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Delapena, Alexander

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Under the Bango Moon

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

Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Art

by

Alexander Delapena

June 2022

Thesis Committee:
Prof. Anna Betbeze, Chairperson
Prof. John Divola
Prof. Brandon Lattu
Prof. Lynne Marsh

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The Thesis of Alexander Delapena is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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Introduction

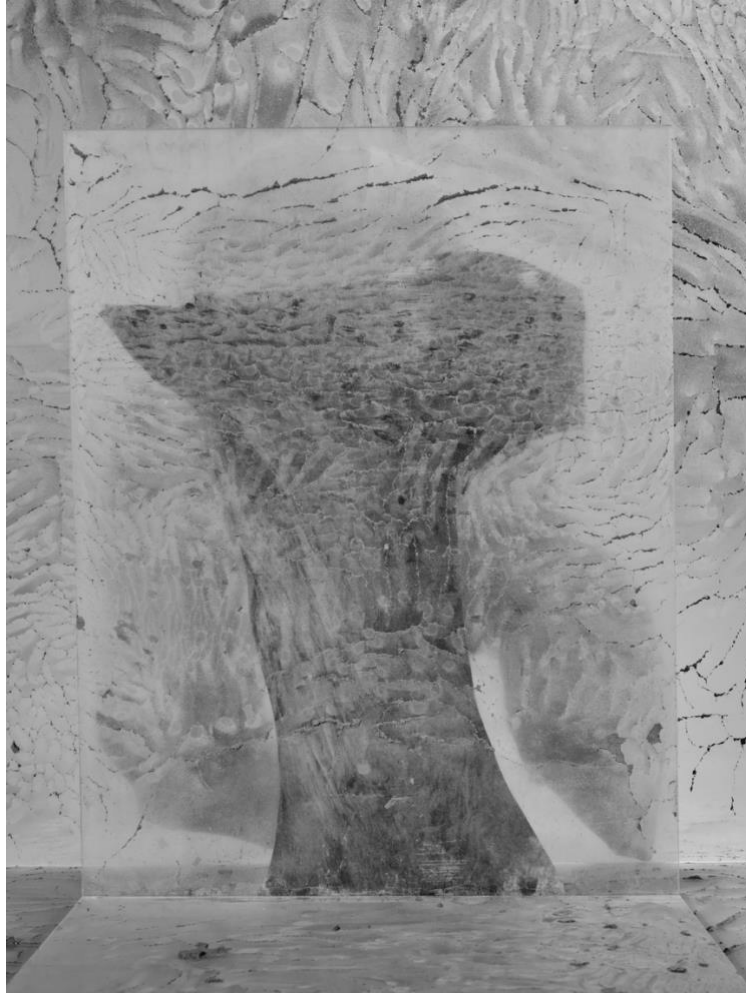


Figure 1- Fingerprint Traces, 2020.

My art practice begins with curiosities and playful improvisations, using sculpture, drawing, and painting. I create objects and scenes and photograph the tableaux in my studio. The studio and tabletop become a stage to make elaborate illusions that merge two-dimensional mark-making and crude constructions. These constructions sometimes also involve printed images that I use to build up a photographic space or backdrops for these still-lives. I'm interested in how light

renders objects in space and how photography can compress space to force a perspective. I look towards shadow puppetry and theater on how props become more of a character for the stage. I show visibility on what is usually hidden in theater prop-making by allowing the process of making to be illuminated. I am more interested in evoking a feeling or sensation rather than something that is documentation or hyper-real. I see the camera as a way to tell a story.

For my thesis exhibition, I am presenting a series of images and photographic sculptures titled- *Under the Bango Moon*. This body of work is a culmination of the studio processes I have developed over the past few years while at UCR. This paper will lead you through my modalities of thinking regarding my image-making process, the curiosities that have inspired my gestures, and historical references.

A Sun That Fell and Casted a Shadow

Japanese photography from the 1960s and 1970s has been a huge influence on me since my time as an undergrad. For example, *The Stray Dog* (1971), by Daido Moriyama and *Man and Woman #24* (1960), by Eikoh Hosoe. Images during this time were not pristine. The images were blurry, high-contrast, and gritty. Yet, I appreciate this approach to evoke a sensation rather than taking a technically well-made photograph. Despite photography being a tool designed to portray the world with utmost detail, Japanese photographers went against the grain with their approach to image-making.



Figure 2- Daido Moriyama, Stray Dog, 1971.



Figure 3- Eikoh Hosoe, Man and Woman #24, 1960.



Figure 4- The Tower of the Sun (太陽の塔, Taiyō no Tou) stands in the Harmony Square of the Expo '70 Commemorative Park in Suita, Osaka. Photo: Noa.

*“Today, when words have lost their material base—in other words, their reality—and seem suspended in mid-air, a photographer’s eye can capture fragments of reality that cannot be expressed in language as it is. [They] can submit those images as a document to be considered alongside language and ideology. This is why, brash as it may seem, **Provoke** has the subtitle, ‘provocative documents for thought.’”*

- Manifesto of the *Provoke* Group by Koji Taki, Takuma Nakahira, Takahiko Okada, Yutaka Takanashi, and Daido Moriyama.

The 1960s marked Japan’s re-entry into global trade after recovering from World War II. Japan rapidly developed its economy through new technological innovations and raised living standards. During this time, Japan was going through an identity change from post-World War II. (History of Japanese Photography, p. 215). Consumer and media culture has also evolved rapidly toward the contemporary appearance we see in Japan today. Despite this economic “miracle” recovery after Post World War II, changes within Japanese society were difficult to adapt to at first. (Okada Takahiko p. 2). In 1968, Daido Moriyama, Takuma Takahiko Okada, Yukata Takanashi, and Koji Taki, founded a short-lived photography collective, *Provoke*. This photography collective sought to reflect on Japan’s changing identity through establishing their voices through the process of image-making in relation to their personal and changing landscapes.

