

Wellesley College
Wellesley College Digital Scholarship and Archive

Honors Thesis Collection

2016

Echoes

Marissa Klee-Peregon
mkkeeper@wellesley.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.wellesley.edu/thesiscollection>

Recommended Citation

Klee-Peregon, Marissa, "Echoes" (2016). *Honors Thesis Collection*. 347.
<https://repository.wellesley.edu/thesiscollection/347>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Wellesley College Digital Scholarship and Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Thesis Collection by an authorized administrator of Wellesley College Digital Scholarship and Archive. For more information, please contact ir@wellesley.edu.

Echoes

Marissa Klee-Peregon

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the
Prerequisite for Honors
in Studio Art

April 2016

© 2016 Marissa Klee-Peregon

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank, firstly, the entirety of the Art Department, which has been my home within Wellesley. In particular, I am grateful to my thesis advisors, Daniela Rivera and Dave Olsen, for their incredible support and guidance throughout the thesis process. I have learned so much from them both in these past semesters. I would also like to thank Lamia Balafrej, my Art History major advisor, for everything I have learned in her classes, and for assigning the paper that would eventually become this thesis.

Preface

The paper that follows is an impossible one. It wants to expand and break apart, making new gaps and shifting old ones, accumulating fragments of texts & of textures, accumulating readings & associations. Like the work to which it is parallel, it wants to be unstable, open to many points of entry, shifts of meaning, interruptions & implosions.

It would like to be sentences pinned up on a wall, with meanings made diagonally. A wall is too flat; it would like to be a constellation, a network, a system of networks – but only if the networks shift.

In order to live inside its numbered pages, this text has asked to be fragmented, irregular, and nonlinear. It still escapes the page – and it will continue, I expect, to escape, no matter how we try – but the paper that follows is the form this text has been happiest in, with gaps enough to breathe.

1.

You are sitting, slumping, your laptop sliding onto your chest and your knees jutting now in the air, your feet folded to the blanket. When you google “colburn chapel gallery” and click on the first result, you come up with. You remember looking at the strangely bright, graphic fresco that the first link leads you to (fig. 1). The gallery, you remember, ends in a hollowed-out half-circle of an apse, a religious shape for a space at a secular site. An interesting site -- a site, you think, wherein the reliquary might gain an additional meaning. You don’t know where exactly the reliquary is displayed, but you recall the other galleries of medieval art in the MFA, and figure it must be sitting alone, under a light. (You hope its metal surface and central rock crystal will reflect the light cast on it, shining in the room, which, you expect, will be dimly lit. So you can write about performativity and the light of God, perhaps how the object acts on the viewer -- subjects you are perhaps overly fond of.)

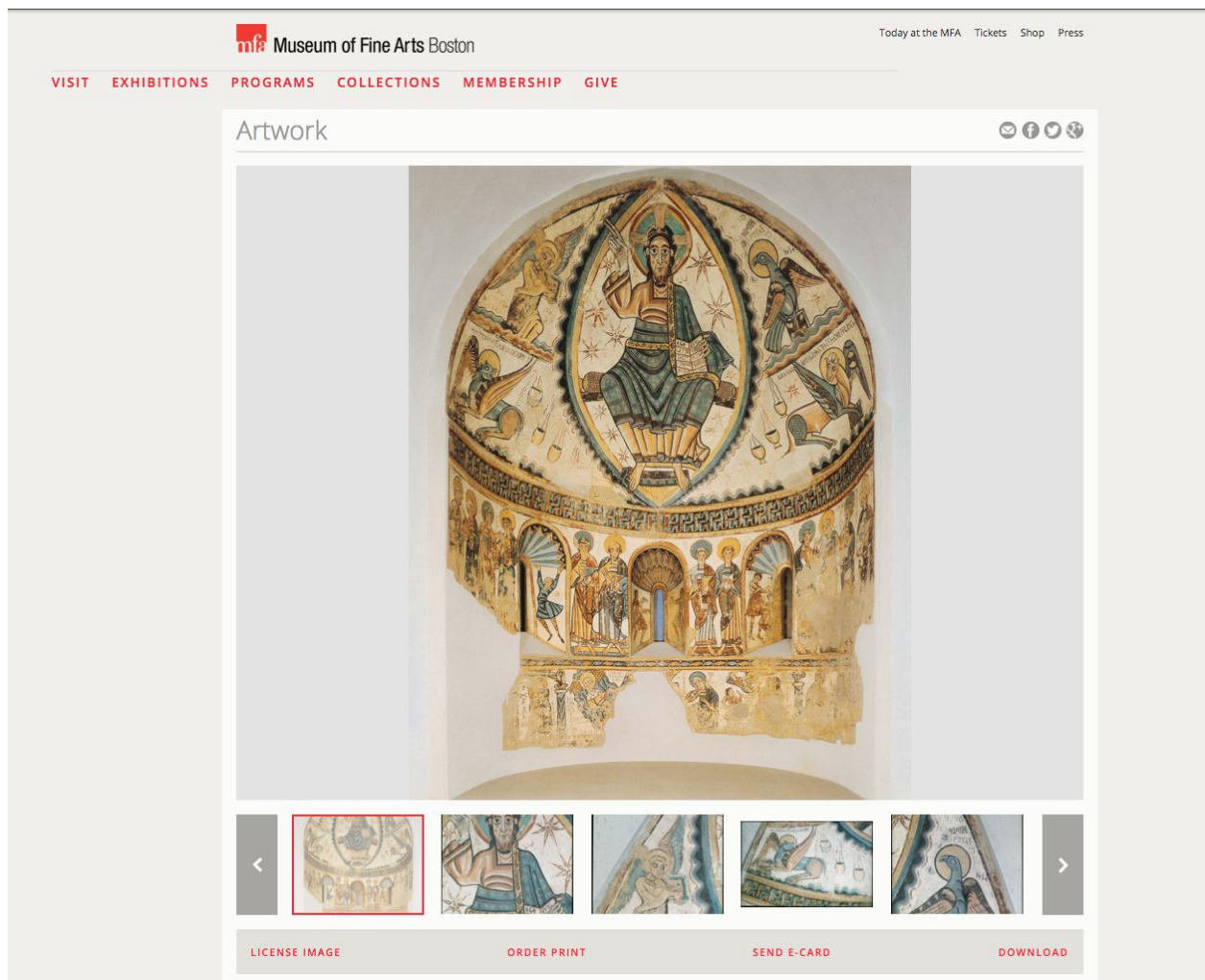


Fig. 1: Christ in Majesty with Symbols of the Four Evangelists, Museum of Fine Arts Boston's website.¹

¹ "Christ in Majesty with Symbols of the Four Evangelists." Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. 2016. <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/christ-in-majesty-with-symbols-of-the-four-evangelists-31898>.

You have googled the Colburn Chapel Gallery to see what, other than the hanging reliquary, is displayed in it. The hanging reliquary -- a small, copper thing, made sometime near the end of the 12th century in Meuse -- will be the topic of your final paper, you have just decided (fig. 2). (A few moments ago, you thought a different reliquary would be your topic. It was a nice looking reliquary, with movable parts, containers to be opened (an interesting bodily experience for the medieval viewer). Then you received an email from your professor pointing out that this nice reliquary was housed in a museum you would never be able to get to, and requesting that you select an object you'll be able to see in person. So.



Fig 2: Hanging Reliquary. German (Meuse), Medieval, third quarter of 12th century. Vernis brun and gilding on copper over wooden core; cabochons and rock crystal.²³

You have searched quickly for reliquaries on the MFA's online catalogue, picked one that looked shiny (our hanging reliquary), and googled the Colburn Chapel Gallery to see what all is

² "Hanging Reliquary | MFA for Educators." Hanging Reliquary | MFA for Educators. Accessed 2016. <http://educators.mfa.org/european/hanging-reliquary-31170>.

³ When you mention in class that you think the reliquary looks like a vulva (looking back, you regret this word choice and wish you had said "looks yonic"), the response is one of uncomfortable laughter and the eyebrows-raised suggestion that you stick to discussing it as a mandorla shape.

You do not mention that all mandorlas look yonic, in your opinion, and someone really ought to look into that. You do turn in your chair as your classmate says oh! haha -- she thought it looked like an eye.

(You look on google and jstor later, just to make sure that no one has pointed out how totally yonic mandorlas can be, or perhaps discussed the striking similarity of central forms in Sheela na gigs and certain Christs in majesty. But no one has.)

in it. Your head is against the wall hard and you tap out an email to your professor, proposing to write about the MFA's reliquary instead. You explain your interest in the object by a discussion of the space in which it's displayed, and the strange relationship between secular and religious space created by the apse's presence in the museum.

In the email, it is implied (you hope) that you have gone to look at the reliquary in person, that you have been considering it for a while. (You haven't.)

In the museum, it is easy to forget that inside the reliquary is a bit of body, a bit of bone. In the middle ages, and still today in churches, the bone (the belief in the bone) is the whole point. The bone provides the "real identity" between relic and saint, which gives the reliquary much of its power.⁴

"The relics insure the saint's presence on earth, [and] also point to his existence in heaven. A saint, now living in glory, is inseparably bound up with that part of him which still subsists below."⁵

Some relics are encased not just in beautiful, decorative materials, but in images of the saints to whom they are connected. The statue-reliquary of St. Foy of Conques is one such example. The image of the saint (through which there is an "identity of representation" between saint and relic) gives her power, links the saint in heaven to the earthly world, and the people of the earthly world to the saint in heaven. The eyes of St. Foy's reliquary, like the eyes of other reliquary-statues, are a particular point of power: the faithful meet her staring gaze and this is the moment of strongest connection.

But without the body – no, without the belief in the body – rather, without the belief in some physical thing connected to the body & thus signifying the body – the image has no power, even in its eyes.

Or, its power becomes immoral, tied up in idolatry.
Either way, the body is important.

--

"When seen upon the altars by the medieval worshipper, shining with gold and surrounded by lights, [reliquary statues] must have had a magnetic effect."⁶

⁴ Ellert Dahl, "Heavenly Images: The Statue of St. Foy of Conques and the Signification of the Medieval 'Cult-Image' in the West," *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 8 (1979), pp. 175-92.

⁵ Ellert Dahl, "Heavenly Images: The Statue of St. Foy of Conques and the Signification of the Medieval 'Cult-Image' in the West," *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 8 (1979), pp.180.

⁶ Ibid., 175.

In museums today, surrounding lights still sometimes magnetize. The strategies used by museums to enhance the aura of the object – such as lighting an object in a particular way; placing it in isolation; separating it from the viewer via a vitrine or a rope – can awaken a potentially similar sense that there is life in or about the object.⁷ I get the sense that these aura-enhancing approaches are at times derided, as if we ought to look at the object without light and space to distract us. To this I say that we have no more access to the “truth” of the object when staring blandly at it in a display case that pretends to give us an objective view than we do looking at it amidst shining light. The space is always a factor and has always been a factor (how could it not be?) – and rather than wish for it to disappear we should take it seriously as an object itself worth consideration, or rather as one of many factors in an assemblage of objects and spaces to consider.

--

But what is it about the body? It is the site of connection between saint and supplicants, thus heaven and earth. It is a medium for the expression of devotion (pilgrimage, asceticism). (It is a handy medium for all of us, though an unreliable one, which often pushes back when we try to shape it.)

--

In a hanging reliquary like our one, which might at times have been worn hung around the neck on a chain (it is too large to be borne on the body regularly, but perhaps it was just the thing for a procession) there is another bodily connection.⁸ Not so many layers, really, when the reliquary hangs around the neck, between the bones of the wearer and the bones of the saint. Would the metal have become warm from body heat?

--- --- ---

In the gallery in the MFA you are prepared to feel that feeling of being shined on. The reliquary directing the light from the museum lamp onto you or at you, a connection, a glimmer, a light seeming to come from within -- god’s light,⁹ the light of paradise, the light of the place where the saint is now.¹⁰ You are expecting to be the audience at a performance! A proper strong reaction of the sort you have when looking at many things shining: gold-leafed things in the MFA’s other medieval gallery; El Anatsui’s *Black River*; Christmas lights in the dark. Like something inside swells and pushes up (which is not the same as your chest constricting, although your body

⁷ Avinoam Shalem. “Multivalent Paradigms of Interpretation and the Aura or Anima of the Object.” In *Islamic Art and the Museum: Approaches to Art and Archeology of the Muslim World in the Twenty-First Century*, 103. London: Saqi, 2012.

⁸ Hanns Swarzenski and Nancy Netzer. *Catalogue of Medieval Objects: Enamels & Glass*. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1986. 48-49.

⁹ Here; my feelings on religion in a single tweet from something like a year ago: “i don’t know if i believe in god, but i sure believe in light.”

¹⁰ Dahl, “Heavenly Images.”

does at once feel vast & tight), like your body wants to meet the space of the [something], expanding & [collapsing] until it has spread as broad as the dome of the Hagia Sophia, as tall as the ribs of Chartres, as--- like it would like to be lifted up and become light itself. A bodily desire to *perform* light! To keep up with the mosaics and the golden forms of letters written on a blue ground -- which in their performance/enaction of light are able to half-escape their bodies. A bodily desire to become myself half light, to perform in the same way. A chest that wants to expand until it is as broad as light streaming through cathedral windows or contract until it is as small & bright as the golden letters of the Blue Qur'an.¹¹

Of course since you can't write in your art history paper an argument that boils down to "this object makes me want to dematerialize & become one with the light," or, more simply, "when I look at this my breath shifts & I want to cry," agency/thingness/matter, performativity, and perhaps something about semiotics all give useful language for talking about this phenomenon.

Perhaps this is where the haptic first comes in: "all our self rushes up to the surface to interact with another surface¹²....we become amoebalike, lacking a center, changing as the surface to which we cling changes."¹³

that i want to lose my subjectivity to the object

& is it our self that rushes, or the object's self, or both? The object/the stuff, "vital and alive in its own right"?¹⁴

I am expecting, as I prepare to haul myself to the MFA and look at this little reliquary, that I will have this sort of response. An assumption, I think, based on the expectation that the reliquary will be displayed like the objects in the other medieval gallery are -- standing, isolated from other figures, on pedestals, each object lit from above in an otherwise dark room. In my notebook from the time, I have written "I'm just gonna be talking about light again (& again & again & again)."

Why, then, has light not shown up in my thesis? Perhaps because what was most striking about the lighting in the colburn chapel gallery was its lack of drama.

