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Above my grandmother's desk hung a picture of a bunch of flowers in a vase. At the age of twelve, I became aware that *sunflowers* were in the vase. At some point, I was told that a well-known artist named Van Gogh made the picture. When I was in high school, I noticed the Ben-Day dots of color that comprised the picture; this evidence suggested, to me, that this was a picture *of* a picture. It was a copy; and, given that my grandparents were smart, they knew it was a copy. At first, I admit, I felt snobbish and dismayed over the cheap imitation that hung before me; after all, I had made some of my own paintings by then and knew its "value." When I asked my grandmother why she had the picture above her desk, she explained that they framed it and hung it on their wall because it pleased them to look at it, not because it was a valued object.

What changed was not the picture of sunflowers; my understanding of the picture changed. The act of situating ourselves in space, whether with pictures, furniture, people, etc., is how I understand that we make ourselves at home. Through the alteration of actual, and visual, spaces and with materials found in, or used for, the purposes of *Home*, my thesis explores the geographies and constructions of the internal *psyche* as predicated on perception.

MAKING AND RE-MAKING

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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## MAKING AND RE-MAKING

### Introduction

“In all of the Oriental religions great value is placed on the Sanskrit doctrine of *Tat tvam asi*, ‘Thou art that,’ which asserts that everything you think you are and everything you think you perceive are undivided.”

Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

*Home* is a place of comfort and also confinement, restoration and isolation, imaginations and limitations. The envelope of *Home* can be transparent and it can be opaque. It is a world unto itself or merely a point of departure into a vast universe. The ambiguity of *Home* is predicated on my relationship to *it* and the *world outside*. My relationship with *Home* is a reflection of my social engagements and disengagements (i.e. my inward and outward behaviors). Determined by my location on the spectrum between imagination and perceived reality, the interior walls of my *Home* appear flat and two-dimensional or they appear vast and three-dimensional. Through the alteration of actual, and visual, spaces and with common materials often used for domestic purposes, my thesis explores the geographies and constructions of the internal *psyche* as manifest in the creation and assembly of *Home* and/or its furnishings.

### Non - Grids

Grids are an ideal that can signify perfection. Agnes Martin made a career of investigating the grid and its relationships to perfection. In her book *Writings*, Martin suggests:

We must surrender the idea that this perfection that we see in the mind or before our eyes is obtainable or attainable. It is really far from us. We are no more capable of having it than the infant that tries to eat it. But our happiness lies in our moments of awareness of it (69).

I believe that this awareness of perfection, and *how* something is distinct from it, constitutes a simultaneous awareness of non-perfection and the phenomena which caused it. For example, looking at a sidewalk that I installed last summer, it is apparent that it is made of both bricks and rocks. Before starting the project, I knew that I would not have enough brick pavers (leftover from a previous project) to complete the job. In order to finish the project, I collected quartz rocks (from the outlying property) and integrated them with the bricks. The significance in this scenario is the 'letting go' of the idea of perfection (i.e. a sidewalk uniformly made of brick) and accepting a solution based on a variety of materials and variables.

Within my studio work, I portray a *lack* of uniformity and perfection through the use of distorted grids, whereby I suggest a variety of stimuli. Drawings from 2009 illustrate these ideas. For example, a blue piece of paper (20" x 30") has a series of white dots that appear as a two-dimensional grid that has been irregularly stretched and compressed. To create this distorted grid, I started with a straight line of evenly spaced dots, which were measured by eye; therefore, the spaces between were not uniform. From this imperfect line of dots, I attempted to place subsequent dots so that any four adjacent dots would approximate a square as measured by sight. Managing each set of four dots in this manner, produced expanding and contracting spaces between the dots, and resulted in an imperfect grid.

Currently, I am making grids in three dimensions by lashing together frameworks of sticks. These frameworks are based on the standard linear structure of a cube;

however, they rarely consist of right angles or equal dimensions. In recent installations, I build with, and combine, irregular 'cubes' to suggest spaces that are askew to our normal perceptions of rectilinear space. For example, an element that is repeated throughout various pieces is a tower form that is wide at the base and narrower at the top. The structure resembles a ubiquitous radio or electric tower. Structurally, the wide base provides support; but, visually, the tapering form suggests converging perspectival lines, and exaggerates the perception of depth.

