

A Thesis Presented to  
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The Observational Sketchbook: Strangeness in the Familiar

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## Abstract

Observational drawing is the artist's way of discovering his or her surroundings. In order to explore this, I constructed an accordion-fold sketchbook and filled it with drawings done around upstate New York. In order to further explore the process of bookmaking and the function of a book, I reprinted the drawings on a smaller scale, and reconstructed them in the same accordion fashion. As the process of drawing and bookmaking progressed, I allowed my subjects and accordion format to influence my creative decisions. Through these steps, I have determined that the observational sketchbook is as much about the reflection of the artist as it is about the subject being observed.

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## The Observational Sketchbook: Strangeness in the Familiar

Observational drawing has long existed as a window into the studio artist's perspective. These drawings reflect both the artist's misunderstandings and interpretations of the world around them, and allow the viewer to imagine the artist's experience. Collecting observational drawings in a sketchbook creates an organized progression of their visual evaluations. One of the more intriguing systems of such a collection is the accordion-fold book, because it can be expanded to show every drawing at one time. As a result, the viewer is able to read the artist's records horizontally, much like examining a row of paintings in a gallery or looking at book spines on a library shelf. By creating a sketchbook and filling it with my own observational drawings of my environment, I investigate the sketchbook's ability to not only allow the artist to become familiar with his or her subject, but for the viewer to become familiar with the artist.

My first experience with an accordion-fold sketchbook came while living abroad, when all of the surroundings I drew appeared exotic. The format was quite foreign to me despite offering a comfortable place to record my observations. By binding my own accordion-fold sketchbook upon my return to the United States, I connected with it more intimately in that it was one-of-a-kind, and in turn, I reconsidered how I would fill each page, both stylistically and compositionally. This reconsideration of how I draw led to a reassessment of the everyday subjects of my sketches, which at first seemed unremarkable after traveling. Another level of altered consideration entered when I reprinted the drawing book on a smaller scale. Because the printer filled these pages, I was able to look at the book as an objective viewer rather than creator.

## 1. Background of the Sketchbook

In late January 2011, I had just moved into a Parisian apartment and was still becoming acclimated to the excitement and unanticipated isolation that accompany a long-term separation from friends and family. Anne-Katerine, my host, had studied art history as a young woman, and she took an interest in the small sketches I had started to do around the city. A few weeks into my stay, she gave me an accordion-fold book of blank pages, which she had bought in China almost twenty years earlier. She told me to “fill it with something pretty.” Throughout the next few months in France, I used the sketchbook as a reason to venture outside our apartment, explore the city, and practice my speaking skills whenever I met curious passersby. Because drawing is so familiar to me, I was able to connect with such an unfamiliar place.

Drawing is often the reaction of artists to “shape an experience,” as Peter Steinhart explains in *Why We Draw* (Steinhart 23). He recounts the anecdote of Eleanor Dickinson, an artist in San Francisco, who responded to the death of her mother by first crying, then drawing her mother’s face. I was equally driven to understand through drawing shortly after my return to upstate New York, when my dog became ill and my family scheduled his euthanasia. I spent the afternoon before the appointment drawing the dog while he slept. Reflecting on such an experience through drawing demonstrates Steinhart’s statement that, “Drawing is more an act of discovery—of one’s own feelings or of the world outside” (Steinhart 23). By focusing on something I did not want to forget, I felt more comfortable with what was happening and was able to express what I saw on paper. I drew from the reality of the situation and formed my own interpretation of what was happening, capturing the spirit of my own perceptions.

Upon my return to Alfred University for my final year at school, I felt the same need to connect with my environment through drawing. Yet because the town of Alfred is so familiar to me already, I wondered why the urge to draw still exists in a comfortable atmosphere. Perhaps I would better appreciate a place that I consider myself to thoroughly understand through re-evaluation. “Drawing is a way of seeing. One test of whether you really understand something is... whether you can draw it... As most understandings are flawed, most drawings are flawed. One draws chiefly to advance one’s understanding” (Steinhart 23). With this elaboration, Steinhart suggests that through reconsideration inevitably comes better comprehension. I realized that if I wanted to revisit my relationship with drawing in an environment that was anything but foreign or intimidating, I would need a second sketchbook with which I could venture out and depict those places and scenes that seem so ordinary.

The value of reconsidering the world through the sketchbook has been seen throughout the history of painting and drawing. Rembrandt’s sketches of a woman reading (**fig. 1**), a servant at a sickbed, and a man seated on a step are pensive. One feels the artist’s concentration emerging in the present from faded seventeenth century renderings. Similar to the accordion-fold format, a panoramic drawing of a village street scene that takes up two sketchbook pages survives from Northern Renaissance printmaker Peter Bruegel the Elder. Although faded, it still expresses the movement of two passing townspeople. And in sixteenth century Italy, Annibale Carracci used round, curly marks to create movement in his drawing compositions, rather than using drawing as a precise study for painting. In his sketch titled *Jacob Asleep* (**fig. 2**), the wrinkles in Jacob’s clothes appear to vibrate, reflecting the slow and steady breathing of sleep

(European n. pag.). Rather than exuding the remote exactness of the paintings and prints from these same artists, their drawings feel accessible to present-day viewers. Because we can see the steps the artist took to create a sketch, we can effortlessly imagine the process of its making. This visualization allows us to connect more intimately with the artist.



**Fig. 1.** *Two Studies of a Woman Reading*,  
Rembrandt (Rembrandt n. pag.)



**Fig. 2.** *Jacob Asleep*, Annibale Carracci  
(Carracci n. pag).

“I often went to Central Park to sketch people and animals. The sheep meadow in Central Park was the playground for the farm animals. It is now the well-known restaurant at Tavern on the Green,” said American painter Theresa Bernstein, in response to a set of drawings done in 1912 (Bernstein 36). I see a relationship form between my reasons for drawing and those of Bernstein, who used the sketchbook as a way to eternalize and absorb. Similar to my depictions of cafés and busy street corners in Paris, Bernstein made quick illustrations of architecture and city squares while in Italy, using

her communication between eye and pen to create records of her experience. On the other hand, she often used drawing as a way to digest her everyday surroundings, spontaneously drawing beach-goers and chess games throughout her life. By drawing her environment candidly, the results eventually became records of early twentieth century American culture, snapshots of a city that has since changed immensely. Yet in viewing these drawings, they retain the freshness of the present, allowing the viewer to witness the period first hand. It seems that from Rembrandt to Bernstein, Bruegel to Carracci, this fresh quality of observational sketchbook drawings is consistent.

Although drawing from life typically means retaining a level of reality, it is more telling about the artist when he or she steers away from complete allegiance to the subject; in this way, drawing and painting may be likened to creative writing. Both activities convey some degree of self-reflection through use of an interpreted or invented scene. Whether or not I am loyal to my subject, the work produced is still seen through my eyes because actual memories have inspired it. A critic in Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* scrutinizes an experimenting young writer's manuscript by saying:

The crystalline present moment is of course a worthy subject in itself, especially for poetry; it allows a writer to show his gifts, delve into the mysteries of perception, present a stylized version of thought processes, permit the vagaries and unpredictability of the private self to be explored and so on. Who can doubt the value of this experimentation? (McEwan 294)

Despite *Atonement's* classification as a novel, the fact that McEwan is a writer describing the reactions of a critic and author means that the story is autobiographical to some

degree. Because *Atonement* revolves around the “crystalline present moment” that one of its characters describes, McEwan is not necessarily having a fictional critic examine a fictional author’s style, but contemplating his own writing methods. This may be the most earnest point of metafiction. Besides creating a literary conundrum in which the truth of a fictional tale is considered, it makes the reader consider the existence of the story’s creator.

This consideration comes into play with visual arts as well, and by accepting that drawing is a means of comprehension, at some point the artist becomes quite familiar with their understanding of and feelings toward a subject. At this time, instead of absorbing information about the subject, the artist projects his or her understanding of it to the viewer. The artist controls the orientation of this understanding, and is capable of bending certain aspects to simulate a reality apart from the one he or she witnessed. Yet through alteration, the artist reveals choices affected by his or her own memory and previous experiences. As a result, the artist’s own experience becomes more apparent to the viewer. Thus, in the case of observational drawing, it is through these interpretations of observations that the viewer comes to know the artist best.

