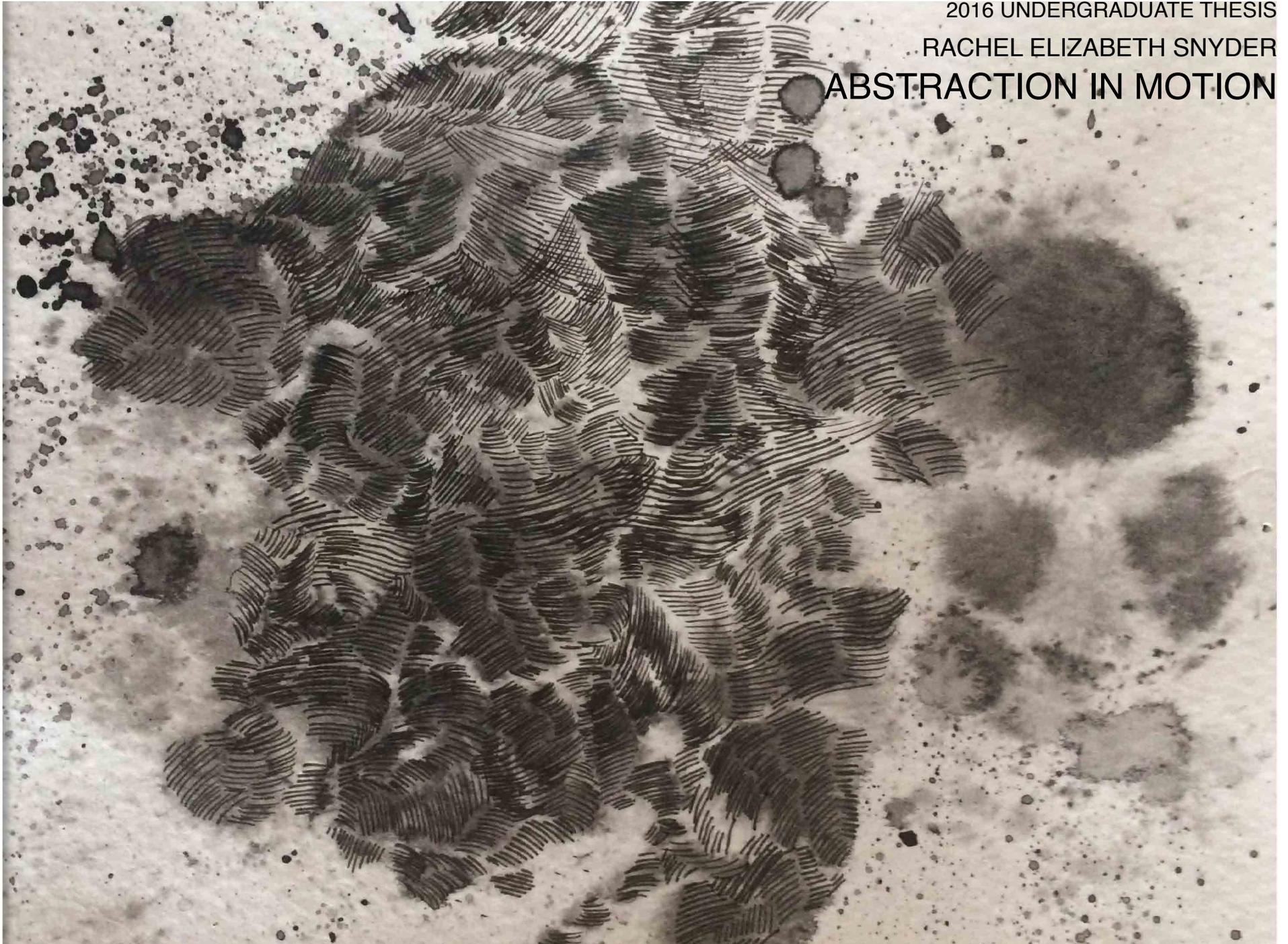


2016 UNDERGRADUATE THESIS  
RACHEL ELIZABETH SNYDER  
ABSTRACTION IN MOTION





## INTRODUCTION

**Abstraction in Motion** is more than merely a title for my body of work; Abstraction in Motion is a direction, a call to the audience member to set their body in motion in order to discover all the visual nuances in the book. I needed my project to be so intricately detailed that no viewer could possibly experience it in full without moving. I needed my book to entice them into my world, my narrative, and make them pursue it in full. Motion distorts the way I perceive objects in my reality; I can change their shapes into time-contorted forms caught in the moments inbetween. The liminal forms I saw in my mind and the forms set before me began to converge when set in motion.

