

FACULTY EXHIBITION

University of Arizona Museum of Art
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Thowra (revolution) was produced in the winter of 2011 – the winter of uprising in the Middle East and North Africa. The predictable cycling of seasons was interrupted by remarkable courage, unimaginable synchronization and the spilled blood of martyrs.

The winter of 2011 marked the worldwide observations of black birds falling from the sky, an eclipse, and the blowing away of corruption, stagnation and tyranny. My video is both a commemoration and a pointed reminder of the sacrifice of so many. Graced in the colors of revolution, the perfect storm of this winter noted in Thowra serves as a reminder of what was sacrificed for this season of change.



Thowra (Revolution)

2011

Video art

5 min 07 sec

My recent work revolves around the landscape, and code, in many forms—from classical watercolors of Arizona—built with dots and dashes of color—to the explorations of unfolding plant life merged with its DNA sequencing as landscape.

This series of work originally began when I extracted the programming code from tiff files of landscape photographs, and layered the code itself on top of the original photo from which the programming was obtained, which created a “veil of information” over the original image.

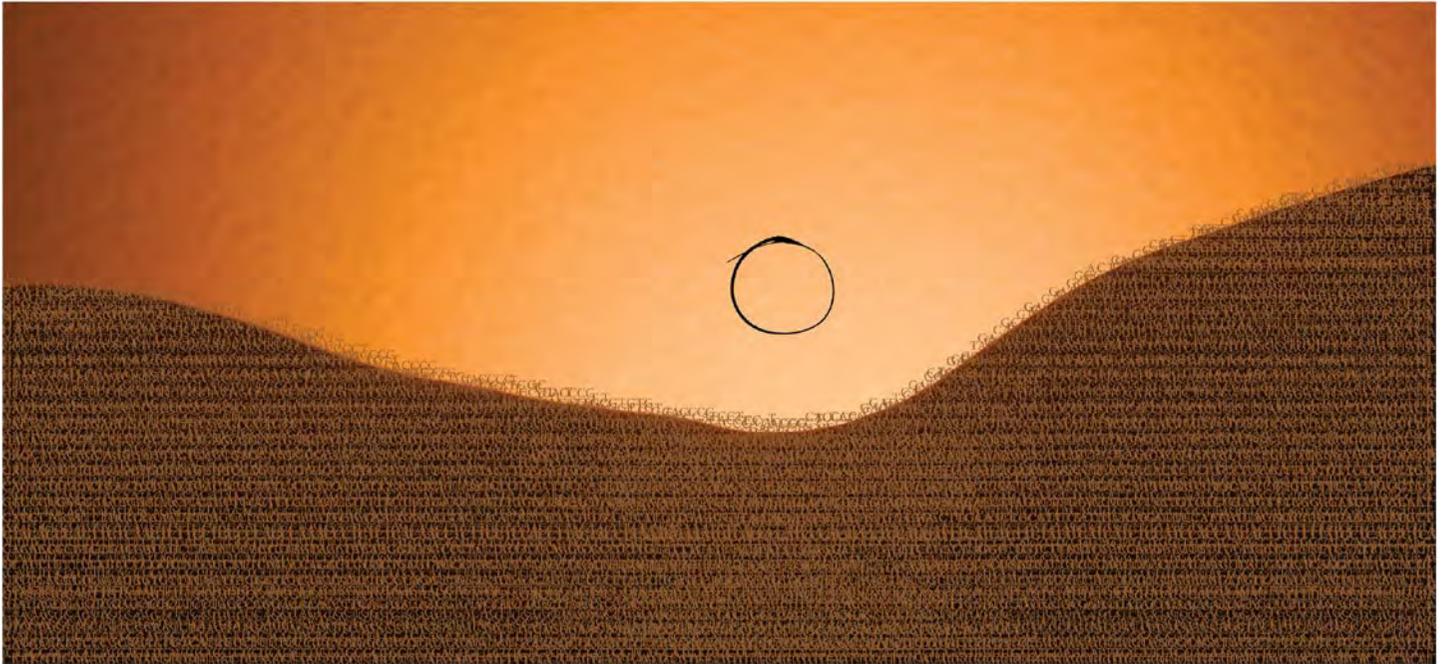
This “layering” presents a quandary for the viewer. From a distance, the landscape is viewable but on closer view the code is quite clear. This visual dichotomy raises questions about how code has become intrinsic in our current environment.

I researched DNA structure and received actual DNA sequences from University of Arizona Professor of Genetics, Vicki Chandler. I then moved to photographing grass, maize of different colors, cotton and poplar trees, the species whose DNA sequences I had been given. The DNA sequences for each of these biological forms were then laid over the images and contrasted with an orb— or circle of watercolor—creating the basic landscape. The resulting landscape then represents (and is seen easiest from a distance) three layers of information: the

overall landscape with sun, the grass or other organic object(s), and the DNA Sequence for that particular object.

