

***The Immortality of Images  
and the Beauty of a Finite Existence***

**Charissa Schulze**

BA, Printmaking & Art History

**Master of Fine Arts Thesis**  
Book Arts/Printmaking Program

The University of the Arts  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

May 10, 2013

This document was produced in satisfaction of the thesis requirements for the Masters of Fine Arts degree in Book Arts/Printmaking at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**Thesis Committee:** Hedi Kyle, Jennifer Rosner, and Susan Viguers

**Thesis Faculty:** Martha McDonald, Peter Kruty, and Susan Viguers

**Director:** Susan Viguers



*For my mother.*

## ***ABSTRACT***

My thesis examines the beauty of impermanence as it relates to the nature of the image, calling attention to the misleading longevity of art by exaggerating the inherent transience of traditional mediums. Through manipulating the ephemerality of my materials, specifically of paper and pigment, I ponder the beauty of a finite existence and question whether the innate desire to capture or preserve such beauty is truly the most compelling representation of it. What follows chronicles the genesis of my ongoing studio investigations into how best to enact this impermanence within the bounds of apparently lasting mediums.

## LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 1            Oscar Muñoz, *Project for a Memorial*, 2004 – 05; video installation, 7:39 minutes.
- Fig. 2            Oscar Muñoz, *Narcissi in Process*, 2010 (series 1994 and ongoing); screen-printed charcoal powder on water, paper, Plexiglass vitrines, installation view.
- Fig. 3            Charissa Schulze, *The Etching Vanishes: In Pursuit of a Fugitive Ink*, 2013; etching on found papers, 16 x 60 x 1 inches.
- Fig. 4            Charissa Schulze, *Tempus Florae*, 2012; pochoir, graphite on found paper, 25 panels, each 9 x 10 inches.
- Fig. 5            Charissa Schulze, *Tempus Florae*, two details.
- Fig. 6            Jim Hodges, *No Betweens*, 1996; silk, cotton, polyester, & thread, 360 x 324 inches.
- Fig. 7            Jim Hodges, *A Diary of Flowers*, 1994; ballpoint pen on paper napkins (60 elements), 50 x 72 inches, installation view.
- Fig. 8            Charissa Schulze, *Dearly Departed: The Origin of Painting*, 2013; unfixed photogram (salt print) with handmade box, 7.5 x 10.5 x 2 inches.
- Fig. 9            Charissa Schulze, *The Tears of Things*, 2013; hand-cut etchings, paste with MDF and book-cloth, 13.5 x 13.5 x 2.25 inches.
- Fig. 10           Charissa Schulze, *What Lies Between*, 2013; hand-cut etchings, paste, flower petal with handmade box, 8.25 x 7 x 1.75 inches
- Fig. 11           Charissa Schulze, *A thing of beauty*, 2013; pen & ink (in-progress), 49 x 27 inches.
- Fig. 12           Charissa Schulze, *A thing of beauty*, detail.
- Fig. 13           Charissa Schulze, *Ozymandias melancholia*, 2013; pen & ink with handmade cradle, 4 x 13.5 x 3.5 inches.

## ***Introduction***

My thesis revolves around the themes of time, beauty, and impermanence, looking specifically at the function of art as a remedy for loss. Artists have always tried to capture in art the things they know to be fleeting, and poets and writers have done the same with words. Yet nothing lasts forever; all things are mortal and eventually succumb to the passing of time and the whim of human memory. Of special interest to me is the futility of the creative act in the face of a universally destructive time, as contrasted with the innate human desire to leave some trace of our existence. Between these two oppositions lies the paradox of admiring the beauty of decay, a beauty that is caused or created by the very force that will destroy it: the ravages of time.

Through manipulating the ephemerality of traditional mediums, I investigate the value of permanence in the conceptual and aesthetic purpose of the image. By working to subvert the perceived immortality of art, I examine the nature of a beauty that oscillates between preservation and decay and challenge whether the preservation of beauty is truly the highest representation of it. Where I am limited in my means of achieving impermanence, I explore creative gestures that mirror the way that time simultaneously makes as it destroys, as well as create simulations of the effects I hope my studio investigations will one day yield.

My artistic practice has long been invested in the pursuit and utilization of traditional mediums that historically have traced the line between art and craft. During my undergraduate years, I pursued a course of study in printmaking, art history, and museum and gallery practices. In the arena of book arts, I could see a means of melding these three pursuits into a single artistic practice: drawing subject-matter from my research and history, and translating it through the handwork of printmaking and related crafts into the curatorial space of an artist's book or exhibition. The body of work I have made for my thesis is the fruition of this approach, the individual pieces comprising a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

## ***Material Impermanence***

Oscar Muñoz is a Colombian artist who investigates memory and transience through the use of ephemeral materials. These conceptual allegories often allude to the drug violence and political

unrest of his native Colombia, hinting at larger themes of mortality and the impermanence of memory. For his *Project for a Memorial* (2005) [fig. 1], Muñoz painted portraits from the newspaper of missing persons who had been “disappeared” by the government in Colombia. He chose to paint with brush and water onto the hot pavement of the street, racing to complete each portrait before the image evaporated. Muñoz filmed the creation and dissipation of each face, documenting the disappearances to be played over and over on the walls of a gallery. It is set up as a multi-channeled film, the beginning of each portrait staggered so that the hand of the artist moves from frame to frame as the portraits vanish in its wake (Muñoz, p257).

The materiality of Muñoz’s work is deliberately and overtly ephemeral. In *Narcissi in process* (2010) [fig. 2], Muñoz screen-printed his own portrait in graphite onto a shallow tray of water that slowly evaporated over the course of the exhibition. There can be no question that the existence of such an image is precarious. As a result documentation plays a significant role in his work. In an article by Canadian curator, Elizabeth Matheson, Muñoz is quoted as saying that he likes the idea of an ephemeral creation having “a lasting effect... that transcends the actual experience of the work (¶2).” He refers to this as the “poetic value” of the art, and this value is translated and preserved through the filming and photographing of his projects.

Like Muñoz, I am also working with impermanent materials, the key difference being that I seek to engender impermanence within the bounds of traditional mediums to create art objects that would otherwise be perceived as lasting. I struggle with the inherent deception of this endeavor. It’s possible that the etching I make to be ephemeral will initially be indistinguishable from a traditional etching. There is no way that I can know exactly how long or brief the existence of these impermanent prints will be. Ultimately the manner and pace of their deterioration is beyond the scope of my manipulations. I can do all in my power to augment the fragility of a sand castle; it is still incumbent on time to wash it away.

