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INVESTIGATING PRACTICE

Somé M. Louis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Prerequisite for Honors in Studio Art Department of Wellesley College

April 2017

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INTRODUCTION

Before the proposal of my thesis, I reflected on a number of past projects, with the objective of identifying any projects I would hope to continue on a larger scale. However, it was not a single project that inspired my thesis topic, but rather a number of consistencies that I observed, both aesthetic and conceptually in my past work. I was intrigued by their existence despite the varied objectives of each project I was reflecting on, and determined that they were the essence of my artist’s process. However, when I attempted to verbalize this process, it was difficult and inconsistent. As I had initially identified consistencies through artwork, I decided it would be a worthwhile effort to identify the artist’s process through work as well.

Defining the artist’s practice as the intersection of physical/aesthetic interests with personal/conceptual interests, and focusing on creating work with an open-ended or undefined objective, I set my stage for thesis study. This year-long project explores my production of work, with the objective of understanding how these physical objects serve as tools to identify my practice. In this paper, I will analyze the results of this “study.” The paper will first acknowledge the vast areas of study that shaped a number of objectives reflected in this project. It will then address the project itself, analyzing elements of physical production and presentation and how they were used to identify my practice.
SECTION I : RESEARCH AND REFERENCES

Before analyzing the work produced in this project, it is first important to identify the external factors that had an impact on my work, including individual research, trips to exhibitions and conferences, and conversations with visiting artists. These factors were often significant in propelling my investigations of certain visual elements, and frequently served as helpful suggestions for further analysis of my work in relation to other artists or movements.

Frances Stark

One of the earliest influences to my thesis visual investigations was the work of contemporary artist Frances Stark (b. 1967) as seen in the MFA’s UH-OH: Frances Stark 1991–2015 exhibition. Among the extensive display in the museum’s “most comprehensive survey to date” of the artist’s work1 were a number of Stark’s early carbon copy drawings, text works, and other works on paper. Defined by their minimal composition, muted colors, miniscule, repetitive text, and tangible qualities, these works were immediately moving to me, as I observed many of my own aesthetic interests in Stark’s work.

Of particular and immediate interest to my thesis production were Stark’s works that involved large areas of gesso on paper, as well as her frequent use of handwritten, repeated words and letters to create a motif.

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Among the first works I created in my thesis production were a series of applications of gesso to tracing paper, in which I examined the application qualities of three different types of paintbrushes. Concepts of working with white ground were not unfamiliar to me, and I was interested in concepts of the variation of this medium particularly in recent paintings. My early thesis tests focused on experimentation and variation of the ground again, this time trading canvas for delicate, tangible pieces of tracing paper. Stark’s gesso paintings resonated significantly with me, particularly in context of this previous and early experimentation with white ground. Her aesthetics perhaps reaffirmed my departure from canvas to paper, an act that served as a continuation of experimental ideas from one surface to another. This concept of gesso
on paper is not limited to my early work. Instead, it has manifested itself throughout the year of production, and is often seen combined with personal text and drawing, visual devices that, although not directly considered to be influences from Stark, may recall some of her works on paper.

Yet another early set of works in my thesis project influenced by Stark are two small, blue, rectangular papers, dominated by light white text applied with transfer paper. These texts utilize Stark’s concepts of repeating letters within sentences, and yet, like the work with white gesso, are more concerned with impersonal documentary content, such as the date and time.
In reflecting on Stark’s work, I have also seen a third, not immediately apparent connection: the concept of self-examination. Although I would not identify my work as “autobiographical,” as Stark’s work has been considered, I find a connection between my work and hers in relation to concepts of abstracting texts and images with personal meaning, despite my interests being primarily related to my opinions on thesis production and internal conflicts.

Agnes Martin, Sol LeWitt

Perhaps the most significant influences on my visual investigations are modernist artists Agnes Martin (1912-2004) and Sol LeWitt (1928-2007). Martin and LeWitt’s consistent work with the grid, particularly the variety and modification that can be applied to it, is a consistent influence in the majority of the works on paper in my thesis project.

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2 "UH-OH: Frances Stark 1991–2015"
3 Ibid.
My first experimentations with the grid began slightly before my exposure to these artists. I was attracted to the simplicity of a gridded pattern, and was intrigued by how the pattern could be printed. However, Martin’s work truly bolstered my investigations of the grid as a visual tool. When I refer to Martin’s work, I am referring to her production in the decade after her move to New York city in 1957, in which she produced the majority of work in her signature gridded format.4

I was primarily attracted to the aesthetics of Martin’s work, particularly, the delicacy of her grids, her use of simple materials such as gesso and pencil, her use of muted tones, and most importantly, the clear expression of a constant and habitual practice.5 However, while my preliminary research mainly exposed me to her paintings, it was her small works on paper, on display in the Guggenheim’s Agnes Martin retrospective, that became the most influential to my practice. Up close, the combination of the tangible, aging paper and Martin’s simple, meticulous lines were almost overwhelming to me. I was fully captivated by the way the paper exhibited the stresses of Martin’s outwardly delicate practice, for example, buckling at the application of ink or gesso, and making evident any mistakes (even those that may have been erased) in her carefully measured and implemented gridded lines.