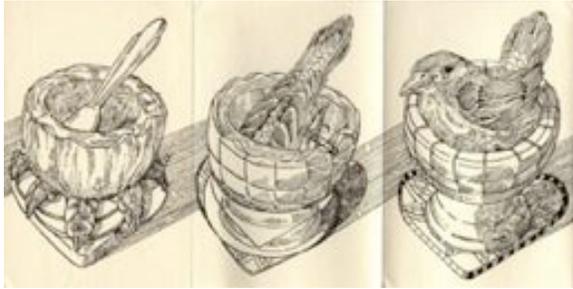
## 2. Bookbinding

The bookbinding portion of this project makes it crucial to consider a book's components. Fundamentally, a book is of a collection of paper that can be opened and explored. As Japanese designer Yukimasa Matsuda describes in *An Illustrated Guide to Design*, "[The] font, size, spacing of the text, layout of illustrations and captions, proportion of the page, margin, texture of paper, smell, size, thickness and weight ... are essentially a book's DNA, and I think you can say that there were no two books exactly alike" (Matsuda iii). With all of these characteristics, an extraordinary number of decisions accompanies the making of a sketchbook, which in turn inform my digital reproduction of the book. In the instance of drawing, the type of paper is perhaps even more pertinent than for a printed book, as it must be conducive to the artist's pen and brush in order to facilitate the book's creation. For my previous sketchbook, I had used the accordion design because that is what Anne-Katerine gave me. Besides utilizing the front and back of the paper, as well as full spreads due to the absence of a gutter, I did not explore the possibilities of unfolding pages nearly as much as possible, and consequently, the first book left room for experimentation with the accordion structure.

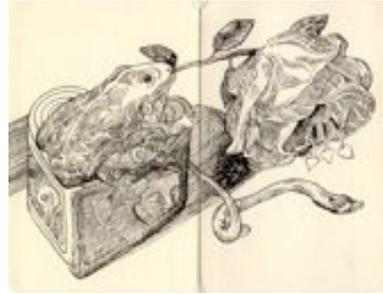
The accordion-fold has been used in an assortment of ways in regard to artists' books. For instance, in Ellen Lanyon's *Transformation I* (**fig. 3** and **4**), she illustrates the mutation of a drawing from one end of the book to another (Lanyon n. pag.). Though still segmented by the page-to-page format, the transformation of objects can be viewed as an entire series when the pages are stretched out. In another instance, Buzz Spector uses the accordion-fold to record an installation of his entire personal library, organized from smallest to largest book on one long shelf; because the installation expanded the

entire diameter of the room, the accordion layout works in his favor (Spector n. pag.).

The catalog remains to simulate the effect of an installation that no longer exists, whose breadth would be difficult to appreciate if the catalog were not designed in this way.



**Fig. 3:** Selected pages from *Transformation I*, Ellen Lanyon (Lanyon n. pag.)

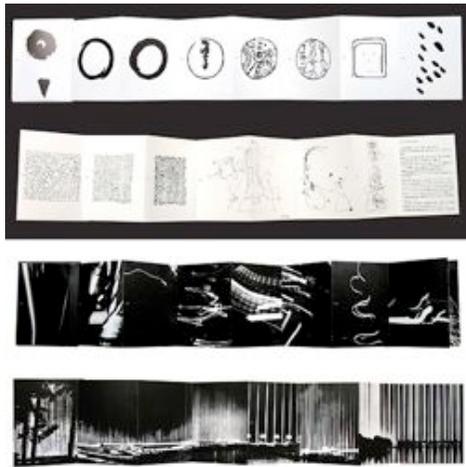


**Fig. 4:** Final page of *Transformation I*, Ellen Lanyon (Lanyon, n. pag.)

Books as display systems have been used elsewhere, such as in Matsuda's book *One-Hundred-Billionth of the Solar System + One Quarter of a Millionth of the Speed of Light*. In this case, Matsuda uses the book's ability to supply the incredible amount of surface area needed to display a model of the solar system (Matsuda 30-31). His creation *Writing Lights/Lighting Write* (**fig. 5**) does something similar, utilizing the expanded accordion-folds to present a diagram of two forms of line and light, while using the division of front and back to mirror a conceptual difference (Matsuda 22-23). While Lanyon and Spector used the accordion fold as a convenient showcase method, Matsuda revolutionizes it as a way to logically and proportionally represent information. Bearing all of these examples in mind, the possibilities of my own accordion-fold book seem boundless.



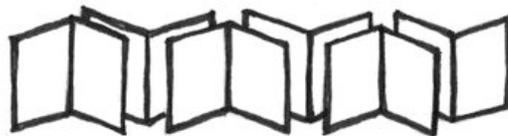
**Fig. 5:** Accordion-fold book *Writing Lights/Lighting Write*, Yukimasa Matsuda (Writing n. pag.)



**Fig. 6:** First and last pages of *Lighting Write* (top) and *Writing Light* (bottom)  
(First Black n. pag.; First White n. pag.; Last Black n. pag.; Last White, n. pag.)

### 3. Construction, Filling, and Reprinting

To start the production of the drawing book, I separated the project into three parts: the construction, filling, and digital reprinting of the book. Because I planned to work with water media, I needed a drawing surface thick enough to resist bleeding. I also wanted roughly thirty spreads in order to give myself an adequate number of drawing opportunities, meaning that perfect folding would be crucial due to the extra length. With all of these necessities, binding my own book was the most convenient route. I returned to my sketchbook from Paris, which had already shown its potential for watercolor, and used this physical example as a template. I made several models, which enabled me to trouble-shoot technical problems such as page connection, puckering, erratic page edges, warping, and glue type. I used Strathmore 300 Series Charcoal Paper, which was mounted in a pad, to ensure that all pages were flush while slicing and creasing. Although the paper is designated for charcoal and oil pastels, watercolor paper would have made the book too wide, and the thickness was still sufficient for pen and water media. I also benefitted from the laid finish, or the parallel lines simulating handmade paper, which offered me a guideline when drawing straight lines. The structure of this book was such that thirty-two separate spreads of paper were glued in a staggered, overlapping manner, forming one long strip when unfolded (**fig 7**). In addition, this technique produces drawing surfaces that are two sheets thick, eliminating the risk of ink bleeding through.



**Fig. 7:** Staggered page composition.

In preparation for gluing, I clamped the pages securely between two pieces of cardboard, and glued the pages with book repair glue while they were still secured as a block. I then flattened the bonded stack in a book press for two days, to ensure that the pages did not warp or slip while drying. For the cover boards, I used two thin panels of wood and applied a layer of cork on top of the boards for a slightly cushioned surface. To reflect a sense of elegance, I used a golden Indian sari fabric for the cover, which I stretched over the underlying board structure, and then attached to the end pages (**fig. 8**). I found a hand-printed paper of blue and gold at a boutique called Paper Source in Boston, which I glued on top of the blank end pages at the beginning of each side of the book.

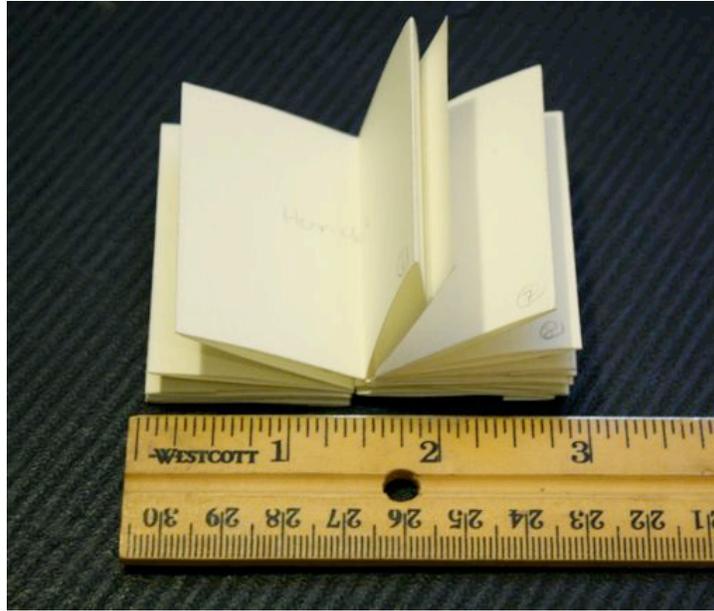


**Figure 8:**

Once the book was fully prepared, I began drawing, which was the longest and most integral step of the project. I used black and sepia toned Faber-Castell waterproof drawing pens and a hatching technique while onsite. I typically drew inside, though if the weather permitted, I drew outdoors. In some instances, I was able to draw an outside scene by positioning myself before a window, as in the Collegiate Restaurant and hospital drawings (**figs 13 and 21**). The style of drawing varied; one drawing might contain enough value that color would distract from the drawing, while in others, I used color to add character. In these, I produced watercolors with Gum Arabic and the same loose pigments that make up my oil palette. I will go more in depth with my descriptions of the sketchbook contents in the following section, starting on page twenty.