To see what established the *Provoke* visual aesthetic, I will trace back in time to the influences that have affected this photographic collective. The 1960s in Japan were filled with political unrest. The *Anpo* (security-treaty) between the United States has caused Japanese citizens to question the trust of their government relying on the United States while still being occupied. Developments in Japan were unchecked, like the Narita Airport for example. Narita Airport faced local resistance to its construction because *Chukaku-ha* (new left) expressed that erecting the airport would promote capitalism and add more U.S.-based military aircraft facilities. (The History of Japanese Photography). The construction of the Narita Airport has also displaced the local community near Tokyo Bay where Narita Airport now stands. (The History of Japanese Photography). Lastly, environmental pollution from Chisso Corporation, a chemical company, and producer of acetaldehyde and ethanol. The Chisso Corporation was responsible for mercury poisoning in the city of Minamata, Japan, and hence the disease terminology, *Minamata Disease*. Between 1959 - 1969, the Chisso Corporation sent out “sympathy money” to the people of Minamata affected by mercury poisoning. (The History of Japanese Photography).

As Japan needed to move forward to recover its economy from post-World War II, the *Provoke* collective developed a unique visual language that expresses

their feelings about a changing society and environment. Art Historian Kotaro Iizawa states:

“The image becomes a symbol that carries meanings that are inexpressible through words—not merely the mechanical reproduction of reality itself but something independent that can be manipulated.” Yet, as the camera is built to record and render moments in a fraction of a second, Ryuji Miyamoto, who was not a part of the *Provoke* collective during this time, argues that all photographs are already past experiences and an artifact within the passage of time itself. (The Silence of Photographs, p 77).

“We are not afraid of being incomplete. Rather we identify joy and beauty in the incomplete, just like each of our wooden staves.”

-Takahiko Okada *“Cannot see, achieving with a setsunai feeling, and wanting to fly.”*

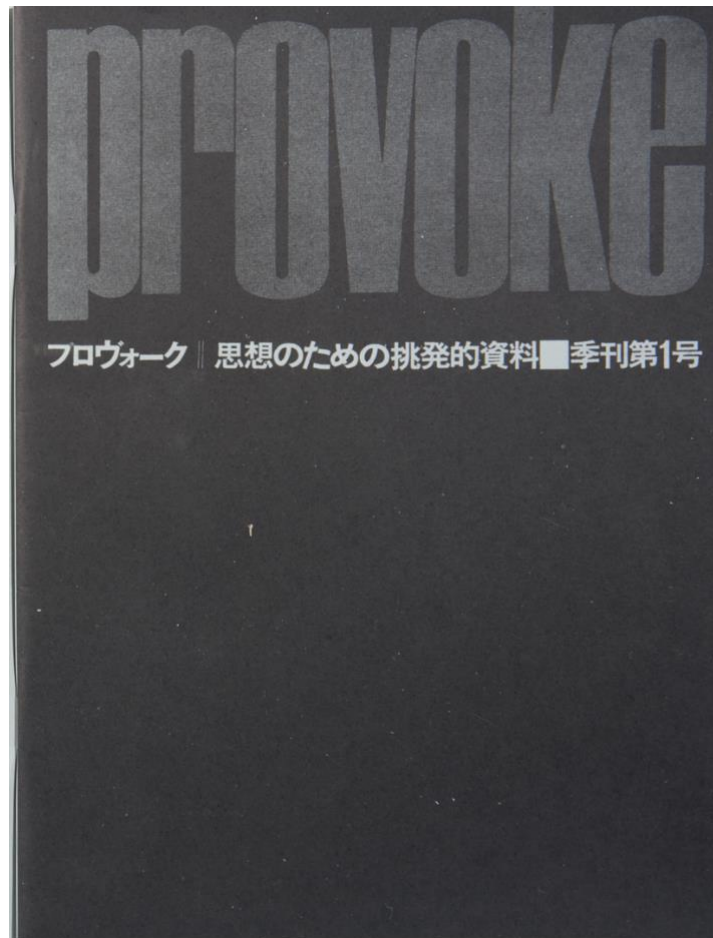


Figure 5- *PROVOKE Complete Reprint of 3 Volumes*, Koji TAKI, Takuma NAKAHIRA , Yutaka TAKANASHI, Takahiko OKADA, Daido MORIYAMA Publisher: Nitesha, 2018.

One unique visual distinguishment for the *Provoke* collective is an aesthetic called *Boke-No-Aware* (Blurred-Rough-Out of Focus). The imperfections in their images shows an atmospheric and dream-like appearance in trade as opposed to deadpan images and technically sound photographs. In addition, the unrest of the 1960s became a backdrop for the *Provoke* collective in how they used photography to express their feelings towards a rapidly changing society and distrust towards the government. Tatsuo Fukushima states that photography has

become a method for raising the subjective consciousness to reveal and question the problems within one another. (A Method For Understanding The World p. 82). For me, Japanese photography goes beyond the photographic film grains that encompass a material image. Instead, the film grains express the local realities and circumstances as a personal projection through the camera. According to Takahiko Okada, the Japanese photographers' sensitivity has been based on *setsunai* (Japanese term for: *frustrated emotions mixed with longing and admiration*) (Takahiko Okada, p. 2). By enduring of the frictions of tragic events and disasters becomes an obsession for Japanese photographers at the time. For the *Provoke* collective, a photograph can act as a release to spark their portrayal of reality within a static image. (Takahiko Okada p. 17).



Figure 6- Shomei Tomatsu, *Protest Tokyo*, 1969.

