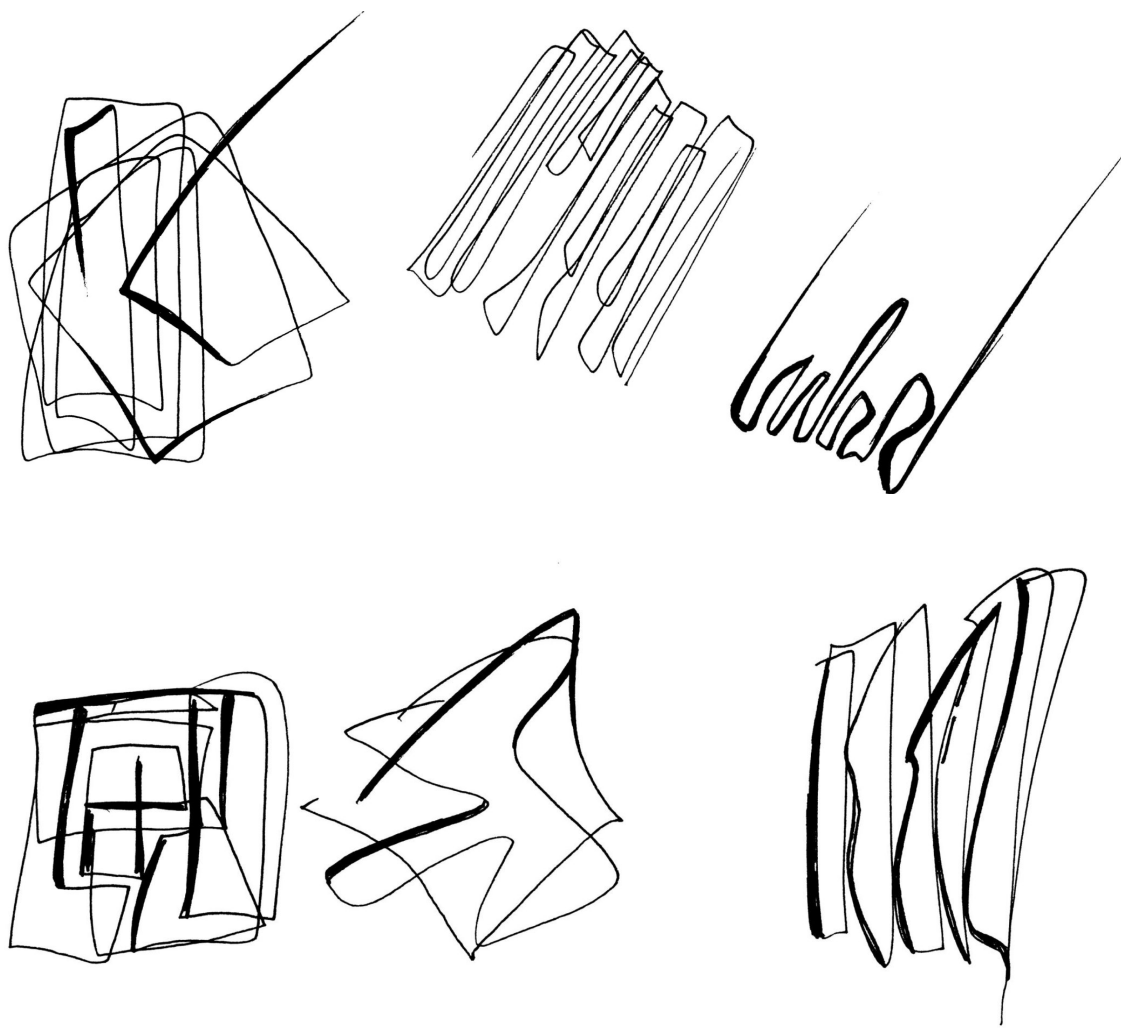


Image 10. Zaha Hadid, *Sketch*, 1997, Lois & Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary art<sup>7</sup>

In July 2016, artist Michael Namkung invited me to participate in the project *Dragan*<sup>8</sup> where artists were invited to interview someone using drawing as a practical tool not as an artistic tool. I decided to interview my father, who has practiced building construction for more than forty years. In the interview my father, Yanio Alfonso, told me, “It’s not necessarily with a pencil that I trace a line, but I draw a lot mentally...”

