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Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Metaphysical Subtleties

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

Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Art

by

Hannah Kit Karsen

Thesis Committee:

Professor Brandon Lattu, Chairperson
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Professor Charles Long
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The Thesis of Hannah Kit Karsen is approved:

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“And I seem to myself like a photographic plate which is exposed too long, in that I still lie open to what is here, this powerful influence.”¹ Rainer Maria Rilke

“And if what we see when we look at a photographic image is unalterable, then there is only one thing we can do: take ‘what is dead’ or ‘going to die’ into our ‘arms’.”² Georges Potonniee

¹ Kaja Silverman, *The Miracle of Analogy or The History of Photography, Part 1* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 115.

² *Ibid.*, 4.

My work concerns itself primarily in an investigation of the boundaries and limitations of sentimentalism. Beauty stems from this consideration and inquiry rather than being addressed as a primary concern. I'm interested in the ontological emptiness of spaces in the periphery- both the intimacy and regard, and the ephemera of occurrences. The images I make deal with encounter and presence but also a relationship of distance and duration. The sensibility of this overlap speaks to an indexicality of sentimentalism.

Part of my interest in sentimentalism stems from research into the work of Bas Jan Ader. My most recent line of focus led me to think about his handwriting. It seemed like an overlooked element to address, instead of trying again and still to decide on a degree of sincerity and truth in his work. Focusing on text in this way led me to address Ader's work which appears through photography- both as primary medium or documentation of installation and performance work. His handwriting remains inseparable to the totality of the work, either presented on the physical photograph, or cemented there through photographic documentation.

The discrete aspects of handwriting in Ader's work addresses sentimentalism in a direct yet finite manner. 'Please don't leave me'.... 'I'm too sad to tell you'... 'Thoughts unsaid, then forgotten.' It is when considering the totality of these declarations that a more tangible pathos can be arrived at. The totality of the relationship and interplay between work, each relating to loss and temporality idiosyncratically.

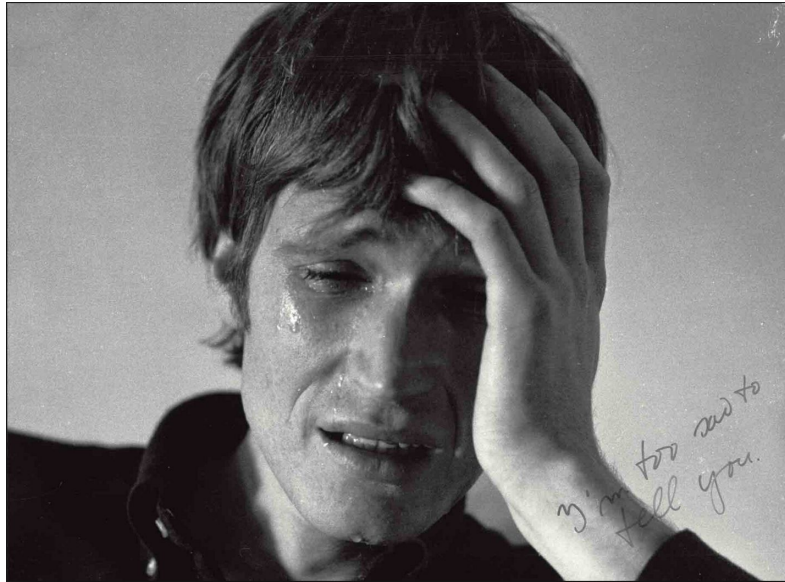


Figure 1- Bas Jan Ader, I'm too sad to tell you, 1970

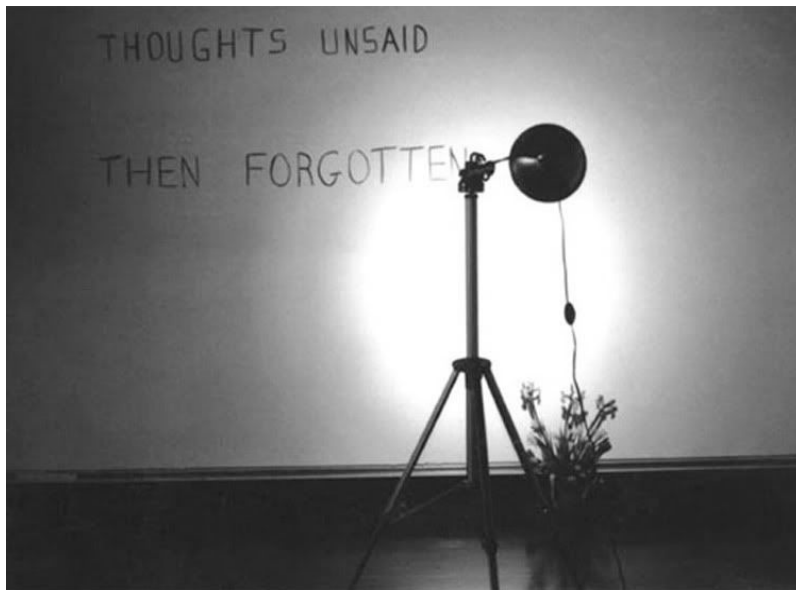


Figure 2 - Bas Jan Ader, thoughts unsaid, then forgotten., 1973

It is here that I will say that I use sentimental over nostalgia for my work in exploring an index of encounter. Sentiment holds place for nostalgia without being so encumbered, there is more fluidity with sentiment than nostalgia. Sentiment deals with the present in a way that speaks closer to my relationship with photography and how I think my photographs function. It is also with a consideration of looking at and understanding subject matter often as something fleeting but recurring. The pathos that my work utilizes relies on a feeling of ontological emptiness, intimacy, boundary.

One's subjectivity and a self-referential model can be represented through various means of exploration of boundary. In doing this research, I was caused to think about the variation of self-referential forms, specifically for, *Thoughts unsaid then forgotten*, a work executed in 1973, in which Bas Jan Ader sent instructions from California to the students at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax to perform. Bas Jan Ader clearly articulated all the components of this performance in a handwritten note. In exchange he received a polaroid of the installation, which is what survives of the work.