The final images feature the sun acting as visual metaphor for growth, the universe, and life giving energy. The biologic image representing life and the typographical texture—the DNA sequence upon which all life is formed—act as a barrier for the viewer through which the object is subtly seen. This then, may lead the viewer to contemplate the duality of the code which created the biomorphic object and visual image, together yet separate.

My latest research involves finding the landscape in the human figure—where the valleys of a thumb or a hilltop of a knee can double as landscape. Although not a new idea, the addition of the of typographical human DNA sequence and of the watercolor circle explores this new unexplored realm.



DNA Sequence: Beauty of a Woman

2011

Digital print, watercolor, ink

20" x 40"

I have discovered in my sculpture something that I used to feel when I was a performing magician during my high school and college years. It is the creation of a visual paradox. As in magic, the viewer is seeing something that could not happen, and yet it is happening. In my work I have been compelled to use recognizable imagery as a starting point for making sculpture, e.g. musical instruments, tools, silverware, and firearms. I am interested in transforming common, recognizable objects into an art experience through manipulation in the studio. I choose these types of objects because they imply interaction with their human makers and users. Because they are well made, these objects allow me to use good craftsmanship as an integral part of the content of the work. The sculpture becomes believable in this new manifestation and inspires visual and intellectual engagement from the viewer regarding the object's expected potential functionality. I am trying to create an opportunity for someone to view common objects in a new light. I chose to exhibit this sculpture in light of the recent debate about guns on campus. We all have some feeling or conviction about guns in our society, whether pro or con. I feel that, especially with the tragedy in Tucson earlier this year, we should be able to speak about gun control in a reasonable way and come to some assurances for all involved that can better our society.



"Draw"

2010

Steel, modified ibeam

46" x 7" x 21"

I make most of the clay forms by combining pinch/coil construction with what I call reverse inlay, achieved by laying leather hard tile fragments and fossil-like shapes backwards or upside down against a flat surface or in some kind of press mold, then pressing plastic clay into and around them to make a conglomerate slab on which I pinch or coil construct the walls of a piece. I laboriously construct work this way because it is parallel to the accumulation of bits of experience that make each of us unique individuals. Once I fire the piece, I can reveal the inlaid side that has been “buried” during construction by repositioning it.

I am guided by the seemingly discordant sensibilities of architectural or geometric and organic systems to create hybrid forms of sculpture. I use the idea of windows or doorways in that there are negative spaces that pass through and into a sculpture, yet the shape of the sculpture may feel plant or pod-like rather than strictly architectonic. The pieces are simple in form yet contain compositional elements in complex arrangements, including layers of tile and fossil-like fragments, carved and distressed surfaces, bright colors, solidity versus hollowness, and the etched text of personal dream stories. This complexity comes out of my meditations on time, past and present, on the making and unmaking of the earth, and on what we can and cannot know from the bits of tangible, paleontological, geological, and archeological clues left from the earth’s constantly changing cycles.



Reopening The Window

1999 & 2011

Earthenware clay, slips and
metallic stains, fired to 1942
degrees Fahrenheit

20.5" x 16" x 11"

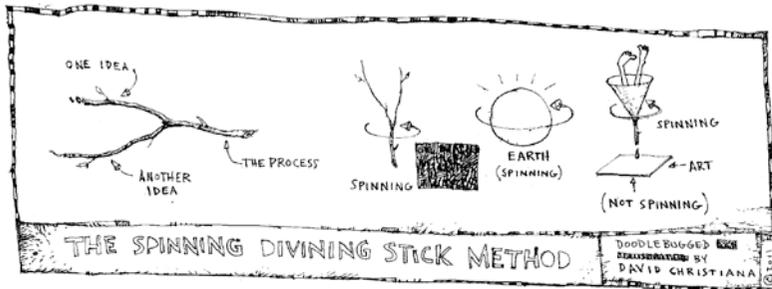
Ecstasies and Homilies

In this time, when our ability to sustain life exceeds our ability to care for the living, I'm interested in the convergence of spiritual, economic and political forces as they pertain to dying. These three pieces (Annunciation, Nativity and Pentecost) are an attempt to uproot ecstatic events from Christian iconographic traditions and repurpose them for a post-Christian age¹.

I began these works blankly, as if buried somehow by the forces mentioned above. Then I started digging. My right arm swooping and turning the way a shaman or priest might summon a spirit. At times, my sliver of graphite seemed to wag like a tongue. Eventually, content formed² and I was pulled in the direction of "a religion reassembled from fragments of our daily life."³

¹Daphne Hampson. Sea of Faith UK Conference, 1997.

