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Persistence of Perception

Gary Hadlock Jr

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PERSISTENCE OF PERCEPTION
by
Gary Dean Hadlock Jr.

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MFA Photography Program
School Of Photographic Arts & Sciences
Rochester Institute Of Technology
Rochester, New York
FEB. 1982

Dr. Richard Zakia, CHAIRPERSON
Richard D. Zakia
Professor
School of Photographic Arts & Sciences
May 5, 1982

Dr. Arthur Taussig
Professor
Orange Coast College, California

Elliott Rubenstein
April 29, 1982
Assistent Professor
School of Photographic Arts & Sciences

Mr. Elliott Rubenstein
April 29, 1982
Assistent Professor
School of Photographic Arts & Sciences

Mr. John Pfahl
Associate Professor
School of Photographic Arts & Sciences
June 10, 1982

John Pfahl
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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

THE PURPOSE OF THIS WORK IS TO JUXTAPOSE GRAPHIC LINE ELEMENTS WITH PHOTOGRAPHS AND THEREBY EXPAND THE MEANING OF THE RESULTING IMAGE AND PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO THE VIEWER FOR MULTIPLE ASSOCIATIONS.
BACKGROUND

This work demonstrates this concept: while having specific meanings, the images allow ambiguities to occur in the viewer's interpretation. This work is the result of a desire to make complex ideas more easily conveyed. I have attempted to do this by combining simple line drawings and written language with photographs.

The simplicity and economy of line used for medical illustration has always interested me. The original function of medical illustration is to convey complex ideas more simply. The power of these illustrations is to be specific in meaning (to doctors), while remaining visually ambiguous (to the uninitiated).

I became equally interested in language as symbols, in the same way medical illustrations are symbols. In medical books, the drawing's meanings are affected by the accompanying text; this text helps to determine the interpretation of what is seen. I use this idea in my own work by selecting found language from the environment and by adding my own writings within the final image.

Another area of concern to me is the history of photographic art and reproduction. A recurring element in current art is the demphasis of craft with a single-minded commitment to the concept being demonstrated. I desired to explore the inclusion of craft with conceptual concerns.

The basis of these image-complexes are documents of a specific American vernacular: the modern roadside "folk-art." These objects, within their environment, are most often used for advertising. These signs and structures, sometimes personal, mostly commercial, describe particular characteristics about the people who built and used them. To make statements that are more complex than could be conveyed in a single unaltered photograph, I have combined these with the medical illustrations and language elements described above.

The work produced is concerned with the reiteration of ideas through words and pictures, mutually bonded. My philosophy is one of examining ideas logically, often
by using questions and answers to test their validity. It is a dialectic system and the projection of this system is designed to encourage dialectic methods of thinking in the observer.

These prints are observations relevant to my experiences in life, including social concerns, philosophies, and my own processes of making art.
The included photographs are 65 line half-tone reproductions. The original art is contact printed on brown tone paper from 8 inch by 10 inch black and white negatives and a series of contact overlays. These reproductions are not meant to be experienced as the original work. These photographs are included only to support the texts descriptions. Neither projected slides or paper half-tones can adequately reveal the gradation of tone, or the detail of the small intricate drawings.
Persistence Of Perception
One of the most heavily recurring traditional systems in art is that of nature studies and landscapes. Among the landscape artists using photography, there have been those who have refined the shared belief in the beauty of nature as a found and natural object. Over a one hundred year period, a diversity of imagery was produced that is now seen as created by masters. These landscape artists thought of unmanipulated landscapes and "straight" photographs as the way of expressing themselves. The frame contained trees, rock, land and sky. Their photographs had all the information needed for both the photographer and the viewer to understand the underlying concept, all within the frame.

Near the turn of the 19th century, while the established tradition of landscapes was in full force, Alfred Stieglitz declared a concept quite different from the established norm. When he called his series of cloud photographs "equivalents", or metaphors for his mental state, something different in photography had occurred. Stieglitz's images could have been just pretty clouds or even illustrations about cloud formations. Instead, the images became by the addition of a verbal report, something quite different from mere factual representation. By the addition of this verbal context, the emphasis then became placed upon the dependency of the images and objects and the context in which they are seen.

