

Resonant Abstraction

Stephanie J. Baugh
Masters of Fine Art in Interdisciplinary Arts
Goddard College, Port Townsend, Washington
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Thanks

At my third Goddard residency, I was concerned about many things. In an effort to calm my fears, I went for several walks around the grounds of Fort Worden State Park. I walked without knowing where I was going. I selected paths through the woods that I had not traveled before, and I walked from North Beach to Point Wilson in fog so thick that I could not see if the tide had covered the shore and blocked my path. I wondered, with every step, if I would have to turn around and retrace my journey. I was anxious with energy of exploration and hope; I was also uneasy about what I might encounter. I wasn't sure it was safe to be alone in an unknown place. My ability to complete these walks was sustained by seeing footsteps in the sand or on the trail in front of me. If someone else had walked this path, then surely I must be able to walk it too.

The Goddard motto, "Trust the Process," was exemplified in these experiences. However, my strength to persevere did not come merely from faith in my own actions; others supported me on this journey. As I look back at the path of this degree program, I am particularly grateful to my husband Brian for his constant companionship and patience, to my mother and father for making my return to graduate school possible and for their unwavering support and belief in what I do, to my fellow classmates, Chanika, Joy, Katy, Lawrie, and Tabatha for being my friends, to the Goddard community – specifically to my advisors and readers, Michael, Cynthia, Laiwan, and Bonnie, and to my colleagues Stacy, Martin, and Hannah who helped cover classes and acted as sounding boards throughout this process. My life has been enriched by this experience as well as by my encounters with all of you.

Artist Statement

I am interested in the felt experience of small and quiet aspects of life. I am curious about how we can lay meaning and import over activities that are often seen as mundane or merely practical. I seek to add this sort of meaning to my own life. I try to approach the common simple activities of my life with a heightened awareness so that I may be open to aesthetic experiences and breathe in the beauty of the everyday.

The works I create are responses to my efforts of paying attention to aspects of my experience that suggest that the aesthetic can be entangled with the normal. I work with abstraction because the process of distilling an object, image, experience, or event down to essential spaces or movements, which I sometimes represent through a network of lines in an articulated space or through the arrangement of geometric shapes, can only happen when I have softened my focus on the world and sought to hold on to some quality of the experience that denies realistic representation.

Ideas that Inspire

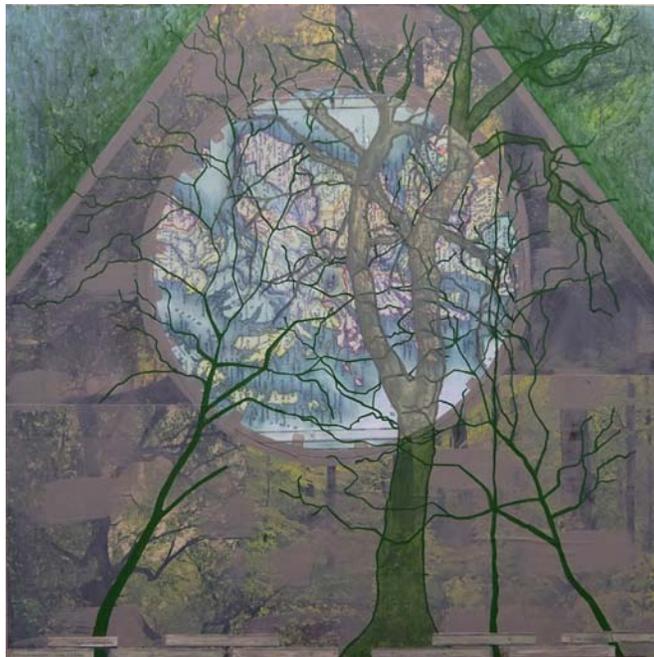
While my work focuses on small, quiet, everyday experiences, larger issues of the natural world excite me. I love trees and bodies of water and mountains, and I'm interested in time – both how we map it and what it feels like. I enjoy posing questions of ethics to my students, and I love talking about artworks with young people. I love being in aesthetic museum spaces; I can be made to feel whole by walking; and I'm distinctly interested in the opposing concepts of travel and home. Sometimes these loves act as nourishment, and sometimes they provide an impetus to work. To some extent this list of loves is a diverse list, but in another way, I'm talking about only a few things. These topics could be grouped as nature, movement, and space, but when looking into the heart of each topic, I have to wonder if they are not all the same thing.

Trees appeal to me because they are visually interesting. But my interest in trees goes beyond aesthetics; they carry real meaning for me. That meaning has a lot to do with time, the movement of growth, and the sublime. Most trees that command my attention are much bigger and older than I am. Somehow the relative stability and stillness of a single tree represent a strength and commitment that I respect. Of course trees cannot seek shelter in bad weather; they cannot run to a better place, but I anthropomorphically read that characteristic as a choice – to stand with determination and patience and perspective. It is a choice that I admire and wish I could emulate.

But trees are not actually still. They move in response to being brushed by the wind, raise and lower their branches in response to the weight of thick summer leaves or the shedding of those leaves, and they move as they grow. Their branches develop and take shape as they seek to maximize their access to the sun; the shape of those branches evidence both genetic dispositions toward form and genuine efforts to seek sunshine. The branches are irregular lines that have recorded movement. Growth records the passage of time. One of the easiest ways to know that

time has passed is to see how much a tree has grown. And one of the clearest indicators of the seasons exists in the state of the leaves on a tree; when someone wants symbolically to represent the seasons, trees in various states of leaf and bloom are often used.

Movement is an expression of time and change through time but is often talked about as if it is a static thing. For example, the saying, “You can’t step in the same river twice” illustrates that the water in the river is always different while the path through which the water flows remains essentially the same. Whenever a specific river is discussed, the water is not and cannot be the subject; the river is a transient thing that moves through a specific place. That place and the movement of water through it constitute our understanding of that river. All movement shares this characteristic. We recognize movement because something is not where it was at an earlier moment in time. Lines, such as the branches of trees, enable us to see both where the tips of the branches are and where they were when the tree was younger.



Woodlands, 16" x 16", mixed media on panel, 2013 ([page 48](#))

Note: All images of my work used within the text are represented again at a larger scale in the Artworks section. Noted in parenthesis is the page number, which is also a link, to the larger image.

Perhaps all aspects of nature that appeal to me do so because I see them as expressions of time, time expressed through movement: the growth of trees, the flowing of rivers, the ebb and flow of tides, and the falseness of the apparent stability of mountains. Mountains can remind me that even something that feels as stable as the earth under my feet, something that has been stable for generations and allowed cities and civilizations to develop, is subject to the influence of force throughout time. Mt. Rainier is one mountain that matters to me, and its neighbor, the partly obliterated Mt. St. Helens, reminds us that mountains change. The hills on which Edinburgh, Scotland, stands also illustrate the power of force over time; glaciers swept away the softer layers of limestone and the left giant waves of cooled basalt that now make up the undulating hills of Old Town. As Adam Gopnik discusses in *Angels and Ages*, a book in part about Darwin and his understanding of time, there is a tremendous challenge in reconciling a perspective of “deep time” – the slow progress of the millennia, with a personal experience of lived time (172).

To think of this “deep time” and the ages that have passed as the world was shaped, presents me with a strong sense of the sublime. “The relentlessness of time,” as Andy Goldsworthy laments in *Rivers and Tides*, is unavoidable. It is powerful, and I am at once made small by its existence and enlarged in that I am aware of it and feel I can take part in its grandeur. Philosopher, Arne Naess, explains, “The smaller we come to feel when compared to the mountain, the nearer we come to participating in its greatness” (qtd. in Rothenberg 26). And philosopher, Alain de Botton, following the advice of Wordsworth, suggests mountains as appropriate companions for improving our personalities. If our identities are somewhat changeable based on whom we are with, then what, “may be expected to happen to a person’s identity in the company of a cataract or a mountain...?” (145).

However, I do not live near a mountain; the prairies of the mid-west often fail to awe me, although the winds and thunderstorms can easily remind me of my smallness. I have no river either. Last year for five months I lived within three blocks of the Arno in Italy, and for another five months I could take daily walks along the river Tay in Scotland. But these places were not my home. The Mississippi River is only twenty miles away from my home, but my daily life is not affected by it beyond the slight undulations of ground that evidence the small streams that once shaped this land. My daily experience of nature is limited to the trees and other plants that surround the streets and buildings that make up my day-to-day life. While such common examples of nature may rarely provide access to the sublime, William Ellery Channing (qtd. in Leude) reminds us,

How much of God may be seen in the structure of a simple leaf, which, though so frail as to tremble in every wind, yet holds connections and living communications with the earth, the air, the clouds, and the distant sun, and through these sympathies with the universe, is itself a revelation of an omnipotent mind!

So I must look to the trees and acknowledge their movement and see them as manifestations of time.

As an example of how this interest in nature as an expression of the force of time can relate to my artistic life, I remember experiences in the fall of 2012 while I was living in Perth, Scotland.

On Wilhelmina Barns-Graham

On our first full day in Scotland, my husband, Brian Baugh, and I visited the Perth Museum that had a traveling exhibition of works by Wilhelmina Barns-Graham. Barns-Graham is a 1950s Scottish artist from St. Andrews (only an hour from Perth) who also lived in St. Ives in Cornwall, spent time in Tuscany, on the volcanic island of Lanzarote, and on a glacier in Switzerland. The exhibition was mostly comprised of her drawings, and these works are primarily of natural subjects like trees, hills, and waves. Her drawing style is heavily linear and has a strong level of abstraction

in the way that the lines do not necessarily follow the contours of the natural forms, but suggest the energies at work within them.

This awareness of internal energies was confirmed by the wall text that began with the Gaelic saying, "Every force evolves a form." The text continued, "Things are shaped by the energies that act upon them." Mel Gooding curated the exhibition, and in the exhibition catalog he further explains Barns-Graham's interest in the natural forces at play beneath the observable world.

Art would function [for modernists such as Barns-Graham] as a means to revealing the underlying rhythms and energies of a living nature, and as a means of presenting our experience, emotional, intellectual, phenomenological, of the world of space, light and dark, colour, atmosphere, of the look and feel of natural objects, of the organic rhythms and patterns of the vegetable and mineral kingdoms, and of their unpredictable disruptions (6).

How lucky for me to stumble upon this artist and this exhibition as I began my adventures in Scotland. Not only could her way of thinking about the natural world inform my own interactions with the nature and landscape of Scotland, but Barns-Graham's perspective about the relationship between her observation-based drawings and her abstract paintings and prints could likewise inform my own views of abstraction in my work.



Lava Muerte, Lanzarote
Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, 22" x 30", pencil on paper, 1992

The relationship between observation, representation, and abstraction has long been a concern for me. Barns-Graham doesn't work from her drawings when she makes her abstract paintings. For her, "the discipline [of drawing] releases me in my paintings to work more freely, expand with ideas and imagination involving colour, texture, and harmony, [to] start creating" (6). She also describes perception as being as much about "inner seeing" as about "outward sensing." Her mentor, Naum Gabo, writes, "[what] we perceive with our five senses is not the only aspect of life and nature to be sung about..." (qtd. in Gooding 7). These ideas clarify that I need to think about the role of perception in my work and in my experiences.

Gooding similarly writes, "So far from being purely 'objective,' our looking at the world is in fact a restless combination of preconception, subjective perception, cognition, and purposeful selection" (6). As evidence of the "subjective perception" of encounters with the world, I would like tell a story about two walks.

In September, after being in Perth, Scotland, for one month Brian and I went for a long, exploratory walk over Kinnoull Hill. We had walked up and down the hill a couple of times before, but we had always followed the same path despite seeing other options present themselves. On this particular day we wandered down footpaths through denser parts of the woods, and finally followed a clearly marked path over the top and down the back side of the hill. As we followed this path, we found ourselves in a woodland area filled with towering thin larch trees and low fern-like brambles. The light and the air were amazing; the space felt charmed. I took no photographs of those woods because that sort of documentation would not suit. The next day I wrote down the following words, which had occurred to me in those woodlands.

