

SYSTEMS OF TENSION AND SUPPORT
Laminate Casting with High Shrinkage Handmade Papers

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the experiential nature of viewing, materials and processes as content, along with the progression from specificity to abstraction to create ambiguous but familiar objects that reference the natural world. I construct my sculptures from dynamic, unpredictable high shrinkage handmade papers. My studio research provides evidence for the scientific advantages of these fibers and laminate casting techniques. Considering hand papermaking's rich craft history, I frame my practice alongside the contemporary revival of craft, discussing how craft-oriented practices challenge the autonomy of the art object through an emphasis on records of the artist's presence and greater viewer subjectivity. Informed by contemporary conversations, I contextualize my work alongside craft, process, and material focused artists Winifred Lutz, Sheila Pepe, and Ursula von Rydingsvard.

Introduction

Often during interactions with works of art viewers are stationary, passive recipients of an artist's concept relayed through optical effects. Large facets of contemporary art continue to focus on such methods, but in the last forty years, more artists have investigated activating the viewing experience through emphasis on the process of creating an artwork. I situate my craft-based practice within the latter trend, by working in the form of installations, sculptures, and books to provide viewer-directed experiences. Considering this framework, I provide contemporary contextualization through references to artists Winifred Lutz, Sheila Pepe, and Ursula von Rydingsvard. Seeking to activate the gallery space, I create modular installations of individual handmade paper sculptures that undulate through space and promote physical movement while viewing the work. Intentionally ambiguous, the pieces are designed not to reflect singular entities in order to invite a wide variety of interpretations and associations. Through this presentation viewers can investigate, question, and consider the work through the lens of their own personal experiences. As a result, emphasis is placed on the individual rather than the artist.

The aesthetics of the sculptures I create reflect my personal observations of nature. Featuring earth tones, these objects begin to take on aesthetic and formal similarities with natural occurring phenomena such as stumps, vines, or branches. I spend a large portion of my free time outdoors, consistently responding to my surrounding landscape of Philadelphia and previous places I have lived, such as Connecticut and Mississippi. While I am influenced by my contemplation of the distinctive aspects of these environments- the swamps and pine trees of Mississippi, the rocky hills and oak trees of Connecticut, or Philadelphia's cracked sidewalks and ginkgo trees- I am not interested in a literal depiction of these elements. It is the

consideration of these separate and disparate landscapes that allows for greater variation of shapes and textures within the sculptures I produce. Thus, the artwork presents opportunities for the viewer to project their own personal associations on to it, rather than anchoring my work within a specific landscape. This ambiguity allows for focus on viewer-directed experience rather than a manifestation of my personal history.

Anchored in the craft-based medium of hand papermaking and I utilize high shrinkage handmade papers to construct my sculptures. As a material, these types of paper are fundamental for achieving the dynamic shapes I produce. The process of papermaking also reflects many of the aspects of nature considered in the aesthetics of the sculptures such as growth patterns and repetition. Contemporary artist and papermaker Winifred Lutz, describes the process of papermaking as follows:

The transformation of the raw fibers through beating, the wave of the pulp washing across the surface of the mold, the layering of sheets during couching, and the rhythmic, cyclical nature of the whole enterprise are perceived as metaphors for ongoing geologic events and life-growth cycles. The basic structure of the papermaking process serves as a paradigm for the human experience and the use of nature (*Making Paper* 26).

These issues of layering, repetition, movement, and cycles with respect to nature are frequently considered in my work. Papermaking places heavy emphasis on process and is associated with the history of craft, and thus my engagement with it in a fine art context will be framed with regards to art historical discourse.

Craft, Handmade Paper, and its History

In traditional perspectives, craft focuses on the “object-ness,” or the physical components and processes of a work. Following the decline of Modern Art and Minimalism in the 1960s and

70s there has been increased interest among artists in engaging craft as a focal point of their practices (Adamson 5). These practices exist in opposition to the issues of autonomy that were central to post-war Modernism. Often when viewing a work from this Modernist period, the viewer is passive receiver of a concept through optical effects and is not meant to consider how the artwork was created or its physical substance. For example, Mark Rothko once expressed that in his color field paintings he was striving for “the elimination of all obstacles between the painter and the idea, and between the idea and the observer” (Arnason and Mansfield 394). Rothko’s paintings explore the role of color and how subtle shifts in tone or hue can convey emotion (393). Here, painting’s obstacles of process and materiality are eliminated in favor of optical effects as the primary communicator. By anchoring itself in material and process, craft draws attention to the artist’s presence and process within a piece, reminding viewers that it is “something consisting of physical actions” and tangible components (Adamson 1).