Shomei Tomatsu's image (*Figure 6*) during the 1969 Universities Protest, for me, showcases this Japanese *Bokeh-No-Aware* aesthetic. Though the shadow lacks detail in this image, it is essential in elevating the framing of the lone subject. The panning technique isolates the subject while also blurring the ground. To me, this creates a visual sensation of a fast-changing environment with the figure being pulled into the unknown, with the gesture of trying to stop their body from entering a void. Although the ground is blurred, the obscure details between the blends of gray tones, generates this pulsing sensation between focusing on the subject and background. For me, this photograph by Tomatsu has laid a foundation for what it means to *Provoke*. The photograph has set the stage like in Tanazaki's reflection of the *Noh* stage of traditional Japanese theater. How the exterior of the stage is shrouded in darkness to make a distinct world of shadows. (In Praise of Shadows). Rather than keeping true to visual static imagery inherent in photography, instead attempt to make images more alive, fragile, and possibly perishable in representation through the textures of film grain. We see physically what is contained in images but cannot know how it truly feels because of how photography removes physical tactility.

Part 1

My experimentations with raw materials during my time here at UCR have intended to evoke a feeling through physical gestures and arrangements made for the camera, similar to how Japanese photographers tried to evoke their own feelings through the camera. I ask myself, during my experimentations with materials, “what would this feel like when it’s photographed?”



Figure 7- UCR MFA studio, 2022.

Textures Pt 1

For me, sound and photography share the same act of processing and reprocessing. Sound travels to tune its shape in the form of a wave. Depending on what affects the soundwave (i.e.) the material it travels through, like metal or wood, and how sound is contained or dispersed, will influence its tone. Similarly, light must travel through a mechanical machine. Light gets bent and shaped through optical elements in photography to make a piece of the world as a two-dimensional compression. Within my own practice, I think about the textures of sound, whether they resonate from organic life or reverberate from manufactured machines and artificial means. Similarly, there is also the lens focal length where the background may be pushed away with a wider field of view or pulled closer when the field of view reaches further with a telephoto style lens than what the eye normally sees. As the field of view changes, so does the relationship to the subject photographed by how a focal length will either distort or compress through optical renderings.

Though my work is based in photography and not sound, relearning how to hear by simulated means also influences how I approach image-making as a feeling for desires to gain a better understanding. Being hearing impaired and wearing hearing aids, sound is emulated and at times, does not sound organic. When I think about how things become emulated, I look towards the imitation of physical experiences through 3D graphic renderings, theater, and set designs. There are also myths, urban legends, and fairytales that frame a way of experiencing a part

of the world through imagination and encounters. These ideas listed above all share a framework that forces a perspective by artificial and constructed means in relation to how we experience the world. In addition, the way I hear is limited and distinct, with hearing aids. This limitation is like how a tamed horse has its blinders to limit its view.

This sense of frustration for myself from being limited has paved the way for me in how I create my illusions and forced perspectives within my photographic practice. The frustrations that I cope with create desires for me to slow down the viewing experience of images and to have viewers insight questions of my materializations of an image.

Textures Pt 2

When a child is born, their eyes are still in development to see the world. A newborn is always curious yet somewhat blind, reaching out to feel the world with all four limbs before walking upright. Textures offer sensations that offer both curiosity and awareness. I use the term *texture* to give the shape of something I don't understand. I think textures are a way to embody emotional responses from past experiences, like when we recall memories that are either pleasurable or painful. Yet, no matter what is recalled, there is a mood in some shape or form associated with memories. Though the memory is in the past, it is not visible in front of us but imagined from within.

Teju Cole mentions- "*Photography is a memorial art. It selects a moment that is to be remembered, with the moments before and after falling away like sheer cliffs.*" (Memories of things unseen).

In the process and activity of making objects and miniature sets, I consider different ways to materialize different textures for my images. My materializations come from playful experimentations or happy accidents within the studio. For example, I question how to emulate metal without using metal because I want to have control on the amount of opacity for light to help shape the objects I make. Below are the modalities of my discoveries through observations that has helped influenced my making for the camera.

Staging

Before entering my first year of graduate school, I took a trip to Las Vegas for the first time as an adult. During my stay, I tuned out the gambling attractions of Vegas and paid closer attention to the architectural designs out of curiosity to understand how things were put together.

The Vegas Strip gives a taste of Egypt, Paris, New York City, Rome, and so on, all within a few blocks. I looked at how each hotel is positioned like a grand stage. Each hotel has an exaggeration and glamor from the night lights that highlights the buildings. If I'm drunk enough, I can imagine a little better being in those different parts of the world without flying to it. The Paris Hotel lobby has

intrigued me the most. I looked at how the base of the Eiffel Tower is piercing through the façade of the sky that I can almost touch and the uncanny sensation of cameras embedded within the painted clouds. Within Caesars Palace, another representation of the sky for the ceiling is shaped along curves of the architecture. I felt compressed with the sky being so close to the top of each storefront.



Figure 8- Paris Las Vegas Ceiling, 2019.

I think about how the earth is emulated in other ways to how Las Vegas allows one to be immersed and how Las Vegas is a sandbox in the middle of a desert for us to play in. The sensation of being compressed and how light illuminates an illusion made me think about ways we place ourselves within a box. It could be a black box or sandbox, but they're both spaces that construct an illusion of the world and are illuminated by light and imagination.

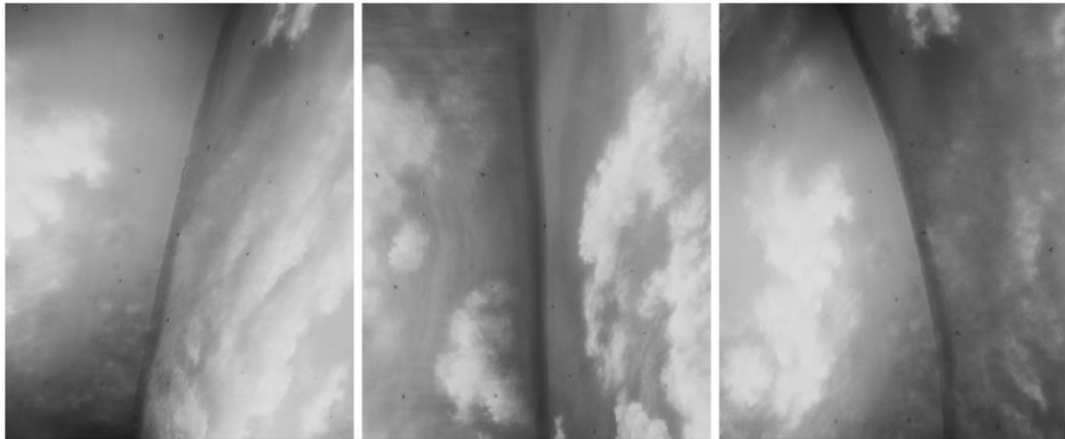


Figure 9- Contract, Retreat, 2019.