*This is the place I will go.
This place of whisper-green silver trunks
towering over mosses and gently arching ferns –
the dappled greens of the woodland floor.*

*This is the place I will go.
this place of sheltered breezes and filtered light
this place of softness and clarity
this place of peace.*

A clear breath. An open breath. An invitation to rest.

I was very anxious to return to this woodland in the weeks that followed. It was such an enchanted place that I wanted to be in that space again. I did finally return, over a month later, with Brian and with four visitors from the U.S. The path was muddier; the green ferns looked tired and ready for autumn; I was concerned about the comfort and energy level of our guests on such a long walk. I felt no magic in the woods that day. I looked for it. I tried to quiet my mind and remember what I had felt before, but there was nothing I could do. It wasn't the same woods at all.



An image of the Kinnoull Woodlands taken on a third walk, on January 1st, 2013.

Yes, the woods had changed, but only slightly. What had changed more was my own awareness and energy. What, then, was I writing about when the woodlands had seemed to be such a place of refuge? Was there some perfect alignment of concrete factors – the angle of the sun, the relative humidity, the specific stage of late summer growth – that created a magical environment? Or was it an alignment of personal energies – my emotional state, my peace and openness of my mind from the long walk – that enabled my appreciation and perception of that space? I suppose it was a combination of the two; I was in the right place at the right time, and I possessed the right frame of mind and awareness. Perhaps this is my task – to be ever open to the possibility that this moment and this place might be another alignment of good things... that, if I am ready, then magic can be experienced right now.

In Barns-Graham's works, her geological drawings show the clearest evidence of the effect of forces on the appearance of the natural world. The volcanic rock formations on Lanzarote and the glacier drawings powerfully exhibit the role that large-scale forces can have on the land. When she was working on the Grindwald Glacier drawings, Barns-Graham found the primary focus of her work. She sought to "interrogate the nature of the world, and make visible its elemental energies and forms" (Gooding 21).

Although the stunning landscapes of Scotland are directly the effect of volcanic and glacial actions of the very distant past, I can relate better to Barns-Grahams' drawings of trees than to her landscapes. Her tree drawings likewise illuminate the forces affecting the tree's growth and shape. But the shorter life span of trees (compared to rocks) means the forces are not geological and epic, but are closer to a human scale – the weather, the soil, and the results of human actions affect their forms.

My own fascination with trees has brought me, many times, to contemplate what affects their forms. Bonsai trees are the easiest example; their stunted growth and twisted forms are the

direct result of bound roots and severe pruning. Seaside trees, constantly swept by the ocean winds, grow asymmetrically so that the force of the wind can be seen even when it is not blowing. But tree forms are also driven by their own genetics. A walnut tree's silhouette, regardless of where it grows, will never look like a cedar. So, when thinking about the forces affecting form, for living things at least, we cannot look only at the application of the forces of the environment. We must also consider the internal, self-determined or genetically established energies.

I wonder about this balance of inner and outer forces with my own body. How much of how I am is the result of genetics and how much comes from conscious choices such as diet and exercise? How much is the result of activities in which I engage, like walking, or slumping over a computer? How much is the result of stress, emotional drain, joy, or love? Sometimes I feel thrashed about by stormy winds and crushed under burdens that I don't know how to bear. How are these forces shaping me, both in my physical form and how I encounter the world? And, how should I judge the result?

Which is more beautiful, a tree that has grown in an open field with good access to light, good soil, and adequate water so that the true nature of the tree can be seen in its height and the spread of its canopy, or a tree that has fought for survival on a rocky ledge, where it has been bent over and broken by hardships and adverse conditions? Both trees can be appreciated; both should be admired for doing what they do (grow) in spite of and because of their surroundings. But trees have no choice in their environment; they have no voice to speak against the construction of parking lots or in support of gardens; they cannot relocate. But I can; I have choices to make, and so I must make judgments about how to live and what forces to endure.

How much choice I have, how much control I have, is limited. I can choose how I react, but I can't always choose what happens to me, what forces come to act on me. Am I more like the trees and the rocks than I want to admit? Am I a passive being, pushed around by greater forces

while I vainly believe that my small reaching toward the sun matters? Can I find answers, or some sense of peace, by returning to Barns-Graham's work?



Old Oak Tree (St. Andrews Cathedral Series)
Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, 20.5" x 15.5", pencil on card, 1979

The forces she captures in lines of charcoal create things and places of beauty. No doubt the forces were violent and terrible in their actions, but the resulting forms, the lasting forms, can be seen as beautiful. Perhaps it is not just that force evokes form, but that form subdues force into something that we, at this small human scale, can appreciate. In this way the artist comments on and translates the energies of life into a graspable shape. After all, we cannot always stand with our face in the ocean spray or lie with our backs pressed against the gradual movements of the earth. On some days we just walk through museums with friends and are reminded of the wonder of life.

Movement: Space and Time

After spending ten months last year traveling, or rather ten months of being not-home, I realized a distinct interest in the difference between travel and home. Traveling can be seen as a type of movement, or it can be seen as a collection of places that are all not-home. There are clearly days of travel, when walking, then riding on a train, then a bus, then a plane, and then in a car means you are moving across the earth – starting the day in one location and ending it in another. But longer experiences of travel tend to focus on the locations where time was spent rather than the actions of getting to those places.

While countless miles were traveled in those ten months of last year, the cities can easily be counted: Perth, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee, Birnam, Dunkeld, Oban, Iona, Elgin, Aberdeen, Arbroth, Stirling, St. Andrews (all in Scotland), then London and Amsterdam (and Seattle and Port Townsend), then Florence, Pisa, Rome, Siena, Venice, and Ravenna (all in Italy). If the essence of our understanding of movement lies in seeing something as being in a different location than before, then listing each city fits the bill in describing travel. But it also raises the question of what counts as home. I lived in Perth for five months. Even with all of the side trips to other cities, at least four months of nights were spent in our apartment in Perth. So, were we “traveling” while we were spending time in Perth, or were we at “home”?

I strongly resisted any suggestion that Perth was home. If we were downtown and ready to return to the apartment, then that’s what was said: “let’s go back to the apartment,” not “let’s go home.” What did home mean to me if not the place where I prepared and ate meals, showered, slept every night, had many important belongings, and was with my husband? How is this house in Illinois where I now sit more “home” than that apartment in Perth or the one in Florence? Perhaps the answer resides in notions of permanence or transience. The duration of our stays in

Perth and Florence were significantly longer than normal vacations, but they were always temporary. We knew our life would resume in Monmouth.

Our house in Monmouth has a feeling of permanence in two ways. We have put down roots here, to an extent. We have worked on this dwelling. We have painted and cleaned and rearranged and decorated and entertained and maintained and repaired; a lot of energy has been invested in this home. These are all actions of the past. But there is a sense of future too. Even when we were abroad, Brian was on his regular, continuing contract with the college; we had conversations about teaching schedules for the next year; and we imagined what future seasons would feel like after we returned. Perth and Florence not only had no significant past with us, they had no future. However, a new house can quickly feel like a home as one imagines a future within that space.

But this question about the difference between travel and home can be distilled to a simpler relationship – between movement and space. Through her book, *Wanderlust*, Rebecca Solnit influenced my thinking about these two concepts. Her thorough examination of the practice of walking opened my eyes to why walking holds a place of interest for me. While she addresses the long history of walking – from the peripatetic classical philosophers, to modern-day rambles in the UK, she clarifies three criteria which must be present for anyone to “go for a walk,” which is distinctly different from walking to get to a destination. A walker must have freedom: freedom of body – to be able to dress in a manner appropriate to the task (women who were not allowed to wear trousers rarely went for walks) and to have ample comfort and control of the body while it walks, freedom of time – to be able to spare time and energy for the act of walking without a purpose, and freedom of space – to be able to move safely and legally through a space that is accessible (168).

This realization of the connection between walking and freedom inspired my painting, *Choice*, which is an abstraction of the words, “freedom,” “time,” “body,” and “space.”



Choice, 24" x 48", acrylic on canvas, 2011 [\(page 45\)](#)

For many years in making visual art, I celebrated the relationship between movement and lines; “lines show where movement has happened,” was my most frequent statement about my work. Those lines might relate to the branches of trees, handwriting or calligraphy, or floor patterns from dance pieces. The movement was always the focus; the lines were the dominant feature of the paintings. As I will discuss later with the painting, *Ritual*, once I began to pay attention to walking and the space through which I walked, then the appearance of my visual work changed too – shifting focus from the moving lines to the space where the movement could happen. *Choice* also represents this interest in space.

Movement, the space within or through which the movement happens, and the places that are connected by movements: these topics intertwine in complex ways that can be seen in the practice of path-making. On campus, students cut across an open field between buildings. They do not use the sidewalks that curve and make an appealing landscape design; they walk the way

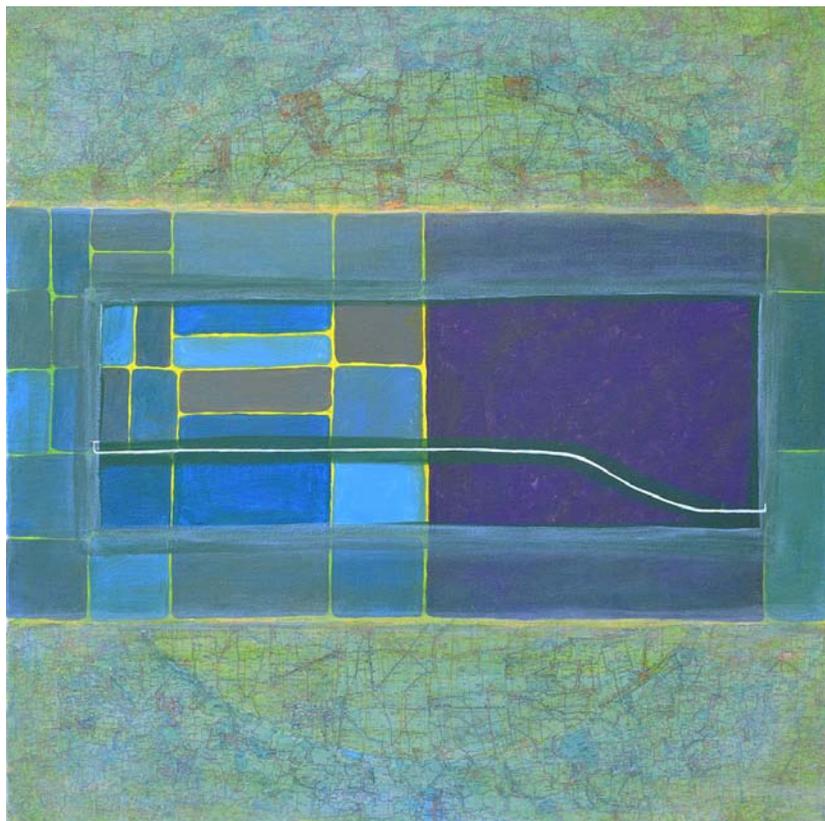
that provides shortest distance. Over time that walkway, which was not marked but appeared as logical, developed into a visible footpath. The grass became worn down and eventually refused to grow. The path became a dirt path, then in the rain, a muddy path. Eventually the landscape crew realized that the students were demanding that path, and it was paved in order to improve its appearance and function. The line of that sidewalk is now a record of the movement of many students over many months as they traveled between the places on campus. That open field was shaped by the act of people moving through it. Space and movement are inherently linked.

Similarly rivers are paths shaped by movement. What *is* a river? Is it the water? But the water is just passing through. Is it a point on a map? Rivers are long, so it must be multiple points on a map at least. Is it the path through which the water flows? If so, then when a river dries up, and nothing but the path remains, then it would still be called a river. A river must be both the path through which the water flows and the flow of water. A river is space and movement.

Movement is grounded in time, but space, or rather a place, seems as if it is not so bound in the passing of time. There is a felt permanence of place, but it is a subjective permanence or else everywhere could be felt as home. And maybe it can be. At a TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) conference, Pico Iyer expresses that notion of place. "Home is where you stand." His concluding remark builds on his earlier statement that "home has less to do with a piece of soil than a piece of soul" – an internal sense rather than an external place. He describes finding home as an act of finding yourself. In that case, we are very much like a river; we are at once ourselves, our movement through the world, and the path, which has both a past and a future, through which our life flows. We are our movements, and we are the space through which we move.

