

material things

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Abstract

My art practice explores things considered without hierarchy as well as how materials used in unfamiliar contexts are continuously unfolding and becoming while also being in a nomadic state of flux. My MFA thesis exhibition, *material things*, is comprised of two shows in separate gallery spaces. I will present a selection of freestanding and wall mounted works at the Allison Milne Gallery in Toronto, and Gales Gallery at York University will house a large-scale installation of mine. My thesis support paper addresses the in-between state of material relationships while considering and experiencing *things* without labels or categories. Through the slow unfolding of the unaccustomed unions of discarded or mundane materials a heightened awareness arises and affect is created. This work strives for a visceral response that could be triggered by the rich saturation of colours, palpable textures and familiar forms that are simultaneously alluring and repellent while maintaining a captivating presence during what is to come. I acknowledge the process of making is equally a physical and subconscious endeavor, and I explore how the significance of experimentation and the recognition of intuition impact my work.

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material things: Alison Milne Gallery & Gales Gallery

My thesis exhibition will consist of two shows: my exhibition at the Allison Milne Gallery entails a series of wall mounted and freestanding pieces composed of a variety of materials considered without labels or categories. As the viewer is about to enter the gallery, they will see adjacent to the doorway a wall of selected small works. These pieces are explorations comprised of wood, polystyrene, flocking, paper mache, sand, acrylic mediums, tarpaper, pins, and fabric: all configured as a group of intimate entities possessing distinct personalities conveying a subjective depiction of intense emotional states. Their familiar scale offers viewers the opportunity to experience them independently, or, with a shift in proximity, they can be considered en masse, in terms of their relationally to each other. The potential for a dialogue amongst them seems plausible as the forms and textures have similarities that connect them, yet their otherness keeps them unique and thought provoking.

The white walls of the gallery appear higher than they are wide; windows flooding the room with light from above create an airy atmosphere for the four individual wall mounted pieces and three floor works. Immediately to the left of the entrance, *gold burrs* will be randomly clustered on the east wall at a height consistent with a burr's natural habitat, three and a half to four feet off the ground. The seven individual 10k gold cast natural forms will be embedded in the wall by a brass rod and lit with the intention of casting shadows to enhance the intensity of their hooks. The Velcro-inspiring bud is tiny and unassuming normally, but the shimmer of the gold aids in the physical attraction it produces.

Continuing around the gallery in a clockwise direction leads the viewer to the largest wall in the space which will house *boiling over*, a large bulbous form. Constructed from wood,

poultry wire, polystyrene, and with a surface finish of sand and acrylics, the top-heavy form tapers and has an upward sweep to a point a fifth of its widest area. Upon close encounter, the overhanging nature of the forms' peak will potentially have an intimidating quality, casting its presence physically over the viewer; however, the soft creamy white rounded surface offsets this.

Uncoiled is comprised of a series of found vintage industrial strapping, new old stock binding, and vintage coiled textiles used for finishing and supports. It employs an unsaturated pallet of muted greens, blush and off whites. Hung over wall mounted steel rods in looped formations, the discarded materials, produced through the physical act of uncoiling, are intended to convey a rhythmic, almost hypnotic formation. The remaining wall sits in the shadow of an overhanging loft area, creating a secluded environment for the piece *uninvited*. Three white boxes with metal-screened fronts will be mounted to the wall. From the screens there will be hundreds of discarded pieces of thread tied to the openings. From a distance the piece will be quiet and still, but when a viewer approaches, a proximity sensor will trigger the enclosed fan and the thread will project outward, inhibiting further close investigation.

The floor area will share the following three pieces, *protect the strong*, *looped form* and *pin piece no.4*. They will be placed in a triangular formation between the wall pieces. *pin piece no. 4* will be situated between *uncoiled* and *uninvited* at the far end of the gallery cascading over a white riser primarily displaying the side of the weighty fur-like pelt, and only hinting at the other side. Closer to the entrance, *looped form* will sit directly on the floor, standing three and a half feet tall with deeply saturated tones of black with a faint scent of roofing paper emitting from the form. The coils of threaded tarpaper circles splay from the full constructed armature, a density so rich that it might suggest the coils become a material of their own. Lastly, *protect the strong*, a grouping of 10 smallish vacuumed form covered stones, collected from various

geographical locations I frequent, will sit directly on the floor in a random arrangement. The slick white plastic grips and exposes the surface of the rock, revealing more than if it were not covered.

In the Gales Gallery at York University, I will present a large-scale installation comprised of a reconfigured roll of white compressed foam packaging material. The banal substance typically found draped over new electronics for protection will become the centre of attention. The material will be uncoiled upon itself over a 15' track, looping at the ends due to the imposed shift in direction and amassing a height unusual for such a material. It is my intent that the packaging material appears free and uninhibited at one end of the long track, yet with the placement of a found concrete and steel bar barrier on the other end, it will take on an appearance that is constrained and restricted. The volume and fluidity of form in juxtaposition to the confines of the inflicted heavy block creates a physical tension.

Introduction: An Unremitting Process

I gather ideas, materials, theories, and effects; a slow consumption of things that manifest themselves in my subconscious. It is difficult to know where exactly my process begins, or ends, for that matter. It can be compared to jumping onto a slow moving train that is on an infinite track with no specific destination or rationally planned out route. Often the path backtracks on itself, this time heading in a different direction, another time allowing views from alternate vantage points, but it is nonetheless unremitting. Though it may appear to some as inefficient or irrational, working in physical chaos, surrounded by *things*¹, allows me to create. Concepts in this environment shift direction, collapse, reconfigure and eventually refine themselves. I realize that the same few ideas keep making their way back to the forefront, striving to be realized; dominant themes include the tensions between material relationships, affect, the abject, and the marginalized.