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Finally, Martin’s diverse application of the concept of the grid was particularly interesting to me. Deviating from, but she revealed experimentations in weight, visible vs. invisible lines of the grid, and color.

Although my own experimentations with the grid are based entirely on my own interests of how the matrix can be modified, the concepts of the grid and its modification stem from my exposure to Martin’s work. Additionally, viewing Martin’s work together gave me a greater consciousness of the application of work with similar concepts in relation to one another and their similarities and differences on a larger scale. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the
works in the Guggenheim exhibition gave me a greater consciousness to the idea of detail and the viewer. What is visible when one is close to the work, and what can be seen when they are far away? Given the emotional response I experienced in relation to Martin’s work, this was a concept that remained important to me throughout the entirety of my thesis.

I was more aware of Sol LeWitt’s work than I was with Martin’s at the start of my thesis, and was perhaps most interested by the aesthetics of notation and instruction present in his works. Despite the practical use of his instructions or notations, they were also strong visual works with aesthetic purposes. The concept of variation in the implementation of LeWitt’s work was also intriguing, as his instructions could be implemented in a number of locations on many different surfaces or contexts. I was particularly attracted to his visual explanations of the various stages or viewpoints of a single line or shape, for example seen in Wall Drawing #786A, 1995. Despite these interests, however, I was only tangentially aware of this relationship to concepts of notation and variability of a subject in my own work.

My awareness of LeWitt’s work in relation to my own was finally bolstered by my mid-November 2016 visit to the Sol Lewitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective at Mass MoCA, in which I was exposed to a comprehensive concentration of many works that I found interesting both aesthetically, and specifically in relation to my thesis work. Among the numerous works referencing line, the grid, and notation, I was particularly intrigued by Wall Drawing 87 (fig.3) that combined elements of notation with an exhaustive display of the variety of the gridded pattern. I became aware of his use of material as well. His use of “delicate formats” such as

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7 Ibid.
graphite, crayon, and pencil, gave me a consciousness of my own frequent use of simple materials on paper.

This work, and further research, bolstered my consciousness to the variability of the grid and other visual conventions. Throughout my thesis practice, I pay detailed attention to a particular visual interest, and can observe various modifications of the same form, a practice that I believe stemmed from this initial attention to the viability of that method.

Eva Hesse, Richard Serra

While I was initially simply attracted to the minimalist work of Eva Hesse (1936-1970) and Richard Serra (b.1939), further research of these artists allowed me to identify them as significant resources for the conceptual thought and art historical context of my thesis project. I was interested in addressing questions of where my art could possibly reside in relation to

Fig 5. Sol LeWitt, Detail: Wall Drawing 87
June, 1971
Colored Pencil
http://massmoca.org/event/walldrawing87/
previously considered artwork, and these artists brought important questions of the meaning of
minimalist and process art and the intersection of these movements with external factors.

Although I had conducted preliminary research on Hesse’s work at the beginning of my
thesis project, my most significant relationship to her work came when I was able to view her
_Test Piece for Contingent_, 1969, installed in the National Gallery in Washington DC. Although it
was presented in context of the minimalist gallery, the work stood on its own both physically (it
was the only work on the entirety of the left wall of the gallery), and conceptually. The work was
simple: a cheesecloth covered with yellow latex, however I was floored by its materiality. I could
observe each square in the cheesecloth, as well as the buckling, fading, and aging of the object
when covered in latex. There was a clear sign of varied application of the latex as well,
displaying the evidence of the artist’s hand in the creation of the work. Further research on
Hesse’s use of latex, particularly her attraction to its material qualities despite the fact that it was
not archival,\textsuperscript{8} revealed a concept that I found resonant in my own work, as I also utilized a
number of non-archival papers driven simply by their materiality.

\textsuperscript{8} Sussman, Elisabeth, Fred Wasserman, Yve-Alain Bois, and Mark Godfrey. 2006. _Eva Hesse: Sculpture_. 1st ed.
These concepts of materiality and the artist’s hand were important to me, not only because they were part of my own aesthetic interests, but also because they allowed me to further explore the intersection of minimalist art, particularly minimalism characterized by anonymity and industrial material, and the tangible or human. Hesse’s work gave me a platform to understand these concepts within my own work, which often references minimal themes but is

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more actively defined by individual works with clear evidence of the artist’s interaction with 
material, both in the limits of precision and evidence of error.

