

Master of Fine Arts Thesis

sweat silhouette

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“a love letter languished on my desk. I had never received a love letter, so I paid a public scribe to write one. Eight days later, I received seven beautiful pages of pure poetry penned in ink. It had cost me one hundred francs and the man said, “...as for myself, without moving from my chair I was everywhere with you.”¹

“Blue pencils, blue noses, blue movies, laws, blue legs and stockings, the language of birds, bees, and flowers as sung by longshoremen, that lead-like look the skin has when affected by cold, contusion, sickness, fear; the rotten rum or gin they call blue ruin and the blue devils of its delirium; Russian cats and oysters, a withheld impression or imprisoned breath, the blue they say that diamonds have, deep holes in the ocean and the blazers which English athletes earn that gentlemen may wear; afflictions of the spirit—dumps, mopes, Mondays—all that’s dismal—lowdown gloomy music, Nova Scotians, cyanosis, hair rinse, bluing, bleach; the rare blue dahlia like that blue moon shrewd things happen only once in, or the call for trumps in a whist (but who remembers whist or what the death of unplayed games is like?), and correspondingly the flag, Blue Peter, which is our signal for getting underway; a swift pitch, Confederate money, the shaded slopes of clouds and mountains, and so the constantly increasing absentness of Heaven (*ins Blaue hinein*, the Germans say), consequently the color of everything that’s empty: blue bottles, bank accounts, and compliments, for instance, or, when the sky’s turned turtle, the blue-green bleat of ocean (both the same), and, when in Hell, its neatly landscaped rows of concrete huts and gas-blue flames; social registers, examination booklets, blue bloods, balls, and bonnets, beards, coats, collars, chips, and cheese...the pedantic, indecent and censorious...watered twilight, sour sea: through a scrambling of accidents, blue has become their color, just as it’s stood for fidelity.”²

¹ Sophie Calle, *True Stories*, (Paris: Actes Sud, 2013), 23.

² William Gass, *On Being Blue: A Philosophical Inquiry*, (New York: New York Review of Books, 1976), 3-4.

Exhibition Statement

Crouch and lean while looking at the work.
Embrace your folds.
Squint at these overlapping horizons.
Focus through, then slip
away.

These frames match blue tape. I am in my studio. My computer screensaver is blue.

A lies down in front of C. C sits cross-legged on my studio chair, nude.
A is nude behind a plywood cutout. BACK.
A clutches his hands.
A attempts to direct himself.
W folds as tightly as possible.

I am horizontal in my bed and studio.

The physical distance between two people echoes a lingering tension in my studio between myself as photographer and sculptor, myself and material, and image and object. I move slowly through these relationships and on my steps walking home. I approach my work with sincerity through staging moments of emotional and physical loss and gain.

Observations of bodily and emotional movement direct my approach to material and representation. Planes intersect. Backs (mine, yours, his and his) merge into one. I feel the rolls of my stomach and sense my foot falling asleep. Out of the corner of my eye I see a color and form blur into one.³

These are moments of self-recognition.

³ A blue suitcase is under my bed. A blue comforter is on my bed. The blue creek runs swiftly in my backyard. The Blue Mountains are a few miles outside Walla Walla, Washington.

Touching

Physical and emotional touch inform my practice as a means to discuss self-care and my care for others. With a therapist I sit five feet away, in a cushioned chair, buffered by a coffee table. Questions prod deeper, layering information, getting to the root of a certain problem. This is a calculated, clinical exchange, and one with a time constraint. With a friend, I hug them or they hug me. No questions need to be asked. This is a physical, non-verbal exchange of information.

What is the difference between action and reaction, representation and expression? How do we read and misread one another's needs and gestures? I might be crying as a reaction to my mental state or I might be crying as a reaction to something I see around me. The first reaction is a symptom of something experienced internally, the second, a representation of something experienced externally.⁴ I shift between making work for myself when I need to cope with an interaction, a loss, or a sense of isolation, and making work to remember a friend or a loved one.

I hold you as we walk home.⁵

Proprioceptive sensors located throughout the body inform us where our hands are, if we

⁴ Vilém Flusser, in his book *Gestures*, uses the following example: "I see tears in someone's eyes. What criteria could I use to justify saying that this is a representation of a state of mind (a codified symbol) and not its expression (symptom)? In the first case, the observed person is active, "acts out a state of mind." In the second case, this person suffers, "reacts" to a state of mind. Both can occur at the same time, or one can be the case and I can read the other in error."

⁵ In therapy, I am called into language by the psychoanalyst. Judith Butler argues that for an "I" to exist in this separation between two people, the other's, in this case, the therapist's, "too-much-ness must be contained and handled." To reclaim ground I listen, activate pressure points, perform breathing exercises, and try different placements of my hands. Crossing my arms and looking down happens regularly as I converse. This reclaiming of my body's emotional and physical needs is at the core of my practice. In my work this sense of "too-much-ness" is mediated through beauty and a quiet poetry.

are digesting, if there is an ache in the spine. The studio portraits and ceramic sculptures explore this sense of understanding the internal body through external means.⁶

⁶ Premature infants are placed in Isolette chambers, and massaged three times a day. This regimen encourages their feeding and recovery. Volunteers, with disinfected, warmed hands, slowly stroke the baby's head, face, neck, shoulders, back, arms, and legs six times for ten seconds apiece. If I attempt to understand myself and imagine the hands that touched me as an infant I can attempt to remember a certain healing touch - the same action that stimulates muscle growth and increases the preemies' appetite. On average they leave the hospital six weeks earlier than preemies who receive no touch therapy. Though not included in my show, "Isolette (two weeks)," is the catalyst for this thesis work.

Looking Back to the Periphery: The Artist as Billy Parham

The following writing serves to situate William Newman-Wise within the framework of Billy Parham, the protagonist in Cormac McCarthy's *The Crossing*. This suggests the artist as observer of isolation and navigator across thresholds. Billy crosses international borders. I cross between studio and home. Sentences that particularly resonate with me today are left untouched. The rest is eliminated/exorcised. It was written in the fall of 2011 for an environmental studies course, "Regional Literatures of Place: The West and the South."

William Newman-Wise
Regional Literatures of Place
Fall 2011
Snow

Alternate Spaces and Reality in *The Crossing*: Billy Parham's Desires

Because of Billy's muteness and
unresponsiveness, his dreams elucidate his understanding of his positioning within the world.