When in proximity to the work on display in my studio I have witnessed people have a visceral response: the forms' distinct textures figuratively reach out and stroke them before they realize it has happened. A faint smell has also infiltrated their olfactory system, perhaps presenting a slight taste in their mouths. Repulsion and attraction occur simultaneously, a response to the abject and familiar. Shiny and matte surfaces skew the visual balance of the viewer; the glint of metal acts as a barrier to the softness of a natural surface. All sparking the question: What is it? There is a sense of confusion as they seem familiar, but in what scenario or world previously or yet to be experienced?

The following thesis support paper is an account of my art practice and the artworks created during my MFA program in Visual Arts at York University; it explores my past and the

¹ *things* – from this point forward this term will refer to all entities inert, human, nonhuman, matter etc.

need to collect, addressing how and what I acquire, while acknowledging the union created over time with *things*. I study the role of my intuition and its fundamental impact on my process and drive for making. A strong work ethic is deeply woven throughout my art practice; through my description of processes or strategies devised to complete work, I hope it can be felt.

To Collect: what resonates

‘The find’ is a term used by many collectors. It is the ultimate elusive thing one has been searching for high and low to complete or make a significant contribution to ones’ collection. Every dindgy bric-a-brac shop has been scoured in order to get ‘the find’. It is a level of dedication, for some bordering on obsession. Usually it is difficult to justify or explain your obsession. The one special thing you were searching for is typically inconsequential to most and therefore almost impossible to rationalize. As Susan Stewart notes, “The collection is a form of play, a form of involving the reframing of objects within a world of attention and manipulation of context.”² This is a game, and the competition is yourself, as you strive to outdo your last score or those bidding against you at auction and constantly hone your skills in order to acquire exactly what will add to the intimate world you are creating.

Longing to collect is a significant aspect of my practice-based research. This passion has been fostered since childhood through visits to auction houses and antique stores compounded with growing up in an old log cabin furnished with antiques. The richness and distinct materiality of experienced things infiltrated my life early on and became a customary part of my life. I can clearly remember sitting at our dining room table, an old butcher’s carving table, and running my knife in all of the grooves and notches, intrigued by the texture. Knowing and understanding what it was and how the marks got there did not bother me; in fact, it heightened my curiosity. Collections of marks tell a story much like the scars on my body do from an adventurous yet accident-prone childhood.

During my time in the MFA program there has been a shift in what I collect. I am still drawn to the materials that resonate with me, but rather than sourcing objects with use value I

² Susan Stewart *On Longing : Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham : Duke University Press, 1993. Pg. 151

have become more open and attracted to the discarded and ephemeral. I am intrigued by Jane Bennett's approach to materialism and how it connects to aspects of my art practice: "What I am calling impersonal affect or material vibrancy is not a spiritual supplement or 'life force' added to the matter said to house it. Mine is not a vitalism in the traditional sense; I equate affect with material, rather than posit a separate force that can enter and animate a physical body."³ This exemplifies why I am attracted to the things I collect: the material speaks to me on a deeper level.

Recently I was walking my dog and I noticed a shard of concrete splattered with florescent pink spray paint, a common thing to see downtown. It caught my eye, but we continued our walk. This seemingly insignificant chunk of concrete— what most would describe as waste — stayed with me for a few weeks. I would periodically find myself pining for this *thing* until one dark night I found myself foraging for it. Thinking I had been successful I returned to my home only to discover it was not it! Immediately I went back out for a second look. I found it. Filled with excitement and the high that comes with 'the find', I cleaned it off and proceeded to make a broach.

This characterizes my process of collection; the rationale for acquiring it is not what it is in its pre-context but what it will become and how it has affected me. Susan Stewart discusses this notion:

Like other forms of art, its function is not the restoration of context of origin but rather the creation of a new context, a context standing in a metaphorical, rather than

³ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2010. Preface xiii

a contiguous, relation to the world of everyday life. Yet unlike many forms of art, the collection is not representational. The collection presents a hermetic world: to have a representative collection is to have both the minimum and the complete number of elements necessary for an autonomous world – a world which is both full and singular, which has banished repetition and achieved authority.⁴

There is no limit to what I collect, the only criteria being that it must resonate with me. The image of a covered-up graffiti paint blotch, scraps of discarded wood, an image of a succulent, a sketch captured during a bout of insomnia, and the gashes and incidental marks made on school desks. The potential is endless.

The things I collect have moved with me, some for years, waiting for their turn when the time is right. In the preliminary stages in the making of *pin piece no.4*, I knew I was going to use a heavy wool blanket, similar to the iconic Hudson's Bay point blankets with red, yellow, green and blue stripes. Not wanting the distraction of the coloured stripes to peek through the mass of pins, the HBC blanket was not an option. A bright red one would be intense but again too distracting and somewhat reminiscent of the flesh of a pelt. Scrolling through eBay and etsy listings to find the perfect option was to no avail. I decided to visit my storage unit, which I had acquired in an attempt to de-clutter my apartment without having to purge all of my amassed treasures, to see what was locked away in boxed treasures, hoping to find something that might work. Success! I forgot that I had purchased a vintage French military blanket while I lived in Paris. The neatly folded mass of flecked grey-brown with neatly yellow stitched lettering sat waiting, as if it always knew its purpose, waiting until I figured it out. It is perfect.

