The Liminalgraphic: Exploration in change

John Ruggles

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.rit.edu/theses

Recommended Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by RIT Scholar Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses by an authorized administrator of RIT Scholar Works. For more information, please contact ritScholarworks@rit.edu.
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences

School of Art

In Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

The Liminalgraphic: Exploration in change

By

John E. Ruggles

1 October 2010
Thesis Approval

Thesis Title: The Liminalgraphic: Exploration in Change

Thesis Author: John E. Ruggles

Chief Advisor: Dr. Tom Lightfoot
(Please type)
(Signature)
Date: _______________

Associate Advisor: Alex Miokovic
(Please type)
(Signature)
Date: _______________

Associate Advisor: Dr. Tim Engström
(Please type)
(Signature)
Date: _______________

Department Chairperson: Don Arday
(Please type)
(Signature)
Date: _______________
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Background</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. The Three Roles of Making</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Interstitial space and the Liminalgraphic</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Machines at Rest</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Conclusion</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Bibliography and Images.</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

This thesis demonstrates my desire to understand the events of change that occur in life through a purposeful investigation into the roles of the artist as maker, and the concepts of liminal spaces. This is accomplished through a series of abstract paintings, which utilize the comparison of positive and negative spaces made through the use of natural processes such as melting and rusting, and the covering of an image with screen. The following artists are mentioned in reference to the development of my work: Andy Goldsworthy, Antony Gormley, and Robert Irwin. The objects that resulted represent a record of the exploration into the moments of change in my personal life.
I. Introduction

There is a photo taken of me when I was five years old standing in the wet sand on a Nantucket beach. I hardly remember the actual event, but the feeling of standing on the shore one foot in the sea and one foot on the sand is something that I have never forgotten. There between the two worlds I felt normal. It was one of the moments in my life where I felt genuine and whole. These moments are ones where I can almost begin to verbalize those inner areas of life that can hardly be put to words: the ephemeral moments of time in a place where both retrospective and introspective dialogue occurs. The areas that exist between places, objects and experiences are examples of these moments. In my desire to recreate these types of moments in my work I focus on time intensive processes, chance mark making, and an exploration through the roles of a maker. I placed my attention on the space between a painting and a viewer. I would like the viewer to be drawn into the space and for time to slow, and the energy of the moment to undulate around them.

My exploration has been built around the ideas and work created by the three artists that have influenced me the most: Andy Goldsworthy, Antony Gormley, and Robert Irwin. With particular sensitivity to touch, Andy Goldsworthy builds objects that exist in a space between the contrasting areas of the natural and man-made world. His work allows him to move between the rural and urban. Furthermore, his creations seem to exist neatly in that liminal space between a naturally occurring object, and the constructed work of man.
Antony Gormley’s focus on his work as catalyst to explore a state of being and awareness intrigues and resonates with my ever-growing vision of art and its affect. I value his inclusion of the empty space within his sculptures as a listed material that he utilized in its creation. Much of his work involves taking plaster casts of his body and using the negative to make a positive cast from metal. The inclusion of the inside space of the sculpture as a material references a unique awareness of the body having occupied the internal space. He also seems to have a sensitive touch when it comes to creating these in-between areas. His focus on his own body as a conduit to the in-between motivates me to further explore the relationship of a maker to the made object.¹

Robert Irwin’s change from a painter to a sculptor reinforces the belief that a maker utilizes whatever material suits the project. His ideas are not limited by a particular medium or plane. This indicates his ability to immerse himself in the area and moment of a concept. This calmed some of my own insecurities of committing to a concept enough to change medium and scale. The spaces that he creates, in particular his use of screen and light to change a room into a palpable moment where the viewer has the opportunity to see the world differently reinforced my desire to explore the between spaces. My intention was to rely on these three artists’ ideas and work toward making a series of paintings, prints, and installations that would help me explore the in-between areas of life and existence. I hoped that these objects would place a sense of value on the notion of a space between maker and object that involved the viewer in a way that was free of associations. The goal is a space where the interaction with self is clearer. I also wanted

the viewer to experience being in the between space in a way that causes confused familiarity. I hoped they would struggle for words to describe the moment of interaction with the objects.