¹¹ On the second day of ARTH 344, gathered with my classmates around one end of a long table in special collections, I nearly cry at the *Kulliyat* of Sa'di. The pages catch the light so gently when you turn them. I have, in fact, cried at light enough times to begin a substantial catalogue of tear-provoking objects. (Actually, we will return to my tears later in this paper. Perhaps "lights" can be a category within my catalogue.)

¹² Though light, I would say, does not have a surface. Where does the body come in?

¹³ Laura U. Marks, "Haptic Visuality: Touching with the Eyes," *Framework: The Finnish Art Review*, 2.

¹⁴ Jane Bennett, "The Force of Things: Steps toward an Ecology of Matter." *Political Theory*, 2004, 354.

For my paper, I write about the factors that shaped my experience in the gallery (rather than the reliquary alone) because anything else would be dishonest. I can't start with anything but the visual material, but the visual material is *my* seeing of the reliquary, an experience I cannot pretend is objective. The feeling that the reliquary was an eye staring back at me became very strong, and that feeling was by far the most interesting thing I had observed about the reliquary. I felt sure that, had I been looking at the reliquary differently (had Athena not said it looked like an eye, had the space been set up differently, had I not forced myself to keep looking at it, etc.), I would not have had that experience. And thus rather than trying to discover if medieval viewers would have felt their gaze being returned, I wanted to discover why I felt that way.

how could I have done a disembodied thesis project when there is at least an embodied response in that I was expecting more of an embodied/bodily response, if that makes sense. What is the importance of this sort of body sense?

--- ---

In a video from much later,¹⁵ taken over Wintersession, I hover in the main medieval art gallery for some time, looking at the bit of fresco visible through the door to the Colburn Chapel Gallery, allowing myself a moment of anticipation. An attempt to be fully present, fully aware, to notice every sensation, to let a feeling response swell in me before I step forward, towards the glimpse of gallery I can see. Like covering up the last paragraph of a book with your hand as you read, afraid of accidentally skipping ahead. (Despite my best efforts, I am always too distracted by not wanting to be distracted to fully appreciate the last page of a book.) I stand, just through the doorway, and pan around the gallery, looking up, first and longest, at the looming green of the fresco.

I don't recall my exact path through the gallery on my first visit, in the spring of my junior year.¹⁶ I did hover, as in my video recreation, trying to open myself to sensation -- hoping, I think, for a hint of tears or wide-eyed awe, a response I did feel in the medieval gallery through which I passed to get to the colburn chapel gallery.

¹⁵ The video is not of me but taken from my perspective, an attempt to capture what I see in the gallery, the path I take, what I linger on. Perhaps I ought to have held the camera up to my eyes and looked through the viewfinder, noting what held my attention longest, what I zoomed in on, and what sort of images I found. But I was trying to pretend that I could capture my "actual" experience of the gallery, and I feared that having a viewfinder would make things too artificial.

¹⁶ Probably, my exact path through the gallery is unimportant. The more I think about it, the more I realize that the choice of the Colburn Chapel Gallery was probably largely an intellectual one (not based on a felt experience, or an experience I was aware of feeling), which may be one of the reasons I had trouble figuring out how to respond to it.

My first note in my journal from that visit says, "Hanging above eye level & honestly it doesn't catch my eye in the same way/as much as some other art here does." I recall that sort of lack of response.

--- ---

A desire to look long and hard at the fresco, but an inability to take it in, to see images in the painting at all, apart from the looming Christ at the crown of the apse. A feeling that if you could just get up close you would be able to understand, and a frustration that the steps up into the apse are roped off. Like you are suspended between the fresco, the Virgin and Child statue before it, and the crucified Christ to the side, caught in a space activated by the three objects, but unable to comprehend it as anything other than an in-between space.

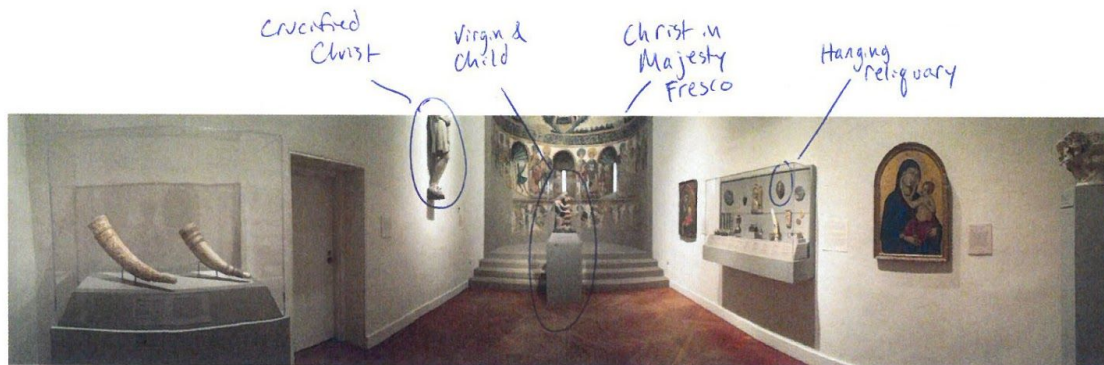


Fig 3: Panoramic view of the I. W. Colburn Chapel Gallery (Gallery 254A)



Fig 4: Partial view of the I.W. Colburn Chapel Gallery.

On another visit, you make your way into the gallery and feel a stronger pull to the fresco than usual -- like for once you could press yourself to its rough skin and linger against the faces of the figures and their oddly bent knees.

*It is interesting for me that the original church's photographic reproduction includes all the damage. It makes sense, because of course they photographed it after the damage had occurred and after the fresco had been moved (and oh, it's not even a photo of what truly used to be there, it's a photo of the fresco *taken in a different place*), but it's still really fascinating to me. A record of loss. A record of ruin?*

& in my work? A record of the space -- a record of a different space -- a record of my body -- indexical? (the photos are, at least, i suppose) & in a way calling the viewer to perform my body within the space. Can you perform a body?

Like you could rub up against them and get into the image. Grateful for this closeness, you look around & discover you are occupying space once devoted to the solid stone statue of the Virgin Mary and the Christ child. She is no longer there & you stand in her place, able to approach to apse so closely only because of her absence.¹⁷ And unlike the statue, you are able to face the fresco, though after a moment you turn and sit on the floor, exactly where her pedestal was, facing the doorway like you, staring, are a statue yourself.

--- ---

This project was born, initially, out of a frustration with the typical way of communicating about art history and art objects. The paper I wanted to write about the hanging reliquary and the gallery housing it would have begun with a personal narrative, and then taken that narrative apart. (At the time, I was sure such a thing wouldn't be permitted, though now I wonder.)

I have been working on and thinking about the Colburn Chapel Gallery for something like a year now. I know very little about the history of the works within the gallery & yet even without that knowledge I still have more to say about the space, more footnotes and associations and interpretations I could add. A thousand additional texts and annotations and interruptions that could take place. (This text could perhaps expand for years, relying only on itself for content. A few months from now I might need to try to explain this paragraph & the experience of writing it & that text could be tacked on to the end.)

Sometimes when I talk about this project, I talk about the experience I am creating for the viewer. Sewing together a space in which visual information is tricky, in which images and objects and histories are skewed and obscured. So that the viewer holds a moment of meaning and then, hopefully, finds themselves grasping at something just to the left.

At other times, I talk about my own experience of creating.¹⁸ About finding myself grasping for a moment that has just left me. Responding to that moment in order to recreate it (or sometimes seeking to represent it) but being left grasping myself. The grasping becomes its own moment. I grasp at a moment of grasping, and then grasp again.¹⁹

¹⁷ I later came upon the Virgin and Child statue in a different gallery, placed to the left of a painting by Oskar Kokoschka and a strikingly similar statue by Kathe Kollwitz.

¹⁸ This is not quite right. The parallel structure of these paragraphs wants this "creating" to accompany the second "experiencing," but "creating" to me feels focused on product, and product is not what I mean. "Making" is closer. Synthesizing, responding, dealing -- those are all in there, as well.

¹⁹ Here a the thesis of my thesis: I am seeking to recreate a fugitive experience.

What is it about the body?

2.

In the summer, I read Alison Bechdel's *Are You My Mother*. Sitting on my couch, with my feet tucked up beneath me. Twice.²⁰ I am enamored with pages like the one below, with theory/analysis/narration/dialogue/image all collapsed on top of each other (fig. 5). The colliding moments, the immediate layering of meanings (each set of captions one way of explaining or door to accessing the image), the nonlinearity -- these things fascinate me. I begin to think about colliding my own stories, observations, and frameworks for thinking about things. The idea of a graphic art history stays with me all summer.

²⁰ My mother had, in fact, also been reading *Are You My Mother*, because one of her clients had recommended it to her, both as an enjoyable book and as a way to get inside their head. So I read my mother's client's copy, (complete with their personal screaming-yellow highlighter marks, which I could not help but read as part of the book, as if narrator-Alison wanted me to pay particular attention to the lines he had highlighted) picking it up off the coffee table and quickly reading past my mother's bookmark. We read in parallel, her in the mornings and me at night. She finished the book, in fact, on the same day I did, after spending many months turning just a page or two at a time.



Fig. 5: A page from Alison Bechdel's *Are You My Mother?* An explanation of Donald Winnicott's theories + an excerpt from Winnicott's "The Child in the Family Group" + a conversation between Alison & her mother.²¹

²¹ Bechdel, Alison. *Are You My Mother?: A Comic Drama*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012: 201.

In writing my paper on the Colburn Chapel Gallery, I had found it near impossible to explain in words the space in front of the apse activated by the fresco and the two statues, the feeling of standing somehow caught in their three energies. A drawing, I think, would do much better. Why write "to the left hangs a wooden sculpture of the crucified Christ," when you could instead (or additionally) provide an image?

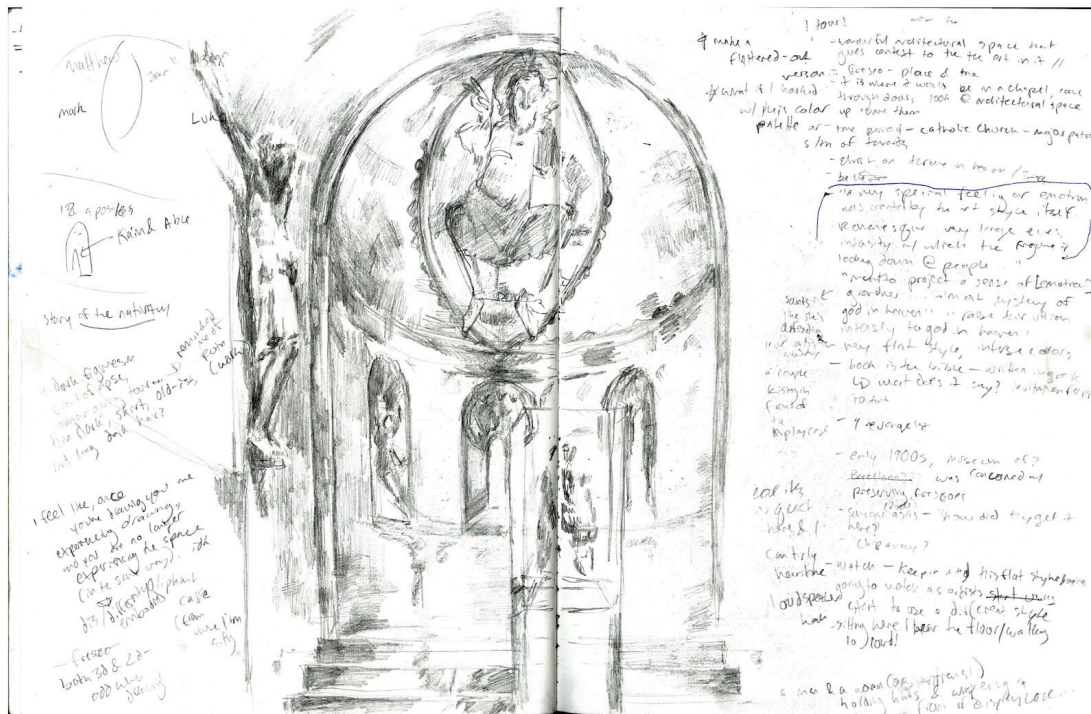


Fig. 6: Sketchbook page with a drawing of the Colburn Chapel Gallery.

Perhaps a part of my problem was I had thought less about the experience itself than I had about the impossibility of communicating about it.

I feel quite certain that in order to write a description of the gallery or the reliquary - or both, it would be necessary to lie.

As a first year I read David Valentine's paper "The Calculus of Pain" and became temporarily terrified to represent.²² The first wave of terror passed, but it has since returned for frequent visits, and we have become--if not friends--quite familiar with one another. We've got a good rhythm going now.

²² David Valentine. "The Calculus of Pain: Violence, Anthropological Ethics, and the Category Transgender," *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 68, no. 1 (2003): 27-48.

Junior fall: hyperaware that i will flatten anything i seek to represent, i figure i will represent the flattening, & project a video of a thing onto the thing itself. instead of straight video i end up using animation, projecting purple drawings of the venus de milo in the sculpture court onto the venus de milo in the sculpture court. I am trying for something about flattening (probably, also, something about immateriality/materiality) but discover that the animation is no flatter than the statue, just flat in a different way. The statue, of course, can't move.

The fear is back by the following semester but Rancière comforts me & says: there is no such thing as an undistorted transmission of an idea; there is always the medium, there between idea & interpretation; when we try to suppress the gap between artist & audience we reinstate it. On all sides of the gap we are always telling, translating, and interpreting stories & since the gap is quite unavoidable, let us welcome & acknowledge it. (Let us acknowledge too that there is no gap in *ability* to tell or interpret stories (& thus the validity of the stories?), only gaps in between what those stories are.)²³

wanting to express the sick heaviness of feeling i

[Jas Elsner understands me -- when we describe art we are telling stories, too.]²⁴

As soon as I start to draw, I realize that while a graphic essay might allow for a layering or colliding of meanings and interpretations, it will in no way allow me to escape the dangers of description or representation. I will still be participating in a sort of extreme editing-out, an artificial framing that felt just as impossible (and perhaps just as violent) in image as in text.

My solution is to forget about the idea of a single graphic text and instead cover my thesis space with a sort of exploded sketchbook, moments of drawings like comic book panels scattered across the walls, making connections and associations. (Not bound to a linear format, I figure, or even to a two-dimensional one, my ideas can be relational, overlapping. I can communicate about layers of meanings with drawings set quite literally on top of each other, piling up or overlapping.²⁵ I can talk about multiple meanings, about things coming together to create experiences, with drawings meant to be moved around and repositioned, each momentary meaning made through the relation between drawings. I can put up absolutely everything, and not have to worry about editing out. Much better, I think, than an essay of words, or even a proper graphic essay.)