This installation/performance, consisted of an oil stick, tripod, clamp-on lamp, flowers, and vase as the materials, performed per Ader's instructions. The details outlined that the installation "should exist on a large, sparsely lit, white wall, in which the text 'THOUGHTS UNSAID, THEN FORGOTTEN.' should be painted (by hand) in light grey-blue letters. This work lasted one week, during which time the instructions outlined that after a few days the wall should be repainted, that the printed words should be obliterated, but that the flowers and light should remain undisturbed."³

In his note, Ader gave clear instructions as to the dimensions of the text, their calculated relationship to one another, as well as the floor, and additionally requested that the text be executed in a specific color, grey-blue. Ader also articulates where the flowers should be in relationship to the text, that no roses should be used, how the wall should be lit, and how it should remain lit even after the text is obliterated.⁴

The specificity of this installation, with attention to both location and performative aspects, relies on a set temporality to unfold both in terms of duration but also within the

³ Wade Saunders, "In dreams Begin Responsibilities", *Art in America*, February 2004, 62.

⁴ Rein Wolfs. *Bas Jan Ader: Please don't leave me*, (The Netherlands: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2006), 100.

materiality of the components. In 2003 Galerie Crousel incomprehensibly re-created Ader's installations, concretizing forms where they had only existed as a trace, a photographic documentation of a moment. "The installation created by painter Editions is wrong... this piece has black letters, no punctuation, was shown in an art gallery, and does not change in the ways Ader specified. In Paris the letters were in place for the whole show... and the flowers were replaced twice a week."⁵

Of all the discrepancies within this reperformance, the replacement of the flowers, twice weekly, stood out to me as the most incongruous aspect. The flowers were made to represent a false ideal, against which Ader was positioning the work. Moving beyond dwelling in the posthumous reinterpretation, finding myself here caused me to think about flowers as a medium for Ader, and their presence in many of his other works. This quickly branched into thinking about Christopher Williams' piece for Bas Jan Ader, which led me on a different inquiry, considering the use of and language around flowers for many different artists.



Figure 3- Bas Jan Ader, Documentation from filming of Fall II, Amsterdam, 1970

⁵ Wade Saunders, "In dreams Begin Responsibilities", *Art in America*, February 2004, 62.



Figure 4 - Christopher Williams, Bouquet, for Bas Jan Ader and Christopher D'Arcangelo, 1991



Figure 5- Bas Jan Ader, detail from Untitled (Flower work), 1974



Figure 6- Untitled (flowers), archival pigment print, 2015

What was at the center of the inquiry was an interest in trying to locate the ways in which flowers act in a work. The regard for them goes into thinking about the way in which they are offered to the viewer, and how we begin to interpret that. Christopher Williams' piece, consisting of a single framed photograph of flowers supported by a freestanding white wall is titled specifically for Bas Jan Ader and to Christopher D'Arcangelo, pointing to the nature of their work, their untimely deaths. A memorial for the self-erasing.

Timothy Martin asserts that "although his work has often been reviewed as a critique of bourgeois museology- Williams is not a polemical artist. He lacks the polemicist's talent for self-simplification, and is generally more interested in the tainted evidence and marginalia that would confound a polemic than the smoking guns and rhetoric that would best prosecute one... [his work] frequently speak another language entirely, a language of buried anecdotes and sardonic visual beauty. Bouquet ostensibly mourns the premature deaths in the late 1970s of the two little-known conceptual artists named in the title."⁶ While many of Ader's works are self-referential, Martin identifies that

⁶ Timothy Martin, *Undressing the Institutional Wound*, Christopher Williams: For Example: Die Welt ist schon (Final Draft), ed. Karel Schampers. (Netherlands, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 1997) 15.

they deal also with 'self abnegation and sentimentality' citing primary time in which Ader arranges and rearranges a bouquet of primary-colored flowers, and the video works of him falling. While many of Ader's constructs are self-referential, it is with abnegation.



Figure 7 - Bas Jan Ader, detail from *Untitled (Flower work)*, 1974

The photograph I made of the shadow of flowers, *Untitled (flowers)*, was in consideration of the trajectory of my research, and my feelings associated with it. The framing abnegates the subject, but the title reasserts its importance. The specificity of the color of the flowers is negated by being depicted in monochrome. This decision was made in thinking about how powerful color signifiers can be. I utilized the leica monochrom, a digital camera that produces only black and white photographs, in which the sensor is supposedly made to be more sensitive because of this attribute. Flowers depicted in this way dealt with considering language dealing with emotion.

The language of flowers has fallen away, but they at one time were imbued with various and specific meaning depending on what kind and color of flower were given. I mean to say that flowers still hold a specific meaning, but not as they once were made to do. This is something I thought about broadly when Bas Jan Ader specified no roses for the installation of *thoughts unsaid then forgotten*. I thought about this more specifically

when looking at Tameka Norris' use of roses in her series of Post Katrina self portraits in which a cardboard cutout of herself is presenting them to the viewer.

In Joel Meyerowitz's series, *Wild Flowers*, though, I think more about what those flowers are intended for, who they are intended for, as he tries to explore the relationship between people and flowers. Something that Taryn Simon has explicitly muted in her recent series *Paperwork and the Will of Capital*, examining treaties and decrees drafted to influence systems of governance- studying images of powerful men flanked by floral centerpieces to underscore the importance of the meeting. Her work in recreating these bouquets addresses a global consumer market of flowers to create 'impossible bouquets'⁷. Patriarchy stands as a more direct footing⁸, whereby executive decision making and documentation operating in classified zones is described.

