

Virtual versus the real: Form in the imaginary

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Abstract

My work highlights moments of human connection by probing subjects of intimacy and anonymity. My exploration of abstracted forms describes moments in time that are often overlooked in current hookup culture. Taking inspiration from the current hookup culture, I explore abstracted form to describe singular moments in time related to intimacy. I show the anonymity that is present in everyday contemporary connections as a result of as a result of virtual habitats. The way in which my work developed for my Master's Thesis encouraged a redaction from a normal working method in the studio. In doing so, the shapes produced and action of making became more intuitive as opposed to a methodical approach. I reference contemporary artists and writers that utilize and express moments of time, intimacy or action in their own work.

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Introduction

This thesis highlights moments of modern connection by probing intimacy and anonymity while investigating the technological advances that influence human connections in everyday life. Through picking and producing pieces in the mediums of printmaking and book arts and embracing the multiple quality that printmaking can bring to a piece the viewer can truly be transported to an experience that addresses these moments that are often overlooked. The multiple can represent the sheer amount of what's presented to us each day.

Looking into the scope of communication

Before entering the program my background was in illustration, which made it difficult to grasp the visual structures of a long narrative, instead of presenting a single moment in time. Although, this has stuck with me, I now understand the power of the narrative that is brought out in the codex and have likewise begun to accept different forms of art that I hadn't considered before. The first aspect of the University of the Arts that made me consider printmaking more was probably the paper studio. Being introduced to the paper studio at the University of the Arts had a direct influence on my consideration of printmaking as a primary method of art making. I fell in love with the intimate and tactile experience that paper can create. By learning the technique of pulp painting, I began to explore the substrate more so than the actual printing medium or matrix. And in doing so my work changed by using more graphic like objects to depict a moment rather than fully rendering a picture. After learning this technique I produced two pieces that relied heavily on pulp painting.



Figure 1 Alexander Quinones, *Prep*, 2017

The piece *Prep* consisted of twenty-four handmade sheets of abaca with pulp painting on top[Figure 1]. Depicted are red blood cells drifting along some of the pages with a burlap texture printed over all the pages. The burlap is to represent our skin peeling back to reveal either a clean surface with no cells or a surface that has candy-like cells scattered across the page to convey blood flow that evokes a party. Each page is supposed to represent a single intimate encounter. In these meetings you are opening yourself up and are putting yourself at risk of what lays beneath and behind skin on a cellular level. This was an important piece in my time in the program. It showed me that I didn't need to stick to a single page on the wall and I began to expand in the

direction of installation. The uniqueness of each page allows the viewer to ask themselves what lies beneath and behind their own skin on a cellular and emotional level. By showcasing a series of works as opposed to a single page on a wall, I was able to expand the ideas and direction of what an installation can become.



Figure 2 Alexander Quinones, *Sway, Swirl, and Swing*, 2017

Another piece that was fundamental to my current working style is a triptych of three lithographs: *Sway, Swirl, and Swing* [Figure 2]. These prints present a warped perspective making the viewer unsure of which angle they are entering the picture plane. The view is from the underside of a dance floor, looking up at couples dancing from underneath. I find the dance floor a very tantalizing and engaging place that requires you to commune with the bodies of strangers, equally with their outer form as well as with the unknown that lies within. The prints evoke an underlying tension with a monoprint splash of color colliding across the masses of bodies huddled in distorted forms.

Action altered by time compression

Time compression, a term coined by Tim Harvey, that means that as humans progress we also must face dilemmas that are present due to these advancements. Harvey explains how in capitalist type societies time and social structures are altered due to the flow of money. By having an increase of funds and ability at which to consume products, humanity's social structure and life is altered. In altering the status quo and having a rapid influx of masses flying at any individual you can expect some conflict. The demand for monetarily received objects/possessions now moves all of the concerns that are presented with the present and pushes them aside. This sense of debt and payment can reflect and be pushed to the surface in my own work. The sense of not worrying about today like with promiscuous sex and not being smart you have warped a moral that has been understood or laid out.

The term globalization can describe these moments, where today's society is challenging the fundamental understanding that was built upon politics and social life. This thought process is put in the framework of the post-modernist intellectual world. A quote from Harvey further explains his term time compression, "I use the word 'compression' because a strong case can be made that the history of capitalism has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us". (pg. 240) (2) As the world shifts to accommodate the fast pace of our technology the mind and ideals of humanity must also transition. To have the power of connection at a finger tap, with the implication of diving into a world of anonymity, one is sure to get lost. These virtual interactions may muddle or overshadow the real. My work has often played with flat and abstract shapes that reflect a stylized figure. This can echo the flat figures presented on the virtual plane. Since my

work is two-dimensional the relationship of form is utilized and reflected to the viewers to elicit the effect time compression has on physical or virtual interactions.



