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Publication Date

2015

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

“Located at O’ and A”

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Art

by

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August 2015

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
SCULPTURE AND BODY.....	2
IMAGE AND PLAY.....	3
IMAGE AND SPACE.....	6
SOUND AND INTIMACY.....	7
CONCLUSION.....	9
Works Cited.....	11
Images.....	12

If I draw my finger across a sheet of paper without looking at it, the motion I perform is, perceived from within, a continuity of consciousness, something of my own flow, in a word, duration. If I now open my eyes, I see that my finger is tracing on the sheet of paper a line that is preserved, where all is juxtaposition and no longer succession; this is the unfolded, which is the record of the result of motion, and which will be its symbol as well... As muscular sensation, they are a part of the stream of conscious life, they endure; as visual perception, they describe a trajectory, they claim a space.

- Henri Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity*

INTRODUCTION

Art being inextricable from one's own story is foundational in my practice. The moment that I am in—my situation, my emotion, my thoughts, and my interests—are material for play and creativity. I embrace the irrational.

Upon entering the Master of Fine Arts program at the University of California Riverside in 2012, my work consisted of digital photographs that investigated everyday objects and commodity. It was my intention, through this program, to challenge my practice and explore new mediums and techniques. The new areas of my work have been largely process-oriented and upon entry to UC Riverside, they shifted conceptually at a quick and readied pace. Throughout my three years of study, I went through four key stages of discovery and arrived with four separate bodies of work that are in my thesis exhibition, *Located at O' and A'* (Figure 1 – 3.). Cognitively, I entertain a number of imaginative expositions that stem from popular culture, absurdist para-scientific stories, psychotherapy, and dream-tending. These areas relate to the transcendental and mystic spiritualism through a lens of humor and gentle skepticism.

The exhibition *Located at O' and A'* examines the points on a map along my trajectory of graduate school. The following chapters will discuss each of these series and give insight into the process and discovery that went into those works. The series that will be discussed are as follows: a freestanding wood sculpture (*Sculpture and Body*), five gum bichromate photographs (*Image and Play*), an acrylic box (*Image and Space*) and a sound piece (*Sound and Intimacy*). My idiosyncratic and impulsivity in the studio, have allowed for themes and materials to emerge, to fold into one another, to lay dormant and

to reappear, all in a non-linear fashion. Through the parsing out of these series, I will reveal the steps I have taken in pursuing my Master of Fine Arts, and the direction I'm looking in for the next stage of my artistic journey, beyond the university.

SCULPTURE AND BODY

Change is the most basic condition (physics) of our universe. In its dynamic change (alongside time and space) constitutes a given in all things, and is indeed what we are talking about when we speak of the phenomenal in perception. Most critically, change is the key physical and physiological factor in our being able to perceive at all. Our perceptual process is a kind of "perpetual motion" assimilator. No change, no perceptual consciousness.

Robert Irwin, *Notes Toward a Conditional Art*

Part of embracing the absurdity of my practice is imagining that an artwork has a life of its own and that I influence it while it influences me. The artwork has its own birth and movement and life span. This is how I think of the carved wooden sculptures in *Located at O' and A'* (Figure 4.).

The freestanding sculpture in the exhibition, *Birch*, is one piece from a larger body of "anthropomorphized fabric sculptures" that I made early on in the program (Figure 5.). These human-sized bulbous forms covered in textured fabric were an extension of my interest in fashion, absurdity, and everyday materials. In my next iteration, I removed the fabric and was left with wooden forms. *Birch* is the raw artifact of that previous series of works. The personified sculpture, all dressed-up, was stripped of its clothing and now stands naked.

The design was pre-visualized, an imagined sculpture, that I then formulated a sketch for and constructed. Each piece of wood was carved to dissolve the industrial 1" x

2” strip into an organic shape. The sculpture separated itself from the rigor of standardized fabrication and stood free, reminding the viewer of the contours of the body. The element of play in *Birch* brought movement, fluidity and vulnerability to *Located at O’ and A’*.