Thinking about flowers deals also with thinking about a specific language- which manifested initially in trying to look into flower dictionaries, but more pointedly in pulling at color articles in the Cabinet magazine tackling 'bittersweet' or 'rose'- as part of this inquiry. "Color conducts emotion. We feel blue, see red....but when pleasure is clouded by pain, we don't call the experience 'bittersweet' because it attunes us to a reddish-orange.... but bittersweet is a feeling"⁹ A feeling, I think, that is so tied within flower giving. Or, how actually wearing rose-colored lenses makes the natural world a putrid and lurid experience in the end. "Looking through rose was increasingly laborious...now i thought with some confusion about the temperature of color very often, and next I began to lose the conceptual ability to distinguish warm from cool."¹⁰

Flowers remain a sign for the pathos of an inability to say something fully, or not having the chance to say it at all. They present tenderness at appropriate times, marking a moment, a physical manifestation of sentiment. The article on rose ends with acknowledging despite the trying experience 'it would be this insistent stratum of

⁷ This has ties to seventeenth century Dutch still-life paintings in which 'impossible bouquet's stood as an artificial fantasy of flowers that could never bloom naturally in the same season and geographic location, representing economic boom. "Taryn Simon: Paperwork and The Will of Capital", <http://www.gagosian.com/exhibitions/taryn-simon--february-18-2016>. Though, Jan van Huysum (which I believe is who this directly refers to) completed paintings over the course of one or two years to achieve this through careful study.

⁸ "These flowers sat between powerful men as they signed agreements designed to influence the fate of the world.—Taryn Simon" (Ibid.)

⁹ Andrea K. Scott, "Colors/ Bittersweet: Spirit twisted" Cabinet, Winter 2013/ 2014, issue 52, 8.

¹⁰ Lisa Robertson, "Colors/ Rose: A carnal becoming" Cabinet, Winter 2012-2013, issue 48, 7.

mortality and pathos that would found my lightest, most evanescent attachments.”¹¹ We hold attachments despite mortality and in acknowledgement of their inevitable paths.



Figure 8- Tameka Norris, Post Katrina Self-Portrait, 2008



Figure 9- Joel Meyerowitz, Wild Flowers, 1983

¹¹ Ibid.



Figure 10- Taryn Simon, Paperwork and the Will of Capital, (Image of forthcoming published catalog), 2015

Collective Actions has a large part in an interest in thinking about the limitations of sentimentalism as well. Collective Actions, active in Moscow from the mid-1970s onwards, was formed from the first generation of Moscow Conceptualists. Andrei Monastyrsky, a central theorist of the group, describes that the earlier works were perceived as a form of poetry reading. In fact, the slogan work mentioned is cited from a book authored by Monastyrsky titled *Nothing Happens*.

While the group continues to produce works, their initial works share a standard format that begins to loosen in 1989. The usual format follows as such, "A group of fifteen to twenty participants were invited by telephone to take a train to a designated station outside Moscow; they would walk from the station to a remote field; the group would wait around (not knowing what would happen), before witnessing a minimal, perhaps mysterious, and often visually unremarkable event. On returning to Moscow, participants would write an account of the experience and offer interpretations of its meaning; these subsequently became the focus of discussion and debate amongst the group."¹² Monastyrski set to complicate this paradigm in ways to produce situations in which participants had no idea what was going to happen, at times finding it difficult to know if they had in fact experienced an action, and where to expect it to occur.

Being present and understanding a certain distance is how I've come to understand limitations of emotion or feeling, how that also comes to impart a work. I imagine in many of these works an emptiness was palpable, both in terms of grasping at a landscape to sustain one's practice, but also in trying to connect visually to one's surroundings and its subtleties. These are things I've experienced in my practice, especially moving from the series of trail photographs and trying to bring that feeling into the next work. The trace of sentimentality held so concretely in the trail photographs seemed to be a dead end after completing that body of work, even when returning to that location and making more photographs of the space, trying to understand it or receive something from it again.

¹² Claire Bishop "Zones of Indistinguishability: The Collective Actions Group and Participatory Art" in *Empty Zones: Andrei Monastyrski and Collective Actions*, ed. Boris Groys (London :Black Dog Publishing, 2011), 10.

The role of the empty field should be carefully considered as an inseparable element to CA's works. Groys outlines its role as a parallel to Kazimir Malevich, in which the minimal aesthetic of the action and the reductionist field was impossible to ignore. The indeterminate nature of the duration of the action is important in believing that a suspension is available to the participants by which they may experience a sense of confounder and contemplation during their movement within the action.

This shift of this paradigm includes anticipation in a way that introduces temporality away from pure presence into a relationship including and of distance. Empty action is something that Monastyrski uses to speak of these performances. It does not have a certain, clearly defined, time and space or communicate a certain, fixed meaning.¹³ Boris Groys defines this further in term of creating an open, empty, zero space. This often is highlighted in relationship to the landscape, and the blankness of the field during winter, in which many of the actions took place.

In introducing the work further, Groys substantiates the claim of empty zones by speaking to everyday life. We tend to overlook, ignore or forget the ontological emptiness of the space in which we move.¹⁴ Empty zones and spaces don't just present on white fields or planes, but can also be cultivated on interior walls and freeway underpasses, the space of darkened horizon lines and palpably textured surfaces of objects.

The group theorized the types of spaces they were setting up in terms of various zones, which were considered for each action. Monastyrski writes that "in our actions it is specifically the exhibitory field that is examined, whilst the demonstrative field (the artistic event itself) is posited as a system of observational positions, 'viewing platforms', from which the contemplation of exhibitory spaces takes place."¹⁵ This clarification becomes complicated in Groys likening this field directly to Malevich's suprematist paintings.

¹³ Boris Groys, "Art Clearings" in *Empty Zones: Andrei Monastyrski and Collective Actions*, ed. Boris Groys (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2011), 7.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Andrei Monastyrski, "Collective Actions and Trips out of Town: The Aesthetics of Collective Actions" in *Empty Zones: Andrei Monastyrski and Collective Actions*, ed. Boris Groys, (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2011) 72.