In the year leading up to my thesis, I was fortunate enough to have two internships in book conservation – one at the American Philosophical Society and the second at the Library Company of Philadelphia. It was a tremendous boon to work so closely with some of the centuries-old books and manuscripts in these two collections. My experiences only reinforced my belief that the decay of an object over time can be quite beautiful and visually compelling. I was

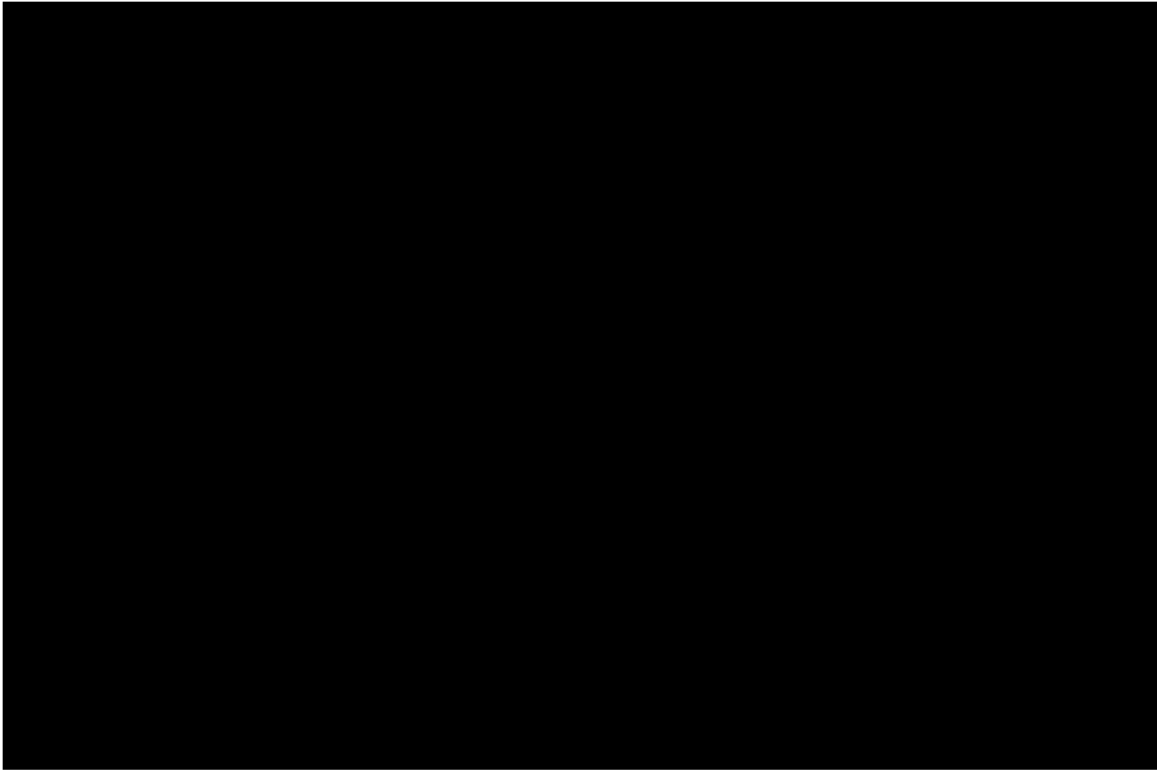


Fig. 1: Oscar Muñoz, *Project for a Memorial*, 2004 – 05; video installation, 7:39 minutes.

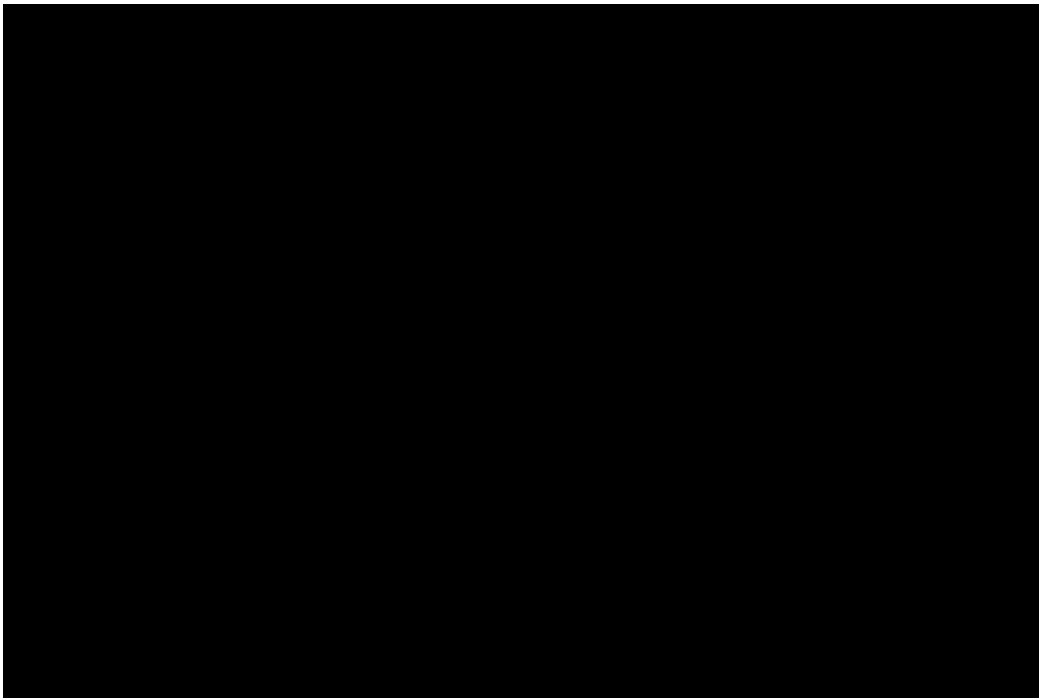


Fig. 2: Oscar Muñoz, *Narcissi in Process*, 2010 (series 1994 and ongoing); screen-printed charcoal powder on water, paper, Plexiglass vitrines, installation view.

both fascinated and conflicted to marvel at the beauty of something that was in the process of self-destructing. Nearly all of these objects bore the patina of their years; the fresh beauty of their original condition was long lost, obscured by rotting leather, the yellowing of paper, the fading of colours, or the ink burning words and images onto adjacent pages. Of course in a conservation department, the aim is to slow these destructive processes as much as possible, if not stop them completely. Still there is only so much that can be done. I was constantly reminded that, in spite of our best efforts, the beautiful decay I so admired would eventually progress beyond the point of being admirable, and those lovely ancient books would cease to be. All the same the precarious existence of these objects made them all the more beautiful and I began to wonder if this was a beauty that could be explored in my own artistic practice.