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<sup>7</sup> “Zaha Hadid Architects.” Lois & Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art – Zaha Hadid Architects. Accessed May 30, 2020. [https://www.zaha-hadid.com/architecture/lois-richard-rosenthal-center-for-contemporary-art/?utm\\_medium=website&utm\\_source=archdaily.com](https://www.zaha-hadid.com/architecture/lois-richard-rosenthal-center-for-contemporary-art/?utm_medium=website&utm_source=archdaily.com).

<sup>8</sup> [https://issuu.com/nathalicalfonso/docs/yanio\\_alfonso\\_\\_\\_dragan](https://issuu.com/nathalicalfonso/docs/yanio_alfonso___dragan)

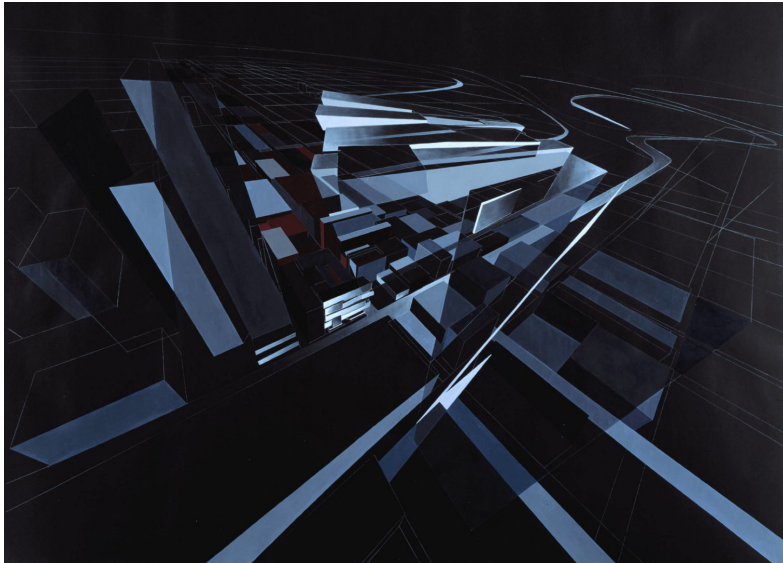


Image 11. Zaha Hadid, *Painting*, 1997, Lois & Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary art<sup>9</sup>



Image 12. Zaha Hadid, *Building*, 2003, Lois & Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary art

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<sup>9</sup> “Zaha Hadid Architects.” Lois & Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art – Zaha Hadid Architects. Accessed May 30, 2020. [https://www.zaha-hadid.com/architecture/lois-richard-rosenthal-center-for-contemporary-art/?utm\\_medium=website&utm\\_source=archdaily.com](https://www.zaha-hadid.com/architecture/lois-richard-rosenthal-center-for-contemporary-art/?utm_medium=website&utm_source=archdaily.com).

“...on my way to work, at my work itself, thinking about how I’m going to install something.”

After revisiting this interview, I thought about the different ways in which I have used the idea of the drawn line to occupy spaces. Two words came to mind, delineation and fragmentation.

In February 2019, in The Pollock Gallery at Southern Methodist University (SMU), I produced *To Occupy a Space is to Delineate Boundaries* (Image 13). Using a ruler, level and two wax pencils, I transformed a third of the gallery space into fragmented rectangles drawn with a continuous line. During the process of drawing, I realized how the technical aspect of the lines further blurred the identity of my body, hiding my rigorous movements as another manifestation of emotional control. I created a fragmented space with the visual illusion of lines wrapping around the corner of the room, expanding the continuum between the conflicted idea of what is visible and what is not. For example, when practicing speed walking, the winner is not only the one reaching the goal in the least amount of time, but also the one who maintains a perfect technique regardless of exhaustion, all the way until the end.

This brought me to consider my next series of works studying the concept of Intervention in a Site Under Construction. I started to think about magnifying the scale of the lines and the scope of their erasure in addition to further understanding "my body" and how I physically respond to spaces. I accessed a site under construction, where I drew a series of continuous lines on the inner structure of three rooms, only to be buried by the final stages of construction (Image 14). In *Structure II, Iteration of line III* (Image 14), I began thinking about other ways of hiding and burying marks. During these iterations, the technicality of the drawn line wasn't relevant, so I began consciously avoiding the use of rulers or levels, allowing me to consider the performativity of the body. I started to move strategically around wooden frames of the





Image 13. *To Occupy a Space is to Delineate Boundaries*, 2019, wax pencil on surface, dimensions Variable, Pollock Gallery, Southern Methodist University (SMU). Photo by Christian Vasquez.