Figure 11- Collective Actions, Gazing at the waterfall, documentary photograph, 1981



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Figure 12- Collective Actions, Gazing at the waterfall, documentary photograph, 1981

¹⁶ (Description of action) The invited guests gathered at a snowy field. For the next 7 minutes N. Panitkov ran across the field at various speeds and directions, stopping and falling from time to time. Finally he stopped and stood in the middle of the field with his hat in hands for 3 minutes. Meanwhile the viewers were given replicas of a 15th century Chinese artist Fen Xi 'Looking at a waterfall'. Later it became understood that Panitkov's footprints on the snow duplicated the picture's pattern.

"Collective Actions. The descriptions, photo, video and audio of all the actions",
<http://conceptualism.letov.ru/KD-ACTIONS.htm>.

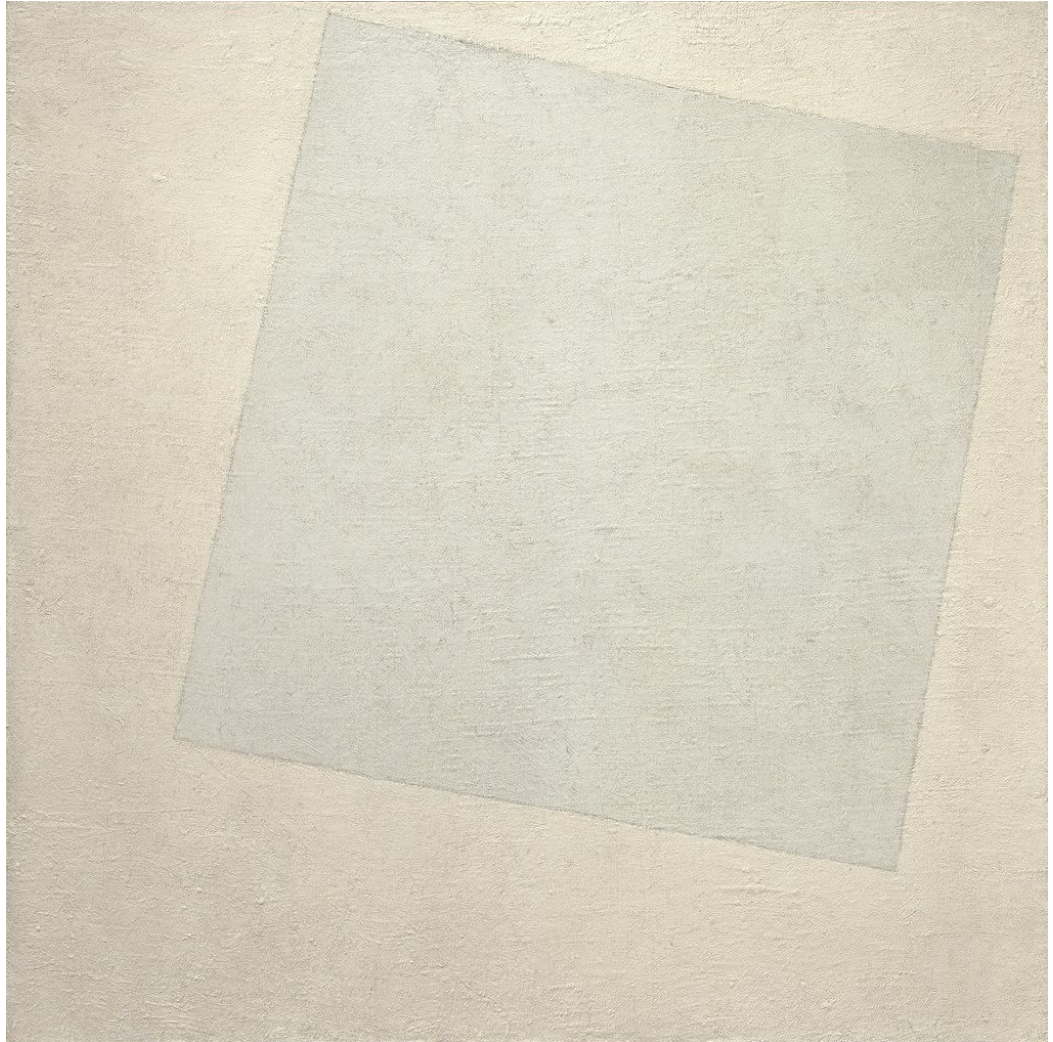


Figure 13- Kazimir Malevich, Suprematist Composition: White on White, Oil on canvas, 1918

While this claim can be understood in a certain way, it has always struck me as an easily passable consideration of the complicated totality of the action Collective Actions was outlining. It discredits the ontological empty spaces set up beyond this field, informing and becoming as much a part of the performance as the field seems to be. It also disregards how the element of their occurrence impacts one's notion of the landscape, and how one comes to relate to the landscape. How one is able to move and navigate it, relate one's body to it, anticipate and even allow myths and narratives to occur.

The Marfa lights, with the breadth of descriptions of their various encounters is important to understand as it relates to my interest in photographing them. What is so often not thought of in the work of Collective Actions is the discussion toward meaning, of trying to understand what happened, and how something occurred. I also became interested in the notion of the viewing platform for the Marfa lights- in part due to the way in which Collective Actions talked about various viewing platforms in their work- to both facilitate an expectation of something to occur, and the specificity of the set location to view it from. These trail photographs as a mark of found abstraction- in a way that the Marfa lights might be as well, deal with this notion, considering the spaces in which we move within- that are designated, delineated.

I went to Marfa this past summer in hopes of photographing the Marfa lights for my thesis exhibition, figuring two weeks would be about enough time to do so. I had thoughts before going on how this could relate back to my interest and research into Collective Actions- mostly by way of a participatory suspension, operating on an expected action, or gesture. Their work and this phenomena deal with perception in a way that I am interested in.