There is an important distinction for me between making something look old and making something that is actually not long for this world. I did not wish to merely imitate a visual quality, but to somehow capture the sense of transience that underscores time-worn beauty. It was also important to maintain an object of quality. The use of non-archival or “cheap” materials may lessen the longevity of a work of art, but I did not want the sensation of poor quality to overshadow that of transience. I wanted to create art objects that are as naturally ephemeral as possible, meaning that their impermanence stems from the attributes of their raw materials. For the purposes of exposing the fallacy of the immortal image, an impermanent etching still must be an etching.

In the instance of printmaking, and informed by my experiences working in conservation, I focused on the chemical deteriorations that ink and paper are particularly susceptible to: the contamination or acidity of paper and the fugitive or corrosive qualities of ink. I chose to work with etching in part because it had the capacity for detail that suited my aesthetic purpose, but also because the process dates back to the late-15th Century and many prints from that period, and since, are still quite well-preserved. Historically, I would classify an etching as a permanent image. I knew before I started that centuries of intending the art to last would not be so easily undone in a single semester. I also chose the medium of etching because etching ink is highly adaptable and can be manipulated without severely compromising its performance in printing. It is made by mixing a ground pigment into a viscous, oil-based binder, and I knew making my own ink would give me the most control over its attributes. I began researching fugitive pigments and what factors are detrimental to the archival quality of paper and ink.

## ***In Pursuit of a Fugitive Ink***

In researching fugitive colours, I read several 18th and 19th century texts on chromatics and artist's pigments. It made sense to look to this portion of history because I knew these scientists, pioneers in their field, would be working primarily with simple experiments on naturally sourced pigments; their findings would be expressed in terms of observation as opposed to the calculations and complex chemical formulas I might find in contemporary sources. My understanding of chemistry was rudimentary, and I felt that my own process of practical research and experimentation was more in the vein of these earlier scientists.

Of special interest to me were plant-based dyes, many of which are notoriously fugitive. It was my goal to find a colour that would be initially dark and would fade noticeably. Since I specifically wanted to make an etching ink that would disappear, I needed to find a fugitive dye that could also be precipitated into a lake – a process for converting a liquid dye into a dry pigment (see: Lawrence). The exact chemical binders and proportions necessary to make a lake pigment vary greatly depending on the dye. Fugitive flower dyes are not exactly convenient, nor conventional, and so I could find no formula or recipe for converting them into lake pigments. My studio investigations were thus reduced to the whims of trial and error and limited by what dyes were available to me. While I had wonderful results experimenting with fugitive colours in dye form, I was unsuccessful in precipitating any of them into a lake pigment and so could not make an etching ink of their fugitive colour.

Still I at least wanted to make a simulation of a vanishing ink. It had been my plan initially to print a series of etchings, one every week or so, leaving them to dry and fade in a sunny window. Shown together they would indicate the passing of time by the visible fading of the chroma as the prints got older. To simulate this effect I printed the etchings with a transparent ink and incrementally added a speck more black for each subsequent print that I pulled. I also sourced several old and found papers to use for the project, printing the lighter impressions on the older papers, to suggest that time and age were the “cause” of the simulated fading. I titled the project *The Etching Vanishes: In Pursuit of a Fugitive Ink* [fig. 3] – an allusion to the difficulty I had in actually making an ink that was noticeably fugitive.





Fig. 3: Charissa Schulze, *The Etching Vanishes: In Pursuit of a Fugitive Ink*, 2013; etching on found papers, 16x60x1 in.

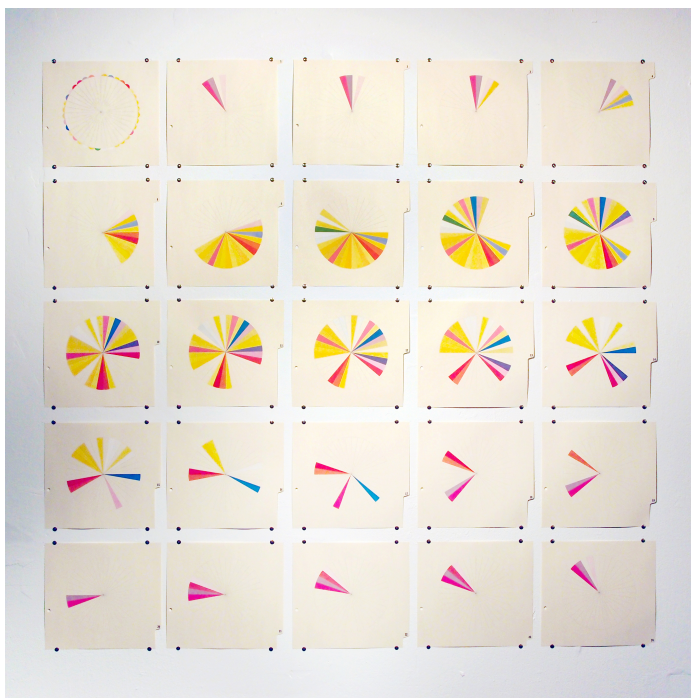


Fig. 4: Charissa Schulze, *Tempus Florae*, 2012; pochoir, graphite on found paper, 25 panels, each 9 x 10 inches.

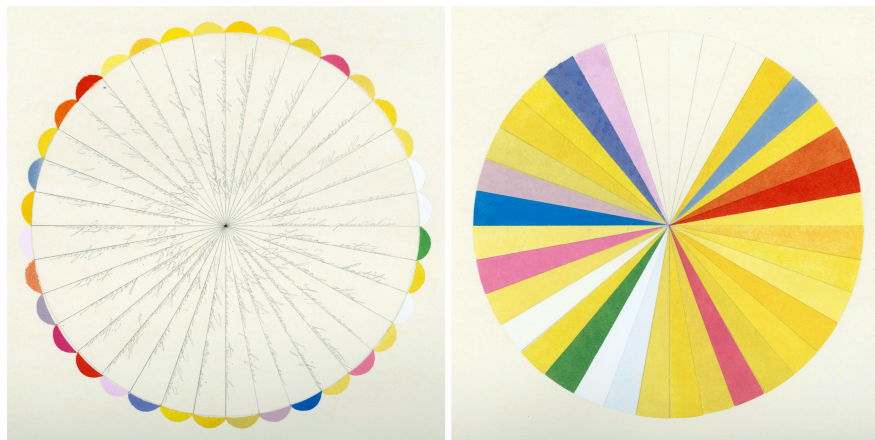


Fig. 5: Charissa Schulze, *Tempus Florae*, details.