The meandering connections between all of these concepts (trees, rivers, mountains, time, movement, space/place, travel/home, walking/standing) to some extent question notions of identity

and subject/object relationships. Does the water shape the land, or does the land direct the water? Is a river action or constancy? What makes this house my home? Is it I, or is it the situation that provides a past and suggests a future relationship with this house? And, if the concept of home and my experience of it are based on my subjective perspective, then what role does objective fact play? The fact of this house sitting in this geographic location is not meaningless. It does matter that this house is one mile from our place of employment. I cannot tell if I purposefully made this place home, or if the conditions of this place required that it become home. Which is the more active agent: me or this situated place?



Work, 36" x 36" mixed media on canvas, 2012 (page 56)

This piece uses collaged roadmaps of the cities in which we have lived and worked and an abstraction of the neighborhood where we currently live. The route that we walk to work is highlighted.

My initial inquiries into the discipline of phenomenology also explore these questions. John Russon, in *Human Experience*, challenges us to drop our notions of our subjective agency in our lives (9). Objects, or anything that we might perceive as outside of ourselves, act on us as much as we act on them. Our sense of those external things is so deeply rooted in our own perception of them that they cannot exist for us outside of our experience of them. There is no “outside of us.” There is only our subjective sense of everything. Our perception of ourselves as acting in the world is really the world acting on us. We are shaped by situation, and we shape situation through our understanding of it (17).

Further, if things do not exist for us outside of our experience of them, then we must understand that experience is not static. We know what something is as much by the characteristics of it as by the characteristics that it is not (19). I was away for those ten months; I was not home; *away* is a non-place. Home *is* not away. Similarly, our only understanding of *now* rests with the realization that it is not *then* and it is not *next*. But *now* would not be as it is without its specific *then*, and *now* is always moving toward one of the possible *nexts*. *Now* cannot be without both *then* and *next*.

Attention

In *The Art of Travel* de Botton addresses questions of attitude and perspective. In his final chapter, he suggests that the meaning of travel comes not so much from the destinations to which we go, but the attitudes with which we go. When we travel, we are surrounded by the new and unusual; our experiences are highlighted because they are so distinctly different from our everyday lives. It isn't the difference that makes those moments stand out so much as it is our awareness of them (242). De Botton encourages us to walk around our own home and neighborhood with that same level of wonder and curiosity and delight. How familiar to us are the things that are

ordinary? Has their everydayness blinded us to their unique qualities? Have we really seen what is commonly around us? The best lesson we can learn from travel is how to see our lives at home with fresh eyes – how to attend to what is at hand with the same responsiveness and fascination as we do the exotic.

One way that I live when I am at home (and when I travel) is through the act of walking. It seems that the only way to know a city is to walk it. Likewise one way I learn my home is to walk it. I walked around the neighborhood of my childhood home, and in every location that I've lived since, I have walked: walked to school, walked for exercise, walked for escape, walked to learn where I was, walked to think. Despite my long involvement with walking, it was only a short time ago that I begin to consider connections between attentiveness and walking.

Thich Nhat Hanh explains that walking can be meditation. "When we walk mindfully, we see the beauty and the wonder of the earth around us, and we wake up. We see that we are living a very wonderful moment" (46). I do not practice walking meditation as he suggests, but I walk the same routes over and over again, paying attention not to my breath or the transfer of my weight so much as which flowers are growing in the neighbor's yard, whether the trees are starting to turn, and where the birds have decided to congregate. I notice the air temperature when the local kids will stay out after dark playing in the street; I notice when the wind blows from the east and wonder what changes that will bring; I notice when I don't notice – when my thoughts are consumed with work and plans, and my attention is blinded by stress.

"I notice. I notice. I notice." This was the name of an art criticism game that I learned from Renee Sandell when she spoke to the art education students at the University of Georgia in 2003. This game is designed to help young people spend time in the act of observation – to slow down the process of looking, so that they could really see. Look at this painting. What do you notice about it? Say everything.

Why should we look at life with any less attention than we look at a painting?

Did I bring a philosophy of attentiveness to my artistic practice, or has my life-long engagement with art taught me to attend? Am I really an entity that makes art, or has my practice of making slowly made me?

Ellen Dissanayake explains that in all cultures throughout history, the best common descriptor for the actions of making art is a “making special” (92). She refers to the creation of special ceremonial objects or of decorating everyday objects so that they are imbued with special meaning. I question the requirement of purposeful action to make something special, I think that something can be seen as special just by paying attention to it – that is a guiding belief for how I encounter the world. The challenge is to be mindful enough to see or remember this fact. Making art is a way for me to be attentive.

The Home Series

I am currently engaged in creating a body of work called the *Home Series*. The series was founded on two paintings: one from the spring of 2012, before Brian and I left for our ten months abroad, and the other was the first painting I made when we returned in June of 2013. These two paintings provide elements that have now become a working vocabulary for all works in the series. The works are characterized by a square format (or a square set within a rectangle), with a circle inscribed within it. The space of each painting is often divided into regular geometric shapes that are filled with different colors. Sometimes linear elements are also present. While in the first two paintings these elements are representational of very specific aspects of being home, the later paintings are motivated in more general ways by experiences or moods. Texture and surface

quality are important in the work, and wood grain, wood veneers, plaster, or collaged elements are often utilized.



Ritual, 36" x 36", acrylic on canvas, 2012 (page 55)

Ritual was created in the spring of 2012, and it not only influenced the current *Home Series*, but marked a distinct departure from the calligraphic linear abstractions of my previous work. Although I generally do not think that verbal explanations aid in appreciating my work, I will describe my process of creating this painting because doing so helps establish the structure of the other paintings of the series.

Many times in my first semesters at Goddard I heard reference to a “daily practice,” and I was concerned that I didn’t really have one. My regular activities change so much that there is almost nothing that is consistent from day to day. *Almost* nothing. Some things persist: wake-up; let the cat out of his room; go downstairs; open the curtains; fix a cup of coffee; eat periodically; brush teeth; close the curtains, wash; sleep; and breathe. Everything else changes. My attempts to establish some other “daily” activity have all failed.

My morning ritual, which consists of the most specific actions in the list above, is the closest thing I have to a daily practice. In the case of these daily actions, there is no memento or object I can hold to help me reflect; making art was my best option for how to examine my experiences. In a sketch I traced the walking path of morning activities. I began by laying out the basic floor plan of the house for the path to flow through, but at the end of the sketching time, I added the large circle that overlays the entire composition. The circle is a representation of the specific period of time: the daily.

Deciding how the path should appear was a challenge. I thought about the path as I walked it daily; in some cases, the path should be more accurate, and in some cases further abstraction was needed. Through simplification of the first sketch, I developed the current shape of the line, but I kept a few of the bigger curves and flourishes from later sketches. The collection of marks in the top right corner reminded me of the zodiac symbol for Libra; Libra doesn't mean anything in particular to me, but then I learned that Libra "rules" the stomach. This symbol sat in the corner of the painting that represented both the kitchen on the first floor and the bathroom on the second – a logical place for the sign of the stomach.

Another flourish rested at the bottom right corner of the painting. The two spiral circles resembled the sign for Taurus, which rules the head. This area of the painting represents the bedroom, the place of sleep – a reasonable place for the sign of the head. I also extended the line to the front door area and created an abstraction of the Pisces symbol; Pisces rules the feet. Walking out the front door is a valued daily action.

The line work builds from my thoughts about lines as records of movement. My interest in walking, however, has led me to an expansion of that concept. Talking about walking requires also talking about where the walking is taking place or where the walker is headed. In all of my linear abstraction paintings that precede *Ritual*, none have meaningful backgrounds. The lines

dominated the images; the background only supported the lines, it did not contribute to the meaning of the piece. The background in *Ritual* does far more than provide a visual support for the lines. The background in *Ritual* isn't even a background; it is a setting. It is context; it is place.



Permeable, 8" x 8", acrylic on panel, 2013 (page 57)

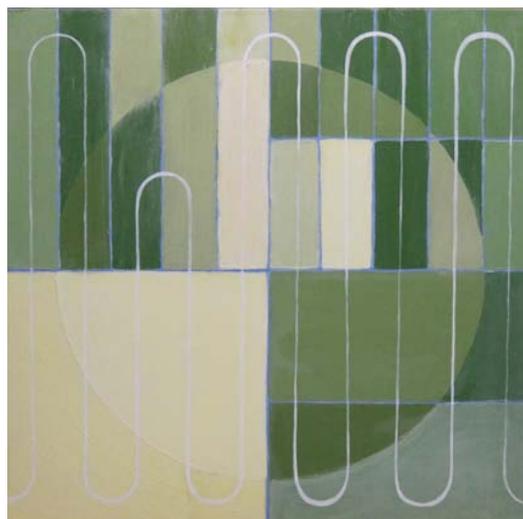
Permeable was the first piece that I made when I returned from our ten months of travel. By this point, I had developed the phrase, "Resonant Abstraction," to describe my working process, and I entered into this piece with a clear sense of how to proceed. In those first few weeks after returning, I was overwhelmed with my own pleasure and relief at being home. At the same time, I felt a real anguish and nostalgia for the no-longer-available opportunities that we had in Italy.

Some of my strongest positive memories of Italy are linked to Venice. On our last visit there, we went to a museum called, Ca d'Oro, the house of gold. The beautiful and peaceful aspects of Venice that I remember fondly are encapsulated in Ca d'Oro's pink-colored ground-level courtyard, Byzantine-arched windows, views of the green-blue Grand Canal, and the deep quiet that meant we had escaped the throngs of tourists.

In those first weeks at home, I was similarly filled with feelings of peace and beauty. What is it about my own home that elicits this response? There are many reasons, but I chose to focus on the windows. The large windows paired with the high ceilings mean that our house is filled with light and an open sense of space. On cool summer days when the open windows invite the breeze inside, and the light streams in from the south-facing windows, there is nowhere I would rather be.

For our first weeks back home, we experienced this pleasant summer weather and beautiful light. As I contemplated both why I was glad to be home and what I missed about being away, windows seemed to provide a common meeting place. The white and pink background layer of *Permeable* represents a blending of the rectangular shapes of my windows and the arched windows in *Ca d'Oro*, and the title refers to how light and air move through the openings.

The simple overlap of window shapes did not feel complete as the final appearance of the painting. Because I had collaborated with Brian while we were in Scotland, I wanted to have his influence in this painting. I borrowed a drawing of an imaginary tree that he completed on the train to Florence as we returned from our last trip to Venice. I traced and abstracted the lines of the trees and created the top green-line layer of the painting.



Day, 24" x 24", acrylic on canvas, 2013 (page 59)

With *Day*, I understood that I had embarked on the *Home Series*. *Day* strongly relates to *Ritual* as I purposefully built on the vocabulary and techniques of that painting. The square format, the inscribed circle, the geometric spaces, and the overlaid, purposeful line were the key aspects I sought to repeat. Also the rectangular window-shape that appeared in *Permeable* became a central characteristic.

The windows in my house are pairs of tall rectangles divided horizontally in half by the sashes, and the top half of each window is divided into five vertical panes. In the front living room window, the right of the pair is usually open, so there is an additional horizontal line dividing that rectangle. In the summer, the view out this window is mostly green. The branches and leaves of the tulip poplar and oak fill the window with just a few areas of pure sunlight and bright sky showing through. The geometric shapes of *Day* directly relate to these visual characteristics of the windows and the scene beyond.

The line work is similarly related to windows, but also relates back to *Ritual* and daily activities. Because the windows, the light that they let in, and the view that they make available are so important to me, everyday I raise and lower the shades. In the summer it is usually daylight before I get up, so the first thing I do is open the shades. Walking from room to room through the entire house means that I uncover thirty windows, and every evening as the sun goes down, I cover thirty windows. At different times of day the light is too bright or the sunshine is too hot, and I will lower those shades partway only to open them fully again later in the afternoon before closing them at night. Up down, open close, cover uncover. These actions are also a daily practice. They were included in the line work of *Ritual*, but in *Day*, they became the full focus on the lines.