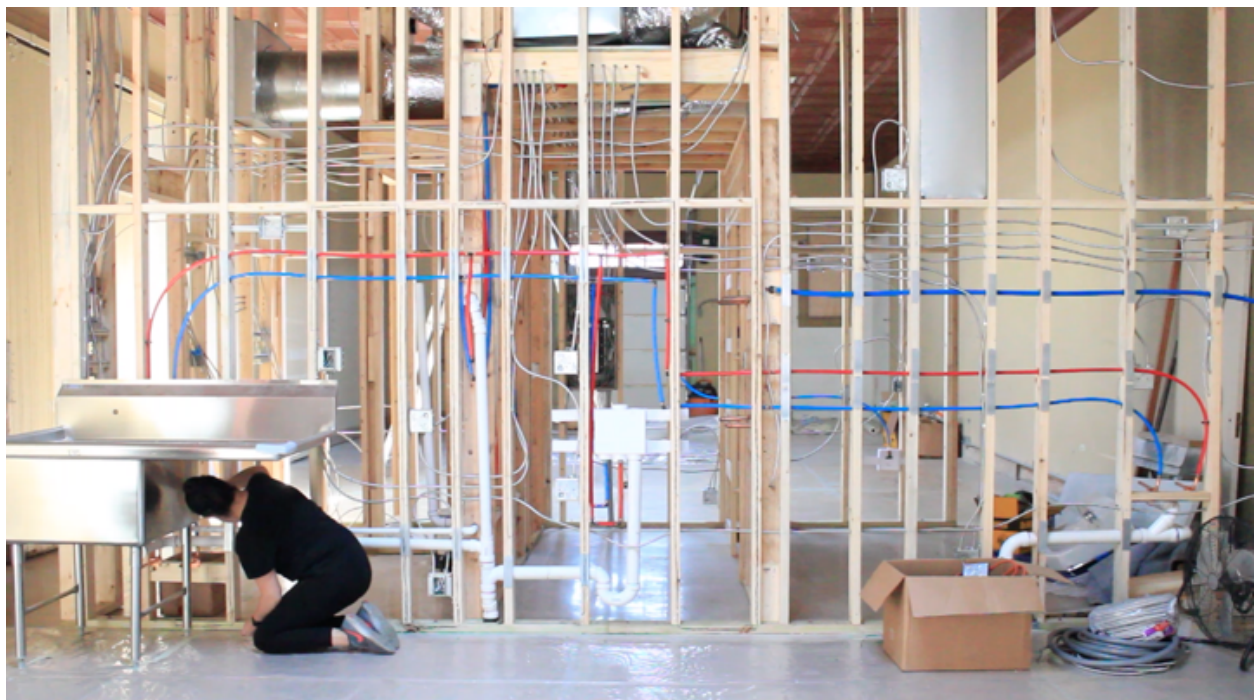


Image 14. *Structure II, Iteration of line III*, 2019, charcoal pencil on wooden frame, dimensions variable, Corsicana, Texas.

building's studs, kneeling, squatting, stretching my arms, and twisting my back in order to reach as much as possible within the wooden frame. Some areas were harder to reach, some easily accessible, and I noticed the attention shift towards my body. Creating space for a new inquiry, how is the body influenced by a building's infrastructure and how does the body occupy it? With these site-responsive line drawings, I considered the architectural interventions by Gordon Matta-Clark and his studies of space, specifically what he called "one of my most challenging iterations" *Office Baroque*, from 1977 (Image 15)<sup>10</sup> in the city of Antwerp, Belgium. Originally, this work was intended to exist in a brand-new building, but due to the logistics of the project, it was impossible to find the right location. Florent Bex, a contemporary art producer in Belgium facilitated the access to a building that could be used to execute his project, then owned by Marcel Peters and his company MP-Omega NV<sup>11</sup>. In the MOCA Collection archives, Matta-Clark's intervention on the building is labeled as:

*Gordon Matta-Clark's work paradoxically ties creation to destruction in two significant ways. First, his sculptural "building cuts" were acts of removal, or "unbuilding." Office Baroque consisted of a series of large overlapping, semi-circular cuts through the floors and roof of a five-story office building in Antwerp, Belgium. Second, Matta-Clark pointedly executed his cuts in buildings that were abandoned or slated for demolition. This was central to his critique of the politics of urban renewal. Since Office Baroque dissected a building that was later razed, it only exists today in the form of surviving fragments and documentation: a teardrop shaped slice of parquet wood flooring, support beams, and drywall, and a photograph providing a view through the successive holes. The objects on display are substitutes for the actual though destroyed artwork as well as a reminder of the forces of gentrification that would ultimately demolish the site of "Office Baroque."<sup>12</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup> Matta-Clark, Gordon, 1945-. 1977. Office Baroque 1 Ernest van Dijckkaai Antwerp, Belgium: det... [https://library-artstor-org.proxy.libraries.smu.edu/asset/ARTSTOR\\_103\\_41822001601085](https://library-artstor-org.proxy.libraries.smu.edu/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822001601085).

<sup>11</sup> Lee, Pamela. "Object to Be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark". ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1996. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304307240/>.

<sup>12</sup> "Office Baroque." • MOCA. Accessed May 28, 2020. <https://www.moca.org/collection/work/office-baroque>.



Image 15. Gordon Matta-Clark, *Office Baroque 1*, Ernest van Dijckkaai Antwerp, Belgium: det. 1977

A very particular aspect of this work caught my attention; his ability to merge the body and the building as a symbiotic act, both depend on the interaction with each other in order to activate the architectural disruption. He challenged conventional ways the body occupies spaces, therefore, truly challenging built reality. To further the idea of architectural intervention and dealing with notions of labor through the use of line, “Beneath the Surface”, studies works produced between August and December 2019. Instead of thinking about cutting open the walls to reveal what was under like Matta-Clark, I decided to create an x-ray of a wall through a drawing. These drawings came shortly after my attempts at burying the lines under construction sites. In *Anatomy I*, 2019 (Image 16), I used a stud finder to locate the inner structures of the walls within the Dimensions Variable Gallery space in Miami, FL<sup>13</sup>. I utilized charcoal and graphite directly on the wall to fabricate an imagined interior structure. While it was impossible to understand precisely how these walls, foundations, buildings and/or structures were set up or by whom, I continued to depict my own constructed truth beyond the sheetrock. I impose my own imagined perspective on the framework on a one-to-one scale. While this drawing was imagined, it allowed the body to consider the pre-existing foundation of the space. Through this process, the drawing that remains on the surface becomes a hologram of reality, a glitchy echo of its own inner construction.

In a second iteration, I realized not all structures are set up under the same regulations, forcing me to think of other forms of intervention. In *Anatomy II*, 2019 (Image 17), I installed in my studio at SMU another kind of “x-ray vision.” Rather than exposing the wall’s interior, *Anatomy II* provided an imagined view *through* multiple walls, down the long corridor of studios that adjoined mine. The work is an image within an image, composed of wide rectangles.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://dimensionsvariable.net/exhibition/10-a-decade/>



Image 16. *Anatomy I*, 2019, graphite and charcoal on the wall, 360 W x 96 H Inches, Dimensions Variable Gallery, Miami, FL, Photo by Diana Larrea.



Image 17. *Anatomy II*, 2019, graphite and charcoal on the wall, 120 W x 96 H Inches Dimensions Variable Gallery, Miami, FL, Photo by Michael Gerrard.

Opaque black charcoal blocks indicated negative spaces while shaded wall renderings grew smaller and smaller in a forced perspective. These drawings called attention to the specificity of the sites as an optical illusion.

The three stages of the research and work in “Line Under Construction”, consolidated my relationship with the drawn line in three ways. First helping me resolve ideas around labor in the art ecosystem where I develop research and produce work. Second, by providing a new insight into my relationship to technical drawing influenced by observing the studies of my father and sister. And third, by expanding my own exploration and interaction with units under construction to observe the adaptation of my body and the drawn line. This brings me to the last section of the thesis where I further explore ideas of embodiment and the architectural aspects of site specificity and ephemeral public installations.

