



**What
are you
Looking
at?**

Erin Wakeland

**What are you
Looking at?**

Erin Wakeland

Returning Red Solo	5
You Have Everything You Need	37
The Postcard Experiment	85
Artist-in-Residence	113


Introduction

I spent my days as a college student furiously biking from class to waiting tables at a french restaurant, photographing student music shows, picking up shifts at the flower shop, returning home to projects sprawled across the room, and waking up to an equally packed day. An object in motion will stay in motion, and I was soaring. The adrenaline of doing things carried me through worries about post-grad, self-worth, and what it all means to be here. Busy-ness was my vice.

A flip switched when I received critical reviews on a project my sophomore year. I realized that more work didn't equate to better work; speeding through the process of achieving your goals is like fast-forwarding a movie: brief and cheated of pleasure. I took the summer off. I thought of myself, or lack of self, as I worked on an archaeological site in Rome, Italy. I felt no pressure for what I was doing to mean anything for the greater me. I was there to observe things that I had no expertise on. I had no idea what people were saying around me. I dug in the dirt, I cleaned pottery, I ate gelato and I did nothing to self-improve.

My research is experiential: I learned by doing, by conversing with friends, by going for long walks, by attempting my hand at doing nothing. I untangled my ideas of self-worth from productivity according to the capitalist value system, or should I say: I'm continuously trying to. I still find myself in the throes of productivity culture, and the best way I can detect overload is to observe where my attention is when I'm crossing the street, when I'm riding the bus, when I'm listening to a lecture. Through this project, I try to recover one's everyday life from the culturally present commodification of time and selfhood for profit: the definition I give capitalism throughout this project.

I seek to explore the relationships between worthiness, ordinariness, and what happens to people's attention in a capitalist system. To engage my ideas with everyday life, I reframed activities like shopping, attending college, and throwing trash away through a series of public, performance-based social experiments. I completed four social experiments throughout my senior year. The final form is this book (hello!) that frames each experiment within a personal essay used to unpack my relationship to the topics at hand. The book includes a variety of media used to document each scenario through photography, painting, and interviews. Ultimately, *What are you Looking at?* offers insight into the hardships of utilizing one's attention to redefine what it means to live well while steeped in American capitalist culture.

A red plastic cup is the central focus, surrounded by lush green foliage. The cup has white text written on it. The text is arranged in two lines: 'RETURNING' on the top line and 'RED SOLD' on the bottom line. The cup is positioned slightly to the right of the center. The background is filled with large, dark green leaves, some of which have small brown spots. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

RETURNING
RED SOLD

I woke up today in the same house

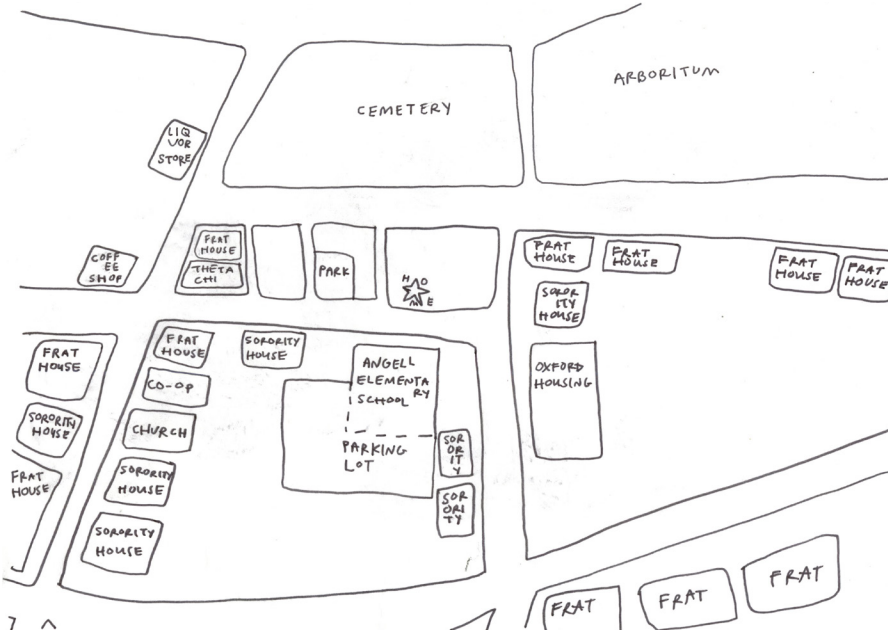
I've been waking up in for two years. The creak of the stairs is my morning hymn as I totter down to brew coffee. My house is old. It was built in 1906 and has poor insulation to prove it. Surrounding it are typical college houses, apartments, and fraternities crammed together like lego pieces.