The imagining of alternate spaces balances the reality Billy sees, and provides a space for the
manifestation of his desires.

/ good

McCarthy makes clear Billy's future by predicating the protagonist's moving listlessly through interactions, despite his admirable ultimate goal of finding ^{the} good. Later, Billy's interaction with the blind man makes this listlessness explicitly clear. McCarthy reiterates the image of "another world where the red sun sank eternally" with the false sunrise in the last sentences of the novel. This alternate world becomes desolately real when the "godmade sun did rise, once again, for all and without distinction" (426). Billy is anonymous within this alternate world, barely acting on the periphery. / yes

reality of disappearance. Sight and sightlessness become distinct from one another with what and what cannot be held. Billy chases a) good purpose

Billy has removed the horse from its work and recognizes its unease and this induces a numbing effect on Billy, reiterated throughout his crossings. This journey makes the world hyper-real to Billy and this feeling induces his ensuing emotional and mental paralysis.

This novel exaggerates Billy's presence, immortalizing him in doing so. But
any wanderer could stand in for Billy. Ashley Bourne discusses the construction of meaning
within space and place in her essay, "Space, Place, and Identity in Cormac McCarthy's Border
Trilogy," concluding with the following statement:

well -
stated

The transformation of place into space indicates an unraveling of a system of meaning. That is, the physical location is able to evoke emotional reactions, but as the external qualities of a place change, the meanings that place holds must be internalized, centered within the individuals as they cope with a physical terrain that has either disappeared or is no longer available to them except through memory and history. (Bourne 118)

Billy's ambivalence towards his surroundings seems to arise following this first failed
very good (journey. His home is no longer a space for him to construct memory, if it ever was given his
family's movement, so he is now atopos. In "Cormac McCarthy as Pragmatist," John Rothfork
writes, "the memories assembled in language constitute the narrative of our identity" (211). *H/S.*
However, Billy has no place to construct memories.

Billy assumes the status of an anonymous individual whose autonomy maintains his being an ineffective, purely reactive human. That his memory is individual rather than communal relegates him to the periphery of society, unable to interact. McCarthy, through Billy's solitude and reluctance to articulate his desires, may be telling the reader that language and community facilitate the resolution of good actions. Rothfork elaborates by writing, "no demonstrably

) Superb
Symptom
(He
becomes
more
like
than I do)

organized world pattern exists prior to experience and organization of our experience in language" (Rothfork 203). Accumulating experience cannot be an end on its own; language, and therefore memory, completes the world pattern. Billy's history lives within no one because "what endows anything with significance is solely the history in which it has participated" and history lies within the hearts of men (405). He lives as an ambivalent composite of failures, with nothing but a "day...made of what has come before" (387). Honor and relentless idealism become the way for Billy to move through his life, maintaining a semblance of reality and striving for good.

and B. is
largely
w/ a
language

Works Cited

Bourne, Ashley. "'Plenty of signs and wonders to make a landscape': Space, Place, and Identity in Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy". *Western American Literature* Volume 44 Number 2, Summer 2009. pp. 108-125.

McCarthy, Cormac. The Crossing. New York: Knopf. 1994.

Rothfork, John. "Cormac McCarthy as Pragmatist". Heldref Publications. 2006.

The Portrait and Falling

Photography enters my practice as a way to deliberately slow down and compose. A shadow on my hip might accentuate a certain bone structure in one image, and it might disappear if I move a toe. Slowing the process is essential to my work.

A helps me finish the work at 5am.

I take A and C to Alex's College Spot as compensation.

I force myself to slow down and compel a viewer to unfold an image. Critical to this image making is how I approach process.

I enter the lighting room with a loose plan. I bring in some props - plaster casts of appendages, a piece of wood, a black mirror - and place them on a table. I get naked.⁷ I pull down the seamless black paper backdrop and set up two strobe lights. The tripod and camera face the backdrop. I plan to shoot just a few staged images, but as the night unfolds, I⁸ loosen up. I⁹ am less self-conscious of what I¹⁰ present of myself. Shooting (conceptual) self-portraits is a slow process. I focus the camera on a surrogate object and press the shoot button. I move the surrogate and replace it with myself. Some images are perfect and crystal clear.¹¹ If I¹² move an inch forward or back, parts of my body (or his) become blurred. I photograph two men. I am in control. They joke about making "dick sweat silhouettes."¹³

These photographs are made in isolation. They each point internally and to the

⁷ I also enter the studio with A and C. They get naked and I photograph.

⁸ They.

⁹ They.

¹⁰ He presents.

¹¹ The work is not erotic, but it entertains eros. C's penis is just a shadow on the pedestal.

¹² They.

¹³ A lies down, sweating. C is shaking. They then switch places, in each other's sweat outlines.

horizon. The resulting images suggest a simple way to corral certain organs (stomach, heart, liver, intestines, kidney, lungs, appendix, gallbladder) and body fluids (blood, bile, urine) between the nape of my¹⁴ neck and small of my back. Other gestures are more simple. I fold over, holding my feet. He is face down on the floor while his partner sits above him. Through these directives I¹⁵ observe my movements, muscles, and tattoos. I reflect on time. I¹⁶ become(s) both subject and object, and aware of myself¹⁷ as both subject and object. This proprioceptive awareness of my¹⁸ body as object is equally as important as an object calling attention to my¹⁹ body through materiality and literal touch, but much more immediate. Models enter the studio and I direct them. A mirror enters the frame and three bodies intersect.

Portraiture - and self-portraiture in particular - introduces a conundrum. I²⁰ am at once exposing my²¹ body to make images and turning away from the lens or presenting only a partial view of my body. Roland Barthes writes, “In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art.”²² The image constructs four identities for the self-portrait subject. I make a collection of solitary pieces, tugging at and for one another, working and looking quietly towards something else. Barthes writes that “the Photograph is the advent of myself as other: a cunning

¹⁴ His.

¹⁵ They.

¹⁶ He.

¹⁷ Hissself.

¹⁸ His.

¹⁹ His.

²⁰ He.

²¹ His.

²² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 13.

dissociation of consciousness from identity.”²³

My²⁴ process for the found images is deliberately loose and external to the lighting studio. My iPhone camera functions as the most immediate way for me to take a photograph when I see something that needs documenting. These images are as cared for as the other series because they indicate a moment when I recognize a relationship external to myself. These are taken from everyday interactions and moments of quiet. The subject is unaware of a lens in their direction.²⁵ These photographs are pixelated, letting the *punctum*²⁶ and *studium*²⁷ drift in and out of focus.