For instance, examine the artwork (see next page) that includes a building photographed partially in shadow and partially in sunlight, a human body dissected into various planes and the words, "Division of beliefs". The building could be looked upon as just a device for vertically dissecting the human form, representing, perhaps, a light and a dark side to the figure's nature. This building also has a siding of clapboards that repeats and echoes the lines of the planes cut through the figure. From this, it could be concluded that the image's subject is involved with a simple photographic representation of the words, "Division of beliefs". Those divisions are apparent and the "beliefs" could be derived from the fact that one of the divisions of the human form is through the head; the mind. But, what if
the viewer notices that a large portion of that building is a door, and that it also includes a large window? The door is deeply carved and decorated, and the window is unusually tall and thin; or is it unusual? At this point, if the viewer were to decide, or I were to tell him or her, that this building is not just any building, but a church; then an important contextual shift has occurred. The word "beliefs", in combination with the church carries an entirely new meaning than it did before. (At present 50% of my viewers have seen the building as a church) Indeed, the split lightness and darkness of the image, and the areas of the human body that are divided then carry much more meaning when combined with the concept of church, hence religion. The dependency of this image upon the context it is seen in could make the difference between a work discussing and illustrating mere visual divisions, or one that examines deeply rooted religious convictions that can divide a man's mind and body from what he believes to be correct.

Being aware of the power of context in affecting meaning, my work is largely concerned with creating new values for signs by shifts of context. The forms (the photographic elements) are manipulated by the addition of drawings and written language. These redetermine and redefine a context for the photograph. Structure is no longer just a means to a solution; it has become my principle passion (as it is with many of today's photographic artists), not a mere ordering device.

My art manipulates the structures that determine context. I question the accepted uses of form and content. How? By making references to things outside of the visual frame. That is, all the information needed to decipher the concept is not included within the frame. However, references to it are. Some of these references are made through language or visual symbols, although both usually refer to some thing or some event outside of the frame. In the photograph just discussed, I do not include within the frame a complete story of religions and their associated
benefits and atrocities. I instead make both a visual (the church) and a written (the word "beliefs") reference to the concept of religion.

The landscape photographers of the past one hundred years were concerned with their immediate sensory experience: Louis-Auguste and Auguste-Rosalie Bisson, Francis Frith, Henry Jackson, Carleton E. Watkins, Edward Weston and Ansel Adams. Their comment was always on the originally perceived reality. On the other hand, many contemporary photographic artists use systems of representation and referring. These artists can be divided into two groups. One group uses language, either oral or written, added as a commentary on photography and the other, a form restricting itself to non-language comments upon formal variables of photography. This is done by using photographic methods only. For example, Nathan Lyons and Bart Parker fulfill the requirement of the first category, the former orally, the latter through written language. Nathan Lyons's book, *Notations in Passing*, is a collection of American roadside vernacular. The variety of images range from a partially torn poster on a brick wall to a blank highway billboard to everyday street scenes. The actual meanings delegated by Nathan Lyons to these prints is only touched upon by the few words accompanying the images in the book, while the real understanding comes from the verbal explanation offered by Lyons in person. The images themselves are far from self-explanatory. Bart Parker includes writing in, on and near his photographs. One of his images is a pair of photographs of a wooden leg floating in a tub with the words, "wood, would" underneath each photograph. This particular photograph suggests a pun on the word "wood" and the probability of wood floating. Many other images by Bart Parker are mini stories from his own life and sometimes include whole paragraphs within the boundaries of his frame. Carl Toth and Robert Heineken fit into the second category. Most of their work restricts itself to non-language comments upon formal variables of photography. Carl Toth has made a series of photographs of small plastic boxes and pins that
includes a photograph of the boxes and pins in the scene. The copy photograph is an SX-70 and the final image is an SX-70 likeness of diluted pastel colors, but full size. Toth's interest is in the instant reproducibility of photography and includes the idea of a frame within a frame within a frame. Like Toth, Robert Heineken is also interested in the reproductive capabilities of photography. Unlike Toth, Heineken rephotographs commercially printed images ranging from advertisements to pornography. His collaged, well crafted results reflect an interest in the mass appeal of reproduction imagery.

