

Extinction

Matthew Eickhoff

Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Fine Arts in Visual Art

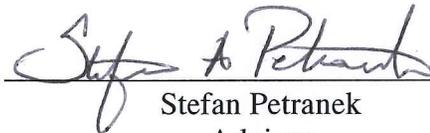
In Herron School of Art and Design

Indiana University

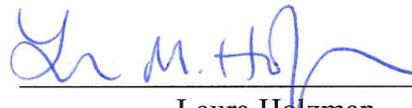
May 2015

By
Matthew T Eickhoff
Master of Fine Arts

Herron School of Art and Design
IUPUI
Indiana University

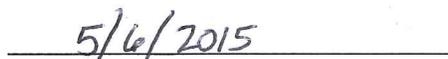

Stefan Petranek
Advisor


Anita Giddings
Committee Member


Laura Holzman
Committee Member

Accepted: May 2015


Professor Valerie Eickmeier
Dean of Herron School of Art and Design


Date

Matthew Eickhoff

Introduction

Four days before I began Herron's graduate program, my close friend, and former boss, Ed Funk committed suicide. This event would forever influence my graduate research and my artwork. I began to search for a deeper understanding of life through the pursuit to tell a story and a desire to explore new materials. Up to this point, painting had primarily dominated my approach to art. The goal of my Master's work was to break through the divisions of artistic medium and discover an overarching theme that would refine myself as an artist independent of medium.

I create narratives by combining truth with myth that emerges from personal and cultural influence. These influences are then reflected back in the imagery I compose by collaging multiple mediums together. The personal journey is why I make art. Cultural influences such as history and science are woven together with personal influences to make an imagined reality that carries a message to the viewer.

Extinction is the message and theme that connects all of the artwork created for my Master's thesis: *The Aquarium Experiments*, *The Lewis and Clark Map*, *The Backdrop Environments*, *The Expedition Portraits*, and the book *Extinction*.

Extinction is about the finality of death; time is explicitly connected to the idea of extinction symbolizing an infinite loss of biological life. It contains all of history itself becoming flattened into the final death of mankind. Extinction touches both humans and animals simultaneously. On its largest scale extinction is a warning, and in its most direct way it reflects my personal journey through loss.



Fig. 1: *Aquatic Desert*, Aquarium Experiments I, 2013, Photograph of Assemblage, 22” x 17”

Filling an Aquarium

During the weeks that followed Ed’s death, drawing became the most important way to work through the flood of ideas: internally how I felt about Ed’s death, externally how I found myself immersed in academia, and personally how I felt tied to keeping Dolphin Papers (Ed’s business) running. Drawing cut through the clutter of everything, because it connects the hand to the unconscious thought. I was inspired to purchase an aquarium to make environments, which could be photographed, and possibly used with drawing. This simple act of running out to the store and buying a common household object proved invaluable to my newly expanding ideas of how to create art without painting. After filling the aquarium with water, oil, and dye, I lit the aquarium with varying colored lights and

began photographing for hours with only a few elements to manipulate. The results from this initial series were revealing. I had removed painting from my artistic toolbox, but I had created abstract photographs which resembled painting by using the main ingredients associated with painting: oil, water, pigment, and light.

The aquarium is a vessel that holds water, and allows us to view underwater life. It captures our imaginations, while providing a soothing white noise that gently relaxes viewers. During the *Power of the Myth* series, Joseph Campbell gave this example to Bill Moyers when discussing the symbolism of water.

The whale represents the personification, you might say, of all that is in the unconscious. In reading these things psychologically, water is the unconscious. The creature in the water would be the dynamism of the unconscious, which is dangerous and powerful and has to be controlled by consciousness. (Campbell)

Joseph Campbell is a cultural historian that uses art history to connect everyone in the world through universal themes held in religion and myth, but he's aware of the deeper symbolic power held within an object, or animal. By using an aquarium, I began to harness all the possibilities of the unknown within 4 glass sides and a bottom by allowing anything I placed inside to hold presence. A similar idea was used in *Prodo*, Herron's M.F.A. collaborative group show that curated everyday objects as a fabricated truth. Unlike the curator turned artist Fred Wilson, *Prodo* used the everyday object as a way to point to the presentation of objects as the blurring of truth and fiction. Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* used real objects from the museum's collection and rearranged these objects together in new ways to convey a poignant message of slavery or oppression not initially present in the objects alone, but connected to the presentation of these objects. This power in the

presentation began to change my view of how objects are connected to the past in a manner that related to my sensibility of collage.

