

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Alfred University

Metamorphosis
by
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the Requirements for
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Under the Supervision of:

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Traveling the world as part of my schooling, I have come to think that I do not have one hometown, but several. Having lived in Japan, The United Arab Emirates, The United States, and China, has aided me to handle risk, experimentation, and failure across different cultures. This life is the backbone of my artistic endeavors in which I assimilate the materiality and physicality of clay and photography to propel my inner desire to track a shifting identity.

Development of my ceramic practice:



Formative experiences at Alfred University and as Junior art student studying ceramics in China have taught me to relish and engineer ways to manipulate materials. Seeking artistic possibility, I researched the mediums of ceramics, photography, acting, printmaking, painting, and video/sound. Different senses, dimensions, and space aided me in building a provenance that I generate through materiality and physicality. In addition to my cross departmental studies at Alfred University, my study abroad experiences in China at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) dramatically changed my approach to art. Working for two months in the “Porcelain City” of Jingdezhen, I was affected by the deficiencies and discarded wares from the factories. Flaws such as fragmented vases and melted porcelain objects were contradictory to the precise handcrafted porcelain wares that were sold at the markets. I was inspired by the imperfections because they were built to the already established Porcelain history in Jingdezhen. The over-fired, discarded wares founded in the dumpster or on the street side were rebellious to the Chinese porcelain tradition, in which perfection has been demanded in the industry. This drove me to investigate the aesthetic within deficiencies once I return to Alfred University as a senior.



Japan and China share a common ground of appreciating ceramic material itself. I incorporate traditional Chinese ceramic techniques that were later developed into a contemporary artistic style in Japan for my ceramic tableware design project in Jingdezhen. I researched marbling, a ceramic technique that was developed in the Tang dynasty, 7th century China and, the *Nerikomi* technique that was explored during the Mingei Japanese folk-art movement in the early 20th century. Aesthetically drawn by the combining contrasting colored clays mixed into free random patterns, I began to explore this artistic style in my studio.



During the stay in Jingdezhen, I investigated the marbling techniques with local porcelain, colored oxides, stains, and kilns. The laborious process in a new environment and culture allowed me to mature visually, and philosophically. Testing and failing was a daily routine, and small innovative ideas came from mistakes. I would dream every night imagining my ideal outcome of the patterned colored clay. As I chase deeper into these discoveries, I noticed that there were phenomenological possibilities through the action of the colors. The colors, gestures, and forms were able to capture geological phenomenon. The patterns intensified and highlighted the movements and the movement opened time and collapsed time.

After studying abroad in China, I took a gap year to live in Tokyo again. Even though I went back home every year as a visitor from the USA, living in Japan for a year felt refreshing. The last time I lived in Japan was nine years ago. I had a different perspective towards Japan. I

questioned and explored the culture as a foreigner. Parallel to my return, the country was also going through a major change. The Japanese government issued the bill that would allow Emperor Akihito to abdicate. Abdication within the Japanese imperial family did not happen for more than 200 years. This historical event also guided me to research the origin of Japan and the traditional Japanese belief Shinto. I was learning the Japanese characteristics and traditions. I was reorienting as a Japanese citizen living abroad. This inner interrogation drove me to investigate Japanese cultural essence through art and materials once I was back as a senior at Alfred University.

Continuum of ceramic practice in Japan is an important aspect of Japan's cultural identity. Ubiquitous themes such as teabowl and Neolithic Jomon vessels are recognizable as Japanese aesthetic qualities and forms. They traditional canvases that offer opportunities to unearth cultural, historical, and geological encounters. Amidst my own multi-cultured interpretations, I have chosen to channel the tea bowl and Jomon inspired shapes.