Hand papermaking is a medium intrinsically tied with the idea of craft. Its history stems back to the era of craftsperson guilds and was first introduced as a substrate for other mediums, a commodity rather than focus. At its inception paper was considered a highly valuable substance due to the amount of labor involved in its production and its scarcity, and thus was reserved for transcribing sacred texts or other texts of cultural significance (Hunter 153). Demand for paper increased after the introduction of printing from moveable type in the 15th century. The equipment for processing fiber to pulp became more efficient and obtaining the preferred papermaking fiber, linen rags, became more difficult. Rag shortage caused the industry to seek out new sources for fiber, resulting in several experiments with vegetable matter (309). Alongside the search for new fibers, at the end of the 18th century Nicholas-Louis Robert introduced his invention of a machine designed to make paper of a great width and indefinite

length thus reducing the need for making paper by hand (348). Not long after the invention of this papermaking machine, ground wood pulp was commercialized in the United States. This type of paper did not replace fine paper made from rag as originally intended, but rather it fulfilled the growing commercial need for paper. The use of paper extended beyond sacred or otherwise significant texts to paper for large quantity print runs, like newspaper or other ephemera (393). Paper made from wood pulp is weaker, unstable, but immensely cheaper and thus introduced the way paper is often viewed in present day, disposable and of little value.

As evident in this brief history, the development of papermaking has largely been in tandem with the progression of printmaking and society's desire to record important texts or relay information. The revival of hand papermaking in the United States since the 1940s has had two main divisions; the first being one that evolved out of an interest in using paper alongside other processes like painting, printmaking, and drawing. Within this context, handmade paper is a substrate and becomes a unique vessel for creative possibilities not available with commercially produced papers. The second division is primarily concerned with paper "as a unique medium for direct manipulation...intentionally ignoring paper's traditional function as an image support in order to explore its physical substance" (*Making Paper* 25). Winifred Lutz is a contemporary example of the second division of hand papermaking and a pioneer in the progression of casting with handmade paper. Lutz's practice is primarily concerned with process and materials, aiming to be in consistent collaboration to develop deep understanding for the intricacies of these components. The distinction between paper as substrate and paper as primary substance is essential for framing my practice as the development of my work, and my studio research is anchored in investigations of handmade paper's physical properties and possibilities.

Process, From Observation to Abstraction

The installation discussed in this thesis, *Untitled* (fig. 1), consists of modular sculptures made from high shrinkage handmade papers.¹ Installed on two walls that form an “L,” the installation begins on the back wall, curves down towards the floor, back up to the ceiling, to the floor again, finally continuing onto the adjacent wall and around its corner. Each individual sculpture perpetuates the flowing motion of the composition through their gestural postures that resemble actions like stretching and reaching. The creation of a piece begins in observation of natural phenomena, such as the color contrast between fallen leaves in the bike lane or the way vines tangle and wrap around tree limbs. I take note of these observations, write reflectively about them, and form these writings into poetic lists. In a continuation of the progression of abstraction from real life observation, I create pulp paintings based on these writings. Pulp painting is the process of manipulating finely beaten pigmented paper pulp on a freshly couched sheet of paper.² When prepared with a desirable ratio of water, pulp, and methyl cellulose the finely beaten pulp acquires a viscosity that allows it to move and be manipulated like paint. When a painting is finished, the sheets are pressed in a hydraulic press to remove excess water and the final dry product is entirely paper. This process introduces a variety of marks, texture, and color to the casting substance (wet sheets of handmade paper) providing greater opportunities for variation and layering.

¹ Due to the 2020 global pandemic of COVID-19, this installation is discussed in the abstract and there are not images of its final form in this paper. Included images are from my installation during the UArts MFA Book Arts and Printmaking Fall 2019 Works in Progress Exhibition. I am writing about how *Untitled* will look and function once I am able to install it, which will be after the submission of this written thesis. The final installation will eventually be viewable at mariawelchart.com

² Pronounced cooch-ed. A couched sheet of paper refers to a freshly formed sheet of paper pulp that has been transferred from the paper mold's screen to the post (the interleaved stack of felts, pelons, and fresh wet sheets of paper).