I finished the book in early April, at which point I started planning the digital reprinted copy. After photographing the three-page drawings, I noticed that the smaller scale of the computer screen accentuated their horizontal composition. In addition, viewing all of the drawings at full scale had proven difficult, since the full strip often spanned the entire length of a room. Because of these factors, I decided to reduce the page dimensions from the original 12.5 by 9.75 inches to 5.5 by 4.3 inches for the reprint. I made a half scale model of the reprint size at 2.75 by 2 inches per page and labeled the pages with the drawing sequence (**fig. 9**). This model gave me an idea of how the images would come together on the front and back of the strip when printing double-sided. I decided to print on both sides because a grid on the computer would manage the drawings, allowing the placement on front and back to be perfect. More importantly, this reduced the amount of paper by fifty percent. At such a small scale, the book's thickness

could easily surpass its height and width, so instead of using thirty-two pieces, I used only sixteen.

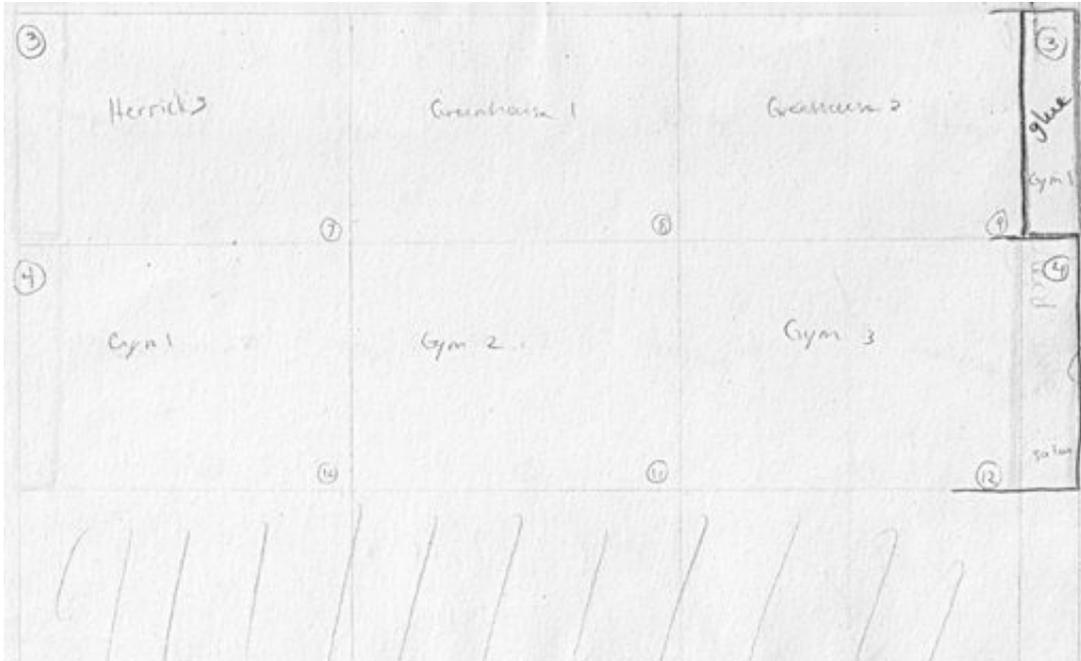


**Fig. 9:** Half-scale prototype of reprinted book

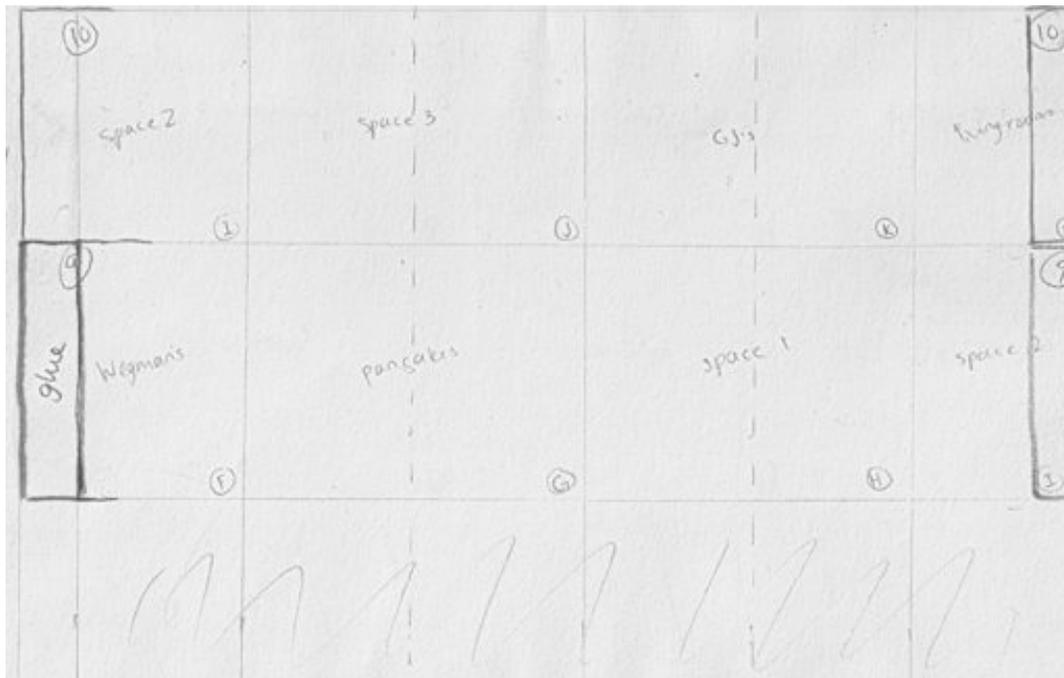
After making this model, I made a deconstructed version of it in order to see what exactly needed to come out of the printer that could be cut down and assembled by hand (**figs. 10** and **11**). I chose an 18 by 12 inch Cougar cover paper, which has the thickness and coating of printed book pages. During this process, I experimented with joint options, since I could only print a maximum of three drawing lengths on 18 by 12 inches and I would have to attach each set with an overlap. One of my options was to place a small white joint every three pages, but this technique would either cover up part of every third drawing, or push the drawings out of their frames. I compromised by disguising the joints with the same image it was covering on the flap surface (**fig. 12**). I used InDesign to recreate my unassembled page templates with quarter inch margins. I scanned in the covers, end pages, and all of the drawings on an Epson Expression v10000 scanner at 350

dpi. In Photoshop, I changed all of the dimensions to my desired page size of 5.5 inches by 4.3 inches and brought out the whites and darks. Following this, I arranged them in the pre-determined order with InDesign. This program facilitated the orientation process because it displays when an image is centered or flush with other images. Seeing as every few images on the back templates had to be cut down the middle to reflect the front seams, InDesign helped me measure the exact center of these images and maintain an accurate layout.

After trouble shooting errors in the orientation and coloring of the Toshiba printer, I came out with two satisfactory editions. I trimmed each segment down with a metal ruler and X-acto knife. I used a bone folder to make exact creases, and similar to constructing the original sketchbook, a thick straight edge was convenient in lining up each page with the ones before it, ensuring parallel folds and flush edges. Before gluing each section together, I attached them temporarily with tape, so that I could make adjustments if necessary. I then used Zip-Dry paper glue to permanently adhere each flap to the adjoining page. The result of the reprinted edition is a handheld book whose full contents can be observed at a closer distance, and more intimately. Because I have the InDesign files saved on my hard drive, I can reproduce this book on different papers, at a different size, or with different printers at any time, making the book an ever-evolving object.



**Fig. 10:** Mock-up of reprinted book, unassembled. Front, pages 7-12.



**Fig. 11:** Mock-up of reprinted book, unassembled. Back, pages F-L



Fig. 12: Diagram of joint system

#### 4. Contents of Sketchbook

In both the sketchbook and reprint, the drawings are ordered from earliest to latest, and dated in each corner. Similar to Matsuda, because I organized the drawings chronologically in two long strips, I am also using the accordion fold as a convenient display system that creates a visual timeline of my observations. The drawing sequence starts off as relatively empirical and develops into a conglomeration of observations that do not necessarily rely on a distinct definition of space. Instead, the second half of the sketchbook is largely made up of scattered renderings of people or objects, assembled in an organized fashion, or united by color, while more exact drawings help establish the viewer in the setting.