II. Background

Art has always been a part of my life. My mother taught art at the elementary and the middle school that I attended. I believed myself to be a maker as early as I can remember, but did not realize that I wanted to be a working artist until halfway through my undergraduate college education. At first I was a Theology major and wanted to be a youth pastor because of the opportunity to create a space that was somewhat free from influences and associations where self-reflection could happen. I went from theology to education because of the way my family had taught me to value the role of teachers. While studying education I became fascinated by the methods for approaching different styles of learners. The idea of multi-modality was really interesting to me because the more areas of thought or senses involved, the more information can be explained and therefore, taught. Translating an idea into different media and expressing it in different ways required a deeper working knowledge of the idea. Committing to an idea this completely actively engaged me in ways that lead to change and growth. It is this desire to understand how different people think in different fields that has come to so greatly influence my desire to understand myself through making. Whether I focused on religion,
education or eventually art, my work has always stemmed from the desire to explore existence and find meaning. ²

Antony Gormley writing for the Guardian newspaper, wrote, “It is through art that we communicate what it feels like to be alive. When you ask, "what is the point of art?" you could reformulate the question to "what is the point of human beings?" Therefore my first goal while producing a series of work is to try to understand my life and my self. While the Christian faith I was raised in taught me that there was a reason to life, the art programs I studied in asked me to question life and search for identity. The moments spent away from both schools of thought was a time where I was free from the direction of either, and without a set of instructions on behavior, I could explore and experiment freely. It was in the liminal moments of transition where I was neither Christian, nor Artist that I began to search for ways of understanding myself. ³

Beth Barrie wrote a biography of Victor Turner for the Cultural Anthropology Department at Indiana University. In it, she addresses how Turner describes a moment of transition where a person was “betwixt and between” a stage of life, or area, as a liminal moment where they are free from societal associations. Upon completion of a rite of passage, the individual can then move from the liminal space into the next stage where laws, and labels apply. Given my relationship with both art and religion, I felt like most of my life has been spent in liminal moments. A person may go through a rite of passage to transition from one stage of life to another, but what about an object? I began to

² Hutchinson, Antony Gormley, 120.
explore the liminal space through making. This led to my thesis work, The Liminalgraphic, which involved the creation of a body of paintings, prints and sculptures based on the concept of the interstitial, or the liminal. The liminal refers to an intermediate state, or being, as well as the boundary separating two closely related objects, or moments.  

The Liminalgraphic references my visual exploration of the thresholds between thoughts and worldviews, with a particular focus on the boundary between maker and object. My exploration was through experiments in object making and automating a natural process. The paintings involve the freezing of pigment and its subsequent melting across a stone covered canvas. The use of acrylic screening to focus light and attention on the space between viewer and object transitioned the paintings towards sculptures. The sculptures structurally referenced pre-industrial machinery and automated the natural process of oxidation to produce prints made from rust stains. These explorations into the visual representation of the liminal were a search for the reasons that I create, and the roles I assume while making.

III. The Three Roles of Making.

As an artist I assumed three key roles; that of preparer, observer and selector. It is the assuming of roles or putting on of metaphorical hats that provides me with personal satisfaction because the most interesting aspect of making is how the object reflects the

---

role that the artist assumed to make it. I enjoy the many different roles and personalities that are attached to them, because it provides several ways of looking at a moment. I found that the moving between roles focused my attention on the interstitial space. The roles of a maker, and how the viewer relates to the made object echoed the ideas of multimodality that I studied in education classes.

