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IP Written Thesis

April 21, 2017

This Is Not A Landscape

Texture: “the feel or consistency of a surface”. When conventionally thinking about textures, we automatically think about the feel of the object. We want there to be a tangible substance for us to examine with our hands. These tactile surfaces are especially prominent in nature. Rocks, water rushing along side a ferry, a rippled stream over rocks, the flow of silk, desert landscapes, and ocean waves crashing on rocky edges. Simply reading those sentences we know what it feels like to touch and hold a rock in our hands. So what happens what these textures are remediated through technology, and transformed into a new landscape that is vastly different from its original form? I have created a hyper real world in which the formally tangible materials and natural landscapes have become remediated into pixels by traveling through diverse forms of technology, to challenge the viewer’s perception of a mediated and real environment.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGOURND

When I first started doing research for this project back in September I was completely lost, not only did I not know what I was doing but I was overwhelmed by the amount of information possibilities. In my sophomore year I researched the history of projections onto 3D objects. I found the wonders of the “Phantasmagorie”-lanterns were created as a way to project light into the air, producing the feeling of ghost like qualities back in the 1700s. But when it came to doing research for this project it was not until I knew what the final piece would entail when I got lost in the Dude Library endlessly picking up book after book of fiber artists, video

and installation artists. When I had a specific direction for my project, I focused my research. I dissected each piece of the installation and put them into three categories: fiber artists, video artists, and projection installation artists.

Weaving

Weaving has been around for centuries, and is one of the earliest forms of a machine. But weaving took a turn in the 19060s and 1970s as many female artists started to use the ancient form in their contemporary work. The German textile artist Anni Albers stated “weavings are not to be sat on, not to be walked on, only to be looked at” there was a shift in how people viewed weavings as an art form and not just for practical use, or table cloths, or rugs ¹. Albers fought for weavings and textiles to start a new relationship as the “fundamental equality of craft and art, emphasized the relationship to art and life, and experimentation with nontraditional materials...a return to fundamentals and free experimentation with materials on and off the loom was a necessary first step to the resulting development of new fiber arts” ². To Albers weaving should not have been confined to just fibers. The experimentation with materials provided a new light into the direction of the fiber arts world. Craft and art can become one, they do not have to be separate, imagination and experimentation becomes a new consistency of fiber art.

Bernard Kester was a textile artist and potter in the 1950s. Like Albers, Kester saw the fiber arts world move out of utility and saw the need for “a reexamination of the traditional and historical process, and these have prompted craftsman to interpreted experimentation” ³. Experimentation comes in all forms, for Albers that meant using acetate and metallic thread in many of her weavings. The change in material it is a small shift, but a shift non the less. I took

¹ Auther, Elissa. *String, felt, thread: the hierarchy of art and craft in American art*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

² Auther, Elissa

³ Auther, Elissa

from Albers the use of unconventional materials as thread, with investigation anything can become thread. I wove steel wire into my weavings, and used the material the same as I used cotton.

Once weaving was seen as sculpture, a whole new world opened up for fiber artists. One of those being American artist Katherine Westphal. Through her quilts and traditional uses of sewing she pushed for experimentation, and through that experimentation how fiber artists are so dynamically involved with the act of making. She stated “we experiment, we try different techniques, processes but the whole thing is the doing. We as craftsman are involved in the doing”⁴. The act of doing is an essential part of weaving, sewing and the majority of craft art. Specifically the process of weaving is a highly intensive and immersive form. The act of simply setting up the loom takes days. I have always come back to the loom because of this immersive process, it is a way for me to involve myself without directly representing myself in my work. Through the movement of the fiber arts revolution Rose Slivka stated one of the most important sentences I have researched “the revolution of rope...do not associate with orthodox textile construction in which the thread is buried in the fabric as the final 2-dimensional limp skin”⁵. I wanted to stay far away from the word “limp”, that was an area of weaving and textiles I wanted to have control over. Weavings do not have to be limp, they can carry the weight of the sculpture, and can take many end forms, far from being a rug on the ground. What I took from these artists was their process for experimentation, and transformation of the traditional uses of fabric, yarn and unconventional materials. I then took that to my work with the process of transforming a typically limp fabric into a sculpted installation.