Hesse’s writings also played a crucial role in conceptual analysis of my own work. Near 
the inception of my thesis, I began reading Hesse’s journals. I was interested in the written 
relationship between a practical record of artwork and artmaking and a record of the artist’s 
personal interests. Furthermore, the journals provided an interesting concept: the rationality of a 
journal to the writer, versus its potentially indecipherable nature to a reader. Essentially the 
journals presented a constructed world in which one could view the artist’s interests both 
practically and personally. With my thesis investigation focusing on observing the artist’s 
practice, I began to incorporate writing and journaling as part of my own work, exploring the 
concepts initially presented to me through the use of Hesse’s journals.

Although I did not necessarily consider Serra’s work a direct visual influence on my own 
production, his work also provided additional conceptual thought I wished to explore in my 
thesis. In my early research, I was particularly intrigued by his well-known *Verb List*, a two-page 
“manifesto” of 84 verbs that he used to inform his work in a number of different media. In my 
investigation of process art, this work became one of the most interesting pieces, as it reflected 
both “actions [that related] to oneself” and process work in the form of residue of another 
artistic interest.

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11 Ibid.
While I certainly found this work to display concepts of the artist’s practice that I hoped to explore in my thesis, for example, the verb list seemed like a thorough example of both artist’s interests and concepts of artistic investigation, Serra’s work, and the definition of process art, also presented a conceptual challenge for me. While a number of works in the process art movement seemed to be unplanned products, or residue, of a greater artistic interest, my works did not necessarily fit entirely in that definition. Despite often depicting the artist’s hand and the process of creating a piece, each work in my collection was a representation of my larger thesis idea.
The work of Hesse and Serra prompted me to analyze the relationship of my work to a number of artistic movements. I was able to conclude that I would not be comfortable identifying a particular movement for which my art could comfortably be a part of. Rather, I found that the work represented the various intersections of artistic practice that I considered intriguing, perhaps a larger representation of the varied interests that informed my thesis practice. Here, it is important to note that while I considered the work of Hesse and Serra, as well as other influences like Stark, Martin, and LeWitt, important visual tools, and was driven to reference or investigate the pared down aesthetics of their completed work, I also recognize the stark differences in their motivations and criticisms.

Julianne Swartz

In addition to my own research on related artists, a number of visiting artists also played a significant role in shaping my understanding of my thesis. This was often through studio visits and conversation, as well as lectures on the artists’ own work and concepts they found interesting.

One of the first extended studio visits I experienced as a thesising student was with contemporary artist Julianne Swartz, who visited as a part of the Frank Williams Lecture Series at Wellesley in mid-November 2016. I was fascinated by Swartz’ deliberate, minimal work, and was intrigued by her ability to use these works to communicate elements of tension and corporeality. Her abstraction of the body\textsuperscript{12} was particularly intriguing as I thought about my own work, and whether or not it could communicate the presence or diligence of the human hand in

its creation. My meeting with Swartz provided me a number of valuable suggestions that impacted my practice for the rest of my thesis investigation. Perhaps the most valuable were concepts of abstraction in my practice (and the function of my notation), as well as the idea of the visible artist in my artwork.

Her suggestion of abstraction prompted me to reflect on a number of my practices, particularly: How does annotation abstract or define my visual investigations? Questioning my relationship with notation allowed me to consider departure from the chronological arrangement of my work, as well as incorporate purely visual experiments that suggested thought and control rather than expressed them through written notation.

Swartz’ concept of the “visible artist” in my work was perhaps the most intriguing topic of conversation. She emphasized that my work perhaps was a reflection of my own personality, a concept that I had shockingly not considered before that point. I believe this conversation encouraged my investigation of the artist’s practice, supporting not only the physical action of practice, but also the personal interests involved in production as well.

My relationship to artist’s texts, particularly those of Eva Hesse and Agnes Martin, as mentioned earlier, was also prompted by my conversation with Swartz, who suggested writing as further examination of my artistic process. This suggestion became a longstanding practice that I maintained throughout my thesis work.

Finally, an informed tour with Swartz, throughout the Frank Williams collection was a defining moment in the production of thesis work. This attention from the artist, as well as curator Rachael Arauz and collector Frank Williams allowed me to develop visual interests from artists I had not previously known, and incorporate new visual investigations into my own practice.
Stefana McClure

My meeting with Stefana McClure, the second visiting artist through the Frank Williams Lecture series, arrived near the end of my thesis project. Her lecture, and our later conversations, were now applicable to a matured set of thesis investigations, and served to bolster new forms of production in my work.