After pulp painting the still wet sheets of handmade paper are packaged in a “wet pack” to prevent them from drying before casting. It is essential that the sheets do not dry before casting so that total contraction of the paper can occur during the drying process. Before casting I construct an armature that references an action. These gestures are drawn from various forms in nature and actions that reflect efforts to make connection. The implied movements are informed by the observational writings and my own gesture drawings of ballet dancers. Through these drawings I form a better understanding of the ways in which bodies relate to each other in space, transforming the way I arrange pieces in the final installation. Ballet emphasizes the role of gravity in relationship to the dancer’s movements. There is a profound emphasis on weight, efforts to rise or pull away but ultimately end with the dancer being tethered to the earth. In watching these performances, I find that the dancer’s movements also resemble my observations in nature such as the spiral fall of leaves, vines wrapping around trunks, or the heliotropic twist of plants.

Within each sculpture there is a “ground,” the base sheet(s) of paper that smaller pieces of paper are adhered to (figs. 2 and 3). The ground is what embodies the gestural shape and provides the foundation of a piece. The armatures that the castings are executed on are made of chicken wire and canvas. The malleability of the chicken wire allows me to twist and contort it while still maintaining structural integrity and incorporating the full extent of my reach. Building an armature is physical and impermanent, and combined with the dynamic shapes, gives the sculptures immediacy that conveys the energy of the moment. Additionally, due to the physical nature of this process, the pieces often retain a relationship to the size of my body.

The relationship of size to my body adds to the approachable nature of the sculptures. Due to their smaller, manageable size they are approachable and carry notes of whimsy, thereby

inviting viewers to interact with them. I relate this to fiber and installation-based artist Sheila Pepe who creates installations from materials like shoelaces, rope, and yarn. These installations, like *Under the F & G* (fig. 4), retain an approachable quality because of the process through which Pepe creates her work, what she refers to as “improvisational crochet” (Porter 224). Critic Dinah Ryan describes this relationship as being rooted in “the way the work proceeds primarily from the space of the body, the lap and the length of the arm from the elbow to the tip of the fingers” (20). Pepe’s work becomes more personal because the physical space it comes from is intimate and in close contact with the artist’s body. Similarly, in order to create the gestures I reference, I often perform these actions in the studio to cast the paper or build an armature. I reach around the trunks of castings, crouch behind them, or twist through them. This relationship between the source material for the pieces and my physical movements while working enhance the anthropomorphic qualities of the sculptures.

Laminate Casting, Paper Science, and Fiber Choices

The actions recorded in my writings and drawings also relate to the natural way the high shrinkage papers behave as they dry. The sculptures are made of high shrinkage flax, a bast fiber.³ When finely beaten flax and other bast fibers release large amounts of hemicellulose that result in an abundance of hydrogen bonds (Koretsky and Toale 30).⁴ The large quantity of hydrogen bonds produced during the process of extended beating is what allows for crispness and shrinkage in the paper which are highly desirable qualities for my artwork. The intensity at which the fibers of the paper bond molecularly during the drying process is referred to as the

³ There are four main types of papermaking fiber: bast, leaf, seed, and grass. Bast refers to the fiber located between the inner core and the exterior bark and is generally considered to be the strongest because here the fibers are the longest as compared to other parts of plants (Hiebert 6).

⁴ “Physically, hemicelluloses are white solid materials that are rarely crystalline or fibrous in nature; they form some of the “flesh” that helps fill out the fiber,” and as a result increase the strength of the paper (Pratima, 19).

Campbell effect and this process is what causes overbeaten flax to shrink in dramatic ways.⁵ I utilize these scientific properties to enhance the gestures of my sculptures by focusing on the paper's natural inclinations. As a result, my forms retain a sense of material liveliness and expression that extends beyond the physical form.