I do not necessarily incorporate the actual object; sometimes the thing's form, texture, or

⁴ Susan Stewart, *On Longing : Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Pg.152

technical execution is the focus. I have no intention of misappropriating their meaning or cultural significance; in the instance of the blanket, my work has no connection with the French military apart from my response to the object's aesthetics. I am acknowledging the thing's worth as I subjectively grasp it. My intent is genuine and I hope that the transference of this authenticity is somehow captured within the work through the integrity of the assemblage⁵ and the care placed on composition and finish.



Figure. 1 studio – process work

Studio Inhabitants

⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. Pg. 306

I spend a significant amount of time in my studio – so much so I felt it necessary to add a coffee maker and fridge to make it feel like a second home. At one point I was considering adding a sofa so I could have the option of sleeping over if I was on a creative streak. This never came to fruition as the dust was too much of a deterrent, not to mention the wall of windows that doubles as a fish bowl at night. Having access to my studio 24/7 is luxurious; to be situated in the centre of the sculpture facility is exhilarating and at times overwhelming as I feel I need to take advantage of every second. In addition to it being a creative space, it also offers further storage to house what I gather.

My studio appears like pure chaos. Small piles intermix with rubber storage containers filled to the brim with potential. Scraps of this or that found in the dumpster wait to become something of purpose. Every flat surface is strewn with works in the making, from pieces of wonderful frosted pink Plexiglas from a laser engraver session to industrial size elastics used for securing shipping pallets. The question really isn't if everything will be used, but rather – and more importantly – when. I like to think that I have an accurate mental list of all the items I acquire. Sometimes a few slip my mind here and there, but as soon as I see them an instant recall occurs causing me to remember where I got them, along with any related circumstances. I appreciate the making of a list, mental or physical, of things to do or objects acquired, similar to Richard Serra's *Verb List*⁶: comprised of a series of verbs that he wrote with hopes of being inspired by them, beginning with *to roll, to crease, to fold...* Lists can act as a reminder of an accomplishment or a manifest of what might be missing. In an attempt to catalogue by area what I had in my studio, I started to list everything, beginning with my desk; after two hours of writing I quickly realized that I wasn't going to meet my original goal. As it is, I began at the

⁶ Richard Serra. *Verb List*. 1967–68. Graphite on paper, 2 sheets, each 10 x 8" (25.4 x 20.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist in honor of Wynn Kramarsky. © 2011 Richard Serra/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

top right of my desk and in a counter clockwise motion moved across the surface, down the left set of drawers over to the bottom right and then finished with the top right drawer.

Desk List:

old wood post office mail box
gold leaf sizing
tube of contact cement.
saw blades.
letter punches.
tape measure.
red ink.
white spool of thread.
sewing needles
cube of bass wood
wax tool
pack of eyelets
coping saw blades
old sculpture maquette.
pen.
tube of Paynes Gray acrylic.
package of large eyelets.
trimming scissors.
pack of half used thank-you cards.
correction tape.
clip
24k gold leafing : 4 packs
pork dot tape
eraser
paint brush.
label maker tape
small knife
tiny brass plane
old grey spool of thread
automatic numerator
chopsticks.
bronze paper airplane
bottle of Advil
leather thimble
hand stamp
eraser re-fills
metal key ring
pencils.

conté
x-acto knife.
rubber mould
bronze burrs.
hand cream
sketch
finishing tool
box of pins x 2.
5 cut off wooden spikes.
vintage counting machine
plexi house cut out.
letter press stamps.
map pins.
bag of hair
carbon paper.
old show card
tiny paper pad.
bag of stir sticks
gold leaf adhesive.
tweezers.
clay tool
vintage silk scarf
calculator
coloured rectangular shaped pencils.
doll house furniture legs.
roll of duct tape
\$ 2.75 in change
doll house ladder
water colour saturated paper.
note pad
found piece of steel
ivory spool of thread
double sided tape
white markers.
jewellery findings.

Starbucks card
tin plate from Sarnia Bridge Company.
enamel letter g.
label maker
styrofoam heated cutter
wood centres from coil of vintage pins x2.
Vintage tin box
psychotropic medication box
tiny wooden house w copper scallops
texture rubber stamps.
spool of wire - small gage.
stamp tools.
Scrap of wood from old box painted white.
desk lamp. (which I never use).
framed red flocked vintage price tag.
moisturizing face spray
Arduino Book.
art catalogues.
scraps of cardboard from old
cardboard string ^{tool boxes} maquette
to-scale maquette of Gates gallery
installating (not completely).
laser cutouts of dipped forms.
drawing from my niece (Arling).
paint palette.
6 - 12x12 pieces of plexi glass.
course notes : drawing 2085
foam packaging
Labour & Wait : York library book.
... more course notes
piece of green bubble wrap.
1/2 inch extra long spade bit.
hole saw bit.
glass crown jar.