Some modern artists using the medium of photography make specific references to photographic history. This art makes demands on the viewer by requiring prior and wide knowledge of the represented symbols. Contemporary photography then is involved with a shared knowledge which eliminates from full and direct understanding all those individuals who do not share a common art knowledge. One of Ted Orland's photographs shows a view from the bottom of a gorge looking straight up the giant vertical redwoods of the forest. In the gorge is a nude woman, not posing, but either asleep or peacefully dead. The title reads, "The Death of West Coast Photography: An allegorical portrait Or The Day the Verticals Converged". Orland's photograph could be considered a pun and also a serious comment on the demise of the West Coast landscape photography as the domineering photographic art form. The nude is possibly a reference to Wynn Bullock's famous females emeshed in leaves, while the trees and their vertical convergence refers directly to all large format nature photography and the capability to manipulate vertical convergence.

My own work falls directly into the category that uses language to assist the commentary. Being much more interested in the systems of representation (the photograph and the drawings) and referring (the language), I use these systems to discuss forms and differences within the two sign systems. That is to say, the work not only
uses representation and referring, but part of the underlying subject matter is about representation and referring. The general thrust of the work is not propositiona, but interrogative. I am examining the various meanings that can result from the different combinations of these systems. My interest is not in a photograph that restricts itself to a verification of the mere existence of objects. By exploring the connection between language and image, it becomes possible to affect image connotations by the context of accompanying language. A single photograph can generate several different meanings.

For those things we call words, the meaning of their combinations of sounds are the result of convention. "Baptism, the giving of a name is neither explanation, description nor definition. It is merely a bonding together of a particular quality or object to a particular word. For those who know both the objects and the names or qualities to which the object belongs, the names do away with any demanding necessity for description."1 When using terms that originally had specific applications in a medical and biological sense, I attempt to reapply such words. These written comments are not a summation but only an element of the final presentation, which is why they must be within the image itself. Combining these words with a photographic image and altering their context allows for completely new meanings. The viewer must make mental connections and perform abstractions while comparing what is seen with what is already known. For instance, examine the artwork (see next page) that contains a landscape consisting of a large pile of small stones, some shrubs, large receding clouds, a part of a tower-like structure, four rabbit profiles of the head only, and the words, "Length of errors in relation to latitude". When viewing this image one must first see all of it, then collect the various components, and then compare this new knowledge with older previously retained knowledge. One might recognize that, aside from the words and the rabbits,

Length of errors in relation to latitude
this image could be a standard landscape that would fit comfortably into that tradi-
dition of documentation. A comfortable fit, except for the intrusion of the tower-
like structure in the left hand corner of the frame. The viewer must search his
or her memory of traditional landscapes and then decide that this particular image
has a flaw. Observing the rabbit's profiles, the viewer might make the obvious
connection that rabbits belong in landscapes, but the fact that they are only par-
tially represented may leave him or her disturbed in that confidence. The viewer
will probably recall that the word "latitude" has some connection with land, but
will be unsure as to what is implied in this particular case. Examining the other
words, "length" and "errors" and "relation" will not reveal anything.

To find any further relationships between these elements of drawings and writing
one must rely on his or her entire storehouse of knowledge. Making a thorough visual
reexamination of the image might reveal that the rabbits are not all the same and
that their ears are dissimilar and get progressively shorter from left to right.
The terms "relation" and "length" might then become more meaningful, while the
words "errors" and "ears" even resemble each other in sound. If memory can recall
that latitude refers to imaginary lines or stripes around the earth and then notice
that the rabbits are neatly lined up, the words "Length of errors in relation to
Latitude" takes on much more meaning. Include the possibility that this image
could be considered an error in the traditional landscape form (the land and the
sky do tend to dominate the image), the drawings, words, and photograph no longer
seem so far removed in relation to each other.

In perception we pick the elements in no particular order and by associations
and abstractions we arrive at full meaning or meanings. It is not necessary to
understand every word or symbol in order to derive meaning. Admitting that we are
not recording all the relevant data, the best we can do is to interpret a given
image or representation conditionally. Our possible conclusions or even first hand
Several variables of creation
perceptions of an image's subject matter remain contingent. Another example of this occurrence is within the artwork on the following page. Looking at this piece, the first thing one sees is the centrally placed black saucer-like object. This object is much like an oriental cooking pan grown to huge proportions. The black saucer is scaleless except in relation to the larger objects behind it. These three objects are cylindrical in shape and could be either metallic or wooden in texture and design. There are walkways between the cylinders and deciding that walkways are human size the cylinders could then be the size of a three story building. They might be containers or tanks, although what they contain is undecipherable. Above the saucer there floats a structure superimposed on one of the cylinder tanks. In the center of this structural drawing reclines a human figure on a rectangle enclosed within a larger rectangle. This large box has openings that indicate by arrows a flow of water, carbon dioxide, and oxygen. It is impossible to decipher exactly what is taking place, except for an obvious exchange of gases and liquids. The drawing is imposed on one of the cylindrical tanks and it floats above the black bowl as if it were cooking in place. In the left hand corner of the frame are the words, "Several variables of creation".