Figure 01:STYX Outlook, By: Rachel Snyder

## CONTEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Most of of my inspirations have literary roots, and all of them share elements of horror and fantastical settings. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* incited a fierce love for weird horror, terrible in its' familiar strangeness. H.P. Lovecraft's *The Call of Cthulhu* showed me men, monsters, and gods that rivaled all myths and folklore I had heard before. Kurt Vonnegut's *While Mortals Sleep* wove strange narratives and psychological mysteries into my waking mind. Accompanied by the illustrative works of Roger Dean's floating interstellar islands and Giger's terrifying renderings of alien life, I had collected a host of narratives and images horrifying and beautiful in the spaces created between my boundaries of thought.

Kiki Smith's attention to detail in her prints, her beautiful expression of a dead cat almost makes it seem more alive. My mark making in *Mountain Waves* (cover page) was inspired by the merging of highly detailed rendering marks of topographical maps mixed with the ethereal kind of mark making seen in Kiki Smith's *Touch of the Eye/Look of the Hand* (see figures 02 and 03).



Figure 02:Touch of the Eye/Look of the Handc, By: Kiki Smith

Figure 03: Atlas Suisse.1802 By: Meyer, Johann Rudolf ,



## MARK-MAKING RESEARCH

A large part of my artistic experimentation was developing a language of abstract mark-making. An example of my imagery can be seen in figure 01. I communicate these images using a highly developed vernacular of abstract shapes and forms that are inked on top of expressive watercolor splatterings. Ink was then applied on the final layer, which directs the movement of the piece. The marks achieve the effect of moving water, or vast mountain ranges weaving in and out of organic shape, allowing the piece to move and breath.

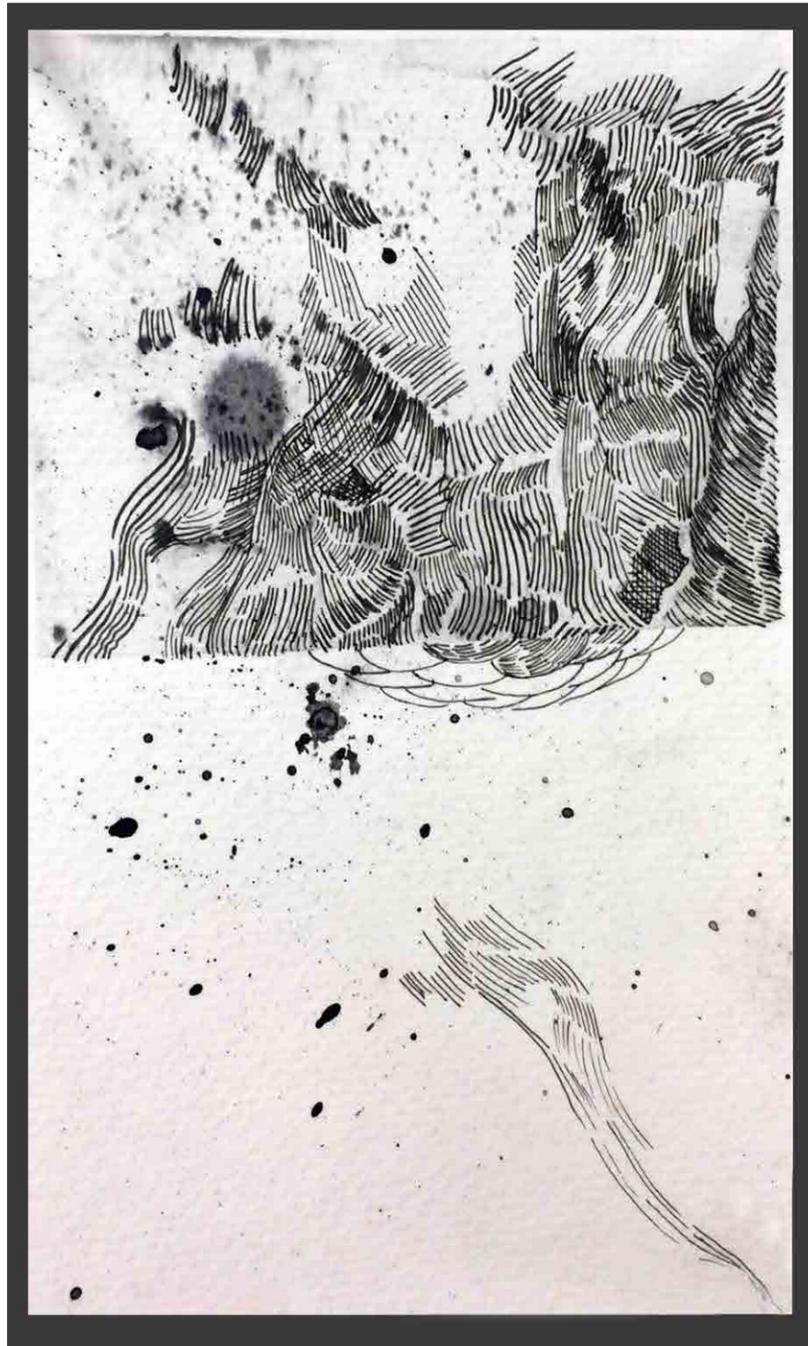
Figures (cover image), 01 and 04 are further works of ink, watercolor and, pen on paper. These illustrated abstractions of movement and natural forms were key in developing the marks used to create the imagery in my tunnel book. As my language of mark-making developed, so did my methods of preparing the paper for printing and drawing.