IMAGE AND PLAY

The signifying function was long ago questioned by Roland Barthes and others because a photograph is utterly contingent and thus outside the realm of meaning. The withholding of images foreground what has been a repressed characteristic of all photography, its metaphoric heart.

Level Rexel, *Edge of Vision*

My second series of work in *Located at O’ and A’*, consist of five gum bichromate photographs that play with the reproduction and manipulation of the photographic image. The four-color CMYK gum bichromate prints operate between photography, painting and printmaking. They are acid-pop abstractions, each uniquely crafted with brush strokes from a hand-applied chemicals and the fallout of image pixilation. The color fields and otherworldly landscapes call on the mystical in art. Though the final works are abstract and surreal, they are reproductions and manipulations of older photographs that went through a process involving both technique and spontaneity.

Despite involving photography, gum bichromate printing seemed to be more about the process rather than the image. I found that only through working with the materials and looking for overlaps between process and image did I find new ground. The process makes the image distort, thus placing the image in a new, abstracted world to live

in. In production, I was interested in the aspects of labor and time, having a personal and physical connection to making the prints. I was curious about the rigor required in their production and the unavoidable chance results. The process of these works can be explained in the following three stages: 1) The digital source photograph, 2) the Photoshop editing, and 3) the gum bichromate printing.

The Digital Source Photograph

I originally photographed inkjet prints on acetate, which were left over from previous experiments. The images were color samples of the sky printed on acetate for a body of freestanding sculptures. The sculptures were temporary constructions and the color samples that were left over became the source material for a new direction. I was interested in the way the color worked on the acetate plastic because of the way these prints interacted with light and movement (Figure 6 - 8.). I then threw these acetate remnants into the air and re-photograph them without looking through the viewfinder or at the screen. Inspired by elements of repetition and chance, the resulting images were abstracted representations of the original photographs. The reproduction and manipulation of the source image of the sky, to the abstracted gum bichromate photographs, questioned what the image really was.

The Photoshop Editing

After re-photographing scraps of images, the second filtering device was Photoshop. In using Photoshop as a tool for changing, altering and shaping an image, I stretched, cropped and pushed the digital file into dissonant planes. This improvised approach was

influenced by my experience and thoughts on making noise music, which will be discussed in later chapters. I also lived in the unencumbered Joshua Tree, CA, where I had the freedom to blunder in the hazy sun, far from academic pressures. This private space opened up a new direction for my work, using technology for art and sound.

Gum Bichromate Printing

The final process is gum bichromate printing. Gum bichromate printing requires the mixing of a two part chemical base (one part gum arabic and one part potassium bichromate) with watercolor pigment. Once mixed, the solution is then coated onto a paper surface, allowed to dry and exposed to UV light. The process is akin to making a cyanotype or a van dyke print, except in that the use of watercolor pigment allows a range of colors. The coating process itself is both physically engaging and requires a sensitivity to application. The results are known to be temperamental. I primarily made solar exposures, and the time of each exposure was particular to the month, the day, the time of day, and the type of cloud coverage. For example, an exposure at noon in the middle of July, in full sun, in Joshua Tree was around 45 seconds, and an exposure at noon in December, in full sun in Joshua Tree, was about 7 minutes. Considering the variables, I developed an intuitive exposure reading based on multiple tests and prints that I had been making over the course of a year, which was less rigid than a structured technical printing method. The gum bichromate photographs are made from paper negatives, digitally printed by splitting the color channels into CMYK (Figure 9 – 12.). I printed each negative in separate layers to build a four-color print. Each print is roughly 36” x 51”, and working at this scale with this type of printing presented a series of

difficulties. In response, there was a certain amount of letting go that was required. I accepted offset registration; scratch marks and chemical bleed, embracing them as unavoidable characteristics and the residue of a lived physical experience (Figure 13. - 17.).