First the foundation of making is preparation. Assuming the role of preparer, I can focus on the first order tasks of translating the thought into an object. It begins with the space where the making will occur. Organizing the space I choose to make in is the most important overall task. I take pleasure in the selection of a place to lay the canvas down, so that I can cover it with the melting paint and let the water slowly expand filling the space with its pigment. Maintaining the making space is the task of the preparer. As the preparer I spend hours cleaning the floors so that later I can move freely in the space. Tables and easels are kept clean and in working order. The materials to be used are laid out and organized beforehand so that I can work uninhibited by the space. I take on the role of preparer because it offers detail and task oriented thinking with clear results. If the space is not adequately prepared then my functioning as observer of natural process and selector of fine art become more labored than is necessary. The real work is in limiting the amount of work I have to do to make something I value. While in the role of preparer I am the caretaker of the space and equipment, but also the maker of the surfaces where a natural process can occur. This is my second task of preparation. My work utilizes processes, such as oxidation, or melting to change the surface of an object. I set up all the objects and mediums so that the chosen natural process is free to occur in the space and affect the surface of the canvas, metal, or wood.
Secondly, as the observer of the process occurring in the space I prepared, I have the opportunity to simplify my objectives. I watch the surface change over the days it takes for the rusting or melting of the ice to run its course. Observing the nature world is a characteristic of the scientific, and artistic, process and has long been practiced as a valid exercise to gain knowledge of an environment. As observer I can focus on the process and allow chance to make imagery. For the paint marks to carry the genuineness I wanted I cannot interfere in the process changing the surface. By allowing chance to enter my work, I am affirming the life I am living because the effect of chance on a canvas is a microcosm for my observation of the process of change occurring in my life. These are moments of change that I do not always understand. I want to understand myself and how I change. Making is a way to process the thoughts that build up from these moments; making is thinking. The more that I can make, the more I understand my relationship to the world around me, and my past. My making is structured around the event of change. When I change, or encounter a change in the environment around me I respond to it by making an object that will help me understand and process these changes.

Not all the changes in my life come about by chance; some are purposeful. The response of making an object to gain understanding of the changes references the cyclical moments of development in my life. I take action to affect a change, which I seek to understand fully, which leads to growth. Each time growth occurs the need to respond by taking action starts the cycle over again. Within my work, the purposeful choice to start a making project references the choice to make a change in my life, while the observation of the staining process references the changes that happen by chance. The framing and
choice of displayed material references the understanding and eventual growth that occurs from the action and change.

Thirdly, as the selector of art from the visual information left as the residue of the process, I end the thought begun by preparing the space and observing the surface change. As selector, I build on the foundation created when I was preparer and observer in order to place attention on individual aspects of the visual information. I essentially edit the unrefined imagery left after the metal rusted, or the frozen pigment melted. The conceptual approach of selecting what to highlight as art brings the made object into a contemporary framework. Deciding what part of a larger object will be called art is the final task. It allows me the advantage of a more complete involvement in setting up an environment. I am able to observe what happens, return to the piece and select its means of display. I select the pieces based on the fullness of understanding that has come from the beginning action and resulting change of the surfaces within the project. In other words, the selection of work as worthy to exhibit comes from my ability to understand the changes in life that the processes reference. The piece therefore is not only visually rich in tone and depth, but it must represent well the natural process that I worked with. For example, in the water and stone paintings I look for strong movement of color across the canvas, a variance in opacity, and a clear boundary on the negative spaces once occupied by the stones. The concluding judgment of the making itself is the most satisfying part of my art making because I feel a sense of accomplishment from systematically completing the procedure of moving from one role to the next, as well as fulfilling the more ambiguous criteria of achieving an overall visually pleasing image.
IV. Interstitial Space, and the Liminalgraphic

My work focuses on the interstitial space at the point of collision between two materials, such as watery pigment and stones, as a means to explore the cyclical moments of life that result in growth through the purposeful repetition of that cycle while focusing on the roles of a maker. The boundary between the roles of making organizes my approach to the cycle of action-change-understanding-growth. The possibility of gaining understanding about life, and change through object making is what interests me, and attempting to recreate the cycle in my work is what I have become focused on. I chose to begin my exploration with paintings because paint is the medium in which I feel the most comfortable and work the best in. The water and stone painting originated from a metaphor relating the human figure to the elements that make up paint. Dry pigment is mixed with a fluid to make paint, which is then used to make an image. Likewise the bones of my skeleton are surrounded by blood, which makes up my physical being: my image. Therefore mixing paint is like moving around the components of self, which allows for moments of introspective thought. This idea came almost directly from a sentence I read in “What Painting Is”, a book by James Elkins: “A painting is made of paint-of fluids and stone- and paint has its own logic, and its own meanings even before it is shaped into the head of a Madonna.”