The colors in *Day* are the pale yellows and dappled greens of the daytime. I intended a freshness and orderliness in this painting. The white lines are fluid, but controlled; the slight

variation of the pattern and subtle shifting of brightness or transparency of the line is purposeful. Despite the smoothness of the lines, they don't move quickly; visually following the measured up and down movement requires patience. The lines disappear on the lighter rectangles, and the pattern of motion is therefore more implied than didactic. The vertical oscillation of the line suggests the ebb and flow of days. Bright days. Calm days. Days whose boundaries get lost and therefore blurred together.



Night, 24" x 24", acrylic on birch plywood with walnut, 2013 [\(page 60\)](#)

Night: it felt very bold to make such a simple painting – to leave out the line work and the layering on which I typically rely. There are lines on the surface, but they are the embedded lines of the wood grain of the birch. The wood is a major player in this painting. I used translucent colors as glazes and washes so that the wood grain would not be obscured. In this painting I also cared about luster. I was inspired by the heavily worked surfaces of work by Brice Marden, whose work I will discuss later, and I wanted to massage the surface of the painting and try to achieve a sense of depth while also maintaining clarity and vibrancy.

Despite the immediate sense of simplicity with this painting, two areas at the bottom hint at a deeper layer of complexity. The uneven scrap of walnut imperfectly inlaid in the bottom left corner, and the heavily textured and color-modulated surface of the bottom right corner act as foils both to the smoothness of the other colored squares and the flatness of the pictorial surface. Additionally, the textured, blue-green-brown area at the bottom right goes beyond the flat color spaces of the rest of the painting by revealing a ghost of a corner of a circle. A faint arc cuts through that section, and without the context of the other circle-in-square paintings like *Ritual* and *Day*, it hardly would be noticeable.

The top right corner of the painting shows the unpainted but varnished surface of the plywood. In some ways this section is the most beautiful, although I'm not sure if the beauty comes from the scarcity of uncolored wood in the piece or from the simplicity of letting the wood grain speak for itself. The painting seems simple – essentially just three painted squares – until I realize how much simpler it could have been: just the unpainted wood would have been painting enough.

The colors are a dichotomy of rich earthy reddish-neutrals and a vibrant jewel-like blue. The colors relate to the deepness and silence of night but also to the gloomy warm glow of tungsten light bulbs. The flatness of the main color areas either stops at the surface or compels a peering through the color into the layers of the wood. That textured area at the bottom right uncovers the surface and reveals some unknown murky depth.

This piece began with excitement about the materials and with the desire to make a piece to correspond to *Day*. I used a simplified version of the double rectangle window structure, and let my color choices be guided by a desire for some relationship to night – the blues of twilight, the dark warms of the glow from within windows when I go for late night walks. The lack of an overlaid line in *Night* marks a drastic departure from my earlier work. I have relied on the linear-

movement connection in almost every painting, print, or drawing that I have made in over fifteen years, and the lack of line here is worth noting. The contribution of the wood grain also cannot be ignored, I am struck by the beautiful and subtle lines, and this piece is as much about highlighting and revealing those inherent qualities of the wood as it is about anything else.

There are currently fourteen other pieces in the *Home Series*. Each uses and builds on the vocabulary of these first paintings in various ways. I continue to focus on surface, and the most recent paintings heavily rely on the natural qualities of the wood panels and the addition of wood veneers. Each piece is motivated by an experience related to the house or to being home. The complete set of pieces in this series can be found in the Artworks Appendix.

Resonant Abstraction

My personal view of art is two-fold. I see both an institutional view of art, in which institutions such as museums and critical publications determine what counts as “important” art, and a functional view that aligns more closely with my own values. The institutional view influenced my original desires to participate in the traditions of art, and my understanding of the institutions of art affects my experience when viewing it. However, a work must serve a particular function for me in order for me to engage with it in a personally meaningful way. A work of art must provide me with an aesthetic experience that expands my understanding. In other words, a work of art must appeal to me somatically, cognitively, and emotionally, and it must expand my awareness and deepen my understanding of life. This functional view of art strongly informs my own practice of making art.

I describe my practice as one of “Resonant Abstraction” in which I aim to create visual objects that abstract some experience of my life in such way that the newly created artifact

resonates with me in the same way that the original experience did. My practice includes a process of collecting and reflecting on experience, a search for an abstract but tangible form, the work of realizing that form, and the contemplation of the completed object.

A Process of Collecting and Reflecting on Experience

Occasionally, I keep mementos or photographs to help remind me of experiences. My hope is that those objects will keep an experience alive for me, but they are frequently insufficient. I want to note particular instances as significant. There are some moments when I am not merely moving through the *now* as I look toward the future, but moments when the *now* shines – when I'm not only aware of my life, but truly feel alive. Such moments need to be marked. So, I pick up a rock as I walk, or hold onto a ticket stub, or make a few notes in a calendar. These actions are efforts to lock down an experience, to pin it to my consciousness. Are these moments, each now linked to an object, the moments that count – the ones worth remembering?

Sometimes they are. Sometimes holding a receipt or seeing a photograph brings back a flood of memories and sensations that, if nothing else, remind me that I was once somewhere else, that I was different then, that I made it to now. But sometimes the mementos are just clutter – collections of do-dads and junk that collect dust and fill boxes; they spur few meaningful remembrances. If only I could know in advance what items to keep, what memories to mark, and from what experiences I will grow. But so often the important experiences are the most mundane of daily actions; sometimes making coffee or opening the curtains are moments of tremendous self-possession and vitality. What mementos can I grab when the valuable instances are the moments of nothing, the spaces between actions, the pause between breaths? Sometimes “collecting” is insufficient.

For example, in 2011 I did a fair amount of traveling. On each of these trips, I acquired little souvenirs that later seemed pointless: a tote bag, a bottle stopper, photographs, notebooks, a key chain, and a magnet for the refrigerator. The Eifel Tower key chain, for example, was purchased in the airport as we left Paris, and while I did see the Eifel Tower, there were other events that were more meaningful to me. On the day that we visited the Muse d'Orsay in the morning, we walked along the Seine toward the Louvre, which we visited later that afternoon. I loved walking along the river; it felt iconic, and romantic, and beautiful. But I have no memento of this experience.

My reflection on these travels of 2011 revealed not only that I had collected a handful of almost meaningless stuff, but that the most thrilling moments of the year were usually connected to water. I had never seen the Pacific Ocean before. Or the Caribbean Sea or the Seine. And to see so many amazing bodies of water in one year overwhelmed me. In the act of reflection, I saw that a year of my life had been tied together with visits to water. First the Caribbean Sea, then the Pacific, followed by the Tiber, the Arno, the Seine, Lake Michigan, Puget Sound, and the Ohio River. This realization helped those travels feel justified – surely it was right to make pilgrimages to see water.

Merely acknowledging the personal value of the water-visits was not a sufficient response, and no mementos captured these experiences. I needed to set that awareness of water outside of myself so that I could look at it and appreciate it from a different perspective. I needed to give this story material form. It was a story – a story of journeys and the passage of time. The form I sought also needed to function in time, to hold and tell a story. Simply describing all of the “firsts” of this year trivialized the experiences. I needed to tell this story without words, so I used pictures. But travel photos gloss over and distance the felt experience of being near water. A photo can be evocative, but its hyper-visual-ness can obscure the feeling of an experience. The telling of this story needed rich color and distinct tactile manifestations. It needed to be more elusive than

explanatory, for my memories were mysterious to me. Why should I be so moved by a proximity to water? And how much had the potential of this proximity motivated the travels in the first place?

These questions, and the need to find form for my reflections of experience, resulted in the creation of a book, *Water Ways*: nine pages of cyanotypes, overlaid with faint graphite maps, and accompanied by sets of numbers that indicated the days of my travels. All pages were sewn together and rolled into a scroll-like tube cuffed with the book's title. This sculptural cylinder of a book serves as a case for holding and exploring my experiences of water.



Water Ways, cover view, 10" tall, 2011 ([page 49](#))



Second page: a wave of the Pacific Ocean at Baker Beach, San Francisco ([page 50](#))

A Search for Form

Part of the act of reflecting on an experience requires that I step away from fact-laden memories and attempt to abstract or distill my reminiscence. I search for some other form that resonates with me in the same way that my memory of the experience does. Perhaps I am looking for confirmation that the feeling of the experience wasn't just perspective-based subjectivity: it didn't just feel special; it was special. Or perhaps I need to find an outward manifestation, something outside of me that still resonates with the truth of the experience but that I can look at objectively. Susanne Langer's concept of art as "objectifying the subjective" (Anderson and Millbrant 48) perfectly describes what I am doing.

However, it is important that the external form be not too literal or descriptive. The concrete details of a remembered experience are rarely what concerns me; I'm interested in the feeling, and a form that is too representational or descriptive runs the risk of being distracting. How can I pay attention to what some event felt like if I am bombarded by visual details and precise images? So, the forms I select are always abstracted. I want to examine an experience and think about it and wonder if it has real meaning for me.

The Work of Realizing that Form

After I begin to work, I must proceed lightly. Elizabeth Murray, in an *Art21* segment, described painting as the same processes used by burglars who crack safes – they slowly turn the dial of the lock and listen for the tiny clicks that let them know they are making progress. Murray's analogy suggests an active listening for the moments when the painting "clicks," and then she knows she is on the right path; she says she just keeps painting until the right thing happens. I call this process "testing the waters" – trying again and again until it feels right.

The work I do could be described more as a process of searching and finding than of making decisions. I would rather have a few canvases or varieties of papers around as options than go out and purchase materials for a specific piece. My search for a match between the form and the feeling of the experience is complemented by a search for appropriate materials. I don't have the foresight to say, "an eighteen-inch plywood panel would best serve this idea." I might have an idea that a piece should be big or small, but the thought process feels more like, "hmm, this canvas will work." I do go out and buy materials, but I'm really stocking the pantry rather than buying ingredients for a specific recipe.

When possible, I use materials that have a story behind them. For example, one day Brian brought me a stack of one-inch, five by six inch poplar boards that were previously a small box that he made when teaching a workshop twelve years ago. The box was simple and served the purpose of the demonstration well; he kept it for all these years but never used it. When he disassembled it, he brought the boards as possible painting surfaces. After a couple of weeks of the boards sitting in my studio, I became motivated to make a painting about a particular experience, and I realized that these boards would provide the perfect surface.



Hearth, 12.5" x 12.5", mixed media on poplar with walnut veneer, 2013 (page 58)

Hearth was created using not only these recycled poplar boards, but several other unusual materials and techniques also contributed to the piece. The muted, central colors of the piece are not paint; they are drawn with watercolor-crayons then coated with acrylic medium. I had purchased the crayons a couple of years earlier, but had never used them; a recent studio clean-up brought them back into my awareness. I carved out the negative space around the colored shapes with woodcut tools that I had not used in about four years. When I assembled the boards into a square, the rectangular shape of the boards meant that a gap formed in the center of the piece, a gap that I later lined and backed with walnut veneer. The veneer was in my studio because it was also a material that Brian had in his workshop and thought I might like to use. I think it is the best part of this completed artwork, and I continued to use the veneer in several other pieces in the *Home Series*.

There were many satisfying aspects to working on this piece. The materials were just part of it. I also really enjoyed Brian's contributions; he is an artist, and we have occasionally collaborated on artworks. Perhaps his supplying me with materials counts as collaboration; he also assisted me when I was cutting boards and gluing supports to the back of the poplar. Even if his contributions aren't really collaborative, his interest in this piece as it developed was energizing for me. When I talk about the process of making my art, it is important to acknowledge Brian's influence and support.

The Contemplation of the Completed Object

All aspects of my process of Resonant Abstraction are personal – from recognizing and reflecting on an experience, to the search for form, and throughout the process of creation. The primary intent with viewing the work is also internal. The artworks become the memento-like objects that capture my sense of an experience. The completed artworks are objects for

contemplation. They are reminders of my reflections on life and experiences; they are records of a process of wondering and working; and they are evidence of my efforts to punctuate my life or at least to annotate the stories that have already been written.