The sculptures I create are accomplished using laminate casting techniques, and this refers to the process of layering wet sheets of paper on top of each other so that they bond together as they dry. This method of casting produces hollow forms from singular sheets of paper as opposed to other methods of paper casting that utilize slightly beaten pulps to produce solid forms. The layering and translucency accomplished through laminate casting allows me to selectively highlight pulp paintings, consider interior and exterior spaces, and the role of shadows. Winifred Lutz explains how laminate casting is possible and necessitates wet sheets of paper, preferably a high shrinkage bast fiber like flax. She writes that "sizing or glue is unnecessary to secure lamination because the hemicelluloses released... in preparation and profusion of hydrogen bonding as a result of extended hydration and fibrillation act more effectively than any paste" (Koretsky and Toale 30). Through this process individual wet sheets bond together as they dry, creating a seamless form. This is particularly pertinent for my sculptures in which I laminate pulp paintings on top of solid pigmented sheets of paper. Due to the natural bonding of the paper I am able laminate fragments of different sheets together in order to construct forms that have a greater variety of mark making, texture, and color, while retaining a largely seamless surface.

⁵ Timothy Barret describes this process, "Stemming from surface tension forces of water existing between fibers...in damp paper, the Campbell effect shows linearly increasing compacting forces which are believed to approach...1500 pounds per square inch...as the sheet nears dryness" (290).

My casting methods and specific fiber choices allow me to create highly expressive forms, which helps relay an overall motion through the installation. Like the way rill erosion reflects the paths of water moving through the topography of a landscape, my pieces are arranged to reflect continuous directional movement. This can be seen in the shapes of individual sculptures that when juxtaposed further enhance the directional movement of the installation's composition. As each form reaches for another the movement flows throughout the space and entices the viewer's physical movement. I look to provide opportunities for the physical movement of the viewer throughout the installation because it challenges the typical passive gallery experience. Their movement, combined with the mental associations that I intend for the sculptures to provoke, enhance viewer agency by placing emphasis on their experience over the artwork.

Intuitive and Material Responsive Practice

In considering the overall movement conveyed throughout a sculpture's shape, I frequently cast sheets in a manner that emphasizes the effects of gravity on a piece. This is accomplished through different gestural armatures and additions to the surface of the cast that dry in different directions (fig. 5). The papers I use, made from overbeaten flax, are highly susceptible to moisture. Thus, the overall cast shifts with each new introduction of moisture through add-ons. The material responds equally to environmental and atmospheric conditions, scientific properties, and my artistic interventions. As a result, my studio practice is intuitive and responds to these constant shifts. For these reasons, rather than working with a specific vision for a sculpture I focus on achieving a gesture or layering colors and textures.

My intuitive and material responsive practice relates to the work of Sheila Pepe and her improvisational crochet. Pepe's web-like installations are constructed using the same repetitive

technique, but they follow no pattern and the rhythm of the stitches varies throughout the installation (Schlatter 247). I consider the buildup of textures on the surface of my sculptures in a similar manner, utilizing the innumerable repetition of like forms and textures to create connections between the pieces in the installation. Pepe's webs are site-responsive and vary depending on where they are installed, giving them an ephemeral quality. Likewise, the arrangement of my sculptures that make up the overall installation shifts depending on the gallery site.

Before creating a sculpture, I spend time observing nature, writing about these observations, and drawing dancers. When materializing different aspects these influences, I also focus on allowing for variation through the unpredictable high shrinkage papers. Sculpture and installation artist Ursula von Rydingsvard has stated that she does not work from a model or drawing, but instead follows an idea or image in her head with process being the ultimate guide (Rooney 62). Von Rydingsvard's works are massive and made from laminated cedar boards that she carves, sands, or otherwise abrades to create amorphic sculptures. Working in this manner allows for greater spontaneity during the production of her pieces such as *Droga*, 2009 (fig. 6), as well as my own, and the finished objects exist as testaments to this process. There is evidence of von Rydingsvard's time spent with a piece through many cuts or abrasions on the surface. In my own work, this evidence appears through shifts in form that are indicative of moisture and gravity's influence when adding new elements.

Movement Through Space, Relationship to Form and Process

My emphasis on intentional ambiguity and movement through space of forms and viewers also relates back to von Rydingsvard. Her sculptures attest to the highly physical methods through which they are produced, but their overall shapes convey smooth, slow

movement. This directional energy can be seen in pieces like *Droga* (fig. 6) in which layers of carved cedar form mounds that rise, compound, and gradually tilt diagonally across the sculpture. Von Rydingsvard stated that, “All of this movement respected the enormity of the piece. With something that big, that weighty, that heavy, a kind of slow movement pulls all of the weight in response to the tremendous pull of gravity in the process of its moving.” (Castro 32). She describes the piece as though it were literally in motion and effected by its physical attributes. These imagined actions relate to the way one moves to view this piece: slowly, allowing for appreciation of the individual marks on the surface and the waves of material that move across the sculpture. The interplay between imagined motion prompted by physical attributes of the sculptures and the literal movement involved in viewing is what I aim to achieve through the interrelated pieces of my installation. Where von Rydingsvard’s works move with steady, slow weight, my sculptures stretch, reach, and fall. My sculptures appear lightweight, as though directed by wind, and seem to be tumbling or flipping through space. These dynamic acrobatics relate to the things in nature I consider in the production, like falling leaves, as well as the gesture drawings of dancers.