I turned to early forms of 3D computer graphics from my joy of playing video games. Back in the early 90s, graphic renderings were primitive and not realistic. Shapes reveal themselves in their attempt to reconstruct something natural and organic. The shapes were harsh and sharp, and the rendered shadows barely represented what was casting it. I questioned what it would look like to flip the renderings of early computer graphics by using raw organic materials and forcing them into a primitive shape. The term sandbox is also a genre for open-world

videogames. An open-world that is confined to a sandbox is immersive. However, it is a boundary of a simulated world that almost feels limitless but still contained.



Figure 10- Final Fantasy VII, 1997 (screengrab of a chocobo looking at something in the landscape)

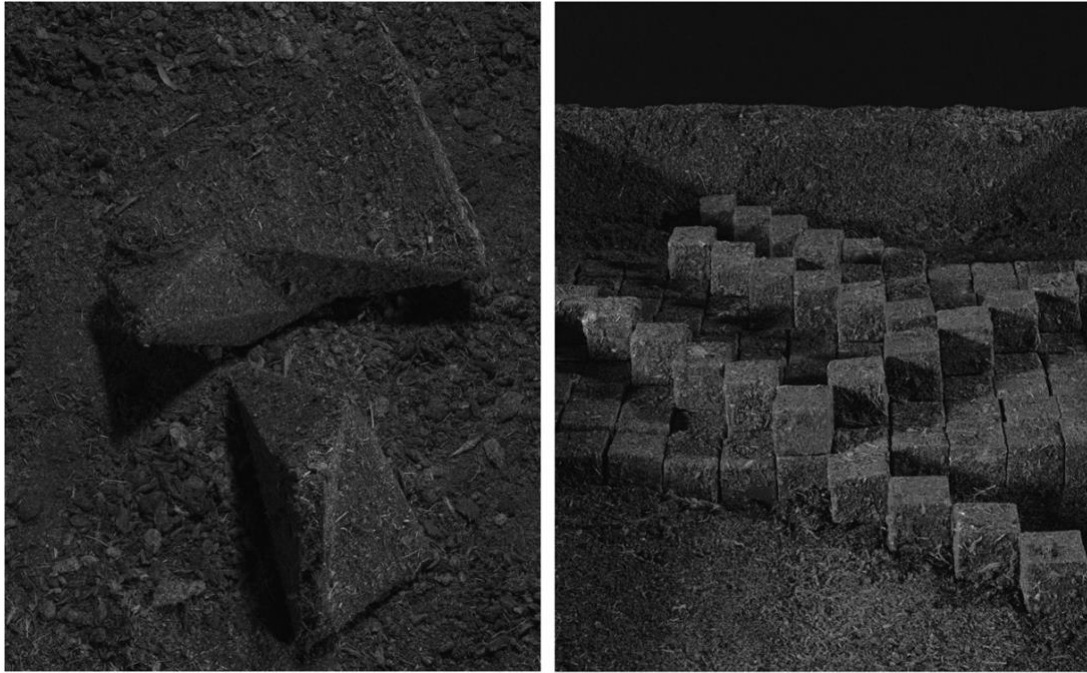


Figure 11- Above the Earth 03 & Above the Earth 02, from the series "Boundary Artifacts," 2019.

Compression, Tokyo Pt 1

In early winter 2020, I had the opportunity to take part in a month-long Artist Residency in Tokyo, Japan, at 3331 Arts Chiyoda. During my time there, I noticed how Tokyo feels compressed with each building very close to others. There is also the compression of being amongst a crowded walkway to where I could barely get to the train platforms since the waves of people passing through could not be disturbed. When I use the term *compression*, I think about what it means to be confined within an open space. Photography compresses a three-dimensional space into a flat two-dimensional plane and the perspective contains viewers within the framing of an image.

Technically in photography, when one compresses an image file, *artifact-ing* occurs. These artifacts are like pixelations and one of the first steps to how an image degrades in a digital space for the sake of making a file size smaller. The works that were made during the Tokyo residency, explore this act of compression. I questioned what it would look like to physically keep compressing an image. To do so, I made multiple xerox copies of source images that I have made around the city and manipulated them by doing image transfers and rephotographing them. For me, this was a gesture to intentionally degrade an image for the camera and to compress images in a more materialistic way within the studio.

Light, Tokyo Pt 2

-The darkness in which the Noh [theater] is shrouded and the beauty that emerges from it make a distinct world of shadows which today can be seen only on the stage; but in the past it could not have been far removed from daily life.

The darkness of the Noh stage is after all the darkness of the domestic architecture of the day.

-Jun' Ichiro Tanizaki: In Praise of Shadows.

Our eyes become drawn to light before what we notice is contained within a shadow. In theater, light helps shape the world portrayed on stage, and I consider the shadows that hide the stage to frame our perspective towards the

actors. To me, shadows obscure our view and help shape an illusion by creating a boundary between the stage production and the actual space to perform on the stage. For example, film backdrops and theater props are made with enough believability because perspective obscures the traces of labor. Another example is a set of a vast forest or cityscape that looks endless because of how perspective fools us. Yet, the backdrop may be flat, representing a horizon collapsed onto a single surface and flat plane.