Figure 3 Robert Longo, *Eric*, 1981

Robert Longo's series *Men in the Cities* is very evocative of action. He drew these images in a way that is representative of the time in which they were produced. By Longo asking the models to convulse and contort in the pose, the viewer senses more of a somber attitude. In utilizing the viewer as an active part of the piece the artist can obstruct or insinuate intent, in turn allowing the viewer to make up their own narrative. By complicit participation in "torturing" the figures the viewer can insert their own ideals upon the character. Many artists have considered the

viewer through the process of making. Longo often spoke of asking the viewer to comply in realizing the work. Whether the viewer wanted to or not, their natural instinct is to make order and rationalize the images presented. The works exploit humanity's want to understand what is presented. "By denying the viewer access to any narrative, yet suggesting that something of profound dramatic consequence has taken place', Longo deliberately tempts – even seduces – the viewer into the pursuit of 'ordering' the 'unordered' picture... Longo's pictures exploit the habitual structure, playing upon the viewer's natural desire to try to figure out what is going on in an unresolved drama." (3) But there is also a notion that the work has changed as time goes on. Since the models' suits echo typical New York business attire it is now evocative of the sadness and distress of the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. This is evidence of how time compression can also alter a viewer's perspective on the pieces that are created throughout time and how it is important to consider.



Figure 4 Alexander Quinones *Plaque*, 2018

I intend the viewer to fully participate when entering my work. A series of shaped prints that occurred during my time in the program touches on unresolved dramas [Figure 2]. The prints are mounted on painted foam that mocks the shape of the print. By placing the print away from the wall I'm elevating the 2D imagery into a physical moment that protrudes into the real, turning the work into an object or an icon. In this iconographic imagery any individual who is familiar with the fast-paced mode of mobile apps can compare these icons as if they were about to open an app, or other "world". The viewer looks upon mounds of sexual interaction which places them as a voyeur in the act as well. In the viewer's choice to participate they ultimately become an extension of the piece. By taking on this role, the audience has their eyes or openings become receptive as if it were a vessel or hole.

Navigating modern connections



Figure 5 Alexandra Pirici *Co-natural*, 2018

Dancing and gesture traverse on the dance floor to open a realm that is initiated by online interactions. Alexandra Pirici's piece *Co-natural* [Figure 5] uses live performers with holographic images. In accessing the digital through holograms while capturing the instance with the gesture of dance, the viewer can see how they are both codependent in today's world of communication. Her piece contextualizes thoughts on the fragmentation of identity and how they connect to a relationship with communication through technology. The piece came about during political conflict over confederate statues. She created an experience mimicking the virtual body of a projected statue, posed by a performer, with the real bodies of dancers present in the space. The hologram performs along with the real bodies but as the performance time progresses the live

performers disperse leaving only the virtual monument which creates an instance of the virtual distorting the real.

The visceral world of today's intimacy can be measured in how successful one is online. It is very easy to understand how a romance can bud through online stimuli, whether it starts from an interaction like online dating or on hook-up sites. A quote taken from Hili Perlson's article about Pirici alludes to how she also incorporates the online element in her work; "I think that new technologies are interesting to reflect on in terms of how they manifest in the human ..." "I'm interested in creating an experience of what you can intellectually perceive online but without having a feeling of it. Like being profiled—you know it's happening but you don't have a physical sensation of it." (4)



Figure 6 Alexandra Pirici, *Threshold*, 2017

In her performance on the High Line in New York, entitled *Threshold*, was performed on the High Line in New York. The artist brought performers or dancers to make a tangible line or a visible threshold. The barrier the bodies made was able to shift and sway allowing people to pass by but not without having a physical interaction. My own work is shaped around the evidence I see from fast-paced interactions. It is through these encounters, the individual or “viewer” bypasses elements that are key, representative, and illuminating of these anonymous confrontations.

Through material and image, the gesture of the online or virtual can be solid and fleshed out. By using material and substance to capture a physical moment, Pirici’s work encourages the viewer to consider those often-overlooked moments that surround the focus of action. It is through the manifestation of making a touchable object that I’m demystifying the untouchable feelings she making reference to.