By the addition of these words, the drawing can be understood as a variable of creation. A creation of what, it is not certain, other than it involves perhaps human creation. The tanks can now be seen as an aid to that creation, but their purpose is undetermined from the available data. One is left with a set of words exclaiming creation, a drawing showing creation, and a photograph of possibly storage tanks and a supporting saucer aiding in that creation. Little may be understood beyond these facts, but in spite of these limitations, each person viewing the artwork will draw his or her own conclusions. One person understood the image as a part mystical, part scientific representation of birth. Another person understood the image as a collection of incongruent elements, and abstracted no meaning from
it. Still another person understood this artwork as a comment on the creative
powers of the artist. This last person saw the image as a monologue about the pro-
cess of making art and the resulting growth within the artist.

It is the perceptual and conceptual activities of first hand encounters that
interest me. I want the viewer to encounter my images, not passively view them.
The work has logical structure in which nothing is purposeless, irrelevent or arbi-
trary. Take, for example, the artwork on the following page. This particular
piece is a conglomeration of human and animal figures. But it is more than just a
random collection, for the framing edges of the photograph include or exclude
exactly what I wish them to. The foreground contains shadow outlines of animals not
seen. The left edge dissects a huge human figure, showing mostly the arm and open
hand. The shadow of that figure falls on a green house roof containing plants, with
a sign in the window that reads, "All plants". There are several lions and a horse,
a few small human figures and one natural sized Venus, painted black. There are also
several stacks of bird baths detached from their podiums, upon which sit some mirr-
ored balls. Each ball reflects a distorted representation of the entire landscape
within. In the sky are the words, "Anatomical Museum", and on the ground are four
boxes (drawings) containing one hand each, open and palm outward.

Although I photographed the environment, the vernacular and other objects repre-
sented are not meant to be factual depictions. Intervening to shape the perception
of such topography, I select and create a composition of things separated in time
and space and without any immediate obvious connection. I am not interested in say-
ing, "there is a place that has bodies of animals and humans and here it is." I am
not interested in this place being any particular place. If I had had the time I
would have personally built each object and placed it in an area to exist only as
long as it takes to record it photographically. I would then destroy the individual
objects and return the area to its original state. Instead, I have found this scene
on the roadside perfect for my particular purposes and once recorded, I have no further interest in its reality.

By the addition of the writing in the sky area and the drawings and writing in the ground area I attempt to make the meaningful connections more apparent. Examining the boxes containing hands, the viewer will find that there are words accompanying the boxes on each of the four. Some of these words are: bridge, labels, stitch, linkage, structure, indicator lines, perspex bridge, optically flat, compound, framework, and fixing thread. The hands within the boxes are meant to represent the artist's hand; my hand. The boxes are symbols for a framing of my hand, or a metaphor for the art produced by my hand. The attached words are exclamations of the methods I use to make my art, not technical methods, but cognitive methods. Connections and underlying structures are my main interests and these are performed by visual (lines) and written bridges (labels). The words "anatomical museum" in the top left hand corner refer not only to the visual collection of objects below it, but also to my entire body of work. My work includes a great many animals, as actual animals, as drawings of animals, as sculptures of animals, as symbols of animals. I can explain this recurrence of animals only by saying that I am strongly attracted to animal shapes and they fulfill my particular needs in each situation. This particular print is a monologue on not only my own art processes, but also on specific recurring subjects and objects within my work. The sign in the window of the greenhouse declares that "all (are) plants". Each drawing or object is placed or planted by me for a particular reason. Nothing is arbitrary or unpurposeful.

The third element of my work, the added drawings, are exclusively biological illustrations used in anatomy or any medical area. These drawings can be purely schematic. The idea that is represented is not particularized. For example, a skeletal diagram does not represent the skeleton of any particular person, but rather is a summary of a broad and general class of shapes of a skeleton. This schematiz-
ing combined with the canonical features of illustration found in medical texts are of interest. "Canonical depth refers to a minimum set of features that defines all the possible three dimensional relationships in a picture. This is at best done without requiring a full articulation of perspective and other depth relaying information. A perfect example is as follows: looking at three versions of a human hand, one a photograph, the next an intricate and detailed drawing, and the last a cartoon. Recognition has been found to require more extended viewing times for the detailed drawing and the longest time for the photograph. The schematized cartoon requires the least time to be understood as the human hand."  