Theory and visual experience do not function as binaries. Both are relevant when responding to a sign as universal as falling.²⁸ Visual coding is integral to producing intersubjectivity within this work. Editing functions in photography to articulate narrative and omit aesthetic elements. The photographs are muted and these bodies serve as the focal point. No clouds appear in the sky. Shapes are organic. Subject matter and viewer perspectives are abstracted, serving to obfuscate the images.

Falling exemplifies the discursive barrier towards death.²⁹ We confront these linguistic limits when viewing images that explicitly entertain this final step. Conceptions of failure are inherent to the act of falling, yet failure to communicate still functions to

²³ Ibid., 12.

²⁴ His.

²⁵ Except A and C. They are aware. I tell them to take a break. We go outside to smoke.

²⁶ “...for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole - and also a cast of the dice. A photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me.” (Barthes 27)

²⁷ “The *studium* is that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste: I *like* / I *don’t like*. The *studium* is the order of *liking*, not of *loving*; it mobilizes a half-desire, a demi-volition; it is the same sort of vague, slippery, irresponsible interest one takes in the people, the entertainments, the books, the clothes one finds ‘all right.’” (Barthes 27)

²⁸ Newman-Wise’s work is folding over.

²⁹ The bodies in WSNW’s photographs are folding over, into one.

guide the viewer through my momentary narrative. In order to read the sign I present - death - one need only be human. This transformative sign is implanted within the act of falling. That this folding repeats across the wall “reduces [the action’s] fluidity to a static, impersonal, and public form whose elements are dissociated and juxtaposed and which can be spoken about in the common language of society.”³⁰ Vocal responses become coded through the viewer’s personal references and the image’s punctum. Paul de Man writes in *Blindness and Insight* that “the subjectivity of experience is preserved when it is translated into language; the world is then no longer seen as a configuration of entities that designate a plurality of distinct and isolated meanings, but as a configuration of symbols ultimately leading to a...universal meaning.”³¹ The universal act of falling becomes the language through which I produce both a unifying and particularizing viewer reading. Through reducing the images to an action, I create enigmatic characteristics. Forms oscillate between attempt and failure. I position bodies within the subject/object dichotomy and thus do not translate my experience into language. The subject functions solely as a fragile body devoid of biography.

Projection of self within the images produces alternate subjectivity.³² Michel Foucault articulates that humans function as subjects in the following two ways: “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes

³⁰ Dorothea Orlowski, *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 129.

³¹ Paul de Man, Paul, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 188.

³² The camera in WSNW’s studio functions as a lens through which WSNW can view desire.

subject to.”³³ Awareness of one’s identity, even if it is just an awareness that one is human, positions oneself within a community of bodies destined for failure. Interpretation of failure is an inherently subjective matter. Objective failure, however, exists as death; subjective failure occurs when one acts within established hierarchies as a subject. Cognizance of these hierarchies, though, produces consciousness of failure as productive when self-reflexive and self-reflective. Emotional regeneration is available through supported failure, a support that community develops through recognition of fate. Rather than attributing identity to fixed coordinates, viewers can tether identity to transient spaces, one another, and death. With shifting constants, ideal Cartesian unity is posited as a nostalgic desire for perfect identity.

Representational photographs necessitate a subject-object delineation, signifying and ordering both the artist and viewer. This claim stems from Roland Barthes’ statement that we each “always possess a knowledge higher than mere anthropological knowledge and perceives more than the literal...in an aesthetic perspective the denoted message can appear...utopianly rid of its connotations,”³⁴ and thus, the message appears innocent. To become objective, one must become an object. However, the object then becomes a subject because we are inextricably linked to subjectivity through our status as subjected subjects. Judith Butler writes that “each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies--as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow

³³ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *The Essential Foucault*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 1994), 130.

³⁴ Roland Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image” in *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), 31.

from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure.”³⁵

Vulnerability functions to subject the artist to the viewer’s gaze. Violence enters this gaze when the subject is explicitly ideologically, physically, or socially vulnerable. Viewers are, ideally, decidedly under the power of a work. As “active subjects,” then, we “inscribe” ourselves within an image, imagining possibilities of the self as subjected.³⁶ “Falling” structures analysis and subject representation by existing as a universally accessible act exercising coded power.

David Hume writes that “repetition changes nothing in the object which is repeated, but it changes something in the mind which contemplates it.”³⁷ What Hume fails to address is that humans exist as both objects and subjects. Repetition either emerges from or changes the mind of the repeater. Barthes writes, “the photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially.”³⁸ That I, or my models, repeat these actions several times complicates both Hume’s and Barthes’s statements. Death is not repeatable; it is the final physical fall. Existential resolution for and acceptance of this fall can only occur when we derive and maintain meaning while living in indeterminate space. Death serves as the end of individual time, so for an image of existence such as mine to raise premonitions of death excludes coherence. The viewers’ mobility establishes the community of viewers for whom coordinates of discourse are available

³⁵ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 20.

³⁶ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *The Essential Foucault*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 1994), 138.

³⁷ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*, ed. D. G. C. Macnabb (Glasgow: Fontana Collins, 1970), 11.

³⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 41.

but too revelatory to share. Individual falling is unaddressed. Benjamin defines tragic time as time fulfilled.³⁹ He argues that living in fulfilled time leads to death. By searching for meaning and the unification of heaven/earth and mind/matter, I enter fulfilled time.

Discussion of life and death particularizes individuals, separating them from Butler's "we." Social abjection results from this differentiation. Because these points exist as fundamentally opposite spectra of time they are as irreconcilable as our status as subjects and objects. To exist as one necessitates the other but they cannot be simultaneously achieved. In the time between birth and death, life experience subjects humans to different biographies. Life functions as liminal time. My bodies are positioned within unsupported and unlivable space. All that remains, then, when looking at an image is the knowingness, but unknowability, of death. Death's facticity is hidden by fear of the unknown and subjection. This fear emerges from desire for belongingness and coherent identity. I obscure the dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity through integrating a body into this unsupported, liminal space. To die indicates a supposed loss of control, a failure of perfect, immutable identity.

These words⁴⁰ express a morbid humor towards this fall. I attempt to subvert power structures by gaining control of my status as a subject. Shared humor could produce recognition of death's inevitability. To confront these images with the security of a "we" viewership would catalyze further visual explorations into the subject/object dichotomy. Because visual images require the body, either in production or subject matter, my images are appropriate when as viewers we acknowledge our transience.