Filling the aquarium became a way for me to build an image and to endlessly play in the camera attempting to capture a scene for the narrative I was writing. As I revisited these *Aquarium Experiments*, I would continually add objects into and around the glass box: slide projections, paper drawn cutouts, dryer lint, motor oil, toy animals, telephone cords, and dead batteries. By using disposable household items, I began to reference our own self-inflicted threat of extinction living in our throwaway culture. Through this process of making tabletop assemblages and shooting photographs of them all night in an effort to capture my internal vision, I found a similarity between painting and photography.

Lewis and Clark in Space

About three weeks prior to Ed's death, I had watched Ken Burn's documentary "Lewis and Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery". What really stuck with me about Lewis and Clark's journey was how Meriwether Lewis was plagued with financial debt, abused opiates and alcohol, and eventually committed suicide. I was overwhelmed by the idea that this man, who was considered an American legend in his own lifetime, killed himself. The name Meriwether Lewis is forever attached to thousands of road signs crossing the United States, and it evokes a hero's journey of exploration. Yet he lived with depression, and found himself drowning in debt, abusing opiates and alcohol until his suicide.

Ed and I discussed Lewis and Clark, and we researched their historic journey together. Weeks later, after Ed's own suicide, my personal connection to Lewis's story became galvanized and it resonated with me on a deeper level. The narrative that I wanted to tell was

the story of Lewis and Clark, but it would take me an entire year to fully abandon all of the signposts and details of their historic journey and replace them with my own. During that first year, Lewis and Clark's journey was a placeholder for the narrative I was attempting to write. The working title was *Lewis and Clark in Space*; this title was the simplest way to convey the style and themes I was pursuing through the imagery being made with the pencil and with the camera lens.



Fig. 2: *ReVision of a Map of Lewis and Clark's Western Tracks*, 2013, Digital Print 8' x 44"

My initial research revolved around Lewis and Clark, but grew to encompass the 19th Century Native American history, and specifically their myths. Out of this intensive investigation into both cultures, I created a *Re-Vision of a Map of Lewis and Clark's Western Tracks Across the Western Portion of North America from the Mississippi to the Pacific Ocean*. Samuel Clark drew the original map, which had been based on William Clark's original drawings, estimations, and maps from the expedition. The map I recreated was drawn completely in digital form and included current boundaries of Native American

Reservations, and the United States. William Clark had made estimations of Native American populations, and so I created visual representations of these population sizes. The most difficult aspect of recreating the map was to actually locate and highlight the original trail taken by Lewis and Clark. It was not as clear in the original document, and it required checking several sources to confirm their specific location while they were lost along the Lolo pass. Initially I foresaw the map becoming an index for the images in the book I was writing visually.

Eventually, my research into Lewis and Clark led me to read “*Native American Myths and Legends of the Pacific Northwest*”, a book of myths gathered from different Native American elders from the Pacific Northwest by Ella E. Clark. Many of these myths describe how the landscape was transformed by events directly reflecting a human drama, often without a clear morality lesson. The myths or tales told to Ella Clark by elders of various Native American tribes were passed down by word of mouth. With each oral storytelling, these messages conveyed an aspect of truth that was broken down and eroded by time. The Native American myths are an attempt to give a message of morality for others to heed, while providing an explanation of how the landscape was created.

Researching both Lewis and Clark, and Native American myths led me to question how we create myth from history. Even the journey of the Corps of Discovery has over 200 years standing between the historical event, and the way contemporary authors, directors, governments, and Native Americans frame the past. Although Lewis and Clark’s journey is not a myth, aspects of their story stand out to the same scrutiny of what is truth. Not much is known about the life and death of Sacajawea, however since there are only a few written

accounts citing her interactions with the Corps of Discovery, she has become more significant because of what she represents to people living today.

When it came to writing my own story, I wanted to give just enough information for each panel or scene in the book without spending too much time clarifying the scientific or logical reasoning of the events. Similar to the way Sacajawea's factual history has been transformed into a hero's myth by the word of mouth accounts surrounding her past, my work began to use these missing gaps as a way to turn history into myth.

Shattering the Skeleton

The goal for myself was to create a book, and that pursuit was fueled by a motivation to explore artistic mediums. At one point my intention was to give a detailed account of the Lewis and Clark Expedition told against the backdrop of space, however the more I tried to stay true to this idealized vision of the past, the further I distanced myself from the deeper symbolism that connected the expedition to personal events. Once I was able to shatter the skeletal structure of Lewis and Clark's story, I began to understand that the narrative I had been developing was more about the pursuit to exist, to overcome death, and to become forever transformed by the exploration.

