Of Being And Hoping

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ABSTRACT

I believe time is unreal; with my photographs I can manipulate time and make reality sticky. This work is about landscape, narrative, desire, and denial. My curiosity comes from the investigation of empirical evidence collected from my early adolescence to present day. These images become satires of personal experiences, representing little proofs of existence. The still image becomes a contemplation of our subconscious fears and desires of all things promised.
Thesis

"If I had a world of my own, everything would be nonsense. Nothing would be what it is, because everything would be what it isn't. And contrary wise, what is, it wouldn't be. And what it wouldn't be, it would. You see?" -Lewis Carroll

Photographs sequence together naturally like tragic poems. My photographs become like a short couple of lines in a poem. Like Emily Dickenson or Sylvia Plath's, my work holds the essence of an experience no matter how mundane or confessional. Art becomes a way for me to show my experience of the world and to prove my existence. The photographs, apart from me, have their own history built upon the strict discipline of both history and the tradition in photography. I am most interested in the rules of composition, carefully framing and cutting away unwanted things to find the perfect frame.

Photography has always been a part of my life. I was raised the eldest child in middle-class America. Due to my father's corporate position I spent most of my childhood relocating every few years until my adolescence. At a young age I learned quickly and easily how to reinvent myself, most notably around age seven in South Carolina, I learned of having to move again and leave my newly made childhood friends behind. During this move, I really started to fantasize about other people's lives. I was curious of the world and the human condition, often fantasizing about other people's experiences for instance, someone having a baby, or the traditional experience of blowing out birthday candles. I especially desired to be connected to
something, some place, or people other than my immediate family members. I feared not having the connections that my friends had within their communities. Picking up a camera gave me a way to capture these moments, even if the prints often just ended up gathered into a box under my bed.

At the tender age of twelve I started working on an apple orchard in Southern New England. My duties included serving coffee, baking, and serving apple crisp. Here is where I embraced my sexuality filled with desires and expectations. My rebellious nature at this young age brought me great shame and frustration among the local population. Yet, I fell comfortably into the skate, surf, and snowboard culture surrounding the orchard. Here is where I tested dangerously for myself the difference between right and wrong and took it to the limit. These things became what made me feel alive. Constantly seeing how much I could get away with, without anyone knowing I was doing it. These little addictions became my dirty little secrets. The fact I was privileged enough to be able to spend my time mischievously while still playing the role of the first-born sister, one that someone was supposed to be looking up to. I felt an immense guilt because of my poor performance as a role model for my younger sibling.
Surely this guilt has been the source of my internal battle of good Lauren vs. evil Lauren. Growing up with three women under one roof was no simple task. My sister and I were taught conservative social standards and like other girls our age, were taught to suppress our feelings. However, my rebellious nature made me want to challenge these social constrictions placed onto me. This same rebellious nature is what confronts traditional darkroom studio practice. I believe this has allowed me to begin thinking as an artist rather than just a photographer.
I have never been a traditional student by means of practice. As a photographer I am interested in using many different camera formats. On any given series of works I use multiple medias including ceramics, jewelry, and video. Especially when creating mixed-media installations on the wall. (Fig.1) I am interested in the effect of scale. When things begin to be too small or too large our perception of things can change completely. Photographer Harry Callahan’s work first introduced me to this concept in his photographs of his wife, Eleanor. You can see similarities between Callahan’s quests for just the right size in my work. For example, I created a ceramic piece called *700 Times Betrayed* (Fig.2). This piece consisted of 143 ceramic shaped candy hearts. The piece stemmed from a specific personal experience about anger and frustration of a failing relationship. Expletives are hand inscribed on each one and numbered on the back.

Fig. 3
Around this same time I started working with metal again, and created a ring *Candy Rock* (Fig 3.) made of Silver. I cast an actual piece of rock candy and made a ring to
fit it. At this time I was using mixed media materials to create consumer seasonal items. I was also doing similar things while creating a series of photographs of still life’s with candy. I was most interested in the idea that art could look like things you could eat. However, if you tried to eat it you would literally break your teeth.