²Although this is, more or less, how I began these works, by the time they were finished (last week) my methodology had morphed. Now it's the Spinning Divining Stick method (not to be confused with "spin art," which I abandoned c.1968 shortly after watching a funeral on TV while my parents, at a riot in Detroit, called on the phone [sounds of shots being fired in the background]. After that, Spin Art for Spin Art's Sake just didn't seem to cut it.) The Spinning Divining Stick method (close cousin to the aptly named Doodlebugging Technique) involves thinking of one thing while drawing another while spinning.



³Adam Gopnik quoting John Updike's essay on his experience of the...Museum of Modern Art. *Humanities: The Magazine of the National Endowment for the Humanities*, May/June 2008, Vol. 29 No. 3



Thowra (Revolution)

2011

Video art

5 min 07 sec

The central projected image is of a cactus-lined desert ridge just after the sun has set. To the left in the darkened foreground is another projection of a man sitting in front of a campfire. He stirs the embers, then takes off one boot, picks up a small hammer, takes some brads from a sack, and proceeds to repair the sole of the boot. When finished he puts the boot back on and continues to stir the embers with a stick. Situated on a small rise some distance away on the ridge is a group of revelers dancing to the beat of techno music.

This wilderness landscape is populated by one who abides in solitude and others who are pre-occupied with themselves, unaware of their surrounds. This references the incongruity of moments and choices in our lives; it speaks to the contemplative impetus vying with the worldly within ourselves; it questions our dutiful actions in the light of our desires—all in the wilderness of uncertainty.



In the Wilderness: To Be Or To Wanna Be

2011

Projected video assemblage

3 projectors, 3 DVD players, speakers

My latest paintings address open pit excavations on the edge of Tucson, Arizona. "No. 1 from Copper, AZ (Bisbee)" is the first painting in many years that has appropriated a contemporary image, but it follows a long output of research and work that critiques the political and environmental implications of monumental man-made interventions into Nature. In this particular piece, my goal is to create an equilibrium between the formal, abstract form of a mine seen from above and the controversial reality surrounding its function.



"No. 1" from Copper, AZ (Bisbee)

2011

Mixed media on canvas

84" x 120"

I made the negatives for these photographs in 1995. I was thinking about the horizon, its inescapable presence in the landscapes I grew up in and its diminished importance in my experience of interior New England, where I lived at the time. I wondered whether it might be possible to make work that was about the horizon and nothing else. Simultaneously I was also convincing myself that it was impossible to make an uninteresting picture of clouds, even unaccompanied by the portentous rumblings of an Alfred Stieglitz. Where better to test these speculations than the rolling plains of North Texas where I grew up?

The form the work took served two purposes: repetition of the line of the horizon might serve to insist on its primacy in the multitude of facts gathered by the lens, like going over it repeatedly with a soft pencil; the arbitrary interval of ten minutes would insure that pictorial considerations could play no part in the exposure of the second negative.

It took a while to figure out what the final realization of the piece ought to look like, then a good while longer for the technology to catch up with the image in my mind, then an inordinate amount of time to actually complete the process. Three different commercial entities were involved, all of which involved delays. My own life wasn't standing still. By the time the silver prints were being produced this past

summer, I was seeing them in dreams. These are the first ones I've seen mounted and on the wall. I'm pleased but a little appalled that it's been sixteen years since I had the idea to make them.

Tucson, September 2011



"Ten Minutes in North Texas #3" Clay County, TX

1995/2011

Gelatin silver print mounted on aluminum

58" x 38"



It's All about Process: Chimney Rock Ranch

2011

Acrylic and Rhoplex on canvas

48" x 48"

Two for One

My practice as an artist is fueled by my idealism. I believe that the only limitation to what we can build is our imagination. I seek to eliminate everything extraneous in order to see how far a form can be refined to be the most direct expression of function and intent. I want the finished product to embody the fine mental focus and intuitive physical rhythms involved in the process of its fabrication.

Two for One is a maquette for the public piece installed at the Steelevator Corporate Headquarters in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The concept behind this piece is based on mathematical evolution and logic, given one set of parameters and how it relates to itself all the way through.



Two for One

Stainless steel maquette

99.999 series

This body of work stems from observations based on the driving experience. Using freeway systems as the investigative constant, these paintings and drawings attempt to recreate the pure structure of urban landscape. In recreation, the original experience is replaced with the image of “lost” landscape. The environment along the freeway structures is essentially lost for the driver in the fast movement of the vehicle, because the driver’s attention is always directed forward; the landscape disappears on either side of the driver, and only fragmented elements of it imprint in the driver’s memory. Fast driving reduces the visual experience from detail to generality and we never can reproduce the whole picture of the trip, only scattered elements as if they had been caught by a strobe light.

