

DAY BY DAY

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Abstract

My art practice embodies the human experience of living with mental illness. In this thesis I examine the relationship between the mind and body, and how they work together or against each other in the act of trying to be well. I trace the development of my content, which includes, the urban landscape as metaphor for living with anxiety, routine as ritual for stabilizing purposes, the need for control and loss of control in everyday life, and the interpretation and use of the color blue. I investigate the influence of process art on my performance work through which I create books as memento, meaning the book as the only remaining documentary record of my performance. My practice aligns with several contemporary artists analyzed in this paper, including Tony Orrico, On Kawara, Yugi Agematsu, and Sheryl Oppenheim.

Introduction

Before I dove into the world of book arts, I did not know what a codex was. I predominantly worked with sculpture, molds and casts, while I also created abstract collagraph prints made from plates of found materials. I viewed these works separately, as content and process that did not meet. The transition of my work into book arts showed me the intersection where two and three dimensions could collide to tell a narrative unlike any other process. It was through the discovery of Fluxus and performance art that I found I could use my own life experiences and daily activities as themes for my books. I revel in the use of symbolism of color, images and my own body's participation in mundane, everyday tasks as process which portrays the human condition.

The Human Condition and Mental Illness

Through the progression of my work, I refined my focus to a subject I identify with, the human experience of mental illness. Everyone experiences anxiety, but in some it is more prevalent and even debilitating to everyday life. When feelings of intense fear and distress can overwhelm and prevent us from doing everyday tasks, an anxiety disorder may be the cause. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health concern in the United States. An estimated 40 million adults in the U.S., or 18%, have an anxiety disorder. Just like with any mental illness, people with anxiety disorders experience symptoms differently, symptoms come in all shapes and forms, but for most people, anxiety changes how they function day-to-day. I specifically suffer from Generalized Anxiety Disorder, commonly referred to as GAD. GAD produces chronic, exaggerated worrying about

everyday life. This can consume hours each day, making it hard to concentrate or finish routine daily tasks. A person with GAD may become exhausted by worry and experience headaches, tension or nausea (NAMI).

Through alternative photographic processes and daily marbling practices, I use image and abstraction to attempt to embody the experience of living with mental illness and the visceral feelings of being trapped in this motion; high highs, low lows, and sometimes numbness or apathy in between. In my recent pieces, I use my hands as evidence of the personal nature and empathy in them. As each anxiety disorder has a different set of symptoms, the types of treatment that a mental health professional may suggest also can vary. One commonly used approach is the use of coping mechanisms in order to ground, in which I mean to alleviate symptoms, the patient and make structure in everyday life, that is where I implement the concept of routine as ritual. The use of routine as a ritual stabilizes my ability to function and create work.

Routine as Ritual – Fluxus & Process Art

I am influenced by ideas of the Fluxus movement; especially the idea that we must destroy any boundary between art and life. Fluxus artists did not agree with the authority of museums to determine the value of art, nor did they believe that one must be educated to view and understand a piece of art. Fluxus art was meant to be available to the masses, they also wanted everyone to produce art all the time (“Fluxus”). In 1963 one of the founders of Fluxus, George Maciunas, wrote and printed the Fluxus Manifesto which contained dictionary definitions of the word “flux” along with handwritten comments on the Fluxus movement. Part of the manifesto states, “Promote a revolutionary flood and tide

in art, promote living art, anti-art, promote non-art reality, to be grasped by all peoples, not only critics, diletantes, and professionals". This statement represents the need for inclusivity in fine arts and promotes the stance that anything in life can be art. Ideas like this can be contextualized with the works of Yoko Ono, George Brecht, and Joseph Beuys.

I am inspired by the "little things" in life and how they can affect us mentally, whether it be a small act of kindness, a walk, or a sign of good luck. I am interested in the grounding effect of using everyday routine as ritual to stabilize symptoms brought on by mental illness. I have my own personal agenda that keeps me stable. If my routine is disrupted, I find myself very disheveled and out of place; it physically feels like I am unraveling. I am entranced by the positive mental effect of repetitive daily practice and the consequences of not maintaining them; I channel this into my art process and content.