Evidence of technologies habitat through gesture

Figure 7 Alexander Quinones, *Portal*, 2018

My most recent piece in the program is *Portal* [Figure 7], a collection of monotypes that were cut out and layered in order to create a circular opening. Holes are a recurring theme in my work, inspired by the holes that are crucial to life itself: we are born from a hole, sustain nourishment through a hole, expel our waste through holes. It's a reflection of life and how simple and referential it can be. By using collage and monotype, I create works that allow the viewer to jump in and out of the moments that are presented. The sense of a portal that the circular structure of clothes creates give a view into a world that maybe the viewer hasn't experienced. Paper can be thin and

vulnerable, while in these moments, the collaged pieces seem to dance along, insinuating a structure and presence. Influences of street art/life and the subcultures that cultivate it have started to enter into my work. Street style is evident in big cities throughout the world. Through personal expression in fashion, make up, and choice of music an individual can convey their place in society. The aesthetic of this work utilizes bright colors that can be reflective of graffiti art but also has a dingy dirty quality. The flat shapes, fragmented positions, and overlay of objects are representative of stickers or stylized street art. While exploring and creating I decided to use the inspiration of surrounding moments to influence and depict how I present my work. By portraying these objects of contemporary society in a flattened format I am abstracting and fragmenting a moment in time that is only evident in passing.

Repetition through reflection



Figure 8 Leon Golub, *Gigantomachy II*, 1966

Repetition through reflection

An artist that has influenced how I present the aesthetic of my work and the ferocity of mood within a work is Leon Golub. He has an understanding of the strange and things that go unnoticed or are hidden in the world. He highlights moments that may drive people mad, or that people want to dismiss altogether. His awkwardly posed figures are lifted from scenes of real life, such as images of war. “The culmination of this period of work was the series of *Gigantomachies*, five frieze-like paintings of waring groups, each figure slightly larger than life-size, completed between 1964-67. Although these are abstracted and generalized depictions of violence, specific physiognomies are marked by Golub’s growing interest and accumulation of photographic source ... everything to do with his seeking visual language of/for the body under duress.” (1) This excerpt from Jon Bird’s book on Golub explains his thought process of

capturing the pain of life by illuminating the physiognomies of the characters. I believe you can capture the energy that these moments exude through color choice, line weight, or inserting a sense of atmosphere [Figure 8]. By using the medium of printmaking and embracing the multiple as a means of representing repetition, both in quality and quantity, these online interactions can seem to blend back and forth. I am portraying interactions that melt into one another, creating memories that may fade but leave their traces.

Submission and compliance



Figure 9 Alexander Quinones, *Tea Room*, 2018

Bending reality to dictate what's present has been a recent device in my work to elude to dissatisfying subjects, or things we do not want to grasp as realities or false truths. We push these deep in our minds and bury them. A lot of memories that are present are hard to navigate. By placing the subject in the unreal space of the print, I encourage the viewer to dissect the intent

behind the work as well as their own convictions. My work has always represented a correlation with my emotions and helps me work out difficult memories. Even in the underground world of anonymous sex you still come across names. My obsession with the communal world of gay bathhouses and the anonymous and accelerated interactions that take place in them, seemed like a perfect place for imagery. In the book *Tea Room* [Figure 9], produced during my last quarter in the program, I used a warped pattern to make an imaginary room. The book format can ultimately represent a single memory in these times. You enter the room as you begin the book and leave when finished. Reading can bring you into the world, which is depicted from a warped perspective, something that seems real but through further investigation is fictitious. . People act in the book but it is ultimately about a stream of water, entering the world and traveling along the pages. This is to convey the essence of life: seminal fluid. Human experience through these interactions is all solely revolved around this fluid or these openings. The stream dances around temptation and inevitably falls through the drain to recycle and start the process again. A sense of memento mori is present within the collation of the pages.

Conclusion

It is within everyday action that people must consider and evaluate what their experiences. Though not everything can be looked over with fine tooth comb, the individual can begin to navigate the world through a scope. Technological advancements may inhibit everyday life by hindering human connection but it can also lend a hand to the future in a positive way. I only hope to instill in the audience a sense of reflection on themselves and their surroundings. My practice will continue to highlight and bring forth the moments that we do not notice or elicit.

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Figure 5

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Figure 3

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Robert Longo

Figure 6

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Figure 4

Quinones, Alexander, *Plaque*, 2018

Figure 7

Quinones,Alexander, *Portal*, 2018

Figure 1

Quinones,Alexander, *Prep*, 2017

Figure 2

Quinones,Alexander, *Swing,Sway, and Swirl* , 2017

Figure 9

Quinones,Alexander, *Tea Room*, 2018