These pictures are not meant to be a representation of the urban landscape, they are landscapes: landscapes for the speeding driver or landscapes for gallery goers. Moreover, these images have the potential to become a part of the road “language,” they may serve as information signs for a specific point of interest or they may be entertainment pictures to break the dullness of commuting.

The formal resolutions of these pictures are influenced by the ideas developed by Russian Constructivists and later by Bauhaus scholars. Only minimal elements are chosen for my pictures in order to affect the viewer in a matter of seconds; these images must have only that amount of information, which is essential for the message I am about to deliver.



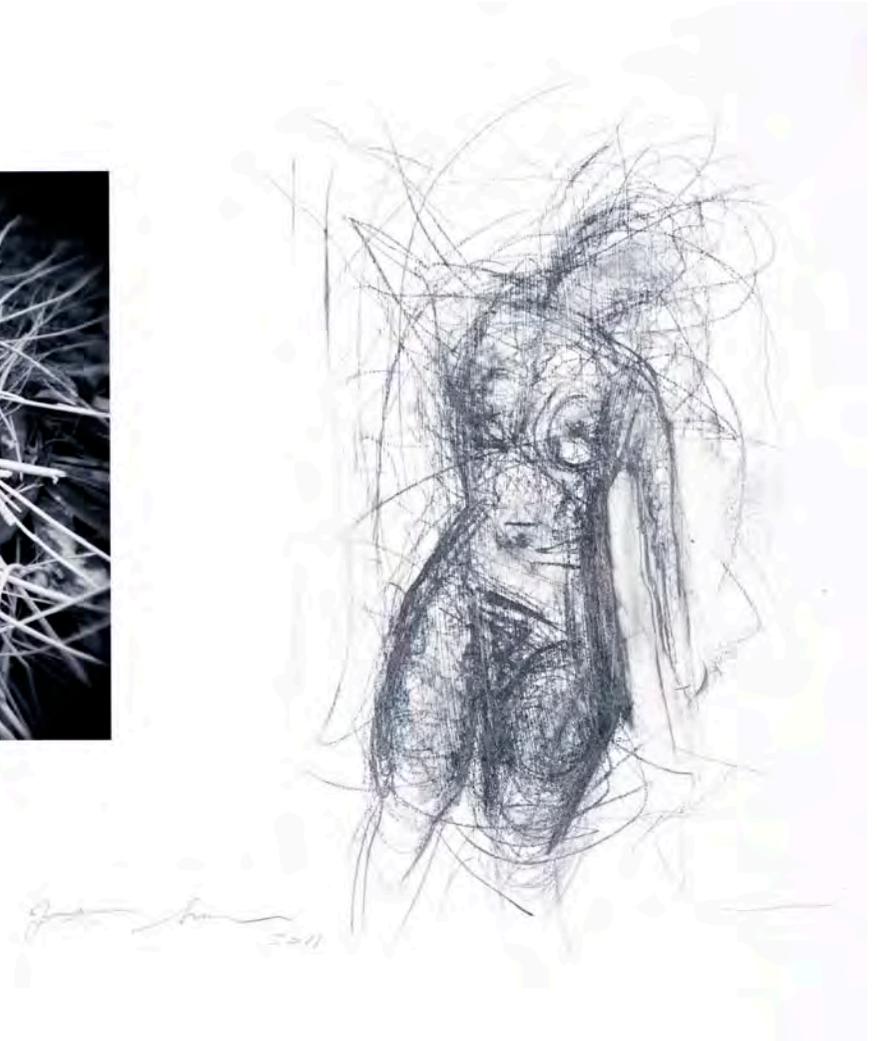
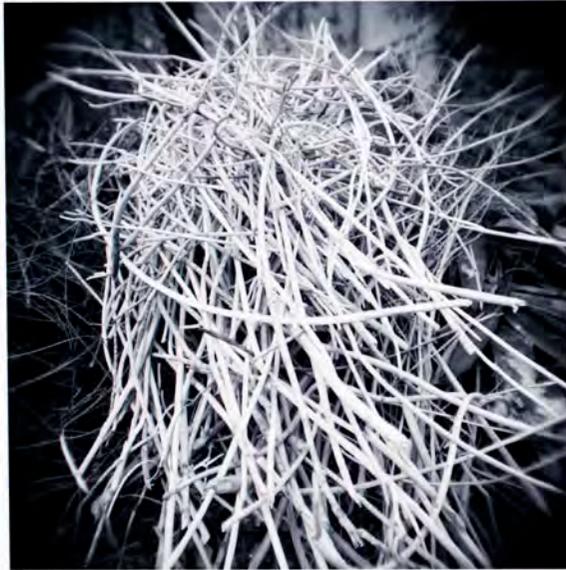
99.999 series

2009

Oil and acrylic on canvas

24" x 34"

There is always something to love to be found. Always. Everywhere.