Everyday tasks that need to be done are uncelebrated. Getting out of bed each day, going grocery shopping, doing the laundry, and washing the dishes, are achievements that require energy, dedication, and resilience, even if they aren't thought of as self-care. They may seem like simple, everyday tasks, but for those who deal with a mental illness they are feats of courage that represent important milestones. The establishment of patterns or routines can be beneficial to manage time and plan for better choices during recovery and throughout aftercare. When a healthy routine is in place, one can make better choices and more easily face any challenges that occur. Routine adds elements of habit and rhythm into daily life; our bodies tend to function better when they are eating, sleeping, and exercise patterns are set to a regular schedule, our minds rely on patterns and routine as well. The mind regularly has so much to process it depends on habits to regulate daily activities.

Science supports the belief that routines and healthy habits are key elements to recovery and aftercare. A study from the National Institutes of Health reported on risks in early recovery which indicates that structured time is vital. Individuals in recovery benefit from the use of a definite plan and a routine that keeps them busy. Unstructured time can also lead to boredom and may increase the risk of old, unhealthy patterns taking over. The establishment of daily and weekly routines help create healthy new patterns (“Boring Self-Care and the Importance of Routines”).

My most recent experiments work with control of the body through the art of marbling paper. I document through video the hours I spend on this work as a performance to be later experienced as printed stills on the paper. This solo performance is not meant to be seen live by an audience; this is in reference to the everyday actions we perform as individuals in our personal routines that often go unseen and unappreciated. Every day, in a painstaking act I marble and layer patterns that constantly change circumstantially on the movement of breath and body in that moment. “1.25.2020 – 3.10.2020”, is a performative act where I document a loss of control within a controlled investigation of the relationship of artist and object and the artist as object. I use the same ink colors, green, blue, and black, so the resulting sheets of paper are consistent in color, but due to the nature of the process each sheet is different: structure and chaos. The resulting book is 7” x 11” inches closed, reflecting to the shape of the tray the patterns are being marbled in, but also acts as a screen to the viewers. Each day is broken down into three stills, and the stills are printed on the corresponding paper marbled on those days and stamped with their dates. The stills are taken from videos of the performance; from up above only the artist and task are present; this refers to mundane tasks we do consistently alone. This is also a study of the

relationship of artist and object and the moment when artist becomes object. The artist acts not just as a subject for the work, but as the object of the outcome of performing the work. The viewer then becomes a voyeur, only to look in. Through the images, the viewer sees traces of the marbled sheet interfering with the stills of myself. This solo performance also refers to production and labor in art, while also a record of the quotidian.

This work is a book as memento, referring to the book as the only remaining documentary record of a performance, a happening or an action (Maffei & Peterlini, 105). As a sort of ‘posteriori’, not existing in the mind prior to or independent of the experience, catalogue, a function the book never fully assumes, it serves rather as an active token or relic, similar to the books of George Maciunas, Joesph Beuys, and George Brecht. Giorgio Maffei stated, “The habit of often including some remnants of the performances it describes actually turns the book object into a hybrid, midway between an edition, a catalogue and pamphlet” (20).

My piece “1.25.2020 - 3.10.2020” contextually relates to On Kawara’s “The Date Paintings”; a series of nearly 3,000 works produced over a span of almost fifty years as part of Kawara's “Today” series. “The Date Paintings” which make up the series consist of the date of composition, hand-painted in sans-serif font, against a monochrome background. These backgrounds are mostly dark grey, though paintings were also produced in shades of red and blue, and the tonal variation between different paintings is surprisingly wide. They varied in size from 8 x 10 inches to 61 x 89 inches, although Kawara generally used the same eight sizes. “The Date Paintings” are partly documentation of a repetitive, meditative composition process which took on something of the quality of a ritual or liturgy, marking

the passage of time, and of the artist's life. Kawara set two main formal parameters when producing the paintings: first, each date was formatted using the writing customs of the country in which it was composed, and written in the relevant language; second, each painting had to be completed on the day in question. If Kawara did not finish a painting by midnight, it was destroyed. The "Today" series is partly a monument to an investment of time, care, and labor which is almost invisible in the finished works, whose appeal to the viewer is immediate, not to say ephemeral ("Today Series [1965-2014]").