![Image]

Fig. 4
As seen in this work I often create art in a non-linear way. This allows my practice to become experimental, which is how I created the technique in the work that I made next. The materials in this new process are ephemeral and phenomenological. We are nothing without these experiences of existence, our capacity of memory, and perceptions of the world. Not having an explanation for these things is much scarier than things we can scientifically explain. I would also argue that we claim to know so much about love and relationships when we actually do not. We often pass them off as something simple when in fact these emotions don't come to us as easily as we desire. We are all guilty of trying to prove our everyday existence via the still image
in brag books, and more often now via 140 characters on social media outlets. We think we can capture a friend forever in a still image, or a moment in a tweet. However, images only allow us the perception of this experience, which is as inauthentic as artificial sweetener.

Phenomenology is a refusal to answer what the world is but tries to answer how we experience things in the world. Philosophy is important to me because it gives me a way to constantly relook at the way we look at the world. When Socrates said, “True wisdom comes to each of us when we realize how little we understand about life, ourselves, and the world around us.” I believe you cannot learn or embrace the world truly or fully until you give up the ego. For instance, Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains it is not about the about Color patches, or sound but the real objects in the world we need to get to. For example, when he starts to talk about the way we think of red, he is trying to explain that it is actually is nothing more but the way our eyes run over bricks. I also like to think about my own work and how silver and gold become a way for me a way of expressing the connotations of old daguerreotypes Goldschlager, or silver and gold rings. We cannot get to the phenomenological experience without letting go of these pre-conceived conscious perceptions.

However, these things cannot exist without my physical self. For instance when focusing a lens, the body touches the telescope which touches the stars. I also can’t think of physical bricks with out thinking of what bricks feels like, rough, cold, or hot from the heat of the sun. The same way I cannot separate Goldschlager from ice-
cold wet smokey strong red hots. “The body catches itself from the outside engaged in a cognitive process.” (Moran pg 409). However, I know that the next time I encounter bricks or Goldshlager it will be an entirely new experience and a new sensation.

This is why I always disliked science. “Science manipulates things and gives up living in them” (Moran pg. 400). Science generalizes instead of embracing the difference in all elements. However, I was always intrigued by chemistry and alchemy. You would have a hypothesis but every time you conducted experiments there would always be a variable that was off from the consistent data. I strive in my own work to find that one variable that is off, which to me is like the 99-cent grab bag you get at a toy store. You have no idea what is in the bag, which makes it exciting. You only have a perceived idea of what it could contain which is at that moment contains all the excitement of what could be or was before. The bag becomes the moment before you open a birthday present, the moment before your
first kiss, drink of alcohol, before you jump off a cliff into water. These things become little addictions which make life worth living.

Fig 6
The bag also has other connotations like every school lunch you ever ate and has a strange familiarity of another brown paper bag experience you have had before. For me phenomenology in a way fails because of its nature to try to discredit the experiences of the world. We need mystery and adventure. It also becomes contradictory when it says that we are condemned to be free and also saying that “there is no such thing an original choice.” (Moran pg. 396). This also makes me think of Rene Descartes and his “I think therefore I am” I always had a hard time with this theory because I can not believe that the only reason we can prove our existence is through thinking. We also interact with the physical world on some level. Dreams become otherworldly for me because of when we know the sleep is coming and we prepare our bodies by laying or closing our eyes. During my time at graduate school I kept a journal of every dream I had, which I hope to publish in the
future to keep them alive. This in between-ness reminds me of the director JJ Abram's *Lost* and *Fringe* and David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*. Life is like a labyrinth of consciousness. The way I photograph is very ontological where as the way I treat the photograph as object becomes phenomenological.

My video work becomes more and more fragmented and slowed down and projected on non-traditional materials. Especially in the video *Opposites mean nothing* (*Fig 5.*). The video is a metaphor for the nature of our true identities and struggle to find them while in a monogamous relationship. I am also interested in how the videos being displayed in alternative, for instance in the corner of a room, in apple crates, or on the ceiling.

I have always been fascinated by the fact that, even in our greatest attempts to become grounded, we always feel a craving for escape and fantasies. An idea can happen fast and is over before a blink of an eye. In contrast, the memory of a simple breath of air can linger slow, like molasses. These ideas become a still photograph or an abstracted video.