³⁹ Walter Benjamin, "Trauerspiel and Tragedy" in *Selected Writings Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 56.

⁴⁰ The thesis paper.

Through imagining the body in flight towards the ground, my fate, history, and time assume primary roles in resolving the emotional involvement inherent in falling. The potential for dissolution subsumes the express acknowledgment of this inevitable dissolution.

Photography can function as a temporary buffer even in the digital age, delaying our need to confront death and prolonging our existence as subjects. Barthes recognizes photographs as an “imperious sign of my future death.”⁴¹ This “fall” is one of the few that humanity shares as fate. Photographs can function as self-preservation through freezing a moment and memory, but A’s, C’s, and my actions of falling counters any rationale of self-preservation. Photographs render bodies and time static, fixing movement and making lives theoretically immutable. This medium can dictate relationships. Intersubjective relationships stem, tautologically, from our being both an object and subject. The universal act of violence produces this intersubjectivity. In the discourse on metamodernism, “...our current modernity can no longer be characterized by either the modern discourse of the universal gaze of the white, western male or its postmodern deconstruction along the heterogenous lines of race, gender, class, and locality...instead, it is exemplified by globalized perception, cultural nomadism, and creolization.”⁴²

Each viewer projects his or her own trauma and biographies onto the image. Emotions are not delineated, producing and allowing for a wide array of viewer responses. Readings are multifarious. People can project, reflect, or ignore this visual

⁴¹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 78.

⁴² Roben van den Akker and Timotheus Vermeulen, “Notes on Metamodernism,” *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* Volume 2 (2010): 3-4.

stimulation despite its immediate recognition.

I toy with notions of Romanticism in this work, obfuscating myself as both subject and object, man and nature, mind and matter. Objects and images are bound by another body (the ocean is bound by land, the body is bound by a frame). I direct these relationships inward. This shift produces an intersubjective, idealistic relationship, uniting “we.” I approach this work with sincerity, apparent in staging moments of emotional and physical loss. My frankness produces a real phenomenology on and mediation of human desire contained within the framework of a post/meta modern psyche.

Horizontal Objects

The work is an act of devotion to memory and failure.

I am horizontal in my bed. I am horizontal in the studio.

Planes intersect and evolve. Three backs (mine, yours, his) merge into one. Forms are squished into shape. Photographs are taped to the wall and I trace those lines onto slabs. Two or more bodies blend⁴³ into one form.

The objects assert themselves. The images receive themselves. Images are a fictional “then,” but through a sculptural staging, they present a “now.” Objects are reality as they shift with light and your footsteps.

Petting a domestic animal (a cat or, perhaps, a man, A or C) lowers my blood pressure, as does simply observing his existence.⁴⁴ I am attracted to cats⁴⁵, babies⁴⁶, and men⁴⁷. Objects confront one another but are unconcerned with the other presence. One looks inward, towards himself, pleasing himself. The other is upright and reaches out towards an unseen hand with his right hand. They become surrogates for myself as men for whom I care about in my photographs. They have been touched, and their gestures are recognizable signs of loneliness and reaching out.

There was the impetus to shed nerves and embrace the body.⁴⁸

⁴³ What happens when two real things (what goes on in my head and what I can see in front of me) are separated by tears? Tears are a boundary and I lose a sense of clarity.

⁴⁴ Diane Ackerman, *A Natural History of Love* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 329.

⁴⁵ Cats are a projection of the self.

⁴⁶ Babies need nurturing. I care for other people.

⁴⁷ I can have honest conversations with A. I can direct men and project my body onto theirs.

⁴⁸ An advising meeting with Lydia McCarthy early in October 2016 was a wake-up call. She told me I was too self-conscious in the studio. I cross my arms and look down too often.

I move material through my hands with a certain tenderness. The work remains soft. The work becomes about me, but also not about me.⁴⁹ It is an interrogation of the self and body, of concurrently presenting a public and private self. I care for the objects and images in my studio, and they, in turn, touch me back.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ John Gill gave me a handbuilding lesson on 3/13/17 and told me to work with clay like a painter. He helped finish a piece. A finished the two largest forms, which are part of “you and me, our boots kicked off, I will hold your arm as we fall asleep.”

⁵⁰ Diane Ackerman, *A Natural History of the Senses*. “What is a sense of one’s self? To a large extent, it has to do with touch, with how we feel. Our *proprioceptors* (from Latin for ‘one’s own’ receptors) keep us informed about where we are in space, if our stomachs are busy, whether or not we are defecating, where our legs, arms, head are, how we’re moving, what we feel like from moment to moment. Not that our sense of self is necessarily accurate. Each of us has an exaggerated mental picture of our body, with a big head, hands, nose, and genitals, and a small trunk; children often draw people with big heads and hands, because that is the way their body feels to them.” (95)

A Book

This book is made of images and words. Photographs of my studio, surroundings, and home converge into one. The first book I made at Alfred registered B, G, and my own spit. I photographed the sink after brushing my teeth. This new book, “sweat silhouette,” reflects a larger community of people (A, C, M, W, and G) as they entered my mindset. A list of every predominantly blue thing I own runs across the pages. This book is 46 pages. Three custom paperweights made through armwrestling with C, A, and G are available to hold it open. They each weigh the approximate average of an adult male heart. I am surrounded by blue. Following is the list of every predominantly blue item in my possession.