The composition in *Untitled* presents a network of forms and implied connections because the individual objects are static and not always touching. They are symbiotically and precariously balanced and often rely on the counterweight of a nearby form in order to maintain their position. Referring to the image of this piece in fig. 7, one sculpture is adhered to the wall but reaches out, using its curved shape to hook onto another sculpture on the floor. The piece on the floor has no other support besides the form attached to the wall and would fall over if the two were not arranged in this manner. Additionally, the weight and rigidity of the floor piece is what allows the wall piece to extend as far as it does. The wall piece is structurally more flexible but

would merely drape parallel to the wall if it were not holding the other form aloft. The two forms are not glued or otherwise mechanically attached to each other. The final arrangement is accomplished through in-depth consideration of weight, balance, and tension. This system of interdependence relates to *untitled (land shoe and Leviathan)*, 2004 (fig. 8) by Winifred Lutz in which the weight of the object on the floor is what keeps the paper form suspended. The two sculptures are similar in their formal qualities but are composed of different materials that enhance the tension between them.

Within *Untitled* shadows are utilized to extend movement or add to the composition without requiring physical contact between pieces. Dramatic, long shadows allow for individual forms to be placed further apart without being disconnected and further integrates the gallery site (fig. 9). The use of shadow also corresponds with issues of perspective and display featured in *Untitled*. The sculptures are hollow and many feature surface additions on the interior and exterior. These pieces are displayed in a manner that invites viewers to move in particular ways to view the details. Issues of perspective and display that encourage viewing from specific vantage points relate back to Winifred Lutz. In pieces like *untitled (wall hole)*, 1999 (fig. 10), Lutz utilizes structural and formal components of the sculptures to guide viewers on how to approach the work. *untitled (wall hole)* features a cast paper sculpture mounted on a wall with a hole cut in that wall behind the sculpture. The hole, only visible from the opposite side of the wall, allows viewers to see inside the translucent flax form as light streams into it (fig. 11). Such details enhance the overarching concepts of Lutz's work that address issues of light and perception while also producing a more dynamic viewing experience.

Role of Associations, Ambiguity, Size and Phenomenology

My pieces are not designed to represent any one thing; they reference nature without depicting it. This is accomplished through the largely earth toned color palette, use of texture, and the shape of the sculptures. A single object may spark associations with tree bark, seaweed, or corn husks but how each piece is interpreted is contingent on the viewer's personal associations with the presented material. The installation is also intentionally titled *Untitled* to further this dialogue by not providing a definitive answer to what the sculptures are. I consider the role of associations in my work alongside Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theories of phenomenology. He writes, "association...never comes into play as an autonomous force...it operates only in virtue of the meaning it has acquired in the context of the former experience and in suggesting recourse to that experience; it is efficacious to the extent to which the subject recognizes it, and grasps it in the light or appearance of the past" (21). Within this context, a viewer's understanding of my work is reliant on their own archive of experience and the resulting realization of this self-referential experience. Meaning, as a viewer examines a sculpture, debating what it is supposed to be, there is a moment in which they are reminded of something they know (straw, bark, grass, etc.). Therefore, they begin to evaluate the piece through that association. There is a moment of recognition whereby they acknowledge they are perceiving and forming an understanding based on their associations. This acknowledgement of perception is possible because the sculptures exist in a balance of familiarity and unfamiliarity, providing an entry point into the work without being anchored in specificity.