I wonder what the street looked like in 1906: a dirt road patterned with the shadows of trees, a few idle horses, and a good view of the cemetery two blocks away. Certainly shoes were not hanging from telephone wires, nor were makeshift beer-pong tables splayed out like smashed bugs in yards, trash blowing down gutters like tumbleweed.

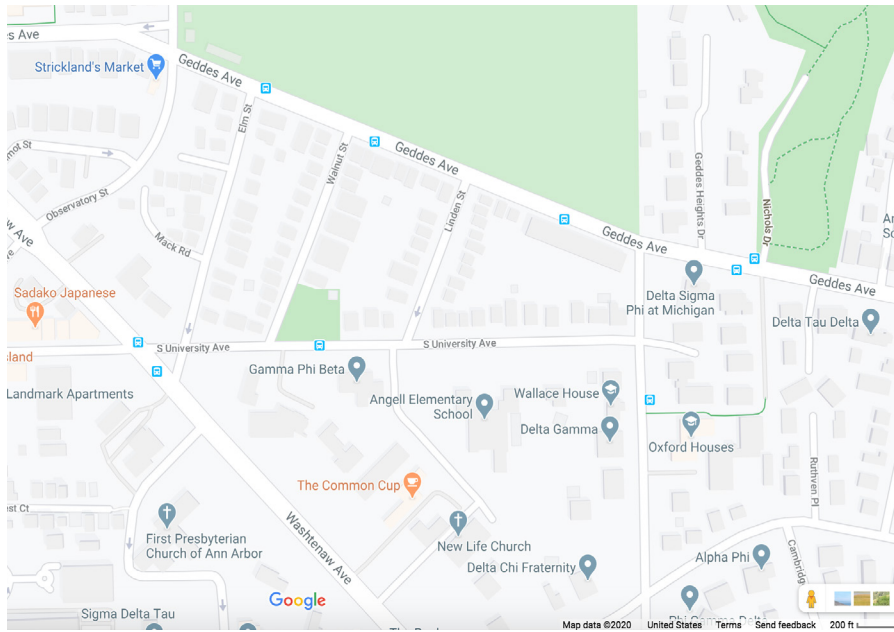
It is October in the South University neighborhood of Ann Arbor, Michigan. To get home, I walk past the Theta Chi fraternity house. I am well informed of this fraternity's doings through locational osmosis (I'm often awoken on Saturday mornings by their blaring of Mr. Brightside by the Killers).

The artifacts left on the sidewalks and yards are not uncommon across the neighborhood, but Theta Chi is the biggest culprit of littering on my street. I've collected some beautifully smashed cans that now hang in my studio. The red solo cup, a frat party emblem, remains aplenty across their yard and spills into the gutter.

Map of what my local geography feels like:



Actual map:



These little red sirens tease me on my
walk home, luring me with their song of a
micro-plastic free water source if I pick them
up. They peak through matted leaves and dirty
snow caps like rubies, the broken ones still
traceable to their original form.

I walk by these cups and think about a reality in which these cups are as precious as rubies. We would keep our cup at the party and wash it out when we are finished. We would stack it with the glass cups or position it like a trophy in the display of chinawares. When it breaks we would repair it. When it is beyond repair we would still treasure it.





I experiment with how long I can take my packed lunch in the plastic bag that once held sandwich bread before it tears. I ran out of maple syrup and use the bottle to hold salad dressing. I made a sweater out of a thrifted blanket and patch my jeans when they tear.

In my own life, I try to smooth out the hierarchy

of preciousness that I assign to the objects surrounding me.

By doing so I hope to pay closer attention
to what I consume and become imaginative
with how I use things.





The life of the red solo cup post-drink is currently unaccounted for: what if we treated the cup with the same integrity as an object with emotional and monetary worth?

I started to collect the strewn cups outside the Theta Chi fraternity house on the corner of Washtenaw Ave and South University Ave. In the evening, I tediously mended them like it was 1906 and I was waiting for the fire to burn-out while Pa plays the fiddle.