Another artist that has influenced my time-based works is Yugi Agematsu. His series, "Zip" started in the mid-90s and continues until this day. Every day since 1997, Yuji Agematsu has placed the small objects he finds while walking the streets of New York City inside the cellophane sleeves used to wrap packs of cigarettes. The collected items include, chewed gum, lollipop sticks, condoms, cigarette butts, wire, stones, hair, string, fragments of paper, twigs, and leaves. Generally, Agematsu constructs his findings into miniature sculptures shortly after he collects them. Laboriously gluing his found objects together, he converts the mundane and overlooked into captivating compositions, and breathes new life into discarded or decaying materials. Sometimes his individual pieces suggest landscape; other times they are anthropomorphic or resemble miniature still-lives (Jacobs). These packages are carefully catalogued by date and presented in groups, like a monthly calendar that also functions as a diary or time capsule of Agematsu's life. The sculptures are accompanied by a copy of the notes that Agematsu uses to document when and where these objects were encountered. While his work transforms humble trash into records of the passing of time, it is also about a transformation: the magical process by which everyday materials become objects of aesthetic observation, simply because the artist

places them in a new role. If one looks closely at Agematsu's small piles, it is visible that these are beautiful and surprising combinations of textures, shapes, and colors, just like other traditional works of art ("Yugi Agematsu").

The movement of process art is an influence in my work; this refers to the actions or, in some cases, the performance of the creation of a work of art and was meant to emphasize how the work was made rather than just the final outcome of the piece. It is a declaration that artists are dedicated and attentive to their creative labors. "The artist's process takes its place in the interlocking processes that make up the world, a microcosm of activity in time" (Grant, 4). The process of using my body in the act of creation drives and inspires my work. In recent prints, "Interference I", "Interference II", and "Poise", I use my breath to create organic imagery in marbling patterns. One coping mechanism when dealing with anxiety is deep breathing exercises in which I refer to as the "Big 6", six seconds to inhale, six seconds to exhale, I use this process to relate directly back to content. As a grounding technique, these works reference how small we may feel when one deals with mental illness, and the strength and power that a breath has.

On a journey through these works I have become very inspired by endurance drawings by Tony Orrico; he uses the rhythm and control of his whole body to create large scale graphite images. In "Penwald Drawings", Orrico experiments with the use of the movement of the body as tool for measurement, to create life-size bilateral geometric shapes. His choreographic gestures derive from the limitation of (or spontaneous navigation within) the sphere of his outstretched arms. Line density becomes the record of Orrico's mental and physical sustain as he devotes his focus to a greater concept of balance

throughout extended durations of drawing (“Penwald Drawings”). These illustrations are created through performance that Orrico conducts at museums and festivals, to publicly record his bodily works of art. Orrico uses the kinetic energy of his performance to charge these works, in a video he describes how he feels the graphite sticks in his hands as conductors, feeling these tools heat in his hands with every stroke. He treats this work as a meditative act, as he told Barcelona Metropolitan, “For the longer duration drawings, I don’t eat or drink for at least an hour and half before the performance. I like to condition my body for about an hour before performance and center myself, I have system of personal techniques I developed that I cycle through” (Interview: Tony Orrico).

Conceptual Marbling – Beyond a Decorative Paper

When I first started to marble papers, I was immediately entranced by the bold colors and variety of patterns. As time went on, I became interested in suminagashi, “floating ink”, a Japanese marbling technique that began in the 12th century (History of Suminagashi and Marbling). This differs from Western marbling because it uses sumi ink, an oil-based ink, which creates no need for alum or carrageenan like Western techniques using acrylic based colors. It also allows for softer, more subtle colors, compared to the bright, bold patterns of Western marbling. I started working in suminagashi for the way I could manipulate my patterns in my tray. In Western marbling, the marbling tray consists of a 50/50 mix of water and carrageenan, a thickener used in food production, then colors are placed on top. Due to the thickness of the carrageenan, the manipulation of the patterns occur when either combs and/or brushes are used as tools. When I work in suminagashi, my tray is only water and ink, so I am free to manipulate my patterns with the use of

movement, whether it be my breath or the slight pressure of my hand on the side of the tray; any slight movement can affect my outcome.