The idea that paint had its own agenda changed my approach to painting because I became increasingly aware of my need to control the set up the environment and mixing of paint, but then allow the paint to move freely. The organizing of a space for a

---

substance to move in fulfilled my need to function as preparer. The idea to freeze pigment came from a series of large drawings Andy Goldsworthy created where he mixed organic materials like blood, dirt and excrement with snow and allowed them to melt across a canvas. By allowing the elements he combined into a frozen ball to melt and fill the canvas without his involvement referenced his view of work as a method of observational understanding, and how he relates to nature. The process of melting became the process I focused my exploration on first. I began to fill ice cube trays with tempera paint. I would vary the amounts of color in each cube area, and then fill the tray with water. These became my frozen blocks of pigment. I set them on a canvas and jumpstarted the melting with a couple dashes of hot water. The paint melting its way across the canvas without my pushing it around with a brush or other instrument was cathartic.  

Consequently, the melting of the frozen pigment and its resulting flow was the first water and stone painting where the organizing of environment produced a visually pleasing product. The painting provided evidentiary information coming from the evaporating of fluid pigment and the passage of time as it dried. The development of an image from the pigment shedding its frozen form became a cathartic metaphor for my own shedding of past self and searching the role of artist. It was at this moment that the exploration of the roles that made up my concept of artist began. The three-part identity became the personal meaning of the interstice. When a puddle of melting pigment collides with a solid mass in the form of a stone, there existed three distinct areas: pigment, boundary, stone. It piqued an interested in the fact that we categorize areas

based on their boundaries, and what each section is called. The boundaries intrigue me, because of their presence as an area to be crossed over in the journey from one place to the next. I strive to recreate this aspect of passage from one place to another with the natural process, and in my personal exploration the moving from one role to another. The time the natural process takes to complete its movement across the surface allows the observer in me to explore identity and my search for understanding of my place in the natural world.

Therefore, as the cubes melted and flowed across the canvas, water and pigment would pool around the stones and areas of greater color opacity and variance would develop. Between the groups of stones the water would evaporate faster and the colors would become transparent and subtle. The stones, when removed, left vacant areas of plain canvas where their weight had prevented the flow of water and pigment, forming a boundary. The defining of the two spaces was the first and most simple goal. The separating of the spaces allowed the definition of the interstice. Where the paint met the stones the pigment bunched up and became more opaque. This defined a third space; the gap between the solid stone, and the fluid pigment. This provided a visual point to progress toward the exploration of maker and object, with attention paid to the roles a maker assumes: preparer, observer, and selector. The water and stone paintings focused on the role as preparer of space and observer of natural process. The water carrying the pigment followed its own course and made the image without the interference of a human once the melting or natural process begins.

I prepare my work with the canvas set up horizontally. The flowing of the pigment needs that type of plane to slowly fill the canvas with color and then to sit and
evaporate. The rocks sit on the canvas and push it downward with their weight. This causes the greater concentrations of pigment to gather around the rocks. Sitting on a table or on the ground is the first space the painting occupies. The work, however, does not remain horizontal. I have no intentions of displaying the paintings on that plane. I display the work vertically because it turns the stained canvas sitting on the floor into a framed hung image, which is a recognizable format for a viewer. This is important because it transforms a horizontal object, which was tracing a process, into a vertical image that will be viewed. It also references the area the viewer moves around in. The painting originates horizontally, and completes its movement through space to a vertical resting place. Its path cuts through the space between floor and wall, which is where people’s heads are at, and where the viewer exists. The conscious choice to construct horizontally and exhibit vertically gives me the ability as selector to focus and enrich the viewing space.