I needle-punched holes parallel to the cracks of the cup and laced the red thread through. Sometimes the holes would split leaving me with more work to do. Once, absolutely frustrated with the pace of this activity, I tried to hot glue a crack. It bubbled and singed holes through the red, thin plastic. Too hot. I began to question everything. Treat it preciously, I repeated in my head, holding myself to my intention. I picked up the needle again.

Despite my care in mending them, you can spot my cups in a lineup. They are clumsy and odd and certainly not *sauve*. Nevertheless, last Saturday afternoon, during the Theta Chi party for the Penn State vs. University of Michigan game, I ventured over to their backyard tailgate to return their possessions. Videographer Miriam Siegel followed me to document the interactions.











I decide to try the front door first even though I see where to hop the knee-high gate partitioning off the party in the backyard.



I'm cordial, I'm neighborly; I'll abide by formalities.



Many knocks later I doubt there is a doorman tending to solicitors.



I join the fence-hoppers in the rite of passage. Shortly after, I land my first interaction.



EW: Hi, are you in a frat?

(A major oversight was not asking for names so I will resort to diminutive cast names.)

Party Boy #1: Yes, ADPi.

EW: Oh so not this one?

Party Boy #1: No not this one.

EW: Well, I found these cups in this yard and I fixed them so you can use them again at your parties. Would you use them?

Party Boy #1: No they are too dirty.

hands him another cup

EW: How about this one?

Party Boy #1: Dirty also. Why did you fix them?

EW: Because someone left them in the yard and—

Party Boy #1: I can recycle them?

EW: Yeah, well you can reuse them.

picks another mended cup

Party Boy #1: I would drink out of this cup.

EW: Okay. Do you want to drink from it now?

Party Boy #1: No not right now but in the future.

EW: Okay.

Miriam, behind the videotape interrupts: Will you take better care of the cups now?

Party Boy #1: Now that it is sewed, I'll definitely take better care of it. People want a recycling bin at parties.

EW: That would be great. Would you do it?

Party Boy #1: Yes, for sure. We don't have anywhere to throw out our cups.

EW: Where do you put them now?

Party Boy #1: On the floor, in the garbage can, on the street. We liter them, it's terrible. If we had a recycling bin and put a red cup logo on there people would love it.

EW: You should bring that to the board.

Party Boy #1: I'm on the board.

EW: Oh so you have the power to change that.

Party Boy #1: I got it. I'll do it for you guys.

I was surprised by his effort to say exactly what he thought I wanted to hear. I wasn't trying to tell people to recycle. And I don't think I hit the objective of instilling a communist view on object importance during this conversation. Whether or not some of his sincerity was cheeky, I hope he remembers this conversation during his next board meeting and goes for the red solo cup receptacle idea.

Miriam and I walk further into the yard. Other people's elbows knead my arms as the ground gets sandier. Music, cheering, and loud conversations ping pong through the crowd. On the party's periphery, we land on our next two subjects.



EW: Hey, are you both in a frat?

Party Boy #2: Yeah, but another one, not this one.

EW: Okay, that's alright. I found these cups outside this frat after a party last weekend and I fixed them up to use again.

Party Boy #2: Yeah, of course!

stares down into the cup like a water well

It's pretty dirty though.

I don't know how I'd drink out of it now.

Party Boy #3: I feel like your drink would fall out.

Party Boy #2: Yeah it would spew.

Party Boy #3: Yeah maybe if you took a blow torch and did this: *motions up and down along a vertical crack in the cup*

Party Boy #2: I think we're getting poisoned. That's glue!
points to the glue holding another crack together on another cup

We laugh a bit about how fragile the cups are. It's hard to play ignorant about the practicality of re-using the cups. But I also feel a timid attachment to the cup with the lumpy glue, like how you love your child even if they grow a gnarly wart on their big toe.

EW: Can you think of using these for another purpose?

Them: No not if you can't drink from them.

And I just like that I reached the limits of their imaginations.

I don't mean to brag, but at this point, I'm a bit of a spectacle. A small line gathers around me waiting to see these cups. I clutch my cups harder. Heads peer in and out of the semi-circle I've made with the next three subjects. Above us, vape clouds blow like the tradewinds.

EW: Hi! Are you all in greek life?

Girl in Stripes: Yes!

Girl in Tie-Dye: Yes!