Figure 04: Presapus, By:Rachel Snyder

## MATERIALS RESEARCH

My most adventurous method of paper prepping can be seen in Collision of Consciousness, where the cold press watercolor paper was wet with a sponge, and then splattered by frozen peas infused with ink. As the peas exploded upon impact they left marks from their ink covered exteriors that were extremely interesting and beautiful (see figure 05). I was able to darken the image in specific areas by throwing more ink covered peas at those specific areas and then lightening the others with a watered sponge. After the ink splattering had dried and flattened I was able to use ink and bamboo pens to begin illustrating abstract marks made to call up imagery of water, mountains, and human/animalistic forms (see figure 05).

Figure 05: Pees on Paper, By:Rachel Snyder





## TECHNIQUE RESEARCH

The majority of my research came from studying different ways of mark-making, experimental printing techniques, treating paper, and various bookbinding techniques. Figure 06 displays the original mono print that was later modified to cover the outer accordion supports of the tunnel book. This mono print was created using a mixture of grey shades, burnt umber, ocher, burnt sienna, and small amounts of ver-bena green. For this, I used an old toothbrush, cardboard chips, a shop rag, and a paintbrush made out of my own human hair (see fig 08)

Figure 06: Rocky Landscape, By:Rachel Snyder

## TECHNIQUE RESEARCH

The experimental watercolor prints displayed in figures 8 and 7 were created using a combination of tea staining techniques, watercolor prints, and oil based paint applied with a human hair brush (see figure 09). The experimental water color printing process is as follows.

First the paper was soaked in boiling hot water with steeping tea bags (five black tea bags) while I prepped the carved linoleum block with thick coats of watercolor paint. After slightly press drying the tea-stained paper I placed the paper face down on the partially or fully dried watercolor linoleum block. I then used a spoon and a rubber roller to press the ink into the paper. After a sufficient amount of even pressure had been applied to the paper I removed it from the linoleum block and let it dry between two sheets of newsprint and two heavy books overnight. After the print had dried and flattened overnight I removed it from the books and used ink to illustrate abstract forms over the watercolor print. Later I used an oil based paint to lightly swipe brush marks into the paper across the image in order to further tie the composition together.



Figure 07: WaterColor Experiment 03, By:Rachel Snyder



Figure 08: Mono Print Supplies, By:Rachel Snyder



## NARRATIVE CONNECTIONS

I incorporated narrative triggers into my work, to pump my images full of possible connections for the viewer to make. In order to bring about a sense of wonder to our reality, I illustrated objects and environments I interact with everyday, but abstracted so their natures seemed alien and new. I illustrated the plants and objects that clutter my apartment, attempting to capture their personality and mystery.

Figure 9: Personality Plant, By:Rachel Snyder

## NARRATIVE CONNECTIONS

In this way I was able to create a collection of digital paintings that displayed the everyday world as I see it, and open up a more exciting reality to the viewer. Through the works shown in figures 09, 10 and 11 I was attempting to transform the way the viewer would look at their everyday environment; just as my literary and visual inspirations had revolutionized the way I see my ordinary everyday environment I had opened the door for others to peer into my head.

