Ambivalence & Hope

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Ambivalence & Hope

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Thesis Statement

**Ambivalence** [am-BIV-e-lens] n. 1. Simultaneous existence of two conflicting desires, opinions, etc.¹

**Hope** [hohp] n. 1. Expectation of something desired.²

The premise of this thesis statement is to choose discern the ambivalences that exist in one’s heart and mind. There is always hope that the path chosen is the correct one. Once the choice is made, starting down the path is the hard part. The traveler must bend, twist, crawl, and turn to stay true to the selected course at all cost. In these travels one may experience self-disappointment as well as accomplishments. Successes and failures mark key points on a person’s lifeline. Marks appear in wood as checks, cracks, shakes, and knots. Whether these marks are measured in minutes, hours, days or a lifetime, we all have our own contributions that we have made on this world. Everyone journeys through his or her own personal labyrinths in hope of finding inner peace, causing the traveler’s soul to come to terms with itself.

At the time of creating this show I was experiencing a season of distress and failure. I was standing at a crossroads in my own personal labyrinth. Many obstacles in my journey caused me to have an attitude of ambivalence. My ridged, aggressive, and dominant personality at this point in my journey was not allowing me to be true to myself. This

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¹ Harper Collins Pocket Webster Dictionary p. 16.
show is about my coming to terms with myself. Understanding the cracks and checks of my past. Excepting them for what they are. Then moving forward with a new attitude, one of hope and thereby changing the direction of my life journey. In order to do this I needed to uncover my point of origin.

To symbolize my travels, I created gesture wood forms that have a sense of curvilinear movement that bend and twist through their environment. The line qualities of these pieces captured the attitude of an animal that never rests. These forms are humanistic in nature. Ambivalence and Hope have similar line quality that are found in blind and contour line drawing.

I explored two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms. Walnut and Zebrawood were used to fabricate Ambivalence. This animalistic form symbolized the dominant force of my thesis show. Hope, the mate piece, was made out of mahogany and canary wood. She represented the submissive force of the show, my polar opposites.

The other pieces and materials that surround Ambivalence and Hope aid in setting the tempo and stage for the rest of the show. Paint and found objects were used for making mono-prints, which helped me better understand the forms Ambivalence and Hope were to take. These mono-prints were reinforced by studies I selected from nature. Between these two studies I was provided with an initial understanding of the creatures' potential movements and how they could be portrayed. This movement was reinforced by ink gesture drawings which captured the creatures animated movements.
There were two experimental pieces as well, which reinforced the inner personalities of Ambivalence and Hope. The first piece, *Inner Hope*, was made out of glass, copper, and plaster. This piece illustrated the idea of inner light, aura, and soul. The mate to *Inner Hope* was *External Ambivalence*, which was created from handmade paper, broken glass, copper shards, dirt, and wire. *External Ambivalence* represented the significance of outer-ridgedness caused by life obstacles. Reactions to the problems one faces in their own journey may cause inner turmoil. This inner turmoil is stuffed deep down inside oneself and will eventually fester its way to the surface, blocking out ones inner light.
The reciprocal processes of life, death, rebirth, and my own intuition and analysis were the driving forces behind my work. The mediums and processes I investigated were painting, mono-printing, ink drawing, blind contour line drawing, contour line drawing, printmaking, assemblage, fabrication, welding, and ideation. The materials used were wood, cooper, handmade paper, glass, light, pulp, dirt, and found objects. I also used drawing materials for sketching and making mono-prints.
The Point of Origin

Every journey has a beginning, middle, and end. Along the way there are internal and external circumstances that affected the path. To understand any journey, one must understand the history of the individual. To understand the history of an individual journey one must find the point of origin. It is possible to find the point of origin or center point in any three-dimensional space. The scientific method for doing this is called geometric center or center of gravity. This idea can be easily understood by examining a simple box structure.

![Six Planes of a Cube](image)

This cube could be a room in a house, a box one places sacred items in, a sculpture, or a human being. Point one is located on the right side of the box. Point two is located on the left side of the box. Point three is on the front plane of the box. Point four is on the backside of the box. Point five is on the top of the box. Point six is on the bottom of the
box. These are the six points that make up the planes of the box. All of these points come together to form three lines that intersect at the box's center, the point of origin in the three-dimensional form.