I employ these irregular grids to suggest alternative spaces that challenge the conventional acceptance of a rectilinear understanding of space. I find it important to let go of this 'perfect' visual interpretation of space and allow other influences, such as emotions, to play a role. In a similar way that our emotions affect our responses to, and interactions with, other people, I am exploring emotional perceptions of the environment, in particular the *Home*.

### Home

Over the past several years, I have wanted to settle into a house with my wife and cats. Circumstances have necessitated renting, and, more recently living with my father-in-law. I have quelled the desire for my own space by altering and amending the spaces in which I have lived; and, it has brought to my attention the various activities with which one engages in order to make *Home*. Due to the transitory nature of the past few years, portability and resourcefulness aided the *Home's* flexibility so that it can be easily transported, as well as appropriated from within the surrounding environment.

*Home* is where I feel prepared to meet any situation. It is where I start my day and where I end it. *Home* is where I prepare myself to engage with the world outside.

The aura of home embodies rest, reflection, rejuvenation, and preparation. As I said, home is where I feel most prepared; therefore, I attempt to always carry *Home* with me. Sometimes, it is as simple as taking a jacket for shelter and snacks in case I get hungry. In my adventures outside, home always pulls me back; so, in order to navigate and experience the world, I need to trust that these attributes do not simply exist at geographical coordinates, whose influence is stationary. While there are ways of physically moving and carrying *Home*, there are also emotional and psychological ways to carry and find its perceptions and comforts beyond the dwelling. What this means to my work is yet to be articulated or realized; but, I can trust that, if I can perceive *Home* as being everywhere, then I should always be prepared.

#### Constants and Variables

In my studio over the past year, the gap between 2-D and 3-D has provided me with insight into a formal vocabulary necessary for the depiction and creation of space. While exploring and tinkering with this “gap” between dimensions, I have also come to realize some things about myself. By way of a thought experiment, my understanding/reasoning starts thus: A blanket lying flat on a bed is two-dimensional. Cat hairs can only migrate in the four cardinal directions (north, south, east, and west) in a continuous line (a constant); but, when that blanket is folded, cat hairs can migrate to the adjacent folded side. Then, as the blanket is unfolded, the cat hair has moved to a new spot on the blanket-but only by traveling a path through three-dimensions, rather than a continuous line on the surface of the blanket (like before). This new path takes advantage of the third dimension by jumping the zero distance between the two sides of the folded blanket. Thus, while charting the territory between two and three dimensions,



the shortest distance a cat hair can travel between two points on a blanket becomes variable. Therefore, in my efforts to understand this “gap” between 2-D and 3-D, I believe that constants in my world *can* become variables.

At first glance, the differentiation between constants and variables appears to be merely an invitation and extension into abstract mathematical concepts; but, as I remember my grandmother’s picture, I consider that, for me, the gradient between constants and variables has to deal with shifting perceptions affected by knowledge and experience. Perception, defined for the purposes of this inquiry, deals with how one understands phenomena based on *prior* knowledge and experience. In *Art and Illusion*, E.H. Gombrich states that the “familiar will always remain the likely starting point for the rendering of the unfamiliar” (81). To take this a step further, the unfamiliar becomes the familiar, constituting a ‘shifting perception.’ In the way that the cat hair’s migration distance changes based on an alternate understanding of spatial dimensions, one’s own perception changes based on experience with the new and unfamiliar.

### Challenging Assumptions

Another way to actively adjust our perceptions is to ask a question that I have borrowed from a mentor. What am I assuming? In my first year as a graduate student, I pursued my ideas and notions of space through the practice of drawing. This initially involved the representation of space, through perspective; however, my drawings were focused onto the surface of the paper. I became hyper-aware of the act of drawing and was trying to understand drawing in its purest form. That meant that I needed/wanted to eliminate as many variables as possible. I only allowed myself pencil and paper.