tube of robber cement.
maquette twigs w rice
dowels.
cardboard mixing container.
container of Windsor salt
roll of packaging tape
roll of masking tape
bag of bulk sugar
wood panel w rubber tubing maquette.
right angle
5 small rocks from my cottage
old respirator cartridges
drywall spackle.
polymer clay maquettes x6.
Vintage drill case (from my grandfathers
shop: hold my dremel bits)
box of couscous.
2 more boxes of straight pins.
empty salt shaker.
glass jar.
sketch book
Sharpie
safety glasses
box of reject pins.
Lysol wipes.
old paint brush holder made from
block of wood w drill bits, scissors
pin tool, paint brush
ear buds
giant spool of old grey wool.
bronze geometric cast shape
metal organizing container : hardware
gloves in a box
dollar store paint
gold Sharpie
spool of white cotton string
2016 receipts (stack)

bag of bulk brown rice
roll of interfacing
roll of wire
old crochet needles
steel measure: gauge
old small tin box
rectangular institutional green
metal box
steel mount
rubber inner tube maquette
plastic container w gold pleat pins
softened wire loop maquette
Tupperware container: holds
respirator
current class list: 2033
small pink bluetooth speaker
chunk of styrofoam
Uline catalogue
iPad
sketch book
(blue) sticky note pad.
keys
iPhone
Starbucks coffee cup (currently
drinking)
box of wet wipes
brnze house w legs x4
brnze hors like form x2
adgustable angle grinder wrench
pack of orbital sanding disks
220 grit.
box of tampons
deodorant
thin masking tape roll 1/4"
glue gun
glue gun re-fill sticks.

pay stubs x3
almost empty bag of trail mix
red cloth rag.
Starbucks napkins
old cashboard box of pins.
small plastic sealable. bag x50+
Tassimo pods.
dust mask.
hair elastics.
lighter.
measuring tape.
Starbucks straws.
small screwdriver set.
fasteners.
snack.
wooden domino's box.
more coffee pods.
sponge
brayer
pencil.
model airplane nose x2.
vintage pack of sewing needles
large spool of white thread
2" hole punch
1" hole punch.
rusty antique hand synth
box of wood carving tools.
2 lexle masonite boards
small hacksaw
old piece of wood w interesting marks.
paint pen white.
plastic container.
angle bracket
rubber mallet
glitter tray x2
old wood block w grid of drill holes.

sm: reusable plastic green bag
 map pins x 2
 coffee maker instructions
 red felt
 drill bits
 container of dremel bits
 3 pack of colored pompons.
 pl premium.
 8 large paint brushes.
 dust mask.
 old bullet casings
 scraps of sandpaper
 antique Fruch postcards.
 small files
 sponge
 1/2-Axlar knife.
 scissors.
 piece of plastic orange netting
 found on Dovercourt to
 give to Alejandro.
 screws
 fasteners.
 sponge paint brush.
 more coffee pods: Americano.
 Sandpaper: wet/dry
 400 grit.
 dust mask
 white cotton work gloves.
 pool of aluminum tubing foil.
 antique wood bobbin
 red handled screw driver.
 files.
 coping saw: 12" opening.
 finishing nails.
 buffing pad for drill

more dremel bits.
 screws.
 jewelers wax sprewe
 angle grinder sanding attachment
 Foredom manual.
 rubber gloves
 Dremmel router attachment
 limitation gold leaf
 coping saw (small).
 old tooth brushes
 scissors.
 scraps of sandpaper.
 box of disposable rubber
 gloves.
 staple gun
 museum gel
 Foredom collets.
 steel strapping.
 fabricated steel mount.
 sm. brackets.
 1.5 hole saw.
 'D' rings.
 compass - new in
 package.
 cutting tool set.
 yet another pack of
 map pins.
 antique silver whistle.
 old door latch.
 dressmakers measuring tape.
 wire brush
 paint brushes.
 spray peroxide (came w/
 studio).
 eyelets.
 blending marker
 spray hand sanitizer
 (came w/
 studio).

Scissors: seems like
 I have a few but
 can never find the
 when I need them
 takeout chopsticks
 standard hole punch.
 'U' shaped bracket
 pencil
 pliers
 wood dowels.
 Turbo-plane angle grinder
 attachment
 Ziplock bag of foredom
 dremmel bits.
 PL premium
 wood screws.
 rasp
 old green box from 20
 took long time
 to acquire this
 white tack
 staples
 blue tack
 wow - more map pins.
 needle nose pliers.
 hanging brackets
 tube of contact cement
 Japanese bone saw
 loose coil of wire
 riffler.
 replacement blades
 chunks of ivory.
 sparkly pink sharp
 pencil.
 wax tool
 wax
 pen
 screw drivers

Figure 2: Desk List

Couscous and Other Materials

Certain materials embody select interests, some overlap, but I do not compile them with intent to categorize, place, or hold formal labels. It is as if the materials were dictating what is supposed to be explored, narrated or portrayed through their *thing-power*. Jane Bennett eloquently describes *thing-power* as “the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience.”⁷ A continuous negotiation, it is during these visual conversations that elegant refined forms emerge from the turmoil. The materials and I select each other. The small round beads of Israeli couscous have made excellent textures en masse. Organic black rubber sealant used for exterior construction projects creates a rich fondant surface. Flocking is velvety and rich with a sensuous impenetrable quality. Scraps of wood teem over rubber bins, all different shapes and sizes, densities and grain varieties used for almost anything. None of these materials were sought after to cook with, repair a house, or to make an intended surface velvety. We found each other with other endeavours in mind, overlooking existing labels or categories of designated use.

The Thanksgiving weekend of 2015 was spent roaming my parents’ partially wooded property, scavenging for burrs; for whatever reason I had a need to collect them, not in the typical stuck to your dog or pant leg sort of collecting, but a finely mastered procedural way. I prepared myself with a disposable grocery bag, rubber boots, and a pair of bright yellow dishwashing gloves. At this point in my life my family rarely questions my practices; they accept that it is part of something to come. Grabbing the base of the stalk with both hands and

⁷ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. pg. 21

slowly dragging upward, I captured the burrs as they entangled onto themselves and, once off, were formed in large clusters.