--- ---

²³ Jacques Rancière, "The Emancipated Spectator," *Artforum International* 45, no. 7 (2007): 271–80.

²⁴ [Jas Elsner, "Art History as Ekphrasis,"](#) *Art History* 33:1 (2010): 1027.

²⁵ Writing at the end of my thesis process, I realize I have done this, though more with spaces than with images. I have piled several spaces into one.

By the first critique of the semester, I feel I have my footing. *An exploded sketchbook!* I say (fig. 7). *A place to collect every single thought--get everything down and pin everything up. Perhaps eventually, I say, I will have all these walls, and then I will come in with gesso and white nearly everything out.* The drawings I make are quick and blue, my pen carrying on along the perimeter of my ideas, sketching out steadily verbalizable images. Most everything on the same off-white paper.



Fig. 7: My thesis space sometime shortly after the first critique of the semester, with all my work up on the walls

At critique number one, it is suggested that I: think about space; think about bodily actions (in the museum and in the church), “experiment with WHOLE space”; think about the function of architecture (to create an experience). We talk about ideology (the church as ideological state apparatus, the museum as ideological state apparatus). My second-to-last note from that critique (smeared now from humid hands & because smearing is what graphite does in sketchbooks) reads:

Tactile // other senses → bodily experience

26

But the body still isn't really involved.

These days I am framing this experience as: a coming back to materials & a coming back to the body.

I am not sure that that is the truth of the experience, but it is the story I am telling myself & it is a comfortable story, even in its weight

A few days later (on Halloween), I return to the Colburn Chapel Gallery .

²⁶ In including these handwritten notes and others throughout this text, I am thinking of Molly Springfield's *The Marginalia Archive*, the history of marginalia in manuscripts, reading notes in the margins of books you have checked out of the library, finding your mother's notebooks in the attic, etc. (And, having gone back to look at *Are You My Mother?*, I have also realized that Alison Bechdel does something similar, including many old notes and typed texts in her book -- each of which she has drawn in.)

10/31/15 - Colburn chapel gallery 1

- do I include taking the bus, do I include turning the wrong way & ^{1st} up in different gallery? being too warm but needing pockets; my ^{1st} e nothing. include the entrance; seeing the fresco statue from the outside
you see (photos)
in comparison to my memory, the room is not so long, the fresco is much larger; I feel smaller

- the partial dome of the apse is "how did they do that?" - two women one larger w/ walker, longer hair, taking apart.
- "hard to be very romanced by it due to the fact that it's falling apart. But on the other hand the fact that it's falling apart means it must be ^{high} that much larger & people should look at it"
- @ Virgin & child painting / "Jesus, a maning"
- Eucharistic dove - "he wings come up on his bird! that's a surprise"
- bigger than I'd remember. He's cly looking down from above is
- the quietness of this part of the museum
- my feelings (tho) of annoyance @ people talking and/or being in the same space as he

✱ ✱ a new hushed feeling

Do I still feel as if ⁽¹⁾ is looking @ me? maybe - but maybe the ⁽²⁾ canonizing myself and anyway so is the eucharistic dove. ⁽²⁾



- a couple people having an intense seeing conversation on a bench outside

am I allowed to sit to draw? sitting is not the typical experience but once I sit it will become my experience.

if I started speaking again would this become better?

I sit against the wall, with it cold through my dress

Fig 8: Sketchbook page with notes from this trip to the MFA.

Notes worth noting:

do I include turning the wrong way and ending up in a different gallery? Being too warm but needing pockets, my left eye hurting

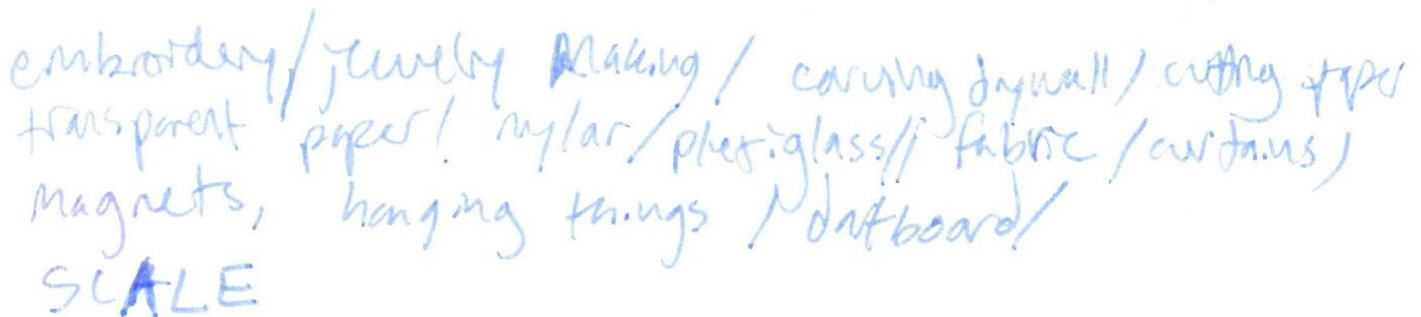
*** a very hushed feeling*

*I sit against the wall,
which is cold through my
dress*

In (month??) I write in my sketchbook:

"[leave more gaps] → but communicate that without writing the word "gap" anywhere."²⁷

As the end of fall semester nears, things slow to stagnation. I have been drawing lines and the same set of concentric mandorlas for weeks and they are not taking me anywhere. Daniela tells me to try more materials. Lists off the following:



embroidery / jewelry making / carving in wall / cutting paper
transparent paper! mylar / plexiglass / fabric / curtains /
magnets, hanging things / Montboard!
SCALE

I mention that the fresco was transported to the MFA in cheese.²⁸ Daniela says, "maybe you bring cheese into the work! Like, carve the apse in cheese. Maybe that's the material you need." Mentions working in strange media. Mentions embodiment.

Dave and I go to the Cage & Dave opens every drawer & then I have more kinds of paper than I know what to do with, plus one large sheet of bubble wrap.

²⁷ Funny that I have written the word "gap" here twice.

²⁸ C. H. H. "A Catalonian Fresco of the Twelfth Century." *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin* 21, no. 125 (June 1923): 32.

I keep drawing. I also: buy materials from Artist and Craftsman; make some images digitally (imagining a distorted gallery space); cut a potato we don't use for Thanksgiving dinner into a stamp (see, strange materials!) and stamp gold reliquary on blue fabric over break; use freezer paper to decorate a shirt with a graphic version of the reliquary on the front.

--- ---

In December, I number every leaf on a bush behind the Lulu (fig. 9). 1632. Not that many leaves, really, not for an entire bush. Not that large a bush. Still, nonetheless: absurd.



Fig. 9: 1,632. Leaves, sharpie. Dec. 2015

The air is cool in December but I pick good days and the right sweater warms with the sun (picks up the leaves that fall against it) & the process is slow but altogether pleasant. I pick one bottom branch of the bush and run my hand up against it until I meet its first branching-off; run my fingers against that until I meet the next branch; repeat until I come to a leaf. I hold the leaf with my left hand (thin between my thumb and forefinger) and pull just slightly, just to create a little tension, and write in sharpie: **1**. I follow along the same small twig until I have come to the next leaf and write: **2**.

Several leaves fall as I am numbering them. If they are in my hand as the bush lets them go, if I know what number belongs to them, I write it on, and let them fall. If I brush an unmarked leaf as I am numbering a different leaf and it falls, I let it go, and do not assign a number.²⁹

In the end, I have numbered 1632 leaves. There are not 1632 leaves on the bush. There were not 1632 leaves on the bush when I started. Several numbered leaves have clung to my hair and my sweater and ridden back to my dorm. Others, lying prone on the ground, are picked up by my classmates the next day during critique.

Cindy says, "it's kind of like playing God." Who assigns numbers? The numbers are senseless -- the act is futile -- absurd. We are responding in our final projects to the idea of cataloguing and collecting nature, but when Andy says, "it points to the absurdity of numbering and collecting," I am thinking as much about art and human artifacts as I am about nature.

1632. I may have miscounted. I may have missed a leaf, doubled up, even skipped an entire branch. Even if I didn't, the number tells us nothing (& this is the point). How absurd to seek any kind of truth, any kind of positive knowledge, in numbers.³⁰

Yet -- the experience, for me, is indubitably valuable. I learn from the numbering, though not from the numbers, about the feel of leaves, about how many leaves can look like so few, about the fractals of branches on a particular bush and the quiet process of counting. (About what my body feels like under the sun on a cool day for several hours & at what point my fingers go numb.) I had expected a frenzied act, imagining that the impossibility of the task would feel like a crisis, but instead it is pleasant. I am almost sad when I am done.

I wonder, sitting in Beebe and looking at the photos I have taken (fig.9), if 1,632 is an accidental solution to the problem I have been trying to address with my thesis: an excess of information; an impossibility of sorting or of telling the truth; a pointing out of the ambiguous absurdity of searching for positive knowledge. I have tried to label each leaf with a number, as if the numbers will tell us something (represent us something?) about the leaves, but feel that the numbers will be empty at best. (When we stand around looking at the bush during critique and Cindy says it's like playing God, I suddenly feel that my numbers are not just empty but violent. I have chosen a bush whose leaves are falling off anyway, worried about harming a plant with my sharpies, but still I feel cruel.)

--- --- ---

²⁹ There is a funny difference here between the meaning in "number belongs to them" and "assign a number," a different sort of ownership perhaps.

³⁰ Here, too, it is about the body & about labor -- though I don't realize that this is the case until I am reading my description of my process for the first time.

Inertia clings to stagnation & I feel I have barely moved.

Daniela has suggested that I write the pieces I want to create -- not words describing content ("So say you want to do a piece about motherhood -- you wouldn't write 'a mother holding her child,'"") but words that are material, physical, visual, experiential, ("you would write warm, or soft, engulfing, cradling--")-

A few days before the final critique of the semester I follow this advice, starting in my sketchbook with:

*gap gap gap distance longing touch body --
material / immaterial / present / not present ????*

and then moving instead to straddle a big sheet of curling paper on the cold Beebe floor, wanting my words to have space to expand (fig. 10).

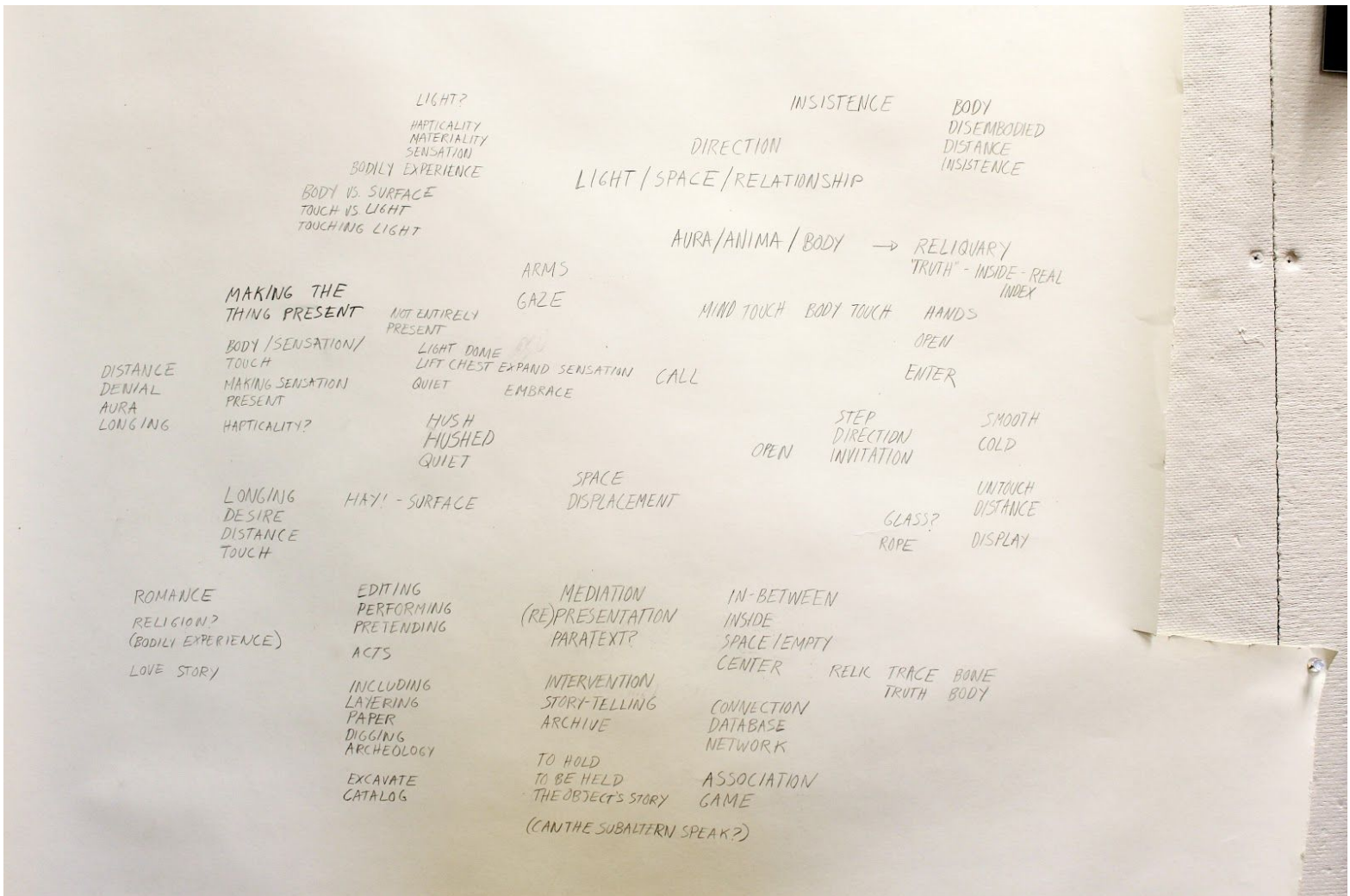
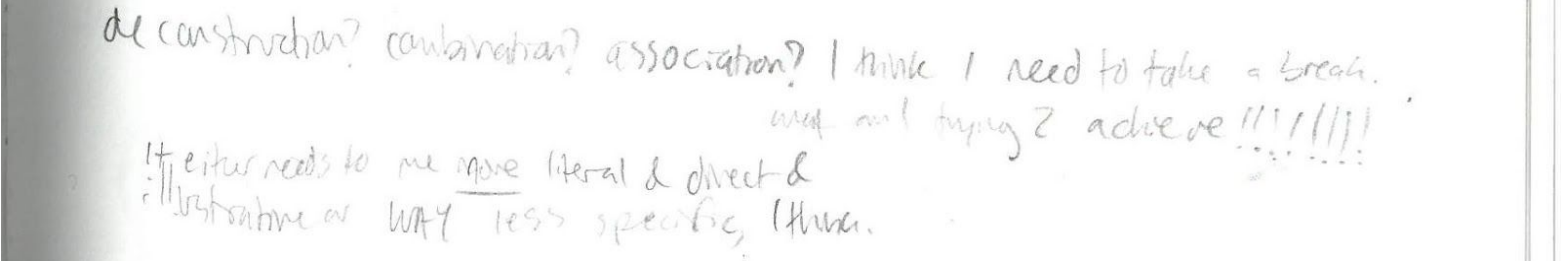


Fig 10: Pre-reverberations.