10' x 20' blue polyester tarp
100% Cotton boxers from Renoma, M
100 % Cotton Short sleeve button-down shirt with birds from Uniqlo, S
100 % Cotton Long-sleeve button-down shirt from ASOS, M
100 % Cotton Hand-me down cardigan from Lacoste, M
100 % Cotton Long-sleeve button-down shirt from Uniqlo, S
100 % Cotton long-sleeve button-down shirt from Uniqlo, S
100% Cotton long-sleeve button down shirt, Lands' End, US M
100% Cotton shirt from JERZEE, S
100% Cotton sleeveless T-shirt from Russell Athletic, M
100% Icelandic Wool sweater from Geysir, Size One
100% Cotton hand towel from Lands' End
100% Cotton sweater with white dots from TOPMAN, US M
30 % Cotton/30 % Linen/30% Polyester/8% Viscose/2% Nylon button-down shirt from Bellfield
50% Cotton/50% Polyester hoodie from Fruit of the Loom, S
65% Cotton/ 35% Polyester boxers from Uniqlo, S
73% Polyester/27% Cotton two-button blazer from Uniqlo, S
82% Nylon/ 14% Spandex/ 4% Polyester boxer-briefs from Uniqlo, S
98% Cotton/2% Spandex pants from Uniqlo, 29x34inch
A Game of Thrones, George R. R. Martin, New York: Bantam Books, 2011.
An Atlas of the Difficult World, Adrienne Rich
Blue tape
Blue + White Gustav Hamilton tile
Can of Wegman's brand Sparkling Water

Catalog from Jim Hodges: Give More Than You Take at the Walker Art Center, Dallas
Museum of Art, Institute of Contemporary Art - Boston, and Hammer Museum
(2013-2015)
Coppertone Sport High Performance AccuSpray Sunscreen Broad Spectrum SPF 30
Daler Rowney Acrylic Artists Ink 1 US fl.oz. 29.5 ml E
Eight 5 gallon buckets from Lowe's
Felix Gonzales-Torres' text-work "Red Canoe 1987 Paris 1985 Harry the Dog 1983 Blue
Lake 1987 Interferon 1989 Ross 1984," from Art AIDS America at the Bronx Museum,
New York
Folding desk chair
Giving an Account of Oneself, Judith Butler
HP cd-r 52x 700MB/80min.
Lands' End Men's Fleece Clog Slippers, Size 10
Lonely Planet: Iceland, 2015. Edited by Carolyn Bain and Alexis Averbuck
MADE IN L.A. 2012, Munich: Delmonico Books.
Microblue from the Grinding Room
Microfiber glass cleaning cloth
"New Island Blue" Heath Ceramics Tile
One 2 gallon bucket from Lowe's
Paul Thek: Divers
Queer Phenomenology: Objects, Orientations, Others, Sara Ahmed
Shimpo banding wheel
The Dog Stars, Peter Heller, New York: Vintage Books, 2012
The Mantram Handbook, Eknath Easwaran, Nilgiri Press, Berkeley, 1998
The Miracle of Analogy *or the History of Photography, Part 1*, Kaja Silverman
Two Irwin Quick-Grips
Ugly Doll keychain
Yoga mat

Approaching the Circle⁵¹

The artist is not at the center. The artist is not an authority. Some possibility of meaning arises through the circle.

I fill the circle with clay and pixels. A text fragment moves from my room to my studio and back again. Once I fill the circle, I can look at it. The work moves quickly. Once the circle is made I will leave and rupture it. I sit on the horizon.

I draw another circle. Every ripple folds out and enlarges the horizon and possibility of the studio.

This rippling reflects both the certain slowness and careful considerations within the work and the resulting drastic shifts in how the work appears.

Alarm set for 8am, but I sleep through it.
Make breakfast, drink coffee, and walk to school.
Open studio door, keep light off unless necessary.
Shuffle papers on desk, plug in computer.
Listen to Podcast.
Uncover clay objects.
Look through recent photos.
Begin making objects based on images.
Flip through words on my desk.
Work.
Observe.
Return to lighting studio to photograph.

I am pulled across floors throughout the day. Working on several different pieces at once, I may lose time to work on something when desired. I then rush to finish. The quality of mark oscillates from smooth to scratched, from fingered to caressed.

⁵¹ This thinking emerged from a conversation with poet Dan Beachy-Quick at the 2016 Haystack Summer Conference.

Anniversary, a poem by Dan Beachy-Quick

You are for me as you cannot be
For yourself, chaos without demand
To speak, the amethyst nothing
Hidden inside the trinket shop's stone,
Dark eyes dark asterisks where light
Footnotes a margin left blank. You
Don't look up to look up at the sky.
Your ears parenthesize nothing
That occurs, that I keep from occurring,
In the poem, on the page, as you are
For me, not a shadow, but a shade
Whose darkness drops from no object
But is itself yourself, a form of time
Spanning nothing, never is your name.⁵²

⁵² Dan Beachy-Quick, "Anniversary," *Poetry Foundation*, accessed April 13, 2017, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/detail/52861>.

Observing Movement

My studio is stacked with sketches, images, and fragments of objects. After opening the door, I take in this information. Work emerges from an everyday observation of movement. Sitting in my chair, writing this, I feel the rolls of my stomach and sense my foot falling asleep. Out of the corner of my eye I see a color and form blur into one. A blue suitcase is under my bed. A blue comforter is on my bed. The blue creek runs swiftly in my backyard. The Blue Mountains are a few miles outside Walla Walla, Washington. I seek moments of self-recognition.

In her theory towards a queer phenomenology, Sara Ahmed suggests that consciousness is “embodied, sensitive, and situated” in the world around us.⁵³ Through this consciousness we perceive the object in front of us, embody the object, and view what is behind us.⁵⁴ This triple-reading expands the object and image’s identities. This is a calling attention to being, and a slowing down of being. This leads to co-perception: the viewer recognizing his/herself, and the work, as complete.

Susan Stewart writes that “there is a carrying over from experience to experience of the experience, a kind of doubling that finds its illustration in the image of a living thing bringing a dead thing to life through the transitivity of touch.”⁵⁵ Through working with clay, photography, and video, I move through experience and transpose my touch onto it.

⁵³ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Objects, Orientations, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 27.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁵ Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 165.

My work fundamentally operates as a form of self-therapy; the work holds parts of the answers, but whether others know said answers is irrelevant.

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- Stewart, Susan. *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Technical Statement

These lists provide a framework through which the viewer can approach my work and process. The names, books, and sounds filter into my studio.

Books

The following books are crucial to my thinking. They address relationships between two people, between the author and language, between the author and family history, and between the author and art history.

Acker, Kathy and McKenzie Wark. *I'm Very Into You: Correspondence, 1995-1996*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2015.

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 2010.

Barthes, Roland. *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 2010.

Barthes, Roland. *Mourning Diary*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 2012.

Gass, William. *On Being Blue: A Philosophical Inquiry*. New York: New York Review of Books, 2014.

Lamott, Anne. *bird by bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. New York: Anchor, 1994.

Nelson, Maggie. *Bluets*. Seattle: Wave Books, 2009.

Solnit, Rebecca. *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. London: Penguin Books, 2005.

Heavy Rotation Podcasts

I listen to music in the studio, generally late at night, when no one else is around.