Throughout history, marbled paper has had one solo function, to act as a decorative paper. In my current three projects, I attempt to push marbled patterns further, to allow them to have another role besides end sheets in a fine binding. I use the marbled paper as metaphors to tell narratives; to be conceptual. While I work on my concept of the human experience of dealing with mental illness, I face one idea daily: the need for control/loss of control. When one lives with mental illness, control can become an obsession. The need for structure can take away some of pain away from the chaos. Author Melissa Binstock best stated it as, "I yearned for a safe and predictable world, which I felt my rituals provided. Without them, my anxiety would be overwhelming, and my stability would return to chaos. Over time, though, controlling my external world was not enough to keep anxiety at bay" ("Obsessed with Control"). These thoughts inform my concepts of marbling. It is nearly impossible to edition a marbled sheet, you can use the same colors, develop the same pattern, but there are never identical sheets. As I created my book, "1.25.2020 – 3.10.2020" I produced the same patterns daily, like a ritual, I lay green, blue, and black inks in steady, even increments to attempt to control the pattern; as in life, the outcomes are never the same and striving for control is painstaking on both the mind and body. This process reflects the need for and loss of control in everyday life, and the attempt to maintain it. The use and movement of the water in my tray also refer back to the ebb and flow we face in life.

An artist who first inspired my conceptual marbling was the artist Sheryl Oppenheim. While on a visit to the MET library special collections I came across Oppenheim's book titled, "Ugly Children." It was a large hardcover book, with varied sized sheets bound together. Each page was a "failed" marbled pattern; "failed" refers to its inconsistencies, air pockets, or specks of dust on the sheet that block color. What was merely a book of patterns, a marbling sample perhaps read to me as very powerful relation back to the self and the human condition. These sheets of paper are damaged and imperfect, but still bound as a fine art book. They are referred to as children, which shows the close relationship of artist and object, and the unconditional love even with the flaws. Oppenheim refers to herself as a, "painter and maker of illegible books, an idea she first became interested in after seeing the work of Bruno Munari, and through her proximity to books, bookbinders, and marbled paper at her first job in New York, at a bookbinding supply house" ("Sheryl Oppenheim").

Using marbling as a method for telling a narrative has inspired my newest book as well. "Stunted Growth" is a risograph book of layered marble papers with cut outs. There are four patterns that repeat and layer one another in dull pinks and blues. These images created by the overlaying patterns reference back to the human body, resembling macro stills of cells, intestines, and muscles. This work refers to pieces of ourselves that we may feel that are missing due to the journey of mental illness or trauma. Although we may feel that pieces are missing, more lies beneath the surface. This work is made for those who feel as though they "should be *this*" and/or "should have *that*"; those who feel mistreated and that trauma has left them behind in life, but this piece is to reassure one's own path. Studies have shown being sexually or emotionally abused as a child can affect the development of a

part of the brain that controls memory and the regulation of emotions. The results add to the grown body of evidence that childhood maltreatment or abuse raises the risk of mental illnesses such as depression, personality disorders and anxiety well into adulthood (Jha). The Health Federation of Philadelphia claims, "In children repeated exposure to traumatic events can overload this alarm state and begin to short-circuit healthy neural connections and disrupt the brain's basic architecture. Ultimately, the brain adapts towards surviving this trauma. This in turn compromises core mental, emotional, and social functioning and normal, healthy development" ("The Science Behind Trauma").