Boy with Sunglasses: Ya!

EW: I fixed these cups up after I found them in the yard of this Frat last weekend. Would you like to use one?

Girl in Stripes responds firmly: YES. I'll pour my drink into it right now.

Boy with Sunglasses examines the cups very particularly. Girl in Stripes pours sprite into the cup. It holds for a few seconds and drips out.

Boy with Sunglasses: Yeah, that can't hold up.

We all disperse. Girl in Stripes took her cup with her as she greeted a friend nearby. I waved goodbye to her, but really it was to the cup. Life of the party, cup, you really were a star.



The gawkers ebb and flow with increasingly short attention spans. The music has gotten invasive as the bass is seriously disrupting our audio recording. My time is up, as I, distinct in my pink coat against the maize and blue, was stopped by a frat boy and asked to stop videoing. I could've stuck around, sipped a few beers and then sat on top of a U-Haul truck with the boys, but I decided to turn in.

I place the remaining cups in a storage cupboard next to the other plastic cups and the pile for spoons that accidentally fall into the garbage disposal. I don't have it in me to toss them into the recycling bin nor do I feel obliged to use them, but they remain precious to me.

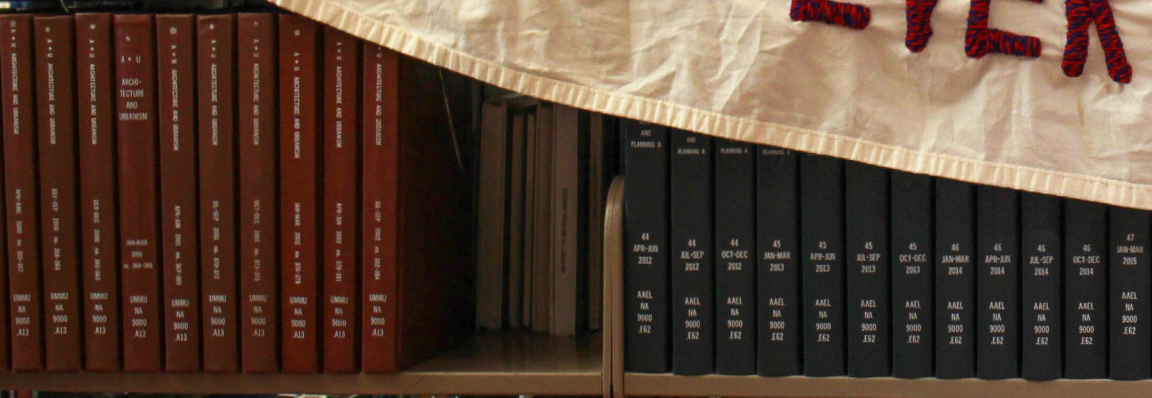
I fought upstream to win others over in the moments shared with the cups: they were special for awhile, held by many hands, inspected by curious eyes. The cups will stick together pondering the outcome of the one snatched by Girl in Stripes.

Maybe that cup is on a dorm room shelf, iconic in suite 23, winning Girl in Stripes strangest thing collected at a party. The other cups will come out for the occasional party, maybe my roommates will accidently serve sangria in them. But mostly, they will sit like unearthed rubies in my dark cupboard. Their brief glory days have passed but ironically they will outlive me after all. ■

EVERYTHING

YOU HAVE

YOU NEED





Last spring, my professor Phoebe Gloeckner told me to stop reading. I was making paintings based on the theory that text and image are interchangeable, and cornered her for a meeting on what to do next. I studied contemporary art like math equations; I was certain that if I could calculate the correct ratios I'd be the next Anselm Kiefer.

Phoebe looked at me puzzled. And then suddenly at ease: she said that I already know everything I need to know to move forward, now it's about what I think. Research was my elegant form of procrastination, preventing me from moving forward, making things, and messing up. I was circling the library like a fish in its bowl, trying to perfectly calculate my next move as to prevent mistakes.

Is it possible to over-consume research the way that we over-consume material things?

YOU

The image shows the letters 'H' and 'A' in a large, bold font. The letters are constructed from a thick, braided rope in alternating red and blue colors. The 'H' is on the left and the 'A' is on the right. The background is plain white.

Maybe the consequences look different: it isn't that your wallet gets skinnier while your closet doors bust open, but perhaps the imbalance leaves you incapable of attending to others things in your life. Have I missed the point of making work with my head stuck in a book? If these words are true of this project, are they true for the rest of my life?