## Locating the Line

In this last section, I review concepts of “Locating the Line” through works I produced studying site-specificity, the functionality of the line, and public interventions. In October of 2019, I traveled to Marfa, Texas, where I encountered *15 Untitled Works in Concrete*, 1980-1984 by Donald Judd (Image 18), at the Chinati Foundation. Beyond the vastness of these concrete cubes, I was struck by the inability to step inside them. With this limitation in mind, I recalled stories about immigrants trespassing the Mexican border into El Paso, Texas, looking for shelter at night in these gigantic, cubic, concrete shapes. No matter how close I got to each set of cubes; arranged in rows of two, three, four, or six, it was impossible to imagine how they were manufactured. I came to the realization this is perhaps an example of a massive eradication of labor-no trace of the hand or the body whatsoever.



Image 18. Donald Judd, *15 untitled works in concrete*, 1980-1984. Permanent collection, the Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas. Photo by Florian Holzherr. Donald Judd Art © 2020 Judd Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> “Donald Judd.” The Chinati Foundation. Accessed May 31, 2020. <https://chinati.org/collection/donald-judd/>.

One month later in the group exhibition, *Chillnaughty*, at The Cedars Union in Dallas, Texas, I installed *15 Untitled works in Plaster after Donald Judd*, 2019. Instead of responding to the three dimensionality of the cubes in the desert, I thought about ways to disrupt the idea of the perfect minimal sculpture. It was also crucial that the work could be disturbed, stepped on and destroyed throughout the duration of the exhibition (Image 19). I selected six different arrangements of Judd's fifteen concrete cubes and drew out patterns on the floor reducing the scale to 30 %. Instead of keeping the drawing true to the original symmetrical arrangements, I skewed the lines in each rectangle and filled them with white powder plaster. The stencils existed on the floor for one night only, and slowly disintegrated by the visitors' footsteps by the end of the night, challenging the interaction and location of my body and the audience's body while navigating the space.



Image 19. *15 Untitled works in Plaster after Donald Judd*, 2019, Plaster on the floor, Dimensions Variable, Cedars Union, Dallas TX. Photo by Finn Jubak.



During the execution of this work, I thought about Judd's disembodiment approach to manufacturing, since the production of his sculptures often required skilled welders, carpenters, or engineers. I intentionally executed the fabrication of plaster shapes on the ground, as it was important that I physically installed these works with my body, instead of designating the tasks to others. In contrast to the eradication of labor and the disembodiment during the production, I thought about a performance directed by Francis Alÿs, *When the Faith Moves Mountains*, 2002, (Image 20). During the third *Bienal Iberoamericana de Lima*, the Belgian artist asked five hundred volunteers to shovel and displace the sand of a dune from one point to another. As a Sisyphian allegory, the work exemplifies how the grouping of collective bodies are irrelevant as individual subjects.



Image 20. Francis Alÿs, *When Faith Moves Mountains*, 2002, Lima, Peru, in collaboration with Cuauhtémoc Medina and Rafael Ortega<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Alÿs, Francis. "Francis Alÿs. *When Faith Moves Mountains*. 2002: MoMA." The Museum of Modern Art. Accessed May 31, 2020. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/109922>.

Examining Allý's intervention, I thought about the presence of the body, and its value. I tried to reconcile with the conflict, and I imagined the process behind executing the task, however I could not help but feel a great sense of disconnection. I wondered if this work could be seen purely from an aesthetic perspective without considering the disembodiment from the artist designating this task to others.

Trying to resolve the notions of embodiment with my own practice, in February 2019, I completed a collaborative project *Sweeping*, 2019 (Images 21- 22) at 500 Singleton Ave. with Brandon McGahey and Tino Ward in west Dallas. This site-specific project focused on the physical and metaphorical idea of sweeping. This task demonstrated how each of our individual bodies carried out the action of sweeping, manifesting different intentions and interests while moving through space. While I cannot speak for my collaborators, I realized embodying the task of sweeping for five hours without stopping challenged the way I perceive and present "my body" to an audience. It was no longer "the body", it was, for that moment, a gendered immigrant body. Suddenly, the strict manner in which I moved became relevant as I moved across the room in contrast to McGahey and Ward. I tried to stay physically away from them, and frantically tried to sweep as much as possible, as if it was my burden to make sure they didn't sweep so much. My body in contrast with the scale of the warehouse made my task impossible, and reinforced my own history and background as a middle-class Colombian woman.