- It's more important nowadays for the set to tell the spectator he's in a theatre than to tell him he's in, say, Aulis. The theatre must acquire qua theatre the same fascinating reality as a sporting arena during a boxing match. The best thing is to show the machinery, the ropes, and the flies. If the set represents a town it must look like a town that has been built to last precisely two hours. One must conjure up the reality of time. Everything must be provisional yet polite. A place need only have the credibility of a place glimpsed in a dream. The set needs to spring from the rehearsal of groupings, so in effect, it must be a fellow actor.

*- Bertolt Brecht: *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic.**



Figure 12- Harajuku Train Station (原宿駅) construction site, 2020.

During my residency in Tokyo, I stumbled upon a decorated construction barrier. This construction site was a part of the Harajuku train station renovation and is near Ueno Park, which has a high tree line to escape the views of the metropolis. A printed, fake forest wall was hung obscuring the construction site, with real trees to surround it. What captivated me most is seeing the contrast between the flat representation of trees and three-dimensional real trees next to each other. Together, this juxtaposition created an uncanny space to wander in. I questioned what it would look like to do the same in the studio to photograph flat objects,

since the studio is the three-dimensional space to arrange objects in. Yet, photography also adds another layer with how the camera can compress and merge spaces and objects together to add another degree of flatness. When images get reprocessed, they lose their detail fidelity. For example: enlargement, exposure adjustments, and file size compression will have a greater chance to cause "artifacts," where the image will begin to lose its quality of details. Another way an image may lose its quality is reprocessing through xerox copies. Since xerox output images for speed and distribution, quality automatically gets degraded where image artificing will occur.

I intentionally wanted to highlight these degradations of images by physically reprocessing my images repeatedly. I utilized xerox copies to apply image transfers to create objects out of images for the camera. I thought of this as a gesture to create an illusion between real and artificial space within the images themselves. As Brecht would say, theater attempts to hide the labor of the stage production. In this work, I chose to reveal the aspects of my own hand with the objects that I constructed by allowing the edges to be rough and crude. Rather than trying to camouflage my materials within a photograph, I allowed paper pulp of an image transfers and poorly cut edges to add another layer of texture. Together, these gestures allow me to emphasize the physical artifice within the images. Lastly, using artificial light allows me to give the confusion of the depth for objects that seem to have weight, but in real space, they're light and fragile to be easily crumbled into nothing.

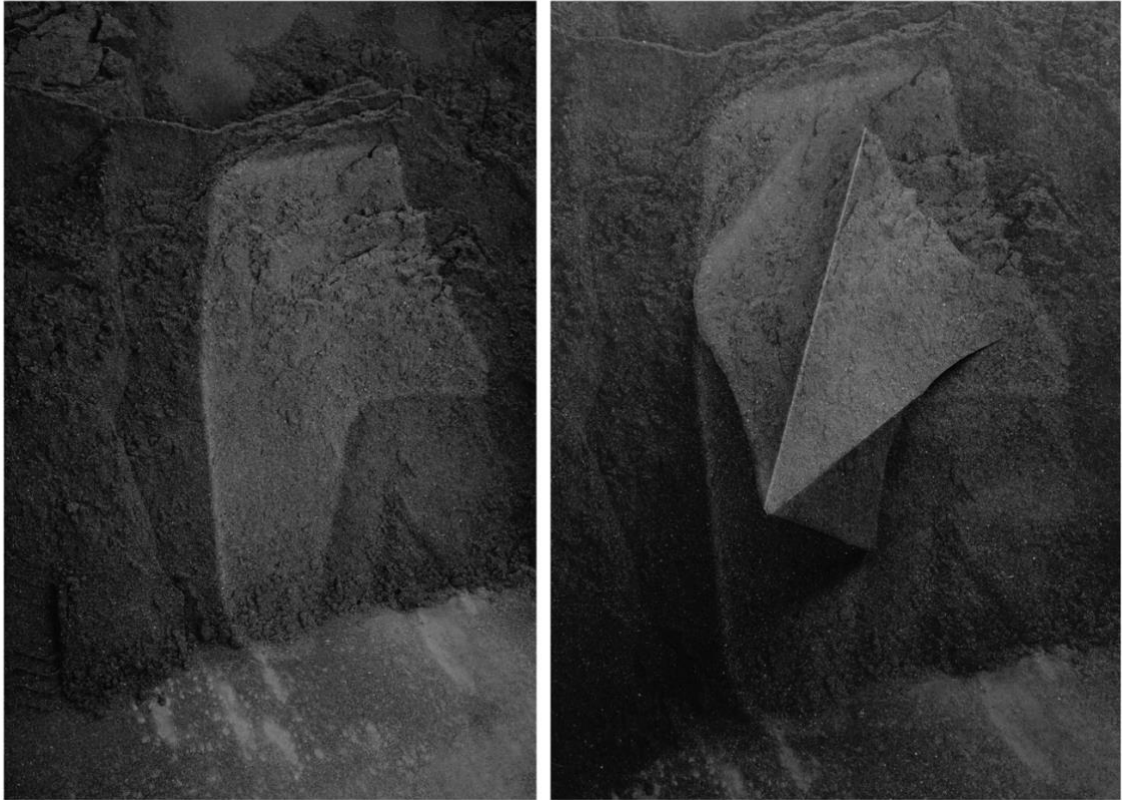


Figure 13- Source image & Pulling of Asphalt, from the series "Boundary Artifacts," 2020.



Figure 14- City Block 02, from the series "Boundary Artifacts," 2020.