Tangled

2011

Pigment ink, gesso and graphite on cotton rag paper

13" x 17"

In this series of prints, I am playing with the multiplicity of meaning that possibility affords. In delicate lace-like forms, many individual units – line, shapes, letters, words – create networks where completeness, self-unity and interconnections can be contemplated.



Possibility #2

2011

Archival digital print

16" x 16"

When the environment becomes intimate—as it is in our age of ecological panic—it no longer remains an environment... but becomes a mesh of strange strangers entangled in infinite connections...

As science and technology deliver to us a world of magnitudes, relationships and organisms beyond comprehension, we can no longer believe our eyes or our preconceptions. The more information that reaches our consciousness, the more we realize how much we don't know and how wrong we've been about so much in the past.

Infundibular Trimorphs is one piece from the series "Phenotypes: observable traits, strange strangers" which utilizes the specialized visual representation and language associated with science to get outside the current fervor of scientific discourse and remind us that most of human experience and the rest of the Universe will always elude measurement and rational explanation.

Much of the photographed material in "Phenotypes" I picked up off the beaches of the Gulf of California or was loaned to me by Annette Felix and David Andres from their collections of material from the same area. Other items were found around my house in Tucson Arizona, or purchased at thrift shops or hardware stores.

Even if Biology knew all the Species on the Earth, we would still encounter them as strange strangers, because of the inner logic of knowledge. The more you know, the more entangled you realize you are, and the more open and ambiguous everything becomes.

Both quotes by Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 2010



Infundibular Trimorphs

2011

Archival Digital Print on
Hahnemuhle PhotoRag
mounted on aluminum

11" x 14"

I notice the turmoil I feel inside myself and in others can run parallel to trends and conflicts in society. I bring this inner/outer dialogue to the table when I make my paintings. As I observe nonstop streaming of information and other effects of mass media on our culture and the world, I respond in my work.

This painting series deals with the theme of "landings". In Giltig Landings, both inauthentic and authentic landings are considered. Some images reflect tangible or physical landings, while others express landing in oneself or in one's situation.



Giltig Landings

2011

Mixed media paintings on handmade paper

68" x 63" (Total Size)

SHEILA PITT

After a catastrophic accident in 2008 that left me a quadriplegic I thought I would never make art again. With limited use of my left hand there was no way to cut wood, the print medium I had done most of my life. Using a digital drawing tablet, my computer and Photoshop, I am able to draw again in a new way. My studio assistant manipulates Photoshop for me, I do all the drawing and image making. My assistant then processes the image. My prints since the accident are a visual diary which documents my slow but steady recovery.