The notion of going to photograph the lights deals also with an interest in the landscape, more specifically relating to a recent body of work that studied a line of a trail in the landscape. That series took its title from a slogan work done by the group (Collective Actions), my first introduction to their work, and a piece I think about very often. *Although I have never been here before and know nothing about this place.* The seven photographs that aggregate my series are made of and on the same trail. This series is one in which I look at the delicate nature of line and ground- as a suggestion of

landscape as body, as gold necklace, as abstract marker of dimension, as a palpable sense of a certain softness, as a relationship, as a trace that becomes faint- and inquiry to grasp at new definitions of thresholds, instead of boundaries.



Figure 14- Untitled, (from although I have never been here before and know nothing about this place), archival pigment print, 2014



Figure 15, Collective Actions, Slogan,1977



Figure 16, Helen Frankenthaler, spaced out orbit,1973

The readiness for something to happen transitioned into a readiness for a mark in a way- an unexpected shift in attention due in part by the words of Nikky Finney, whose residency in Marfa overlapped with my time there. Finney presented a yet to be published work, *Ode to the Daystar*, and spoke bluntly about the importance of working on paper. She explained this choice by speaking about how easy it is [when working on a computer] to lose your attempts, to dismiss your drafting. Holding on to the copies she erases and works through, the poem retains the stages of her writing. I imagine this as a sort of orbit, circulating something you are tracing out, trying to perceive its direction.

I also related this notion to the tendencies and sensibilities that hold me in a certain type of looking. A quick documentation that stands in for an encounter which stems from waiting, observing, tracing- in a certain way. Finney spoke about a necessity for a quality of light when writing, identifying an embarrassingly large number of lamps in her home. The control of the physical light on the physical piece of paper was something I could understand. At the time I thought about my photographing traces of light on film, and the record of this imprint being important to me.

“I pay close attention to how fresh my eyes might be able to see and feel something they have seen a hundred times before.”¹⁷

Finney spoke passionately about the blankness of a page, how the feeling of it changes, how she pays attention to it to sustain her writing. The blankness mirrors what I imagine Collective Actions was trying to understand in a way as well, through empty spaces, the empty field. And also was Bas Jan Ader was allowing for the flowers in *thoughts unsaid then forgotten*- a place for something to be held onto, to be considered and felt. The embodiment of these spaces, the paying attention to that, is where sentimentalism draws a line between all of these works. The sensibility of a subjectivity is what becomes heightened, what the work is made to be about.

The installation of photographs in this exhibition, *drafts of a poem*, came from a holding on to of discrete moments. After returning from Marfa I held on to photographs made in that space unsure of their direction, keeping them on the wall of my studio as I

¹⁷ Nikky Finney, *Ode to the Daystar*, Carolina Writers at Home, (Hub City Press, 2015), 31.

worked on a different body of work, *a number of times* (addressed later). What I have held on to has developed over a period of time into what remains, a drafting toward a shared sensibility, and a desire for these moments to still be considered.

There exists within this work a certain characteristic of softness and fragility, and of temporary encounter. Something that I experienced in Marfa despite the harsh and unfamiliar landscape. The space these photographs inhabit is intimate, only a few people can move through the space at one time. The photographs overall are smaller than how I've presented my work before, asking for another kind of closeness. Composing negative space in the way I have done with this small space feels akin to writing, or drafting.

Other photographs of different spaces became added over time. Through a drafting of a selection of work, the spaces hinted at began to share a sensibility of softness, having been marked, thinking about the hand, how something handwritten can feel.