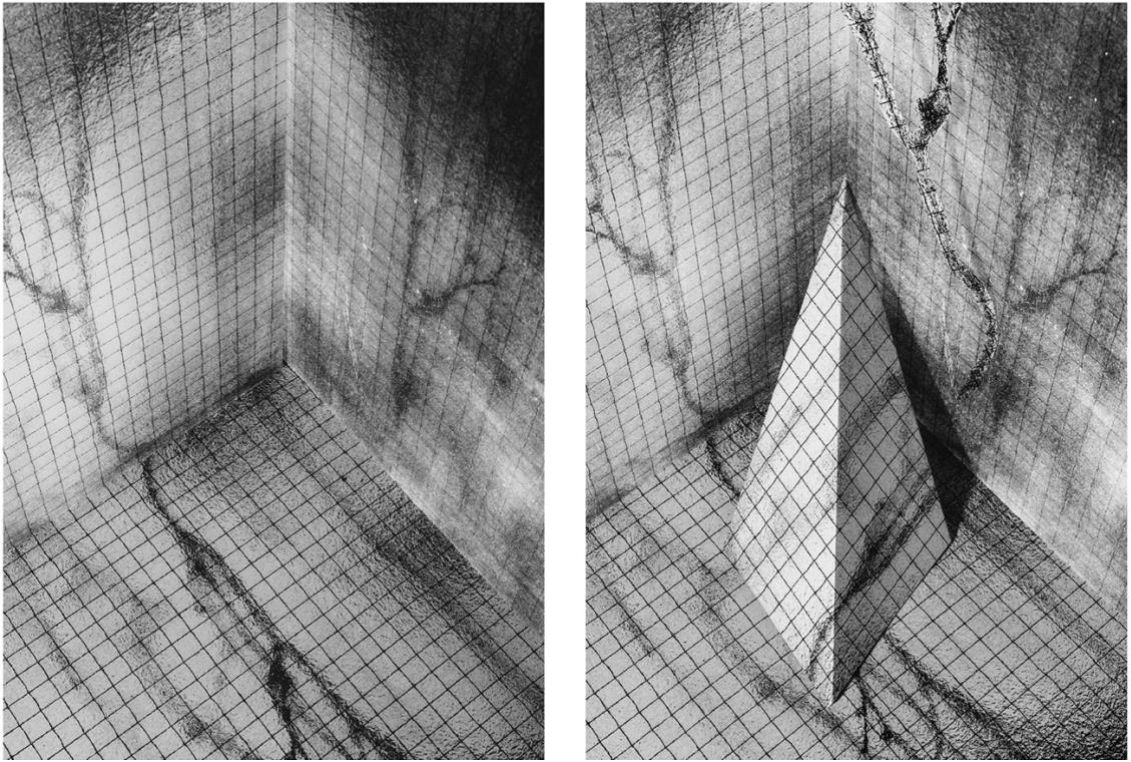


Figure 15- City Block 01 (diptych), from the series "Boundary Artifacts," 2020.

Part 2

Sensations

When I was a child, my parents told me not to whistle at night. If one were to do such a thing, the whistler would lure in evil spirits. I do not know the origin of this superstition, but it gave me another belief on how the night takes another shape out of fear. Another time during my adolescence at my first funeral service, I was curious to know why the deceased did not have their shoes on within the casket. Instead, the shoes were placed next to them. My Aunty told me of a myth about *Multos* or *Mumu*, (Tagalog for the spirit) of our loved ones. She said if the deceased were to be buried wearing shoes, their spirit would stay in the living world instead of passing on. With their spirit being trapped in the living world, family members will hear footsteps during the funeral service and around our deceased's home.

I think about the different ways stories are told. Stories may be passed down through oral traditions that become embedded in our ancestries. Also, they may be told through a theatrical lens as well. Franco “Bifo” Berardi states that: *“language organizes time, space, and matter to bring recognition to human consciousness.”* I think about how memories manifest when things are unknown. To me, memories help us establish an equivalent meaning to give recognition between the past and present when we hear a story made to make us feel uneasy.

Recalling these myths and superstitions, I think about how the weight of words constructs something that is not visible but a sensation of fear and wonder.

Bruno Bettelheim states that myths are not like cautionary tales like a fable that conveys morals and consequences from choices. (The Uses of Enchantment p. 38). Instead, it is a way to arouse anxiety to change how we act around the space of a myth. (The Uses of Enchantment p. 38).

Myths and fairy stories both answer the eternal questions: What is the world really like? How am I to live my life in it? How can I truly be myself? The answer given but myths are definite, while the fairy tale is suggestive, its messages may imply solutions, but never spells them out. Fairy tales leave to the child's fantasizing whether and how to apply to himself what the story reveals about life and human nature.

-Bruno Bettelheim: *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales.*

As myths and superstitions may change how one thinks or acts, these stories may serve as a placeholder for incidents and unexplainable encounters.

According to Komatsu Kazuhiko, in Japanese culture, the term *Yokai* is a way to give unexplainable happenings or events a personality in the form of a mythical monster. (Yokai, p. 12). The term *yokai* is broken down into three forms: incidents, entities, and depictions. (Yokai p. 13). Incidents come from fear; entities give an unknown or mysterious presence a shape. The shape of the

entities could be based on the human body or refer to different wildlife to help provide the entities with a recognizable shape. (Yokai, p. 17). Lastly, depictions tie together both incidents and entities as a visualized form of storytelling of yokais. (Yokai p. 17).



Figure 16-Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), *The Dish Mansion*, from the series "One Hundred Ghost Stories," 1830



Figure 17- Morikawa Otojiro (1869-1882), *The actor Nakamura Utaemon III and Demon; Humorous Shadow Pictures for Slide Shows with Ghosts*, 1879.

Shadow Construction

“ [...images] are etched [and] a host of clear indicators along with other, imprecise ones: significant detail is mixed with illusion. Thus the image are etched with a host of clear indicators along with other, imprecise ones: significant detail is mixed with illusion. Thus, the image is always in itself an enigma, demanding that we articulate what it really shows. Interpreted by an expert it can be considered as evidence.”

- Diane Dufour: Images of Conviction, The Construction of Visual Evidence.

Storytelling allows one's imagination to run vividly as one tries to piece together spoken words into shapes and forms. The conditions and structures could be in the manner of theater to lure viewers and allow them to feel the sensations of spoken words. There are also puppetry and shadow puppets as another way to give spoken words a visual shape and form. This way of storytelling evokes a sense of wonder and mystery as a viewer tries to imagine what it would be like in real life. During my second year, I questioned what it would look like to photograph a shadow, a ghost, and or spirit? Even though shadow puppets provoke a sense of narrative in a theatrical sense, there is also the physical mechanism that holds its form.