Eating Spaghetti

2011

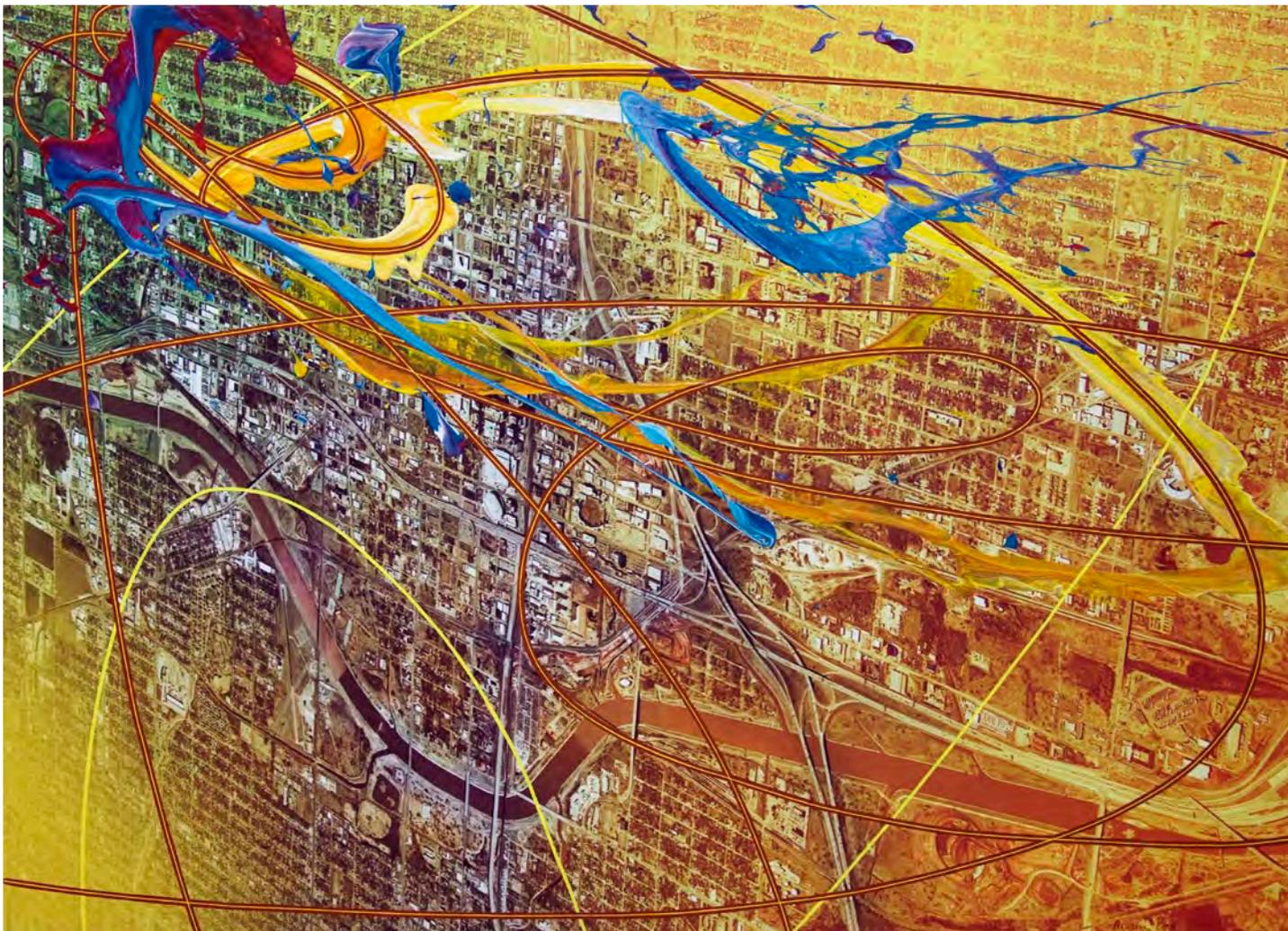
Archival inkjet print

16" x 12"

A few years ago, I found that working with aerial photographs was like looking at things from the heavens, both, literally and metaphorically. From a distance, things are much different. The farther away one gets, the less personal things become, and the easier it becomes to appreciate what might not be apparent otherwise.

Angels in the Sun is one of 12 paintings from the Oklahoma Series. With this series, each painting presented Oklahoma City as seen from distant perspectives, and I did so through lenses of mystery, sentiment, curiosity, and discovery. By combining aerial views of the city's roads, bridges, buildings, waterways, and neighborhoods with expressionistic painting techniques, I re-contextualized the way one might look at the city: its design, obviously, but also its history, industry, and climate.

It is interesting to note how much of Oklahoma's past and present is inextricably connected to the land: who owns it, how it came to be owned, what is on and under it, and how it has been shaped over time. Oklahoma City from above is a visually fascinating and inspiring city. The views depicted in the works of this series were not purely geographic. I wanted them to be about much, much more - the poetry of the land, the music of the elements, the drama of the history, the heroics of its peoples, and all the possibilities that one might imagine.



Angels In The Sun

2010

Acrylic and inkjet on vinyl

60" x 84"

My creative process is based on satire, whether it is about the socio-political world we live in or my own personal history. I am interested in the hypocrisy of how certain historical events are glossed over. I witnessed this firsthand in Vietnam. I served in the U.S. Navy, 1963-67.

The work involves extensive research and relates to current events, such as the needless wars this country has gotten involved in since World War II. I am also fascinated by the usage of the word “war”, such as the drug wars, border wars and the war on crime, terror, etc. Humor is vital. I see these events as visual “cartoons.” Here I am using the word as it was originally used during the Renaissance to mean a quick sketch.

My approach utilizes bright color, whether it be acrylic or oils, geometrical compositional elements based on the Golden Mean and very often these elements are distorted beyond the rectangular format. This method has allowed me to create larger than life paintings that can spill into a room.

I have been working on a series on the U.S. Presidents since 1994. Intertwined with other minor series involving the politics of being considered a “minority.” My work is constantly evolving; I have recently begun a new series based on “classical” art.

My work has been reviewed in Art in America, N. Y. Times, L.A. Times, Washington Post, Artforum, Providence Journal, San Francisco Examiner and the Chronicle, etc.



The Mendacious Maniacal Magician

2011

Oil in canvas and wood

62" x 49"

Supralingual/Sublingual: The Tongue is the Terrain is a series of interdisciplinary works that integrate performance art, video art, and electronic music. I perform live in front of a rear projection video screen that also features me but garbed in orange coveralls and typically situated in a ritual activity at the surface of the landscape. I metaphorically parallel the division between air and land with the division between language and its meaning. The surface of the landscape is the literal seam between the atmosphere and geosphere; as such, it becomes host to a range of metaphoric activity revealing both the poetry and gracelessness of straddling the language/meaning divide. This merger of process-oriented art and electro nu-wave music delivers a nerdy audiovisual spectacle that recalls Bruce Nauman and Joseph Beuys as much as it does Devo.