The tea bowl signifies intellectual meaning that is not only functional. Inspired by ceramic artist Cory Brown, I begin the making process by structuring the bowl form on the pottery wheel and making clay slabs out from various colored clay. I marleize colors by wedging multiple colored clay bodies. The random flamboyant colors from marbled clay slab is then wrapped around and paddled into the bowl form. I paddle into the form with a silk cloth to add a layer of texture. I then rambunctiously alter the form by torching, scratching and heavily applying glaze, in which they intensify and heighten physical presence. These processes of degradation are generate uncontrollable movements in the firing process and cause warpage and cracks in the kiln. The balance between luck and control

through the physical modification create unique gestures and ruptures that enact the historical convention and activate exceptions to how the tea bowls are expected to function.



Throughout human history, clay's role has been crucial to our preservation and growth. We have been making artifacts through this natural resource to express human agency and identity. I hearken back to the Japanese primitive ceramic culture and primordial tradition. The Neolithic Japanese ceramic form called Jomon. These wares have

exotic and abstracted forms I channel through the traditional coil building process and thereby systemize my desire to locate my inborn identity.



The cylindrical vessel is a primitive form that has been shaped into various perceptions in different cultures. I construct my vessels and create exterior gestures by embodying my physical actions such as pinching,

slabbing, and torching. I discover my origin through the meditative and repetitive process of pinching and compressing.

Thinking about mud, clay, and earth, the primordial ceramic processes offer insight to the foundations of how the culture was built and my primary indigenous past. I use the rope-patterned surface design to hint the eccentric Jomon aesthetic. The melting glazed surface on the vessels become expressions that metaphorically connect a geological paradigm which deals with gravity, heat, and vitrification.



The largest piece *Median*, stands 5 feet tall covered with heavily applied felspar-based glaze. The gravity pulls the glaze down creating tension and weight. As the glaze melts and accumulate throughout time, it forms into Stalactite-like dripping gestures. Some drips have volume and some drips are thin and fragile enough that they could break at any moment. This tall cylindrical shape acts as a monument when it is displayed in a space with my tea bowls and smaller-sized vessels. *Median* is grounded in the center of the show space and acts as a core of my thesis show.

Development of my photography practice:

The exploration in my current photography practice begun when I took a Junior level course called Painting & Photography with Professor Lydia McCarthy and Stephanie McMahon. Experimenting with painting and photographic materials, I was searching for a gestural movement that shares a commonality within the two mediums. The use of scanning to create visual movements happened serendipitously while I was scanning books in the library. The book page accidentally moved while being scanned, the image came out with digital glitches and color

distortions. The black and white texts were so heavily abstracted that the words turned into unique shapes. I was astonished with the fluid effects the light created from the scanner, and I wondered if the book scanner could guide me to create intriguing photographs.



I developed my photos by going through laborious processes. Commensurate with my ceramic practice, I am curious to understand and find something more to discover through experimenting with materials. I started my scanner exploration by transforming images that were taken for another project in *Painting <3 Photography*. I experimented with the speed of the scanner by increasing and decreasing the image file size. The scanning process was slow when the file size was large, and I had more control of the movement of the scanned image. By breaking down time, there were more dynamic wavy gestures. The scanner as a material became the matrix that photos transform into eccentric images, and I was able to see various results from my unwearied experimentation. However, I was not satisfied with just using the scanner to play with light, time, motion and space. I wanted more layers of complexity and enigma in the images.