On Abstract Painting

Laurie Fendrich's 1999 *Chronicle* article called "Why Abstract Painting Still Matters" reads as not just a defense of abstract painting, but as a defiant declaration that certain ideas, such as stillness, play a vital role in contemporary society; these ideas are set into the world through abstract painting – even if no one pays it much attention. In considering the role that artists should play in the world, I appreciate Fendrich's assertions of "what abstract painting *can* do."

Fendrich's six statements about abstract painting assert that abstract painting offers "a *de facto* philosophical point of view on life," that it "can enable us to be quiet," that it "offers a counter to our society's glut of *things*," that it is "often, quite simply, beautiful," that "it is not a story," and that abstract painting is "very uncamera-like." The "philosophical view of life" idea aligns with the "quiet" and "non-thing" concepts. The beautiful and non-photographic characteristics refer directly to the visual qualities of abstract painting. The non-story, or non-narrative, characteristic relates to how a viewer can draw meaning from an abstract painting.

For an object to have meaning, the viewer must be able to make a connection between that object and something that he or she already knows or has experienced. Meaning comes from relationships. A story's ability to help us make meaning is somewhat revealed in this definition.

Fiction writer, Joan Didion states that, "Stories fill in the space between what happened and what it means" (qtd. in Frederick). Fendrich explains that stories are our most persistent method for describing, explaining, and persuading. Stories, because they either directly involve people or personify non-human things are extremely relatable. Viewers or audiences can connect

with the characters or the situations in stories, and these connections help them to find the story to be meaningful. Considering the power of story to connect with viewers and with making meaning, why would artists choose to use an art form that denies story?

Do abstract artists not wish to connect with viewers? Do they prefer that their work be seen as meaningless? Or are they hoping to connect with the viewers without humanizing the formal experience of the artwork? Perhaps abstract artists wish to assert that there is a way to experience the world that doesn't place humans at the center. Perhaps abstract artists wish to lead viewers out of their egocentric perspective so that they may dwell in the visual experience without the immediate burden of interpretation.

Without a narrative, a painting also loses its reference to time. It does not invoke questions of what happens next in the story or how we got into this situation. The viewer is confronted with the object-ness of the painting, the fact of its existence, and the self-referential nature of its form. Abstract painting presents the viewers with "a non-blinking 'thereness'... an ineffable balance of sensation, experience, and knowledge" (Fendrich). Can viewers find such an experience to be meaningful? That depends on their openness to such experience and their willingness to be still with the painting and see what it presents.

In my own work, although I arrive at the abstract forms from specific concepts, images, and objects that could be narratively represented, I have no expectation that viewers will find any of the meaning that motivated the work. I hope to appeal to the viewers' appetites for harmonious colors, linear movement, contrast, and balance. If these formal qualities encourage them to look at my painting for any length of time, then perhaps they will find that they can relate to the energy of the painting or the connections between the elements, and, maybe, that they can make meaning of the painting for themselves.

Brice Marden

The most meaningful and affective aesthetic experiences I have had while looking at abstract paintings happen in front of works by Brice Marden. In 1997, I saw Marden's *Cold Mountain 2* at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington D.C. It took my breath away.



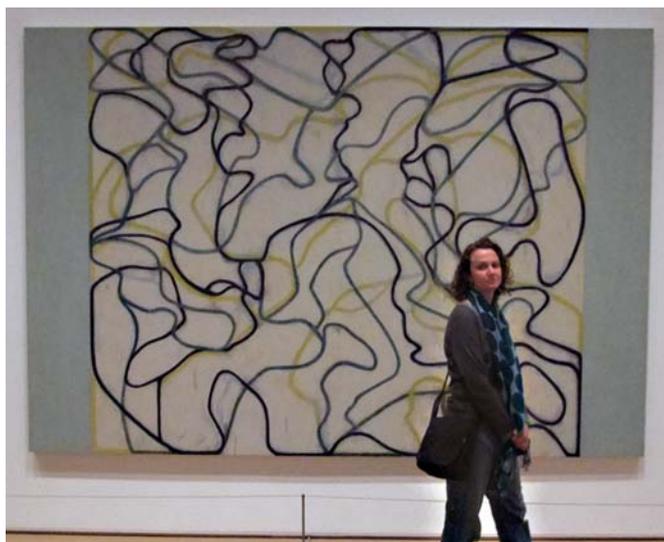
Cold Mountain 2, Brice Marden, 108" x 144", oil on linen, 1989-1991

I have seen very few of his later works (later meaning after the solid-blocks-of-color paintings of the 70s and 80s). The D.C. *Cold Mountain* is one, and the Chicago Art Institute's *Second Letter: Zen Spring* is another. If I consider myself in a conversation with other abstract artists, then looking at Marden's work is more like a love song.

The *Cold Mountain* series consists of six large-scale works painted from 1988-1991. The visual design of the paintings developed as abstractions from Chinese poetry, specifically from the work of Han Shan, whose name translates as "Cold Mountain." The linear work in Marden's

paintings is composed following the structure of the poems – vertical lines of characters that are read from top to bottom and from right to left (Costello 110). At that point, I was interested in the marks made by a moving hand, as seen in handwriting or calligraphy, and Marden’s paintings provided a beautiful suggestion for how to abstract from written characters. I felt, and often still feel, that I didn’t really need to make art because Marden was making the work that I wanted to make.

Second Letter: Zen Spring is also one of a series of six paintings by Marden that use calligraphic lines as their primary inspiration (Weiss 40). This painting is owned by the Art Institute of Chicago, which because of its proximity to my home, allows me to spend more time with it than with *Cold Mountain 2* that I saw so many years ago. I feel as if I have a relationship with this painting in Chicago.



Me with *Second Letter: Zen Spring*, Brice Marden, 96" x 144", oil on linen, 2006-2009

It hangs in a room with an Elizabeth Murray, a Jasper Johns, an Ellsworth Kelly, and a sculpture by Martin Puryear. This room holds tremendous calm for me; I feel as if Marden is

speaking to me through this painting. It isn't that I receive some specific message but that I feel as if we speak the same language and therefore meet as friends.

When I stand with the painting, I visually follow his line work; I notice the layering of paint applications; I weigh his decisions to curve a line this direction and not that; I notice when a line skirting along the edge of the surface comes dangerously close to slipping off. I breathe deeply when I'm in this room in the Art Institute. I sit in front of Marden's work; I stand across the room; and I pace closely in front of it. I watch the other visitors stroll through the room and hardly give it any attention. I sometimes stand by the painting and look back at the other viewers as they pass.

Why does this piece resonate so strongly with me? The linear work is a clear connection to my own previous linear work, but I have been so influenced by Marden's work for so long, I have no idea if it came from me first or from him. I wonder if this piece reminds me of my own work, or if it reminds me of some other experience that I too am trying to reference with my work. Not only do I find an affinity to Marden's visual aesthetic, I similarly respect his process and the importance of process for him.

In his early work, Marden desired to deepen the appearance of his surfaces and allow more subtle color variations to be seen. He began mixing beeswax with his oil paints to achieve this effect (Costello 54). His dedication to surface and his patience with process also appears as he works on more recent paintings from various distances. He frequently views the paintings from a long distance (twelve feet or so) while working, but he paints at two different distances too; he uses brushes that are six-feet long to allow a distant perspective, but he also works very close to the surface when he is sanding or scraping it (Weiss, 42). As I work on the *Home Series*, I think about Marden's care with his surface and his dedication to his process; I found I had a lot of energy to put into my own work when thinking of his example.

Goddard

For me, coming to Goddard was a return to graduate school; I had already earned a Masters in Art Education. I also already had an established professional life in art; I had been teaching college-level studio art courses for over five years. Before beginning my Goddard journey, I already made art on a regular basis, occasionally exhibited my work, and participated in the local arts community. So, why would I return to school? What did I hope to gain by coming to Goddard?

My goals for what I wish to learn in this program are personal and aesthetic. I wish to develop a personal artmaking practice that acknowledges the valuable aspects of my previous artistic experiences without exclusions. I wish to integrate this practice fully into my life so that making meaning out of everyday experiences can have greater aesthetic value for me. I want to learn how to be an artist – how to feel like an artist...

(quotation from my Goddard application materials)

Despite my life in art before Goddard, I declined to use the term *artist* when referring to myself. I was an art educator, or perhaps an “art person.” But, to me, *artist* meant something else, something that I was not. I had no right to that title, and I could avoid the responsibilities that come with it. I did not *have* to make art; I could avoid nurturing the aesthetic side of my spirit because it wasn’t practical to do so. But I felt that lack, and I felt dissatisfaction with my self-image. In pursuing an MFA degree, I gave myself permission to engage with life in a different way than before; the program would demand it of me. These five semesters under Goddard’s care have been transformational for me; my sense of self has expanded. I now claim the title *artist*, and I appreciate the many facets of experience that contribute to my understanding and acceptance of that identity.

Artworks

Paintings:

page

43	<i>Moving Now</i>
44	<i>Perspective</i>
45	<i>Choice</i>
46	<i>Anticipation</i>
47	<i>Solace</i>
48	<i>Woodlands</i>

Bookworks:

page(s)

49, 50	<i>Water Ways</i>
51, 52	<i>Enclose</i>
53	<i>Painters: The Practicum Book</i>
54	Handmade journals given as gifts or used as journals and scrapbooks

The Home Series:

page

55	<i>Ritual</i>
56	<i>Work</i>
57	<i>Permeable</i>
58	<i>Hearth</i>
59	<i>Day</i>
60	<i>Night</i>
61	<i>Sleep</i>
62	<i>Summer</i>
63	<i>Safety</i>
64	<i>Morning</i>
65	<i>Two</i>
66	<i>Helpful</i>
67	<i>Omission</i>
68	<i>Playtime</i>
69	<i>Weight</i>
70	<i>Soon</i>
71	<i>Lost</i>
72	<i>Break</i>



