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Connectedness of Existence

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Connectedness of Existence

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I am drawn to the most human of things, the ordinary everyday experiences that connect us. I seek to remember pieces of life that are easily forgotten or left behind. It is within the constructs of interdependence that my work explores the poetic space of a shared human experience. These connections are made evident through the suggestion of memory, identity and the idea of the viewer as collaborator. I seek to create a narrative in which the viewer becomes aware of change and discovery within the behavior of an individual self.

In my most recent work, the idea of the viewer has visually and metaphorically manifested into the act of drawing a circle. The shape of the circle is meant to be representative of the nature of experience within the intricacies of both the enlightened mind as well as the confused mind. It is a mutual circle or a circle of togetherness where the connectedness of our existence becomes indisputable. The circle is the beginning and ending, presence and absence. The viewer, then, becomes a silent collaborator who quietly charges my work as I search for social understanding of both the viewer and myself. In this way the viewer becomes a willing participant as well as the subject.

**Connectivity:**

The idea of connectivity has become an increasingly important theme throughout my work. Connectivity to myself, to other people and to other things such as place or even objects have all been brought into question. I keep, however, returning to human connections, perhaps because I am a human after all, but more specifically because I find those connections to be the most direct, the most sincere and truly satisfying. By searching for sincerity within the framework of connection I began to draw circle forms.
as if they were individuals, imperfect and overlapping. The circle is a basic visual form that is able to promote a feeling of familiarity and relate-ability when looking at an image. Henry David Thoreau wrote of the form, that a circle is the first shape our eye recognizes closely followed by the horizon line. This would then make both of those forms universally known to all people, at an extremely intimate level. The image itself in that way carries a rich content of connection.

The Japanese Enso is well known to Zen Buddhists, who see it as a spiritual meditation, not as a character but as a symbol. Traditionally the Enso is used to represent a moment of enlightenment in an endless cyclical line. It can take on many different variations of the circle. For example, the line could be a single, broad, closed brush stroke or it could be a thin line left partially open. It can be created in perfect symmetry or exist as a much more inconsistent circle. The mark becomes a symbol for the absolute or the true nature of existence. The circle that is open shows an Enso that has not contained itself, but that is opening outwards, perhaps to infinity. The primary types of Enso that I have employed in my work are typically ones that describe existence, and in doing so, also describe forms of connection. The mirror Enso is a singular, symmetrical line in which its secrets or interpretations are left for the viewer to contemplate; it is the Enso that typically promotes an awareness or remembrance. The moon Enso is depicted as a full moon, an entirely closed in circle, which is clear and bright. It silently illuminates all things that fall under its gaze without judgment, just as the moon itself would. The wheel Enso is perhaps the most poetic circle form. It is the circle of life, in which everything is subject to change, and all life revolves in an endless pattern of circles. By effect the Enso is always an imperfect circle: because it is drawn by a human hand it can never be a truly
perfect shape. However, the imperfectness suggests perfection in that it is perfect just as it is. Life itself is perfect as a lived experience, as it is also with the Enso.

The Enso speaks to the idea that we do not just take up space, rather we inhabit space. In that way for me the circle began to serve as individual portraits of people with whom I interact. As a symbol that combines the visible and the hidden, the simple and the profound, the empty and the full, the Enso becomes in a way very much a portrait or trace of a person. The introduction of the portrait creates a marked separation between the tradition of the Buddhist Enso and the circle form that appears within my work. The Enso reflects the alignment of body and spirit according to the gesture of the drawn circle. It is a record of the state that the maker’s mind was in at the time of creation. In this way the Enso becomes a repetitive act that through daily use conditions the mind toward a more clear state, ultimately reaching enlightenment where the human mind becomes satisfied with the world. It is an exercise of multiple practicing, a meditative ritual. The Enso’s meditative characteristic ensures that it is primarily constructed within the act of creating the circle form and not within the individual who is behind the mark. The physical mark left behind becomes a representation of a shared moment in time, a shared experience between the creator and the world. The shared experience of the Enso points toward a non-specific connection; however, I am more interested in revealing a more defined connection. My work speaks to a social connection within the circle. Instead of the circle encompassing the world, the circles that appear within my work distinguish individuals. In that way the circles that I draw become portraits of not only the moment that they are created, but more importantly they become portraits of individuals with whom I have had a shared experience. A portrait is historically seen as a description of an individual, most
often thought of as a painting or some form of life-like visual replication. The circle then in my work, appears as a carrier of human description, becoming an abstracted metaphor of experience.

The series entitled *Moment* illustrates the Enso as a participatory portrait. While questioning the moon Enso, I was reminded of relationships I had formed but perhaps had not interacted with in several months. I will often think of friends or family members in quiet moments. Perhaps while I am walking my dog or taking a shower, a remembered conversation or shared meal will come to my mind. *Moment* began in such a way as I recalled a summer evening spent with friends at our favorite wine bar. The bar had the largest patio in town with a water fountain in the center making it the ideal place to sit and talk while enjoying dinner. As I remembered that night and ones like it, I longed to create a way, not just for me, but for everyone who was there to form a new connection to the moment of life in that place.