Once the point of origin is identified, one knows where a person's labyrinth began. The concept of a dot, the dot of self, completed, and placed in the infinite universe, given everything it needs for survival, is an amazing concept. "Would you look at all those stars, I mean you look up and you think God made all of that and still remembered to make a tiny speck like me, is kind of flattering really."¹ I wanted to discover the path God created for me when he created my point of origin.

¹ George P. Cosmatos, Director, Tombstone, 1993.
I was once told that the past is already over and only good for reflection, but do not stay there and reflect very long. The future is not here yet; all you have is today, this moment or point, the now. Enjoy it for what it is at present, the present, and a present. Once today is over you will never have it back. I am starting to learn the meaning of the above adage by looking to my center and slowly coming to terms with my past in order to change the direction of my life’s future journey.
A Dot and Its Path Through Life

Paul Klee once said, "All a line is, is a dot that went for a walk."^{4}

I used blind and contour line drawing to represent one’s journey through life. Both the blind and contour line drawing start with a single point, the point of origin. As with any journey, obstacles are the encounters that need to be addressed. How the problem is resolved will have an impact on the line. Each lines’ beginning point might have started in the same place, but due to the hindrance that each encountered and how they handled the complication allow each line and the line’s quality to differ greatly.

Blind contour line drawing is a mythological process (Reference A). This type of drawing is drawing in its purest form. The rules in this type of drawing are that the tip of a writing implement, in this example a pencil, cannot be lifted off the page. The artist’s eye is steadily focused on one point of the object in the still life and is not allowed to view the page until the drawing is complete. The tip of the pencil slowly crawls along on the drawing’s surface. The pencil records the line that the eye sees and transcends it to the paper. This type of drawing has a spontaneous and whimsical feel to it. The process releases the inner energies that are trapped in inanimate objects, making them appear animated. The blind contour line captures the essence and intuitive nature of the object being drawn.

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^{4} Paraphrased from, Pherotic Sketch Book (1925) p. 6 “An active line on a walk, moving freely without goal. A walk for walk sake. The agent is a point that shifts position.
The second drawing is a contour line drawing (Reference B) with two main differences. The differing characteristic in this type of drawing is that the artist can look down at the paper; however the writing implement is not allowed to leave the page. The second difference is that the instrument used to create the contour line drawing line was a pen with blue ink.

Even though there were a minimal number of obstacles that differed between these two drawings it is evident that there is a drastic line change in each. The line quality in the
contour drawing is tighter, more ridged, and defined. The blind contour drawing is more sprawling and carefree. Through the process of contour line drawing a more realistic image is created. The viewer can clearly see all the objects in the still life. In blind contour drawing the forms of the objects are not as apparent to viewer; imagination on the part of the viewer is needed for recognizing what some of the objects are. Viewing a blind contour drawing requires thinking more abstractly therefore allowing the viewer to recognize all that is happening in the drawing.

When viewing both drawings I attempt to personify people and their personality types. I saw two different personality types on the pages before me. The blind contour drawing represents a forgiving, carefree, energetic person that went with the flow of life. This type of person sprawls along through life and is not deeply rooted. This person's root structure would be similar in nature to the root structure of a willow tree that spans across the top level of the soil, going whichever way the earth will let alow.
The contour line drawing symbolizes a more conservative person, rigid, stiff and taut. I can almost feel the tension and precision in the lines. This type of person’s root structure is similar to the root system of an oak tree, having sprawling branches that search for water and one huge taproot that penetrates the earth like a drill seeking a constant and stable water source.

Let us continue this discussion of line by viewing a reproduction of Monique Prieto painting titled *The Other Side*, circa 1997. The dimensions of the painting below are 72-by-69 inches. This image is courtesy of ACME, Los Angeles, California and Pat Hearn Gallery New York, New York.
Take a moment to carefully view this painting, conceding that a reproduction in a book does not do justice to the paintings' true colors. The question could be asked: Do you see any shapes in this painting that remind you of people? If so, what shapes? What characteristics do these shapes have that relate to the people you are now associating them with? How is the color communicating the shape's mood? What kind of mood does the combination of the shape and color portray?