I had no idea how these fragile nuisances were going to evolve. They sat for four or five months tucked away under one of the desks in the studio before I decided to cast them in bronze as a technical trial. The result was successful but not entirely satisfying. It played on the contradiction of the materials' fragility by giving it more longevity, but it wasn't resolved. Another year and a half passed by until I decided to have them cast in 10k gold. I could envision the tiny clusters embedded into the wall of the gallery. The glint of gold and irregular forms will cast stunning shadows, simple, unassuming and precious. Gold is a conceptually loaded material, usually associated with commodity and being a thing of value. For me it is also a material of importance on a nostalgic level: my grandfather was a gold miner in the Yukon – it was something he did and spoke of often. Used in this context, the gold burr is unique because in its natural state a burr is often seen as abject and something to avoid, yet now it will potentially have the ability to attract the viewer. The shift from its usual circumstance demands it be reconsidered as the thing it has become.

The use of non-traditional materials and their subjectivity in contemporary art has long been a focus with the work of the Dadaists and Duchamp, Meret Oppenheim's *Object* and the Arte Povera of the 1970's in Italy. Recently the exhibitions *thing* at the Hammer Museum in 2005 and *Unmonumental* at the New Museum in 2007 have been well reviewed. Exploring the catalogue of *Unmonumental*, a survey of work compiled by Richard Flood, Laura Hoptman and Massimiliano Gioni for the inaugural exhibition at the New Museum's Bowery location, has been affirming to me regarding my use of objects. The works in the exhibition repurposed and recontextualized things that are otherwise entirely banal, but in their new context can be

appreciated on a more sophisticated level. *Thing*, an exhibition focusing on emerging artists in the Los Angeles region, who also approached materials in a similar context but the work was cleaner and had a refined aesthetic that I found far more compelling. Joel Morrison, one of the contributing artists, creates work that appears tactile and alluring but maintains a rawness about it that is honest and real. Striving for a similar impression in my work is important, as I want the viewer to relate on a visceral level, building an understanding or a commonality potentially through the selected material and a sense of familiarity with form.

Intuitive Practice

I embrace my intuition; at times intuition is a co-creator, separate from myself its intensity is so strong and distinct it is easily interpreted as an entity in and of itself. It wasn't until reading Jennifer Fisher's book *Technologies of Intuition* that I felt a sense of legitimization of my interpretation of intuition: "Whether sensed as a gut feeling or a flash of insight, intuition is central to processes of 'coming to know' in aesthetic practice and experience."⁸ I too have gut feelings about the objects I collect and some of my ideas evolve from moments of epiphany triggered by my surroundings. My intuition amplifies the beauty and artistic potential in simple forms or objects, such as, for example, how a fabric billows and drapes or the unique configuration of a cluster of branches or a tangled mini-blind cord. These visual encounters penetrate my subconscious and remain there for an undetermined period of gestation, until they disclose themselves as a new idea.

The environment I create for myself encourages this approach. Surrounding myself with my collection soon stimulates a relationship between us and amongst them. The idea of *things* becoming is significant; I interpret the evolution as if the thing is continuously proposing new ideas, which substantially contributes to the momentum of our creative process. Matter is fluid and it practices an act of becoming, not residing in its pre-existing category but transforming into a new existence. My use and understanding of materials harnesses the development of becoming; the forms I make have a resounding agency generated from their perpetual exploration. Classifying or labeling materials only inhibits their potential, whereas being open to letting them dictate their intended trajectory provides a voice, and I feel a responsibility to listen

⁸ Jennifer Fisher, *Technologies of Intuition*. Toronto: Winnipeg: YYZ Books, 2006. Print pg. 11

and include them in the creation of the work. Coupled with the idea of working intuitively, not questioning or blocking potential configurations, further aids with the intra-acting of the materials. Karen Barad uses the term *intra-action* in relation to the theory of agential realism with the understanding that things come to matter through the act of doing: “On an agential realist account, matter does not refer to a fixed substance; rather, matter is substance in its *intra-active* becoming – not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative *intra-activity*.”⁹ It is because of this undertaking that the thing becomes so much more than the label it holds. The doing that Barad speaks of offers a sense of vitality surrounding the object resonating more with some than others. If having to select from a dozen of the same thing there will always be a noticeable distinction based on how we *intra-act*. It is because of this that I am selective, knowing that if I permit something that is not in sync with what I already have I am easily thrown off and so too are they. I become bothered and agitated by these imposters, needing to purge them from my world. Once comfortable and content with my atmosphere I can *make*.

Sometimes I just make because I can. Dipping, cutting, sewing, gluing, augmenting, or manipulating whatever comes to mind or what I’m in the mood for. I can equate this to a writer’s use of “free association” a notion devised by Freud and then adopted as a technique used in psychoanalysis. The purpose of the technique is to write everything down that comes to mind, without censoring or questioning what that might be¹⁰. On the way to work, I might have an idea pop into my head like dipping looped pipe cleaners into plaster. There is never a point of direction when these random thoughts come to mind; I follow through to see what will happen.

⁹ Karen Barad. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007 pg. 822

¹⁰ J. Jones, “About the Free Associations Method.” *Freud File*. N.p., 2016. Web.

The luxury of ample studio time has allowed for freedom to play, which has subsequently shifted how I work. Prior to having this time I would make only to execute a final work, never experimenting or even constructing maquettes. This former approach was not wrong, it was my norm, but now my practice has evolved and embraced the idea of trial and error.