Before meeting with McClure, I was fascinated by the work she presented, which was often paper-based, involved text (both handwritten and typed), and reflected a careful and meticulous method of production. I was particularly invested in her *films on paper*, in which she analyzed the subtitles of a film frame-by-frame, and transcribed them onto tracing paper, taking careful consideration to accurately reflecting the size of the screen in which she had viewed the film, as well as the font, kerning, and location of the original subtitles. The works in these series displayed the materiality and temporality of tracing paper, the active role of her own hand in the production of the work, and a meticulous, repetitive process that required significant time and concentration to complete. As my thesis also explored similar elements, I found these pieces particularly resonant.
My conversation with McClure began with the discussion of these themes, as well as her general knowledge of paper through her extensive experience with papermaking in Japan. I was particularly interested in this topic as I had recently returned from a trip to Japan in which I made an effort to look for different types of paper, as Japanese paper was a key tool in a number of works I had made. These shared interests prompted McClure’s careful investigation of my work, and in our brief meeting, she shared a vast wealth of information about paper and materiality, as well as compositional concepts that encouraged me to continue with new visual investigations.

McClure also provided important insight on my work outside of paper-related discussion. She commented on the color scheme of the work, and referenced artists practicing in building
environments from careful color considerations. She also paid close attention to the detail in my work, and gave thoughtful and unique comparisons, most notably that the drilled holes of the grid in one of my works on newsprint were quite similar to certain Japanese paper-eating bugs she used to observe when she purchased old books.

Similar to Julianne, tours of the collection with the artist allowed for me to obtain further insight into her work. I obtained valuable visual references for the production of new pieces in my thesis, and observed that these conversations with McClure truly served as a significant push for production in the final weeks of my thesis project.

FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS WITH VISITING ARTISTS

Outside of the studio visits with artists from the Frank Williams Lecture series, there were a number of other visiting artists, working in varied media and fields that contributed valuable viewpoints on my thesis work, as well as my previous work. Ulrike Lopez was an early visitor to my studio, and viewed my portfolio before thesis work had been created. He left valuable comments on viewing “personality” and “personal interests” through my investigations, a comment that would later be echoed by Julianne Swartz. Xia Zhang, an artist whose work I admired even before our visit, gave valuable comments on concepts of body consciousness, balance, and movement that she viewed in my work. This opinion was shockingly fresh, and prompted me to reevaluate the relationship of my thesis work to movement and choreography—perhaps my dance background, which I did not consciously involve, was still evident in the work? Sarah Tortora, who visited my studio later in my thesis production, confirmed my investigation of the artist’s process by verbally identifying concepts of comfort and control evident in my numerous investigations. Finally, a brief/spontaneous discussion with the
Newhouse Mellon Visiting Artists, architect Thomas Tsang and composer Ken Ueno, brought unique viewpoints outside of the visual arts environment. Most notably was the concept of my pieces functioning as a form of landscape, or perhaps an architectural plan for one, and the attempts of the two dimensional work to return to their original “flat” form once they were arranged on the wall. In their discussion of their collaboration between architecture and music, I was prompted to think again about the intersection of my work, not only between art movements, but also between the materiality of work and physicality of its production.

Concentrated Viewing

A final staple of my thesis research was concentrated viewing, a term I use to define being exposed to a massive amount of visual information in a short period of time. Often overwhelming, these experiences allowed for valuable reflection, not only on my visual interests, but also on my own art practice.

An immediate example of this concept is my visit to the Southern Graphics Council International (SGCI) conference in Atlanta, Georgia. As is common with conferences, an exciting environment full of lectures, gallery visits, portfolio viewings, and social activities were all concentrated within a few days. The most characteristic element of “concentrated viewing” in this conference were the open portfolio sessions, in which 100s of artists displayed their work over a series of four, one-hour table sessions. With so much to see, I settled on quickly moving through each table, pausing only when I found something that I considered interesting. My reflection on this practice, through the sketchbook notes and business card (and Instagram handles) that I acquired revealed that my interests, both aesthetic and conceptual were more varied than I expected. It also shaped my understanding of the artist’s practice - not only of other
artist’s but also my own. How did we communicate? What did we emphasize about their interests? These fast interactions forced us to engage in a rapid-fire summary of our work that attempted to detail the entirety of their investigations in a few sentences. This activity allowed me to return to my thesis work with a clearer concept of what to look for in my practice, and answer what about this practice was being reflected in the physical objects that defined my thesis project.

Another, slightly different, example, was a week-long trip to Japan I took shortly after my trip to Atlanta. This, frankly lucky, opportunity was defined by numerous brief journeys to as many “staple” areas I could visit. This new environment, defined to me, an outsider, mainly by the spaces I was able to visit, forced not only a reflection of the journey, but also a reflection of the self. What elements of the trip did I enjoy? What practices did I gravitate towards when forced to move so quickly? These observations could inform not only my personality, but also my practice.