A common example of the phenomenological in art history is Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (fig. 12); a work that created great controversy because of the way it disrupted public space and created an uncomfortable viewing experience (Arnason and Mansfield 606). *Tilted Arc* is large,

looming, and literally leans towards viewers. Its imposing presence causes viewers to suddenly become aware of their own body in relation to the work, and it is this self-consciousness or viewer subjectivity that makes the work phenomenological. Artist Robert Morris considering the notion of viewer subjectivity writes that, “through the experience of an interaction between the perceiving body and the world that fully admits that the terms of this interaction are temporal as well as spatial, that existence is process” (90). In this context the viewer’s experience and their physical and mental awareness in relation to the artwork are as important as the piece itself and this viewer subjectivity presents an alternative interaction to conventional gallery experience.

The role of associations, experience, and the use of “untitled” artworks was also inspired by Winifred Lutz’s ambiguous and experiential handmade paper sculptures. In *untitled (hemisphere with light source)*, 2004 (fig. 13) the parenthetical title provides no context for the intention behind the work, just description of visual elements. Works like *untitled (hemisphere with light source)* are meant to be experienced and interpreted on an individual basis without interference from an overt narrative. Lutz’s work invites pause, stillness, and reflection which are highlighted by her decision to display pieces as individuals or duos. The one to one experience of Lutz’s sculptures combined with their muted tones and static forms further this stillness and meditative interaction (Moyer 53). Concerned with the effect of form on the experience of an artwork, I elect to create gestural, dynamic shapes in order to imbue a higher level of energy in my pieces and the physical movement involved in viewing them. My energetic forms and staggered pops of color are intended to evoke associations of movement, sound, and flow that invite viewers to move around them.

Considering the size of the individual pieces within *Untitled*, idea of “objects” within the realm of sculptural artworks warrants discussion. According to Robert Morris’ writings, the

distinction of “objects” from sculptures is that they are often smaller, intimate, and potentially handleable (25). When viewing the individual pieces of *Untitled* there are often moments of imagined movement, such as contemplation of how the pieces might move if they were able to, or what environmental factor may have caused this arrangement of forms. Due to the arrangement, size, and surface treatment of these pieces, they “project possibilities for action as much as they project that they themselves were acted upon” (90). Along with the projection of associations, this mental experience allows for a more personal, viewer-directed interaction with the work. Due to their smaller size, objects require close inspection and draw the viewer into their space, creating a lessened visual and spatial view for viewers. By manipulating this quality alongside the undulating movement of the composition I am able to entice viewer movement on two physical levels: linear movement that corresponds with the composition of the installation, and a literal back and forth between close and far viewing of objects due to their size variance.

The take-away book accompaniment to the installation, *the lists* (fig. 14), is designed to prompt the mental meandering of associations similar to those described above. *the lists* is a Risograph printed pamphlet with pulp painted handmade paper covers containing my written observations of natural phenomena. The text reads like stream of consciousness poetry and is intended to resemble the mental wandering that takes place while viewing the installation. The text is arranged to promote reading back and forth across the gutter and is often abrupt or staggered, designed to reflect listing and the mental leaps of a wandering mind. For example, on the first spread (fig. 15) the text begins like a list, “movement/ mine... object’s... viewer’s... accumulation/ repetition/ of objects and actions.” As it continues, it departs into contemplative wandering, “whether my pieces are dead leaves/ flowers...or chicken feathers/ the weird plants

that grow on the water in the swamp.” This progression is indicative of the type of experience the installation aims to produce, beginning in specificity and departing to abstract thought.

The overall form of the text on the page also resembles the shape of the sculptures, particularly the final spread (fig. 16). The backgrounds of each spread are images of tree bark that have been abstracted, making them not immediately recognizable. This imagery provides subtle context for inspiration behind aesthetics of the pieces in the installation. The aesthetic and compositional similarity found in the shape of the text and background imagery maintains a connection between the book and the installation. The covers of the books are also essential context because they are made from the same type of paper as the sculptures. While viewers are not able to touch the sculptures, they are able to have a more nuanced understanding of the materiality of the sculptures through the book covers. Additionally, *Untitled* only exists in one location and the sculptures are not and cannot be serial, but *the lists* allows the installation’s content to be shared. The combination of *the lists* take-away status and its large amount of text make it unlikely that individuals would read it in its entirety within the gallery space. Thus, this book is likely to be fully read without the installation nearby allowing viewers to reflect on their gallery experience and associations with the sculptures that are now informed by the text. This cyclical and referential experience in which viewers are reminded of a past interaction through association highlights the underlying goal of the installation, the acknowledgement of perception.