Combining the medium of drawing and photography became the most natural way to explore, and eventually I began combining digitally drawn elements with photographs. A Wacom Tablet allowed me to connect and edit the photograph using Photoshop in new ways. For example, I added a digitally drawn whale skeleton to a photograph I had taken from the first time I visited Canon Beach, Oregon in 1988. The result of which became *Sacajawea and the Sea Monster*, this digital print blurred both mediums together by showing off a contrast in

the way the forms were created. These blended realities play off of each other convincing the viewer that it is both potentially real, and suspiciously fake. Similar to the way historical accounts can become blurred by the way we see them through contemporary context.



Fig 3: *Sacajawea & the Sea Monster*, 2013, Digital Drawing on Photograph, 20” x 11.5”

The image of *Sacajawea and the Sea Monster* goes even further than just a technical discovery with the blending of mediums. The imagery itself is based in the historical account of William Clark learning of a beached whale near what is now Canon Beach, Oregon. Sacajawea insisted on traveling with the men because she had never seen one before. When the group arrived, the whale had decomposed, and was picked clean by other people and scavenger animals. Clark traded with a local tribe for some of the blubber to add to their elk meat. (Lewis and Clark)

The pursuit to connect the imagery together into a coherent narrative has been the driving force to create the book; the pursuit to find truth for myself in the act of creating the book outweighed the actual end goal of the book itself. Joseph Campbell describes this pursuit to tell a story as something larger that is universal to all humanity:

“Anyone writing a creative work knows that you open, you yield yourself, and the book talks to you and builds itself. To a certain extent, you become the carrier of something that is given to you from what have been called the Muses-or, in biblical language, “God.” This is no fancy, it is a fact. Since the inspiration comes from the unconscious, and since the unconscious minds of the people of any single small society have much in common, what the shaman or seer brings forth is something that is waiting to be brought forth in everyone.” (Campbell)

To bring forward a message that was relevant to a majority of people, while still remaining true to my inner voice was difficult to reconcile. Without this pursuit and an artistic structure to produce imagery, the final goal of a bound book could have easily been swayed or dismissed by external influences. In many ways my exploratory art practice mimicked Lewis and Clark’s exploration, both taking nearly two years to complete, and ending with jubilation and celebration in the telling of the story.

The Expedition is a Funeral

There was no funeral for Ed held in the traditional manner. Generally one thinks of a funeral as a public showing, a displaying of a body, or a church service where messages of salvation are delivered. For Ed, there was only a gathering of his closest friends, in his studio, and in his music room. Although Ed was an artist, at the very end of his life he lived for music, or at least the pursuit of capturing the moment. Ed would have weekly jam sessions

with a very small gathering of friends, and in those moments of chaotic dissonance and erratic simpatico, music was created.



Fig 4 : *&Ecer ~ Expedition Portrait*, 2014, Photograph, 24” x 36”

This gathering of a group of friends led me to create *The Expedition Portraits*, which consists of photographs taken on Ed’s camera (Nikon D1-the first DSLR made by Nikon), and given to me by Ed just one week before his death. In these portraits, Ed’s closest friends are seated in front of one of his paintings. After sizing the photographs, and printing them out, I added a hand drawn layer depicting each person wearing an animal/space suit. The final

image is a portrait of Ed's family, but they've been transformed into members of an expedition.

The idea of *The Expedition Portraits* was to create a framework to unify this unspoken family group together. One person in particular who sat for a photo session in front of Ed's painting began to laugh at something said. The photograph shows the face of a man trying not to laugh, but it suggests a man trying not to cry. The success of this portrait lies within the duality held in place by the restraint of facial muscles and overlaid with this flattened cartoonish space suit attempting to protect the person from feeling the influence of the surrounding landscape (Ed's painting). All of this percolates into one image flattened by the process of photographing and printing, and finally displayed in the book as well as on the gallery wall. It is this photograph that succeeds in not only creating a strong image through rigorous experimentation of mediums, but it is successful by including supporting contextual elements seen and unseen (Ed's Paintings and Camera). A funeral for a man who will never be forgotten by those he held closest.

There between the backdrop and the figure, ideas about what Roland Barthes defines as studium and punctum appear and play against each other. Barthes work *Camera Lucida* is well known in many artistic fields. It helped shape and redefine how we talk about the power of the photographic image. Studium is loosely defined by Barthes as the intent of the photographer to code elements of the photograph that can be identified, whereas the punctum is the unidentifiable happenstance that occurs without knowledge or intent to the photographer. The punctum punctures, and marks itself in the areas of the photograph that remain interesting to the viewer beyond the hand of the photographer.