My research for this project involved many more of these concentrated viewing trips, for example, the New York Print Fair, a second trip to New York that involved a visit to MoMA as well as four galleries, the Iron Printmaker competition coupled with visits to MassArt’s various exhibitions, and three days of museum visits in Washington D.C. Each of these moments of concentrated viewing forced focused attention to personal interests, and were perhaps some of the most formative practices for gleaning insight into the key factors of my artistic practice, out of a project characterized by a heavy concentration of production.

SECTION II: THE OBJECTS AND THEIR REPRESENTATION OF PRACTICE

PART A : THE OBJECTS
When one approaches the Jewett Sculpture Court, then encounter a carefully constructed field of neutral rectangles. Despite being attached to each natural wall in the sculpture court, as well as three built panels, these objects fill the space without overwhelming it, perhaps a result of their careful arrangement and simple, related tones of whites, blues, and browns. The arrangement of these objects, all relative rectangles of various sizes and textures, is punctuated by, and perhaps defined by, a roughly half-inch space of visible wall or panel between each work, as well as small strips of white tape that attach the objects to the walls and demarcate their location. Depending on the time of day, light from the large, horizontal window adjacent to the installation is cast on different areas of wall and panel, emphasizing elements like transparency, sculptural quality and shadow, and miniscule detail on the objects in its path.

The many works in this space are the result of a year of thesis production. They combine physical interests in material and variation with personal concerns, thereby functioning as representations of my artistic practice. In this section, I will detail the construction and driving interest of materiality, color, and arrangement of these physical objects, and will explain their significance in defining my practice.

MATERIAL AND SURFACE

On Paper and Tape

Despite being defined as objects, which may imply a certain three-dimensional quality, every work in this installation is a work on paper. This interest in paper stemmed from a combination of interests, identified both early in the thesis project, as well as while the project was well underway. The initial interest in using paper as the dominant material for this project was directly related to my early identification of the importance of “experimentation and
variation” in a number of my previous works created at Wellesley. Paper provided a universal substrate with seemingly infinite possibilities for variation, including elements such as color, texture, and surface that I could easily categorize and explore. Essentially, it functioned as the experimental “constant,” on which various ideas could be tested.

I was additionally attracted by the concept of paper functioning as a preliminary or preparatory surface in traditional art historical discussions, often serving as the surface for a plan for a work of art on a different surface. I was interested in making this implied concept of planning function as a final work of art, while also using a substrate that would reference concepts of accessing the artist’s “mind.”

Similar to paper, the use of tape was a decision that also represented elements of the artist’s hand. Less sterile than pins (although pins are occasionally utilized in this work for pieces that require both functional and aesthetic installation), the pieces of white tape that hold up the works on paper function as demarcations of my role in the arrangement of the work mentally and physically.

The Three-Dimensional Objects

Perhaps the most disruptive elements in the field of flat, rectangular neutrals, are the three-dimensional works, defined by their irregular shapes, buckling surfaces, large and organic details, and sculptural qualities. They perhaps seem to be a departure from the order and organization of the other works in the collection, however, the explorations into three dimensional work, or surface investigations, were some of the first works produced in my thesis project.
As briefly described in my interest in Stark’s work, the first objects created as part of my project were a series of “tests,” experiments with no expected outcome, of the surface changes caused by the application of gesso and acrylic on tracing paper. Using a number of tools, such as foam brushes (wide and thin), palette knives (large and small), paintbrushes (medium), and a speedball brayer (small), I applied the gesso or acrylic to tracing paper in various methods, carefully notating elements such as the tool used, mark made, and drying time.

Directly related to this project came the production of the second method of three-dimensional work in the installation, paper sculpture, which was inspired by the sculptural shape of scrap tracing paper made after using it as a tool to clean up excess gesso. Later paper sculptures were created as a method to investigate the surface of different papers, with a focus on both how they held shape, but also how they would be held on the wall, a form of presentation that is not necessarily conducive to their crumpled, illogical shape.

Both forms of three-dimensional work clearly exhibit that the concept of experimentation, and annotation, is necessary to my practice. Despite the works presenting a freer, more organic form than the two dimensional works in the project, they are still carefully annotated, with notes on what was observed at the time of their creation. This seems to imply that control, in addition to experimentation, is a key element of my practice as well.

However, an additional observation to the time in which these works were produced adds a second dimension to the role of experimentation and control in my practice. Throughout my project, three-dimensional work was mainly created at the beginning of a phase of production (of two-dimensional objects sharing a similar interest), or, most frequently, at a point in the project where I was unsure about what elements I would like to investigate next. They may therefore function not simply as experiments, but as tools for managing production anxiety or worry.
around creating new work. Although these works are significant parts of the thesis themselves, they perhaps suggest that concepts of experimentation are not completely analytical, but rather elements of control in my practice that embrace uncertainty and allow space for free expression, frustration, and mistakes before embarking on more meticulous work.