The moon Enso’s silent observation of all things sheds light on the presence and absence of people in daily life, including my friends from that night and many others. Each print in the series *Moment* is a portrait of a friend. I asked individuals
to send me dirt, or grass or any natural material that was readily available to them within the area where they currently lived. That material was then made into handmade paper, according to each person involved. The resulting print is a vertical image of layered forms. The moon Enso is a full, dark form rising towards the edge of the paper entwined within the flux of curving lines representative of a lived experience. The portrait image is printed within a larger embossment emphasizing the importance of the visual as well formalizing the standard view of a portrait. A narrow strip of white paper holds the layered portrait in place on the right side, forcing the eye to read from left to right as if the image was made of words written on a page. The expanse of white paper suggests a history leading toward the image, with just enough white space after the image to lead the viewer to continue scanning to the right and off the paper. The dark circle is self-contained throughout the majority of each print, acknowledging separation between presence and absence, or more specifically the separation between a lived, conscious experience and the unconscious, unaware experience. The distinction between presence and absence is used as a tool of understanding for seeing the print as an experience. Edmund Husserl described experience as a phenomenological condition in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* by stating that "experience is not an opening through which a world, existing prior to all experience, shines into a room of consciousness; it is
not a mere taking of something alien to consciousness into consciousness...Experience is the performance in which for me, the experiencer, experienced being 'is there', and is there as what it is, with the whole content and the mode of being that experience itself, by the performance going on in its intentionality, attributes to it (Husserl, 6)". Thus intentional looking promotes complex temporal awareness within a stream of consciousness, or lived experience. Moment requires spatial attention to understand one's own experience, embodied action and social interaction based on the collective action of gathering materials to make the paper. Each moon Enso in Moment’s series calls for intentional looking by challenging a seemingly confirmed experience. The full circle changes with each print: some are veiled and some are strong as if to say there are different levels of connectedness. The last few prints begin to change form in small ways, until the final circle seems to be actively dripping from its previously fixed form, suggesting that an event has happened while the viewer was looking. This, then, is a distinguishably
phenomenological way of describing, interpreting and analyzing a lived experience.

*I See You* came about as a way for me to better understand my connection to an ever-changing world. The black image of a circle sits in the center of a square embossment surrounded by white. The circle itself seems like a strand of ribbon or a shoelace carefully placed in a continuous line. *I See You,* like most things in life, asks the viewer to look closer, to look longer and discover something more. Upon closer inspection each print, each circle is not whole. The circle has a small knick where the CNC router used to create a seemingly perfect circle skipped. It is a perfectly imperfect circle only seen when actively studied. The imperfection becomes a narrative of life revolving in endless patterns of circles for anyone willing to read such a story.

**Memory:**

A lived experience advocates for the idea of a history. A history creates a memory according to experience and so time cannot be ignored as a companion to either memory or history; they are all bound together in various, tangled ways. Roger Shattuck writes in phenomenological terms using the writings of Proust to demonstrate the effects of time on conscious thought. "To see anything in temporal depth, we need at least two impressions of it. One image, one present, is not enough, because a single event or impression isolated in the consciousness cannot sustain itself, has no dimensionality in time, it remains 'flat' to the mind; it can be
kept alive only by voluntary memory or the sheer uncreative repetition of habit” (Farr, 33). This theory of memory does not alone support the previously stated concept of connectivity. Shattuck, however, goes on to write a more definitive statement by saying that “memory, in its alternate form of recognition, progressively sets one image beside other chronologically separated images and sees in them not change, not trompe l’oeil, but revelation of true identity, the ‘optical view’.” In that way “multiplicity now brings not confusion but dimensionality and depth. Memory in Proust’s sense designates a stereoscopic or ‘stereologic’ consciousness, which sees the world simultaneously (and thus out of time) in relief. Merely to remember something is meaningless unless the remembered image is combined with a moment in the present affording a view of the same object or objects. Like our eyes, our memories must see double; those two images then converge in our minds into a single heightened reality” (Farr, 32-33). Memory, then, is tied to many of the same truths of connectivity and intentionality. The mirror Enso that is normally seen as a singular, symmetrical line propels the viewer toward awareness of one’s self, but also places remembrance at the front of its purpose. The piece entitled Surround Me is the physical culmination of some of these ideas. Using the mirror Enso I drew two imperfect, overlapping circles. Unlike the traditional mirror Enso Surround Me employs the use of a non-symmetrical circle; both forms are different from the other, yet the same. The circles overlap and are left open in some areas. Drawn with a single, fine, black line the two forms are once again printed in a vertical format referencing a portrait for while these are seemingly just two circles, they are representative of a lived experience between two individuals. The image was printed over and over until the circles began to fade and
eventually printed into nothingness. The paper was then waxed leaving only the line of two imperfect circles for each individual to recognize. Totaling eighty-nine prints, memory is described in multiplicity and the evidence of time. Surround Me is laid in a circular pattern on top of a platform barely rising off the ground. People are invited to sit around the edge of the piece and experience the revelation of identity created by the visual depth of the circles. Memory forms, perhaps, the strongest when our mind has seen multiple images of an object or scene. It no longer exists as a fleeting moment; instead it is imprinted on our conscious mind making it an experience that we live through or in some cases preform them. Surround Me gives the potential collaborator a choice to act in a relatively passive manner by looking at the images, but there is also the choice to sit or walk around each print. The act of walking around the piece ushers realization, or a consciousness of self that passively looking would not have revealed. This awareness of self is not made in the idea of motion, though. Multiple experiences does not mean that time has the strongest hold. Surround Me, though it clearly reflects a memory, a memory of two people, does not imply the beginning or ending that only time can bring. Rather it uses the Enso’s principle of awareness within a single moment to bring attention to one single human connection, and in doing so places the importance not on the narrative of time but the lived experience. Shattuck refers to this as the stereoscopic principle, which “abandons the portrayal of motion in order to establish a form of arrest which resists time. It selects a few images or impressions sufficiently different from one another not to give the effect of continuous motion, and sufficiently related to be linked in a discernible pattern” (Farr, 33). Though Surround Me uses time as a reference to memory, history plays a larger role in projecting our “binocular vision of
mind to hold contradictory aspects of things in the steady perspective of recognition, of relief in time” (Farr, 35).