The background in *The Expedition Portraits* was intentionally coded and placed there by myself or chosen by the intended sitter for the portrait. The foreground of the hand drawn suit is placed over the original image and is also seen as intentional. It is the hovering between these two studium elements and the shifting between the identifiable and unidentifiable that creates a punctum for the viewer to decipher.

The Expedition Portraits when hung together and next to *The Backdrop Environments* create a visual play for the audience to interpret the figures and the landscape. Both series are hung in a similar manner, attached at the top, and allowing the paper to hang down freely like large pages in a book. The portraits evoke a solemn feeling as the explorers that once trekked the landscapes. As the viewer walks in between the large *Environment Backdrops*, the viewer is then placed inside the world created for the book. The viewer and audience are immersed in the myth of the story, with or without their knowledge of what they are experiencing.

The Backdrop Environments

I was drawn to what Barthes describes as the punctum existing in late 19th Century photographs of Native Americans, but it was the hand of the painter revealing the truth situated behind the subject of Native Americans. These early photographs were an attempt to create an authentic looking environment for the Native Americans to appear as though they were photographed on the Plains of North America. The backdrops subtly reveal the hand of the painter and the realization that they were posed in front of faux-landscape.

This discovery of the punctum as an element of fabricated truth is what led me to begin painting large 80” x 9’ backdrops. My initial pursuit was to depict the manifestation of

a thunderbird returning to our contemporary world to wreak havoc upon the Earth. At first I was only concerned about the creation of a backdrop, but that soon turned into designing and fabricating a costume resembling a thunderbird.



Fig 5: *The Endless City*, 2014, Acrylic Painting on Paper, 80” x 9’



Fig 6 & 7: *The Backdrop Environments*, 2013-14, Acrylic Painting on Paper, 80” x 9’

Since the *Endless City*, I’ve continued to paint more backdrop images. There was something about returning to painting that felt reassuring to me. Even though I have not created more costumed figures to pose in front of the rest of the backdrops, the backdrop series became more focused on creating the illusion of another world. They loom large over the viewer, both inviting them to step forward and remaining a clear, separate illusion. They appear vertically in portrait format, however the subject matter consists of all landscapes with no figures. The figures are the viewers walking in front of the backdrops, like giant pages from an even larger book floating in the gallery space. The viewer becomes a part of a larger diorama by moving in and out of the environments.

The Book *Extinction*

The book is the culmination and the result of an internal drive to create a story that encompassed Lewis and Clark’s journey, Native American myth, and my personal loss. The narrative that came out of this pursuit was almost entirely written visually. Although I attempted to solve the story through writing alongside drawings in my sketchbook, none of

those attempts provided lasting results. The story was primarily composed and edited through the act of storyboarding different images together. Similar to frames in a movie, each scene was either hand drawn, photographed, or created through digital collage.

Stylistically the drawings, photographs, and paintings created as part of *Extinction* depict all stages of artistic creation, from the very earliest inception of an idea held in the graphite-drawn line to the fully developed photographed image that had been poured over in formal and conceptual thought. The images in the book move from one medium to the other, showing the shifting of extremes as the viewer turns the pages. The book unifies and equalizes all the mediums I utilized by the simple fact that all of the images are printed on the same paper, in the same scale, and then bound together. The narrative of the book is subtly embraced and held together by the fabric of Ed's shirt, held together by this symbol of friendship, reinforcing the message of absence and connecting it to the potency of an object.

The following is a walk through of the book and the story telling narrative that has been brought out of the images created.

The cover of the book is of an owl face. It is carved into a large board made of spruce pine. The eyes of the owl are empty and open, displaying the black paper that is the end sheet for the beginning of the book. The book is approximately 70" wide (when opened) by 24" tall. Upon opening the book, the inside cover displays a black, silver, gold marbled paper, with waves moving from the inside towards the outside. The first page is an end sheet, of black paper, and when turned we see the title *Extinction* through cutout shapes in vellum paper. There are three sheets of vellum with varying cutout shapes that form the word "EXTINCTION". As the viewer turns the vellum pages, the cutouts forming the word "EXTINCTION" are destroyed and made extinct by the act of turning the pages. The word

and the action are connected. After the first 3 pages of vellum, we see one last vellum page that has a hand drawn image of Indianapolis underwater, and we can see through this overlay to a digital print of what looks like a dessert. These first four vellum pages are a prelude as they open into the story.