The Two-Dimensional Objects

Perhaps the most abundant work in the thesis project are the two-dimensional works, the elements of the project that create the field of color and rectangular variation that one observes immediately upon approaching the space. These two-dimensional works are considered such
because of their flatness in relation to the more three-dimensional elements of the project. They are the aspects of my thesis work that present the most variation, including work in drawing, tracing, photo lithography, linocut and woodcut, digital print, text, and handwriting, and their presence emphasizes the variability in appearance of papers based on natural surface and added detail. In addition to their general variety of surface altering mediums, these works are also defined by frequent inclusion of miniscule details that are only visible, or decipherable, by close looking, such as drilled holes, miniscule handwriting, and white ink printed on white paper.

Just as the surfaces of these works are varied, so are the sources for their inspiration. The visual elements represented on paper stemmed from aesthetic choice frequently informed by individual research on influential artists, or prompts from conversations with visiting artists, an example of which can be seen in the use of the grid. However, despite the wide variety of production methods seen in this work, their content is very closely related. Quite often, large bodies of two-dimensional works were created in long, uninterrupted sessions of work time that began by analyzing work created before. In viewing this work, I determined if I was still interested in pursuing the concepts I explored in the previous work session. For example, I might have been concerned with abstractions in the grid in my latest work, and could decide whether or not I wanted to continue with this concept or move on to something new. This practice of evaluation and production could be identified as a *start-start* method. In which one visual interest was explored, and prompted the creation of another interest.

The interconnected nature of this production represents the existence of varied channels of interest combined with an analytical evaluation of their connections, and consciousness of how works relate to one another. They represent an artist’s practice that is expansive in the open-ended nature of this thesis project, yet, with the analytical practice of the *start-start* method,
committed to maintaining close relationships between varied work, perhaps yet another example of variety and control.

The Neutral Surface

While neutral papers contribute to the general field of color and arrangement one notices when they enter the space, they are slightly different than the two-dimensional or three-dimensional works in the project due to their lack of any form of alteration or manipulation.

Although their lack of manipulation perhaps suggests the absence of the artist’s hand, they instead represent pure aesthetic interest, and the acknowledgement of their materiality that perhaps was “interesting” enough for them to avoid any form of alteration. In other cases, a neutral paper may serve as a constant, functioning in conversation to a paper that has perhaps been altered with a detail but also functions on its own. The selection of “interesting” neutrals is perhaps an absurd logic of what elements of the project could be presented in a basic state, however they make evident concepts of controlled self-regulation and justification in my practice as an artist.

The neutral works also present an interesting personal intervention to the artmaking practice, referencing an ongoing external practice of mine in which I constantly hoard papers that I find interesting. These pages are often stored together, organized by size, or date of purchase, but remain unused or unaltered. The decision to display unused paper perhaps represents intersections of personal practice in artistic practice, and implies an informed set of aesthetic decisions, suggesting they are formed not only by artistic research, but by actions outside of the artistic canon.
Color

As mentioned in the initial description of the installation, a relationship with color is perhaps the first encounter that a viewer will have with this project. The color scheme is characterized by cohesive, cool and neutral tones, that are often light enough to be considered a *tinted white*. This selection of colors reflects both past and present visual interests, and functions as yet another tool for the representation of the artist’s process.

The concept of tinted white in particular references some of my previous work, particularly a painting titled *FP 315 White Study (U=R)*. In this painting, I explored red-tinted whites, presenting their subtle variations in a grid punctuated by the exposed gesso of the canvas. In comparison to my thesis work, there is a clear relationship beyond the use of tinted white, exhibited by an interest in presenting color variation on a raw or neutral ground. On a broader scale, the colors utilized in this thesis project appear frequently in past works, particularly in the relationship between white and blue-white. These similarities certainly suggest a consistent approach to viewing color, but perhaps also suggest an unresolved exploration of color in previous work that is finally being investigated due to the expansive nature of production in this thesis project.
While the development of a color palette references past work, it is also referential to an internal thesis practice: the concept of *start-start* investigation as defined in the production of two dimensional work. An outline for this color palette, featuring the whites, blues, and browns recognizable throughout the work, was detailed relatively early in the thesis project. Using a method similar to *start-start* investigation, I analyzed the wall in each section of work production, deciding on the material and color that could be appropriate for future investigations. However, unlike the wide variety of visual experimentation produced in *start-start* investigations, the color palette of this project remains relatively similar and neutral. Why?

The first solution is that the color scheme is simply the logical continuation of previous color used in the project, as a result of the *start-start* analysis. However, the simple color scape, never at odds with the natural surface, added detail, and manipulated texture on the surface of the work, may also serve as a subtle tool for the communication of this variation. In other words,
while the color is a carefully planned aesthetic choice, it is not the main function of the project. Rather, it serves to highlight the visual investigations on the paper’s surface.