The variables only opened up once again. I had to confront the physical properties, qualities, and dimensions of the paper and the lines I was using. This led me to experiment in my drawings first by way of folding. At the time, my drawings were constructed of continuous dashed lines (- - - -) drawn in a looping fashion with a fine point pencil. These lines depicted, and were the record of, my meandering exploration of the surface of the paper, as if tracing a path of a shadow on a desert floor from a soaring bird's point of view. These explorations, via the dashed line, visited, circumambulated, and sought out aberrations and anomalies embedded within the thin, but strong, mulberry paper; the points of interest generally consisted of small inclusions (most likely fragments of bark) and creased lines, as a result of my folding. The folding provided physical boundaries on the paper's surface and a potential foray into the realm of three dimensions. I was beginning my inquiry into the physical properties of the paper, beyond just being a picture plane or merely a surface on which to make marks. The paper could be folded like a blanket and laid flat like a blanket, but it was not a blanket, nor did it share its inherent qualities or connotations. Regarding my studio practice and process, these drawings represent what I consider to be a *first* step; that is, to make without preconceptions, to trust intuition, and to have faith that my interests, thoughts, and concerns will clarify as I continue to work.

Working, I again asked myself, *what* am I assuming? Unsure of the success of my drawings, I wondered if it was necessary for me to always draw on a piece of paper. Were the attributes of the paper compelling enough for me to continue with it? I wanted a surface to draw on; would any surface suffice? At the time, I was thinking of aerial views of terrain, which led me to the following interpretation of what I saw. Looking at an old wooden chair in the corner, what I saw was a figure/ground relationship created by

the paint and the voids of paint, as a result of brittleness, fatigue and its consequential flaking off; about ninety-percent of the chair was still covered with paint. More specifically, the surface appeared to me as *land* (the remaining paint) and *lakes* (the voids of paint exposing the wood underneath). I interpreted this bird's eye view into what resembles a common topography map applied to the surface of a common wooden chair.

This piece looked like a chair, I thought it was a chair; however, after drawing on it for three days, I began to tell myself another story. Simply, this object, for me, became an entire planet that was no longer at home on the floor; rather, it needed to live in space. In order for me to make any necessary revisions and alterations, I had to let go of my assumption that this drawing was still a chair. Precariously suspended from a crudely engineered support made of wire, peg-board, and screw, the chair found a home independent of contact with the floor. The result was a "chair" hovering a few inches above the floor and slowly rotating on its diagonal axis. While I do not completely or permanently suspend my belief that this object was a chair, I did have to *alter* my assumption that it was *only* a chair. This ambiguity has become an important aspect of my seeing as I am becoming aware of the potentialities of conflated points of view.

The importance of the chair was not that it simply provided another surface whose formal vocabulary was different from the sheet of paper, but that its physical presence helped ground me in reality and experience. Initially, the chair provided me with comfort, insofar as I considered it furniture that I would bring into my house. As I worked with the chair, however, I realized that, it could suggest its own context(s). Simultaneously, the chair reminded me of the table where my family sat for meals and also a world unto itself.

Through investigating the formal aspects of drawing, that began with only pencil and paper, and by challenging my assumptions of what makes a drawing, I was able to transform my perception of drawing into an inventive process capable of evolving. The acceptance of the evolutionary nature of drawing has been critical to my practice, as it has shifted my focus away from a predetermined product to a mutable process.

### The Wall

This perceptual mutability soon manifested itself physically. During the fall semester, various faculty members encouraged me to expand my drawings from 'art paper' size (e.g. 20" x 30") to wall size, allowing more room for ideas to grow. Thus, I had to address the wall and its properties. Formally, the wall is two-dimensional, just like the paper, but bigger; however, as evident in the topographic chair drawing, the wall is not necessarily just a flat plane. Emotionally, the wall serves as a barrier, both protective and confining. The wall is like a skin. Could the wall be pliable like skin? Could it be stretched? I wanted to make the wall look as if it was being stretched, either by an object pushing from behind or something pulling inward. First, I attached a three-sided pyramid to the wall, so that, when it was patched and painted seamlessly to the surrounding surface, it looked as though the corner of a box was pushing through the wall into my studio. Not only was the stretched surface of the wall intriguing to me, but, so too, was the implication and depiction of an object (the aforementioned box) existing in space. With this in mind, I proceeded to conflate a drawing of a chair onto the wall and the protruding "corner." Drawn with diagrammatic pencil lines and cross-hatching, the image of the chair, as it appeared to float in space, coincided with the real

space/volume of the distorted wall; the result was a form of relief sculpture, where 2-dimensional drawing and 3-dimensional form work together to depict form and space.