Figure 17- Untitled (from drafts of a poem), archival pigment print, 2016



Figure 18- Untitled (from drafts of a poem), archival pigment print, 2016



Figure 19- Untitled (from drafts of a poem), archival pigment print, 2016

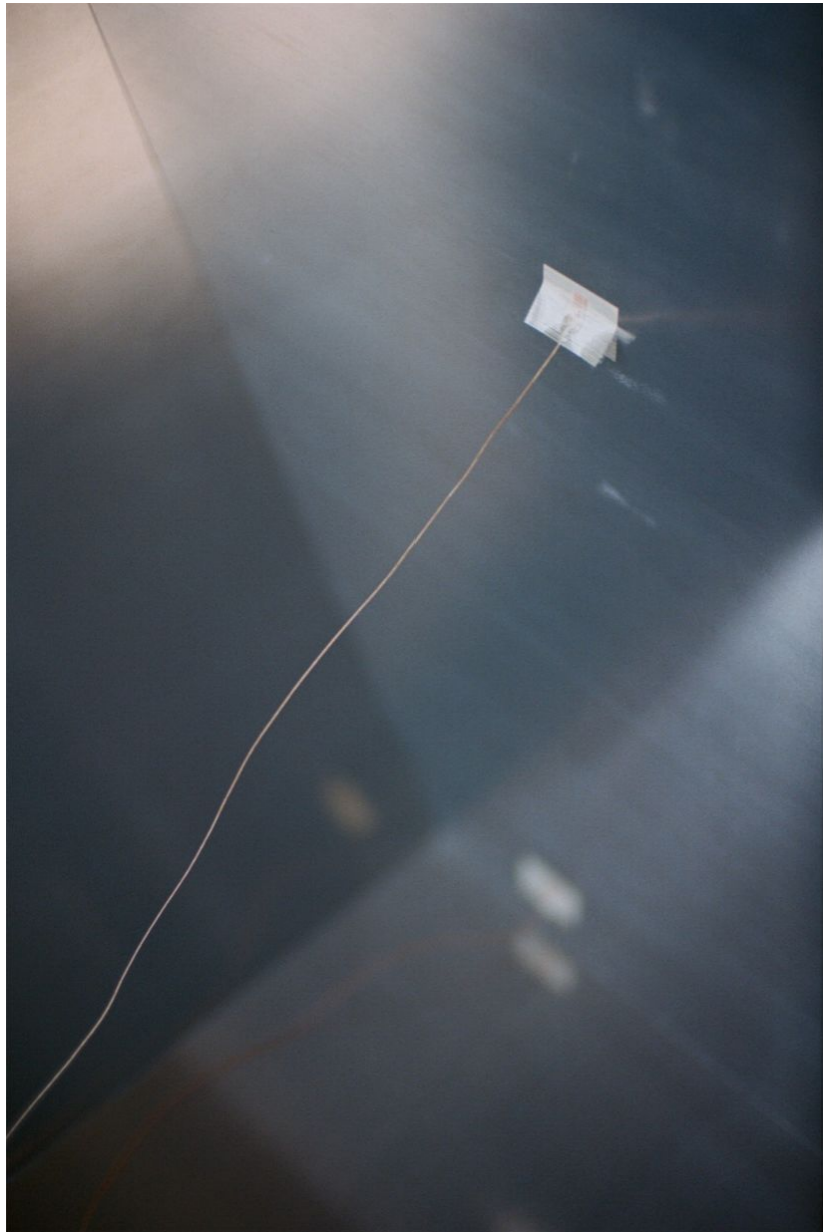


Figure 20- Untitled (from drafts of a poem), archival pigment print, 2016



Figure 21- Untitled (from drafts of a poem), archival pigment print, 2016

Mark making and marking one's place through various drafts was something I was trying to consider with these images. Moving from these, I can tie in an inquiry that persisted for some period of time, which led me to the next body of works. I had unexpectedly come upon two notes in separate books I had checked out from the library, which had probably served as bookmarks. One was an slim, old, faded blue construction piece of paper. The other was a handwritten note, written kind of in cursive, 'fruit and nuts'. Their appearance in the book was striking, forming relationships with the format of the book, with the text, and with images. Considering these notes as a found composition, I photographed them in the totality of their context. These notes link to an indexicality of use, of becoming marks through saving one's place in a certain page. The element of handwriting and the feeling of loss (though understanding the scrap nature of these pieces of paper), held a certain sentiment in consideration of these objects, placing focus on the relationship this held with someone previous.



Figure 22- Untitled, 2015

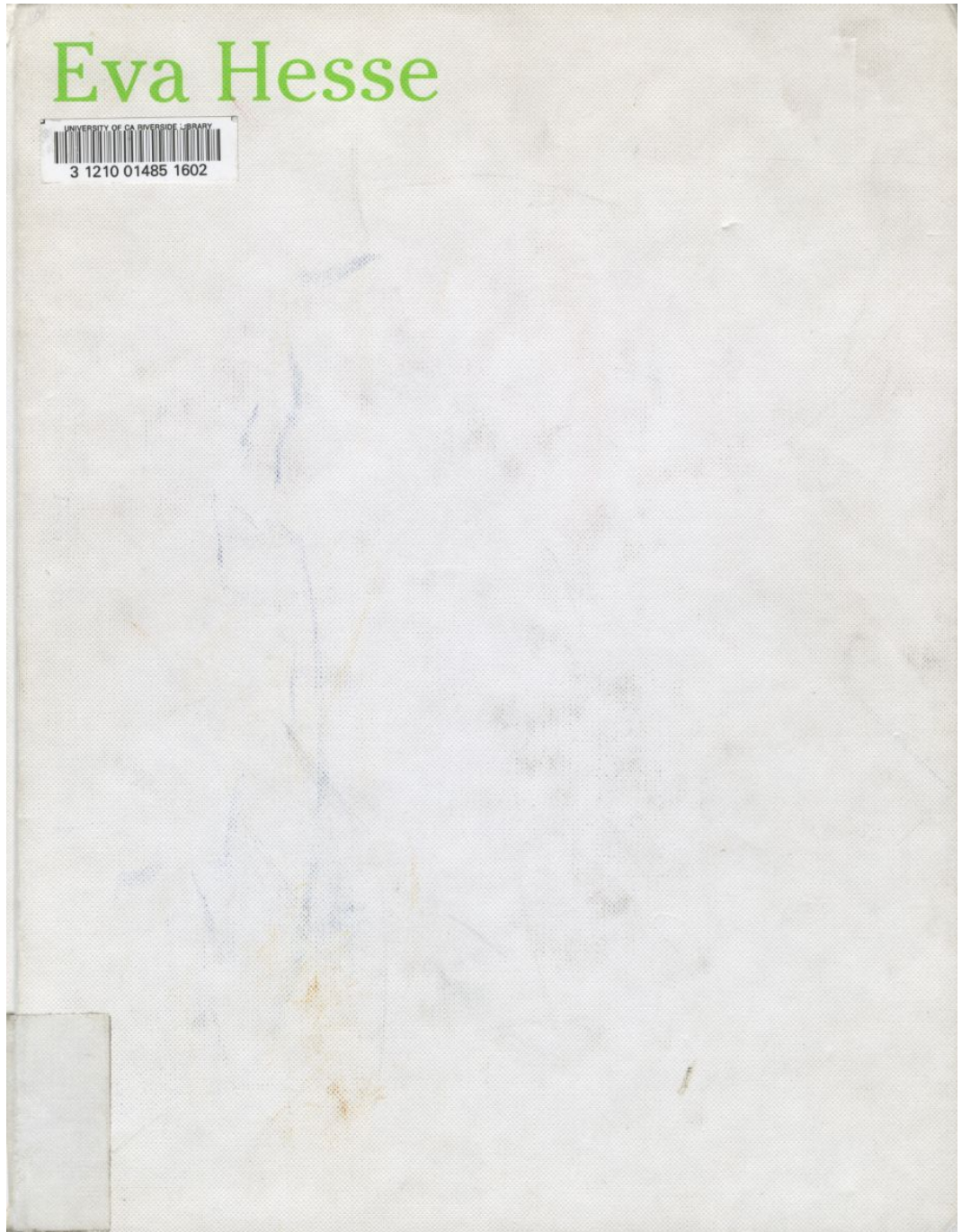


Figure 23, Untitled, archival pigment print, 2015

After hours spent sifting through pages hoping to find more handwritten notes, detritus of use, I came upon something else. The dingy pathos of white covered art books that have become marked over time. These white book covers are particularly vulnerable surfaces, especially so in public libraries. Finney's words were the first of which I drew from when thinking about these surfaces. Likening the surface of the book to the surface of a fresh, white piece of paper- holding a different kind of handwriting.