This approach to color adds a new interpretation to the concept of control that has become apparent in defining my artist’s practice. Through references to past work, as well as a constant consideration for aesthetic similarity, color choice in this project may reflect a practice that utilizes the comfortable or recognizable as a method for control of an otherwise infinitely variable environment.

![Image](image.png)

Fig 11. Example of Color Consideration, T:00
In addition to the constant production of physical work for display, my thesis project also included a constant journaling practice. These simple, typed, stream-of-consciousness journals contained entries that related to both the production of work throughout the thesis project as well as personal relationship to the work and the pressures of completing the assignment. The distribution of entries relating to the two topics were relatively equal, with journals often beginning with extensive details of projects I would like to try within this project, and reflections on work that was already made and how it helped to define my practice.

Preliminary Decisions

The decision to journal stemmed from my interest in the writings of Eva Hesse and Agnes Martin. Hesse’s journal was particularly intriguing, as the entries often related to both work and personal relationships without any clear distinction. The entries were often unclear or difficult to decipher, revealing clear meaning to the artist, but obviously no intention of addressing an outside reader. The journals seemed to reveal, however, an abstract view of Hesse’s process, constructed entirely from the artist’s perspective with little outside interpretation. This concept of the intersection between art production and personal interest or commentary, as well as the individual nature of journaling became an important one for me to explore in my own thesis project.

Unlike the writings of Hesse and Martin, my journaling was limited to discussions related to thesis work as a way to maintain consistent and easy to access record of development and opinion on the work over time. Although the texts are not created to be clear or decipherable, and often contain detailed specifics, they are annotated with headers, identifying sections of
“planning” where topics like materials and projects to explore are listed, and “reflection,” where I wrote freely about my thoughts on the project.

Despite the analytical use of these journals, the content was widely varied. Lists of interesting materials, as well as lists of upcoming projects were punctuated by question marks on how pieces could relate to one another. Occasionally, writing served as the space for my start-start method, analyzing the work done before and identifying what I wanted to try next in text form. Rhetorical questions, or some too big to answer were frequent in each journal.

The tone of the journals changed over time as well. During the beginning of my thesis, a period in which I focused my attention to research, there were often comprehensive texts with focused questions. Often bulleted thoughts on important texts or relevant concepts were outlined in the reflection sections of the journals. However, near the end of the project, the tone became more panicked. Reflection sections were more questions than answer as I grappled with understanding the “thesis” and the stress of production.
These texts reveal quite a bit about the personal analytical process involved in my thesis work. There is attention to recording and observation, as well as careful planning that can be observed in the extensive technical lists and project ideas sections. There also appears to be attention to concepts of rationalization and personal understanding, which is quite evident in the reflection sections of each journal. Perhaps, the journal also functions as a method of control in the form of containment, creating a space for the written expression of new ideas, stress, and insecurities just as the three-dimensional objects at the beginning of the project are material vessels for the same issues.
PART B: THE OBJECTS, ARRANGED IN SPACE

On curating

Throughout this essay, it has been defined that each part of the project, each physical object or behavior, is a tool that can be used to communicate my artist’s practice. However, perhaps the most important tool for this communication is the arrangement of each object in space. In my thesis I define the act of arranging these objects as curating, and consider it not only physical arrangement, but also construction of an environment for their viewing. This section examines the curatorial actions, and identifies how this final act of physical “production” in my thesis project serves as perhaps the most definitive representation of my practice.

As mentioned, the physical space in which work is displayed is relatively unassuming. The three, 7’x4’ walls, staggered in relation to one another in the cleared sculpture court are the only intrusions in the space. Those walls, coupled with the natural walls of the court are the surfaces for presentation of the numerous works on paper, or objects, created during the thesis process. This use of space, however, does not function solely as a surface on which the objects will hang. Rather, considerations have been given to how it will function.

The three built walls, for example, have a number of values. First, they reference my actions of displaying finished works on paper in my gallery spaces during production, where finished objects were taped on the wall in an arrangement that was somewhat chronological but often aesthetic. The walls also promote concepts of movement through space and close looking, an action that became repetitive in my actions, and the actions of my visitors, whenever they entered the studio. The walls allow viewers to walk between the works but also view them from afar in multiple panels, emphasizing concepts of parts to a whole, and the differences in viewpoint. Finally, the walls also promoted the concept of the constructed environment, serving
as minor intrusions to the space, and emphasizing the significance of an environment *made* for
the objects on display.

The installation of work away from the built walls and on the existing walls in the
sculpture court reflects concepts of the expansive collection of pieces created for this project, and
the unending variety of visual experiments that can be made. And as another example, the “floor-
to-top of wall,” installation solidifies this concept of expansive work that may at times be
overwhelming.