## *The Clock of Flowers*

The themes of my thesis in many ways began with a clock of flowers devised by Carl Linnaeus, an 18th-Century naturalist and the father of modern taxonomy. In 1751, while working on his *Philosophia Botanica*, Linnaeus observed that certain species of flowers could be used to determine the time of day, based on the precise regularity with which they open and close their petals (Linnaeus, p392). Romantic as it may sound the clock was actually quite complex, requiring the methodical cross-referencing of several species in order to decipher the hour. For the Works in Progress exhibition last fall, I created *Tempus florum* [fig. 4], a visual rendering of the information presented in Linnaeus' time table. I drew a circle for each hour and stenciled pigment into specific segments within each circle, to indicate which flowers were open during which hours [fig. 5]. The meditative process of filling in each of those solid wedges of colour was itself a measuring of time and a reflection of the disparate lengths of time that the blossoms of each species would be open. As I sought to understand the particulars of how such a clock would function and be used, I became increasingly interested in the metaphorical time that is kept by the flowers – that is, the impermanence of all things and most especially of beauty.

Contemporary artist, Jim Hodges also explores notions of beauty and time through flowers. I read in an essay by curator Olga M. Viso that Hodges was first drawn to working with flowers because they are so easily written-off as decorative or overly sentimental, and yet can express such varied and significant meanings (p129). To address this concern, Hodges began making colossal curtains of cascading silk flowers, monuments that precariously trace the line between excess and fragility. Measuring 30 by 27 feet, *No Betweens* (1996) [fig. 6] is painstakingly constructed from thousands of delicate silk blossoms that have been flattened and sewn together. San Francisco curator Garry Garrels speaks to the investment of time in Hodges' work as a means to impart “a seriousness, a gravity of purpose, which holds our attention (p22).” In this way Hodges transmutes artificial flowers, a commercial imitation of natural beauty, into something that approaches the sublime in its scale and grandeur.

In *No Betweens* time becomes a constructive element, an ingredient or medium in the making of art – most obviously as time spent in creating the work. But time can also function as a material; one of captured moments. For his *A Diary of Flowers* (1995) [fig. 7], Hodges made hundreds of

drawings with cheap pens on paper napkins over a period of three years. The resulting collection of flowers vary greatly in style, referencing the myriad of moments during which they were created. The choice of everyday materials lends an ephemeral frailty to the collection that art-writer Skye Sherwin describes as evoking a “sense that it could simply dissolve or flutter out of existence (§2).” A napkin is a thing we know to be disposable, as are flowers; we only seem to appreciate them when they are clean and fresh.

The symbolism of the wilted flower is a wealth of metaphor. In the Vanitas paintings of 17th-century Holland, they served as both a *memento mori* and as a display of artistic virtuosity. The irony of the Dutch still-life is the immortality of images. When an artist creates an image of a flower, they are arresting, or at least slowing time, translating into a more lasting form a beauty which was fading. Yet there is a measure of futility in the very attempt of art to immortalize its subject. The image, while more lasting, is ultimately no more immune to the ravages of time than the subject whose beauty it might seek to preserve. The ink and paper crumble and fade as assuredly as the flower withers. The death of the image is only a more gradual one; so gradual that it often evades our notice and we think of the image of a flower as a thing to be preserved indefinitely as an object of art. I wanted to draw attention to this false immortality by making as impermanent an image as possible and so become an accomplice to that gentle violence that hastens the demise of my own creations.

In my pursuit of a means to this impermanence of the image, the writings of Sir John Herschel, a 19th Century scientist, and one of the major contributors to the development of photography, were especially helpful. Herschel wrote extensively about the light-sensitivity of natural dyes, and developed a photographic process based on the fugitive colours he extracted from plants: the anthotype (see: Herschel). Anthotypes are made by coating paper with the juices of a plant or flower, and then exposing the sensitized paper to the sun, with some sort of an object or “film” establishing the positive and negative areas of the image. Depending on the strength of the sunlight and the sensitivity of the dye, the exposure can take anywhere from a day to several weeks. The sun bleaches the colour from all of the areas exposed to its rays and when the contrast reaches its desired level, the print is done. Because the areas of fugitive colour that were protected during the exposure remain sensitive and are at constant risk of being incrementally erased by the action of light, the resulting image is impermanent, making it ideal for my purposes.