Urban Landscape as Metaphor

My environment is an inspiration for my current work. I was born and raised in the city of Philadelphia, which gives me a strong connection to the cityscape. I am influenced by the energy and life of the city, the fast pace, the lights, the people I encounter, but also signs of decay and the erosion like roots broken through concrete and brick, crumbled architecture, invasive plants, and worn pathways. My environment adapts and changes overtime, just like a person who lives amongst it. As I walk through different neighborhoods, I photograph the city, natural and manmade as a metaphor for a living being and the human condition. I use these images as a representation of the effects of the struggle with and balance of mental illness, though parts may be broken and desecrated, they still stand and function. I also document ivy plants as a metaphor for anxiety; they are invasive in nature but can be trained to grow in a certain direction.

In my recent documentation, the ivy invades certain structures, homes, walls, and sidewalks, throughout Philadelphia. I specifically crop the images to abstract them and use

their forms to refer to structures on the human body. These images address the balance of structure and chaos. The street images are printed using an alternative photographic process called cyanotype and have silkscreened linework on top that invades the picture plane and resembles my marbled patterns. Cyanotype is a photographic developing process that involves mixing chemistry, equal parts ferric ammonium citrate in combination with potassium ferricyanide, that then becomes a photosensitive emulsion to be brushed onto sheets of paper. I expose my digital negatives of photographs directly onto paper. Anything that blocks the light can expose as a cyanotype. When they fully develop, the prints have values of Prussian blue.

Blue

Throughout my practice I use the color blue to convey my presence. I use it consistently in images and text to represent my visual voice. For this reason, it was natural for me to be drawn to cyanotype. Cyanotype alone can create a high contrast image with solid Prussian blues, but I am inspired by the range of other colors that are achievable. To create a rich tonal range, like a Van Dyke Brown, I can soak the print in citric acid, or bleach can create a soft, denim blue or even a pale yellow. To achieve an intense dark violet, I use bleach and tone it. These variations influence the mood of each print and how my marbled patterns interact in the foreground or background of the image.

Our emotional responses to color in general are culturally and individually conditioned (Burns & Wilson, 28). Christina Z. Anderson said, "Blue is the most popular color, which carries both positive (serenity, peace, spirituality) and negative connotations as do all colors." It is linked to the depression term, "feeling blue", it's connected to the

emotive musical stylings of the Blues, and in Shakespearean time “to burn blue” was an omen of death, evil spirits or the devil himself. Today, it is solely linked with “tranquility tinged with a bit of melancholy” (3). This is one of blue’s essential characteristics in Western color symbolism: it doesn’t make waves, but is calm, pacified, distant, almost neural. Michel Pastoureau said, “It invites reverie, of course (we recall again the Romantic poets, Novalis’s blue flower, and the blues), but these melancholy dreams have an anesthetizing quality” (180).

Conclusion

With the completion of this body of work I have learned a lot about myself and how my work can move forward. I have discovered how art can be a form of mental maintenance, through the process of creation and the act of interacting with and experiencing art. The book is a tool that can carry much power; it is an object that can be intimate and personal. It is an object that needs to be physically handled and held physically close to understand the content; it is recalled from a library, shelf, or pocket to experience time and time again. My progression through book and print has assisted me in defining my audience, as my work speaks of empathy and understanding of the human condition and what comes along with that role. My books and prints are intended to offer guidance for those who feel disenchanting and alone, a reassurance of their emotions, a validation of their struggles. I now truly understand the purpose my work can serve in the bigger picture, bridging the gap between fine art and self-care.

Addendum

Due to the nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, some pieces have been altered due to the limitations set by the global crisis. My book, "1.25.2020 – 3.10.2020" was intended to run until the end of April, but due to unforeseen circumstances it was cut short. My print works are now large-scale inkjet prints of scans of original cyanotype pieces; I use scale and cropping to experiment with micro/macro. Other projects are now theoretical concepts because of uncertainty for their completion. The creation of anything during this moment in time is draining and ambiguous due to mental and physical restrictions. This experience may affect the outcome and appearance of the original work described in this thesis but will result in accompanied work inspired by the transition.