During my undergraduate studies at The College of Saint Rose, Albany New York, I saw an article in Art in America titled The Nine Lives of Painting. I have carried this magazine around with me since 1998. This is what art critic Ralph Rubinstein, for Art and America, had to say about the above painting September, 1998.
"There are no intermediate zones, no interceding planes, just these smooth contoured, often biomorphic silhouettes against unpainted canvas. While this type of composition has obvious precedents in Color Field painting, it also relates to the computer software ("Painter 3"), which Prieto employs to develop her compositions. Along with the blatant figure/ground format, the 1997 painting, "On the Other Side" displays another typical Prieto trait: a sense of animation that verges on comic. Two crooked vertical lines, one orange and red, divide the 6-by-8 foot painting into two roughly equal areas. The three individually distinct upright shapes to the left—one cadmium orange, another faded green, the third pale blue—are positioned so that they appear to be leaning against the irregular orange line, who’s weight they nearly match. The five smaller abutted shapes on the right side are more formally varied and vibrantly colored—pale purple, violet-blue, lemon yellow, a deeper purple, magenta—and instead of inclining toward the center line, they lean away. Huddled together, they almost seem to be shrinking in fear from the more formidable array of shapes on the left. Thus, the bent lines in the center appear to create not merely a formal division but a psychological one as well." "She thinks nothing of wedging her forms together the way a child might stuff toys back into a box that’s too small for them...Some viewers may carp at the fact that these ebullient compositions are computer aided, but others (like me) will be too swept up by the visual excitement on offer to give a damn how it came into the world." 

5 Art In America p. 97
Lines can represent people and their moods. Combined with the use of color and gesture these moods can be magnified. What may appear to be a simple cartoon-like contour line drawing with shapes can transcend into something much more. We see this in the above painting *On The Other Side* (p.12).
The Show

I constructed the environment of this show to represent discovering the point of one’s origin, understanding how life’s obstacles shape paths and the coming to terms with past external circumstances. Allowance is given for the participant to choose or change the direction of life’s journey so that the line formed by the traveler’s journey may reflect their inner being and not simply external circumstances. Lucky bamboo, ink drawings, studies from nature, curly willow, experiment pieces, *Ambivalence* and *Hope* were assembled to illustrate balance between chaos/harmony, life/death, and ambivalence/hope.

The materials selected to create *Ambivalence* were black walnut and zebrawood. These woods are extremely hard and were not easy to carve. This piece has a presence, similar to that of Nick Taylor’s *Untitled Burn Wood* piece. The wood of *Ambivalence* is very dark and appears void-like at first glance. My sculpture has a larger than life-size scale, defensive stance, and gesture to keep the viewer at bay. *Ambivalence* is very dominant and defensive representing the personality type of a contour line drawing. *Ambivalence* was made to represent my stiff, ridged, external persona. Here is more proof that two-dimensional lines can transcend off their page, into three-dimensional spaces.
The outer contour of *Ambivalence* is strong, threatening, tense, causing of my thesis show to distance themselves by standing out of striking distance of *Ambivalence*. For the braver viewers that did approach, they were able to examine the beautiful natural layers created by the tree's natural growth pattern in addition to the unnatural layers created by the stack lamination process.⁷ Theses layers all combined to create *Ambivalences* social history and contour. The head of this piece has some holes penetrating into the brain.

⁷ To create *Ambivalence* and *Hope* I used this simple woodworking process, stack-lamination, along with templates to create my three-dimensional forms. The steps to perform stack lamination are: Lay out all scrap wood collected. Examine the grains, patterning, and thickness of each piece of wood. Overlay the full-scale sketches of the models. Select the wood from the collected scraps to lie over the sketches and stack them to appropriate heights that achieve desired thickness. Draw the general form from the full-size sketch onto the wood. Take the drawn on wood to the band saw and cut out the general shape. Repeat this process until all the desired pieces are cut out. Lay out paper on the workbench. Lay down the bottom piece of wood to be stack-laminated. Place the next piece on top of the bottom piece and double check to see that they line up correctly. Once satisfied with positioning, glue the top of the bottom piece and the bottom of the next pieces that are to be laid on top of it. Place the second piece on top of the first one. Press down until glue comes out around the seams. Repeat the process until all the pieces for that section are compiled. Clamp the pile of stacked wood together and apply enough pressure to the clamp so that the glue oozes out the spaces in between each plank. Wipe up excess glue with a rag. Allow wood to cure for twenty-four hours. Once the process is complete and the pieces have bonded the sculpture can be carved, shaped, sanded, and a patina applied for a final finish.
cavity. One could speculate how these holes were made. Could they have been made by *Ambivalence* defending *Hope*?