The words I choose do not match with the work I have made.

body
disembodied
distance
Insistence

relic trace bone
 truth body



deconstruction? combination? association? I think I need to take a break.
and not trying? achieve !!!!!!
It either needs to be more literal & direct &
illustrative or WAY less specific, (thru).

I feel, still, suspended between possible directions. I haven't work on the graphic essay proper in weeks, leaving my first shot at it -- a small thing, meant only to tell the story of my first visit to the gallery & the realization that the reliquary stared back at me -- in little separate rectangles of paper, jumbled together in the back pocket of my sketchbook.

So. Two nights before the critique I am pushing myself off the floor where I am writing words connected by space & not by syntax to hunch over my sketchbook & write:

"This is not particularly academic & maybe it is a shift from what i have been thinking, but -- perhaps the primary experience is a bodily one; an experience of longing, longing to enter the apse, to touch the objects in the display case -- what else? Is there more? Is that true?"

"SOMETHING about the objects being present but distance being imposed but distance creating the sensation but the sensation making you want to be closer -- ?"

Something unattainable? Unarticulable? Something fugitive? Something in the wanting.

I don't know that desire has anything to do with it but perhaps longing does. Space I think is often about longing. Looking, i hear, is about desire, though with seeing i am not sure.³¹

³¹ Or perhaps desire is dependent on space between -- "a violent distance between the seer and the object" (Marks, "Haptic Visuality")-- but certainly, *certainly*, touching and looking-as-touching can be as violent as optic visibility.

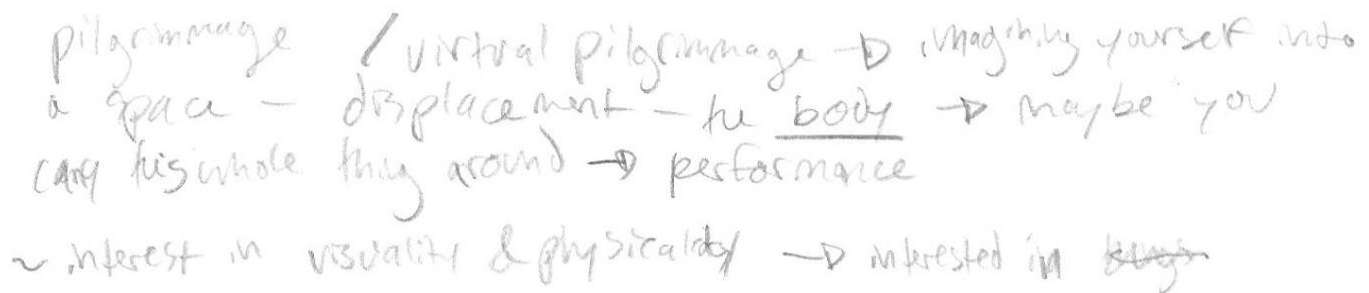
I realize, around this time, that I cannot create an experience of ambiguity by telling the viewer "it was ambiguous!" That telling an experience and creating an experience are different projects, and I may have to make a choice. (I am still not thinking much about my own experience of the work or of the space.)

All this time I have really only been beginning projects, never following very far through for fear that no project is right, or right enough to spend time on it. Hesitation? Difficulty with planning? Yes, and also a desire to avoid editing-out -- a desire to maintain multiplicity and use multiple strategies and approaches. I won't commit too much time to a project because I want every project up on my wall, nothing left out.

During critique, looking at the words I have pinned to the wall, somebody says: maybe it's really something about the relationship to the body that you're missing here. Andy suggests that perhaps there is room for a feminist reading -- mentions the body -- implies that the yonic nature of the reliquary (and my drawings of it) may be related to the suggestion. A gendered reading? I'm not sure. I can see a gendered reading of my work, but not a gendered reading of the little gallery in the MFA.

The historico-critical attitude? The impossibility of positive knowledge? Resignification & the idea that the object in its current context is just as worth looking at, though of course the looking will tell you something different.

In my sketchbook I write:



pilgrimage / virtual pilgrimage → imagining yourself into
a space - displacement - the body → maybe you
can't bring whole thing around → performance
~ interest in visuality & physicality → interested in ~~being~~

Phyllis, I think, suggests that I make work I can carry around on my body.³²

³² Later, when I am feeling fed up with my strange exploded sketchbook project, I will consider eating all my drawings.

(I remember a few minutes later that I am wearing the shirt I have made, with the stylized image of the reliquary, and I shrug off my sweater to show the shirt.³³ It is only my body, the gold-paint reliquary on my chest as the real-life reliquary might occasionally have hung. An initial bodily connection -- but not, for me, a bodily experience, at least not so far as I am aware.

I fail, during the critique, to articulate the things I was thinking about as I sat scribbling on the floor of Beebe two days before. The next day I remember that I feel stuck because I am aware that there is a difference between telling about an experience and creating an experience (or *having* an experience), but during critique I can't seem to find those words.

I do say, with the kind of laughter that is hopeful about not becoming tears, "my favorite thing about my work right now is the way this edges of this piece of paper curl!" (fig 11).

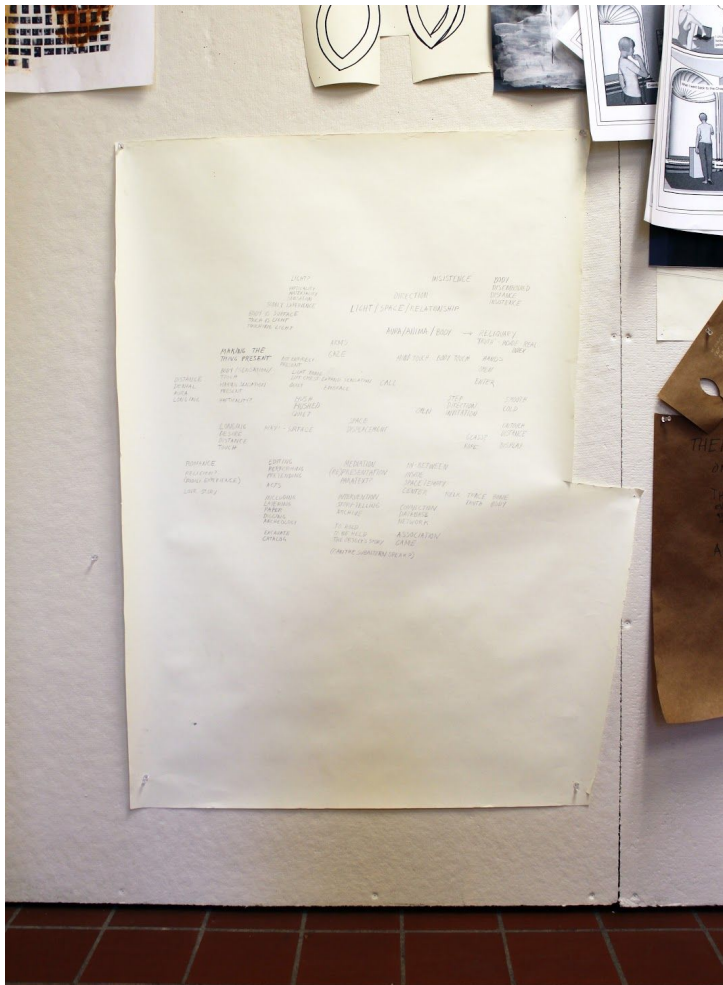


Fig. 11: My paper with its list of words & its curling edges.

³³ When my friend Claire sees the shirt, she grins & says, "is that a-- it is, isn't it? That's awesome!" And I have to tell her that it isn't really an image of a vulva, just a graphic depiction of a reliquary that sort of looks like one.

This work, I think, was a plea for the materials to notice me. Something about longing.

Every thought I have about how to relate the work to the body feels forced, either literal or irrelevant. I stop thinking about the body.

The next semester, I am making work about the body for several weeks before I realize the body is there.³⁴

as my experience of the gallery, once I finally went, was trying to prove to me that I needed to see the thing in space, needed to ~experience it~, so too has my experience of making this work been trying to prove to me that the body (in space) is important

³⁴ I have become suddenly concerned that my emphasis on the body is too great. Please, if you are reading this, forget what I have said. The body is there but it is not the only thing.

3.

--- --- ---

~~My thesis is not half so heavy as winter break.~~

--- --- ---

When I return for Wintersession, inertia holds me. I sit across from Anat who eats dried fruit from a clear plastic tub and sleeps at strange hours (& whom I love). I am up early but running late & every morning I tell myself I will sit in the art library for longer than I actually do. (At 3pm, my brain goes flat. I either sit and stare but read nothing, or I return to my dorm room, panic slightly over what to make for lunch, and then sit in stillness for the rest of the day, unable to get started.)

Here I will use the word "paralyzed."

Until things become flat at 3pm, I sit in the art library and read. Mostly, I am catching up on things I should have been reading during fall semester. This includes reading my own notes and looking at the work I have already made, something I have not previously been doing enough of.

I looked, over Wintersession, at Walid Raad and Mark Dion. Later, I looked also at Geoffrey Farmer. Each deals with the archive, the museum, and the telling & re-telling of history in a way I find interesting. Fictionalizing and shuffling the past & the stories we tell about it.

A week into Wintersession, I pull myself to the commuter rail station. (The first time, I don't notice the flashing sign informing me that the inbound train will be on the outbound side and vice versa, and I miss the train. I am too anxious to sit in a coffee shop (though I do pace back and forth in the ville for a bit), so I walk back to Wellesley and sit on my bed long enough to doodle a bit before I leave again and try to catch the next train.

Because it is Massachusetts in the winter, it is dusk by the time I get to [the station]. I am cold, and my feet hurt already from my trek to and from the ville and from my choice to wear combat boots, so I walk, eyes-darting & hands on high alert, through the darkening park [what is the park called?], walking between geese and telling myself that I will be fine. (I walk through the park again on the way back, walking behind a young man whom I think probably will not hurt me, and hoping he doesn't think I'm following him.) In front of the museum, I stop to fumble for my fancy new camera.

I am asking questions about where the experience begins.³⁵ Whether the before & after matter.

When I go to see the Geoffrey Farmer exhibit at the ICA, I am deeply uncomfortable amongst his puppets, very aware that it is just me and the docents, very aware that I might be being watched. I am uncomfortable too in the room with the slideshow, shuddering at sounds and gripping my elbows.

The Boston Globe's review says of the slideshow, "the second piece in Farmer's show is all about immersing us in photography's meaninglessness."³⁶ On the day I see the show, I have, I confess, been teary all day, but I have to bite down on the inside of my cheek to keep from crying at the images and sounds with which the slideshow bombards me. (also, sometimes i am laughing out loud).

James Elkins argues in *Pictures & Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings* that tears (& other strong, often bodily responses) are a perfectly legitimate reaction to a work of art, and should be taken seriously.³⁷ Tears should, moreover, be seen as reflecting something about the art, not just the about the person who sheds them.

So: what parts do you include in your account of an experience of looking at art? Do you include your tears?

Do you include the boys in the museum who look at you funny because you are cross-legged on the floor, or the women sitting on the dark bench in front of "The Dead Christ with Angels," having an intense discussion about their personal lives?

What gets archived? What makes up a history?

In the history I am writing now, I have just included my trek through the dark park up to the doors of the MFA.

³⁵ See fig. 8: "*Do i include turning the wrong way and ending up in a different gallery? Being too warm but needing pockets, my left eye hurting*"

³⁶ Smee, Sebastian. "Geoffrey Farmer's Art at the ICA: Once You've Seen It, You Can't Shake It - The Boston Globe." BostonGlobe.com. April 14, 2016. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/theater-art/2016/04/13/geoffrey-farmer-art-ica-once-you-seen-you-can-shake/FvaQx3SchZKbusPE9delPO/story.html>.

³⁷ Elkins, James. *Pictures & Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings*. New York: Routledge, 2001. (I would like to thank James Elkins for making me feel I had permission to talk several times in this paper about crying. Additionally, as I expect that I will soon begin to respond to requests for observations about works of art with, "it makes me want to cry," I would like to preemptively refer anyone who would not welcome such a response to Elkins' book. Finally, I would like to mention that the book itself....also made me cry.)

On my way up to the doors of the MFA, I take pictures, and then take a picture of my camera bag before I put my camera away.

Documenting the repacking. Is this part of the experience of the gallery?

I take my camera out again once in the museum and return to documentation.

I said the other day that i didn't think this project had much to do with the museum as an institution -- that it dealt with the physical space, but maybe not the museum itself (though of course a museum is a loaded thing and there is plenty that could be dealt with). Except that it deals with practices of looking, displacement, surrogates, information & obscuring information, time, history, etc., & so the museum is present even when I am not thinking about it.

The museum as institution was more present when I first began the project, before I realized I had too much to think about even without delving into institutional critique.³⁸

I remember Daniela suggesting, at one critique or another, that I use a GoPro to chart my path through the gallery, like measuring a baby's eye movements to see where its attention turns & understand what it can perceive. I never end up using a GoPro, but I use the camera as I might have. I take pictures of the Sargent room, an early landmark. I take pictures as I turn down the wrong hallway.

I am recording video when I step in the gallery preceding the colburn chapel gallery, entering through a different door than I have in the past and not immediately recognizing my surroundings. When I realize where I am, I start a new video file. (Perhaps I reorient myself, so the video begins with me not in the place where I actually entered the antechamber, but where I had entered it in the past.)