Curatorial decisions allow for communication of concepts seen in the work as well. The
arrangement of works on different walls either facilitates, or obscures, concepts of
intersectionality between different areas of object production. One example can be observed in
the close arrangement of a three dimensional object and a two dimensional contour of the
object’s shape. Despite not being created around the same time, and not necessarily visually
similar, the decision to place the objects together prompts thought into their
relationship. Another example can be seen in the relationship between neutral papers and two
dimensional work, prompting conversation on the differences between miniscule detail and
absence.
Personal Presence

This construction allowed for reflection other external factors as well, such as the presence of different forms of light in the space, and how they affect the views of the work, or the reaction of certain objects to movement around their installation space. In essence, curatorial decisions allow viewers to see the works both as individual pieces, but also parts to a whole, a view that was often the norm in my production of the work.

These interpretive concepts explored in curation stem from two important of personal practices or experiences. The first, and most prominent, is my work as a curatorial intern, and assistant, at the Davis museum. Concepts of connection between work, in relation to their visual content, material, and perhaps production time, which are essential issues to think about in curatorial work, became active considerations in my arrangement of my own objects.
Issues of movement and physicality were the second important consideration in my curation of the space. In the simplest explanation, the action of arranging finished objects for display in the studio required a set of repetitive motions, akin to choreography. Picking up a work, stretching or bending to adhere the work to the wall, and returning again to arrange the next piece was a consideration I hoped to communicate in the space, both my utilizing the same tape I used in studio display as in the final installation, but also by suggesting viewers move through the display, prompting a motile relationship with the work.

Physical movement between three spaces of production during the thesis project: the Beebe studio in the fall, Pendleton studio in the spring, and finally Jewett for installation prompted other curatorial choices: the built walls replicate the shape of the only similar wall I had in each studio during production. The arrangement of objects also questions the viewer and myself: is the difference in production space visible in the works on display?

Interpretations

These actions reveal the curatorial practice as a method that combines the concept of physical and practical aesthetics with personal references, thought processes, and actions. In this way, curating presents a clear picture of my artist’s practice. However, the discussion of curating can be analyzed further simply because this curated space holds all of the work produced in this series. It serves as a tool for whole reflection and an overall definition of the artist’s practice drawn from each individual section of work produced.

On the physical level, the careful curation of all works produced in this thesis allows each discussed element; paper, tape, three-dimensional work, two-dimensional work, neutral papers, color, and writing, to be seen as parts to a whole. In this action, one can then recognize the
artist’s practice. Perhaps, the practice is defined by tension between expansive interests, or
variation, and a strict desire to organize/compartamentalize or control these interests, actions that
have been identified in each individual element of production.

The curatorial process itself is not exempt from these concepts of variation and control. When curating, it was necessary for me to take each and every work produced for display and arrange them in space. That physical action displays the variety of objects produced, and the need to organize (or control) their variations in a way that is logical to myself and others. On a larger scale, this action of curating reconciles the wide variety of physical tools used in this thesis, and the frequent attempts to control the extensive set of ideas both for myself and for viewing by an outside audience.
CONCLUSION

With the intent of understanding my artist’s practice through physical works, this open-ended project; defined by research, conversation, writing, and most definitely the expansive production of objects, gave me the material to acknowledge and present myself as an artist. The identification of a practice defined by variation and control is a significant tool for personal understanding, as well as more deeply appreciating my work, both past and present. The concept of identifying the artist’s practice also presents interesting questions. In relation to this project, one may wonder if this is a permanent definition of the artist, or if one’s artistic practice shifts significantly over time. How would my work influence my understanding of my artist’s practice 10 years later? This project also prompts thought, not only about the application to my work, but also the work of others. Is the process of understanding one’s practice universally effective?

Finally, the emergence of the personal is significant in this work. In a number of aspects in this project; from research, to production, to installation, I came to see the strong role my personal interests, or practice more broadly defined beyond the studio, play in my process of artistic expression. Is this investigation of the artist’s practice perhaps a form of self-portraiture? Though this was not the objective of my thesis project, I think my open-ended approach has yielded a multi-faceted portrait of myself, the Artist.


Additional Figures, T:00

Fig 15. Title detail

Fig 16 (Left). Adjacent view 1
Fig 17 (Right). Adjacent view 2
Additional Figures, T:00 (continued)

Fig 18. Balcony view detail

Fig 19 (Left). Balcony View 1
Fig 20 (Right). Balcony View 2
Additional Figures, T:00 (continued)

Fig 21. Install detail

Fig 22. Install detail
Additional Figures, T:00 (continued)

Top to Bottom: Fig 23, Fig 24, & Fig 25. Detail
Additional Figures, T:00 (continued)

Clockwise: Fig 26, Fig 26, Fig 27, & Fig 28. Details
Additional Figures, T:00 (continued)

Top to Bottom: Gig 29 & Fig 30. Wall arrangement, details