Albert Giacometti’s painting *Annette*, circa 1957 created by has a very holocaustic feel and look. The humanistic form of the woman in the painting appears to have imploded, leaving behind the remains of a skeletal structure. These remains appear on the canvas as a void of darkness. In the voided area where a woman should have stood, stands a dark tar-like humanistic form. The form stands at attention and appears to look forward. *Annette* perhaps is standing in shock at the implosion that just took place. Maybe she is a spirit in search of her missing pieces that could have been scattered by her inner turmoil.

The wood used to create *Ambivalence* was discarded scrap from furniture makers. They discarded these pieces of wood without hesitation. I thought they were beautiful. These scraps were patiently collected over a period of time until there were enough of them to
create Ambivalence. I felt that the scrap wood symbolized the experiences of Annette. When I saw all these beautiful pieces of wood and remembered Annette’s implosion and the holocaust survivors that were scattered. As I assembled Ambivalence through the stack-lamination process, I remembered all the tension in my body I felt as a child and the imprisoned pain I had witnessed during my studies of art. I wanted there to be an underlying internal conflict in Ambivalence that symbolized my own inner turmoil, therefore I made Ambivalence appear dark and defensive. Creating sculpture by hand, using the process of stack-lamination, the use of my hands, I began to release some of my own inner pain in an outward fashion. The viewer could sense the tension in the art and have a conversation with it. I wanted the viewer to see the beauty and strength that could rise out of discarded scraps and turmoil. With this intention Ambivalence was born.

![Ambivalence Detail up of head](image)

Ambivalence
Detail up of head
Jeremy Charles Stipano
2005
Hope was created from mahogany and canary wood. Both woods are hard and exotic. Hope was not assembled from discarded scraps of wood. Most of the mahogany in this piece was cut off from the most beautiful piece of wood I had ever seen. The plank of mahogany that was purchased to create Hope was eight feet long, four feet wide, and 3/4 of an inch thick. I bought the wood on sight, rough cut. I did not know what a gem I had until I ran it through a planer a few times and saw the beautiful cathedraling wood grain. I then realized that this wood contained a solid unwavering undertone of the church that is Christ. The red of this wood reminded me of his blood and the rose that symbolizes Mary, the mother of Christ. Both this board and Mary were virgins. Both virgins gave birth to amazing entities.
The curvilinear form of Hope is very submissive and non-threatening, quite beautiful and welcoming. Hope's soul radiated an inner light of warmth and peace. Life's circumstances have not caused Hope's inner light to fade. The grain of the bright yellow canary wood is interlaced with blues, greens, reds, and purple hues that enhanced the aura. Hope's soul appeared strong and nurtured, yet very submissive, allowing the viewer to come very close and examine the sculptural inner beauty and social history.

![Seated Nude with Arm on Head by Henri Matisse](image)

I first saw Henri Matisse's *Seated Nude with Arm on Head*, 1904, Bronze, as a humanistic in gesture while simultaneously appearing bone-like and natural in structure. This skeletal structure would, support muscle tissue, tendons, and ligaments if assembled with other similar bone like elements. This would allow the independent bone-like form and the muscle structure to work together, giving the whole group of parts a sense of animation or movement. This sculpture by Matisse demonstrates the whole gambit of life,
birth, growing pains, choice, entrapments, fears, dreams, ambivalences, and hope captured in one minimalist brilliant work of art. The figure is trying to press its way out of its own void. The sculpture appears to be a full-size human trapped in the womb. A unobservant viewer could easily miss this important information due to the minimal components that define this sculpture.

The same quality is seen in *Ambivalence*. The sculpture at first glance, seems aggressive but upon further inspection the viewer can see the stack-laminated parts become the collective. The viewer is also able to see the wood grain of each layered section is pushing against the next grained layer in an uncommon way. Even though the piece appears to be solid and rigid, upon further inspection of *Ambivalence* the viewer can clearly see a hodgepodge assemblage, holes, scars, and cracks. As the viewer spends more observations time with the sculpture a deeper conversation with the work occurs. Through this conversation, the viewer begins to understand why *Ambivalence* has stance it exhibits.