Though trying to get as close as I can (ha) to recording the unmediated experience of the gallery, I wind up recording a sort of rehearsal of an experience.³⁹

I am rehearsing (representing, though trying to re-present) my previous experiences.
I am performing my own body.

³⁸ I could have gone in this direction, though, and would have enjoyed looking more closely at artists like Andrea Fraser & Marcel Broodthaers. (I have been thinking about Broodthaers' *Bateau Tableau*, in particular, nonetheless.)

³⁹ Something like Philip-Lorca Dicorcia's photos of his family & friends -- I am thinking of *Mario*, 1978; every night Mario stands in front of the refrigerator just like this & this time it happens to be recorded -- between staged & spontaneous, incidental & intentional, performed & unperformed.

In the video, I hover in the main medieval art gallery for some time, looking at the bit of fresco visible through the door to the Colburn Chapel Gallery, allowing myself a moment of anticipation. An attempt to be fully present, fully aware, to notice every sensation, to let a feeling response swell in me before I step forward, towards the glimpse of gallery I can see. Like covering up the last paragraph of a book with your hand as you read, afraid of accidentally skipping ahead. I stand, just through the doorway, and pan around the gallery, looking up, first and longest, at the looming green of the fresco.

During this trip to the MFA, I took 233 photos, most of them in the gallery. Photos of what I saw and I what I looked at, and some photos of myself, looking at the objects, as if I could get a sense of what the object saw when they looked at me.

Having looked at Walid Raad and Mark Dion, I was thinking about fictional archives, but not sure that I wanted to create an archive of the same sort. I didn't want to edit so much out, or to intentionally skew the story I was telling. Knowing that every story is better when edited to include only the most effective parts (or the parts most appropriate to its audience,) I thought maybe I didn't *want* to tell an effective story -- I wanted to tell everything, even if it was ultimately meaningless. I had thought I would work frantically, putting absolutely every thought down and pinning every thought up on my wall.

Then I thought that perhaps I would limit the everything--rather than getting everything about the gallery down in a sort of drawing shorthand, I would work from the photos I had taken as my particular source. I would draw, carefully, each of the 233 photos I had taken on my trip to the MFA (fig. 12).

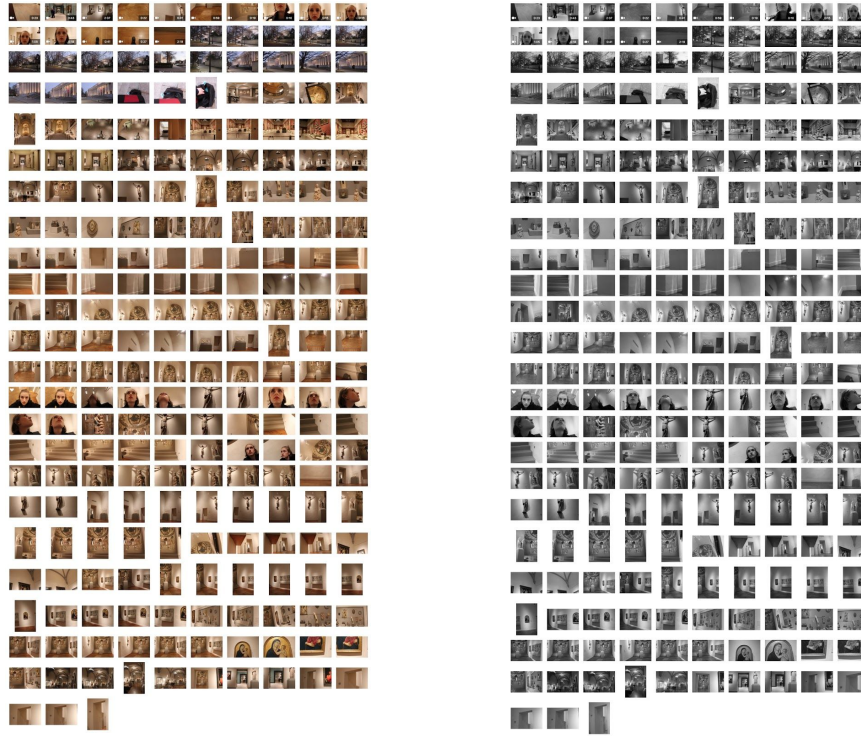


Fig. 12: All 233 photos from my trip to the MFA, in color and in black and white.

A sort of map of my experience. An almost-accurate map, an always-expanding map --

A totally pointless act, or rather an act whose point would be pointlessness.

(An act of excess. An excess of graphite & paper; an excess of labor & time. An act of resistance, then, and a bodily one.⁴⁰)

Both my 233-photos project & 1,632 could be, I thought, a sort of acting-out of Borges' "On Exactitude in Science."⁴¹ With my photos, I would provide so much information that

⁴⁰ Jeremy Biles, "For the Love of God: Excess, Ambivalence, and Damien Hirst's Diamond Skull," In *The Uses of Excess in Visual and Material Culture, 1600-2010*, ed. Julia Skelly (Ashgate, 2014), pp. 225–247.

⁴¹ "... In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography.

Suárez Miranda, *Viajes de varones prudentes, Libro IV, Cap. XLV, Lérida, 1658#*"

Jorge Luis Borges. *Collected Fictions*. Translated by Andrew Hurley. New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Viking, 1998.

the information is useless. Pointless. So accurate, so invested in telling the truth, that it has to fail. The purpose of such an exercise would be to allow the process and the product to be an embodiment of the idea of the lack of purpose, and, particularly, the failure of representation.

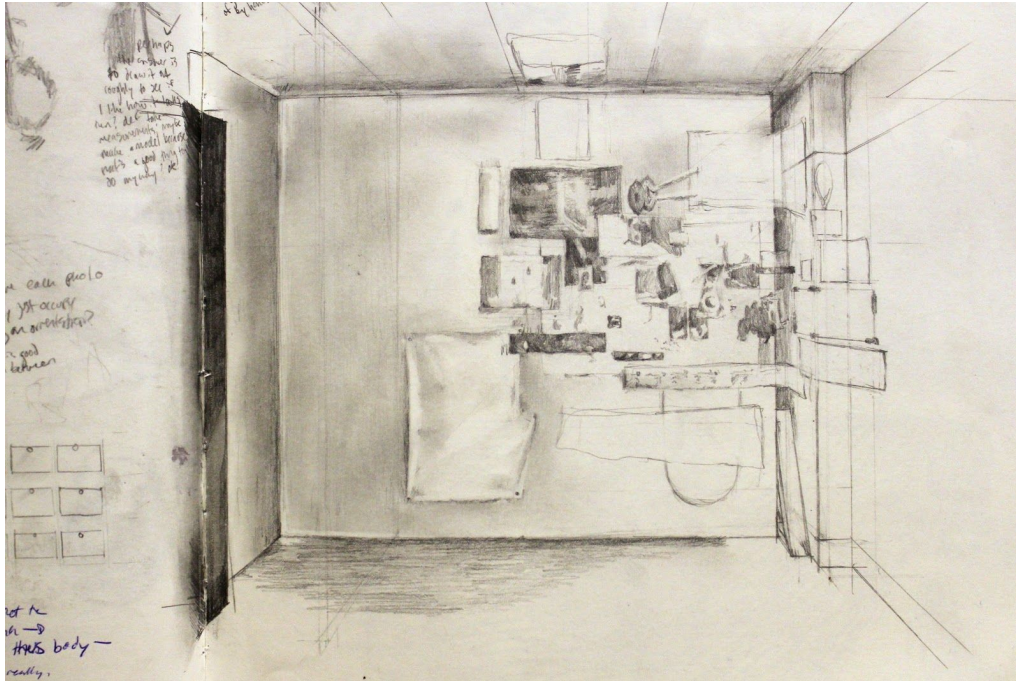


Fig. 13: A drawing of my thesis space, in preparation for 233 photos project.

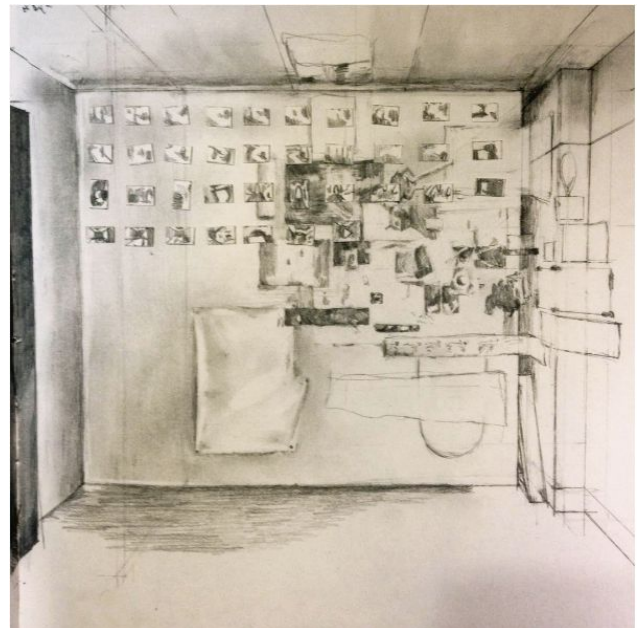
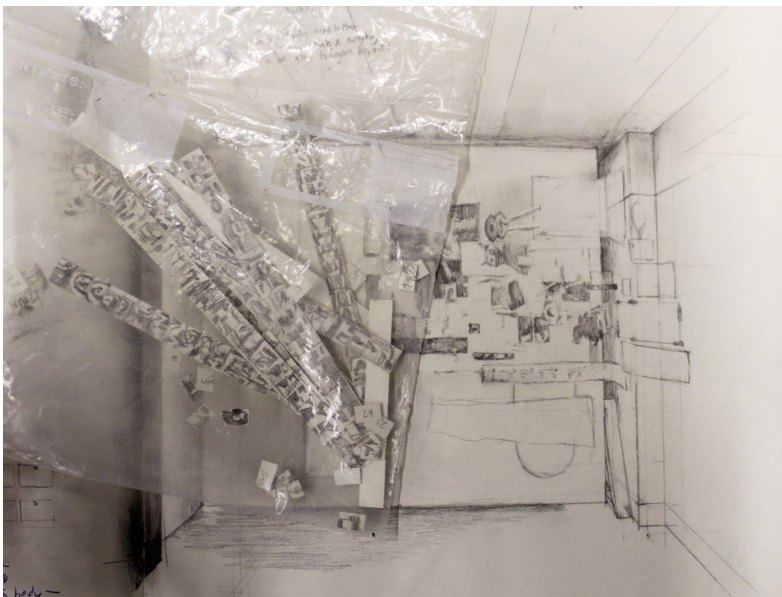


Fig. 14 (left): Preparatory drawing for 233-photos project, with 233 tiny drawings of photos (numbered & drawn from the photos I took in the gallery, see fig. 12).

Fig. 15 (right): Preparatory drawing for 233-photos project, with some of the 233 tiny drawings set up.⁴²

I began with this project, attempting to calculate the exact size my drawings should be, exactly what they should look like. I measured & calculated & decided that I should start not with the real thing, but with a model, to make sure it would look right. I rethought, remeasured, and began to cut foam core.

In advanced painting, we are not yet painting, but making viewfinders and stretcher bars and collages. Elaine, who is teaching the class for the first few weeks, shows us a way of finding compositions amongst messy bits of paper, using our viewfinders and plexiglass. The collages will serve as models for our first paintings.

When we start painting--when I stand in front of the first empty canvas of the semester, laying in a gentle blue wash--I feel like I am home, but like I have never been more excited to be home.⁴³

I draw on soft yellow paper an image⁴⁴ of Jesus (fig. 16). Because I do not know how to slow down, I draw quickly, loosely. I can't seem to get the proportions of composition quite right (& I am trying to get it *right*, to draw accurately, the purpose is precision) -- my Christ is too long for the frame I've created, and the shadow of his feet and the thing on which he stands falls outside of the intended space of the image. I don't want to redraw, so I think I'll just keep the statue too big, keep the shadow outside of the frame, at least for now, and fix it later.

Of course, when I step back to look at the drawing, the shadow, falling alone outside of the frame, is the part I find most compelling.

⁴² I kept laughing & making the tiny drawings move.

⁴³ (A footnote here about painting as a lover.)

⁴⁴ An image of an image of an image, really, as I draw from a photograph of a sculpture.

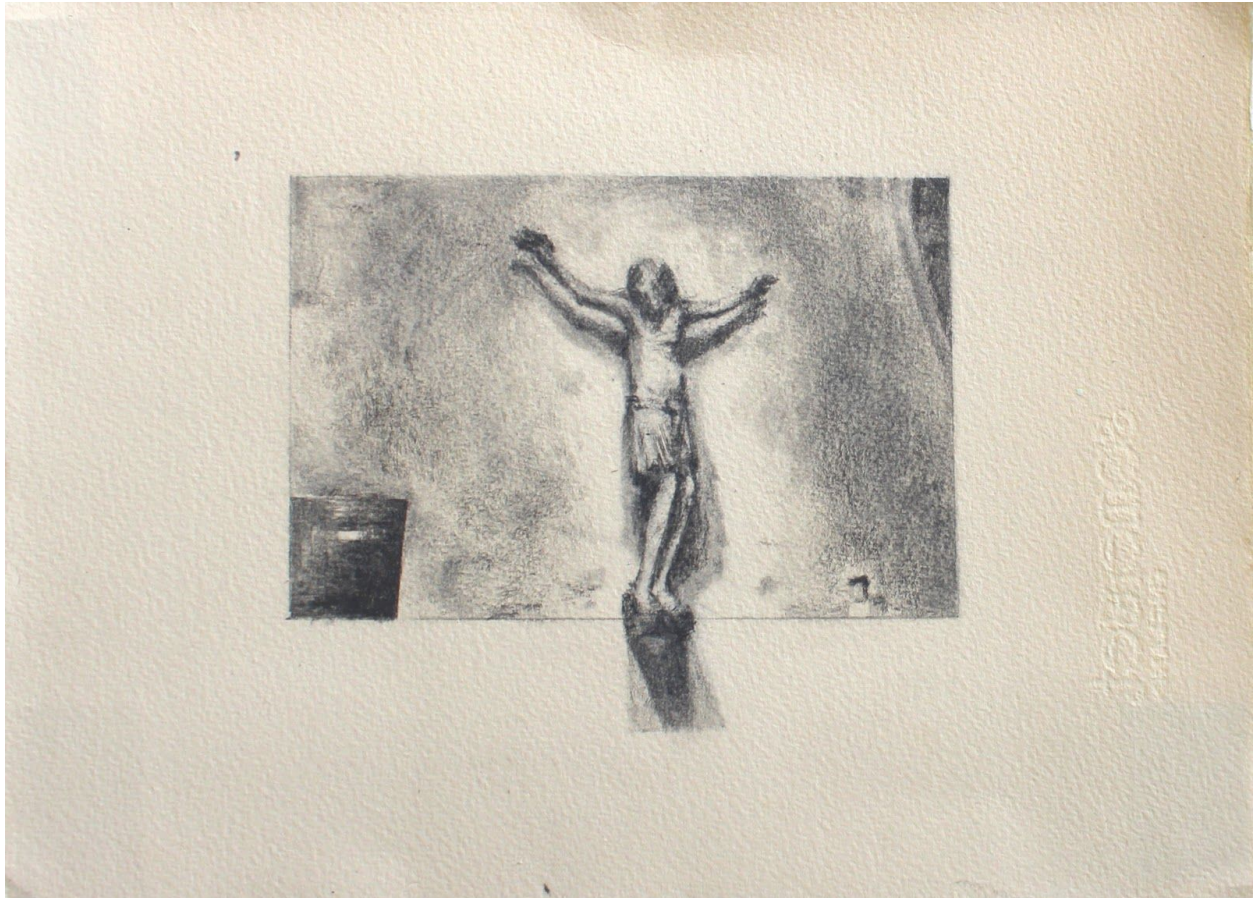


Fig. 16: *Echo #1*. Graphite on paper, 8" x 11"

I don't want to stop painting in order to work on my thesis, or, really, to do anything else. So, having found some scraps of oil paper around the studio, I do my next mockup of what my 233 pieces might look like in in a heavily-gamsol-ed gray, wiping the light areas out with a rag & letting the image seep, unspecific (fig. 17).