There was a point during the process that I struggled to find spaces and subject matter that were interesting enough to draw. Even though the nature of the project meant facing the ordinary in the same way that I faced a Parisian street corner, it was difficult to overcome the difference; Paris appeared exotic in its unfamiliarity and urban bustle, thus I was drawn to compensate for the familiar conditions and slow pace of Alfred by searching for unusual spaces and scenes. I also feared that depicting my college town during my final year would produce a collection of overly sentimental and picturesque images. Indeed, the first drawing may be exactly this, as my careful consideration of the Collegiate Restaurant's architecture almost idealizes the place (**fig 13**).



**Fig 13:** Page 1 of drawing book, Collegiate Restaurant  
Jan. 17, 2012

Following the restaurant drawing, I kept my eyes open for interesting opportunities to sketch, which ended up including a court hearing, greenhouse, and fitness center. I eventually became just as interested in the way I rendered a place as in the location itself. So for example, in the courtroom drawing, while the intrinsic tension of a courthouse comes through because we observe a defendant and lawyer before the judge's stand, I did not stylistically utilize this fragile tension in its rendering (**fig. 14**). Although my search for a subject still revolved around intriguing places more than the familiar after this second drawing, I began considering what the most important features of a space were in the two-paged drawing of a greenhouse (**fig. 15**). Resultantly, I summoned the luminosity of the structure by shifting the perspective to the glass ceiling, and highlighted the plant life by keeping the palette limited to green and blue. Comparably, in the three-page drawing of the weight room, I used bold lines to mirror the build of the men within, the heft of the equipment they use, and the very unadorned structure of a fitness center (**fig. 16**).



**Fig. 14:** Page 2 of drawing book, Court Hearing  
Jan. 18, 2012



**Fig. 15:** Pages 6 and 7 of drawing book, Alfred State Green House  
Feb. 2, 2012

**Fig. 16:** Pages 8-10 of drawing book, Fitness Center, Feb 26, 2012



My first experimentation with multi-page drawing came at the beginning of the book. Situated at the commons area in Herrick Library, I spent two days recording my view of the library entrance and circulation desk (**fig. 17**). In an attentive mindset, I kept the drawing very organized and calculated, using only straight hatching. I also limited myself to one point of view, which resulted in a fish eye lens effect as the horizontals bend beyond the center panel.

Slightly half way through the book, I chose a more candid environment that would inform my drawing style more perceptibly. In this spread of three pages, I drew people walking outside, as well as students playing intramural soccer (**fig. 18**). Far from dealing with as a stationary subject as architecture, these drawings revolved around movement. Because none of the subjects were posing, the easiest way to draw them was by taking a single glance and then drawing from memory, in order to avoid contradictions in their posture and position. Of course, this becomes the real transience of the situation, because an image in the mind can deteriorate just as quickly as the subject vanishes. The introduction of color helps ground these fleeting models in a space, though by placing only a monochromatic stain around the forms, it does not subtract from the ephemeral quality of black and white.

**Fig. 17:** Pages 3 - 5 of drawing book, Herrick Library, Jan. 27, 2012



**Fig. 18:** Pages 16 - 18 of drawing book, campus sidewalk and gymnasium  
Mar. 19, 2012 and Mar. 20, 2012



Three quarters of the way through the book, I segmented a long and messy ceramic workspace into four drawing situations, and before each, I recorded the piles of objects in simple, unelaborated contours (**fig. 19**). The students occupying this space did not seem to fuss about the placement of their possessions, so I mimicked their indifferent attitude through simple lines. Similar to Buzz Spector's representation of objects placed on a long surface, I use the extendable accordion format and multiple viewpoints to simulate the effect of walking through the space.



**Fig. 19:** Pages 22 - 24 of drawing book, Ceramic Space, Apr. 2, 2012

A few pages after this, one finds the book's closing three-page drawing. After spending the first twenty-seven spreads observing the things around me in public, I ended by addressing the contents of my personal space (**fig 20**). Returning to Steinhart's remark that drawing is a way of discovering not only one's surroundings, but also one's feelings, and to my own conclusion that drawing is a means of personal reflection, a valid endpoint is to examine my already personalized environment. The three resulting subjects of my room, the clothes within, and my feet in the bath are rendered in ways quite similar to the initial drawing of the diner. Yet because these places are intimately related to me, that level of dedication is firmly warranted. So when comparing the first drawing of the diner to the last of my home, I see a transformation of removed speculation to understanding of and immersion within an environment.



**Fig. 20:** Pages 28 - 30 of drawing book, my apartment  
Apr. 9, 2012

The first part of the drawing consists of a view into my room. The space was once a parlor, twice the size, and accessed by double French doors. However, because the landlord split it into two small bedrooms, one side belongs to me and the other belongs to a co-renter. Between us, a wall runs from the front windows to the middle of the wide doorframe. This segmentation creates a cross-section of two symmetrical spaces when viewed from the shared doorway. The book page echoes this

transformation, because although the middle seam functions as the divide, the two sides are part of the same spread and close upon each other when the page is turned. As part of a whole, this location provides a setting for the other two drawings, showing the viewer that he or she is entering a domestic space.

Following this external perspective, I entered my side of the room, and depicted the line of clothes hanging on a freestanding rack. I see a reciprocal relationship between the drawing book and clothes rack. Both serve as a means of organized representation. More importantly, the drawing book is a collection of my views of the world, and my clothes are my options of self-representation to the world. Ergo, drawing the latter signifies a strong connection between drawing and subject. This idea I explore even further in the final panel.

Because the third part depicts my feet poking out of the water in the bath, I show a location very representative of the quintessential routine that first intrigued me to do this project; by drawing while bathing, I placed myself in an even deeper mode of self-focus that comes with immersing oneself in water, when one reviews the day and turns the attention on oneself. In turn, this intensified the state of self-reflection already present in drawing. On another level, my feet carried me to every subject outside of that intimate moment in the tub, and they function as an embodiment of my means to discovery. This final panel shows my total awareness of my environment, position as the artist within it, and ability to personally explore it through the act of drawing. In essence, if drawing is indeed a manner of reflecting, and bathing is a state of routine contemplation, then with this drawing, I reflected on my own contemplation.

## 5. External Factors in Drawing Observationally

In Alfred, the reactions of people to my drawing were certainly not as common as those I encountered in France. It is possible that because my French is not at the level of my English, conversations seemed more exciting and memorable, and people took a gentler approach upon learning that I was not French. I was often approached in the city with questions about my interests, career, and background, and sometimes people just wanted to talk. This brings about the difference between urban and rural environments. In the city, people are typically either in transit or touring, and seeing a stationary student drawing the bustle is unusual. I predicted that in a small town, people would be more willing to ask questions and have more time to talk, but my findings were much to the contrary. In Alfred, which hosts nearly four hundred art students at a time, a young person drawing from life is common, and therefore, not incredibly unusual.

My most interesting encounters were in places removed from the artistic college environment. While waiting for a haircut in my hometown of Endicott, NY, I drew the line of seated clients before a long mirror (**fig. 21**). Five minutes into the drawing, a young girl crossed the room and looked over my shoulder, remarking on her desire to draw well and dragging her siblings over to introduce me to them. During my interaction with the young girl, I recalled another I had met while drawing the previous year, in a park outside my apartment in Paris (**fig. 22**). Though shy, she watched me quietly, pointing to colors that I should add, and running into the sandbox I was drawing and back, to see if she had appeared on the page.



**Fig. 21:** Page 12 of drawing book, hair salon and Wilson hospital  
Mar. 13, 2012 and Mar. 16, 2012



**Fig. 22:** Page 3 of Paris drawing book, Square Charles-Victor Langlois  
Feb. 12, 2012

This example draws to my attention that the norms of the French city and rural New York town are different. The adult and child relationship is sensitive in upstate New York, as I was warned that drawing at the Alfred Montessori playground could get me arrested if I did not obtain permission first. In Paris, parents and caretakers chatted freely with me while I sat on a bench beside them and drew the kids bouncing around the jungle gym (**fig. 23**). On another occasion, after drawing a small boy and girl standing before a carousel, their father brought them over to admire the drawing (**fig. 24**). Appearing to see

the drawing as a good learning opportunity for his children, he asked me to explain my technique. On the other hand, at the salon in Endicott, the young girl's mother did not speak to me, though I noticed her eyeing me while her daughter engaged me in conversation. Based on this distancing and watchfulness, conceivably, their mother may have asked me to stop if I had shifted my drawing to the three young siblings in the waiting room. The only similarity between these situations in Paris and New York is that the children were equally ready to approach a stranger. Perhaps as American children mature, they adopt skepticism of strangers from their parents, serving as a possible explanation of the infrequency in conversations while drawing in Alfred and Endicott. Conversely, Parisians may be more prone to raise children to be curious and independent, which would also explain the more regular conversations with both children and adults in the streets of Paris.