IMAGE AND SPACE

In the case of the transcendent, the mystery is what promises to unveil itself in the wake of the apocalyptic passing of reality. With this enigma, the self faces its limit, envisions the end of worlds in order to escape their tyranny. Transformation means the rupture of the ordinary domains and patterns of authority. The dense cityscape of doxa that conduct the traffic of thought. Transformation portends the possibility of an alternative self and social order, while enigma preserves a radical open-endedness, vigorously resists perfection in the sense of ontological completion or metaphysical resolution. But in either mystery or enigma, transcendence or transformation, something must die in order for something new to live. Death and rebirth and their dialectic of conflict are the characteristic moments of the human self and the principle features of spirituality and its artistic evocation.

David Morgan, *Secret Wisdom and Self-Effacement: The Spiritual in the Modern Age*

The acrylic box in *Located at O' and A'* is a hand-made frame that at the standardized size 16" x 20" (Figure 18.). The work is reductive and is a container of only air, light and shadow. The transparency allows light to pass through and then reflects the viewer's image, but as a framing device the work is empty. There is no image and there is nothing physical to hold on to. There is only a surface to look through, a white supporting wall and the shadows cast from the frame's edges.

Leading up to the acrylic box, I explored image and space in a series of freestanding columns made from inkjet prints on transparent polypropylene (Figure 19 - 22.). At the time I was thinking about air and space as positive form, with volume and mass. I was interested in how the camera and a digital interface ultimately fails to access the idea of the infinite. Touching on these ideas, I took color samples from photographs of the sky and printed them on swaths of acetate. I also printed a photograph from the Hubble space telescope and a photograph of the sun coming through venetian blinds. The prints were then rolled into sculptures and are semi-transparent containers. Within the context of the exhibition, this reductive acrylic box as a container is a visual point of contrast from the additive wooden sculpture and gum bichromate prints.

SOUND AND INTIMACY

At the appointed time, necessities become ripe. That is the time when the Creative Spirit (which one can also designate as the Abstract Spirit) finds an avenue to the soul, later to other souls, and causes a yearning, an inner urge. This yearning—this inner urge—acquires the power to create in the human spirit a new value, which, consciously or unconsciously, begins to live in the human being. From this moment on, consciously or unconsciously, the human being seeks to find a material form for the new value, which already lives within him in spiritual form. In this process, the spiritual value, searching for a form of materialization, finds matter. Matter is merely a storeroom. It is from this storeroom, that the spirit chooses what is specifically necessary for it to reveal itself—just as a cook chooses what he needs from a pantry.

Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*.

Circle and Tonic is a split channeled sound piece in a 1:59 minute loop. In the exhibition the digital file was played through two headsets, in a partitioned space for semi-private listening (Figure 33.). When played, a white noise fades in and out, in an audible circular

looping. The sonic sensation has been described as restful for some listeners and unsettling for others.

The left channel is a recording of my finger circulating around the edge of my left ear and the right channel is a recording of a mirroring motion around the right ear. To make the recording I placed my cell phone against my cheek, turned on the voice memo application and performed this simple gesture. After recording both the left and right tracks, the sound was post-edited in Final Cut. Using the sound editing portion of the video editing software, I overlapped the recordings and made moderate manipulations to the pattern, giving each channel specific peaks and valleys and altering the decibels and range.

What interested me in *Circle and Tonic* was the parallel between the sound of a finger touching the ear and that of a windstorm. This dichotomy becomes a metaphor for intimacy, and the listener is placed within that close mental space. On the one hand, you have the implications of touch therapy—such as auricular therapy—where the ear is thought to be a microsystem mirroring the whole body and where it is possible to treat physical, mental and emotional health by stimulating the surface of the ear. On the other hand, there is the powerful and psychological charge of a windstorm. Together, these contrasting phenomenon's reference the inner world and outer worlds in simulation to one another.