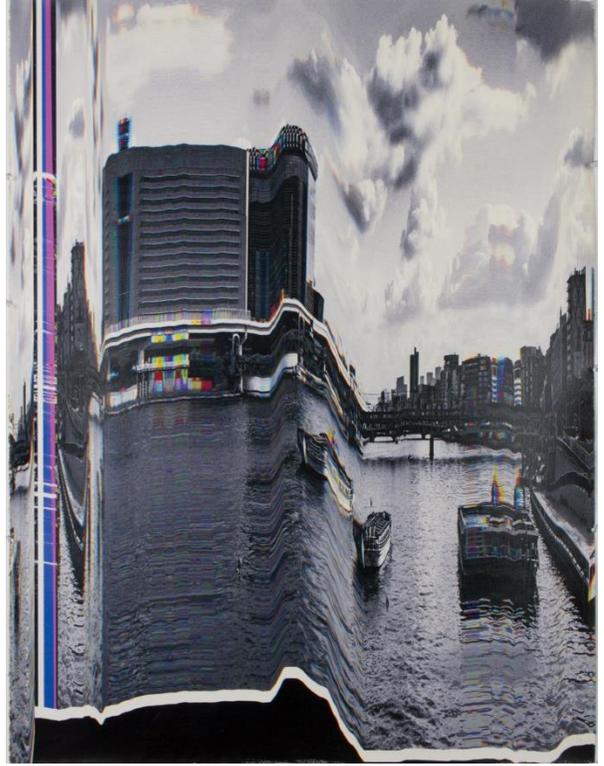
Returning to photography in my senior year, I started to use black and white images inspired by the evocative images from Eikoh Hosoe's photo book *Barakei*.¹ Eikoh manipulated his images by going through a process in the darkroom. By layering multiple developed litho films, he created high contrast black and

¹ Hosoe, Eikō, and Yukio Mishima. *Ba-ra-kei = Ordeal by Roses: Photographs of Yukio Mishima*. New York, NY: Aperture, 1985. *Ordeal by Roses* #16

white images with heavy grains. I was inspired from the subject matter in the images being deconstructed and mutated, and I began to believe that if I develop my manipulated images from the scanner, I could create an illusive reality similar to Eikoh's photos.



The final images in my BFA show are created from enduring process. Like the multiple layers of culture that I have experienced in my lifetime, I layer and stack multiple images and processes on to one image. I begin by creating a glitched image through the scanner. The image is inverted in photoshop, and is then printed on to an 8.5x11in acetate paper. The printed acetate paper is contact-printed in the darkroom, and I expose the image on to a water color paper that is hand sensitized with a brush using liquid emulsion. The image has a painted effect and a strong black-and-white contrast to give tonal values that emphasize the shape of the abstracted gestures created from the scanning stage. To enlarge the developed image into 30x44in paper, it is rescanned and printed from the fabric printer. The enlarged image from the printer is then heat-pressed on to the same sized watercolor paper that is coated with liquid polyester. I coat the paper with liquid polyester to avoid absorption of the ink on the paper. The resulting images have high contrast black and white prints with moiré sheen effect. The indexical brush marks from the liquid emulsion and liquid polyester are visible from the systemized method. Like the multiple layers of culture that I have experienced in my lifetime, the abstracted gestures resemble the liquidity of my identity shaping in various environments.



My artist statement for my exhibition, *Metamorphosis*, is as follows:

The Japanese origins of my name Takumi translates literally to “Open Sea” (拓海). I am a Japanese vagabond that had the opportunity to travel to the UAE, USA, and China. This life serves as the backbone of my artistic endeavors in which I assimilate the materiality and physicality of clay and photography to propel my inner desire to locate my identity.

For my ceramic works, I use ubiquitous themes such as tea bowl and Neolithic Jomon type vessels which are recognizable as Japanese aesthetic qualities and forms. They are licenses of traditional canvases that offer opportunities to unearth cultural, historical, and geological encounters. Thinking about mud, clay, and earth, I alter my forms by torching, scratching and heavily applying glaze, in which they intensify and heighten physical presence.

I develop my photography by going through laborious stages of layering and stacking multiple images and processes on to one enigmatic image. I experiment with materials such as scanner, developer, printer, and heat-press to construct high contrast and grainy monochromatic prints. The original photos are important moments from different places I have lived, and they are digitally manipulated into fluid wave-like patterns. Like the multiple layers of culture that I have experienced in my lifetime, the abstracted gestures resemble the liquidity of my identity shaping in various environments.

BFA exhibition, *Metamorphosis*:

The BFA exhibition *Metamorphosis*, is located in Harder Hall Floor 1. My ceramic and photography works are exhibited with Aidan Kaplan-Wright's painting works. The show is on view May 11-17, 2019.













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