My photographs become a simultaneous depiction about desire and denial. When you are denied the things you want most, you are left with nothing but hope for the love and approval from your friends and family. The desire to be able to capture a moment in time, knowing that no matter what the photograph is, it never truly proves you were there or surely, could never tell you what the grass smelled like.
Working large scale allows me to create images that create a new experience. The acetate larger-than-life images become a negative and a positive at the same time my images have shadows. Like depicted in the Garden of Eden and in Alice in Wonderland, the desire of knowledge can only be desired, never reached. Director David Lynch fragments scenes in a way to stay mysterious while implying a much more curious, full meaning and incredible beauty.

My images depict the orchard and the diverging paths in the forests. Our own domestic spaces become ingrained on a paper that becomes like a skin. I am interested in how these simulacras seem compared to the twisting branches of these natural habitats, and how they still bear such delicious fruit (Fig 7.). Like Emily Dickenson I am interested in what physical limits do and do not mean. Curious of my preconceived realities and empirical evidence of my being, I wonder if these
mysteries of love, personal histories, and truth will always be unattainable, and just beyond our awareness.

“.../ Between the light -- and me / And then the Windows failed -- and then / I could not see to see--” -Emily Dickenson

Photography, like all art media, contains a sense of fiction. Artists try to convey a concept or some part of the human condition, which is nearly an impossible venture. In my pursuit of truth, I have found that authenticity can never be fully obtained. These ideas and photographs to me are ephemeral. They change by the hour and by the week. They are destroyed by paint or transferred like a skin. Like a dream within a dream, the process is real and familiar yet transcendental and sticky. In a desperate attempt to understand what all these photographs I was making meant, I spray-painted them gold. If the idea that my experience was failing to live in the world as a photograph, I didn’t want anyone to be able to see the images. To my avail when I dropped the print, the image began to bleed through to the other side of the transparency revealing a daguerreotype like quality. Complete spontaneity is caused by the drips of spray paint that allow the image to bleed through the other side of its transparent skin. I later titled this series 'Fools' Gold’ (Fig 4,6,8.) after its perfectly magical collaboration of this chemical process and myself. Fools gold became the perfect metaphor for our capacity of memory.
Fig. 8

This actionary way of working challenged my rule of needing to own every inch of the image. I found trying to create order out of chaos was impossible. The opposite of chaos is more chaos. The frame allows me to create order within the shape the work encompasses.
The Thesis Show

The Thesis show (Fig 9.) is made up of two sculptural elements and three transparency print installations of fragmented images taken at different orchards throughout the Midwest. The prints are T-pinned to the wall as specimens to allowing a psychedelic experience as you walk closer and the shadows to appear behind the installation on the wall. The work is haunted by the past connotations of the orchard, such as the book of Genesis and Eve and the tree of knowledge. In addition to the installations I showed two sculptural elements. These two floor installations are stacked apple crates that I pulled out of a barn near Xenia, Ohio.
The installation needed this element to bring the viewer to the farm. Without these weather-beaten crates, the room becomes sterile. Stacked on top on each other the crates live precariously creating a sense of trust between the gallery goer and myself. Peering into the crates you see at the bottom there are apples that will over the time in the gallery begin to rot. The bottoms of the crates are also sprinkled with cinnamon for a more authentic experience. When approaching the stack of crates and you peer onto them, you see a video. Both stacks of crates holds a video projected onto muslin. (Fig 10.) The first stack on the left is projecting *The Great Red Oak* (Fig 11.), a video cut from old family 8MM footage that my late grandfather took in the early 1960’s. The frames are composed of an Oak Tree at the peak of fall foliage.

![Fig. 10](image)

The video is slowed down to accentuate the breath of wind as it dances in the leaves. *Fade Away* (Fig 12.) in the second stack of crates features another set of outtakes.
from family 8MM videos. This video is from a family vacation where the camera is pointed out the window towards the water. There is a smoke on the water, and a seagull freezes to the screen before it fades away to yellow and then transitions to my sweet aunt as a child, dangling a heart shaped Christmas ornament for the camera. It was important to me that the videos have an odd sense of time.

I believe time is unreal; with my photographs I manipulate the desires and denials about our reality. Using multiple medias and formats and installations I try to bring a sense of curiosity to my audience. The still Image is more than meets the eye. They become satires, documentation of personal experiences, and little proofs of existence. This mysteriousness, ambiguity and the way an image can represent our personal reality is what inspires me to push my work farther.
Bibliography


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