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The primary objective of this written thesis is to use illustrate how experimentation and exploration direct and inform my artistic practice within the discipline of printmaking. By using an interdisciplinary approach that seeks to integrate attributes of sculpture, new media and installation art, my work as a printmaker becomes enriched and enlivened through experimental techniques and processes. Through the exploration of form, space and scale, the imagery that comprises this thesis work questions the role of the viewer and challenges his or her awareness of their own body relative to the physical environment.

THE EXPANDED PRINT AS VESSEL FOR
EXPLORATION

by

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THE EXPANDED PRINT AS VESSEL FOR EXPLORATION

The work that I produced for this thesis exhibition reflects not only my sensibilities as an artist working in print-media, but also those of space beyond the conventions of pictorialism through the integration of traditional printmaking techniques and those of new media, sculpture and installation. My artistic practice is defined by this interdisciplinary approach to image making. As a working model, the interdisciplinary or mixed-media approach serves to shape and direct both the formal and conceptual basis of my work. Although this model presents me with a great deal of potential opportunities and options to be explored, it also presents numerous challenges. These challenges assume various forms and ultimately become obstacles along the path toward completion of a body of work. Often these obstructions are technical concerns, but they can also be rooted in an idea. Whatever their form, the basis of my response to them is always intuitive. As this written thesis will illustrate, my artistic practice can be best described as *pseudo-scientific*. In this way, the formation of a hypothesis as empirically informed opinion becomes supplanted by intuitively motivated intervention.

To substantiate the claim that my working methodology is comparable to that of scientific investigation, I propose the following parallel: in order to test any

hypothesis, one must first perform an experiment. Since its inception, this body of work has come into being through this type of propositional structure. It is by asking, "What if?" that these works exist in their current form. Simply stated, the basis for my hypothesis is to investigate relationships of form, space and scale. To test these three components, I am relying on printmaking as an experimental device. Print-media is ideally suited for this purpose; it readily lends itself to experimentation and accommodates a variety of approaches.

The form these images take is largely influenced by scientific illustration. I tend to gravitate toward vintage book illustrations specifically, in part because of their inherent aesthetic quality. This quality is largely attributable to the way the images are drawn, which in most cases is dictated by industry standards and practices for print reproduction at the time of their publication. This bears a striking dissimilarity to the computer-generated illustrations and models used in contemporary publications. I rely almost exclusively on illustrations from books and scientific journals as sources for the imagery that I use in my work, a working methodology that I greatly prefer to collecting and appropriating images from the Internet or other digital sources. The sources I use for my imagery are varied, but include illustrated books on subjects within the fields of Histology, Mycology, Botany and Comparative Anatomy. My preference for images selected from physical books as opposed to digitized reproductions has as much to do with fulfilling an innate need for tactile, sensual experience as it does with simply satisfying some aesthetic predilection. The ways in which I organize and

reconstruct the disparate visual fragments I collect is arguably an extension of the exacting and scientific language these illustrations convey.

I have always considered myself to be an artist whose primary means of visualization maintains its origins in the realm of two-dimensional pictorial space. This affinity for graphic visual language has its beginnings in my childhood, especially my pre-teen and teenage years. I was an unabashed comic-book geek at this stage of my life. Countless hours of my formative years were spent absorbing the images that filled the pages of those books, and I became immersed in the worlds that opened up before me, panel by panel.

My subsequent education as an artist has served to deepen my understanding of formal visual language; my training and experience as both a graduate and undergraduate student have been in the areas of printmaking, painting, drawing, and illustration. For me, the culmination of these experiences has forged a clear understanding of how images operate within the picture plane, and by extension, what can be inferred when that relationship is subverted, challenged, or expanded. It is within this propositional structure that my work begins to take shape, and I can begin to question the relationship of the viewer to the work by creating a hybrid environment that exists simultaneously as both pictorial and physical space.