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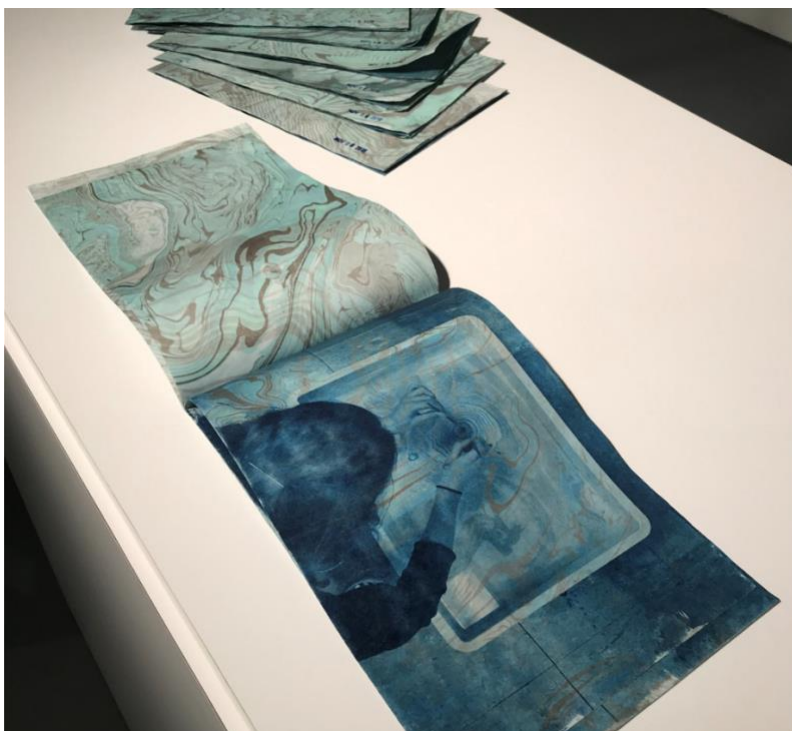