In the morning, afternoon, and early evening, the following voices direct my making.

99% Invisible	My Brother, My Brother, and Me
All Songs Considered	NPR Politics Podcast
Art Talk	On Being with Krista Tippett
Bullseye with Jesse Thorn	Rose Buddies
Clever	Science Friday
Dear Sugar	Song Exploder
Film Reviews	Soul Music
Free Meditation Podcasts at the Hammer	Still Processing
Fresh Air	TED Radio Hour
Good Food	The Heart
Heavyweight	the memory palace
Hidden Brain	The Modern Art Notes Podcast
Invisibilia	The New Yorker Radio Hour
Judge John Hodgman	The New Yorker: Fiction
KCRW's Here Be Monsters	The Sporkful
Love + Radio	This American life
Modern Love	Wait Wait...Don't Tell Me

Clay and Glaze

Sculptures in my thesis show used the following recipes. I bisque to Cone 04, sand with 400 grit sandpaper, vacuum, spray bisque slip, re-fire to Cone 04, and then glaze to Cone 04. Glaze is first sprayed on the work, then a second coat is brushed. Some work was etched with Vari-Etch Cream post-firing to matte out certain areas.

Bisque Slip (▲04)

OM4 Ball Clay - 25

Silica - 30

Frit 3110 - 25

Talc - 10

Borax - 5

Zircopax - 10

CMC Binder - 0.5

Cobalt Carbonate - 2

Mason Best Black - 5

Junior Tile Red (▲04-6)

Red Art - 15.5

Newman Red Sub. - 32

Gold Art - 12.5

Hawthorn 50 - 12.5

OM4 - 12.5

Talc - 15

Fine Grog - 12

Medium Grog - 8

Barium Carb. - 1

Water - 23

Blunge Barium Carbonate in water.

Luscious Gloss (▲04)

Spodumene - 21.10

Frit 3124 - 53.7

Silica - 16.9

EPK - 8.3

Bentonite - 2

Mason Best Black - 10

Cobalt Carbonate - 1

Mason Charcoal Gray - 3, 5, 7, and 9

Photography

Considerations: notice a curve, notice a color, notice a rustle, notice when I stop breathing. Beautiful images can be staged or stolen. Good pictures are deliberate.

Cropping is a necessity. Lines and tonal shifts direct my eye across the frame. Horizon lines are intentional.

Black and white photographs are in blue frames. Blue photographs are in black frames. Frames were painted with Valspar Deep Space and Dark Kettle Black latex paint. The frames are 1" wide and 2" deep. Photographs were shot using a Canon 5D and an iPhone 5s. They were printed on the 60" and 44" Epson Inkjet printers in Electronic Integrated Arts. I used razor blades to trim the prints on a 4'x8' protective grid in Harder 268A. Laumont Editions provided mounting and Luke Voytas built the frames. Hannah Thompsett, Kiyoshi Kaneshiro and I framed them.

Laumont Editions
44-01 21st St.
Long Island City, NY 11101
T: 212-245-2113
E: mounting@laumont.com

Book

The book was made with InDesign and printed at Alfred State University. Joe Scheer helped me set up the InDesign file. It was bound by Aodi Liang on the Sterling Digibinder Plus the 3rd floor of Harder Hall. Razor blades were used to trim off extra glue around the binding.

Alfred State Print + Mail Services
Document Center, 10 Upper College Dr.
Alfred, NY 14802

Becky Comer
comerrl@alfredstate.edu

Images



sweat silhouette
Installation view, Fosdick-Nelson Gallery



sweat silhouette
Installation view, Fosdick-Nelson Gallery



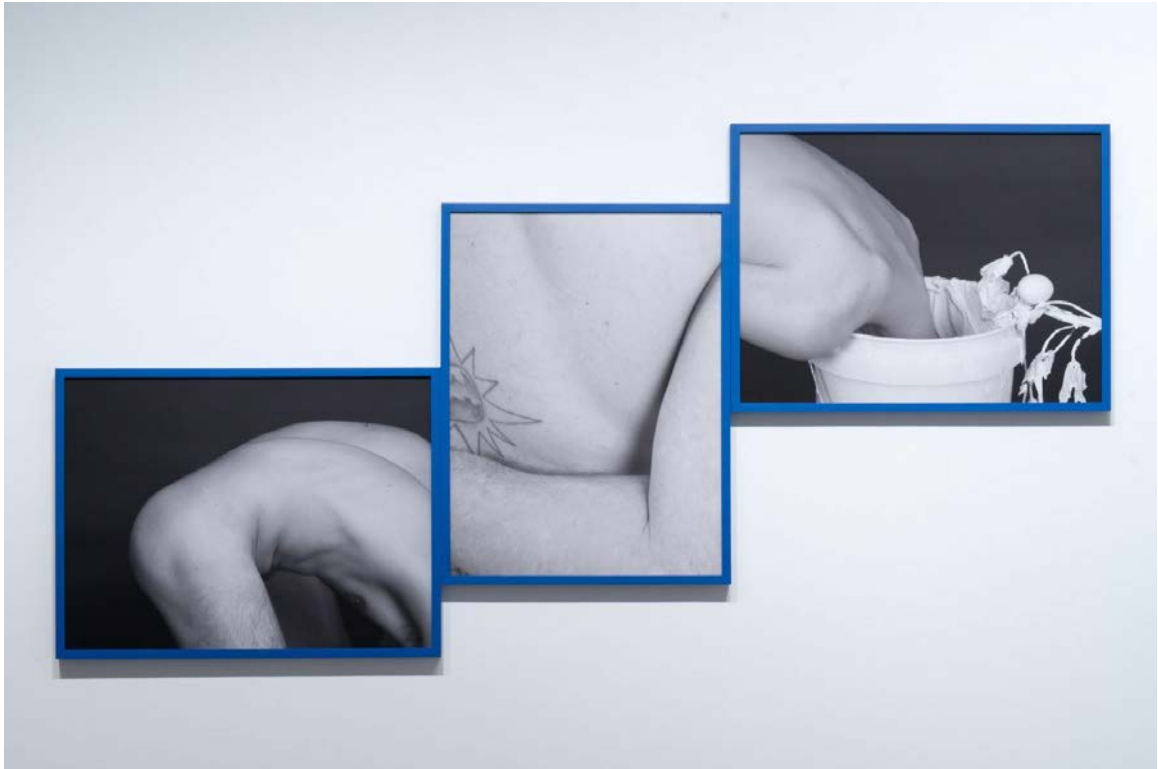
sweat silhouette
Installation view, Fosdick-Nelson Gallery