As a means of responding to this structure, my impulse is to expand the picture plane as referencing two-dimensional space beyond the confines of its rectilinear demarcations. To achieve, I am rely on the interplay of forms printed

on paper, cut out so as to extricate them from their origins as an image set within a rectangular “frame” and adhere them directly to the wall. Similar forms are also printed on paper in multiples and arranged into larger composite forms. These new arrangements are then cut out and adhered to wood supports. The supports have been shaped to coincide with the composite form’s contours and are presented as freestanding objects reminiscent of stage sets. Other forms have been printed onto canvas and muslin in multiples, sewn together and stuffed to become sculptural elements that are suspended from the ceiling with monofilament. These hanging prints also seek to activate the space through their centralized arrangement as a “swarm” of biomorphic forms that seem to be in mid-flight. By suspending them from clear monofilament, this illusion of flight or flotation can be pushed further, creating another dynamic relationship within the space and with respect to the viewer.

The juxtaposition of these forms, which occupy varying degrees between two and three dimensions visually coalesce into a hybrid spatial environment. In this ambiguous setting, the cut out prints occupying the walls are intended to be read as existing in the same dimensional space as the other printed forms that occupy physical space. The result is an inharmonious environment that fluctuates between illusionistic representation and flatness, two-dimensionality and three-dimensionality, physicality and artificiality. I want the visual discord to be unsettling to the viewer, a response that is accentuated by the somewhat repulsive nature of the imagery itself. The composite images that I make, that I

carefully splice together from appropriated source material, are to be viewed and interpreted as specimens yet to be discovered. The visceral nature of these microscopic views and cross sections of various cells and tissues yields a strange and otherworldly quality. As a result, these large-scale printed amalgams of various membranes, organs and cell structures take on an eerie believability when arranged and composed in ways that operate within a corrupted system of logic.

The basis for this system of logic stems from investigating the relationship between *micro* and *macro* worlds. The act of removing the source material from its original context as depictions of tiny, yet still observable organic forms and re-contextualizing them as larger than life representations allows an entirely new perceptual experience to emerge. This level of interaction is made possible by the viewer's awareness of his or her own physical bodies relative to the prints themselves. Central to this experience is the viewer's heightened awareness of the level of intricacy, mystery and beauty present in these forms. It is by accentuating these attributes through the manipulation of their scale that these images become enlivened. Such a subtle intervention is capable of great effect, and it is this subtlety that makes these images so strange yet so familiar, so specific yet so ambiguous, so repulsive and yet so attractive. These images reference parts of a whole, or substructures that perform an integral function in sustaining the entity from which they are extracted. In this way, they are vital

components of something larger than themselves, both scientifically and metaphorically speaking.

The physicality of these images is contingent not only on their scale or the nature of their source material, but on how they are made. This component is perhaps less obvious, but is critical in forming a context for the work. The majority of these prints were made using hand-carved woodblocks as their matrices. The size of the prints, compounded with the fact that they are printed by hand from single blocks should give some clue as to the degree of time and labor that went into creating each of these images. This more physically demanding aspect of my practice becomes transformed however through technological intervention. The result is a synthesis of traditional printmaking processes, techniques and materials with those that are digitally based. It is through this hybrid approach that the work addresses contemporary concerns with regard to art production. As a practitioner I understand that both digital media and its analog counterparts carry their own set of aesthetic qualities and concerns, advantages and disadvantages. Having made that statement, I realize there are many things that digitally based media can allow an artist to do more effectively, if not also more efficiently. The challenge for me as an artist using such varied approaches is in maintaining the integrity of the imagery itself. It is through methodical integration of both digital and analog processes that these images retain a sense of their previous incarnation as scientific illustrations.

Similarly it is through the interplay of digital media and traditional printmaking techniques that they can be transformed and re-imagined.

As a contemporary printmaker I am indebted to the historical conventions and tenets of printmaking, and to the artists so instrumental to its development that preceded me. At the same time, it is because of this admiration and reverence for print as a discipline and art form that I want to push it beyond the limitations set by its conventions and traditions. As a result, I am motivated by the need to challenge previously held notions about printmaking. It is however my intention to use this multi-faceted approach to art making to highlight my practice as timely, relevant and contemporary.

SUM OF ITS PARTS (INSTALLATION VIEW)

The Expanded Print As Vessel For Exploration



Sum Of Its Parts, 2012. (Installation view)
Woodcuts on paper and muslin.
Dimensions variable.