The story begins with the destruction of our livable planet Earth; we see how the things we leave behind kill off the animals. There is an exodus to leave the Earth and use a moon-base as a place to house the last vestiges of humanity. From there they launch an expedition team to find a new home. The expedition travels to Mars where other humans have attempted to terraform Mars, but there isn't enough time left and all of humanity's resources have become depleted. One of the crewmembers dies unexpectedly from appendicitis, which leads the expedition to bury him. Beneath this grave they discover an underground cave of enlightenment filled with time doors. As the crewmembers make their way through one of these time doors, they are transported to Astoria, a broken moon orbiting Jupiter.

This doomed broken moon is being pulled apart by a wormhole swirling at the center of Jupiter's Great Red Storm. From Astoria, the crewmembers decide to travel along a gravity river into the eye of the Great Red Storm. The expedition leaves behind a failsafe, or protector to find a way back in case their mission fails. The rest of the crew lands at Seaside, the edge of a precipice before entering Jupiter. There they must pay Coyote passage in order to enter the wormhole.

As we enter the wormhole, we see the center of the book, and it is the only image divided into a two-page spread that bleeds off the page.

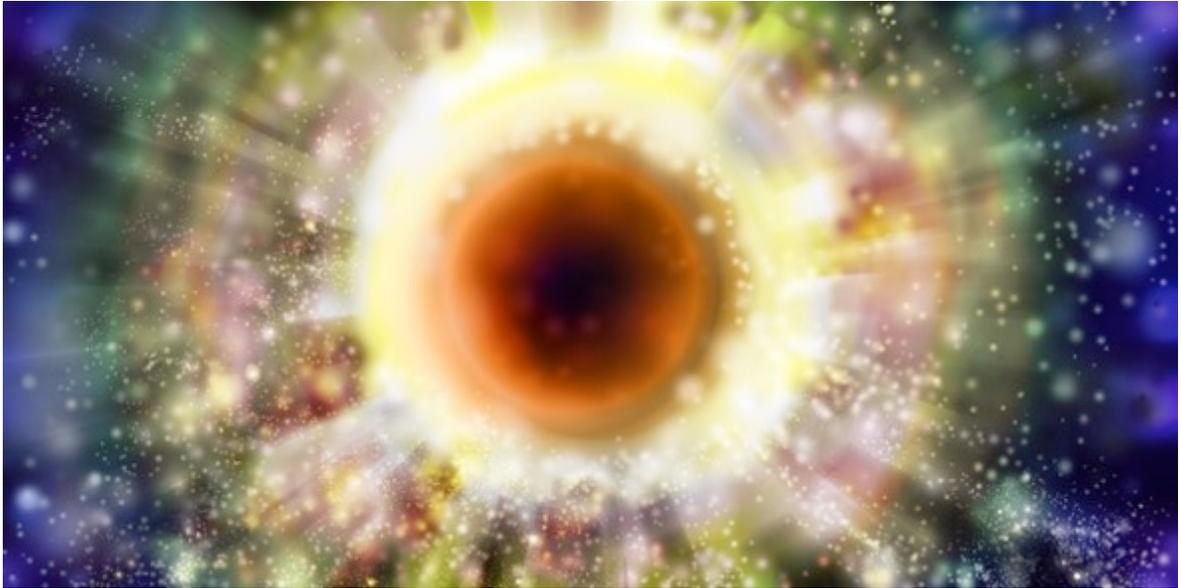


Fig. 8: *Center of a Wormhole*, 2013, Digital Drawing, 36" x 18"

On the other side of the wormhole, the expedition has arrived to Atheria, a world flush with natural resources. The crew members themselves have become transformed, they now wear suits that resemble the animals and the natural resources they lost on Earth. The expedition attempts to capture this new world's energy in order to bring it back and save Earth. This stealing from the landscape leads to their betrayal by the natives living on Atheria. The expedition is led down the wrong river, and over a gigantic waterfall. The crewmembers embrace their final fate as they fall to their death, sealing humanity's fate to extinction and all attempts at finding hope. We see a beam of light echoing the shape of the waterfall, and a well of souls gather beneath it. A being of pure light and energy grants them rebirth and transforms them into animal spirits, sending them back to reclaim and cleanse planet Earth of humans.

There is one last animal spirit, an owl, that returns to the failsafe as a reflection and memory of those he has lost. This last man is both Meriwether Lewis, and Ed Funk. He sits

with a bottle of pills, and a bottle of liquor contemplating his life's journey, surround by blue he contemplates suicide. He chooses death, and we see the last man's death. The last image is of a lifeboat or space capsule that floats above the Earth. It is both a casket and a final seed of hope for any future.