Identity:

Connectivity as I have been talking about the concept, in some ways seems to eliminate individual experience in favor of the broader lived experience of more than one’s self. However, this is not entirely accurate on several accounts. In her film Tacita Dean, Roni Horn states that we are “locked into an abstract context of technical progress we climb and endless ladder of previously unexperienced clarities. Each fresh degree of definition gives retrospective approximation and a continuously new version of old. This succession permeates both individual and collective, recalibrating awareness, altering identity itself” (Farr, 28). In this way we proceed by focusing on the first person point of view when understanding the identity of the experincer throughout an experience. Familiarity plays a certain role in recognizing a conscious experience, which also requires a high level of self-awareness so that things are not experienced passively. The lived experience from the first person view calls into question seemingly unimportant variables such as material choice and how that contributes to a tale of identity. As I have previously stated, the intentionality of looking determines the level of experiences one may or may not have when looking at my work. This same intentionality of looking, or seeing applies to the way in which I approach each
material. *Last Night I Dreamt I Grew Wings*, shown in my thesis exhibition, are individual pieces of handmade flax paper installed as a suspended group. Each piece of paper was formed into a dome shape as it dried, quietly hinting at a circular becoming. The paper has been elevated to art object rather than an art carrier. The pieces are a nude, almost flesh color, and like my own flesh they bend, crack, tear and age. *Last Night I Dreamt I Grew Wings* is an acknowledgment and tribute to the importance of paper in my daily practice. The paper takes on my characteristics, either by mark making, or as in this case, by the formation of fibers into a single sheet. *Last Night I Dreamt I Grew Wings* requires active looking from myself as the maker as well as from the viewer, and in that way forms a connection unlike any other. The circle is no longer defined; it is more open than it ever has been which tells of self-awareness within my own mind and within a viewer’s mind that we share a moment of enlightenment. The flax paper is suspended in varying stages of life: some touch the ground and others hang high above my head as if frozen in a moment of action. It is becoming and uncoming simultaneously, as is the nature of identity.
Sometimes I Feel Like Wind Trapped Inside a Jar, also part of my thesis exhibition, was created in response to the idea of the circle evolving. There are fifty-two prints hanging on the wall opposite the flax installation; each one holds an embossed, active circle in its center of white paper. The embossment has no ink, as once again the paper itself has become the art object. The image lives and moves as part of the paper, they are one in the same. Multiple lines can be seen at different thicknesses and lengths to form the image of a sphere. The sphere rests among a protective wall of paper, which reflects the sphere’s movement as an obliging ripple. Each embossment is held away from the wall as if ready to fly away with the next gust. They cannot, however, leave one another anymore than we can leave ourselves. They will stay inside their jars in contained support of myself and anyone else who ventures near enough to truly look at them. Connection to other human beings is a natural born desire, however understanding and fostering those connections requires more than absent thought.

Human, shared, portrait, connection, ordinary, honoring, acknowledging, meditation, experience, exchange, poetic, life, change, imperfect, perfection, lived, moment, individual, symbol, visible, hidden, trace, repetitive, satisfied, ritual, multiple, memory, remembering, conversation, awareness, perception, feeling, tolerance, surround,
impression, consciousness, alive, voluntary, habit, me, may I, identity, definitions, names,
I, context, inexperienced, clarities, retrospective, continuously, collective, altering, new,
old, approximation, emotion, night, constructs, discovery, narrative, suggestion, us,
fragments, interdependence, personal.
Bibliography