From this piece, I began to ask questions about the walls that I had taken for granted. If a wall acted as a protective barrier for me, should it not be as strong as possible? If it was a barrier of confinement, would I not rather it be easily breached? A general answer to both questions would be, "Yes, this is what I want my walls to be." The conflict is that based on emotions, sometimes the walls are too thin, sometimes too thick. The walls of the psyche are indeed pliable and mutable. For example, when I am starved for motivation to leave the house, the walls and doors are as thick as a fortress; however, when I am motivated to move about, the walls and doors serve merely as a lines differentiating inside and outside. The experience of walls is relational to my perception of them.

### Forces

I realized that my perceptions of space were contingent on my emotional experiences. In the installation, *Tension*, I wanted to explore the idea of window curtains as a barrier to access of the outside. At once, the curtains can limit access, but, also, can be easily breached. Within this ambiguity, internal tensions become a quagmire of uncertainty that exists internally in the heart and mind. In my personal experience, I experience tension usually as a result of conflict between perception and reality. For example, depending on one's mood, a small room may feel comforting and safe, or it may feel confining and restrictive. This ambiguity of perception, as interpreted through the lens of emotional experiences, reflects the symbiotic relationship between constants and variables that I proposed earlier.

With reference to the small room mentioned above, *Tension* explores the opposing perceptions of a single space. In this work, installed in the Gatewood Gallery, I suspended two 3' x 7' sheer white curtains on adjacent walls connected by a semi-circular curtain rod. On the back of each curtain, about two-dozen clothespins, tethered to the corners of white cardboard boxes that were resting on the ground, pinched and pulled the curtain towards the floor. Pinching the fronts of the curtains, two-dozen more clothespins (per side) were tethered to one another across the intervening space. Standing on the floor, two-dozen sticks, ranging from 4' to 14' tall, leaned outward on the strings connecting the two curtains. The sticks were constructed from smaller pieces of wood, measuring  $\frac{1}{4}$ " x  $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 12", lashed together with crochet thread. *Tension* was my attempt to convey a struggle between forces acted out by the tugging on both sides of the fabric. The conflicting forces and ambiguity present in this piece represent the shift of perception, where new constants and variables are defined—a moment of simultaneous uncertainty and understanding.

#### Thesis Installation

For the graduate thesis show, I installed *Tension II (Why don't you go outside?)* in the Falk Gallery at the Weatherspoon Art Museum. Between *Tension* and *Tension II*, I worked on a series of installations in the Gatewood Gallery and in my studio. The first piece, *Inside and Out*, focused on the concept of 'inside and outside' as manifested in the form of a tent-like structure whose interior was visible, from outside the gallery, through glass, and whose exterior was visible from within the gallery. The fabric, supported by thin sticks and taut strings, comprised five lengths of muslin (1 yd. x 10 yd. each). The pieces were joined along the edges with clothespins spaced 4 inches apart.

I used the clothespins, instead of sewing, to join the fabric in a temporary and alterable fashion. Referring to the portability of the *Home*, this, and subsequent installations, have been made with the same materials, but reconfigured in different ways. Following *Inside and Out*, I used my studio space, and the same materials, to create more installations. Because my studio was much smaller than the Gatewood Gallery, I began by taking advantage of the vertical space. Through several iterations of these studio pieces, I explored different ways of creating space by combining and recombining the fabric, sticks, strings and pins. At first, I was more concerned with using the planes of fabric to create walls and suggest rooms. I used the sticks to support the fabric. Then, I realized that I could suggest space by treating the sticks as lines. At this point, I had arrived back at drawing; only, this time, I was using three dimensions, not just bending two dimensions.