**Fig. 23:** Page 9 of Paris drawing book,  
Square Charles-Victor Langlois, Mar. 3, 2011



**Fig. 24:** Page 4 of Paris drawing book, Hôtel de Ville  
Feb. 13, 2012

Another element of observational drawing is that it instills firm memories of everything going on around the drawing's creation. For instance, from a drawing done in a hospital lobby, I recall the banter between the valet employees, the request for a member of staff who could "drive stick", the hospital greeter who gave out wheelchairs and directions, and the pregnant woman who asked if I draw in the hospital often, and took a call from her mother in Spanish (**fig 21**). Because the artist who draws observationally is doing nothing but concentrating on his or her surroundings, details from other senses are generally registered at a higher frequency than normal. Drawing for an hour or more requires that one sit still as a witness to the environment. It is more common than usual to overhear a conversation about a woman's stepdaughter in a coffee shop, appreciate the smell of maple syrup in a pancake restaurant, or become accustomed to the warm temperature on a pool deck.

Correspondingly, the artist becomes more aware of one's internal sensations, such as cramping, hunger, and the need to use the bathroom. During a morning drawing session at the greenhouse, I was drawing on an empty stomach after having left in a rush for class and missing breakfast. By not preparing properly for the drawing, I was forced to go home and eat before finishing the drawing in the afternoon. As for the hospital drawing, I was there for a blood test for which I had to fast overnight. Knowing that I would be hungry by the time I got to drawing, I brought a small bag of cereal and a bottle of juice so that I would not be distracted by hunger pangs or put out by lightheadedness.

In order to prepare for a drawing more generally, I leave most of my belongings in the studio, to avoid burdening myself with unnecessary weight. There are often people occupying the setting, and having to worry about my possessions adds an unnecessary layer of concern. Similarly, I do not listen to music while drawing, as I wish to embrace the environment and this would remove me from it, nor do I inconvenience myself with uncomfortable clothing. For example, when drawing at the pool, I did not wear shoes so that I could enter through the locker room showers and walk on the pool deck without soaking my shoes. Combined, all of these physical elements contribute to an even more memorable drawing experience.

## 6. Reprinting a Handmade Sketchbook

I began this project by building a sketchbook, and fitting drawings within it. Reprinting was the opposite of this, because I began with my drawings, and built a new book around them. When I view the original sketches, I think back on the drawing experience: how the sketchbook fit on my lap, what the weather was like, and how I negotiated bringing a second or third page to the drawing. Yet on this smaller scale, even though I am viewing the same drawings, I view the work more objectively since I have been removed from the process; instead of drawing on these small pages, the printer applied all the marks of the pen (**fig. 25**).

It is apparent to me when I flip through the original sketchbook that the book was in all of the places depicted within its pages. The covers are worn on the edges, pigment was spilled on the fabric, and some of the pages have ripped on the creases or wrinkled due to water. Yet in a miniature, pristine version, all of the whites are bright, the blacks are black, and the pages are smooth and unwrinkled. Instead of retaining a history of drawing locations, the reprint is refreshingly deliberate. All of the drawing discoveries have already been made, so in replicating them, I create an alternative and polished setting in which to showcase them.

It is also significant that in neither of these books do I include any text. I faced this dilemma in Paris, when one of my professors expressed that I should make a story out of the drawings. I enjoy the idea of making observations and then applying my imagination to them to create something new, and I do this quite often in painting. But just as I do not offer descriptions with my paintings, it is more powerful of a narrative if

it is left up to the viewer to invent the circumstances of the drawing situation. This comes into play especially when reprinting, because it would be much easier to add text or a storyline when working digitally. But because these miniature books do not hold the physical evidence of being drawn in, the mystery of their purpose increases. I could one day produce a separate kind of book with descriptions of my drawing experience, similar to Theresa Bernstein's, but I feel that this project would be better as a retrospective book than as a specific deconstructed description of each drawing. A sketchbook of Egon Schiele has been reproduced in a way similar to mine, and when looking through it, because of the lack of explanation, I feel that I am granted permission to look into Schiele's interpretations of the world (Schiele n. pag). These renderings were enough to hold my attention, so I did not need any explanations of how or why he was drawing. In this way, my imagination was better engaged. Although I feel removed from the process when I look at the digital reprints of the accordion-fold sketchbook, I still have an intimate and personalized viewing experience.

The small stature of the reprint also relates it to objects on a similar scale. When the creases are severe and the pages lay flat, the book recalls trading cards or a deck of cards in its collection of double-sided surfaces. When the creases are gentler and the thick pages seem to float on top of one another, the book feels lighter and more playful, creating the urge to unfold the entire book as one would unfold a slinky or release a yo-yo. The time that goes into calculating the location of each crease also reminds me of origami; when unfolded, both the origami and miniature accordion-fold book become larger and reveal their construction. In general, the small-scale paper object represents something intimate, collectable, and delicate. It can be placed in the pocket and hidden

from view, or opened up and shared with others. The sharing aspect is emphasized in that it is a multiple, and several people can own the same thing and have separate experiences with it. The more editions I make, the more the drawings are circulated.

Although reprinting a handmade book means that the computer takes over a large portion of the job, the accordion format means that the book is still handmade. I at first planned to send the drawings to Blurb and have them printed in a simple single-spine edition. However, sending the book out would sacrifice its unique folding structure, and would mean surrendering my ability to make proofs of each section. In turn, this takes away from the original book's tenderness; rather than enhancing the book or highlighting its characteristic structure that is crucial to many of the drawings, I would be splitting up the book and segregating its contents.

By digitally reprinting but then assembling by hand, the drawings seem legitimized by the printer. The actual drawings involve guesswork and speculation, apparent in mistakes that cannot be covered up. But through replication, I show that I accept these mistakes and directional changes, and still retain a link between original and copy in their consistent accordion structure. This acceptance of impulse and uncertainty is characteristic to the art world. The composer and poet may never be sure of their orchestration or writing, but all the same, they share them in records and publications, or concerts and readings. As a painter, I often doubt my artistic decisions, but simply sharing them and presenting them as finished validates their existence. There was a moment during each of these drawings that I put the cap on my pen or put the brush down, determining that a page was finished. This moment builds the artist's confidence to get behind the work and allow other people to take part in it.

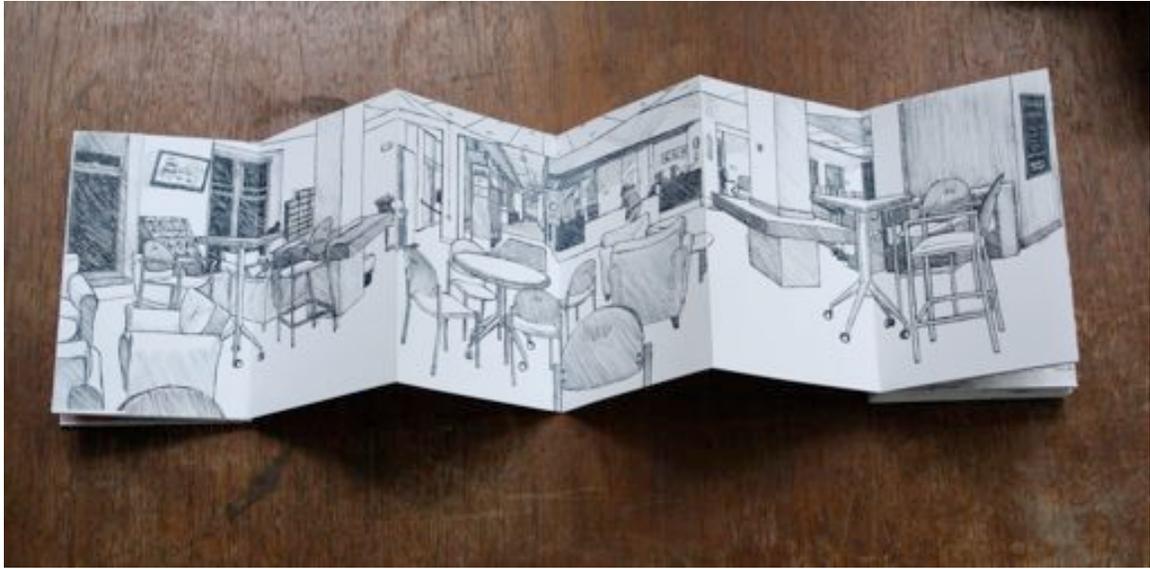


Fig. 25

## 7. Connection to Painting

Simultaneous to this project, I have been creating paintings from digital photographs with paint made from raw pigments and oil. At the beginning of the year, I used one photograph at a time, wrestling with the decision to reproduce an image that already exists. I felt perhaps the same drive that Steinhart describes, to understand the world better, or at least to better understand the small universe that exists within a digital image. While in France, I had used this raw pigment technique to mix a traditional palette and produce copies of old master paintings. Upon my return, I was conflicted by my traditional portrait training and interest in digital photography, unable to find a middle ground, or a source of inspiration beyond two very different ways of working. For instance, in *Accordion Player*, I used a photo of a man playing his accordion in the metro and produced a painting almost identical to it (**fig. 26**). In hindsight, I was so inspired by the education that I had received abroad, that this “how” of my paintings—raw materials and digital images—distracted me from the “what”—the subject matter and conceptual content.