Realizing my own embodiment in the act of sweeping, I decided to continue exploring the functionality of the line, and the ideas around public interventions. I studied the works of Michelle Stuart and Doris Salcedo, more specifically, their use of the line and ideas around ephemerality, impermanence and dislocation.



Image 21. *Sweeping*, 2019, Nathalie Alfonso, Brandon McGahey, and Tino Ward, Video Projection, Duration 05:00:00, Dallas, TX. Video by Christian Vasquez.



Image 22. *Sweeping*, 2019, Nathalie Alfonso, Brandon McGahey, and Tino Ward, Video Projection, Duration 05:00:00, Dallas, TX. Video by Christian Vasquez.

Michelle Stuart's *Niagara Gorge Path Relocated*, from 1975 (Image 23) negotiates the dislocation of the line. In the essay by scholar Anna Lovatt, *Palimpsest: Inscription and Memory in the work of Michelle Stuart*, the work is:

*Niagara Gorge Path Relocated... Utilized the processes involved in the production of a later series of scrolls, where—instead of laying paper over the ground and rubbing it with graphite—rocks and earth from the site were smashed and smoothed into the paper's surface. In Lewiston these processes were executed on a monumental scale, as Stuart and her student assistant imbued a four-hundred-and-sixty feet long, sixth-two-inch-wide roll of paper with earth from the site. The scroll was then unfurled in the gorge where Niagara Falls once flowed, now situated on the Artpart site.<sup>16</sup>*

The formal elements of drawing in Stewart's work transcend to an impersonal negotiation with body and scale using soil as the primary source to make marks and break ideas around autobiography. For example, once Stuart decided to bring the paper scroll in the Niagara River Gorge Path a dislocation took place. It was not the only dislocation of the artwork, or dislocation of the soil utilized to create the mark on the foreign material, but the dislocation of the line itself. Now existing as a photograph, the line becomes the main character in this intervention. The Niagara River Gorge Path frames a long white line extending from the top of the mountain to the edge of the river water bed. The line's functionality is directly related to the idea of water flow, referencing "the man-made pillars and sculpted palisades through and down which the paper is placed..." Stuart reiterates that the line of the piece refers to "going from one point to another."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Stuart, Michelle, and Anna Lovatt. *Michelle Stuart Drawn from Nature*. Hatje Cantz, 2013. Page 12

<sup>17</sup> Casey, Edward S. *Earth-Mapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape* / Edward S. Casey. Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 2005. Print. Page 61



Image 23. Michelle Stuart, *Niagara River Gorge Path Relocated*, (1975). Earth and shale from site on muslim-backed paper, 460 feet x 62 inches. Artpark, Lewiston, New York<sup>18</sup>

In relation to the location of the line, and public intervention, the work *Shibboleth*, 2007 (Image 24) by Doris Salcedo questions the essence and power of a single line and its function in space. In a past interview, she speaks about her urge to utilize the poetics of art installations to tap into spaces that humans inhabit that are not tangible or physically present, but emotionally universal.<sup>19</sup> In *Shibboleth*, Salcedo uses the line to speak about

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<sup>18</sup> Michelle Stuart. Sayreville Strata Quartet. 1972. Artstor, library-artstor-org.proxy.libraries.smu.edu/asset/LARRY\_QUALLS\_10311281988

<sup>19</sup> “Doris Salcedo's Public Works.” MCA. Accessed March 31, 2020. <https://mcacheicago.org/Publications/Video/2015/Doris-Salcedos-Public-Works>.



Image 24. Doris Salcedo, *Shibboleth*, 2008, Digital print on paper. Image: 640 × 483 mm, Presented by the artist, White Cube, London and Alexander and Bonin, New York.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Tate. "Shibboleth IV', Doris Salcedo, 2007." Tate, January 1, 1970. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/salcedo-shibboleth-iv-p20337>.

dislocation, discrimination, and a sense of abandonment. After the installation was over, Salcedo filled in the entire crack leaving a scar on the concrete ground to remind viewers this act of intervention remains. The functionality of the line directed the motion of the body in space, and the tension caused the slowing down of the moving masses through the open floor of the Tate Modern. In the essay *The Salcedo Effect* by Michael Kelly, he explains;

*...Tate Modern visitors who recognized 'Shibboleth' as art would still have been at a loss to recognize that it was about immigration if Salcedo did not say that her intention was for the crack to intrude in the space of Turbine Hall 'in the same way the appearance of immigrants disturb the consensus and homogeneity of European societies' ....The space which illegal immigrants occupy is a negative space, ...this piece is a negative space.*<sup>21</sup>

Transforming this public space into a place of quiet reflection, the line becomes both the tension and the messenger. Salcedo's use of line is not ritualistic or religious and yet claims a moment of spirituality, its power lies in considering and creating a moment for contemplation and perhaps an act of healing.