Conclusion

My thesis work seeks to provide an avenue for viewer-directed experience within and outside of the gallery setting. I accomplish this through the incorporation of accessible and distributable take-away works such as *the lists* alongside a modular installation of handmade

paper sculptures. Utilizing high shrinkage handmade papers, I create forms that are expressive and dynamic, inviting physical movement through the installation space. The sculptures reference nature but do not depict it; rather, they behave like it in actions and compositions, calling to mind leaves, vines, and other natural phenomena. Through intentional ambiguity I encourage the projection of personal associations by viewers onto the objects, thereby furthering a viewer-centered experience. By featuring objects that are created in relationship to my body, exist at a manageable size for viewers, and focus on the acknowledgement of perception, I offer an alternative approach to the phenomenological in art history. My works do not loom over individuals through monumental scale, but rather beckon and invite through their gestures and approachable size. In the creation of this body of work I present opportunities for connection alongside individualized and shared experience in order to present art that can be appreciated by many rather than an informed few.

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Figures List



Figure 1. Maria Welch, *Untitled*, 2020. Handmade flax and abaca paper.



Figure 2. Maria Welch, *Untitled*. Example of a paper “ground” that more paper is then added to.



Figure 3. Maria Welch, *Untitled*. Example of smaller pieces of paper added to a casting.

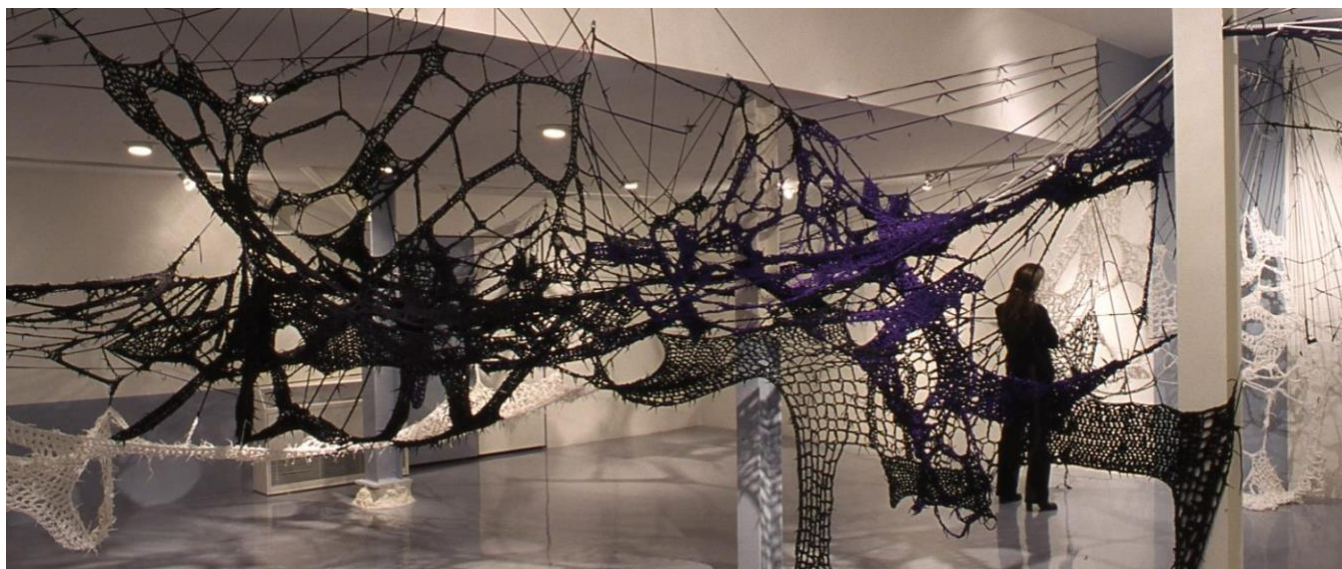


Figure 4. Sheila Pepe, *Under the F & G*, 2003. Mixed media installation.



Figure 5. Maria Welch, *Untitled*. Details of add-ons drying according to gravity.



Figure 6. Ursula von Rydingsvard, *Droga*, 2009. Cedar and graphite, 54 x 115 x 99 in.



Figure 7. Maria Welch, *Untitled*. Example of symbiotic and precarious forms.



Figure 8. Winifred Lutz, *untitled (land shoe and Leviathan)*, 2004. Cast pigmented flax paper, beech bark, wood, vinyl coated stainless steel cable, steel. Floor unit: 5 ½ x 38 ¼ x 12 ½ inches. Hanging unit: 17 x 13 ½ x 40 inches.