sweat silhouette
Installation view, Fosdick-Nelson Gallery



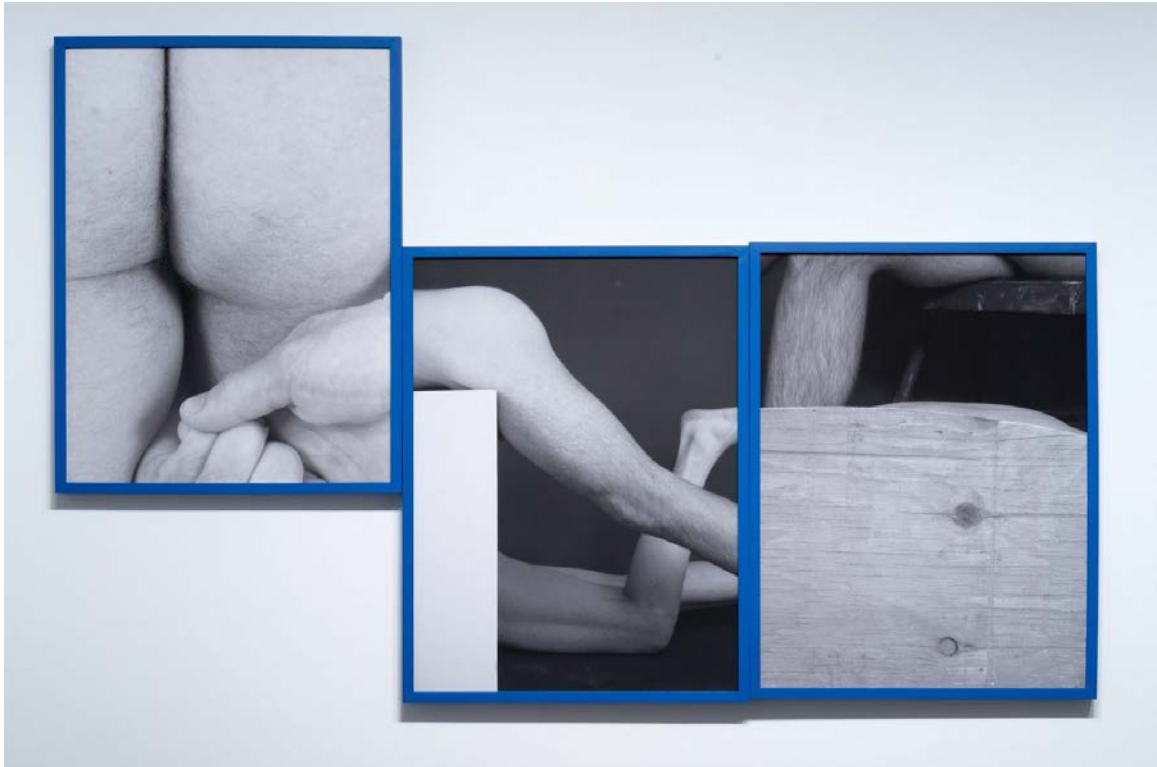
sweat silhouette
Installation view, Fosdick-Nelson Gallery



how to bracket his body (direction: not here), convulsing because I love you so much,
Self-Portrait 9 aka “how to fold over when you are feeling desperate”
Archival Inkjet prints in Artist’s Frames
114.5” x 58.5” x 2”
2017



how to bracket his body (direction: not here), convulsing because I love you so much,
Self-Portrait 9 aka “how to fold over when you are feeling desperate” (detail)
Archival Inkjet prints in Artist’s Frames
114.5” x 58.5” x 2”
2017



how to bracket his body (direction: love more and clutch), the divers, BACK
Archival Inkjet prints in Artist's Frames
94.5" x 61" x 2"
2017



how to bracket his body (direction: love more and clutch), the divers, BACK (detail)

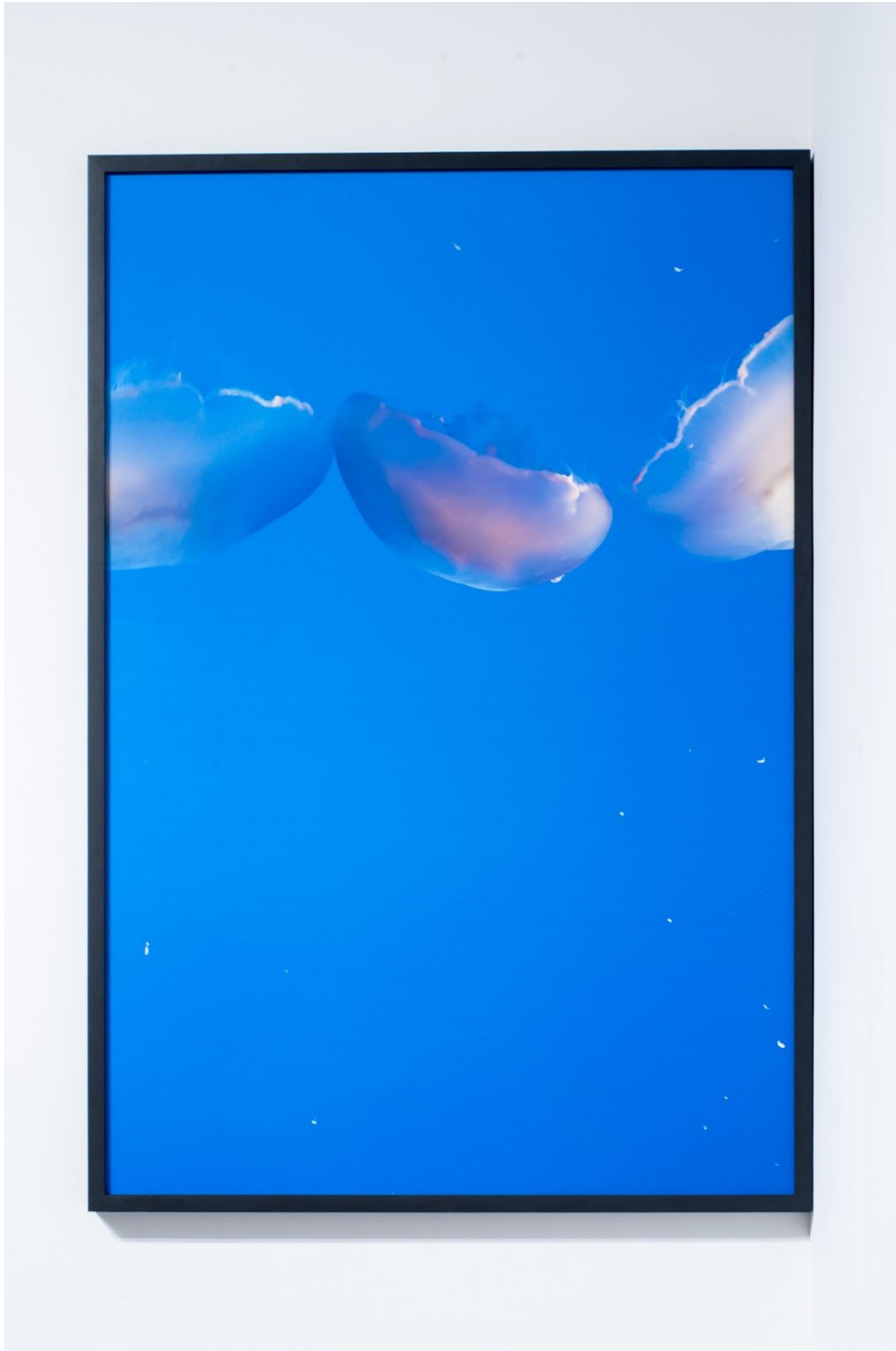
Archival Inkjet prints in Artist's Frames