Furthermore, the heavy focus I place on the process of organizing, or setting up an environment where a moment can occur, came from the influence of Andy Goldsworthy and his approach to making objects. Watching documentaries about him and seeing his work in person have played a large part in the formulation of my sense of aesthetic and the role of preparer. In *Rivers and Tides*, a documentary about his method of working, there is one scene that has particularly motivated me. In the scene Goldsworthy is grinding bits of an iron-based stone into powder and making piles of it. He eventually gathers the piles up and throws them in the river. The stone turns the water red and flows away, and then is gone. This fleeting moment of clarity between two objects is what I want to recreate in my work. His interaction with nature, or rather his ability to let natural forces act on an object as equally as his own physical involvement creates a tension in the
work that I am seeking to achieve when arranging environments for the medium to move freely. An example of this the stone egg shapes that he builds. During the construction of these objects his interaction with the flat stones he uses is intense. He describes it as an active dialogue with the stone. He built several on beaches, and had to work with the sand and the changing tides. During high tides the object was fully immersed in the water. The building of an object with the awareness that the natural world may destroy it is the tension I’m speaking of. This process of melting pigment to stain the canvas becomes a part of the metaphor for the action-change-understanding-growth cycle I sought to understand. Preparing the space for the movement of material begins the work of observing the natural phenomena occurring in the environment and eventually selecting visual evidentiary information as art objects.\(^7\)

One of the well-known installation pieces by Antony Gormley is Field. In it, he fills several rooms of a gallery with thousands of eight to ten inch high figurines he handcrafted from red clay. The figures have eyes, and roughly shaped bodies that at times hint at appendages. Visually they are a field of eyes staring back at the viewer. Filling the space they stand like guardians of the space. The viewer is confronted with the demands of an imaginative response to the figures and the concepts of spatial ownership. In an interview with F. David Peat, Gormley states: “I like the idea that I'm temporary (sic) borrowing, like I do with my body, from the planet's matter/energy and chain of being. I borrow a few bits of material that I try to shape. In the same way I try to shape my life, or my life tries to shape me. Then what happens to the art does not really matter. I really like

the idea that *Field* belongs back in the earth. It is to be buried or to melt back into the earth. The iron is strong but it is not protected from oxidation. I'd like one to be in a tank of water that would disappear. It's a temporary record of a moment in life. It may extent (sic) the image of that life but it has to go back into the cycle of things.”

The concept of making “being” as a way of indexing what happens to an object in a space, over a period of time, intrigues and resonates with my growing vision of art and its effect. I value his inclusion of the space within his sculptures as a material that is listed for the object when it is exhibited. It acknowledges the maker and object holistically by including aspects of the making that he did not physically do. He did not fill the interior space with air, but his inclusion of it as a material he utilized speaks to his conceptual approach to the act of making and the environment he works in and with. He frequently utilizes his body as a base for his metal sculptures that I see as a reference to his role as maker. By having molds taken of his body he is acting as the selector of what the art object is made from early in the process. He observes the preparation for the art object when the mold is created on his body. He finishes the piece with patinas and decides how it will occupy a given space. His titling of the piece and material list gives a sort of catalogue of the areas the object has existed in.

Robert Irwin’s work focuses on installations involving light continually changing a space. He began as an action painter fully immersed in abstraction. During his explorations with paint the frame of the painting became a boundary to be overcome. It is his sculpture, and installations that further pushed me towards looking at the idea of a

---

9 Hutchinson, *Antony Gormley*, 120.
maker without having identity based on activity. Irwin as a maker fully immersed himself into an idea. He translated that immersion into the creating of an actual moment through a space interacting with light. *Seeing is forgetting the name of the thing one sees*, a book by Lawrence Weschler cataloguing many years of talking with Irwin, describes one of his more famous pieces. In it he took on the role of preparer and spent days cleaning, repainting, and finishing a room at a gallery in California. When he had finished his preparation of the room, he destroyed one of the walls, and replaced it with a translucent scrim. The light from the natural world coming through the screen changed the room throughout the course of the day, and transported the viewer into an observer of natural process. The spaces that he creates through his use of screens and light started the thought process that assisted my moving past the frame of a canvas.\(^\text{10}\)

This thinking led me to make boxes. A box contains a space inside and the outside surfaces. The shape itself poses questions of a viewer as to its meaning and contents. The first boxes I made were small models constructed from cardboard boxes where an object was placed inside and the opening was covered with screen. This led me to construct a much larger box with a three by three opening and a length of five feet. I built it based on the idea of a shipping crate, albeit a poorly and roughly constructed one. I covered one opening with a painting that faced inward, and the other end with wood that left a small slit of space to peer into the box through. Inside the box I placed a cast iron sculpture of a figure and the shell fragments of the mold it was cast in. I recorded waves hitting stones

\(^{10}\) Lawrence Weschler, *Seeing is forgetting the name of the thing one sees*, (Berkley, University of California Press, 2008), 211.
at the beach, edited it into a looping video and projected it onto the figure, shell and past it to the painting at the other end.