These temporary installations served as practice and rehearsal for *Tension II* (*Why don't you go outside?*). An important aspect of the project was that the installation would not be completely planned out. The general intent was to indicate an interaction within the gallery space, but the specific execution happened 'on site.' Knowing that I would have to perform in an improvisational manner, the practice and experience of working in my studio beforehand helped me articulate my ideas with a new visual vocabulary. My plan was to make an intervention between the southeastern corner walls and the adjacent window facing south. A length of muslin was attached to the wall, from floor to ceiling, with straight pins spaced six inches apart. In the middle of the floor stood a nine-foot tower made with sticks (measuring  $\frac{1}{4}$ " x  $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 12") joined at the ends with crochet thread. Between these two elements was a network of sticks, strings, and fabric pulling at and supporting each other. The network represented an internal battle

where the walls and pins want to stay inside, and the fabric, with help from the sticks, wants to go outside. This struggle depicts an internal turmoil between staying in the comfort of *Home* and wanting to venture away.

### Materials

Throughout the course of my thesis work, I have begun to understand the importance of materials. Moving my drawings from paper to the chair was my first clue. The chair brought its own suggestion of history and function, and I worked to both reinforce and challenge these qualities. After working on the wall and testing its mutability, I realized that I was looking for the properties that are inherent in fabric. While I have just begun to explore this diverse category, I am intrigued with the many ways in which it is used and how we come into contact with it on such a constant basis (i.e. clothing, bedding, home furnishings). The strings and pins also serve to remind viewers of objects that are commonly found in the *Home*. The reaction that I received when purchased the clothespins is worth mentioning. At each purchase, the cashier remarked on not having seen a clothespin in a long time and asked, “Do people still use those?” The truth is that I put my clothes in the drier too; however, I feel that a simple clothespin represents domesticity in its most mundane manner, and, for the purposes of attaching things, serves my work in a temporary and alterable fashion. The arrangement of sticks can, likewise, be taken apart and reassembled. I began cutting the sticks in an effort to make small-scale lumber with which to build small-scale walls. I soon found that the sticks worked wonderfully well as three-dimensional lines, and the small-scale walls are on hold.



The important aspect of all of these materials is the manner in which I am using them. That is, they are my units of construction whose final form has yet to be realized. At this point, my materials are constants and the forms and dimensions are variables. I anticipate that this will, one day, change.

### Conclusion

When I go home at the end of each day, I usually do not feel any different from when I left in the morning; however, as I look back on the past two years of graduate school, I realize that the past experiences have changed my perceptions, and that these perceptions will influence my future experiences. The pursuit of this thesis, as it explores various perceptions of *Home*, will continue to be a point of reference in my future investigations. While the concept of *Home* is universal, I expect that my personal understandings, misunderstandings, and subsequent realizations will facilitate further inquiries into the behaviors, and habits, of surrounding ourselves with space.