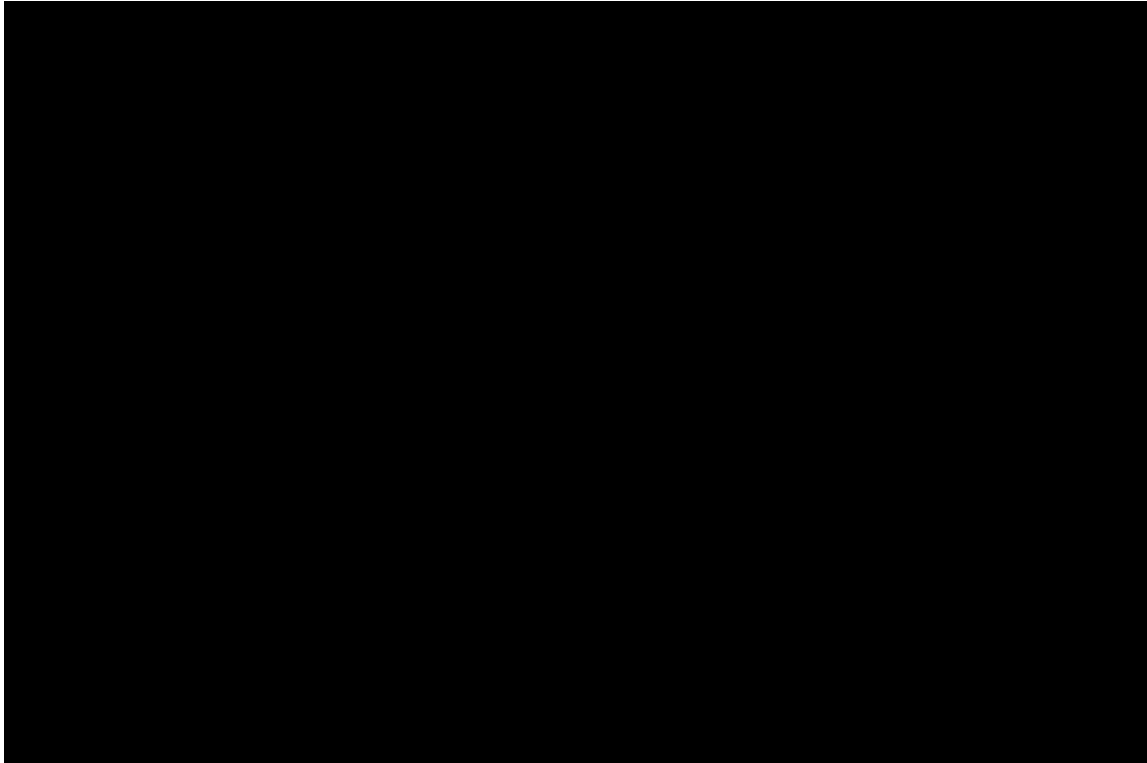


Fig. 6: Jim Hodges, *No Betweens*, 1996; silk, cotton, polyester, & thread, 360 x 324 inches.

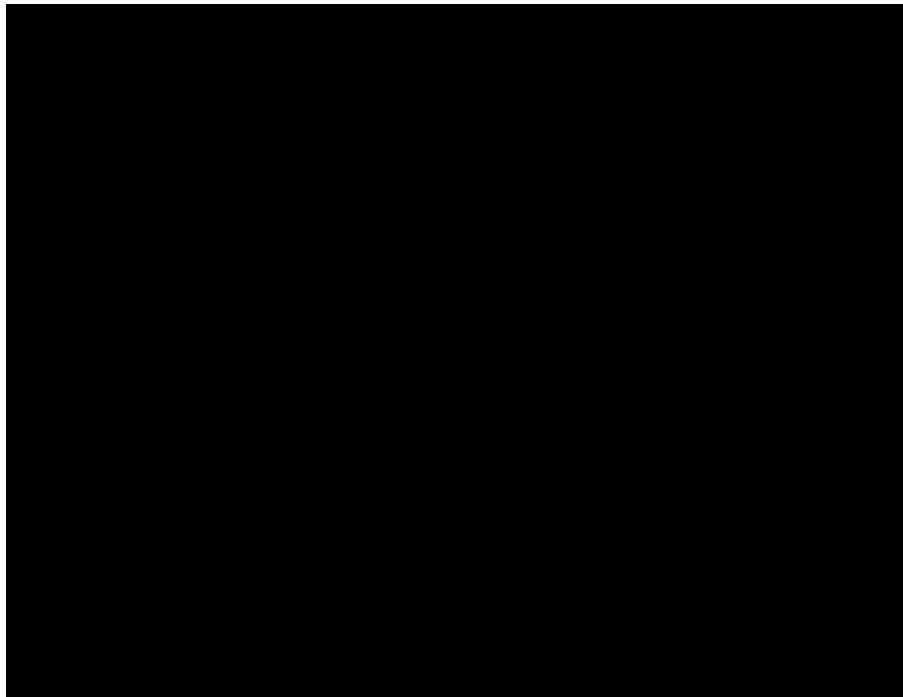


Fig. 7: Jim Hodges, *A Diary of Flowers*, 1994; ballpoint pen on paper napkins (60 elements), 50 x 72 inches, installation view.

I began searching for a species of flower that ideally would give a beautiful print and would have a short exposure, meaning also a rapid erasure. Herschel recommended the red corn poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*) as yielding a beautiful slate blue print that is quickly bleached by the sun (p187). Unfortunately, this was the dead of winter. Not only were flowers difficult and expensive to come by, but the sun itself was weak and intermittent – meaning that exposures could take as long as two months. Nevertheless I was stubborn and kept trying to find a source of these flowers; spring was fast approaching and I was hopeful that things would suddenly be in my favor. I was attached to the thought of working with flowers in this way; there was a certain symmetry to the idea of using the raw material of a flower in the creation of an impermanent image of one.

If nothing else, I thought I could fall back onto silver gelatin prints, simply leaving them unfixed, so they would remain sensitive to light. My approach to photography is specifically devoid of a camera. I instead choose to work with photograms and hand-drawn films, and so photography for me becomes an extension of printmaking: printing with light. This is where I began to realize how incredibly difficult it is to make an impermanent image within the bounds of traditional artistic mediums. I expected that unfixed photographs would rapidly fade to black when exposed to the light; I was wrong. Perhaps this might be the case with hand-mixed emulsions, but commercially produced photographic paper turned out to actually be quite stable. In my tests the highlights of the image would turn to a grayish pink, but would grow no darker; the blacks remained black. I thought perhaps the modern and incredibly efficient developer I was using was somehow contributing to this unexpected stability, and so I began experimenting with Caffinol developer, made from coffee, washing soda, and vitamin C. I got the idea from an old story I'd once heard about the Navy developing photos in their coffee during World War II. Internet research revealed that the process had a cult following and several websites complete with customized recipes. While it was neat to develop photographs with things from the pantry, the images were just as stable as those developed with traditional photo chemicals. Again I would need to look to history.

### ***The Preservation of Beauty***

British art historian Simon Schama writes that art “presupposes the elusiveness, if not the outright disappearance, of its subject (16).” The ancient Greeks tell a story of the origin of

painting: Pliny the Elder famously recounts in his *Natural History* the tale of the Corinthian Maid, who, being in love with a young man about to embark on a journey, traced the outline of his profile as he slept, capturing his likeness against the wall by the light of a candle (175 [35.151]). This simple and romantic gesture can easily be read as an act of surrogacy, the silhouette on the wall functioning as a proxy for the soon-to-be-absent lover; but there is an important distinction to be made: she does not draw her lover, but instead traces his shadow. The portrait on the wall could never replace the person she has lost. It is a delineation of her lover's very physical presence and when he has gone becomes the embodiment of his absence.