**Fig. 26:** *Accordion Player*, Sep. 2011

I found the connection between my drawings and paintings as I began to work with ambiguity as a painting subject. By having regular drawing sessions between painting sessions, I felt both an appreciation for the camera in its ability to lock down a transient moment, as well as an interest in observational drawing to record more than one moment at a time. On this subject, Stienhart notes, “A drawing can express things that may be inexpressible in a painting, for aesthetic reasons. Lack of color, simplicity of line, ambiguity of grounding that might be criticized in a painting—all can work to the advantage of a drawing” (Steinhart 24). By training myself to look at more than one movement at a time, and instead using the passage of time to create a composition, I grew interested in using more than one photograph for a painting. This method simulates the passage of time despite the use of a static source, since each photo was taken at a different time, with the advantage of a digital image’s detail and accuracy.

Eventually, a more perceptible conduit formed between the practice of drawing observationally and painting in the studio, and started as preparatory drawings. Unlike the first semester’s paintings, which were essentially reproductions of a single digital photo, I approached my paintings the second semester more as a designer. I would choose two images that correspond visually, and produce several drawings that allowed me to experiment with the placement of the two components. By working in this way, I not only reflected on my decision to depict these two things, but also ended up with a draft of the painting from photographs, which had been produced with the freedom and spirit of an observational drawing.

In one such instance, I began by juxtaposing simplicity and intricacy in extravagance (**figs. 27 and 28**). While the delicate white figure of a bride behind many

layers of transparent veils, and a Persian rug that is covered in deeply colored geometric shapes, both convey extravagance, the stark contrast between the two puts forth the question of their relationship. When developing this idea, I knew I wanted to use a bride because of her lack of color in the midst rich color, though it took several drawings for me to find another level of meaning in the composition. I soon found that by using a bride whose body was completely obscured by veils, the viewer was more curious about her relationship to the space than her identity. But paring down the content to veils and carpet, their dominant property of being a tradition from the West and East, respectively, become more apparent. Although the drawing exists on its own as much as the drawing book images do, it doubled as a visual reference for the final painting, allowing me a resource beyond the stillness of the photographic sources, and one that is based on my own interpretation of the photographs.



**Fig. 27:** Drawing of bride before Persian rug, Mar 2012



**Fig. 28:** Painting of bride before Persian rug, Mar 2012

A further level of connection between my painting and drawing practice is my use of raw materials and obsession over every part of the final work. My paintings have all been produced with linseed oil and raw pigment that have been mixed together on a slab of glass. My canvases are small, and stretched with fine linen and upholstery tacks. To

produce layers that build up the surface of a painting quickly and allow the image to glow, I use a mixture of dammar varnish and methylcellulose glue. Because of the miniature size of the paintings, which contain an enormous level of detail and are produced by materials put together by the artist, the result is compact painted objects that exude a sentiment of clarity and deliberation.

My paintings are very controlled in their execution. I use miniscule brushes to capture elaborate patterns, and my hand moves slowly and steadily to maintain concise lines and workmanship. Conversely, my pen moves quickly across the sketchbook page, capturing a different kind of concision beyond clean lines and color transitions. When drawing, unnecessary information is excluded, so that the subject's essentials are captured at a pace more natural to human motor skills and eye movement. Similarly, the sketchbook was assembled by hand; as opposed to a mass produced sketchbook sold commercially, I constructed the book to the exact dimensions and page count needed for the project, chose the paper best suited for the drawings, and devised a page structure that would work powerfully with its contents. This control over every aspect of a work can be seen throughout my second semester projects. It reflects my own desire to maintain order by reducing the distractions of poor craftsmanship and lacking attentiveness, and celebrates the tenderness of the artist through thorough craftsmanship and creative

A similar relationship can be found between my use of technology in my painting and reprinting processes. Rather than printing out the images that I plan to use for a painting, I work straight from the computer screen. By imposing a grid, I can proportionally overlay separate components, and with the rapidity of technology, I can place a grid on different areas of the image and increase the number of squares quite

easily. This calculated set-up of a painting ensures that I can dedicate the rest of my time to my rendering of the images rather than fixing proportion and perspective errors.

The same goes for reprinting. Changing dimensions to 5.5 by 4.3 inches could have gone wrong if I had only changed the image size and skewed the image. By keeping the aspect ratio fixed and doing half the changes in Image Size and the other half in Canvas Size, the image remained proportionate to the original while still fitting my desired dimensions. And by making all of the images the same size before entering InDesign, the drawings lined up on the first try and layout was not slowed by size discrepancies. Although dealing with measurements and mathematically driven layout are not the most inspiring ways to begin an artistic process, they are reliable and allow the artist to take more liberties with the creation later on.

Bearing all of this in mind, my hope is that I produce objects in which every piece has been considered. If I achieve this, then the decision-making process of the artist, from the beginning to the end of the work's production, is apparent. As a result, the memory of the artist's contemplation and awareness is engrained within the final piece.

## 8. Discussion

Although I have thoroughly considered all of the aspects that I have completed during this project, it could be taken further. In order to more fully understand the cultural implications of this project, I would have to draw in more locations than just Paris and upstate New York. For instance, I cannot truly understand the treatment of the artist in France and the United States without drawing in an American city, small town that does not host an arts college, a rural French town, the West coast and Mid West, the South of France, and many others. Sampling different types of French and American culture would allow me further opportunities to compare the two, and would give me a better idea of the variety of people in each country. Although I did explore the parent and child relationship in each country, as seen from my perspective as the artist, I cannot draw any conclusions until my locations are more varied and the situation of drawing around children has occurred more than a few times.

If I were to take the creative process further, I might experiment with a scale shift in the book size. If I had a sketchbook at a size similar to the reprinted edition, I could explore how the speed and preciousness of the drawing changes. Perhaps this would allow me to fill up a book more quickly, or focus on smaller portions of a scene. I would also be interested in talking to people about how they react to seeing an artist drawing from life. I have been in the situation of sensing a person drawing me, and it has made me feel both uncomfortable and unsure if I should slow down in what I am doing. On the other hand, I imagine that others might be flattered by appearing in a drawing, or concerned that I have not captured a good likeness. Because observational drawing is a more focused version of people watching, it becomes voyeuristic. Any attempt at

interaction seems foolish in that it would bring the subject out of the action that I am observing, but it might allow me to better understand their point of view of my artistic actions.

Structurally, there are several choices in the bookmaking portion of the project that resulted in project flaws. Although I chose wood panels as cover boards, I did not anticipate that these would warp with fluctuations in humidity. In addition, preliminary fabric testing might have revealed that the gold sari fabric that I chose for the covers puckers when wet, and gathers when loosened from the adhesive. This complication could have been prevented if I had purchased several different types of fabric and conducted thorough experimentations, rather than searching simply for aesthetic value.

I place far more value in drawing after exploring the sketchbook in conjunction with my painting studies. When I drew in Paris, I had not yet recognized drawing's role in self-reflection. By exploring three different aspects of the sketchbook—bookbinding, drawing, and replicating—it feels far more integral in all of my creative pursuits. In the future, I would like to return to Paris to draw aspects of French culture that could translate into paintings that contain more intentional narratives. For instance, perhaps I could expand my level of exploration by focusing on France's position as a confluence of different cultures, particularly for North African and Islamic societies. By identifying the importance of drawing and planning to capture a more specific aspect of culture, I can rely more on my sketching skills when I encounter these things and less on the immediacy of a digital camera in capturing visual resources. By spending time focusing on something I wish to remember by drawing it, I cultivate my interpretations of the subject, and gain an appreciation that would have remained undiscovered.