CONCLUSION

The work I have completed during my three-year investigation at the University of California Riverside are unified in their connection to process and image. It has been my intention to use my time in graduate school to quickly move through ideas, so that upon completion, I can continue to pursue any of these thematic tendrils, with each one offering further potential. In the future, it is possible that I will expand on how an image can be re-casted through alteration and medium, and I will further formalize new inquiries with sound and phenomenology. In reflection, I have learned the importance of developing a practice that functions both *in the studio* in terms of rigorous production, and *outside the studio* through experience and context.

Ultimately, I have always felt like I was looking for something and not understanding what that thing was. This vague unknowing and act of searching has often propelled me to work in the loose and inspired manner that I do. Learning can be a continuous process of undoing what is familiar and rebuilding from a place of total openness. This idea of death and rebirth and how they tie into mystic traditions on the paths to self discovery are part of this. Moving to Joshua Tree for last two years of my graduate school experience shifted my focus and attention away from the full immersion within the institution. Along with the on-campus studio, I began to use my time living in the desert—a new landscape—as a resource and place of work. The contrast between a studio within academia, and a house in the desert, set up a number of challenges. I plan on further developing my criticality through research, conversations, and studio practice, and exposing myself to more art within and beyond the university setting.

The role of experimentation, creativity and play will stay pertinent to my practice, but I will continue to discover the heart of what drives me and the relevancy of how and why I am working. The research and experimentation that I have completed during my three-year investigation in graduate school are only the beginning.

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Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.