Examine the artwork on the following page. The piece containing the words "Filter Feeding" in the left upper corner, also has four human profiles in the center of the sky. I am not interested in the humanness of these profiles, so I have not represented them with any great articulation. I desire the viewer to see these drawings first, before all else, and the fact that they are human faces is only of minimum importance: the nose as a filter of air, the different noses as shapes or types of filters is all the drawings must represent. These profiles, if not actually seen first, are understood first. The drawings of the noses are understood well before the contents of the photograph or the detailed drawings of the rats in the bottom of the frame. The concept of readability is further explored by varying the texture of the surfaces against which these illustrations are seen. By adjusting this background texture it can help to determine the time required for recognition of objects printed over it. Placing the disemboweled rats over a textured surface interferes with the readability of the rats. The varying readability of these added drawings exists to give me some control over which elements of an image make their impressions sooner upon the viewer. I desire this control because the selectivity of the human mind is an underlying interest of my art.  

If the viewer's powers of abstraction are less than that of the artist, the

viewer will not comprehend what he or she perceives and the resulting perceptual dissonance will create not only tension, but possibly even frustration. On the other hand, if the viewer's powers of abstraction are greater or more varied than that of the artist, he or she may at best discover relationships beyond those that were implied by the artist and at worst be bored because of the lack of challenge to their abstracting abilities.

Pronouncing a value judgement on all that I see, the final images give me the pleasure of contemplating my own "sense of life". The summation of my artistic outlook is that the the images are linked to my conscious appreciation of life and contain an unextinguishable optimism. This optimism is intertwined with humorous observations (humorous to me), on the quality of life. The humor is derived from a subtle sarcasm directed towards other people's view of life. It is not a "making fun of", but a "having fun with" point of view that scolds at its worst and denies flattery at its best. The first four images, on the following pages, are examples of my most critical comments. The first artwork, containing the words "Managing without brains", is a reaction to my experiences while attending Universities. The image contains an aerial perspective of two exposed brains, a belljar with a brain as contents, and a large "Humpty-Dumpty" with a container of liquid cow manure placed in front of it. This image was created after years of experiencing distaste with people who were unwilling to think for themselves; who would supplement another's ideas for their own, without even an examination of those ideas; just accepting them.

The next artwork contains a large fence with the words,"progress in progress", a simple drawing of three chickens and three eggs at the bottom of the frame, and the words, "Life without mind". This artwork, partially derived from my scholastic situation and partially from political actions taken in the world, is a summation of my dread of the vacuous mind. The chicken-and-egg question of which came first,
Opposing groups of metaphors
is in this image repeated three times and for me perfectly exemplifies the mindless progress reproduction can, but should not be. Constantly changing, constantly building and rebuilding, few people actually question the changes. The prevailing philosophy has become "change for change's sake", rather than change for improvement. In this image, by using a structure built by man I am commenting on one type of progress, that of physical growth. The structure is only a sign voicing its own progress, another indicator of mindless change with no purpose other than that of movement.

The next artwork contains the words "opposing groups of metaphors". It also contains small effigies of cats and dogs, signs welcoming and forbidding, several large human-like figures that are arranged in the foreground, and various oriental writings and drawings of sign language. This artwork is specifically about a universal lack of effective communication. Not only do animals and people oppose each other, but so do the words. The cats versus the birds and dogs, the signs of welcome opposing the signs of keep off, and the people in the form of fat dolls oppose each other. One of the opposing groups is divided and opposes itself; half of the sculptures peer into the backs of their contemporaries; none see each other eye to eye. There are also two examples of hand sign language in the center bottom of the image, one that translates "Yes" and the other "No". The writing around the edges of the bottom and corners is Chinese for "grey and overcast" and also "bright and sunny". Neither the hand sign language nor the oriental characters are meant to be understood by the majority of viewers. I feel that there is enough information that can be understood present in the image, though. A lack of communication, a break in language codes, differences of opinions; all are the subject of this print.