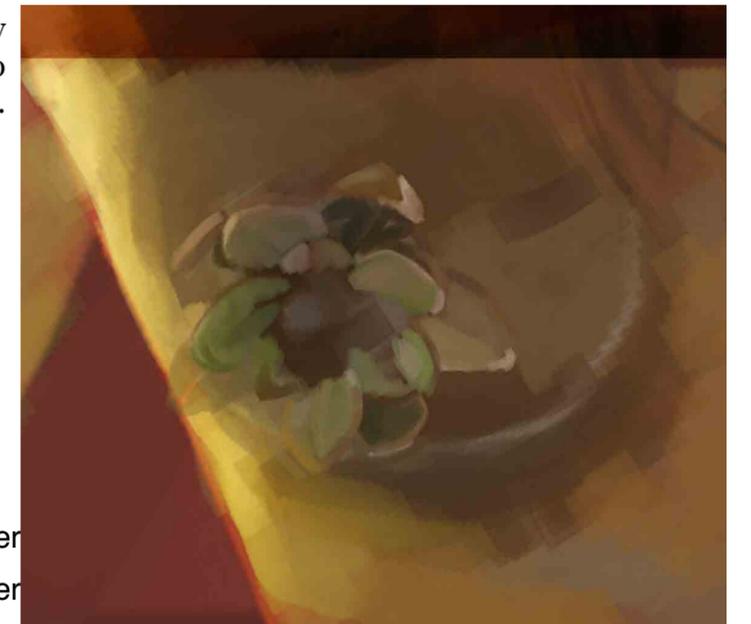


Figure 10: Space-Craft Plant, By:Rachel Snyder

Figure 11: Personality Plant, By:Rachel Snyder



## PROCESS

All of my making comes from compiling and building on smaller pieces; smashing them together until something more refined and pure comes out of the exercise. All along the key element of my process has been building and connecting smaller experiments and turning them into larger more complex pieces (see fig 12). Figure 14 display the process behind the abstract long rectangular prints. I would carve 4' tall 3" wide boards that I would arrange together through linking interlocking puzzle pieces on the press, inked in various colors (primarily black). Later I would separate and rearrange the composition of the images using a tare bar and temporary adhesive. When I was happy with the composition I would glue it into place and later I would use weaving techniques to secure the smaller pieces into place for the larger composition.

Figure 12: Personality Plant, By:Rachel Snyder

## PROCESS

In my piece Green and Gold Woven Collage, displayed in figure 07, I have sliced my prints into long rectangular sheets and used them to create a much larger layered image. I used this similar practice, with the new process of weaving together the paper rather than simply layering it on top of each other. I thought the interlocking pieces would make the piece more visually connected. Most of the print and paper material used in the piece was created from dismantling and adding new color prints to the Untitled Large Image Collage in figure 04. The color pallet I was experimenting with -- rich umber injected yellows and browns with delicate shades of green resembling the color of shaded foliage and money -- carried through to the color scheme of the final tunnel book.

The construction of the tunnel book was complex and took many trial and error models to perfect. The final dimensions of the book were 18" tall by 15" wide and approximately 5" deep. I constructed the accordion using black stonehenge paper and masonite. I folded the stonehenge paper in the accordion folding style and glued the masonite supports in every other fold (the other folds would be used to hold the framed and illustrated pages).

After securing the masonite support panels to the inside of the accordion folds, I covered the masonite in green print paper, leaving the ends long to be mitered later. I used the same process to cover the outside of the accordion sides, alternating layers of monoprints (a combination of figures 8 and 5). The pages were secured to the free sides of the accordion folds, and then finally secured by mitering and gluing down the corners of the decorative print paper over the pages.

Figure 13: Green and Gold Woven Collage, By:Rachel Snyder

Figure 14: Progress Prints, By:Rachel Snyder



## INSTALLATION

I was fortunate enough to be able to show at the Work Gallery in downtown Ann Arbor. I favored that venue because I believed it would promote a more intimate viewing experience of my piece. I installed my book on a raised pedestal, placing the large tunnel book at eye level. There was a pre-existing hole in the podium, which I used to house a plant with the same shade of green as the prints displayed on the inside support panels of the book. Dried purple daisies were placed to cover the mounting fixture used to secure the piece to the podium. They cast lovely shadows above the book, and provided for more color in my predominantly black and white book. I was thrilled to see how the green in the fern complimented the green on the inside of my Tunnel book.

Figure 15: STYX outlook, By:Rachel Snyder

## CONCLUSION

It was intensely interesting to watch people experience my piece. I was beyond thrilled when audience members would move back and forth, crouch and stand on their tip toes, and peer around the sides of the book. It was almost as if upon reading the title, seeing the word motion cued them into action, and they were free to explore the piece at all angles. Strangers discussed the use of detail in the piece with me, their delight in the addition of the live and dead plants to the composition. Many viewers expressed the use of color, the green in the book and the fern, as an enjoyable surprise.

I recall the first day of Independent Project Senior Studio, the excitement mixed with fear at the potential of a year long project on whatever we wanted to explore. For many of us it was the first opportunity to have our own studio and studio community, for me it was my second opportunity and I have no intention to make it my last. I grew as a person and an artist; so much of my artistic process was conquering fear and indecision. I am glad to have felt fear, to have pushed myself to new limits and come through proud of myself and my work.

Figure 15: STYX outlook, By:Rachel Snyder

## BIBLIOGRAPHY/BIOGRAPHY



I am a midwest-based artist working in analog and digital mediums to create images that balance between beautiful and grotesque in color and form. I explore the intricate nature of visual paradox, and push the boundaries of my mediums in order to inspire a more intimate relationship between my work and the viewer. I want my work to entice them into my world, my narrative, and make them pursue it in full.