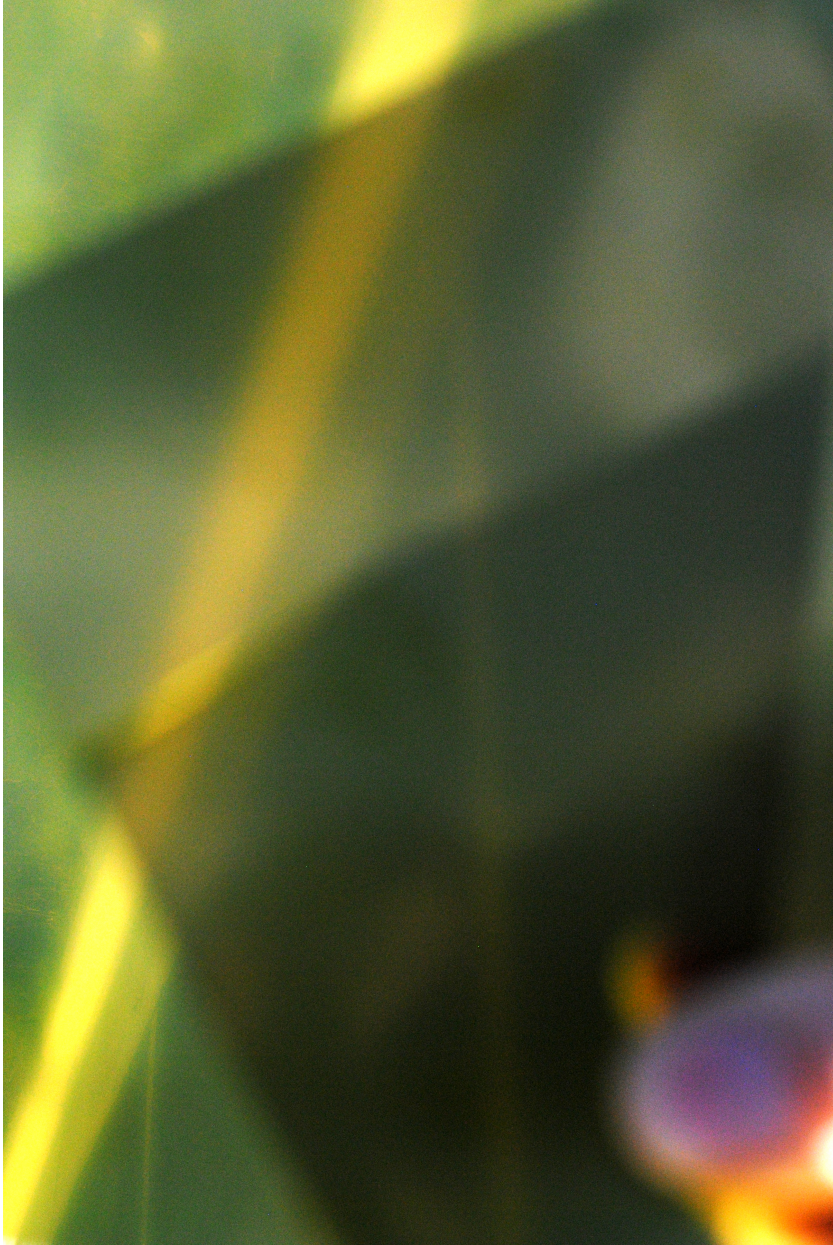


Figure 9.



Figure 10.



Figure 11.



Figure 12.



Figure 13.