Video

⁴ Auther, Elissa

⁵ Auther, Elissa

Stan Brakhage is known as the pioneer of experimental film in the 1960s. His films are fast, colorful, and have no narrative. Brakhage refers to his films as “moving visual thinking”, for him there is a story through the images that move across the screen ⁶. He scratches the film, and uses techniques of collages, hand painted the film, and submerged it in film emulsion which changes the colors. He also included images from his life, such as Colorado where he lived and his family. He used his films as a way of experimental documentation. When I travel I take videos constantly. My video in a sense is a way of documenting the places I have been, however in no way the sense of traditional documentation. Though I am not using film for my videos, I still take the processes that Brakhage coined through Final Cut. My videos as well do not have a strict narrative, which at first I was concerned about. But after looking at the work as “moving visual thinking” I became more interested in the process of editing the videos in this way.

Video art was seen as processing representations of reality through image processing. Writer Lucinda Furlong wrote about the first US video art exhibit at the Whitney Museum in New York during 1985. When selecting work for the exhibit Furlong states the museum “decided to limit the program to tapes which focus on the ability of videotape to create and generate its own intrinsic imagery, rather than (on) its ability to record reality. This is done with special video synthesizers, colorizers, and by utilizing many of the unique electronic properties of the medium” ⁷. The artists that were selected for the exhibit were focused more on their ability to create art through the medium of video tape, as opposed to film’s original use of capturing reality. The videos would go through many different processes to get to the form they showed in.

Robert Cahen experimented with electronic image processors, he was looking at images devoid of their original significance. In his work, he overlaps images and disrupts their original

⁶ Brakhage, Essential Brakhage: Selected Writings on Film-Making 2001

⁷ Meigh-Andrews, Chris. *A history of video art*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014.

quality through electronic processing. The images become static and lacking of their original context. Cahen stated, “The possibilities of transforming the image enabled me to distance myself from the direct representation of reality as the main means of communication, and to rediscover the textures of generated images a different reading of reality”⁸. I took from his work and the way he talks about his work that representing reality as people already experience reality is not the focus of videos. The newly found representations of videos through these high-tech image manipulations is how reality takes a new form.

Installation

Pipolotti Rist brings the natural world into the gallery through video installations. Within her work she creates “immersive environments, radiant with color”⁹. She projects onto objects such as underwear, scrim, the ceiling, the floor, and much more. Her videos range from concepts of feminism to the organic world. The high contrasting colors of her videos leave the viewer reconsidering their relationship to nature. When I went to Rist’s current exhibit at the New Museum in New York earlier this year, I was left with wanting to compare the video images and installation projected by Rist to the natural world I see around me. The differences and the nuances of her videos provide a new exploration of human interaction to the organic world. In some of her installations she even has pillows and beds for people to lay on while watching the videos. I enjoy in her work that there is an invitation to explore the space, and understand the space occupied by the viewer.

Benedict Drew is an installation artist who is concerned with human’s relationship to technology and the machine. I was lucky enough to walk into a gallery filled with Drew’s work

⁸ Meigh-Andrews, Chris

⁹ Smith, Roberta. "Pipilotti Rist: Pixel Forest, Deep in the Wilds of Video." The New York Times. October 27, 2016. Accessed April 21, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/28/arts/design/pipilotti-rist-pixel-forest-deep-in-the-wilds-of-video.html?_r=0.

in Edinburgh last year for the British Art Show 8. The room had three 15 foot screens with one conch shell posted on each screen. The projected images of landscapes were highly altered, and very sensual. The constant color changes of images were so inviting. I could have been there all day. Drew sees his “work as trying to create an alternate universe that [he] can inhabit...because the real one is so desperately terrible”¹⁰. The themes and concepts that drew centers his installations around is the human relationship to technology, he creates spaces where the viewer can escape from what he calls “the horrors of the modern world”¹¹. In my installation I want the viewer to enter my hyper real and examine their relationship to the natural world through technology. I do not see the world as much of a horrible place as Drew does, however I do want the viewer to understand how they see the natural world through these highly unnatural mediums.