In my own *Origin of Painting (Dearly Departed* [fig. 8]), there is neither portrait nor painting, instead the tale of the Corinthian Maid is carefully handwritten onto translucent *washi* and contact-printed onto a piece of photographically sensitized paper. The silver chlorides in the chemistry of a salt print darken when exposed to the sun. The words exist as negative space within the resulting image: a shadow, captured in the reverse – not unlike the Corinthian Maid's tracing of her lover. Historically salt prints were among the earliest of photographic processes, dating from a time when a photograph was by nature impermanent; it had not yet been discovered how to chemically “fix” the image and prevent the silvers from continuing to darken by even the dimmest action of light.

The chemical processing of this photogram is left deliberately incomplete; and so it, like its historical predecessors, remains light-sensitive. To house this fugitive print, I constructed an enclosure that serves to preserve it in darkness, but also emphasizes a tension: the only way to see what the box contains is to participate, albeit incrementally, in the destruction of that content. Because it takes a few moments longer to also read what is written, the dilemma is prolonged. The box holds two photograms, one within and one without, each initially reflecting the respective future and past of the other. In time they will be identical.

As the Corinthian Maid sought to keep the likeness of her lover, the protective containment of the one photogram is indicative of the basic human desire to collect and preserve objects we deem significant, as though by holding onto and caring for such things in our own lives, we assure ourselves that those after us will do the same with what we leave behind. By keeping and remembering the history of others, we trust that our own histories will be kept and remembered by those in the future. Ultimately, what remains and survives of our lives and accomplishments is



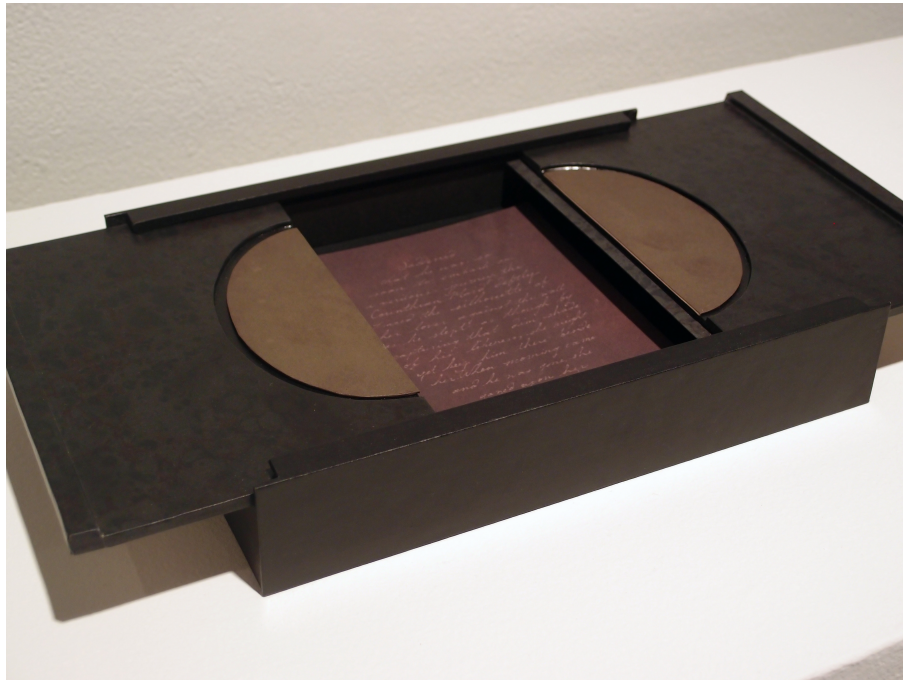


Fig. 8: Charissa Schulze, *Dearly Departed: The Origin of Painting*, 2013; unfixed photogram (salt print) with handmade box, 7.5 x 10.5 x 2 inches.



Fig. 9: Charissa Schulze, *The Tears of Things*, 2013; hand-cut etchings, paste with MDF and book-cloth, 13.5 x 13.5 x 2.25 inches.

beyond our control, yet it is somehow reassuring to tell ourselves that we, at least, are upholding our own side of this unspoken agreement.

I explore this with my piece, *The tears of things* [fig. 9]. I printed an edition of 220 etchings, each with seven petals that are cut out by hand. I carefully pasted each of those petals, one to the next, into a sculptural book and assembled they represented the largest number I've ever made of anything: upwards of 1,500. In this piece, the original is comprised of multiples, which will act quite literally as a diminishing element. The object itself is beautiful and took countless hours to print and construct, yet it is meant to be taken apart by those who encounter it in the gallery. Because I know all that went into making it, and because I know the significance of an etching, I assume that others will recognize the same value that I place on each of those petals. But it isn't up to me. I have only set the stage. The piece is accompanied by a simple, and purposely vague phrase: "one petal is yours to have." The petals are there for the taking, but whether they will be cherished or find their way to the bottom of a purse or pocket, only time can tell.

I wanted to create conflicting desires, between wishing to preserve the beauty of the original and the desire to possess a part of it. The construction of the book itself is tenuous and its disassembly requires a delicate touch. There is the potential for heightened destruction which is alluded to in the double reading of the title: tears and *tears*. It is really all a grand experiment between which of the desires will win and how someone might react or feel if they damage the book more than they meant to. The context of the gallery lends an almost illicit quality to the interaction, and there is a level of disbelief that an object made in this manner is truly meant to be deconstructed and scattered. The project highlights the futility of the creative act. It is left to others whether what we as artists make will be preserved or neglected; it is the relinquishing of a control that was never mine to begin with.

### ***Replication & the Multiple***

Over the winter break I created a piece for an exhibition in tribute to fiber artist, Lenore Tawney, who passed away in 2007 at age 100; in many ways this piece was the precursor to *The tears of things*. *What lies between* [fig. 10] was inspired by a petal I had found pressed in one of Lenore's books, a decrepit leather-bound volume from the 1720s. For the exhibition, we were each,



students and faculty, given materials and objects from Tawney's studio to use in the creation of our work. I found the petal carefully folded in a tissue and placed near the center of the book; an obvious effort to preserve that delicate object – yet, apparently forgotten. I can never be sure of her true intention – it is even puzzling that she chose to press the petal in a book that itself could be seen as a precious object. Nevertheless I found it significant that Tawney forgot the petal she took such efforts to preserve. In response I made a simple line etching of the petal, printing it onto *washi* so as to reflect the lovely fragility of the original. I printed 100 of these etchings, until I realized the petals had themselves become a book. I had never before used the multiple in this way for the creation of a singular object. The idea intrigued me.