## Image List



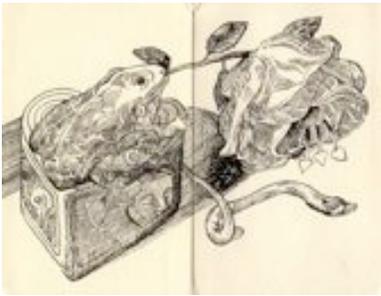
**Figure 1:** *Two Studies of a Woman Reading*,  
Rembrandt (Rembrandt n. pag.)



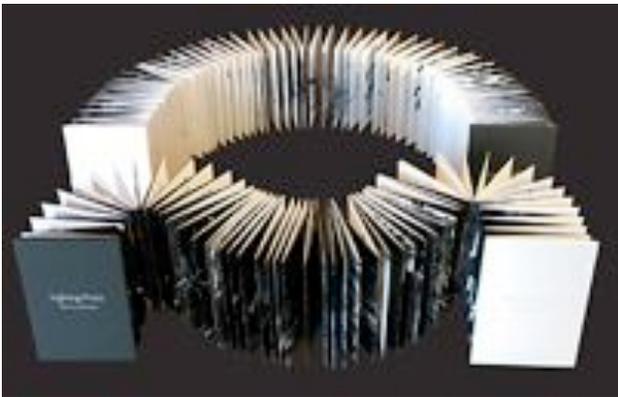
**Figure 2:** *Jacob Asleep*, Annibale Carracci  
(Carracci n. pag).



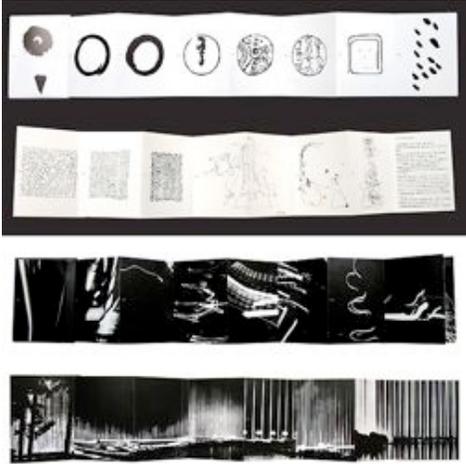
**Figure 3:** Selected pages from *Transformation I*, Ellen Lanyon (Lanyon n. pag.)



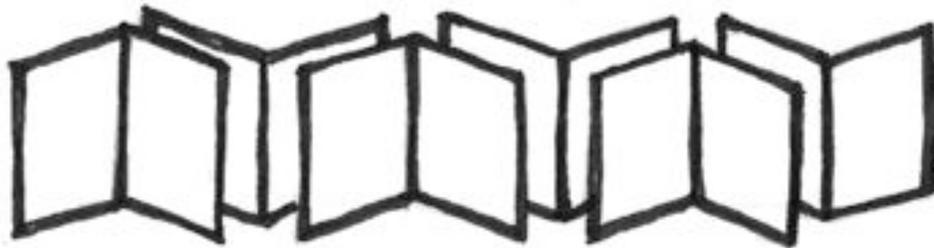
**Figure 4:** Final page of *Transformation I*, Ellen Lanyon (Lanyon, n. pag.)



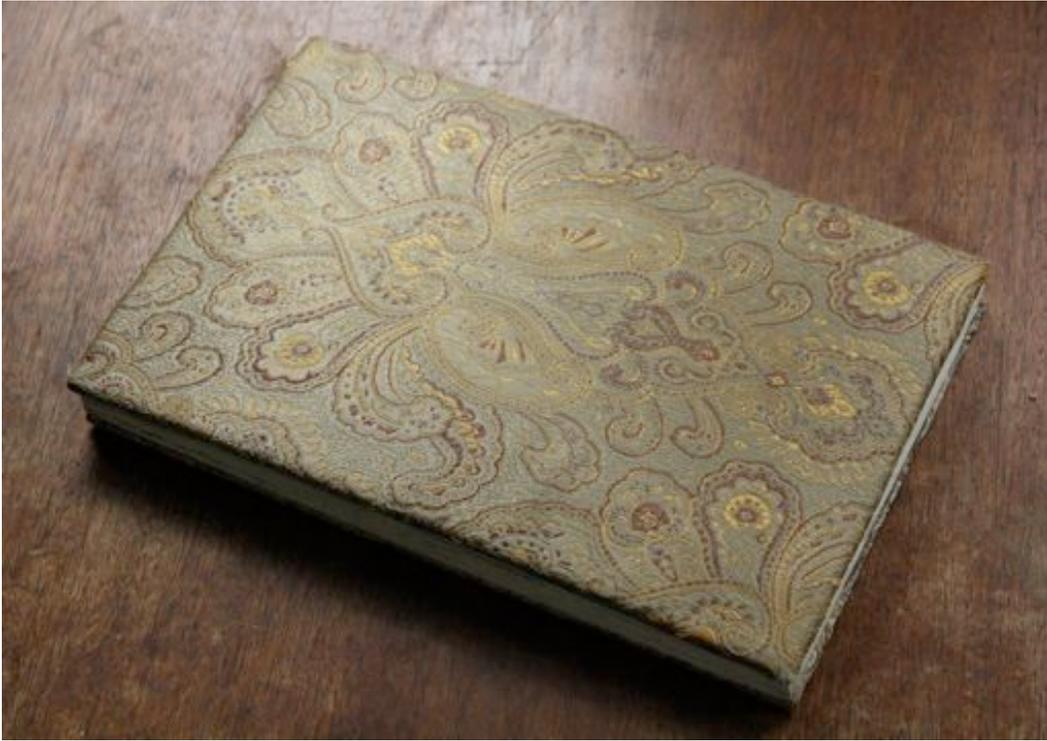
**Figure 5:** Accordion-fold book *Writing Lights/Lighting Write*, Yukimasa Matsuda ([Writing](#) n. pag.)



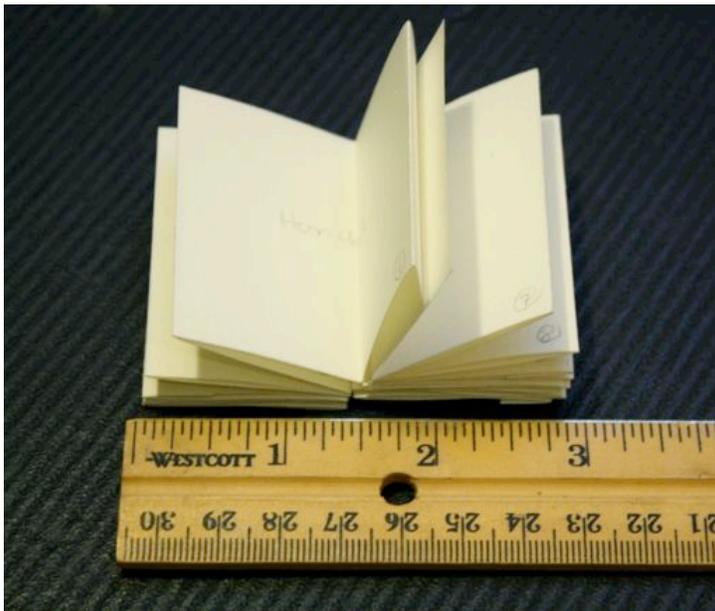
**Figure 6:** First and last pages of *Lighting Write* (top) and *Writing Light* (bottom)  
(First Black n. pag.; First White n. pag.; Last Black n. pag.; Last White, n. pag. )