METHODOLOGY

For the past year I’ve become interested in the process of remediation. A process which takes an older media, and refashions it into a new media. In a past project I asked my sister to send me a photo of a palm tree. That photo went through her phone, then was sent to my phone, then went through my computer, then through a projector where it landed on the grass of the Burren, and it was then photographed through my digital camera, where it arrive on the 32 GB SD card, which was connected to my computer through a card reader, which allows the photograph to travel through a flash drive and be transferred to another computer connected to the Epson Style Pro 7900 printer, where it was then sent to the printer and finally landed on a single sheet of Glossy Paper. In this case I remediated the photograph to take on a new form of the grass. At the time I spending my semester aboard in Ireland. I became increasingly interested

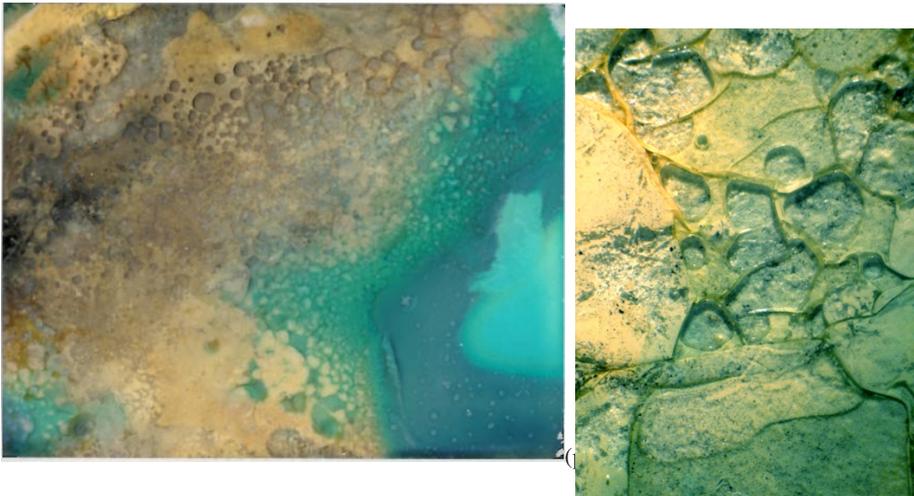
¹⁰ British Art Show 8. Accessed April 21, 2017. <http://britishartshow8.com/artists/benedict-drew-1499>.

¹¹ British Art Show 8

in the distance between me and the rest of my family, and how I was connected to them through different forms of technology. I wanted to track the travel of the image and really understand the process and means of my connection through these different devices. I found that though I wanted to have a connection to my family and friends while being so physically separated, but when I did have the immediacy of imessage, facebook, Instagram, and email, it felt strangely too connected. I wanted to feel the physical separation and a connection at the same time. Which sparked my investigation of connection through travel I typically do not think about.

Through this work, I discovered that by remediating, I can be detached to places and people I associate with while mapping out the distance. In Michigan I am less concerned with the distance between myself and my family and friends, and feel more of a loss of connection to nature, and the natural mountainous landscapes and seascapes I grew up with. I have found that while living in Michigan I spend more time looking at photos of mountains and documentaries of national parks than actually being outside. I can find ways to connect to nature through technology and question the relationship to nature through inorganic mediums.

This year, I started manipulating polaroids and discovered that by using chemicals I could make an image look like a natural substance. For example, when I poured bleach into the polaroid film taken of computer screen and looked at the images under a microscope, I found that they looked strikingly similar to an image of cheese fungus that I had on my wall. I began looking for further connections between nature and man-made objects and substances. I was trying to recreate natural landscapes through contrasting unnatural substances.



(microscopic polaroid)

I did research into fractal geometry and the power of tens. I was very intrigued that an image taken of the earth from space, looked weirdly similar to that of a microscopic image of red blood cells. The lines that connected the system of blood cells and the lines that were of rivers and mountains were very similar to each other, something so small could look like something so big, perspective goes completely out the window and lose your sense of space, and conventions centered around the macro and the micro. Through the chaos theory I found that most things in nature are all reoccurring patterns. I was looking for the connected through of the macro and the micro through the telescope and polaroids.

I began projecting images of polaroids onto manmade substances and reflective installation and drop cloth material. I was unsure at the time what the connection of the materials and the projection was. What I found most interesting was the connection of the polaroids projected onto the weaving I had done with copper wire. With this weaving I was able to sculpt the fabric in a way that it looked like a landscape. However, the weaving was small. Only about 4 feet long. So the projection of the microscopic images over took the look of the weaving. With the projection and the weaving, I was playing with the scale of the images, and distorting the

convention of what microscopic images are supposed to be, and the vastness of mountainous regions.