94.5" x 61" x 2"

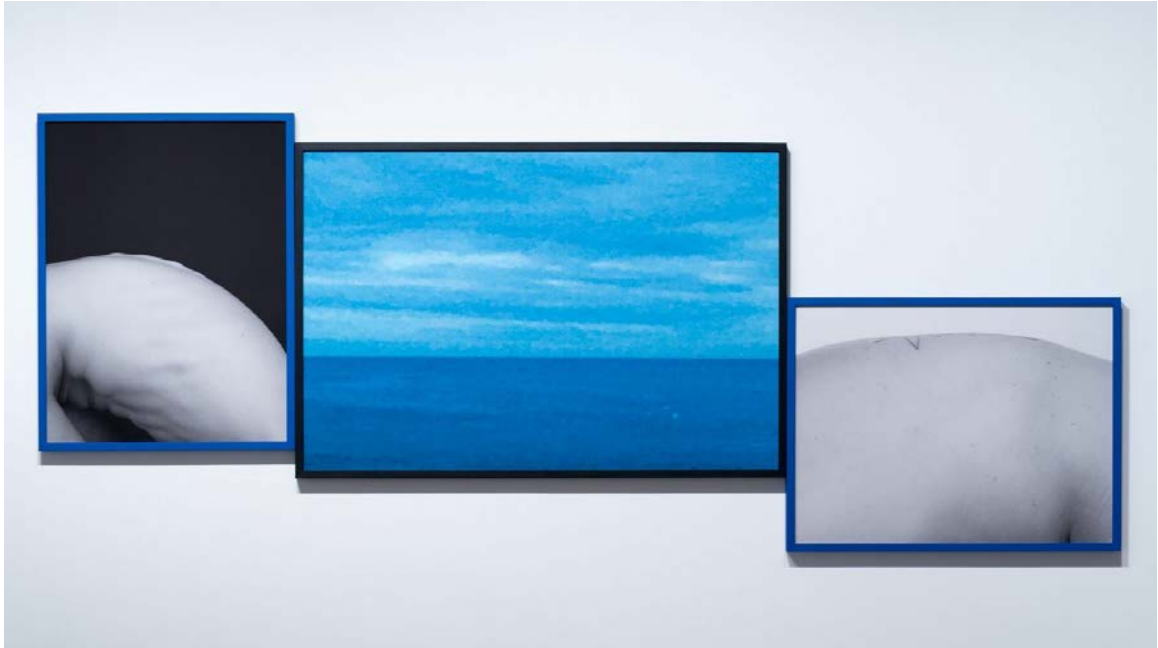
2017



even if it isn't everything
Archival Inkjet print in Artist's Frame
31.5" x 41.5" x 2"
2017



an ocean just for you
Archival Inkjet print in Artist's Frame
41.5" x 60.5" x 2"
2016



how to bracket his body (direction: not there), horizon line, you are my constellation and
I feel the moles on your ribcage and side (4/22/2017)

Archival Inkjet prints in Artist's Frames

144.5" x 54.5" x 2"

2017



how to bracket his body (direction: not there), horizon line, you are my constellation and
I feel the moles on your ribcage and side (4/22/2017) (detail)

Archival Inkjet prints in Artist's Frames

144.5" x 54.5" x 2"

2017



perhaps as we fall asleep

ceramic, glaze, maple, Valspar Dark Kettle Black latex paint

24" x 24" x 10"

2017



perhaps as we fall asleep (detail)

ceramic, glaze, maple, Valspar Dark Kettle Black latex paint

24" x 24" x 10"

2017



in two too deep

ceramic, glaze, maple, Valspar Deep Space + Dark Kettle Black latex paint

38" x 48" x 27"

2017



in two too deep

ceramic, glaze, maple, Valspar Deep Space + Dark Kettle Black latex paint

38" x 48" x 27"

2017



in two too deep (detail)

ceramic, glaze, maple, Valspar Deep Space + Dark Kettle Black latex paint

38" x 48" x 27"

2017



it could still be something at every sunset

ceramic, glaze, maple, Valspar Deep Space + Dark Kettle Black latex paint

26" x 34" x 31

2017



it could still be something at every sunset (detail)

ceramic, glaze, maple, Valspar Deep Space + Dark Kettle Black latex paint

26" x 34" x 31

2017



for the figures, holding
ceramic, glaze, maple, Valspar Deep Space latex paint
32" x 36" x 26"
2017



for the figures, holding
ceramic, glaze, maple, Valspar Deep Space latex paint
32" x 36" x 26"
2017



you and me, our boots kicked off, I will hold your arm as we fall asleep
ceramic, glaze, maple, Valspar Deep Space + Dark Kettle Black latex paint
46" x 36" x 31"
2017



you and me, our boots kicked off, I will hold your arm as we fall asleep
ceramic, glaze, maple, Valspar Deep Space + Dark Kettle Black latex paint
46" x 36" x 31"
2017