Fig. 1 1.25.2020 – 3.10.2020, Angelique Kopacz, artist book, 2020



Fig. 2 *Today Series*, On Kawara, paintings on canvas, 1965-2014



Fig. 3. *zip: 01.01.06... 06.30.06, 2006*, Yugi Agematsu, found objects, 2006



Fig. 4 *8 Circles*, Tony Orrico, graphite on paper

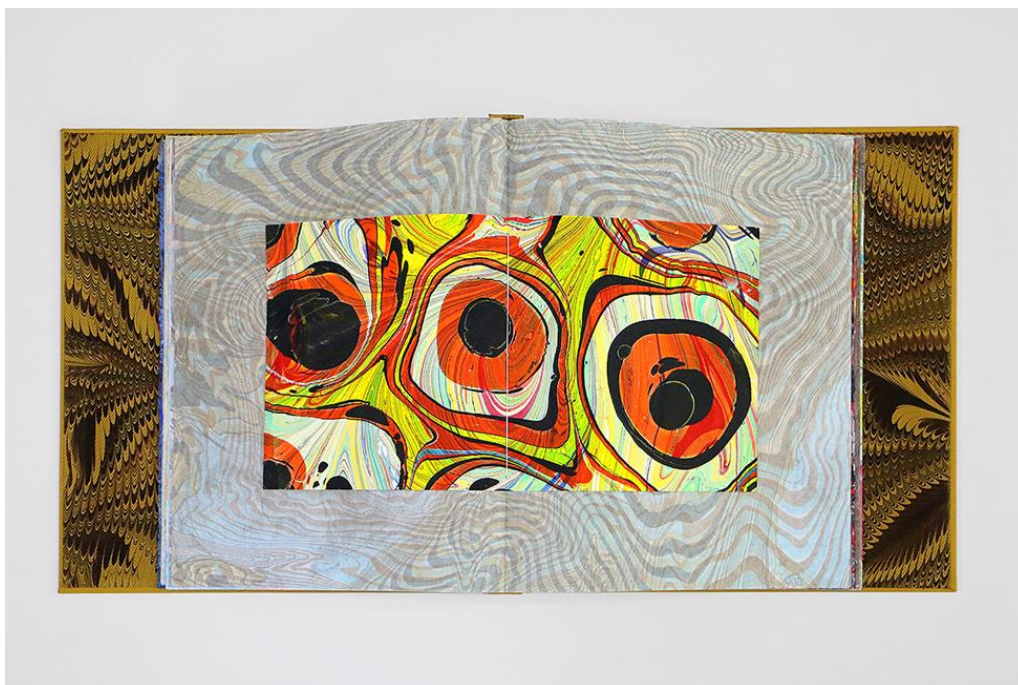


Fig. 5 *Ugly Children*, Sheryl Oppenheim, marbled papers, 10.5" x 12", 2017



Fig. 6 *Stunted Growth*, Angelique Kopacz, artist book, 2020

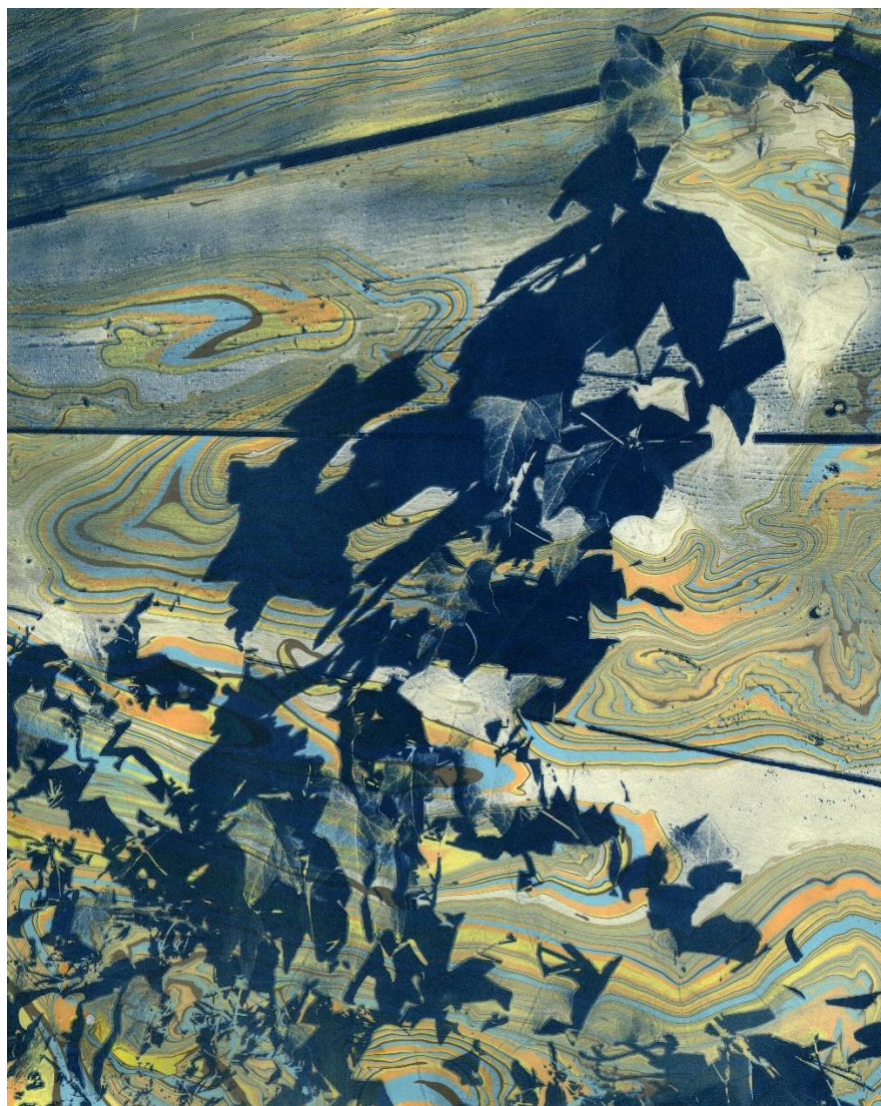


Fig. 7 *Interference II*, Angelique Kopacz, cyanotype, marbling, inkjet, 2020