Figure 18- John McMahon, *Remote Lands: Travelogues, Ratchaburi: Thailand's Last Shaddow Puppet Show*, May 2019. <https://www.remotelands.com/travelogues/ratchaburi-thailands-last-shadow-puppet-show/>

I was drawn to physical constructions that allow shadow puppets to articulate movement. Thin wires, sticks, and poles all anchor a shadow that is behind the curtains. Some of these puppets are crude in their construction, barely holding together in the telling of a narrative. *The Ramakien*, Thailand's national epic, tells the story of good triumphing over evil between King Rama and Tosakanth, "The King of Demons." The *Ramakien* puppets, rather than be veiled behind a curtain, the puppets are fully revealed instead. This reveal showcased the beautifully crafted and complex forms of puppet construction.

In this body of work, *A Whistle is a Thread for the Weight of a Lure* (2021), I thought of the mechanics of shadow puppetry to contain a shadow temporarily. I considered how whistling at night is like a gesture for trajectory or flight path in luring a spirit. Our bodies would become the weight of a lure and a target for a spirit if one were to whistle at night. With shadow puppetry theater, constructed wire mechanisms are thin and visible yet ignored to provide a suspension of disbelief for entertainment.

I sought to make the mechanisms that hold different shadow forms more visible as gestures. In this work, thin wires and thinly drawn lines, for me, act as gestures of trajectories and an anchor to contain a shadow. The shadows take the form of cutouts and are manipulated with charcoal, graphite, or glossy paint to absorb or reflect light for the camera. Images are also used as a physical material where images are processed and reprocessed to be rephotographed. Together, the collective objects in these works are crudely constructed, barely holding their weight and existing long enough to be a documented encounter.



Figure 19- A Whistle is a Thread for the Weight of a Lure, install, UCR MFA Studios, 2021



Figure 20- A Whistle is a Thread that Pierces the Air, from the series "A Whistle is a Thread for the Weight of a Lure," 2021.



Figure 21- Shadow Recollection, from the series "A Whistle is a Thread for the Weight of a Lure," 2021.



Figure 22- Trying to get Close, Only to Not, Hold Your Head Up High, from the series "A Whistle is a Thread for the Weight of a Lure," 2021.



Figure 23- Weight of a Lure, from the series "A Whistle is a Thread for the Weight of a Lure," 2021.

Part 3

Thesis Exhibition: *Under the Bango Moon, 2022.*

Roots

The sugar industry has brought multiple ethnic groups to the islands of Hawaii over a century ago. This convergence of migrate-laborers has helped shape contemporary Hawaii known today for its diversity and merging of different cultural backgrounds that present local identity within Hawaii. Yet, the value of sugar came at a cost.

Ko (Hawaiian for sugarcane) back then, have been cultivated by ancient Hawaiians on personal plots. Sugarcanes within Hawaiian agriculture are used as both a sweetener and medicinal means. It was not until 1835, that William Northey Hooper, from Boston, (1809-1878) founded the Ladd & Company in Koloa, Kauai, marking Hawaii's first commercial sugar plantation. (Pau Hana, p. 4). *Koloa* in Hawaiian means "*Great Cane*" (*Ko: cane, & Loa: Great*) and Koloa was a hot spot for mass amounts of wild sugarcanes in southern Kauai. (Pau Hana p. 6). The island Kauai is nicknamed "The Garden Ise" due to its high average rainfall a year. Annually, the island of Kauai sees rainfall that averages around 460 inches a year and has a stable, but humid climate which makes it ideal for growing crops. Due to the climate conditions on Kauai, Hopper saw value in this natural resource to grow sugarcanes on a commercial level and negotiated with King Kamehameha III to lease 980 acres of land to cultivate sugar for \$380 (equivalent to \$12,414.95 for 2022). (Pau Hana p. 6). This leasing of land as well as the ideal climate of Hawaii to grow cash crops has resulted in other corporations to develop sugar mills within Hawaii. (Pau Hana p. 7). The

Reciprocity Treaty of 1875 brought sugar production to the mainstream for duty-free trade of sugar between the Kingdom of Hawaii and the United States. (Pau Hana p. 18). US corporations of Theo H. Davies & Co, C. Brewer, Castle & Cooke, Amfac, and Alexander & Baldwin were known as “The Big Five” within Hawaii and held considerable power of land control during their investments in the sugar boom. (Pau Hana p. 19). Sugarcane in the latter part of the 19th century was a “King Crop” and needed mass amounts of labor to cash out.

Convergence

Early plantation laborers in Hawaii sugar plantations were under a contract system to commit several years of work but prevented them from sourcing other jobs. At first, native Hawaiians were the bulk of the labor force, although the amount of laborers present could not meet the output of the production demand to process sugar. (Pau Hana p. 19). Either the native population within Hawaii were finding other means to make a living, for example, in California for the gold-rush, or dying from diseases brought by foreigners. Population in Hawaii decreased from 300,000 in 1778 to 71,000 in the 1850s. (Pau Hana p. 22). The solution to finding more laborers started in 1850 when the Royal Hawaiian Agricultural Society was founded. Labor was first sourced from China for a cheaper cost than the local workforce. To the plantation leaders, Chinese workers were quick learners, steady, efficient, and cheap to source. (Pau Hana p. 23). Yet, the issue with Chinese laborers is that once their contract was up, they would either return home back to China or migrate elsewhere to make

themselves a new home. (Pau Hana p. 23). Japanese laborers were next to be the bulk of the labor force within the plantations to compete with Chinese plantation workers due to the Annexation of Hawaii in 1890, which limited the number of a single ethnic group immigrating to Hawaii for plantation work.