Figure 9. Maria Welch, *Untitled*. Example of shadows.



Figure 10. Winifred Lutz, *untitled (wall hole)* 1999. Cast unbleached and bleached flax, polystyrene, wood, chipboard. 20" high x 6" wide x 11" deep (includes wall thickness and form depth).



Figure 11. *untitled (wall hole)*, from opposite side of the wall.



Figure 12. Richard Serra, *Tilted Arc*, 1981. Hot-rolled steel, 12'x120'. Formerly at Federal Plaza, Foley Square, New York; removed in 1989.



Figure 13. Winifred Lutz, *untitled (hemisphere with light source)*, 2004, Wood, gourd half, flax paper, abaca paper, carbon paper, copper leaf, 5 x 15 x 6 3/8 inches.

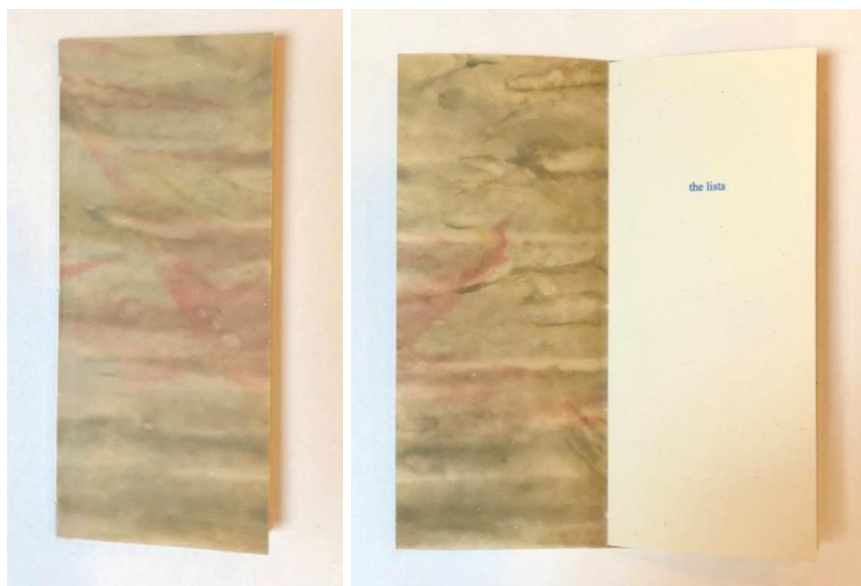


Figure 14. Maria Welch, *the lists*, 2020. Risograph prints on paper, handmade paper covers, 3"x7" closed.

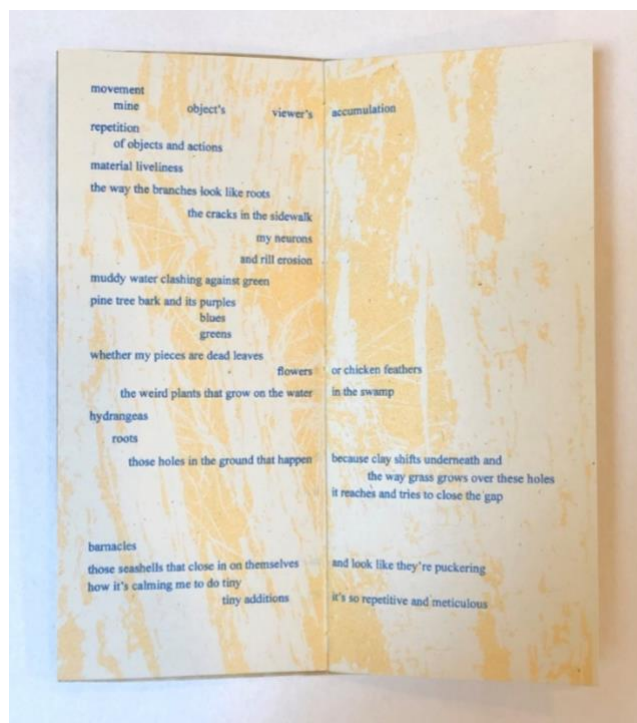


Figure 15. Maria Welch, *the lists*. The first spread.



Figure 16. Maria Welch, *the lists*. The final spread.