Fig. 17: *Echo #2*. Oil on paper, 6" x 4"

Although my intent is merely to get a sense of scale, to start imagining what 233 of these things hung up on a wall might look like (and to keep painting while being able to say that I am working on my thesis), I find that I like what I've made.

A much quicker way to create. A much more ambiguous image. (I imagine 233 of these hung up in a grid. A full wall. Together they would look like Rorschach blots or photo negatives in graphite or in oil.)

*Somewhere, there was a moment when i realized that editing was necessary and unavoidable.
A turning moment. When did it happen? When did I stop struggling about whether to tell a truth
or create a fiction?*

In painting class we critique our first paintings. We tell Daniela about the assignment we have been working on: using viewfinders and plexiglass to find compositions within our messes of collage paper, thinking in color and in composition.

In my notes from that critique I have written:

~get to content thru the back door~~

Elaine and Daniela talk about thinking formally, first, and then finding that there is often content willing to be seen within the form.⁴⁵ It is otherwise too obvious, too literal, too forced (though, still, I think, always up for what an author invested in their meaning might call misinterpretation). One of them--Elaine, I think--says, "you look at Fra Angelico's paintings and you know he wasn't thinking about saints when he was painting, he was thinking about *that shade* of green."

I think -- *Oh! I have barely been thinking about shades of green at all!* That is, I have thought about content. I have thought about the failure of content. And I have thought about form as something with which I can create/comment on content (how the way I draw affects the meaning), but I have thought barely at all about form for form's & form as meaning.

--- ---

If I am responding to the museum, I get stuck in space (how are things presented?). If I am responding to/working in the art history paper, I get stuck first on description. Not in just the knowledge that representation is flattening, but specifically in the space where descriptions of art fail -- are always, necessarily untrue -- where you can't describe every brush stroke or every way of seeing something, and even if you could it would be meaningless. The space where we say we see something but really all that is there is paint, or pigment, or paper.⁴⁶

Two things here: one, we describe the factors relevant to our argument, leave the others out, and act as if our description is objective or objective enough.⁴⁷ Two: we do the same thing when we define an image's iconography -- it is of course impossible to avoid this but at least one should acknowledge that we cannot tell the truth.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Willing, not waiting. I won't say the content is there before we see it--it's not, not in my opinion, not beyond the paint (which in any case is only *content* once we see it as such), and that's true I think regardless of authorial intent, that the meaning isn't there until we see it, regardless of what the creator sees. (Which is to say, the meaning is relational.) But there is form and form is often willing to be seen into meaning. (See Rosalind Krauss, "In the Name of Picasso," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT press, 1985), 23-40.; Also George Didi-Huberman, "Appendix: the Detail and the Pan," in *Confronting Images* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005): 229-271.)

⁴⁶ Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*.

⁴⁷ Jas Elsner. "Art History as Ekphrasis." *Art History* 33, no. 1 (2010): 10-27.
doi:10.1111/j.1467-8365.2009.00720.x.

⁴⁸ I am thinking here about Didi-Huberman & challenging the idea that you can discover the "true" reading of the detail, or find some semantically stable meaning.

The first sort of problem I could address with my hand, draw every detail of every photo perfectly -- include every scratch and stick, trying to achieve such extreme accuracy that it's totally useless. To draw something is to declare it worth-looking-at, right, and so in drawing each of my 233 photos, I think, I will say "look at this part of the museum, too," and by drawing each one carefully I will say, look even at this tiny detail in this part of the museum. Look at everything, see how accurate. But know also that it is drawn and thus translated, limited necessarily by the mediation.

Yet having done this painting from my half-accidental collage and having noted that some of the most interesting parts of my 233-photo printouts are not photos alone but photos next to each other, the compositions created by adjacent photos. Adjacent not necessarily because of immediate chronology, but because the way I printed my 233 photos out, one was above the other -- I wondered if I should continue to think so hard and follow such a plan. I also worried that, drawn or not, my images all up on a wall together would look like still frames from a video. Not an association I was opposed to -- but not but not one I wanted to commit to, either.

To my next meeting with Dave I bring my first few drawings and my thoughts about description, but also my strange photo printouts with tape marking out found compositions (fig. 18). Dave suggests drawing from my drawings, looking at photos through the tape that covers them, thinking about editing and obscuring information. We talk about framing an image within a mat much larger than the image revealed. What do you let people see? What does the museum let people see? I think about editing and framing and describing and space.



Fig. 18: *Echoes* (233), 1-4. Paper, tape, graphite & oil, 17" x 11"

Dave tells me to think about how I would display my drawings, consider the relationships I'm creating between works. ("Maybe it's about, like, this warm gray next to this cool gray.") And moves my little drawings around (fig. 19).

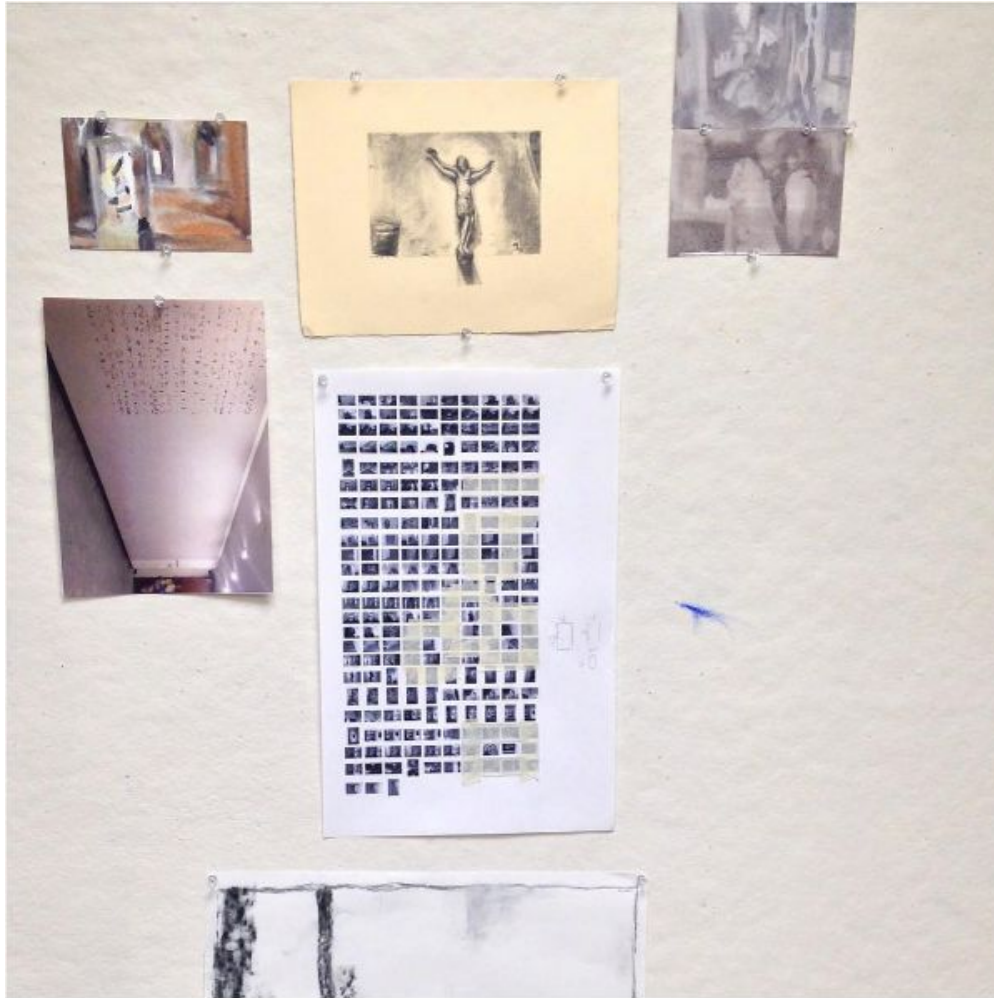


Fig. 19: Process #1.

I meet with Daniela for the first time since the previous semester. We meet in the painting studio, where I have pinned up small paintings on oil paper and the drawing of the crucified Christ sculpture. She perches on a stool and says, "so, tell me," and then, "no, do you want me to react first?" (I do.) She says the work I have up now acknowledges the materials, the labor, the handmade-ness in a way the previous semester's work hadn't; that she sees continuity

between this work and the work I did last spring, she recognizes me in this work. I tell her I feel like, having come back to the studio, having come back to paint, I am home.⁴⁹

[painting/experience/phenomenology?]

I keep drawing. I keep painting. I consider writing descriptions of each image I make, descriptions that tell the reader nothing about the content of the image, but possibly something about the way it looks or feels. Maybe a book of descriptions, without any indication of which descriptions go with which image. I look to the strange labels on the taxidermy birds in the Science Center for inspiration.

I make a drawing more careful than the one of Jesus. A strange, empty, architectural space (fig. 20). Also drawn from a photo of the Colburn Chapel Gallery, one of the tiny ones printed in a sheet in the science library, where the color printing is best (see fig. 18). I draw carefully, from left to right, with a mechanical pencil. (I doubt I have ever before slowed down so much for a drawing.⁵⁰)

⁴⁹ I hadn't thought about the continuity between my work in the past and the thesis work I started doing second semester, but I see it now. Perhaps this is romantic of me, but I think it was painting that brought me back.

⁵⁰ I have in the past preferred paint & charcoal because they cover ground more quickly. It is easier to immediately have a whole image in which one part has a relationship to the next.

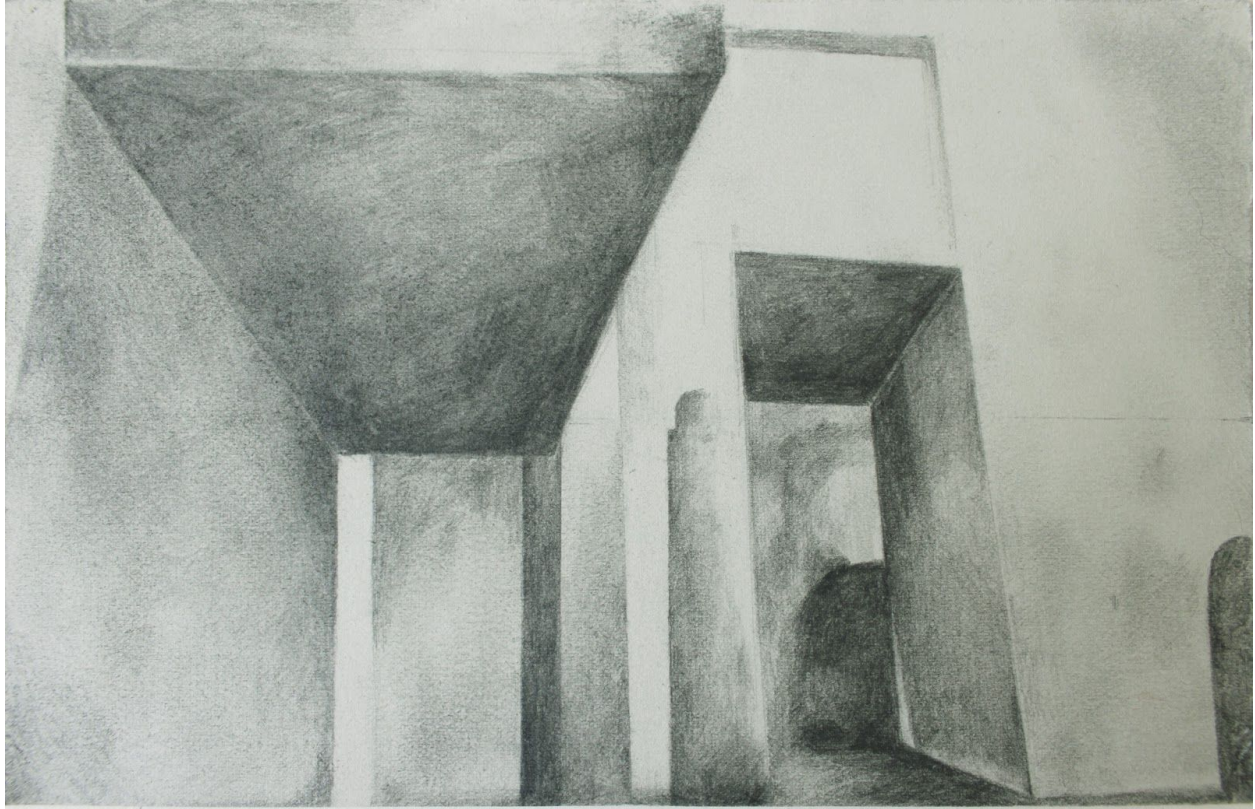


Fig. 20: *Echo #4*. Graphite on paper, 9" x 6"

I meet with my fellow thesis students and we talk about what we've been working on. My stuff is up in Beebe, so I ask Orli and Jayne and Jennie to take a look at it, ask that they share their thoughts before I explain what I've been working on. With a half-laugh and a half-shrug, Orli says that if she didn't already know what my thesis was about, she would read one of the paintings -- the first one I did on oil paper (fig. 17) -- as a blonde girl with her boob out. ("That's awesome!" I say. "It's Jesus!")