Moving Now
18" x 24" – acrylic on panel
2011

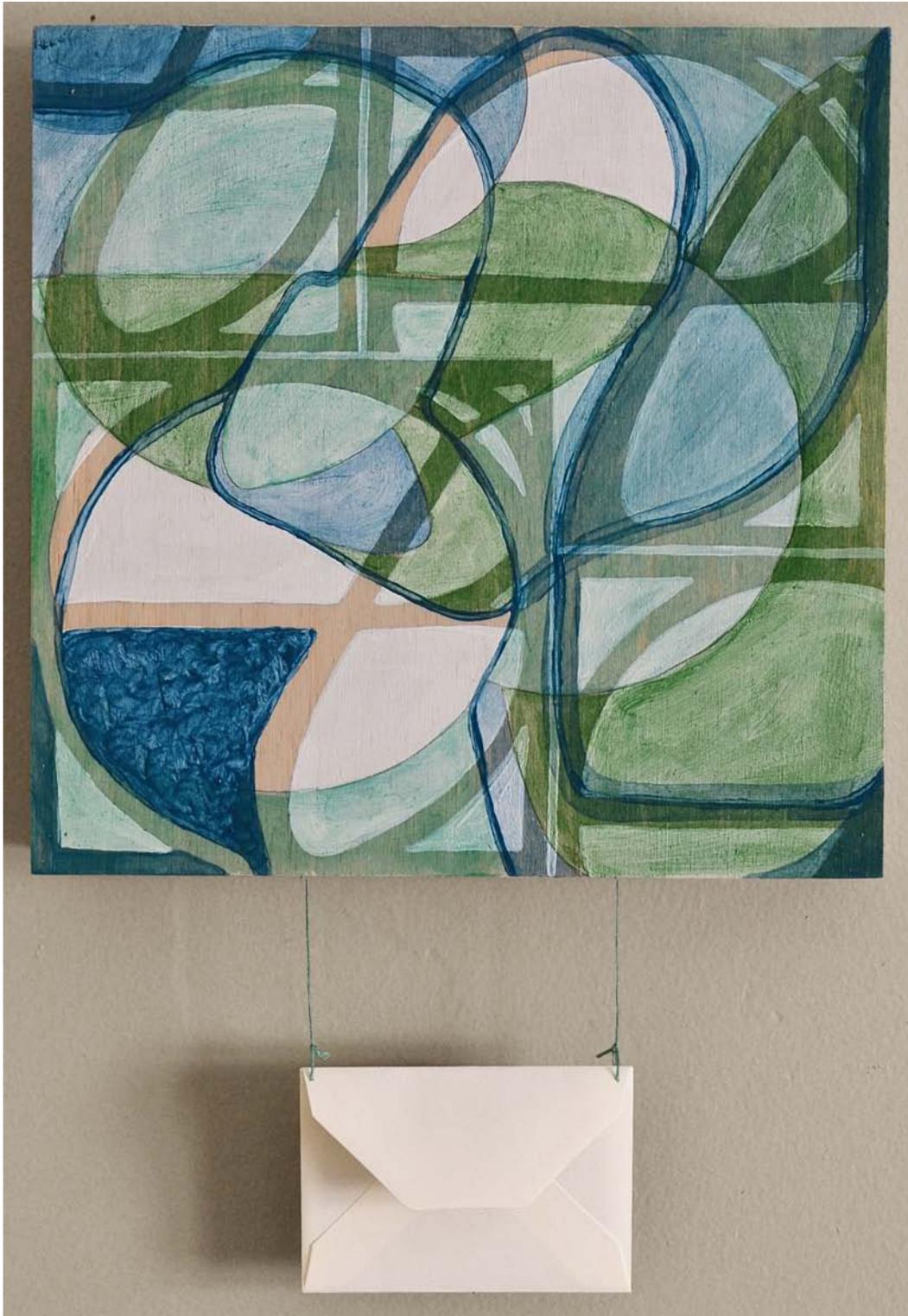


Perspective
24" x 24" – acrylic on canvas
2012

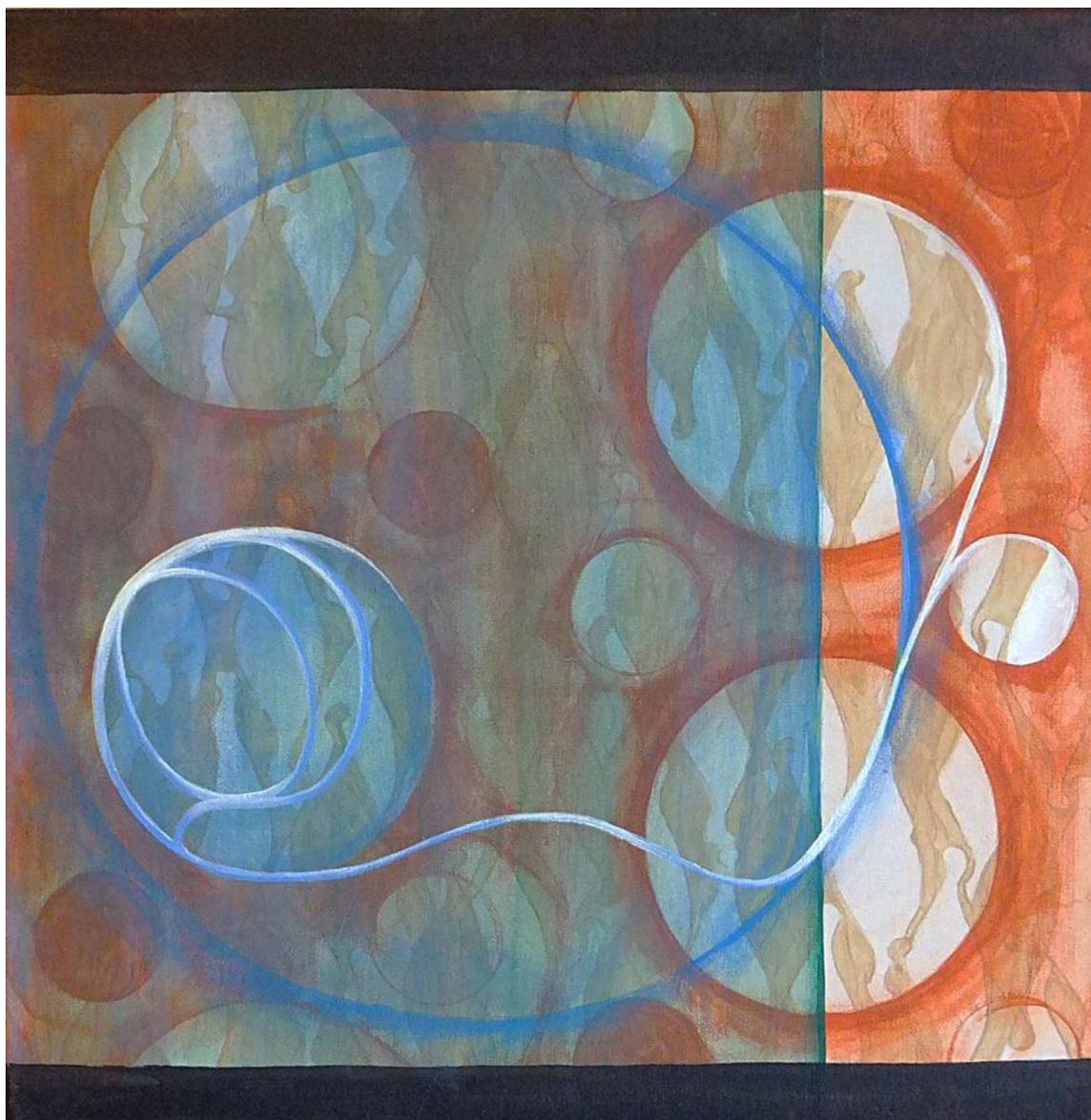


Choice
24" x 48" – acrylic on panel
2012

(discussed on page 16)



Anticipation
15" x 10" – acrylic on panel with envelope
2012



Solace
16" x 16" – acrylic on canvas
2012



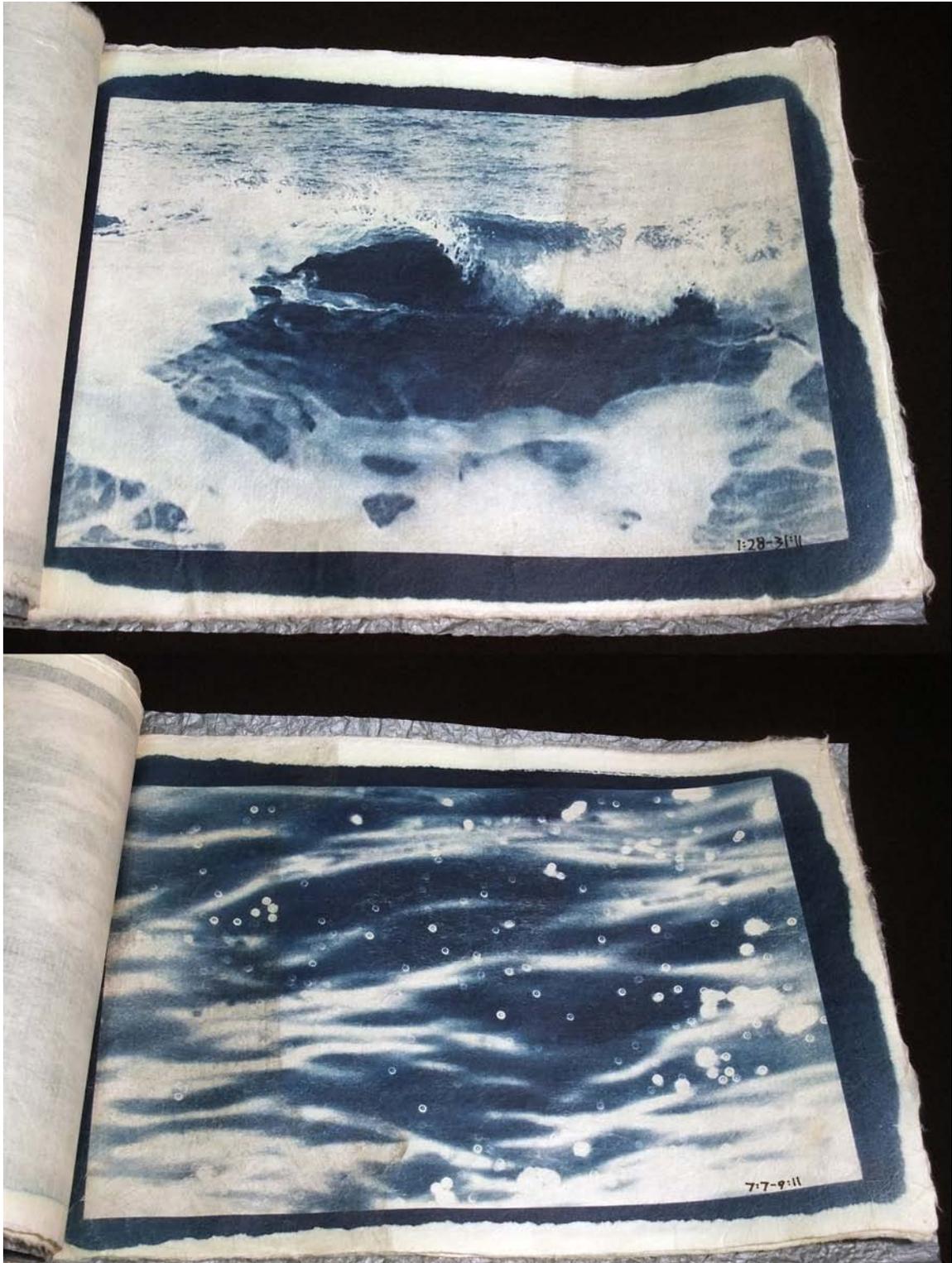
Woodlands
16" x 16" – mixed media on panel
2013

(discussed on page 5)



Water Ways
10" x 14" – handmade book – view of cover
2011

(discussed on page 32)



Water Ways
interior pages

(discussed on page 32)