The projector gave off heat, which made the box begin to have a smell of hot wood and metal. The heat and smell were more noticeable than the video, or the objects occupying the interior space. The light emitting from the cracks was interesting, but the box I built was inadequate because the definition between outside and inside was too opaque. The view to the interior of the box was a crack in the front panel. Having all of the sides made of solid wood and only a crack in the very front to look through was too literal of a definition for me. I need the separation to be distinct, but transparent. The division needed to be hazier, more like a shadow cutting a room into two parts, than a wooden wall. This took me conceptually toward using nylon screening to divide my areas.

I revisited the water and stone paintings and began to build three-inch wooden frames around the work that set the painting inside an open box. The opening is covered with black plastic screening, and then I selected areas of the painting to highlight by cutting squares into the mesh. The cut outs focus uninterrupted light in ways that make the areas glow and shimmer. The selection of where to cut squares out of the screen allowed me to draw attention to areas of visual interest produced by chance through the pigment melting and meeting the stones. Focusing light on these areas multiplied five fold the sense of visual depth the painting displayed. With the increased depth, the paintings moved closer to sculptures. The pieces had a radiant presence that I wanted to explore more, and so I chose to push past the frame of the canvas and screen towards sculptures.
V. Machines at Rest.

Therefore, I built objects that visually reference pre-industrial machinery. During the industrial revolution there was a marked switch toward the usage of iron and brought into conflict an object maker and the mass-producing factories. Iron was the material I wanted to build the machinery out of; mostly because of the way it referenced the stone of the initial metaphor of water/stone, blood/bone, pigment/medium. I was particularly interested in iron because of the way oxidation changes the surface of the metal. I moved towards primitive machinery because in my exploration of making roles, I was beginning to look at the object that is actually made. A machine automates a process normally completed by a person, by hand. Building a machine that would make prints that could be collected, sorted and a few selected as art objects was interesting because it isolated the role of selector more than the paintings or screenings had. The process was completed by the machine and moved the conceptual moment where the hand of the artist comes into play. In the paintings my hand was there preparing, and in the selecting, but now the machine gave me the opportunity to move away and wait to select the art object. This turned out to be a conceptual move that worked because it seemed ironic to build a pre-industrial machine to mass-produce contemporary objects I could sift through and decide to label art. In this form of geological inscription, with the colored residue coming from the metals own minerality, on a scale that references Pollock-like action painting that was then selected and framed as polished works of contemporary art, abstract expressionism collides with pop art and births a framed piece of scientific evidence existing as art. This
complexity in object making, I feel allows something to use it's whole measure of time. When an aesthetically interesting residue is collected my removal of the paper and framing of it as art moved my role from contemplative observer to the selector of an art object that also provided a commentary on making in the contemporary sense. Geologically patient expression and artistic intervention with a certain amount of responsibility is the duality that this series of work came to be about.

The labeling of a stained piece of paper as a fine art print conceptually rested on the foundations of contemporary art thought. The paper being stained by an automated natural process in a machine that referenced a time where modern art could not exist is the irony. The imagery from the rust machine was visually the least dynamic of all the works because it was monochromatic and was not screened in, but conceptually stronger because of the emphasis it placed on an imaginative response from the viewer. The rice paper captured in its grain the residue of the chemical process of the iron oxidizing. The objects ability to exist as an artifact is based on the implied requirement of imaginative inference, and not the manufactured geology. As the residue decreased in aesthetic interest the colors moved towards monotones and the most banal of residual information. The framing, however, became more deliberate which secured the object as a more precious artifact, again referencing the ironic.

Likewise, I felt there was a sense of conceptual weight to a machine that was approachable visually. Martin Heidegger wrote about the genuineness of machinery:

“The repose of equipment resting within itself consists in its reliability. Only in this reliability do we discern what equipment in truth is. But we still know
nothing of what we first sought: the thing’s thingly character. And we know at all of what we really and solely seek: the workly character of the work in the sense of the work of art.”