However, I discovered that the images I was taking were too static so I began gathering footage of moving images. I took video of different sceneries through different media forms that get me closer to nature, but also create that separation. I started with footage that I took in Ireland on a fairy boat of the waves moving by against the boat. Then I took footage of Montana, the mounts, the rocks, the snow, I just wanted to have a ton of footage to play around with. Through this process and by going into the photo studio to set up my weaving and video projections, I found that the most successful videos were the ones of the close up textures of the earth, shot in slow motion. Since rocks and mountains do not naturally pan across the screen, in these videos I was in a car, which gives the panning sense. This way the video move across the weaving with ease in between the cracks and crevices of the weaving. Once I knew exactly what shots look the best on the weaving, I went out again and took more footage. This time I was in Israel, I knew that close up textures in motion was the best angle of filming the earth.

There were two main questions that were the driving forces throughout this process of discovery. Why am I using projection? Why am I weaving the screen? In the beginning of this process, I could not fully answer these questions, because at certain points I simply didn't know the answers yet. I was constantly getting asked these questions, and did not have the full answers

to them. However, throughout these past few months I have finally come to a conclusion. I started getting very interested into video work when I was a sophomore. I was making videos in some classes and making wearable works in another. I spent so much of my time sitting in a dark room editing, that I became less and less interested in the process of editing, but still loved making videos and shooting footage. I started to combine the processes of making that I enjoyed, like weaving and sewing with videos through projection. During this whole time, I have also been weaving to connect the manmade and natural through my own hands. As the fibers artist in the 60s proved that weaving and textiles was not just to walk on, fibers artists are very involved with the act of doing. I wanted an unconventional screen to distort images. The weaving has been woven with steel wire and fishing line intermitted. So along with the white rayon and white cotton, the steel wire gives shape the weaving where it typically does not have shape. In some sections where there is the wire I have the control to shape it in the way I want, but in other sections with the fishing line and yarn, I had no control over the shape. The mistakes in the weaving show my hand in the installation. Where as with the videos there is a loss of my hand, and my doing. With the combination of projections and fibers in this project I am able to weave together my two acts of making. The technology takes away the human, and the human mistakes. The act of editing requires that I sit in a dark room for hours on end. Where with weaving the act of making takes a much more physical form. I am up and down and on the ground, weaving can really be backbreaking work. The projection is much more than just a media to transfer the video onto the weaving. The weaving has no color in it, while the videos are highly processed with color. The projection acts as a type of dye for the weaving. This way the screen is constantly changing and evolving, just as landscapes are never static, snow is melting, the sun is shining, leaves are changing ect. The projection allows for the weaving to take on its own sense of

environment and be ever changing. The combination of elements and processes in video and weaving are essential to my hyper-real world. It is saturated and stimulating and is so unnatural and far from nature. The novelty, the ever changing, shifting dynamics of nature, the lack of control found in nature, and the unpredictability.



(Close up of weaving shaped with fishing line and steel

wire. Dyed with projection)

CREATIVE WORK

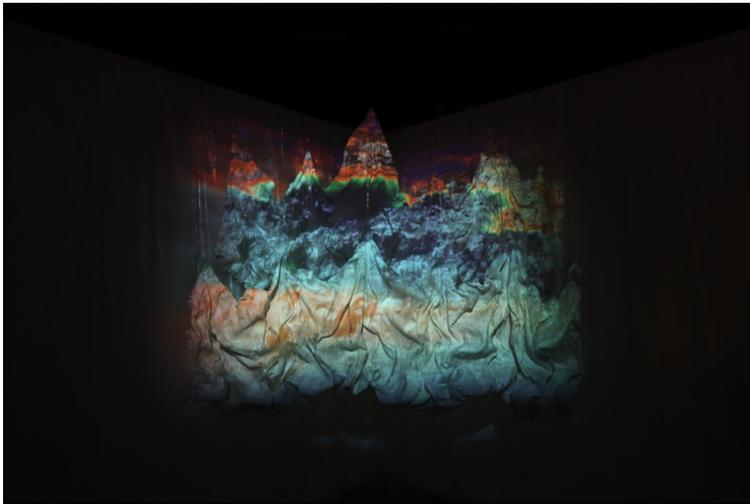
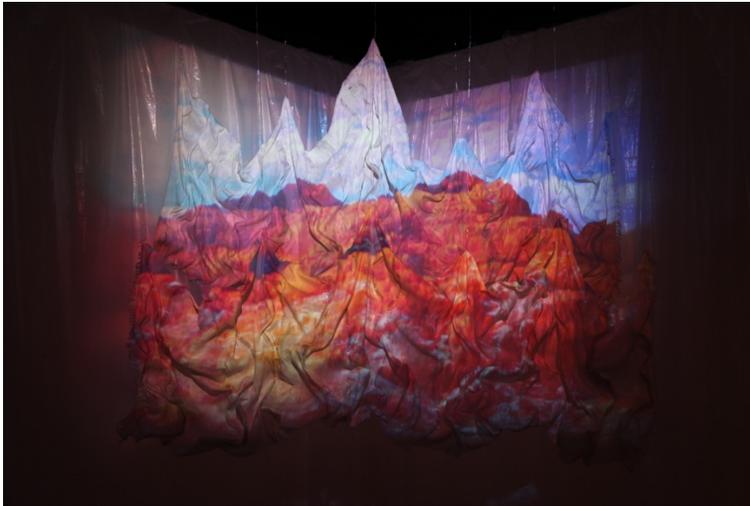
When walking into my installation the weavings are hung to look like the peaks of mountain ranges. The top weaving hangs higher than the viewer to bring in more of the vast mountainous scape, where the second one is hanging lower and about 3 feet apart from the top one. This invites the viewer to walk in between each weaving, as if to be woven into the cloth. The walls surrounding the weavings have been covered with plastic. The overspill of the projection bleeds onto the walls and the plastic to where the edges have been blurred and the images are again distorted and the light reflects off of one wall onto the next to create a fully encompassing world. The weavings are placed in the corner of the room, so when the viewer walks behind the weavings they are blocked from viewing the outside world. All that becomes visible to them is the close up patterns of the weavings and the projection. Because of the nature of the light, the projector casts a large shadow of the weaving onto the wall. The nature of the