For one, let us question the idea that if we get close enough to a bit of painting, we can figure out what it truly is -- that is, what it truly represents. No matter how close we get, the images (the details) we see will not be semantically stable entities with one "true" meaning. And indeed, sometimes the closer we get the more clear it becomes that the images are actually just paint. But sometimes we needn't get so close to see that -- sometimes there are moments in paintings (moments Didi-Huberman refers to with the word *pan*) where, amongst shining images, the paint reveals itself as paint; the physical,

material structure breaks through the image-structure. Where you can't ignore the fact that really the thing you're looking at is paint on canvas.⁵¹

--- ---

I am making images from photos I took of a gallery of medieval art. Some of these images, drawn carefully with mechanical pencils, are faithful to the photographs from which they are drawn. Others are softly abstracted, and still others somewhere in between.

Here. Some works that I have made:



Fig 21: Clockwise from upper left: *Echo #17*; *Echo #16*; *Echo #2*; *Echo #4*. Oil on paper, 6" x 4"

The paintings and drawings are about description -- about art history as ekphrasis, challenging, perhaps, the primacy of verbal ekphrasis, or reminding the viewer that paint and graphite can describe just as well (just as always-inaccurately) too.

⁵¹ George Didi-Huberman, "Appendix: the Detail and the Pan," in *Confronting Images* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005): 229–271.



Fig 22: *Echoes, #10-15*. Oil on canvas, 36" x 36"

The paintings and drawings are about information -- some information obscured, other information highlighted. Obscuring as in blocking out entirely but also as in blurring, abstracting. Rendering images with content that doesn't tell us much, or wouldn't seem to tell us much (a strange view from half-underneath a display case, for instance (fig. 20)), carefully, accurately, legibly. Leaving the shapes hazy in images of, say, the art in the gallery, the information one would expect to be highlighted, sharper in images of small empty corners.

politics & flattening & description & the museum & so on



Fig. 23. *Echoes*, #10-15, detail. (*Echoes* #12, 13).



Fig 24: *Echo* #9 (photographed in context). Oil on canvas paper, 9.75" x 6.5"

The paintings and drawings -- small and unfixed, rearrangeable -- are about ?? circulation, exchange, portability, relationships and contexts.



Fig. 25: *Echo #18*. Oil on paper, 6" x 4"

They are about description. About the meaninglessness⁵² of the detail and perhaps the longing for the *pan*?

About a space you could project yourself into but not orient yourself in, a body you could follow, a hand you could touch & also about paper

⁵² Not meaninglessness, exactly

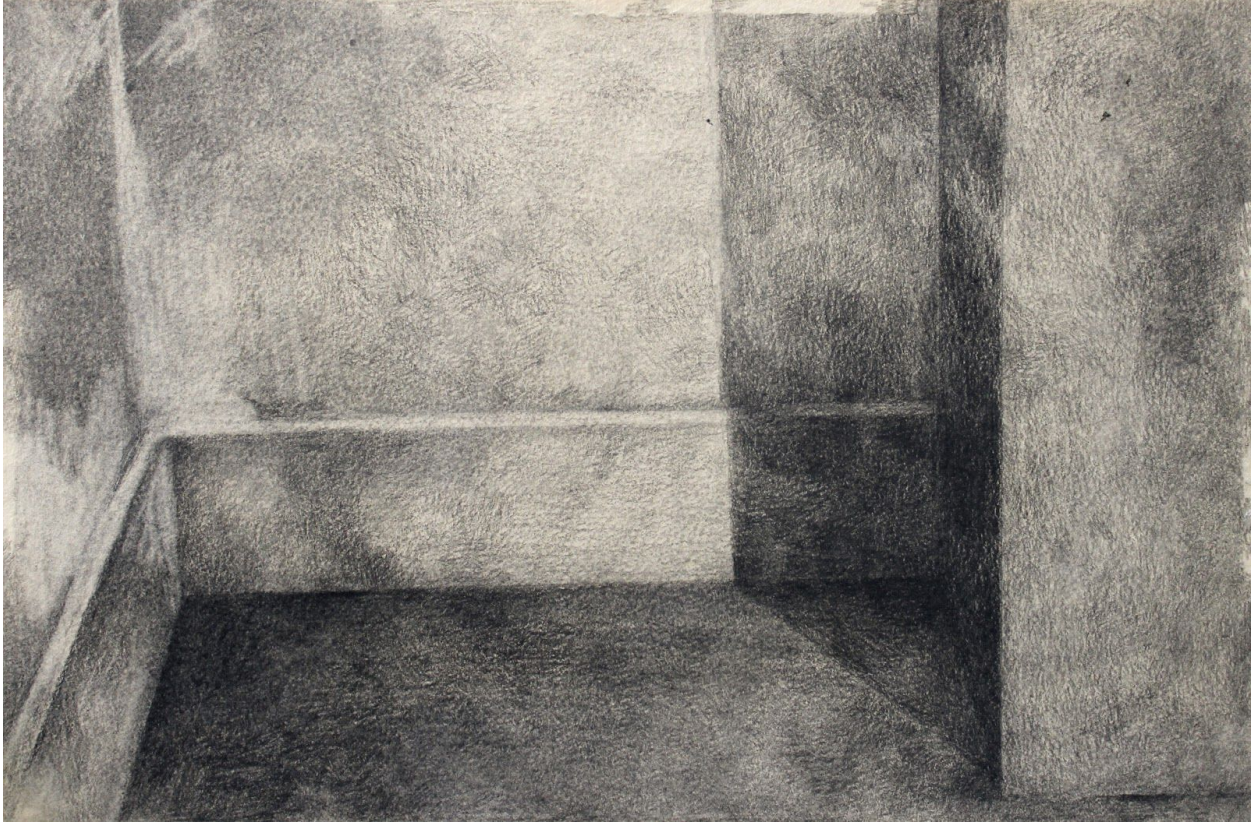


Fig. 26: *Echo #19*. Graphite on paper, 10.5" x 7"

that is rough because you have kept on scratching with your pencil.



Fig. 27: *Echo #3*. Oil on paper, 6" x 4"

They are small to circulate, sure, but also small to refer to their (imagined) source, the art history paper with its printed photos, for instance. Small so that they are talking about a thing and a description of (/a signifier for) a thing, or, better, the tension between thing and description of thing. So that they are objects or additions to a space but not creators of space, so that they give you a space but do not become a space.

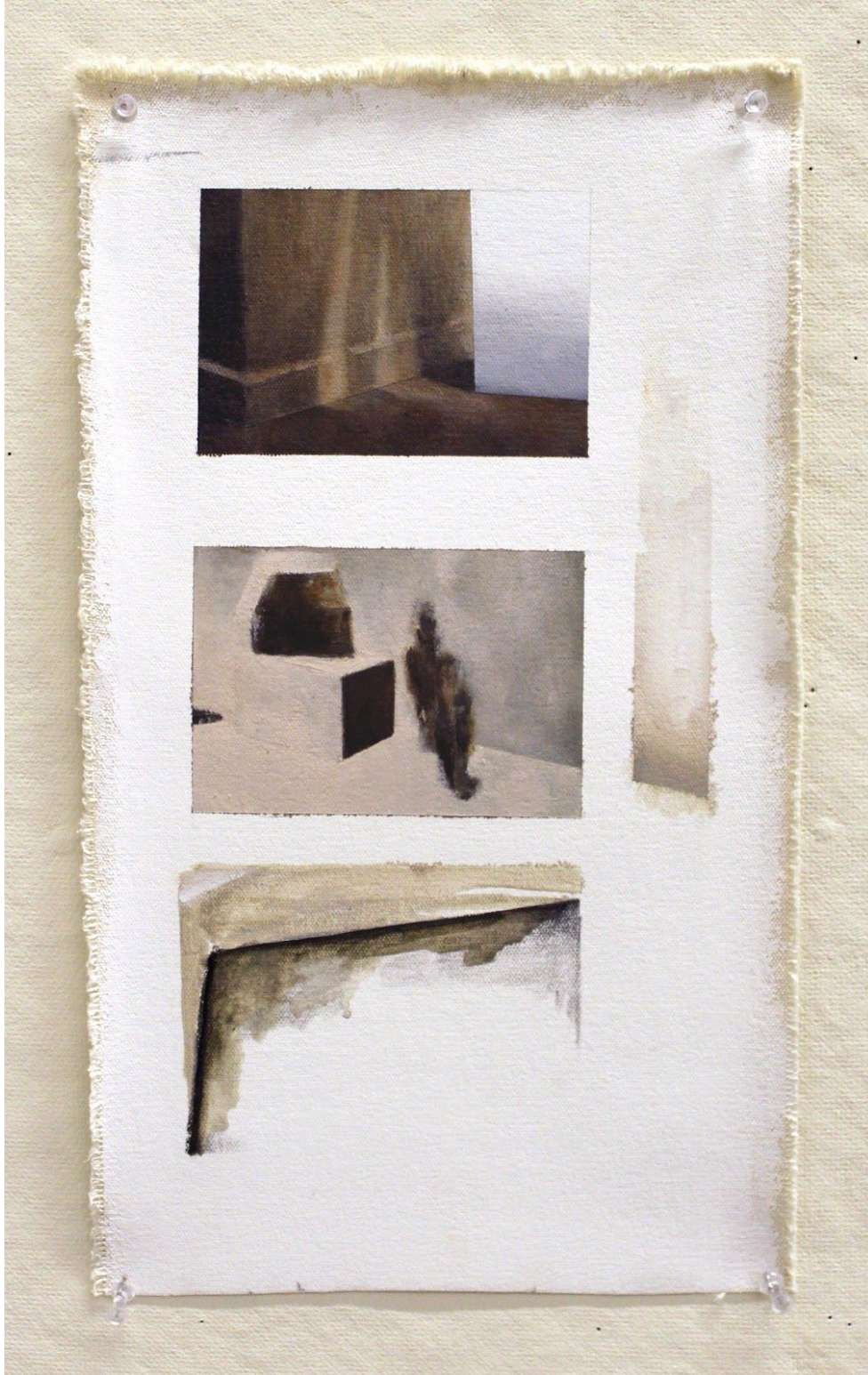


Fig. 28: *Echoes, #20-22*. Oil on canvas, 9" x 16"

This is how I understand the work. With some combination of these approaches, explanations, each valid and mostly compatible with one another but somehow not held at the same time. (In

fact, at this time I am meeting with Dave and Daniela separately, and the project sounds different depending on who I am talking to. I consider writing sort of separate but interwoven papers, one for each approach.)

And then -- over spring break -- I put the work up at the end of the hallway in Jewett, where it will be displayed for the thesis show (fig. 28). And, quite suddenly, I am not thinking about description or information or circulation (the work no longer needs to be able to move). The work has become about space.



Fig. 29: *Echoes, #1-25*, installation view. Jewett Arts Center Hallway.



Fig. 30: *Echoes*, #1-25, installation view, detail. Jewett Arts Center hallway.

Space as in spaces (places) and as in spaces (gaps). In-between and across.

It is a very different thing to step into your own representation (recollection; reconstitution?) of a space than it is to step into a space that is not yours. And it is perhaps even less possible than usual to imagine someone else's experience of a space when the space is one you know so intimately. But in the space at the end of the hallway I felt --

I put my images up in a way that corresponds with their subject's location in the Colburn Chapel Gallery. Images of the apse in the front and center. Images of Jesus (including the one Orli saw as a blonde girl with her boob hanging out) to the left, where the statue in the gallery hangs. Displayed like this, the paintings and drawings talk about the space of the Colburn Chapel Gallery in an entirely new way. Suddenly they are not just showing me the apse or the display case but transforming the strange, amputated space in Jewett into the strange, grafted space of the MFA.



Fig. 31. *Echoes, #1-25*, installation view. Jewett Arts Center Hallway.

(Yet without totally transforming the space -- the images are too small for that. Transforming the space into an echo. The gallery in the MFA, of course, already has its own echo and its own echo-ing in the church from which the apse was removed, the Santa Maria del Mur (fig. 32-33).)

The day before putting my work up in Jewett, I learn that the Santa Maria del Mur does its own echoing (or perhaps it is something more solid than an echo). It invokes the Colburn Chapel Gallery not just by the absence of its fresco, but with a photo of the fresco, standing flatly at the end of a rough stone nave.⁵³ The photo is a representation not just dependent on absence but highlighting absence. Highlighting, moreover, the act of removal--an act which seems suddenly violent; an act of bodily harm; a dismemberment--and then a wish to undo the removal, to become an entire body again.

Like the museum painstakingly peeled away the skin of the church's belly, leaving raw red flesh revealed, and when scar tissue grew on the belly,⁵⁴ they returned decades later with an image of skin to paste on top.

⁵³ "Santa Maria De Mur." - Viquipèdia, L'enciclopèdia Lliure. Accessed March 2016. https://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa_Maria_de_Mur.

⁵⁴ On Saturday I cried in front of Marlene Dumas' *The Painter*, whose seeping purple belly is likewise marked.



Fig. 32-33. The apse of the Santa Maria del Mur.⁵⁵

My work up at the end of the hallway in Jewett recalls, for me, the Santa Maria del Mur as much as the Colburn Chapel Gallery. Invokes one, invokes the other. The church and the gallery invoke each other though they don't yet know to invoke my space. The strange amputated form of the recess -- the irregularity, the bit of wall that sits at an angle, where one could once pass through to Pendleton -- helps. For anyone familiar with the building (which in this case means the vast majority of my audience), the end of the hallway is the record of what used to be a passage; a record of change. The construction outside the window contributes, too, nodding to shifting spaces and an ongoing process of change.

⁵⁵ Gustau Erill i Pinyot, *Castell De Mur. Mur. Santa Maria De Mur 17*.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=6433195>.; *Castell De Mur. Mur. Santa Maria De Mur 20*.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=6433412>



Fig. 34. *Echoes*, #20-22, installed in the construction site visible through the windows in the hallway of Jewett.