The story is not a happy tale, but it is one that reflects a celebration of death seen through this journey for survival. Larger aspects of human interactions with animals can be seen as the story moves from humans destroying animals to humans wearing animals as remembrance, and finally becoming the animal spirits that cleanse humanity. Also there is a thematic movement depicting larger groups of humans dwindling down to the last man.

The last two pages are grey, and include the colophon. The book ends as a mirror to the beginning. The black end sheet is next to a marbled paper with black, silver, gold, colors moving inward to outward. The back cover of the book is the same owl design carved into spruce pine, except it has been inverted. This owl imprint is referenced inside the story, when the last man sees his reflection as the owl. The owl eyes are open, and represent the two worlds traveled by the canoe shape situated between them.

The spine of the book uses a sage green t-shirt with a red, white, and blue target symbol that reads "The Who". I gave this t-shirt to Ed Funk 10 years ago, and he wore it throughout the time I had known him. It is with that shirt and symbol that holds the pages together and connects the wooden covers of the book.

The book *Extinction* uses many different mediums and artistic choices to tell its story. While the narrative does not illustrate every nuance depicted in the imagery, what does remain is the emotional resonance that lifts from turning the pages. The journey of discovery within the narrative and within the artworks varied mediums, have melt together to create a

pastiche of an epic myth. To create a myth, a truth must become fractured enough to believe in its power.

The power of *Extinction* is built on personal loss, reinforced with historical fact, merged into a science fiction fantasy. A book is an envelope of information, waiting to be opened. This book looks back at the viewer with the owl eyes that are connected to the last man. It is a warning of our own cataclysmic fate.

Extinction: the MFA Thesis Exhibition

Ed Funk helped reshape Fountain Square by purchasing the G. C. Murphy Building with Phil Campbell. Ed moved Dolphin Papers into the G. C. Murphy Building in 1999, and from there he and Phil renovated the entire building, level by level turning it into the Murphy Arts Center. So much of the emotional weight and themes in the work *Extinction* relate to the loss and the absence of Ed Funk. I felt strongly that returning to the Murphy Arts Center to show this work would be the most appropriate venue. The audience has changed since the Murphy Arts Center's early years. Ed's name is all but forgotten, or even known to many that traverse the hallways.

As I was installing this show, I came to the conclusion that this was to be my last show at the Murphy Arts Center. The work was so connected to loss, and spoke so efficiently about the removal of people to a place that there was nothing left for me in the Murphy Arts Center. Although the entirety of *Extinction* is not about my personal attempt to overcome loss, it was at the core of the work.

The Mt' Comfort gallery space is a long narrow room, which left little room to hang *The Backdrop Environments*, as I had initially envisioned. However I made use of the white-

cube, empty hallway right outside the gallery space to create a space which passers-by would be forced to experience. In the hallway I used two backdrops that were nearly devoid of color, and consisted of repetitious forms, alluding to a decayed civilization painted in black, white, and gray. These two backdrops: *The Endless City*, and *Beneath the Moon*, created a dull yet dynamic feeling while in the hallway, exploiting the fluorescent white light that cast a very cold vacant feeling on the audience. As viewers looked into the gallery, they are welcomed with the sight of warm lighting, which highlighted a lush green river valley backdrop entitled *Columbia River Gorge*. Along the left and right side, seven digital prints on paper from *The Expedition Portrait* series hung down like banners from simple strips of wood.