Enclose
4" x 3" x 1.5" – handmade book
2011



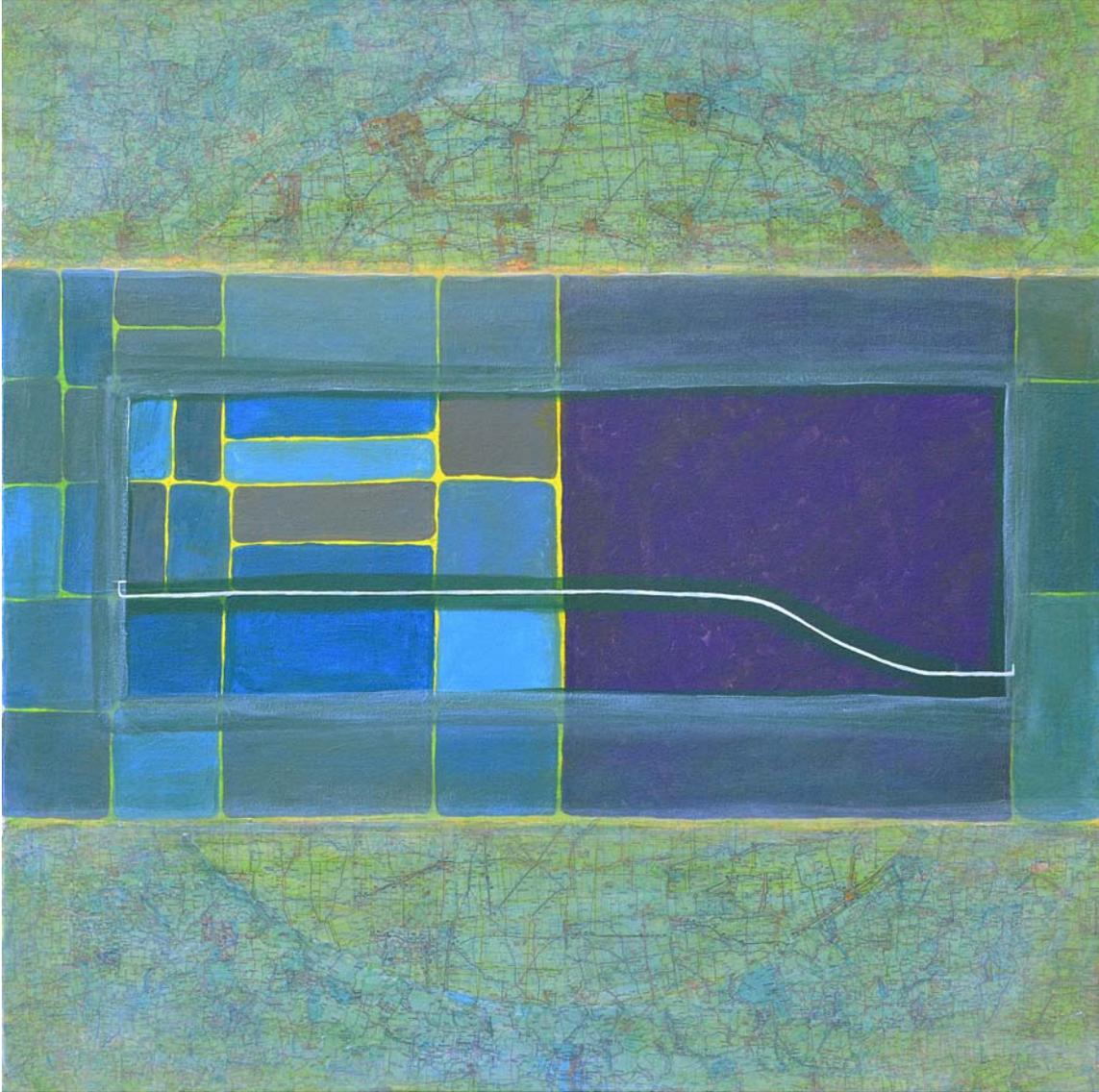
Enclose
expanded view



Painters: The Practicum Book
5" x 5" x 1.5" – handmade book
2012

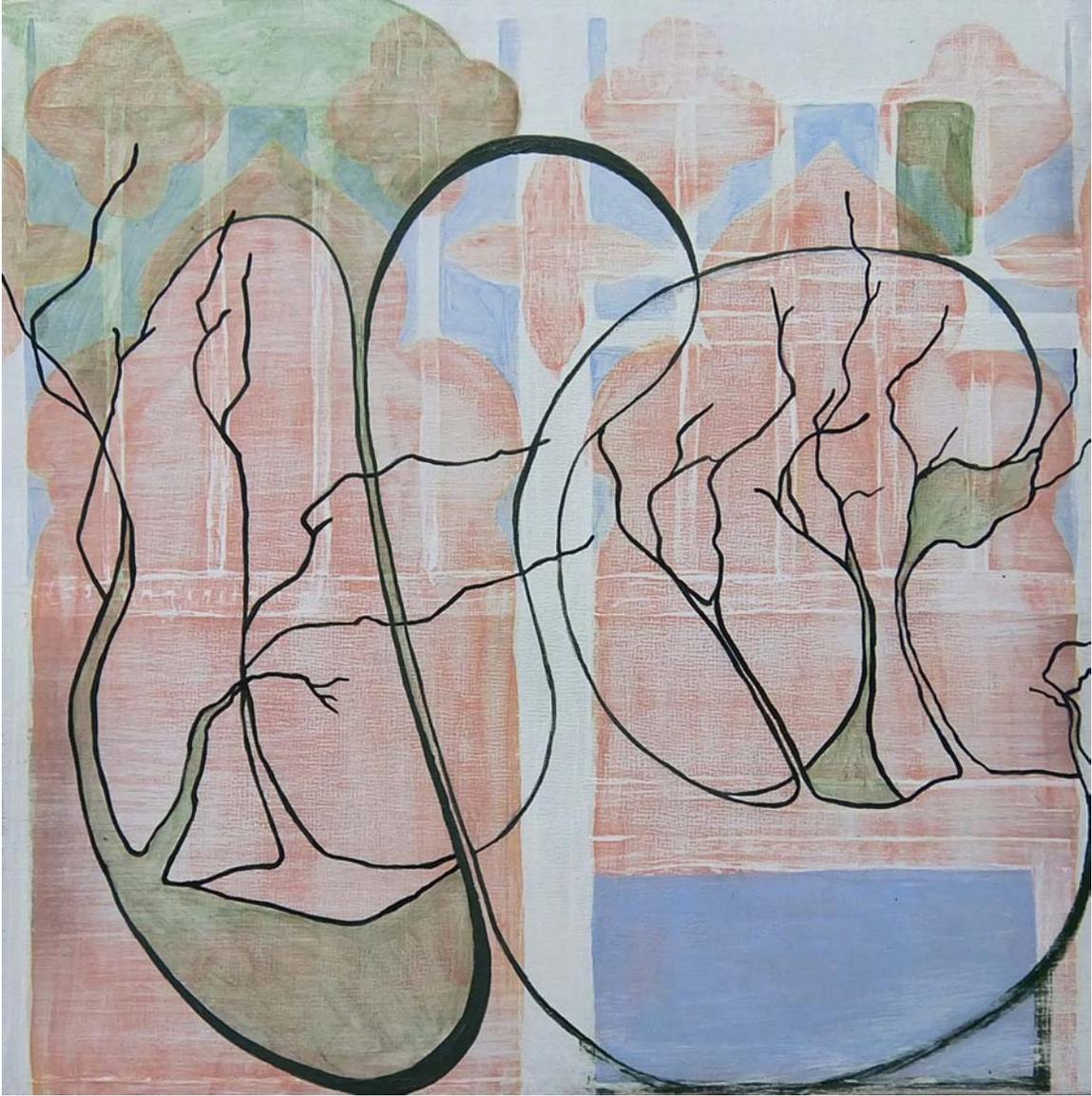


Handmade Journals



Work
36" x 36" – mixed media on canvas
2012

(discussed on page 18)



Permeable
8" x 8" – acrylic on panel
2013

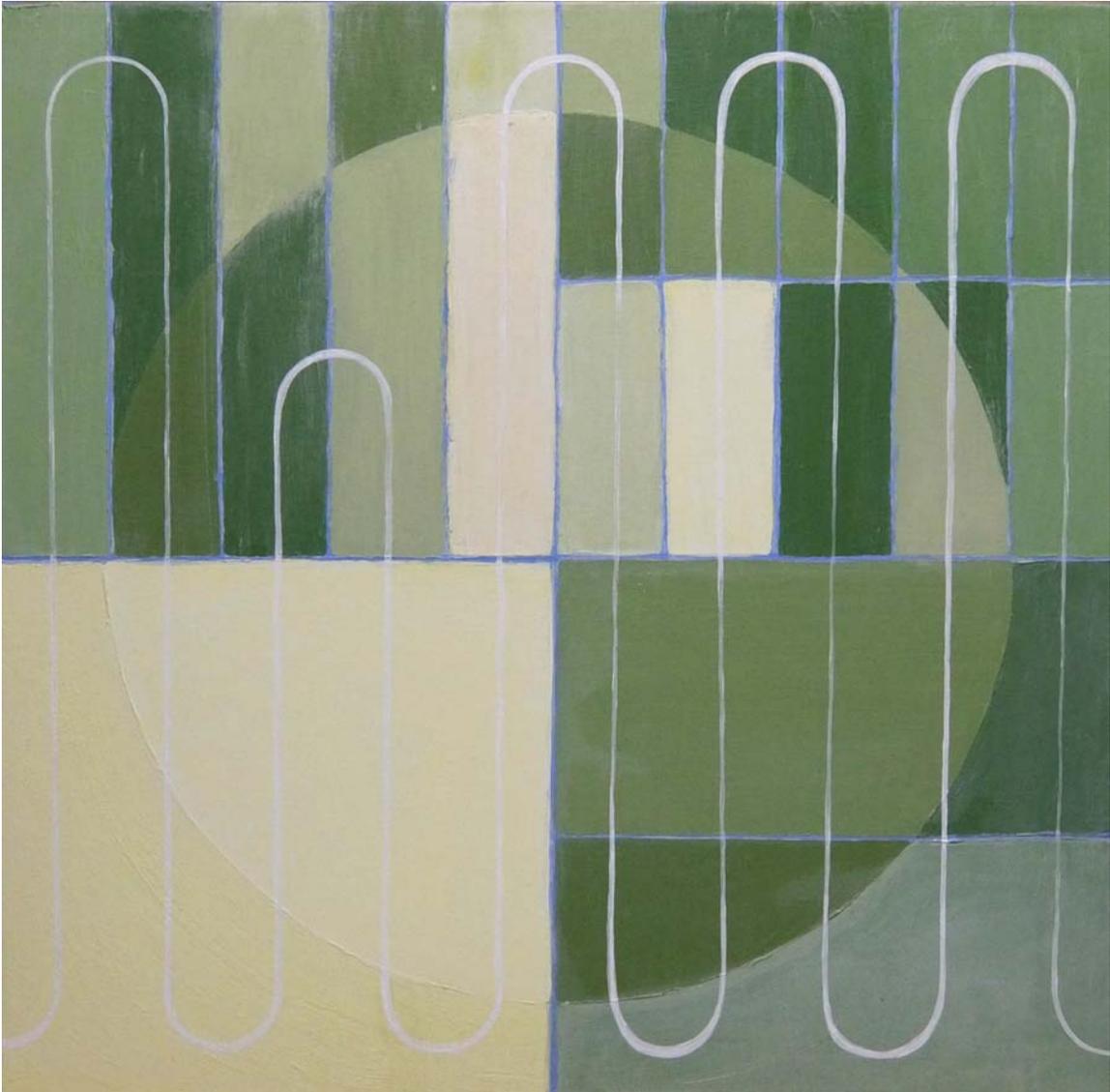
(discussed on page 24)



Hearth

12.5" x 12.5" – acrylic on poplar with walnut
2013

(discussed on page 34)



Day
24" x 24" – acrylic on canvas
2013

(discussed on page 25)

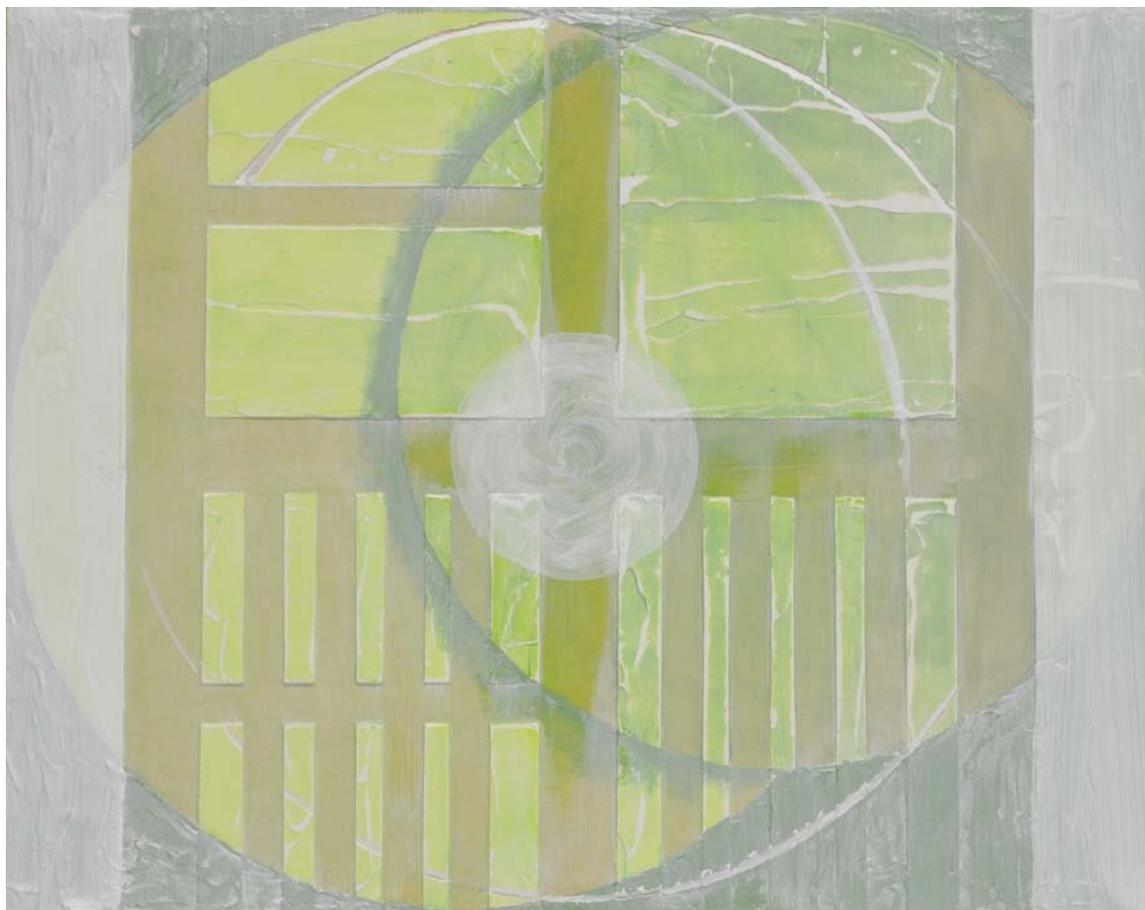


Night
24" x 24" – acrylic on birch plywood with walnut
2013

(discussed on page 27)