Walter Benjamin's seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" touches on his idea of the "aura" of an art object and how it is diminished by the act of reproduction. The original is singular, authentic, has provenance and bears the trace of the artist's hand – all traits which factor into our awe of the art object (221). Printmaking has a strong history as a medium of reproduction, and yet in today's context we consider the print as a sort of multiple original; within an edition, no etching is any more or less original than any other. They are all hand-inked and pulled from the same plate, a matrix, which has been crafted and made by the hand of the artist. Even in their sameness because of the involvement of the hand in their production, they are rarely identical.

Replication is an inherent quality of art, but I do not mean to say that art is mere reproduction – only that there is always a subject, a source. Whether the work is visual or conceptual, something is always being captured, expressed, or conveyed; nothing is created out of nothing. Even painting and manuscript writing were once the Xerox of their day. With the advent of new replicating technologies, older methods become obsolete in their practical applications and assume the status of fine art mediums. Whatever system or technology of the copy is most current puts all precedents in perspective. We live in an age now when an image can have an immaterial existence, as pixels of light on a screen. For me this accentuates the object-ness of the older and now archaic means of image-making; an etching is more than merely an image, it is itself a *thing*. Mid-century American art critic Clement Greenberg, championed along with flatness, the specificity of mediums; that a medium ought to embrace and exemplify those



Fig. 10: Charissa Schulze, *What Lies Between*, 2013; hand-cut etchings, paste, flower petal with handmade box, 8.25 x 7 x 1.75 inches

qualities and effects unique to itself (86). The art objects that result from printmaking and early photographic processes can be created in no other way.

### ***The Word as Image***

With time drawing shorter, and studio investigations not always yielding the expected results, I was forced to consider other creative gestures that would mirror the way that time is simultaneously the cause and destruction of beauty. I started writing out the entirety of *Endymion* onto a single large sheet of paper [fig. 11]; beginning again from the top each time the page was filled. The poem, written by John Keats in 1818, is notoriously long: comprised of four books, each with approximately 1,000 lines. It famously begins "A thing of beauty is a joy forever (365)" and chronicles the longings and passions of Endymion, a beautiful Grecian youth who attracts the love of Cynthia, the goddess of the moon.

In writing out the poem by hand, the words assume a physical presence [fig. 12], and the weight of their duration is visited on the page that would attempt to contain their length. Layer after layer, the paper is weathered: the surface grows increasingly black, the thickness of the ink becomes silvery as it oxidizes, the weakened paper fibers buckle and tear. The paper is sculpted by the strokes of the nib, slowly wrinkling into an inky dark sea that reflects not the Elysian setting of the poem, but rather the subtle melancholy and longing that underscores the person of Endymion.

Each phase of the over-writing was beautiful as each stanza was eclipsed by the next, but, unlike Muñoz, I intentionally resisted the temptation of documenting them. I wanted to leave the possibility of regretting this decision; if there is something that is lost, then I wanted to feel that loss. Writing is often used as a means to preserving words, recording them. I was interested in how this attribute could be used to achieve the opposite result, in order to see what is lost and what is left in this physical rendering of Keats' poem. The result is as visually intelligible as every line of the poem being read aloud at once would be audibly discernible; the poem exists in its entirety, but is completely inaccessible. Obscured by its own length, the lyrical beauty of the words is reduced to an erosion of the materials. With the loss of legibility, the strokes of the



Fig. 11: Charissa Schulze, *A thing of beauty*, 2013; pen & ink (in-progress), 49 x 27 inches.

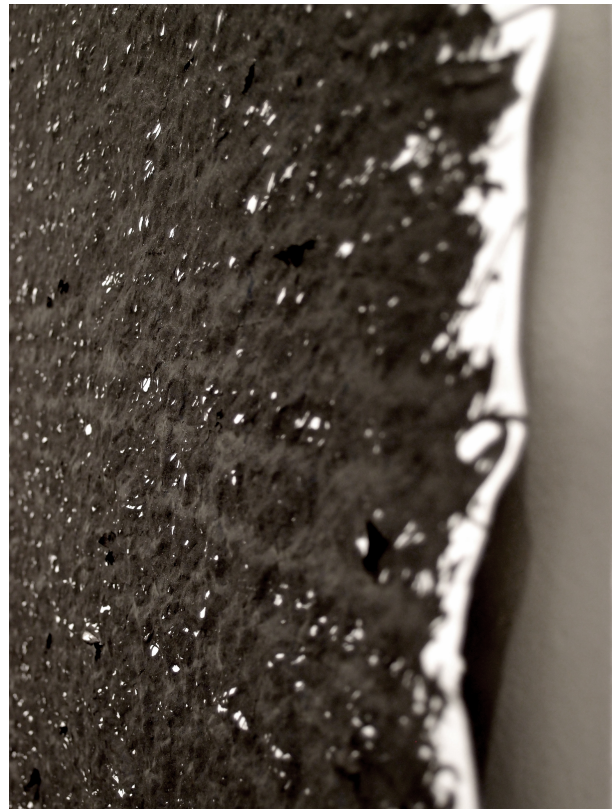


Fig. 12: Charissa Schulze, *A thing of beauty*, detail.

letterforms become something more than words. They become something more like an image – an image that changes with each additional layer of the text.

In the hopes of drawing attention to the stages and loss of this beauty, I made a similar piece in book form using the text of *Ozymandias*, a much shorter, 12-line poem by Keats's contemporary, Percy Bysshe Shelley. In *Ozymandias Melancholia* [fig. 13], the sequence of pages allowed me to show the progression of the overwritten words by gradually increasing the density of the text on each page. The smaller scale meant that the damage to the paper was more quickly realized. The nib was sharper, and the ink had less time to dry between layers, causing the pen to catch on the damp fibers, and more ink to spill. As this shorter poem was obscured through repetition, it was simultaneously burned to my memory. In the process of both recording and obscuring the text, I inadvertently memorized the poem giving it an immaterial existence within the space of my mind.

The poem tells the story of a ruinous statue that stands alone in the desert, all that remains of a great and powerful king who lived so long ago that he has been forgotten by history. There is an inscription on the pedestal which reads: "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:/look on my works, ye Mighty and despair (491)!" The forgotten king took such pride in his accomplishments, and what must have been a truly impressive empire, that it is humbling to see that even such a man as he can be all but erased by time.