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## CATALOGUE OF IMAGES

1. *CHAIR (TOPGRAPHIC)*

Wooden chair, graphite, wire, pegboard  
18" x 18 x 72". 2009

2. *CHAIR (WALL)*

Cardboard, paint, drywall, graphite  
18" x 24" x 10". 2009

3. *TENSION*

Fabric, string, clothespins cardboard, wood  
8' x 10' x 14'. 2010

4. *TENSION II (WHY DON'T YOU GO OUTSIDE?)*, Installation shot 1

Wood, fabric, string, clothes pins, straight pins  
8' x 20' x 10'. 2010

5. *TENSION II (WHY DON'T YOU GO OUTSIDE?)*, Installation shot 2

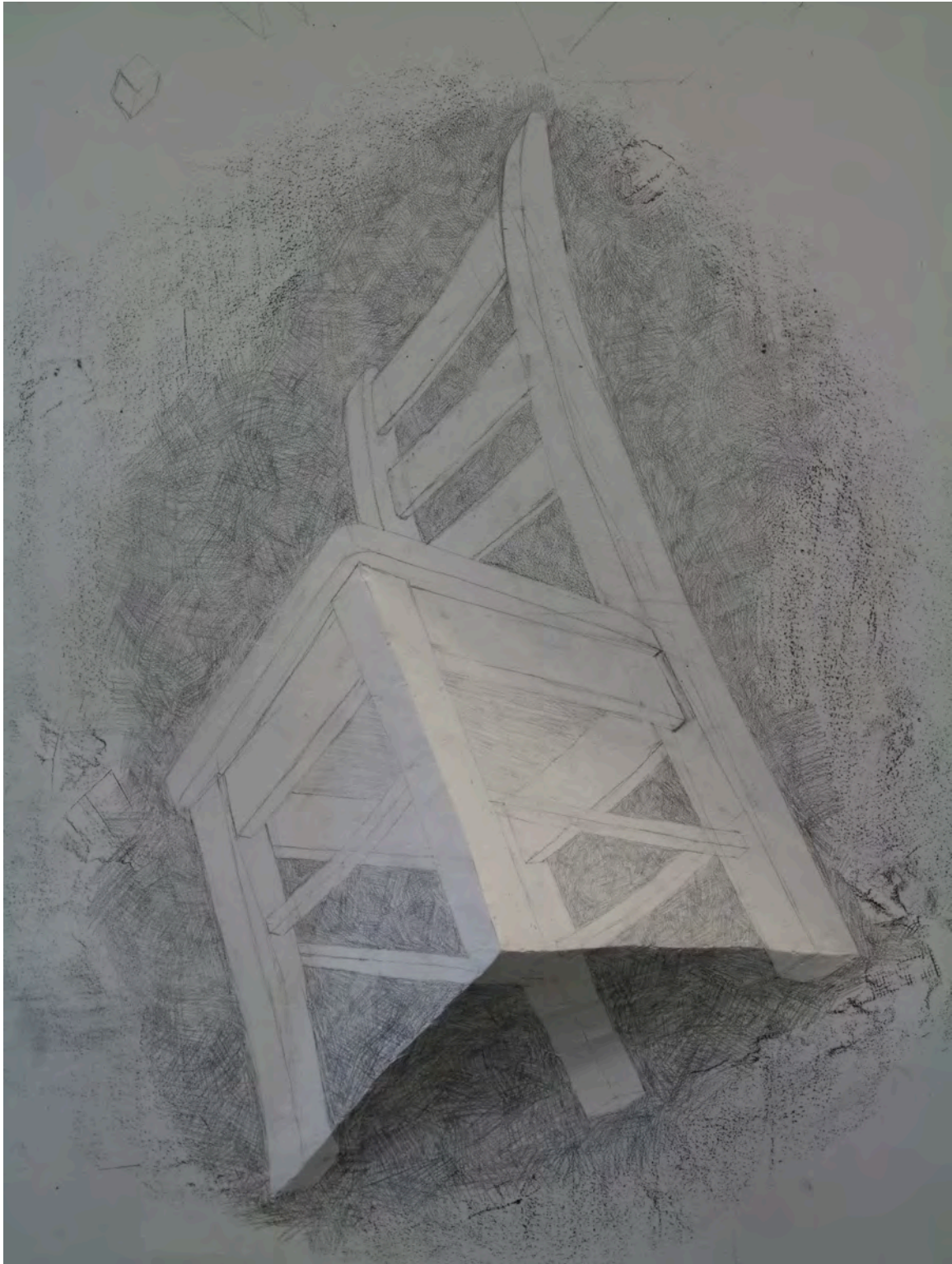
Wood, fabric, string, clothes pins, straight pins  
8' x 20' x 10'. 2010

6. *TENSION II (WHY DON'T YOU GO OUTSIDE?)*, Installation shot 3

Wood, fabric, string, clothes pins, straight pins  
8' x 20' x 10'. 2010



1. *CHAIR (TOPOGRAPHIC)*, 2009



2. CHAIR (WALL), 2009



3. *TENSION*, 2010



4. *TENSION II (WHY DON'T YOU GO OUTSIDE?)*, Installation shot 1, 2010



5. *TENSION II (WHY DON'T YOU GO OUTSIDE?)*, Installation shot 2, 2010





6. *TENSION II (WHY DON'T YOU GO OUTSIDE?)*, Installation shot 3, 2010