I parallel art and music, both time-based fields of study, “piggy backing” performance art on top of music because of music’s readily accessible nature. While my enthusiasm for both fields runs deep, I recognize the very real accessibility problems with performance art. By hybridizing the two approaches, I hope to inject a more palatable tempo into the repetitive action of performance—alleviating the “boredom” of performance and providing interest incentive to devotees from both circles. *Supralingual/Sublingual: The Tongue is the Terrain*

seeks to sustain the critical conceptual depth of process-oriented work while simultaneously appealing to the open mind and bodily instinct people have for rhythm.



Supralingual/Sublingual: The Tongue is the Terrain

2010-11

Excerpt from performance
at the Martine Chaisson
Gallery, New Orleans, LA

My recent work explores the literal and metaphorical delineation between public and private space, and the inevitable displacement that occurs in all still photographs. Following an observational methodology, these images are perhaps more about the act of looking than a narrative about place, foregrounding the notion of being alone, somewhere. My conceptual strategy involves an ongoing investigation of natural and artificial boundaries that both protect and isolate within an environment. The resulting images offer a glimpse of tangible separation points, borders, and thresholds.

148 days (Kagawa Prefecture, Shikoku island) is a meditation on time, insularity, and the distance between. Although there is no explicit reference in the work to the earthquake and tsunami, the destruction and loss of life cast a long shadow over much of the work that I made prior to the disaster.



148 Days

2010

Archival pigment print

24" x 30"

To be alive is to be vulnerable.



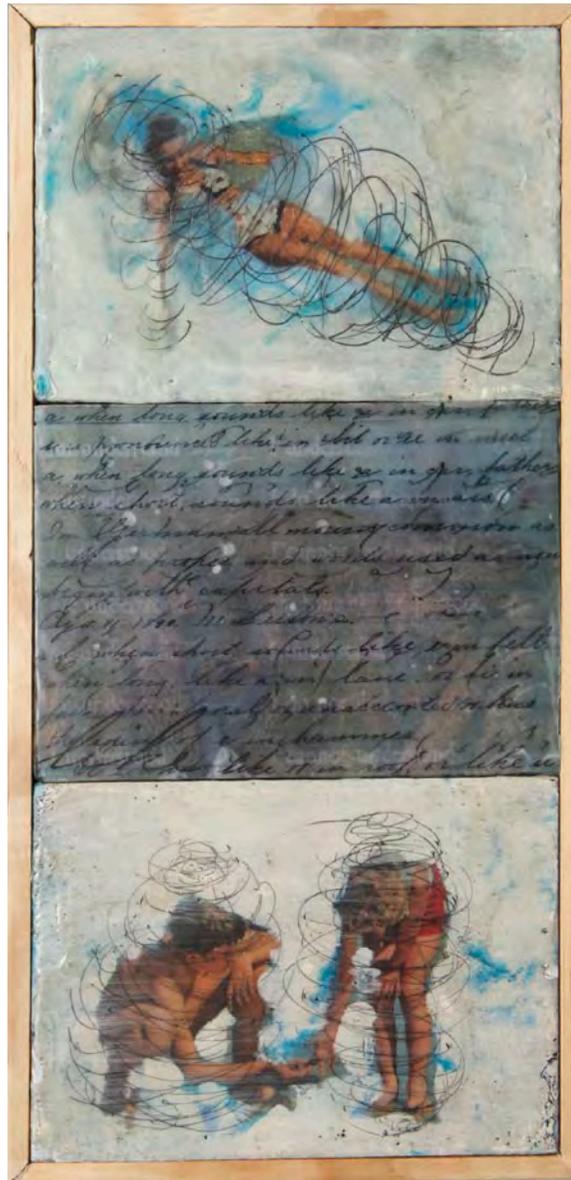
Easily Broken

2009

Acrylic, graphite, encaustic on birch panel

4' 1" x 2'

This panel is part of a series reflecting communication. A line representing the internal world they live in surrounds the figures swirling around their seemingly floating bodies. In-between the two panels of figures is another panel that has multiple representations of written communication, repeating the ideas—I understand, I don't understand, we understand, we don't understand. The images and text are found. The text is from a manual of stenography and a practice book for handwriting from the 1800s. I am interested in the transformation of communication from handwriting to contemporary digital processes. The method and form are changing in communication, but there is a disconnect in the communication, or understanding and comprehension of the other voice. In a communication model, there is the sender and receiver and noise in-between that changes the message from sender to receiver. I am interested in the variety of visual forms in communication—in this piece specifically typography, handwriting and stenography— as well as the changes in technology that are currently evolving. We can say it faster, but do we understand any better?