The last artwork in this group contains the words "nervous tension and instructions". This image also contains a close-up of tangled and frozen roots and vines in snow, with a genetics related schematic superimposed on it. The feeling derived
from viewing this print is one of a nervous disorderly chaos. The nervousness is from the random scattering of roots mingled with the schematic, and the tension from attempting to visually untangle what actually is an orderly planned construction. The artwork is a comment on planned nervousness. The insistence by major foundations and publications that nervous tension is a result of modern society and cannot be totally eliminated (almost acquired at birth), is another farce that I seek to ridicule.

These last four artworks as described are extremely critical viewpoints, and at first may even seem pessimistic. They are anything but this, for pessimism implies an acceptance of things as they are, because no hope for change is believable. These artworks are optimistic by reason of their actual existence, which implies a non-acceptence of things as they are. This non-acceptence is crucial for a thinking, rational change for the better. While I do not, within these artworks offer solutions, the acknowledging of a problem is the first step towards a solution.

The next two artworks are a total antithesis of the last four. The images that contain the words "Harmonious goal-setting" and "Physiological Enlightenment", are both loud exclamations of my delight with life and its various endeavors. "Harmonious goal-setting" also contains a stark white barn labeled sky acres, a sky with large and receding clouds, and a foreground with musical notations imbedded in the grass. This image was created at a time in my life when a goal was being reached and new, higher and less secure goals were being set. I was graduating from college after 19 years of formalized schools into the less formalized, but more demanding school of life. I have set my goals high enough not to become bored by achievement and low enough to be obtainable. As the writing within the image states, it is harmonized (rational, logical) goal-setting.

While "Harmonious goal-setting" is about future goals, "Physiological Enlighten-
Harmonious goal-setting
Physiological enlightenment
"Enancement" is concerned with past and present goals. The artwork contains an athlete who moves from left to right across the print. This figure has started to fall or has been thrown down from the left corner and slowly corrects its fall until it has been completely righted, and at this moment a ray of pure, white light strikes the head of the figure. The light obliterates the face from sight then disappears while the figure continues on a straight and determined path out of the right hand corner frame. At the bottom of the image are several Rorschach ink blots that resemble birds, bats, or butterflies. This artwork is the symbol of my past years of work and learning. The figure is myself, tossed downward by philosophies and opinions not my own. After years of struggling to grasp meanings from the knowledge presented to me, I finally have been offered a method of understanding and revealing myself, through my artwork. The word "physiological" refers to body and mind joined together, and this print is the cumulation of equal years of training my body (through the martial arts) and my mind (through philosophy and the Fine Arts). Each type of training is mutually beneficial to the other and together they work to achieve harmony of body and mind.

The next two artworks, which include the words "Aggressive Control" and "Artistic Intentions", can be placed within a third group of intentions, neither that of criticism, nor an expression of enjoyment, but that of a commentary upon my own art and its encompassing physical and mental processes. The already described "Anatomical Museum" is also a member of this group. First, examine the artwork that contains the words "Aggressive Control", a stone sculpture of an alligator and a deer, a walled and barred environment, and the drawing of the human head, its brain revealed, and before it a piano keyboard imitating the curve of the head. The aggressive portion is represented by the alligator and its eating of the deer (which it has caught and is presently sitting on). The control portion is exemplified by the analogy of the mind to the keyboard, both being instruments of perfection and con-
Artistic intentions
"Aggressive Control" refers to that which an artist does with his or her perceptions, the shaping and conscious rearranging of knowledge and objects to fit his or her purposes.

The next artwork contains the words "Artistic Intentions". A wooden shelter has "The land of let's pretend" written on it, and also included are drawings of lungs with the accompanying words "repeated daily air injections". There are also several animal forms near the shelter. The land of "let's pretend" is the world of the artist, where anything can be confronted and everything is made equal in consideration. The lungs are shown breathing in, then breathing out, with the accompanying words "repeated daily air injections". The lungs also have the words "inspiration" and "expiration" above them. The word inspiration is used both as an intake for breathing and as an intake for creative thinking, towards the production of art. This intake is "repeated daily" and even the animals mimic the breathing with mouths wide open. "Artistic Intentions" is definitely about the process of art making, and of art creating from the raw materials available.

All of the remaining images from this thesis portfolio fall within one or more of these three groups of images: those that criticize, those that exclaim joy, and those that comment on the process of art.
Unknown and referred pain
Developmental points of interest