I now construct independent forms and textures that I consider unique materials that I can then use to create completed works. They are inspired by daily encounters, meditative moments, and/or periods of insomnia, but the key is that I have made them, recognizing that I trust my own instincts and intuitive exploration. The dipped looping pipe cleaners did not immediately amount to anything specific, but over a gestation period of two months they evolved into a two-dimensional work focusing on the perimeter trace of the made form with a flocked surface finish. This piece partially inspired the making of a larger work titled *looped form*.

looped form suggests the exuding sensation of emotion, originally envisioned after hearing devastating news. I could not verbally express how I felt, other than that it was an intense feeling of heaviness weighing on my chest, resonating for days. I wanted to eliminate this sensation. Every time I went to express myself all I could do was gesture with my hands an outward motion from my chest with splayed fingers, suggesting an expunging. This action transformed into a representation of a weighty exhausted sigh depleted of any and all expendable energy listlessly waiting for what was to happen next.

I saw *looped form* in its entirety, placed in a gallery setting, lit and ready for viewing. This may seem efficient, but to some degree it can be detrimental as I have a tendency not to complete a piece because it already exists in my head. Having chosen to proceed in spite of this, I then determined how to construct the work through experimentation and a rudimentary sketch of the envisioned sculpture, allowing the concept to develop a couple of weeks before

starting construction of any sort. The time was spent figuratively breaking down the physical form, deciding what materials and tools were appropriate for the maquette. As much as I have an inclination to collaborate with my intuition and see it as the source for my ideas, I also have to acknowledge a strong relationship between it and my technical skills. Erin Manning articulated this in her essay *Artfulness*: “For intuition is never separate from technique. It is a rigorous process that consists of pushing technique to its limit, revealing its technicity – the very outdoing of technique that makes the more-than of experience felt.”¹¹

In general, having a skill set to draw from complements my intuitive practice, allowing me to have some understanding of what to expect, but sometimes new challenges arise. I purchased several large format circle punches, which proved to work well but over time became physically draining. I had to search for an automated option. Through online research I was able to find an electronic cutting machine that works with various materials. From a computer file I could produce twice the amount of circles in half the time without any physical strain. When working in massive amounts of multiples, the need to circumvent from the handmade is sometimes necessary and does not detract from the work. There is still a handmade quality, as the circles were then hand drilled and threaded onto a wire cord, with some slightly off centre, creating an irregular appearance.

The multiple loops swelling out of the form reflect a sense of controlled chaos and potential movement. Simultaneously projecting exhaustion and energy the form appears to identify as both. It is neither one nor the other, a hybridization of a restless and agitated state – shifting further within the relationship between the two depending on the subjectivity of the

¹¹ Erin Manning, *The Nonhuman Turn*. Ed. Richard Grusin. University of Minnesota Press, 2015. Print. *Artfulness*. Pg. 48

viewer. Upon close inspection it becomes clear the coils are made from thousands of black circles cut from tarpaper, a banal material typically used as a roofing barrier prior to the application of shingles. There is a faint smell reminiscent of a construction site, and if heated under the usual circumstances, the potent odour increases. To the touch it is sticky, and once torn the many thin layers that it consists of become apparent. The intensely saturated black draws the viewer in, with a subtle fibrous quality that feels as if it is absorbing what is around it while the frenzy of the loops repel. The unsettled state suggests agency, an awkward vibration that, if given time or the correct moment, could physically move despite being densely grounded.

Pierce, Dip, Thread, Overlay

The act of intense repetition has been associated with ritual, obsessive-compulsive tendencies, fetishism and aspects of craft. My connection with time and repetition is complicated but connects best to the concept of ‘repetitive crafting’, which, as explained by Sera Waters, “can be understood as a dexterous laboriousness, where the relationship between body and material is bound by long periods of concentrated time.”¹² I believe in modest physical gestures that are executed with care, patience, and commitment. This type of approach cultivates a deep intimacy, I often found myself stroking the works, as if to nurture them. Painstakingly pushing myself to complete small goals, a strategy devised to foster immediate gratification when the light at the end of the tunnel is dim.

During the creative processes of *pin piece no. 4* and *looped form*, undergraduate York Visual Arts students and my mother have been employed to aid in their completion. We sit together around the outstretched blanket, placing pins into position, talking about art, politics, health, and a myriad of subjects. Similar to the historical references of a “quilting bee”, conversations help pass time while making. The additional assistance does not make the work a formal collaboration; however, the many hands do in fact impart a subtle added trace. I can obviously distinguish who placed the pins in what area, or who threaded the coils of specific circles. I find the richness of the added touch enhances the sculptures, ensuring no suggestion of machine-fabricated work, while incorporating details that support precision handwork.

¹² Sera Waters, 'Repetitive Crafting; the shared aesthetic of time in Australian Contemporary Art', *craft + design enquiry*, issue 4, 2012 pg. 71

gather, select, pierce, adjust; select, pierce, adjust; select, pierce, adjust; select, pierce, adjust;
select, pierce, adjust; select, pierce, adjust; select, pierce, adjust; re-orient, select, pierce, adjust;
select, pierce, adjust; select, pierce, adjust; select, pierce, adjust; select, pierce, adjust; gather....