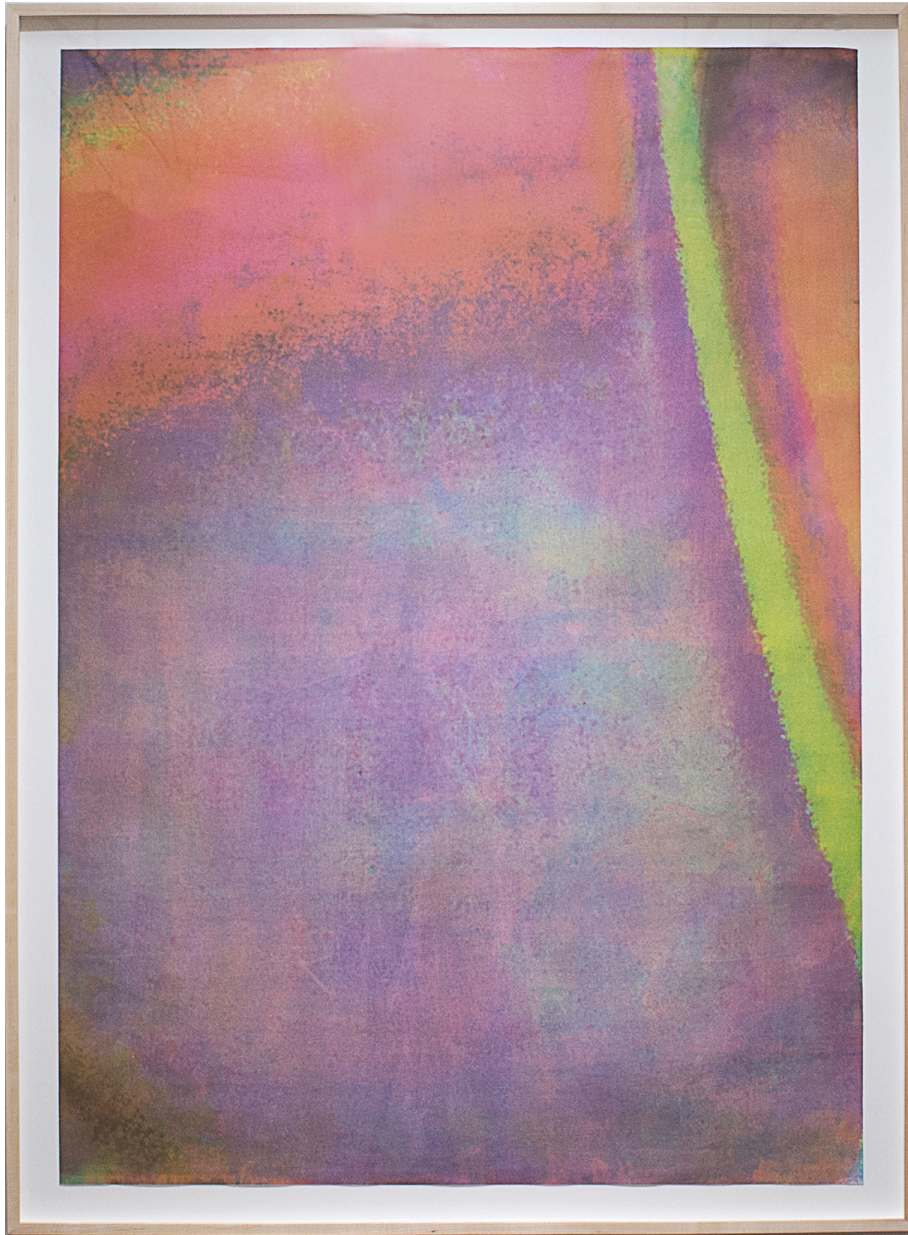


Figure 14.

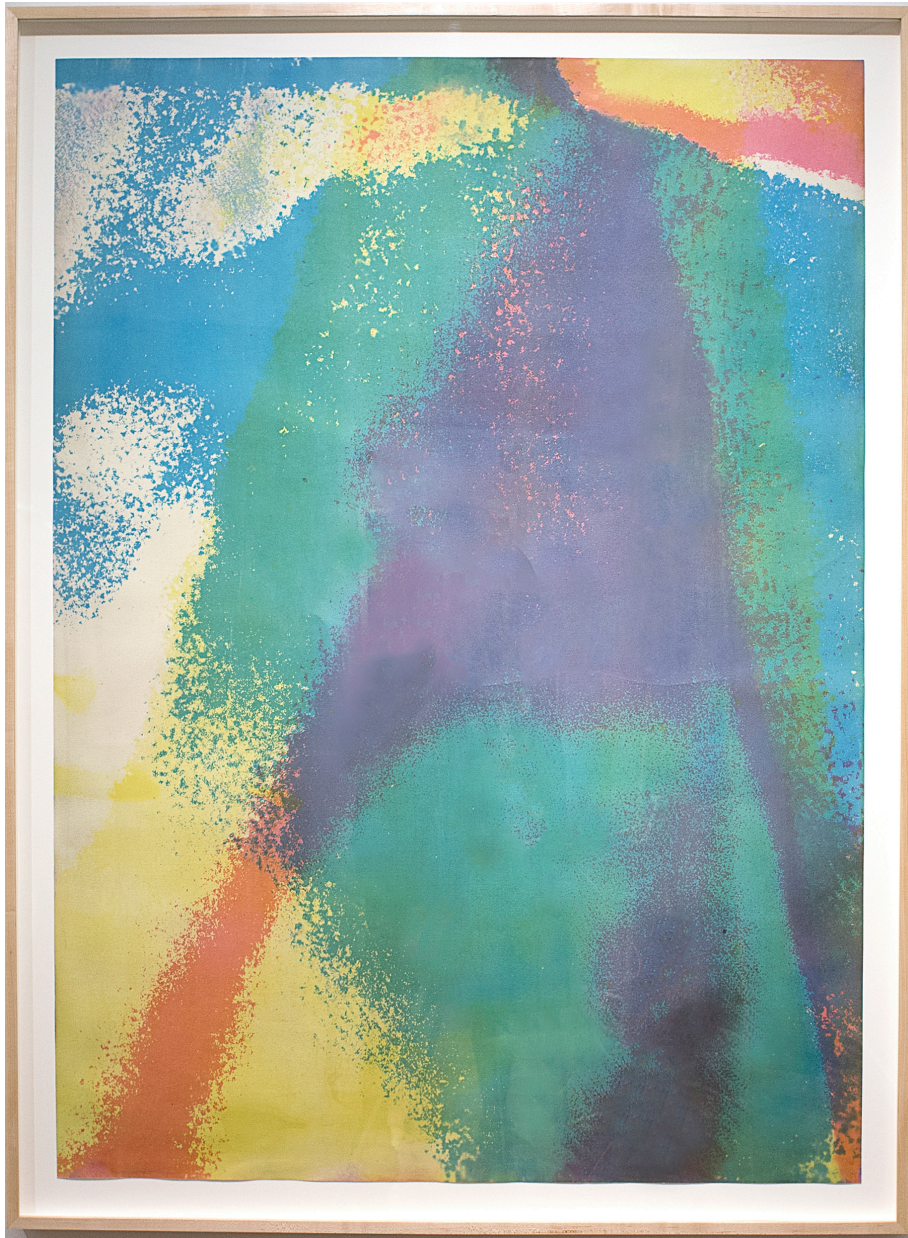


Figure 15.