I like to imagine that Heidegger was writing about the genuineness of a machine no longer functioning but carrying physical information documenting its one time usage. The physical information on the machine implying a history of usage elicits a more powerful response from a viewer due to the demand of imagination. Machines are familiar to the modern world, and are often seen running. Something that is meant to move, but is seen at rest carries the interesting dynamic of implied purpose and activity. It has the illusion of genuine solidity and importance because it is still.

The constructions I made that referenced pre-industrial machinery are displayed at rest. There was a movement of material on them and through them. They automated a natural process, and the residual information of having been used at one point exists on their surfaces and grants them a moment of genuineness. The residual information, whether tempera paint or rust, stain a piece of paper that as been placed within the machine. The paper catches the color moving through the machine, and symbolically captures a liminal moment. Since the paper is placed in effect between different areas of the machine it literally occupies a liminal area. The staining of the paper, when displayed with the non-running machine points back to the moment the machine was running. There is validity to an object bearing the marks of being used that references the passage of time, decay, and the touch of a maker’s hand. This authenticity of the object was one

of the characteristics of a work that becomes important for the viewer to grasp. The problem then is how to exhibit a series of objects referencing progression, the passage of time, and an overall conceptual framework. A series of works, that is more retrospective, makes the order of the pieces more important and demands some information pertaining to my involvement as artist. The whole installation should reference the evolutionary qualities of a series in circulation.

VI. Conclusion.

However, the success of one’s work depends largely on its ability to succeed in a gallery space. What seemed the climax of graduate school, left me feeling somewhat disappointed. The pure truth of the matter is that the arrangement of the work did not work the way I had wished in the allotted and planned space of the gallery. The artist knows the work the best and should dictate the way that it should be shown. The typical or classical way of exhibiting work implies that each work needs an abundance of space to allow the work to breathe. When the work was hung and arranged in the gallery the gallery director felt that each piece needed more space, so we expanded the space between the objects. I became aware of the separation between studio and gallery. It is one of the problems with making that an object is made in one space and displayed in another. The difference in size between the gallery and a studio is large. Within the confines of a smaller space the works carried a greater sense of circulation, which brought emphasis to the overall progression of thought through the experiments. With less space a series of work is imparted with the ability to reference the process of making at large.
I was intimately connected to the objects in my studio because they were always around me, filling the room. In the smaller space they became an index of my thought development. In the larger gallery while each piece was given individual importance, I felt they lacked the self-referential quality that really defines the space I was trying to create. My response after the work had been hung and was up in the space for a few days, was that something felt wrong. I found that I valued the indexing of thought and was impressed by how much more energy the work emitted when set up in the round, surrounding the viewers with imagery that happened when viewed in my small studio space. The context of the progression of the work was more apparent as well in the round set up of the smaller space. The viewer immediately is surrounded by the history of the work. Each work has to its left and to its right the preceding and proceeding moment. The viewer existing in a space surrounded by the work presented in order of its making and its progression of thought is the real point of my work. This reference to the chronological allotted to the work by the complete surrounding of a viewer of the work hung in the order of production brings a different set of values to the forefront of the visual work than that which was apparent in the larger space of the gallery. I find that the smaller, more intimate space allows the work to flow and undulate around the room and into the subconscious of the viewer. The process of thought progression is apparent and time itself comes to play as the person moving around the circle references the movements of the hands of a clock. The viewers and objects interact with each other, and together complete a unique fullness of time in a particular space. In this fullness of time in a small space the viewer and object are exposed in a moment of genuine awareness.
Given the self-referential aspect of the work, my direct involvement in the gallery experience becomes crucial to how well the moment of viewing becomes the experience of awareness I seek. What I lacked in involvement during the thesis exhibition gallery set-up cannot happen again. In the future, I must exert greater control over how the work is hung and displayed in a gallery setting. The work itself references the moments of taking action to seek growth, and to not take action in how it is displayed does the work itself an injustice. I want to reveal the cycle of growth that can occur within a liminal space, and that means a direct involvement with the gallery staff and space.