These found abstractions are kept within the materiality and texture on these surfaces, and hold the index of movement and use. I encountered these objects within a specific type of looking, a viewing platform that i've created, check them out as others have done, and scan the surface. Holding the imprint and accumulation of the mark in my photograph, i've marked a point in its orbit. Thinking about how I've used film in the past, I wanted the sensitized surface of the scanning bed and to utilize light to think about the physicality of this information. The texture of the fabric and the information that held was important to retain.

The record of these scanned surfaces of the books serve as documents of when I came upon them. The titles of these works further serves to address this, as I have researched how many times each book has been checked out, and used that number for the title of each piece. Citing a number for the title dealt with the object as it is used, circulated, addressing its state and discoloration in a way. The numbers were surprising to me to hold into account when looking at the amount of mark making that had occurred. It is with this information that I began to think about how this object was cared for and handled. The number addresses that they operate in a public and private space and are subjected and influenced, by these factors. It also holds a particular index speaking to a sentimentality I began to hold for these objects.

This numbering functioned over the title of the book as the title for these works, in a decision to disclude addressing the artists' work housed within. The focus is placed back on the covers that have become fields, abstractions. Though, I can't disregard the whiteness of my scope- both unintentionally with artists chosen, and intentionally with the surface color of these books. The decision for the white cover was arrived at despite finding numerous brilliantly colored book covers with marks that occupied space in this

type of looking. But white felt so fragile, and the readiness for a mark became so palpable.

In thinking about the fabric of these covers I used surface and skin to describe them, and carried this through when thinking about the paper chosen for the final prints. Choosing an inkjet paper one is made to think about the warmth or coolness of white, how well it can hold tonalities of the print, the subtleties of the subject matter. In choosing a Hahnemuhle paper as i've done, dealing with a surface structure, an element I wanted to emulate in thinking of the texture of these scanned surfaces, was also carefully thought about. The shift in paper type did not just deal with emulating a surface texture, but also transposed a presence for the print, imbuing a different quality to the print that felt more substantive. The prints felt as though they were reaching out of emulation and into a presentness of their own.

I've presented five photographs from this ongoing body of work, *a number of times*, in this exhibition and have meticulously considered presentation in a way I have not realized for my work before. The photographs are mounted to dibond, framed with white wash wood, and finished with museum glass. The effect of this presentation concretizes these marks in a poignant way- acknowledging accumulation, temporality, efflorescence.

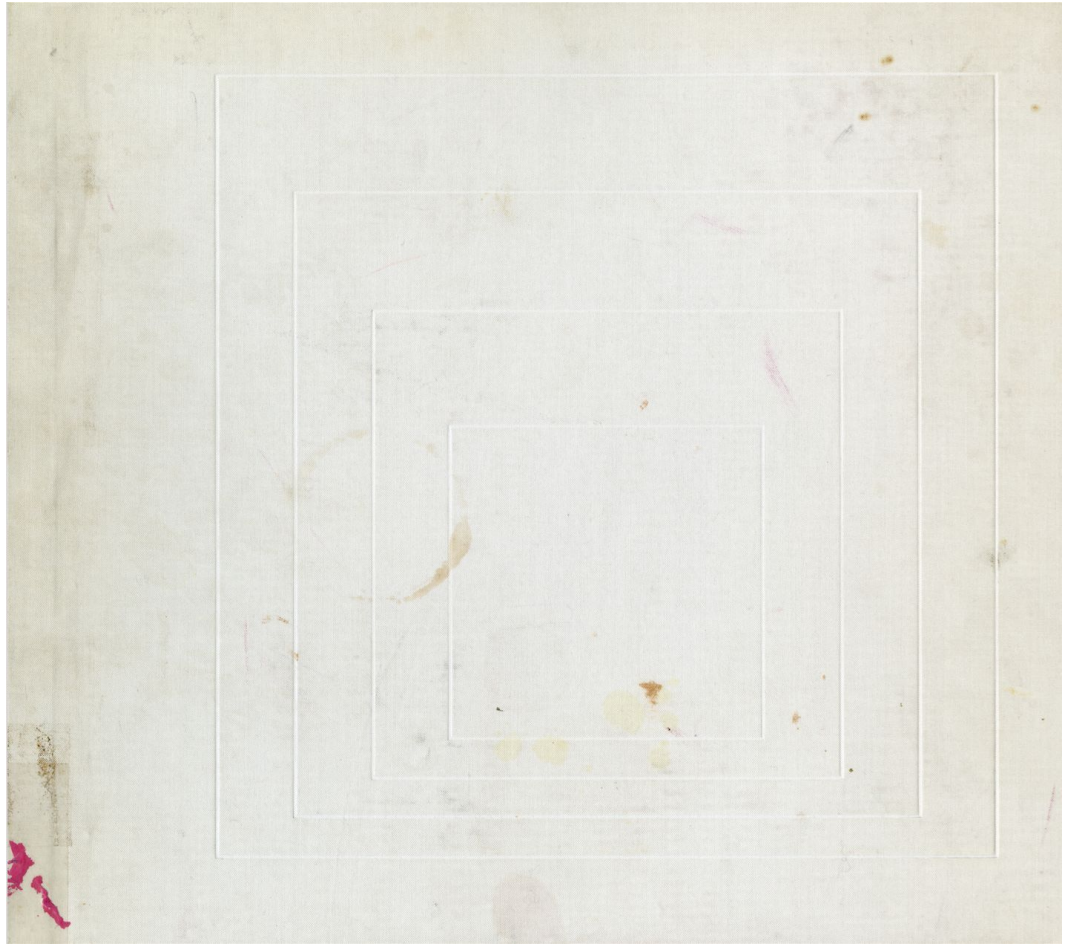


Figure 24, 2,(from a number of times), archival pigment print, 2016

These marks transitioned into thinking about finding or making a composition with marks and materials that weren't intended for use¹⁸. On the one hand I explored the physical materiality of flowers as a medium for mark making. This dealt with color and 'brush' and material in a way that alleviated choosing. It also seemed to me like a useful tool in trying to make an unintended or unexpected mark.