I am thinking about Katrin Sigurdardóttir's work -- the personal & communal histories, fictional & nonfictional & reconstructed, the layers & records left behind, particularly in *Foundation & Unbuilt Residences in Reykjavik, 1925-1930*. the palimpsest, the memory, & the echo.

My work talks to the space it is in. For me, the space changes. (For others, who knows). The drawing of Jesus & the face of the lefthand wall stare across at the materializing/dematerializing drawing on the wall to the right. Rather like the crucified Christ sculpture, the Virgin & Child, and the apse throw a net of energy or something in the Colburn Chapel Gallery. I have transformed the space, but I have not transformed it into another space. No image I have made is so large that you feel you can exist inside it, nor are my drawings so detailed you can press your face ever closer, trying and failing to see where the image breaks into pigment and accidentally entering the image world. There is funny sort of tension present in the space.

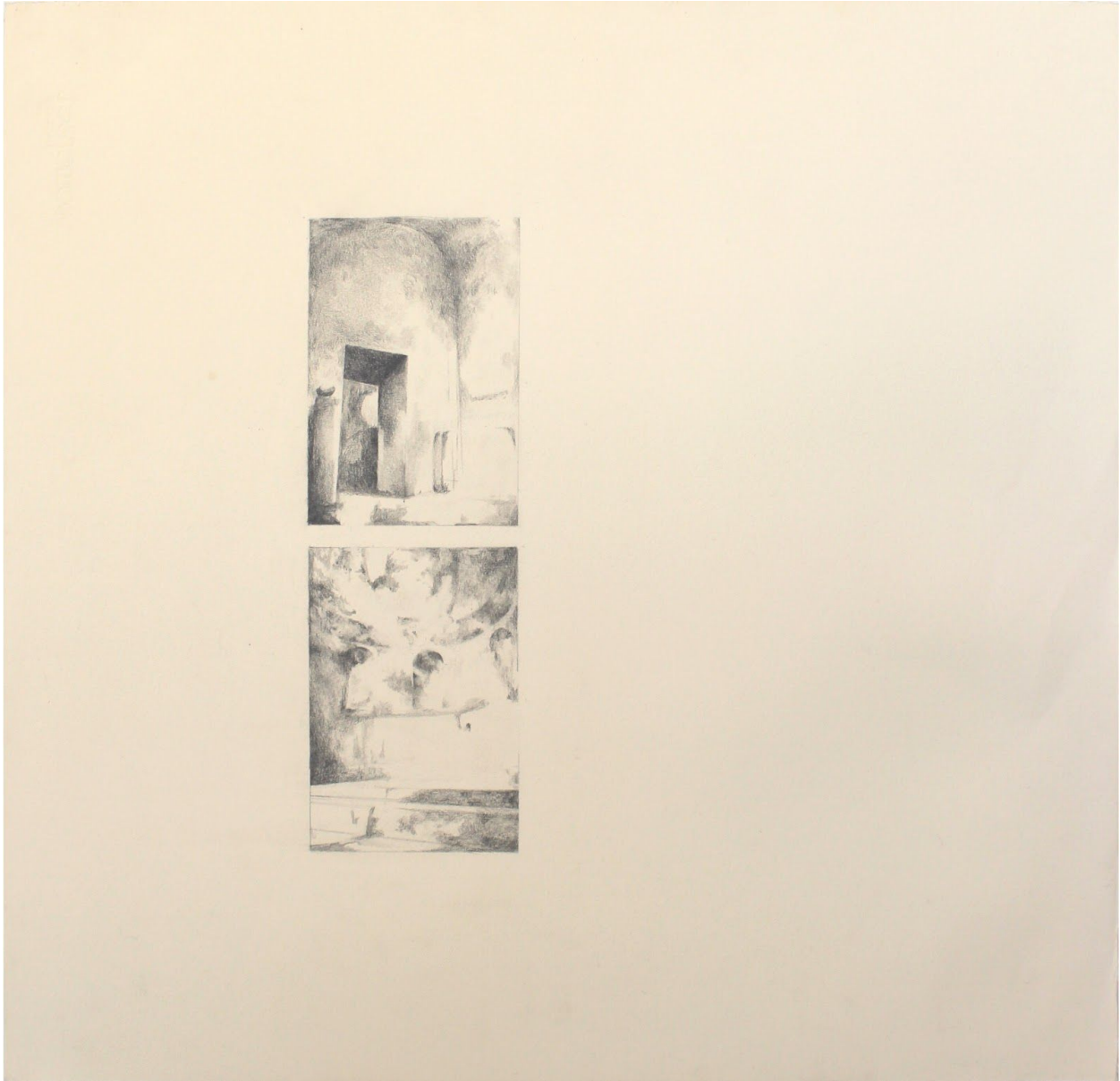


Fig. 35: *Echoes, #6-7*. Graphite on paper, 22" x 22"

The work is about space.

(Also about becoming, or coming together, or falling.)

Space implies a body.

An empty space -- an absent body, or your body, projected into the space.



Fig. 36. *Echo #16*, installed in Jewett Arts Center hallway.

(When I show the space to my partner, with bits of text about experience pinned up on the wall, she says it feels like being in me, in a museum. Or standing next to me as I experience the space alone.) Of course, a projected body is still an absent one.

The work is about the body.⁵⁶

The work is about the body, but in what way?⁵⁷ It is about the body because, installed, it traces the route through the museum. A sort of fragmented time and space with my body -- as the medium? The perpetrator? The example? Or -- time and space reconfigured to run alongside and within my body, my body which is not there but which (I hope) the viewer enters for a moment, or rather copies, or rather stands behind, close enough that time & space reconfigure alongside and within their body, too. (The viewer as yet another surrogate, a surrogate me.)

Marks, Bogue, Didi-Huberman? ??? the body? the paint?

My response to Didi-Huberman is that the *pan* makes the paint not just visible but touchable, or almost so.

& perhaps that reverberations are felt in the body as well

⁵⁶ (Of course it is.)

⁵⁷ This is important: the body is there, but it is nowhere near everything.



Fig. 37. *Echoes, #23-25*. Oil on canvas. 36" x 36" x 3".



Fig. 38. *Echoes, #23-25*, side view/detail.



Fig. 39. *Echoes, #1-25*, installation view. Jewett Arts Center hallway.

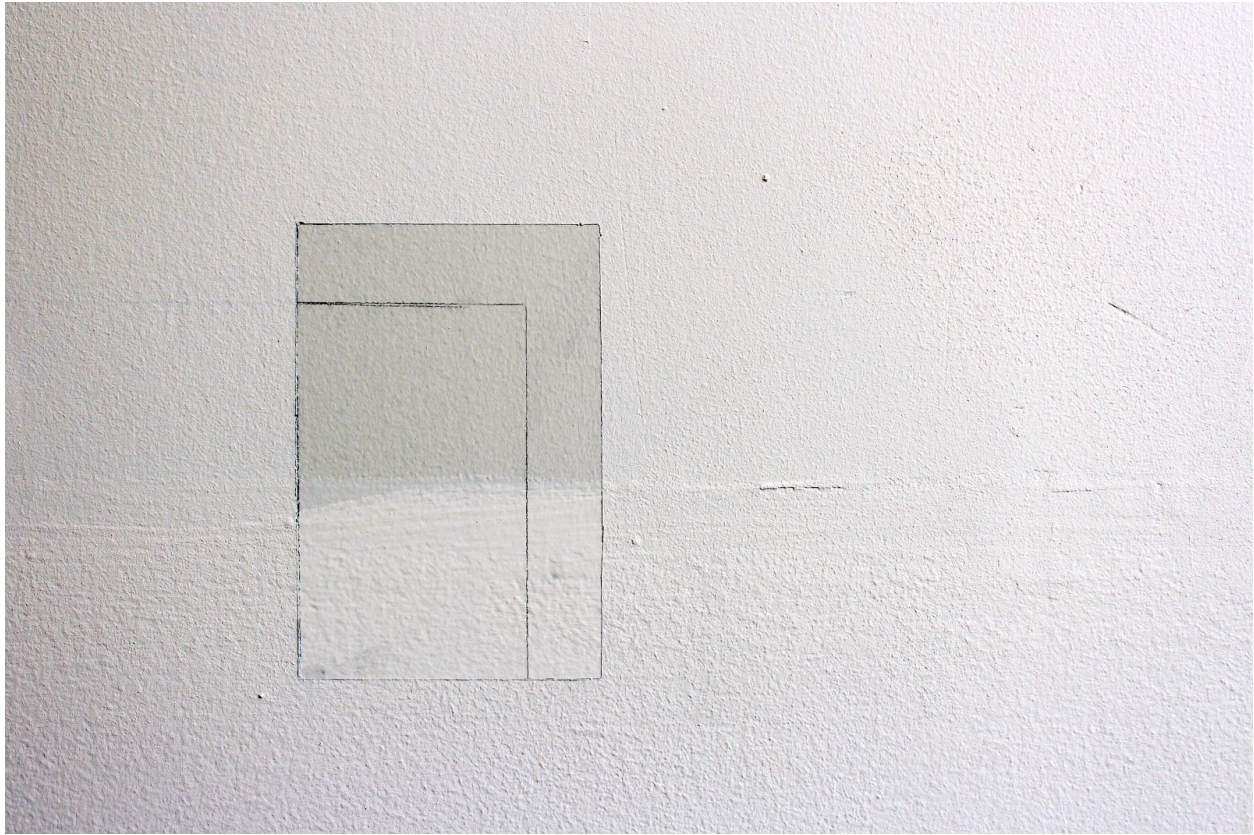


Fig. 40. *Echo 26*. House paint (old and new) and graphite on wall. 6" x4".



Fig. 41. *Echoes (233) i*. Graphite on paper, displayed in plastic bag. 5 7/8" x 3.5".

Bibliography

- Bechdel, Alison. *Are You My Mother?: A Comic Drama*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.
- Bennett, Jane. "The Force of Things: Steps toward an Ecology of Matter." *Political Theory*, 2004, 347-72.
- Biles, Jeremy. "For the Love of God: Excess, Ambivalence, and Damien Hirst's Diamond Skull," in *The Uses of Excess in Visual and Material Culture, 1600-2010*, ed. Julia Skelly (Ashgate, 2014), pp. 225–247.
- Bogue, Ronald. *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. *Collected Fictions*. Translated by Andrew Hurley. New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Viking, 1998.
- Bush, Olga. "Prosopopeia: Performing the Reciprocal Gaze" *Muqarnas* 32 (2015): 13–19.
- "Christ in Majesty with Symbols of the Four Evangelists." Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. 2016. <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/christ-in-majesty-with-symbols-of-the-four-evangelists-31898>.
- Clifford, James. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Cadava, Eduardo. "'Lapsus Imaginis': The Image in Ruins." *October* 96 (2001): 35-60.
- Cortázar, Julio. "Don't Blame Anyone," in *Unreasonable Hours*. Translated by Alberto Manguel. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1995.
- Dahl, Ellert. "'Heavenly Images: The Statue of St. Foy of Conques and the Signification of the Medieval 'Cult-Image' in the West,'" *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 8 (1979): 175-92.
- DiCorcia, Philip-Lorca. *Mario*. 1978. Museum of Modern Art, New York. <http://www.moma.org/collection/works/46273?locale=en>.
- Didi-Huberman, George: "Appendix: the Detail and the Pan," in *Confronting Images* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005): 229–271.
- Elkins, James. *Pictures & Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Elsner, Jaś. "Art History as Ekphrasis." *Art History* 33, no. 1 (2010): 10-27. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8365.2009.00720.x.

Erill i Pinyot, Gustau. *Castell De Mur. Mur. Santa Maria De Mur 17*. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=6433195>.

Erill i Pinyot, Gustau. *Castell De Mur. Mur. Santa Maria De Mur 20*. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=6433412>

Foster, Hal. "An Archival Impulse." *October* 110 (2004): 3-22. doi:10.1162/0162287042379847.

Gell, Alfred. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

"Hanging Reliquary | MFA for Educators." Hanging Reliquary | MFA for Educators. Accessed 2016. <http://educators.mfa.org/european/hanging-reliquary-31170>.

Hay, Jonathan. *Sensuous Surfaces: The Decorative Object in Early Modern China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010.

H, C. H. "A Catalanian Fresco of the Twelfth Century." *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin* 21, no. 125 (June 1923): 31-40.

Ingold, Tim. "Materials against Materiality." *Archaeological Dialogues* 14, no. 01 (2007): 1-16. doi:10.1017/s1380203807002127.

Krauss, Rosalind. "In the Name of Picasso," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT press, 1985), 23-40.

Marks, Laura U. "Haptic Visuality: Touching with the Eyes," *Framework: The Finnish Art Review*, 2.

Marks, Laura U. *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art* (MIT press, 2001), pp. 253–287.

Preciado, *Paul B. Testo-Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, trans. Bruce Benderson (New York: The Feminist Press, 2013 [2008]).

Rancière, Jacques, "The Emancipated Spectator," *Artforum International* 45, no. 7 (2007): 271–80.

Respini, Eva, Finbarr Barry Flood, and Walid Raad. *Walid Raad*. Edited by Eva Respini. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2015.

"Santa Maria De Mur." - Viquipèdia, L'enciclopèdia Lliure. Accessed March 2016.
https://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa_Maria_de_Mur.

Shalem, Avinoam. "Multivalent Paradigms of Interpretation and the Aura or Anima of the Object." *In Islamic Art and the Museum: Approaches to Art and Archeology of the Muslim World in the Twenty-First Century*, 103. London: Saqi, 2012.

Shalem, Avinoam. "If Objects Could Speak," in *The Aura of the Alif*, Jürgen Wassim Frembgen (ed.), exhibition catalogue, Völkerkunde Museum, Munich (Munich: Prestel, 2010), pp. 127–147.

Smee, Sebastian. "Geoffrey Farmer's Art at the ICA: Once You've Seen It, You Can't Shake It - The Boston Globe." *BostonGlobe.com*. April 14, 2016. Accessed April 22, 2016.
<https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/theater-art/2016/04/13/geoffrey-farmer-art-ica-once-you-seen-you-can-shake/FvaQx3SchZKbusPE9delIPO/story.html>.

Springfield, Molly. "The Marginalia Archive." MOLLY SPRINGFIELD. Accessed 2016.
http://mollyspringfield.com/section/38675_The_Marginalia_Archive.html.

Swarzenski, Hanns, and Nancy Netzer. *Catalogue of Medieval Objects: Enamels & Glass*. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1986. 48-49.

Valentine, David. "The Calculus of Pain." *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 68, no. 1 (2003): 27-48.