## ***Conclusion***

*Ozymandias* and *Endymion* both touch on the themes of my thesis, as do all of the literary moments referenced in this body of work. Together they paint about the edges of a larger story, each illuminating some part of the relationship between art and the beauty of a finite existence. I sought to call attention to the misleading longevity of art by exaggerating the inherent transience of traditional mediums. Easier said than done. Where I was limited in my means of achieving impermanence, I explored other creative gestures that would mirror the way that time is simultaneously the cause and destruction of beauty.





Fig. 13: Charissa Schulze, *Ozymandias melancholia*, 2013; pen & ink with handmade cradle, 4 x 13.5 x 3.5 inches.

I was thinking of many of these themes in terms of the stories and literary references I had been mentally collecting over the years. When I began I was fixated on the permanence/ impermanence of images, and as I struggled with how to translate these narratives into a visual form without falling into a clichéd or obvious handling of the subject-matter, words surreptitiously emerged as a solution. The text married with the medium of photography was transformed into a hybrid of word and image. Likewise the overwriting of the poems became increasingly like drawing.

I found also that the exaggerated impermanence – an image that will vanish, words that will darken, paper that will crumble to dust, petals that will diminish in number, poetry obscured as it is recorded – activated these images in ways I had not fully anticipated. By drawing attention to the transience of the inanimate image, it had ceased to be quite so inanimate; the more imminent the demise of the art object, the more accentuated the vitality. Age is the measure of life, and the beauty of those old books in the conservation lab was the visible presence of the time they had seen. Moving forward, I hope to continue with my studio investigations and see what forms of impermanence can be achieved without the time constraints of a semester. What I have begun, time will complete. Both the wonder and the despair of time is that it inevitably brings an end.

## CITATIONS

- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Ed. Arendt, Hannah. Trans. Zohn, Harry. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books, 1968. p221.
- Garrels, Gary. "Jim Hodges: No Betweens." *Present Tense: Nine Artists in the Nineties*. 1st ed. San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1997. p22.
- Greenberg, Clement. "Modernist Painting." Ed. O'Brian, John *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995. 85-93.
- Herschel, Sir John F. W.. "On the action of the rays of the solar spectrum on vegetable colours, and on some new photographic processes." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Vol. 132*. London: The Royal Society, 1842. 181-214. Web. 26 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/108152>>.
- Keats, Jonathan. "Endymion." Ed. Coleman, Elliott. *Poems of Byron, Keats and Shelley*. New York: International Collectors Library, 1967. 365.
- Lawrence, L. "How to make a lake pigment." *Sunsikell: adventures in the quest for colour*. 10 Jan 2011. Web. 26 Feb. 2013. <<http://sunsikell.wordpress.com/2011/01/10/how-to-make-a-lake-pigment/>>.
- Lemay, Marie-France . "Medieval manuscripts: some ink and pigment recipes." *Traveling Scriptorium: A Teaching Kit by the Yale University Library*. Special Collections Conservation Unit of the Preservation Department of Yale University Library, March 2012. Web. 26 Feb 2013. <<http://travelingscriptorium.library.yale.edu/2012/03/>>.
- Linnaeus, Carl. *The Elements of Botany: Containing the History of the Science ... being a Translation of the 'Philosophia Botanica,' and other treatises of the celebrated Linnaeus ... by Hugh Rose*. 1st ed. London: T. Cadell and M. Hingeston, 1775. pp392-397.
- Matheson, Elizabeth. "Remains and Disappearances: The Work of Oscar Munoz ." *Ciel Variable, v.81*. 02 Mar 2010: Web. 10 Feb. 2013. <<http://cielvariablearchives.org/en/articles-and-portfolios-cv81/remains-and-disappearances-the-work-of-oscar-munoz.html>>.
- Munoz, Oscar. "Oscar Minoz: Project For A Memorial." *Virginia Quarterly Review* 81.4 (2005): 254-259. *OmniFile Full Text Mega (H.W. Wilson)*. Web. 10 Feb. 2013.
- Pliny, The Elder. "II. Modelling." Trans. Jex-Blake, K. *The Elder Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art*. New York: Macmillan & Co., 1896. p175 (35.151).



Schama, Simon. "Unnatural Beauty." *The Guardian* [Manchester, UK] 05 11 2004, 16. Web. 6 May 2013. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2004/nov/06/art>>.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "Ozymandias." Ed. Coleman, Elliott. *Poems of Byron, Keats and Shelley*. New York: International Collectors Library, 1967. p491.

Sherwin, Skye. "Exhibit A: Jim Hodges' 'A Diary of Flowers'." *AnOther Magazine*. 13 Aug 2010: Web. 10 Feb. 2013. <[http://www.anothermag.com/current/view/376/Jim\\_Hodges\\_A\\_Diary\\_of\\_Flowers](http://www.anothermag.com/current/view/376/Jim_Hodges_A_Diary_of_Flowers)>.

Viso, Olga M.. "Beauty and its Dilemmas." *Regarding Beauty: A View of the Late Twentieth Century*. Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution. 1st ed. Washington, D.C.: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 1999. p129.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Benezra, Neal David. *Regarding Beauty: A View of the Late 20th-Century*. 1st ed. Washington D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, 1999.

Fabbri, Malin. *Anthotypes: Explore the darkroom in your garden and make photographs using plants*. 1st ed. Stockholm: Malin Fabbri, 2012.

Hoskins, Steve. *Inks*. 1st ed. London: A. & C. Black, 2004.

Hunt, Robert. "Section II. On the action of the solar rays on vegetable substances." *Researches on light: an examination of all the phenomena connected with the chemical and molecular changes produced by the influence of the solar rays; embracing all the known photographic processes and new discoveries in the art*. London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1844. pp165-202.

Kerner von Marilaun, Anton. *The Natural History of Plants: Their Forms, Growth, Reproduction, and Distribution*. 1st ed. London: Blackie & Son, 1894. pp215-221.

Leaf, Ruth. *Etching, engraving, and other intaglio printmaking techniques*. 1st ed. New York: Watson Gupill, 1976.

Rood, Ogden N.. *Modern Chromatics, with applications to art and industry*. 1st ed. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1879.

Rosenblum, Robert. "The Origin of Painting: A Problem in the Iconography of Romantic Classicism." *Art Bulletin*. 39.4 (1957): pp279-290. Print.