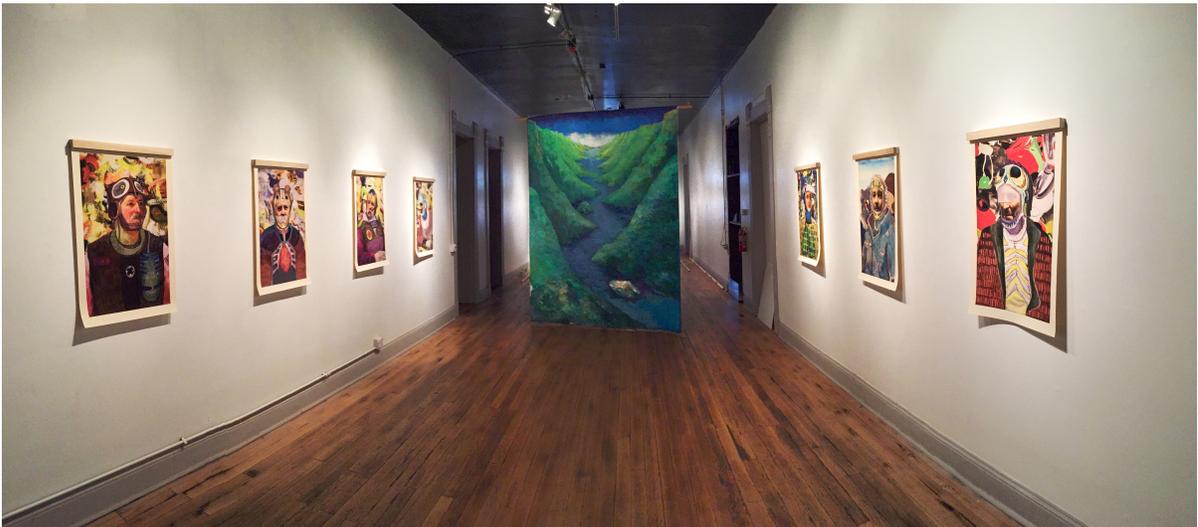


Fig 9: *Extinction*, (Installation View) 2015, Photograph at Mt. Comfort, Murphy Arts Center

The second half of the gallery is seen once the viewers pass by the large backdrop, and on the opposite side a change of environment can be seen in context to the front side.

The backside shows a red-skied, desolate, desert-like canyon, named for one of the moons of Jupiter: *Ganymede River Canyon*.

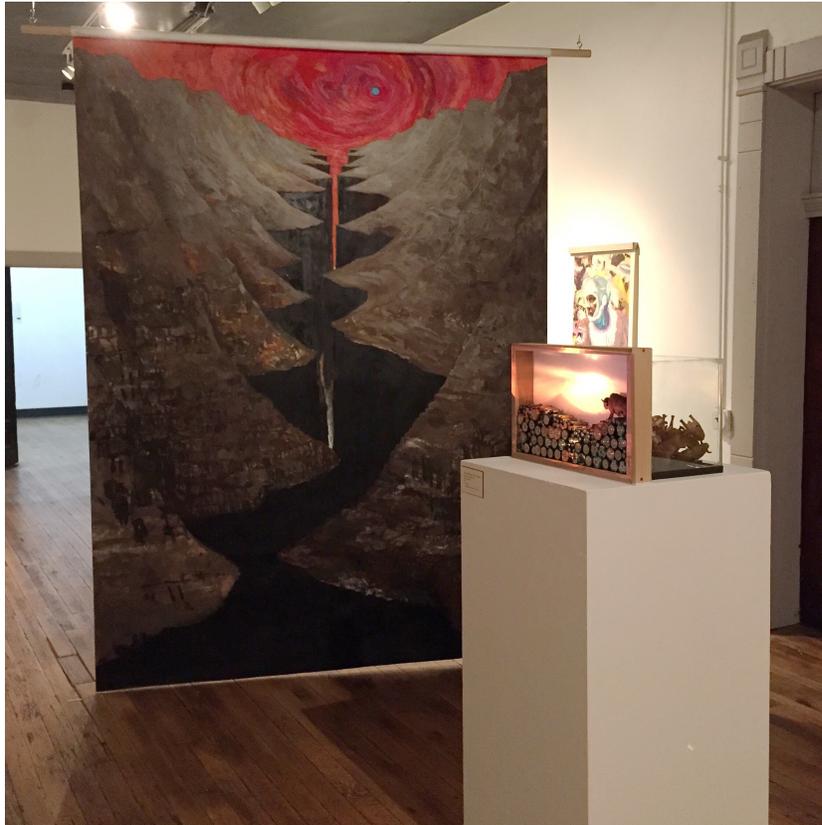


Fig 10: *Extinction*, 2015, Photograph of *Last Bison Left in Japan* and *Backdrop Environment*

Next to this backdrop sits a pedestal with an aquarium assemblage on top, which has one continuous projection from an old slide projector sitting on a shelf. The aquarium is filled with about 40 toy plastic bison, turned upside down. Next to this sits a wooden rectangle the same size as the aquarium filled a third of the way high with dead batteries of different voltage. The dead batteries create a landscape with one bison standing near the edge. A slide projection of Mt. Fuji near sunset, taken by Ed Funk, touches and fills the matte plastic sheet with light.



Fig. 11: *The Last Bison Left in Japan*, 2014, Photograph of Assemblage, 20” x 11”

Next to this assemblage sits a long narrow table, with the book *Extinction* on top. On the wall behind the book hangs a large 8’ wide Lewis and Clark’s map, hanging down from simple magnetic wood strips very similar to the way the Expedition Portraits are hung. The opposite wall contains three storyboard shelves filled with smaller versions of the images contained in the book. The storyboard shelves were used in the story development as a way to figure out the final page order in the book.