Figure 16.



Figure 17.



Figure 18.



Figure 19.



Figure 20.



Figure 21.

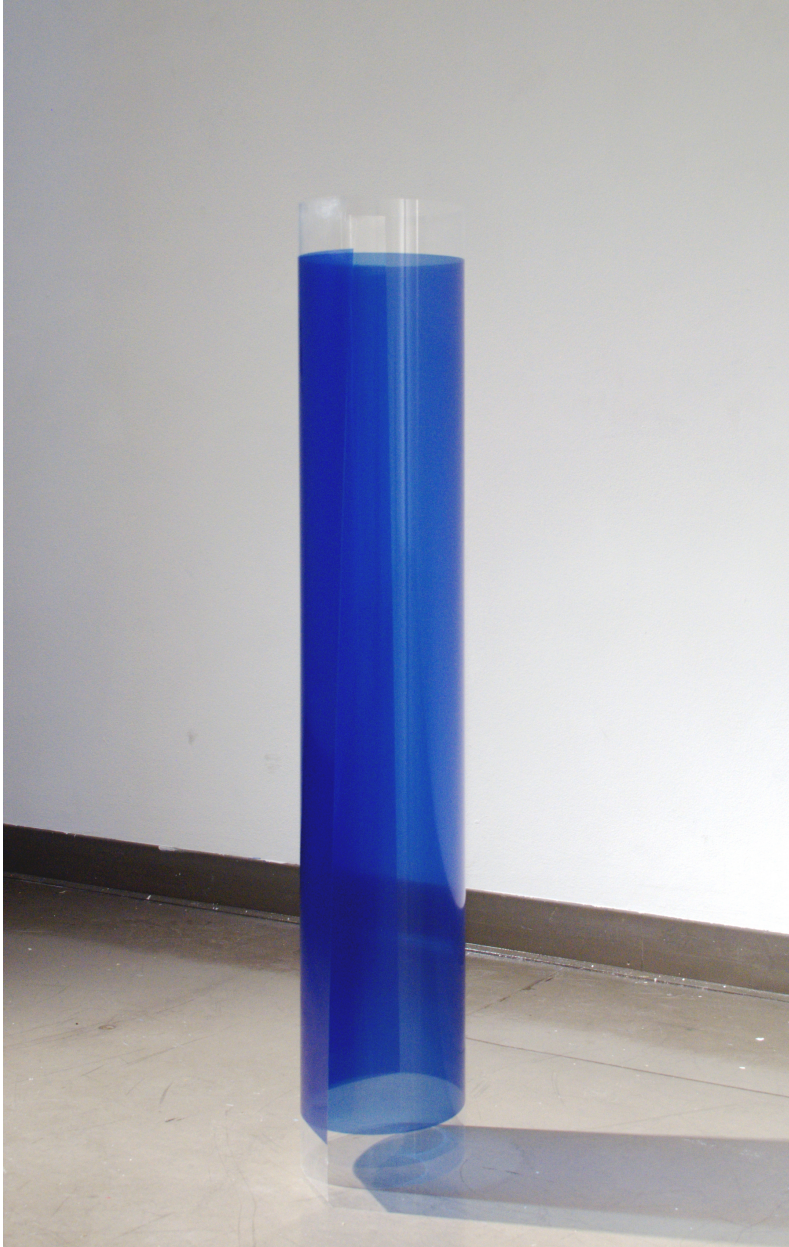


Figure 22.



Figure 23.