The pins are packaged in beautifully lined one-pound boxes, without order, presented every which way, making it difficult to grab a handful while avoiding being pricked. Through trial and error a specific pinning process was developed and refined to ensure safety and efficiency. A small amount of pins are dumped out onto the stretched fabric; from there a cluster can be easily acquired with thumb and pointer finger with one's non-dominant hand. A slight reconfiguring of the cluster brings the lot into a unified orientation, except some point ball-end up and the remainder the reverse. Best practice is to retrieve ball-end up pins first and then flip the remaining, while using the dominant hand to pin with. The pins are pierced in close proximity of each other; only a pin-head spacing exists between them. This dense coverage creates a pebbling effect and to the touch is reminiscent of a passage in Braille. With each placement, the pins generate small formations that are spaced out until they eventually close in on themselves as completions draws closer. The dense wool sometimes proves resistant and extra force is required, a somewhat violent yet laborious and satisfying act.

Intended to drape on a low white riser with it slightly grazing the floor, *pin piece no.4* will sit below the viewers' sight line. Its physicality will interrupt the passage in the space, fostering the potential of an exchange that might compel the involved parties to interact and respond to one another. I hope the familiar materials captivate the viewer until further consideration elicits

subtle unease, evoking conflicting emotions awakened by the forms' agency. There is a distinct sense that the form has an energy and purpose despite its ambiguity – its anthropomorphic quality has the capacity to evoke a desire in the viewer to stroke the piece.

The materiality of the form is intended to create a heightened presence, generating the imagined sensation of what it actually feels like. The suggested softness of the fur-like texture is juxtaposed against the visceral recoil from the sharp points of the pins. I am examining the possibility that the history of the thing, as in the case of the straight pins, might impact its current understanding and subsequently profoundly affect those that encounter the form. Flashbacks of sewing lessons, standing impatiently on the dining room chair as your mother folds and marks the hemline of your trousers while accidentally pricking your ankle, the positioning of a poppy on your lapel and underestimating how close your finger was to the back of it. A triggered sensation from personal experience potentially contributes to the visual processing of the artwork. Gilles Deleuze speaks to the movement attributed with sensation: “Between a color, a taste, a touch, a smell, a noise, a weight, there would be an existential communication that would constitute the ‘pathic’ (nonrepresentative) moment of the sensation.”¹³ All of these accounts are synonymous with the sight of the straight pin and its triggering sensations. Just before the conscious registration of your mind formalizes an emotion, your body experiences a form of communication from an in-between state. The viewer must question if the reaction is heightened because of the excessive and somewhat uncanny nature of the work, or, if it is possible that the transformation of a single pin into a mass pelt of metal evokes a sense of the sublime. By disrupting the intended trajectory for the straight pin the viewer is subjected to a new becoming of unconnected materials. Building on nostalgic connotations, it is in the new context that the

¹³ Gilles Deleuze and Francis Bacon. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. Pg. 42

form has the potential to thrive and affect viewers, shifting the work into a creative unexpected direction, one that will continually change and reinvent itself with every new encounter.



Figure 3: pin piece no.4 – process work

labour

Scale has always been a significant aspect of my work, with the confines of a small studio space largely dictating my parameters. In order to combat this issue I had focused on making multiples to achieve installations with a grander sense of mass; however, this approach has become less satisfying, almost routine and expected by those who know my work. In need of a challenge I decided to pursue a minimal large-scale installation in the Gales gallery as part of my thesis exhibition. I wanted to create an environment that felt as though it were inundated by the piece, simple in colour, form and material – the more minimal it was, I felt, the more it would draw attention to the scale and essence of the form. I am inspired by the contemporary British artist Tara Donovan, who uses simple everyday objects in her sculptures and installations, transforming drinking straws, buttons, paper plates, and plastic drinking cups into coveted works of art. The intensity of her work through the repetitive use of materials, multiplied by the thousands, is impressive and something I strive to emulate. Keeping in line with my freestanding sculptures that also employ utilitarian materials, uniquely formulated textures and a muted colour palette, my primary material for the creation was foam sheeting used for packaging. Sourced from Uline, the slightly wavy sponge-like foam was purchased in a 6' x 250' roll; it was lovely, simple, and unassuming. There was no denying it was an entity in and of itself, with a personality distinct from its nature. The simple compact roll was quiet, yet the mass had an overall strength about it. Paired with the foam will be a compact blocked cube of concrete with a broken off rusted handle, which will act as a grounding point as the foam will be compressed and restricted as it sits on top of it. The block is something I have been passing en route to school for the last two years; it sits in an alley way and appears to not have been used this entire time. I plan on borrowing it for the exhibition; I equate it with taking it on a holiday for a week or two.

Upon the foam's arrival, I felt as though it was sitting waiting patiently to be used as a protector, knowing its designated roll was to secure and act as a layer of armor between the precious forms it engulfed and the world around it. Passing by the calm substantial roll tucked away in the studio was exciting, as if I had a secret it wasn't privy to. Its mundane existence was going to be challenged, freeing it from the preconceived expectations imposed upon it from its intended use. Providing it with an opportunity to meet a potential that it was never supposed to experience, surpassing a bar that had been set without consultation.

Having ordered the foam early on and with the opportunity to use Special Projects Gallery, I decided to see how the installation would look and trouble-shoot any unforeseen logistical issues. The crisp white institutional walls of the gallery framed the equally crisp white of the packaging material, and the porous texture that constituted sponge-like qualities subtly glistened under the glow of the gallery lights, in slight juxtaposition to the matte paint surface. The large roll was heavy, weighing close to fifty pounds, which made moving it difficult. To ease the handling of the weighty material, a piece of steel was threaded through the center of the roll, leaving twelve inches protruding on either side. The excess steel was used to prop the roll up onto a block of wood with wheels affixed to the bottom. Without the aid of this crude wooden device, the roll's transportation would have been unmanageable. Deciding upon the final placement of the installation marked the beginning of the rollout! All two hundred and fifty feet of the material was to be released of its coiled tension and physically elevated into an undulating series of curved overlays.