*Hope* longs for attention, contact, and affection. *Hope* bows her head in a submissive way welcoming the viewer into her space and allows for a closer inspection of her joints and seams. This piece is better defined. The grain matches up closer than *Ambivalence*'s, causing less stress and pressure to be placed on the wood. The canary wood, which impregnated the mahogany that creates *Hope*, is also well placed. The colors and the wood grain that traveled through the canary wood, contrasting the mahogany, draws the viewer into a mesmerizing gaze with *Hope*. 
The Lasso created by Joan Miro Circa 1927, is my stepping stone, a deciding factor of how a two-dimensional surface such as a mono-print could become three-dimensional, then transcend back into a two-dimensional form again. This process of visually vacillating two-dimensional and three-dimensional space was very hard for me to understand at first. I embraced a very solid two-dimensional photography background having little sculptural background, to this point in my life's journey. The Lasso was the perfect artwork to demonstrate how a line can penetrate the two-dimensional surface and become a three-dimensional form. The overlapping of the line, changing diameter, and use of negative space that make up the composition confirmed the possible means for creating a three-dimensional sculpture from a two-dimensional surface.

Miro also incorporates the principles of balance and harmony and the element of line and line weight. These are key elements and principles in my own work. Insight for translating scraps of black walnut and zebrawood as well as beautiful pieces of mahogany
and canary wood into the centerpieces sculptures excited me. Each piece illustrates a separate part of my life's journey. Together the work created an amazing dichotomy that has a sense of balance and harmony between Ambivalence and Hope.

Nick Taylor’s Untitled Burned Wood, Albert Gicomettie's painting of Antinette, Henri Matisse’s Seated Nude with Arm Raised, and Joan Miro’s The Lasso helped me as an artist to realize the potential human qualities my sculptures can convey. The works of the above artists helped me to select the elements of art and principals of design that would allow my work to efficiently capture my complete vision. This allowed my artwork to speak to the viewer.

Inspired by these artists, I have begun to work primarily through intuition. I am keen on emotion, feeling, movement, rhythm, and timing in my life and in the art that I create. During the process of creating a sculpture, all these elements and emotions came together in my heart and were passionately transformed into my artwork. During this process I lost track of time and space. The tools, wood, and my hands become one, sending me into a state of ecstasy, a holy trinity, the three of us engaged in the dance of life, love, and passion. This dance is a very intimate and sensual one, similar to the tango; hours of shaping, feeling, and caressing pass in a flash. I transition into an alternate state of consciousness. My intuition takes over, leaving no room for analysis. The intuitive dance goes on for minutes, which turn into hours, and then days. I begin to feel very satisfied and fatigued when I regain consciousness from the ritualistic dance of sculpting.
Final Thoughts

My Soul is filled with cracks and checks that are now only starting to heal during this stage of my personal labyrinth. Turning discarded scraps of dead board back into an organic form has helped in this healing process. This was accomplished through the stack lamination process and carving. As I began fitting the centerpieces of my show together, I could feel sparks inside my soul. Theses sparks reminded me of childhood standing out on Moon Street in the darkness holding on to my first sparkler and the magic I felt from the process. The flickers of the sparks were warm and felt alive, this was an unusual feeling for me. These sparks from my thesis show fell on some amber that remained buried deep in my soul, rekindling a flame inside me, a flame that I though had died a long time ago. This flame turned into a fire that would not allow anything or anyone obstruct me from finishing my thesis. The Phoenix of my soul had again risen out of the ashes and transcended toward the heavens. This was very apparent to me at the opening of my exhibition. When I saw my work and the people’s reactions to my work my hope in myself were reinforced.

I was asked at the opening reception for of my thesis exhibition “where do you see your art pieces fitting in the genres of art history?” I said that is a good question. That question was answered for me in a critique I had of my work one day. A professor of mine said that these creatures fall somewhere between high modernism and Saturday morning cartoons.

If the viewer finds familiarity with the sculpture and the words on these pages and can support their intent, then the work is speaking to them. The thesis investigation and my
written thesis paper are my own personal labyrinth and public contribution to the field of art. I am grateful and thankful to have had the time to spend on this creative research.

Through my trials and tribulations I have learned to laugh harder, cry more often, and be able to be more real with myself than I ever thought humanly possible. I want to win the self-respect and come to terms with me and my point of origin. I also want to surround myself with true friends that are respectful and intelligent. I want to be able to smile at honest criticism and be able to thank that person for their insight. I want to see the best in all people. I want to bend, twist, crawl, and dig in with all I am worth to stay true to my artistic journey. Every life that I come in contact with I want to make a little better, even if it's only in some small way. To have accomplished these things is to truly have lived. In ravel, there is no greater gift on this planet than to have left a positive imprint on this world. I believe that our world is a better place because ambivalence and hope exist.

8 KP/MS
Bibliography


*American Venacular New Discoveries in Folk, Self-taught, and Outsider Sculpture*.