(Bonnie M. Miller). Annexation of Hawaii has been brought forth to help relieve native Hawaiians population and the Hawaiian Monarchy to hold political power within the booming sugar industry from U.S plantation landowners who have invested resources within Hawaii. (Bonnie M. Miller). Without land, then there would be no crops to grow, and Hawaii had the best geographic foundations to grow sugar canes in abundance.

Bango

During the late 19th century and early 20th century, the sugar industry in Hawaii showed that sugar was considered a highly sought-after cash crop. The demand was high, and more laborers were needed to keep up with the demand for exportation. Besides from Chinese and Japanese plantation laborers, Koreans, Filipinos, and Portuguese were all brought into Hawaii for plantation work. The idea behind bringing in more ethnic groups was brought forth by Theo. H Davies & Company (Pau Hana p. 81). This mass ethnic migration of different cultures was to not only counteract the Annexation of Hawaii in 1890 but also as a solution when a single ethnic group would revolt against plantation leaders about poor working conditions. (Pau Hana p. 92). At times, different ethnic groups would be strategically grouped together to pit them against one another. For

example, how one ethnic group is able to do more work for less money and not care to revolt against plantation leaders for fair wages. Although this strategic plan was designed to help keep labor costs down, the mixing of different ethnic groups made it difficult to keep track of each laborer's name and ethnicity. (Pau Hana p. 82).

Plantation leaders needed to keep track of different ethnic groups and had difficulties pronouncing various names from different cultural backgrounds. Prior to the use of social security numbers, a solution that plantation leaders brought forth was a system called "The Bango System," for record-keeping within the plantation during this time. (Pau Hana p. 82). Each ethnic group was given a particular shape and a number as a placeholder for actual names for accounting and book-keeping records within the plantation. (Pau Hana p. 83). *Bango* is a Japanese term for "number," and *Bango* tags act as a form of identification card. Each laborer was adorned with a *Bango* tag of a particular shape and number to replace their names. If laborers do not have their *Bango* tag on payday, they will not get paid.



Figure 24- Bango Tags, Hawaii Plantation Village, Waipahu, 2021.

Yuko ka Meriken yō (Shall I go on to America)

Kaero ka Nihon (Or return to Japan)

Koko ga shian no (This is my dilemma)

Hawai koku (Here in Hawai'i)

Hawai, Hawai , to yō (Hawai`i, Hawai`i)

Yume mite Kita ga (I came chasing a dream)

Nagasu namida wa (Now my tears flow)

Kibi no naka (In the canefield)

Asu wa Sande ja yo (Tomorrow is Sunday)

Asobi ni oide (Come for a visit)

Kane was hanawai (My husband will be watering the cane)

Wash'ya Uchi ni (I'll be home alone)

-Holehole bushi- Canefield folksong from Japanese-Isei (First-generation) immigrants.

Under the Bango Moon is a body of work that focuses on the *Bango* tags used during the early days of the plantations in Hawaii in the late 19th century. When you first enter the exhibition space, you will see two free-standing images of sugarcanes, with a close-up of a sugarcane stock on the verso side. The free-standing images, for me, act as stand-ins for the body because at first glance, the sugarcane stocks on the versos look like bones. It is my intention to have

these free-standing images to serve as a constant backdrop as a foreground to the wall works to lead viewers into this make-shift landscape of Hawaii's history that I have constructed for my images. The images that contain sugarcanes within my exhibition have been sourced from Hawaii Plantation documents that I found in the UCR Orbach Science Library. These plantation documents date back from the 1920s to the 1950s, which documented scientific studies on how to cultivate sugarcane. I sought to manipulate these found images through image transfers and rephotographing them to bring this piece of history into the present day.

Archival photographs constitute a place in which we can continuously engage with important cultural memory work, which helps us reread the actual making of the past and therefore reconfigure different historical narratives concerning the stories that make up history, race, rights, and recognition: four vital stations in our understanding of humanity that remind of the power relationships between the 'observer and the observed.'

-Mark Sealy: Decolonising the Camera: Photography in Racial Time.

The basic shapes within my photographs reference the different Bango shapes and, for me, also act as a stand-in for entities of plantation laborers of the past. The Bango shapes in the images are cutouts that have been covered in graphite powder to emulate a metal sheen and patina when light wraps around these crafted objects. It was my attempt to make these shapes feel like they had life by

giving them a patina because of the reduction of identity and individuality during this time in history.

The recurrences of silhouette cutouts for me, trace the roots of photography and its limitations when it was first developed. The limitations of photography during the 19th century could not render motion as something still and sharp but instead, a blurred dark figure that is anonymous. I intended to stage the images in the form of altars to give homage to the plantation workers of the past.

I constructed three different stages to photograph the works in this exhibition to evoke a narrative reading for my work. The first stage is a diptych with representations of full moons behind the figure in the images. I thought about how Hollywood and urban legends show a full moon as something for a supernatural transformation. For me, these works act as the origin or beginning before one's identity has been transformed by the *Bango* tags. Secondly, a velvety gray backdrop and representations of windows covered in graphite powder attempt to portray somber acceptance of a Bango shape. These images take influence from cathedral windows in how they incite a narrative through a multiplicity of images. Lastly, opposite from the diptychs, are my representational abstractions of altarpieces made for the Bango shapes. Within this stage setting, I attempt to collapse the photographic space by converging drawn gestures and three-dimensional objects together to create a shelter for the altar construction within the images.



Figure 25- Under the Bango Moon, install 01, Culver Art Center of The Arts, Riverside, CA, 2022.



Figure 26- Bango *New Beginning, Inhale* (left), *Origin Before Bango, Exhale* (right), 2021.



Figure 27- Sugarcane 01, 2022.



Figure 28- Sugarcane Stock 01, 2021.



Figure 29- Under the Bango Moon, install 02, Culver Art Center of The Arts, Riverside, CA, 2022.



Figure 30- Under the Bango Moon, install 03, Culver Art Center of The Arts, Riverside, CA, 2022.



Figure 31- Bango Window 03 (left), Bango Shapes (right), 2022.

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