At the very end of the gallery, and at the end of the table containing the book, a final backdrop hangs down depicting a pivotal moment from the book. A large waterfall with a predominately pink sky depicts one lone canoe drifting over the edge and into the long fall into the mist below. This was the final fate of the expedition inside the narrative of *Extinction*, and when the readings of the book began, the two were connected in the storytelling experience.

My initial thought was to allow visitors to interact, read, and draw their own conclusions based on the images alone. I had considered giving a reading of the story possibly near the end of the show, but almost immediately I found myself giving readings to the audience. The first reading occurred very naturally out of a willingness to tell the story. Almost all of these storytelling moments began with only 2-4 people, and then a crowd of 12 or more would gather to listen.



Fig 12: *Book reading of Extinction in Mt. Comfort, 2015, Photograph, 5” x 5”*

This storytelling aspect gave an unexpected performative quality to the artwork that solidified the myth. The ending of the story is tragic, and many listeners felt the weight of that loss of humanity at the end, leaving them with a message similar to the way Native

American stories would be told at a campfire as entertainment and as a warning. One audience member approached me after a reading, thanking me for keeping the art of storytelling alive. This had not been my initial intention, however it became an important component to the book.

It appears that the book *Extinction* has a new life beyond this one event. It has the potential to grow a larger audience with future shows, and continued readings given to more people. With each telling of the story, the words I use shift, change, and alter slightly, giving a fractured truth to the story that travels with the audience.

The End

The last time I saw Ed was in a dream the morning after he had died. In the dream I first see darkness, a black-grey void with an owl flapping its wings in place. Even though it is dark and so dimly lit, I can see every detail of the owl's wings. The owl is beating its wings in place without moving forward. It is flying at such a slow pace, every second feels like seven minutes.

As the owl moves in slow motion, I begin to see that the owl's head is being pushed into a vertical wall of snow. It is nearly silent except for the slowed down flapping of the owl's wings. It is a delayed thunderclap, distorted with time, and out of synchronicity with my vision.

I turn away from this vision.

I turn my head to the left and see Ed. He's wearing a grey, collarless shirt with a little owl's face stitched in yellow and orange thread located near his left clavicle on the shirt. Ed looks at the image I've just witnessed, and he says to me, "It's in the subtlety"



Fig 134: *Breathing Into a Wall of Snow*, 2015, Drawing, 20” x 13”

I turn back to look at the owl flying in the darkness, but it is no longer there. In its place is the impression of the owl’s face in the snow wall. Every detail and crystalline feather formation can be seen in the impression of the owl’s face in snow. The owl was gone; it had suffocated itself in the snow. This dream was Ed’s way of saying goodbye to me, and it was like a poem or a print, and it contained something of the unknown.

Perhaps it is impossible to identify the lines that divide personal and public myths, just as it is impossible to divide the varying mediums, styles, and storylines presented in my artwork. In the wake of loss there is always gain, just like in the wake of extinction there is creation. *Extinction* then becomes not just about the book, but also the messages held between the turnings of the pages, and between the layered experiences held within all art.

Through the act of bringing something into existence there is always a death, a mess occurs whether through blood or pencil marks, extinction is in the wake of creation and they press back and forth into one another to reveal form. The work of *Extinction* has grown out of the simple phrase *Lewis and Clark in Space*, but it has been boiled down to these fundamental natural forces pushing humanity endlessly in and out on the brink of existence.

Whether we are a child or an astronomer, we understand the magnitude in the blackness of space, a void without end. We can only understand the emptiness of space and the magnitude of extinction when we see the dying light of a million stars shining back at us through the night sky.

Bibliography

Barthes, Roland. "19." *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981. Print.

Campbell, Joseph, and Bill D. Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday, 1988. Print.

Clark, Ella E. *Indian Legends of the Pacific Northwest*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1953. Print.

Clark, William, and Samuel Lewis. "A Map of Lewis and Clark's Track, across the Western Portion of North America from the Mississippi to the Pacific Ocean : By Order of the Executive of the United States in 1804, 5 & 6 /." Map. *Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C.* Philadelphia: Bradford and Inskeep, 1814. Print.

Lewis, Meriwether and Clark, William. *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*. Abr. ed. Anthony Brandt. Washington, D. C.: National Geographic Adventure Classics, 2002. Print.

Lippard, Lucy R. "Exhibitionism, Minding the Museum." *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art and Place*. New York: New ;, 1999. Print.

The Journey of the Corps of Discovery. Dir. Ken Burns. PBS, 1997. Videocassette.