My most recent site-specific installation, *Underwaterline*, 2020, was presented in the group exhibition, *ECHOSTOP* at Sweet Pass Sculpture Park and ex ovo in Dallas, TX. Through this work, I revealed, unfolded and dislocated the line. Since this project took place in an open, outdoor area, and attempted to reveal what was below the surface of the park. As a starting point, I made a series of charcoal drawings and a group of six compressed soil blocks as prototypes. In *Underwater line drawings* (Image 25), I covered a sheet of Bristol paper with a solid, thick rectangle of charcoal, then erased and revealed possible areas where imagined water pipelines

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<sup>21</sup> "THE SALCEDO EFFECT." *A Hunger for Aesthetics: Enacting the Demands of Art*, by Michael Kelly, Columbia University Press, NEW YORK, 2012, pp. 129–174. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/kell15292.10](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/kell15292.10). Accessed 6 Apr. 2020.



Image 25. *Underwaterlines Drawings*, 2020, charcoal on paper, 24 W x 48 Inches, ex ovo Gallery, Dallas TX. Photo by Michael Fleming.



could travel under the park. It was essential to remove the charcoal from the surface of the paper as a physical and metaphorical revealing act - the resulting internal structure creating a mapping template for the sculptural installation. The installation *Underwaterline*, 2020 (Image 26) consisted of six beds of compressed soil forms, eight by eight feet squared installed six feet apart... Within each square (Image 27), a solid hard line of plaster was mixed and carefully poured in place to replicate the imagined water pipe lines from the drawings. The plaster pipes were disconnected, and were intended to dislocate the assumed function of the pipes and their underground connectivity. By creating the functionality of an imagined line and locating it, this work made the invisible visible, creating my own reality. My body's physical effort was pushed beyond my own capacity and at the same time, this performed effort was hidden from the audience. Not necessarily focusing on a Sisyphean looping task, but a Sisyphean looping response to my emotional control, I began to gain control over my inherent relationship to labor.



Image 26. (aerial view) *Underwaterlines*, 2020, dirt and plaster, 120 W x 120 H x 4 D inches, Photo by Michael Fleming.



Image 27. (Single) *Underwaterlines*, 2020, dirt and plaster, 120 W x 120 H x 4 D inches, Photo by Michael Fleming.



Image 28. (plaster lines) *Underwaterlines*, 2020, dirt and plaster, 120 W x 120 H x 4 D inches, Photo by Michael Fleming.

## Conclusion

“Drawing Under Construction” is a thesis that navigates the use of the line in my practice as an artist through the study of the drawn line, from the gestural to the technical mark. Through these presented works during my MFA candidacy, I have come to accept the hand and the body as the drawing tool to expand my gesture drawings and movements beyond the scale of my body. Through this action, I’ve considered “my hand” versus “the hand”, and blurred the identity of my body, distancing any notion of visible labor. I’ve recognized my body’s relationship to architectural spaces, and how "my body" responds to specific sites. This exploration has reconciled the similar patterns produced by the movements of my hands in comparison to the movements of my body. This reconciliation has helped me realize that my practice is not about claiming control over the drawing tools, but perhaps understanding the need to detach myself from the end result. I’ve worked to create an opening in my practice to consider the notions of “the body” vs. “my body”. Through the process of drawing, I’ve come to realize how the technical aspect of the line can blur the identity of my body and hide my rigorous movements as a way to manifest emotional control. This thesis is a step closer to answering questions about the relationship of my body with the drawn line. I didn't make it to the Olympics, my body doesn't perform in track and field anymore, and I do not earn my living by sweeping and cleaning toilets. However, the endurance of my body has moved to realms where there is no limit to understanding the line from its unfolding, construction, or dislocation. I recognize how this working process has helped me go beyond my own life experience to confront issues around labor. “My hand” versus “the universal hand”, “my body” versus “the universal body” now live in an expansive and fluctuating ecosystem in constant evolution.

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