In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Martin Heidegger writes “the Greeks called the unconcealedness of beings aletheia. We say “truth” and think little enough in using this word. . .the nature of art would then be this: the truth of beings setting itself to work.” The artist is a being setting himself to work. I set myself to work and search for the aletheia of self as artist. The identity of artist is a concealed one, and as an artist I have been concealed from my own self. The assuming of three different roles became a necessary step in making and in the unconcealing of identity. The natural processes, screening, referencing of pre-industrial machinery, and the selecting and framing of evidence unconceals time, the figure, the object and the object and subject of the artist. Faced with the unconcealed truth of the moment the interstice becomes more than just in-between. It becomes the now, the current moment of thoughtful inception.¹²

While I have spent much time exploring the roles of maker, and the concept of a liminal space, I realize that I had been searching for an awareness of self and the process of change in personal life. I believe that my explorations were successful, but also that

---

¹² Heidegger, 32-40.
they are far from being over. My work will continue to be a form of thinking, and exploring how a person relates to the world. I plan on making more machines that produce imagery, as well as exploring the space a viewer exists in as an art object itself. The process of creating a series of works over several years has been rewarding, but has reminded me that the work of a maker is not necessarily seen in the final object. The true work, and even exploration, is in the day-to-day commitment to transferring thoughts into objects that aid in understanding the many moments of change that occur in life.
Bibliography


Heidegger, Martin. Poetry Language, Thought. New York:


Reidelsheimer, Thomas. Rivers and Tides: Andy Goldsworthy Working with Time. DVD.

Direct by Thomas Reidelsheimer. Edinburgh, Scotland: Skyline Productions,


Weshler, Lawrence. Seeing is forgetting the name of the thing one sees. Berkley:

University of California Press. 2008. 211
Image 1

One of the early water and stone paintings. The negative spaces, within the mostly orange tempera paint, are caused by the stones, which blocked the pigment from staining the canvas.
A detail from the water and stone painting titled “Orange Puddle” illustrating the more opaque areas where the frozen cube of tempera paint from which the pigment flowed. In this case the cube was located in the bottom right of the image.
In this image a water and stone painting has been screened in. The luminescent geometric shapes near the corners of the image are areas where the screen has been cut out to concentrate light and create more depth.
The above image illustrates the further development of the water and stone paintings with the inclusion of the gesture, as well as the polymer screening covering the frame. Again, note the areas of cut out screen that focus the light onto areas of the painting creating depth.
In this image, the scale of the painting has been increased to 4’ x 3’. The addition of a colored background increases the depth as the first layer, which is followed by layers of tempera, enamel gesture, and screening.
Here the background is again colored, but with a pattern of negative spaces before moving to the layers of melting tempera, enamel gesture, and screening. In this case the screening is not a solid piece with areas cut out. It is smaller width screen layered to create variance in the transparency of the screen.
In this piece I have limited the palette to shades of black and white only. The background has been tinted with several layers of paint, before applying a fairly transparent melting tempera layer, an opaque black enamel gesture, and ending with the solid piece screening with areas removed to focus light.
The above images show the early box constructions that were meant to bring focus to the space inside the box, which is filled with a cast iron sculpture and its shell with a video projection illuminating it and a small melting tempera painting at the far end.
Above is an image of the rust machine at rest. Each tower is designed to have a rusting solution flow downward through it through holes in the flat pieces of iron. The bucket on the top of the right tower shows where the solution would begin to flow through the tower, onto the trough and into the other bucket. The rice paper can be seen catching the rust within the machine, and drying from the wire connecting the two towers.
The above is a detail of one of the flats of iron that made up the shelves of the towers. The rice paper is sitting on top of it absorbing the rusting of the shelf. Behind it, the trough with a piece of rice paper is visible.
Image 11

This is an example of the rust prints that came from the rust machine. The variance in pattern and tone come completely from the chance flow of the water over the surface of the iron plate.
Another example of the rust prints from the rust machine. I titled them as Liminalgraphic Experiments followed by a number system to emphasize the amount that came from the machine. For example this one is title, Liminalgraphic Experiment No. 000163.
After further consideration, and viewing the work in two vastly differently sized rooms, the wall space between the works in the thesis exhibition, as seen above, was too great and did not emphasize the chronological and self-referential aspects of the work.