Sleep
18" x 12" – acrylic and plaster on panel
2013



Summer
11" x 14" – acrylic and plaster on panel
2013



Safety
30" x 24" – acrylic on panel with walnut
2013



Morning
12" x 12" – fresco on panel
2013



Two
12" x 12" – acrylic on panel
2013



Helpful
12" x 12" – acrylic and plaster on panel
2013



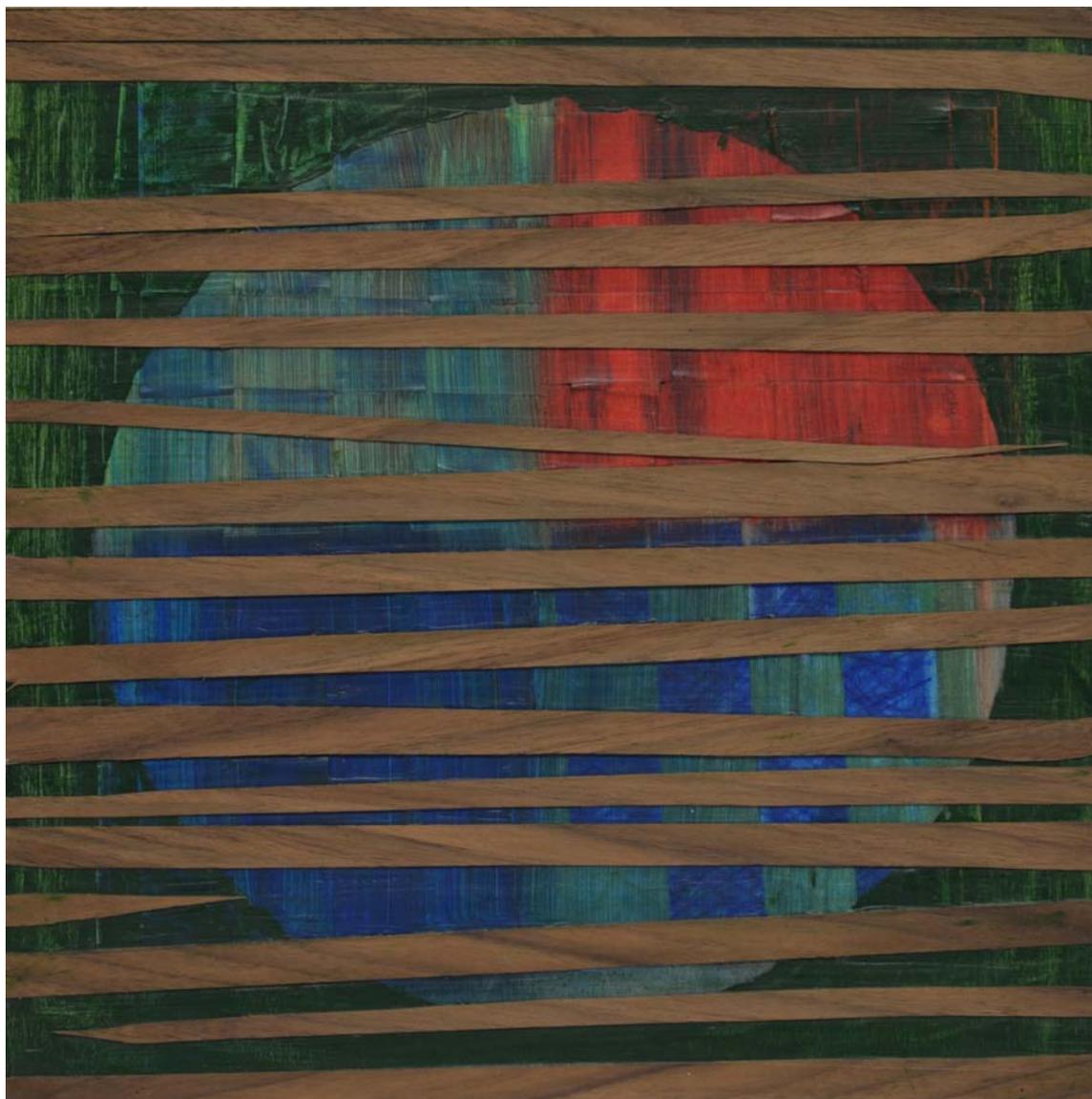
Omission
12" x 12" – acrylic and plaster on panel
2013



Playtime
8.5" x 12" – acrylic on panel with pine
2013



Weight
10.5" x 8" – mixed media on mahogany and poplar
2013



Soon
12" x 12" – mixed media and walnut on panel
2013



Lost
16" x 16" – mixed media on panel
2013



Break
8" x 6" – acrylic on panel
2014

Annotated Bibliography

Boutet, Danielle. "Turning Attention to the Maker." *Making, Meaning, and Context: A Radical Reconsideration of Art's Work*. Goddard College. Plainfield, VT. 14-16 Oct. 2011. Address.

This address is, in part, an explanation of the concept of interdisciplinary art. Boutet tells the history of how art disciplines were named (by Hegel) based on the materials, but that as the list of possible materials with which one can make has expanded, it has become clear that art isn't about the materials used or the object produced; it is about the energy and intent of the maker. She also references Foucault's term, "technology of the self" as a way of describing the purpose or experience of the one who makes art. This address has been highly instrumental in helping me shape my understanding of interdisciplinary art.

Costello, Eileen. *Brice Marden*. London: Phaidon Focus, 2013. Print.

This text is one in a series of "essential introductions to modern artists" recently published by Phaidon. Brice Marden had been a strong influence on my work since college, but I learned a tremendous amount about his influences, early work, and working processes from this book. I most appreciate how he talks about his work from the natural sources that influence him, as Costello writes including the words of Marden. "He abstracts the energy he finds in these natural forms, turning his own drawings into abstractions. 'When you draw a tree, you get a certain kind of energy and just by drawing the way it grows it's about the energy of that organism'" (92). And I appreciate how Costello writes about his work, "[he] sought to convey his sense of what inspired him rather than a factual illustration of the person, place, or thing" (5).

De Botton, Alain. *The Art of Travel*. New York: Vintage. 2004. Print.

This beautiful little book says everything I wish I had thought to say and everything I need to hear about why we travel and how to travel well (as in having a good attitude for the activity). De Botton's structure is to use examples from art (literature, painting, or architecture) and examples from his own experiences to consider specific aspects of travel. His focus on our attitude and awareness when traveling (and when returning home) has helped me process and appreciate my own experiences of travel.

Dewey, John. "The Live Creature." *Art as Experience*. NY: Penguin, 1934. 1-19. Print.

This first chapter sets up the arguments that Dewey will make about developing a new philosophy of art; this set-up includes establishing art as being strongly connected to everyday life and explaining how creatures perceive aesthetic experiences in the normal activities of negotiating with their environment. Many of Dewey's arguments, particularly in the second section of the chapter, explore the nature of experience. This text laid a groundwork for considering the nature of experiences and in further readings in phenomenology.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Nature*. 1836. Web. 24 Oct, 2013.

Emerson's Nature is an important text of the American Transcendentalist movement. In it he explains a particular way of being in nature and seeing it as a manifestation of the wonder and aliveness. I think that Emerson's perspective of allowing nature to take a place of importance somewhat above humans (although he sees us as being a part of nature too), is refreshing and articulates some of the joy I have felt when I have been alone in nature.

Iyer, Pico. "Where is Home?." *TEDGlobal*. July 2013. Web. 17 July, 2013.

In this lecture, Iyer discusses various views of home and conceptions of what it means to be home, to seek home, and feel at home. In many ways this talk addressed issues of multi-culture-ness that don't really apply to me. I found it applicable, though, because of the last year of travel and my happiness to be back home. Key quotes: "Home is the place where you become yourself." "Movement [i.e. travel] is only as good as the sense of stillness that you can bring to it to put it into perspective." "It is only by stopping for a moment that you can see where to go." "Movement only has a meaning if you have a home to go back to."

Kaprow, Allan. "The Real Experiment." (1983). *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*. Ed. Jeff Kelley. Berkeley: U CA Press. 1993. 201-218. Print.

In this chapter, Kaprow makes an argument that draws a distinction between "artlike art" and "lifelike art." He is giving a critique of the contemporary art world by saying that all of its accouterments, such as museums, galleries, traditional materials, forms of critique, and audience response do not support what art really is. And what it is, he says, is something that helps heal the disconnected quality of modern life. Lifelike art can do this because it brings meaning to the activities of life. I was most struck by Kaprow's desire for art to be in service of living life better. He stresses the need for people to become aware of their own lives and to find ways of bringing meaning to their lives.

Koren, Leonard. *Which "Aesthetics" Do You Mean?: Ten Definitions*. Imperfect: Point Reys, CA. 2010. Print.

This text carefully examined the different ways that the word "aesthetics" is used, both formally and in casual conversation. I found this text very informative and interesting because I

often wonder what exactly someone means when he or she use the term aesthetics, and if the meaning is the same as I mean when I use it. In addition to the different perspectives on aesthetics, one of the most useful aspects of this text was the summary of various philosophies of art. The explanation of the differences between an institutional view, and functional view, and a hybrid-functional view was very useful in thinking and writing.

Rothenberg, David. "Melt the Snowflake at Once! Toward a History of Wonder." *Wilderness and the Heart: Henry Bugbee's Philosophy of Place, Presence, and Memory*. ed. Edward F. Mooney. Athens, GA: U of Georgia. 1999. 18-31. Print.

This essay is part of a collection of essays discussing the writing and ideas of American philosopher Henry Bugbee. While Rothenberg strives to communicate Bugbee's philosophy, he also communicates Bugbee's poetic sensibility and transcendentalist outlook through this strongly lyrical and moving essay. Bugbee was a walking philosopher, like Thoreau, and he has also been described as an American Zen master. While I have tried to read some of Bugbee's Inward Morning, I find Rothenberg's essay more accessible, enlivening, and applicable to my own thinking.

Russon, John. "Interpretation." *Human Experience: Philosophy, Neurosis, and the Elements of Everyday Life*. Albany, NY: State U of NY, 2003. 9-20. Print.

This first chapter of Russon's text provides me with the clearest and most understandable reading I have done concerning phenomenology. Much of the content of the chapter reminded me of Dewey's discussion of experience, in particular the relationship between the inner being and the outer environment. Russon explains how those boundaries get broken down and begin to lose their meaning as our relationship with the objects of our environment is examined. In my work, the

study of phenomenology ties into my artmaking practice in how I collect and reflect on experiences and in how I seek an outward, objective form to match my subjective experience.

Solnit, Rebecca. *Wanderlust: a History of Walking*. London: Verso-New Left Books. 2001. Print.

Solnit's exhaustive examination of the history and practice of walking touches on topics from physiology to politics, nature, poetry, social-economics, philosophy, protest, preservation, and mental and physical health. Solnit's text answered questions for me, and expanded my thinking beyond my own experiences.