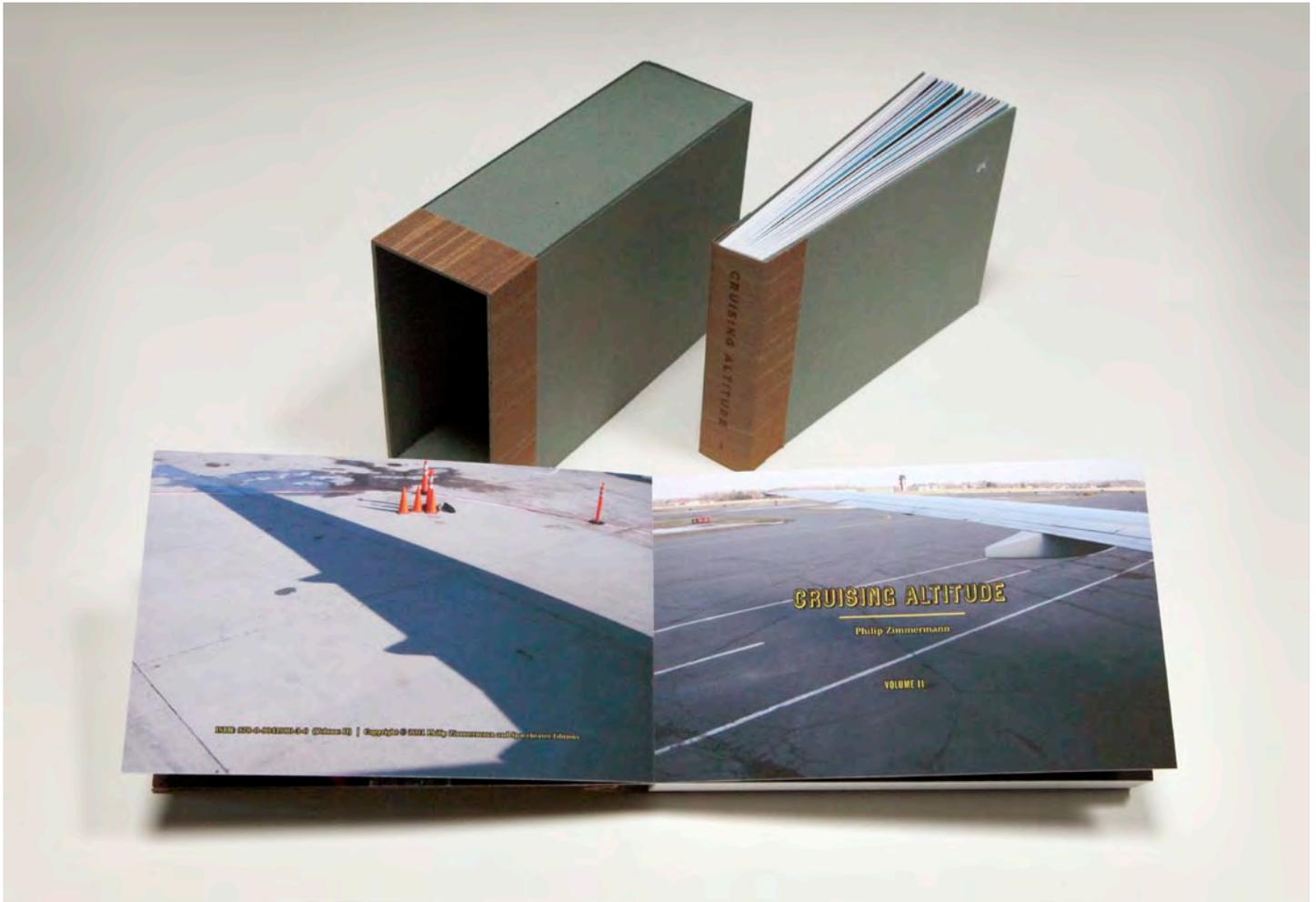
Understand

2011

Encaustic mixed media

16" x 8"

The books *Cruising Altitude*, Volume I and Volume II are about two sides of travel. Volume I is about the deep feeling of wanderlust many people experience out of a need to open one's own world view. This is the desire to travel away from one's normal and boring world, and to see and experience the different and the exotic. Part of what drives wanderlust is an impatience with the everyday and the need to escape the humdrum work-a-day world. Volume II is about the flip-side of wanderlust. In this book a traveler encounters a virulent and often jingoistic resistance from the inhabitants of the new locations that one enters as a visitor. Terms for "the other", usually derogatory and demeaning, appear over photographic views from airplane windows. As the child of an American diplomat, I grew up loving the many different places we lived, but never fitting in to any of them.



Cruising Altitude

2011

2 volume set of books interior text: archival pigmented
Inkjet on Somerset Velvet paper

Designed by Jonathan Black for Studio A

Produced by The University of Arizona School of Art

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