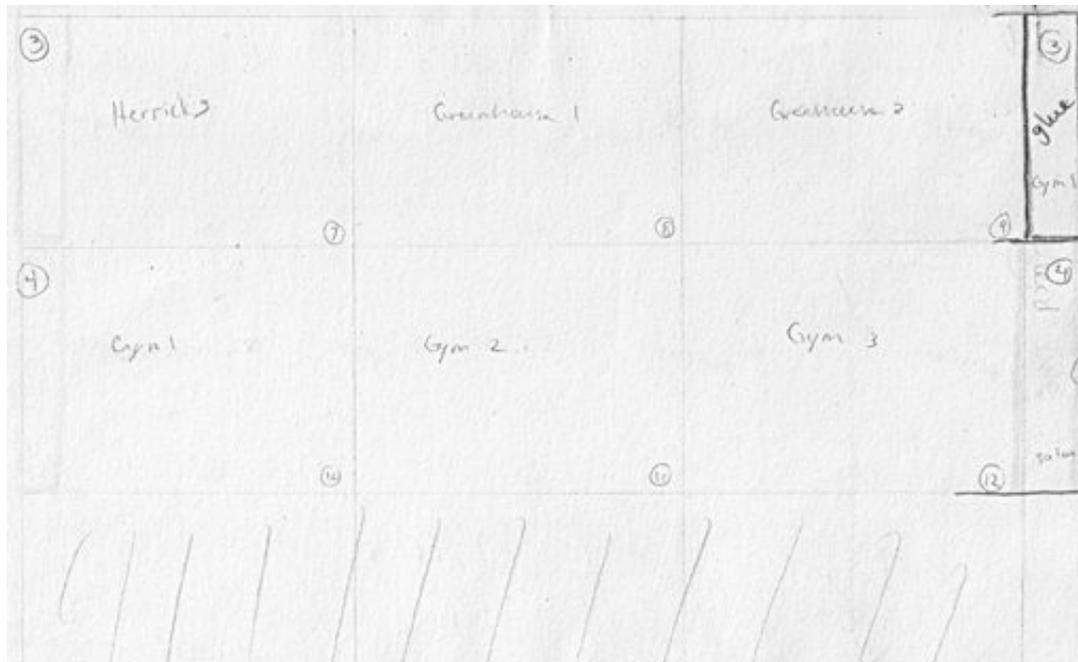
**Figure 7:** Staggered page composition.



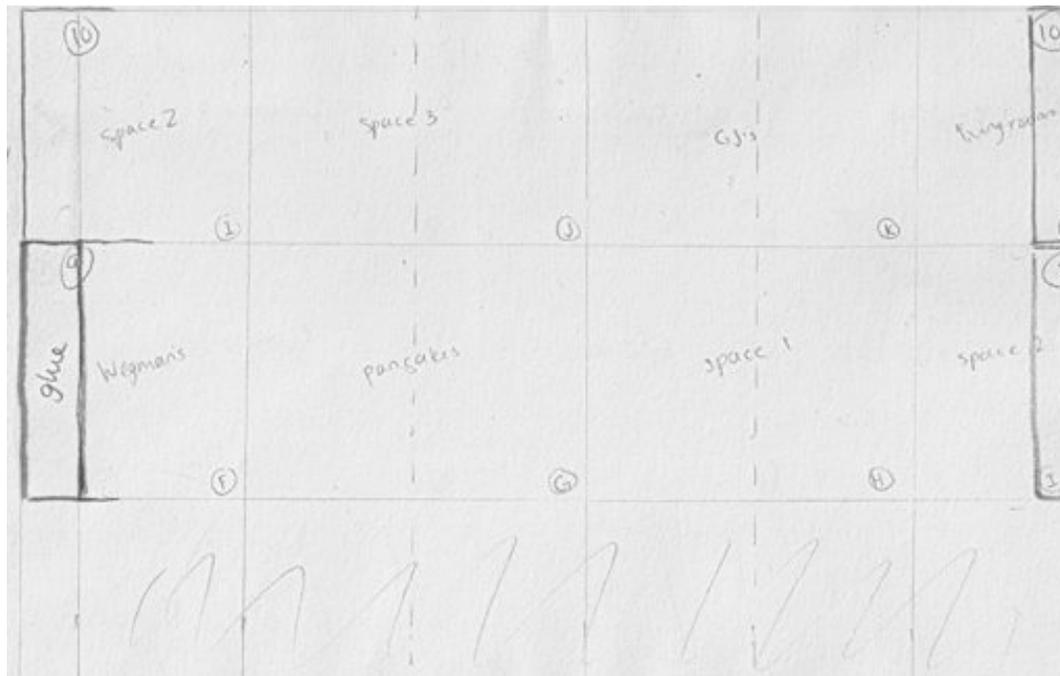
**Figure 8:**



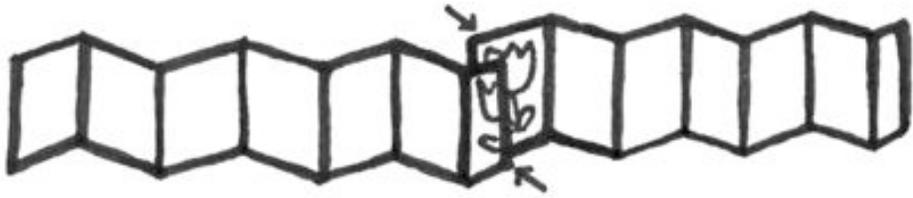
**Figure 9:** Half-scale prototype of reprinted book



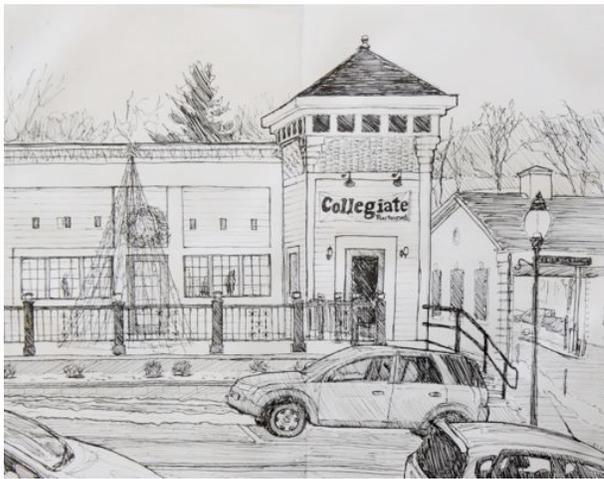
**Figure 10:** Mock-up of reprinted book, un assembled. Front, pages 7-12.



**Figure 11:** Mock-up of reprinted book, un assembled. Back, pages F-L



**Figure 12:** Diagram of joint system



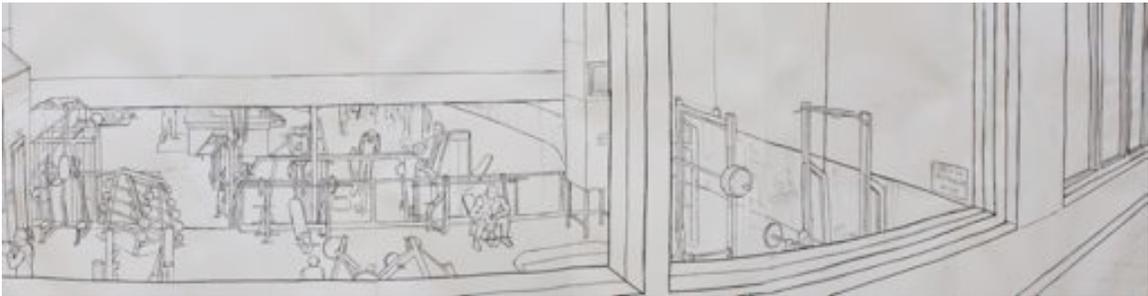
**Figure 13:** Page 1 of drawing book, Collegiate Restaurant, Jan. 17, 2012



**Figure 14:** Page 2 of drawing book, Court Hearing, Jan. 18, 2012



**Figure 15:** Pages 6 and 7 of drawing book, Alfred State Green House, Feb. 2, 2012



**Figure 16:** Pages 8-10 of drawing book, Fitness Center, Feb 26, 2012



**Figure 17:** Pages 3 - 5 of drawing book, Herrick Library, Jan. 27, 2012



**Figure 18:** Pages 16 - 18 of drawing book, campus sidewalk and gymnasium, Mar. 19, 2012 and Mar. 20, 2012



**Figure 19:** Pages 22 - 24 of drawing book, Ceramic Space, Apr. 2, 2012



**Figure 20:** Pages 28 - 30 of drawing book, my apartment, Apr. 9, 2012



**Figure 21:** Page 12 of drawing book, hair salon and Wilson hospital, Mar. 13, 2012 and Mar. 16, 2012



**Figure 22:** Page 3 of Paris drawing book, Square Charles-Victor Langlois, Feb. 12, 2011



**Figure 23:** Page 9 of Paris drawing book, Square Charles-Victor Langlois, Mar. 3, 2011



**Figure 24:** Page 4 of Paris drawing book, Hôtel de Ville, Feb. 13, 2011



**Figure 25:**



**Figure 26:** *Accordion Player*, Sep. 2011



**Figure 27:** *Painting of bride before Persian rug*, Mar 2012



**Figure 28:** *Painting of bride before Persian rug*, Mar 2012

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