weaving has points where the weaving is very loose and the viewer can really see each piece of fiber and how the wire and rayon are woven together. In this sense the grid of the weaving and the grid of the projection and in stark contrast with each other. In the projection the structure stays static and rigid, where in the weaving the structure is loose. The highly processed videos stimulate the weavings and give a sense of movement. The slow textures of the earth bleed into each fracture and bump of the sculpted cloth. The imagery of desert rocks and the sides of mountains mimics the shapes of the weaving.

The experience of walking up to the weavings and being engulfed by them, I want the viewer to connect the weavings to landscapes they have been in before. The imagery is seductive and invites the viewer to stand and explore the space for an extended period of time. The ever-changing and shifting qualities of the video allow the viewer to stay in the space, because they are not just watching a video on a screen, but watching how the light interacts with the unconventional screen. When being back in the small space between the weavings and the wall, the viewer is shut off from the rest of the gallery and is forced to focus on the shadow, the spill over of the projection and the grid of the projector becomes visible. The back space is small, only 3 people can fit comfortably at one time. It is illuminated by the colors, and reflective abilities of the plastic, fishing line and wire. The viewer can not see anyone or anything else in the surroundings, giving a sense of awe of nature and the hyper real environment I have created.



(Viewer in installation)



CONCLUSION

Leading up to this project I have been working with the integration of fibers work and video since my second year. In my sophomore review I talked about how I lost the sense of making and physicality of material through video work, but still had a deep connection to videos and the footage I was taking of my family. I decided that unconventional screens that I was making was the best way to have more of a physical integration of myself through the work. When I started this process of my year long project, I really had no intention of doing both fibers and projection. I think that it was a natural progression for me to revert back to these medias while working with newer concepts than what I was working with in my sophomore year. One of my favorite lecturers to work with, Annica Cuppetelli, once told me when it comes to art at a certain point “nothing is new” there is simply a constant shift and reimagining of older concepts and ideas. This has resonated with me in the sense that the medias that I am working with has been building up for the past few years. The concepts have also been building up and have worked with them in numerous different projects. I see my thesis as a culmination of the work that I have done throughout my undergraduate degree. And everything else leading up to my senior year has been smaller tests and iterations of this final installation with videos, weavings and landscapes that I have produced. And even now this “final” installation is not the ending point for this piece. There is much more to move forward with. Including the sound, the way the viewer interacts with the work, and the movement of the plastic that right now stays static on the walls. Throughout the semester this piece has been put up and taken down countless times for each iteration and experimentation of the project. And each time the weavings would get more and more tattered, the wires would pull on each other, and the fishing line would loosen up. Just like a landscape throughout time there is wear and tear. This is not the last time with weaving

will be taken down and hung up, it will be an ever going process. And my travels of video taking are not over. I will be driving back to California through a series of vastly different landscapes, from the planes to the Rockies. The video is a collection of placeless landscapes. My collection of videos and experimentation of fibers will continue to transform throughout the next stages of my life.

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