The process was calming and rhythmic in nature; back and forth over a fifteen foot designated path I guided the foam, growing in height with each pass and becoming more precarious. The physical uncertainty of the material read as an anxious response to its new

function, a definite deviation from its customary function. In its new state of being, the material had obvious limitations, requiring guidance and support to establish a secure accumulation. The intensity of emotion grew, saturating the material with unease that it would carry to its final state of pause. Despite completion, the material's agitation was still present, affecting the space and those in its vicinity. I could feel the nervousness with an underlined state of exhilaration emitting from the foam – as if it were holding its breath in anticipation of something that was about to happen.

The juxtaposition of weightless foam against the weighted concrete block provided stabilization, a false sense of security as the foam was trapped only offered a certain amount of liberty. The materials were transitioning from one existence into another, shedding their original pre-determined function and becoming nomadic. This in-between phase and use insinuates a state of flux, a journey in its infancy searching for something, not necessarily a final destination but a discovering of what's to come. The right side of the foam structure was compressed and constrained, like a paperweight dutifully holding delicate sheets of paper at bay.

The contradictory terms of material form a curious relationship, raw and integral to complete the immediacy of the moment. The limitations imposed on the installation were a fundamental decision, only incorporating two materials to unite – stripping the work down to a pure raw state will invite the viewer to experience its essence. The obvious binaries are not in question, hard-soft, masculine-feminine; it's not about *this* or *that* – in reality the focus is on the *or*. *Or* is a term used in choice, yet it is a fluid intermediary. It is not necessarily linear; rather, it is similar to a rhizomatic¹⁴ sequence, shifting every which way and in doing so not resting long enough to be labeled or defined in relation to the original binary. In Rosi Braidotti's book

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Pg. 6

Nomadic Theory she addresses the term ‘figuration’ as a transformative account of the self and addresses the “internally contradictory multifaceted subjects we have become.”¹⁵ We are in a permanent process of transition. This includes all of us. If we are figuratively oscillating in our tiny orbits, how we experience our environment is always varying; simultaneously those around us are having similar experiences. It is because of this that even when experiencing art, specifically *overlay*, the continuously transitory state of fluidity affects the environment in which it resides for the time being.

overlay has had a substantial progression and transformation prior to its present state. Initially this piece was intended to be a large undulating mass, covering the perimeter of the Gales gallery. The dark and foreboding form was devised from small pieces of hand charred charcoal adhered to sections made of wood, chicken wire, and a paper mache sub-surface; a stark contrast to its current state. The use of charcoal emulated the Japanese technique *shou sugi ban*, used to char the surface of wood structures and tools to protect them from fire and insects. The initial installation was abandoned for the time being; after completing a trial section it became very clear to me that there was not enough time to execute the work with the amount of detail necessary to make it effective. The sculpture studio’s filtration system was also compromised because of the dust from the charred wood, making it impossible to continue working inside and with winter approaching outside was not an option.

However, the physical and mental labour did not go to waste, it was a natural transition into *overlay*. The similarities are surprising: both materials are traditionally used for protection. They both have an organic porous quality that catches light and reflects it; their minimal compositions are derived from one material, foam from oil and the charcoal from wood. The

¹⁵ Rosi Braidotti – *Nomadic Theory: the portable Rosi Braidotti*. Columbia University Press, New York, 2011 Pg. 29

extensive time spent investigating how to make charcoal and experimenting with burning units, cutting techniques, and appropriate adhesives still proved beneficial during the transition into the second concept, a migration of sorts. The nomadic installation has lived more lives than most; it's curious to know what will be the next journey. Ironically the initial subsequent plan that included the found concrete forms never materialized, the forms seemed to go on a vacation of their own, requiring an alteration to the installation. *Overlay* was finally comprised of the 6' x 250' roll spanning the length of Gales gallery, relying on two pieces of cotton rope holding the billowing material up off the walls. The foam partially draped on the floor with little space to pass under it, physically blocking the east side of the space to viewers, creating tension in every direction.

Conclusion: a continuous transformation

The works created have been made with materials that have left an impression on me, communicating as they linger in my subconscious. At times the sculptures appear to be comprised of things that purposely create a juxtaposition posing a suggested binary – but in actuality the work is not about choosing or categorizing; it is meant to be an exploration of the subjectivity that exists in the materials, depending on the approach or proximity to them as a whole. It is because of the fluctuation in subjectivity that the work is continuously becoming as it is experienced in *its* here and now. The infinite potential of what lays in the transitory state of what is to come complements my need to create and exercise my intuitive nature – a fluid journey with no specific destination.



Fig. 4: Erin Vincent. *material things* (installation). Alison Milne Gallery, Toronto. 2017



Fig. 5: Erin Vincent. *material things* (installation). Alison Milne Gallery, Toronto. 2017



Fig. 6: Erin Vincent. *material things* (installation). Alison Milne Gallery, Toronto. 2017



Fig. 7: Erin Vincent. Material things – overlay (installation). Gales Gallery. York University, Toronto. 2017



Fig. 8: Erin Vincent. Material things – overlay (installation). Gales Gallery. York University, Toronto. 2017

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