These flower drawings were created in a serial manner, in a watercolor sketchbook, moving quickly from one composition to the next. The watercolor pages smelled of this material for weeks after. A reminder of the flowers being life filled and decaying. The flowers become annihilated in one sense, but also memorialized. While these drawings still faintly retain this smell, it has faded- perhaps how their materiality will also fade over time.

The decision to scan these drawings was a consideration made both in wanting to keep these marks and monumentalize them. As I am unsure about the lightfast qualities of making drawings in this manner, scanning served as a way to record them, hold on to them. The decision to print them larger than actual scale came from a desire for these casual marks to be transposed and given a heavier visual weight.

¹⁸ This inquiry can further be traced back to my painting from an architectural plan for a house. Both in looking at that composition and being interested and drawn to it. And also of using an architectural plan in an unintended way. Of trying to make a painting emulate my encounter with its stand in.



Figure 25, Untitled (flower drawing from sketchbook), 2015

The other inquiry that presented here was looking toward make up marks that presented in lustrous accord, a signifier for the materiality of these products. I accumulated these marks online, creating catalogues of the range they presented in. Flesh and skin is an implicit conversation within these marks. “Flesh and skin are, when referring to the fact of our having a surface to our bodies, often used interchangeably- but flesh is mostly for the fictive. While there may be no immediate hue-projection that comes to mind upon seeing or hearing the word itself, and no appropriate color default for the hawkers of stockings, liquid foundation, or house paint swatches, the term ‘flesh-colored’ still exists. I don’t want to paint my house the color of flesh, but maybe I do. *What color is that?*”¹⁹

These marks are meant to stand for a question of what a color, or its stain, looks like, how it feels, how it can be applied. These marks are gestural, connoting volume and materiality. The different methodology of using these found make up marks as painterly gesture to create my compositions deals also with a borrowed language of painting. The

¹⁹ Corina Copp, “Colors/ Flesh: So alone”, *Cabinet*, Fall 2014, Issue 55, 9.

index of these gestures point to a hand creating them, but they too are transposed and given a different weight in this context.

The accumulation of these marks was explored in a curiosity of considering how they could be seen together to create a composition, to be freed from a supposed use in the way they have been specified, articulated for. To instead become accumulated, and considered as marks of a painting.

In his essay, *Painting the task of mourning*, Yve-Alain Bois focuses on the claim that the history of abstract painting can be read as a longing for its death, “freed from all extrinsic conventions, abstract painting was meant to bring forth the pure *parousia* of its own essence, to tell the final truth and thereby terminate its course. The pure beginning....could not but function as an omen of the end.”²⁰ Bois outlines the line of this investigation and discourse which centers on the appearance of photography, and mass-production, both of which he understands us to identify as causing the end of painting.

Bois cites Meyer Schapiro to delineate the struggle between the hand and the mass produced, ‘the emphasis on touch, on texture, and on gesture, as a consequence. Bois identifies this as the reason one witnessed a practice of ‘one-upmanship’ as historical progression. The paradox here though, as Bois later asserts, though enunciated by thierry De Duve, “is that the opposition of painterly finish to the mechanical bore within itself the stigmata of the mass-produced.”²¹ This leads to discussion on the tube of paint as a readymade- how one never truly start from scratch.

It is here I want to reassert the book cover compositions in thinking about mark making, production, gesture, touch, and use. While markedly different visually, the book covers and the make up piece that I’ve presented deal with these thoughts. Working from found marks in the make up piece, thinking about the reproduction of this mark, of the accumulation of these marks, of the possibility of the mark being made by someone’s hand, of their replication and duplication.

Thinking about skin and flesh for both these bodies of work creates a dialogue to Bois’ argument with a different throughline, “The paints all point at their author instead of

²⁰ Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model*, (Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1990), 230.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 232.

outward... enclosing you within an expectation of seeing 'yourself as the 'painter' while re-making the threat of absence."²²

My inquiries include, and continue to hold an interest in the boundaries and limitations of sentimentalism to think about a moving body, the place of a viewer, presence, mapping, understanding, regard. The interstitial places I've focused on here tend toward looking at cyphers, located in a holding on to the index without a clear referent. The instances are left open, trying to follow or understand a mark, the limitation of conveyance. The accumulation of these spaces lends to a sensibility overlap set up through a relationship of language. It is through this experimentation, of remaining open, a generative process and acknowledging subjectivity, that I've imprinted and cared for these conditions.

²² Corina Copp, "Colors/ Flesh: So alone", Cabinet, Fall 2014, Issue 55, 11.



Figure 25, 20, (from A number of times), archival pigment print, 2016



Figure 25, Untitled, (video projection on raw canvas), 2015



Figure 26, Adrian Piper, Catalyst III, 1970

“It’s not the room or the house or the yard. It’s the light. The light that clarifies. It is the light that reveals, that illuminates. It is the light that finally stamps the handwriting down into the skin of the page and changes the work into the Work.”²³ Nikky Finney

²³ Nikky Finney, *Ode to the Daystar*, Carolina Writers at Home, (Hub City Press, 2015), 31.



Figure 27- Untitled (from drafts of a poem), archival pigment print, 2016

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