The image shows the letters 'V' and 'E' from a handmade banner. The letters are constructed from a thick, textured yarn that is a mix of red and blue. The 'V' is on the left and the 'E' is on the right. The yarn is knitted or crocheted in a way that creates a dense, three-dimensional appearance with some fraying and uneven edges, giving it a rustic, handmade feel.

I decided to make a banner out of an old bed sheet and yarn to remind myself that I have everything I need. I thought a handmade banner was a perfect way to offset wants and desires: its presence is large and bold, but upon closer look, the uneven stitches and wiggly spaces reveal imperfection. Hopefully my message will get across with loving enthusiasm. I took the banner to the entrance of my favorite wing in the Art and Architecture library to investigate, to see if I could convince myself that I have everything I need.

The image shows the letters 'EVERY' from a handmade banner, continuing from the 'VE' above. The letters are made of the same red and blue textured yarn. The 'E' is on the left, followed by 'V', 'E', 'R', and 'Y' on the right. The texture is consistent with the previous letters, showing a mix of red and blue strands that create a thick, fibrous look with some irregularities in the stitching.

THING



10/17/19 9:10 AM - 10:52 AM

There is a trickle of students in and out of the library this morning and I joined them at the long tables to spy on my banner while it went to work. Most people notice the banner, some smile. Some stay with their heads in their phones. I would say there is an average of 5 people per minute walking through the doors. This proceeds for 2 hours.

At around 10:50 AM, two library employees walk in. The one in the red vest exclaims “What the fork is this?” — obviously flabbergasted, possibly angry. She proceeds to take a photo and at this point I can’t tell if its out of amusement or if she’s going to turn it in to campus security.

YOU

NEED

She smiles at the other employee standing next to her. The other employee is wearing a black vest. Black vest says something like “oh but it’s harmless...”

“But we still can’t have it!” red vest says stormily and marches out in disbelief that someone, somewhere has introduced a bump in the road of a usual Thursday morning.

I didn’t go up to them to talk about the banner, afraid they’d cuff me right then and there; is it the truism that cuts or the passive intervention of placing the banner in the library? Did they feel violated as recipients of unsolicited advice? Dumbfounded by the absurdity of an intervention in a library; a place as neutral as Switzerland? As soon as the vested ladies turn around I slink over and take the banner down. I remain incognito and sit back at the long work tables to observe what ensues.


Four new library employees entered staggeredly to scan the area. Some seem angry, some bewildered, some confused; all of the library employees look like children on an Easter egg hunt. Did I just make them have a good time?

I did not feel suddenly struck by the epiphany that I should stop reading. I did not even believe my banner. It was like reading the words “you can’t read.” This seems to be a classic case of overcompensation: it is childish of me to think that the answer is to stop reading altogether.

However, I did like planting a surprise for the staff and that wasn't reading. I like to think my banner seasoned an otherwise bland day for the librarians, suddenly distinguishable from the rest. While trying to figure out what I can consume less of in my life, it seems I've found that I need something else: disruption.

A photograph of a shoe collection on clear shelves. A white banner with red and black embroidered text is draped across the middle. The shoes are diverse in style, including sneakers, high heels, loafers, and boots. Some shoes have brand names like 'CalmKieir' and 'AIR' visible. A red and white string is tied to the left side of the shelves.

YOU HAVE EVERY

A photograph of a shoe store display. Multiple shelves are filled with a variety of shoes, including sneakers, loafers, pumps, and sandals. A white banner with red and blue braided lettering is draped across the middle of the shelves. The banner reads "EVERYTHING YOU NEED".

EVERYTHING YOU NEED

After my run at the library, I wanted to find a place with both elements of disruption and truth. I landed on the Briarwood Mall: home of department stores and kiosks, frozen yogurt and strong perfume.

I venture to the Briarwood Mall with very low expectations for tolerance of my project. This is brick and mortar materialism, no conspicuous, targeted Instagram advertisement, no proceeds are going to a charitable cause: we are in the business of buying for pleasure. While physical commerce spaces are increasingly transitioning to online platforms, becoming more ubiquitous, more ingrained into our daily lives, I admire the clarity of intentions at the mall whether I fundamentally agree with them or not. The honesty almost holds me back. But then I see a pair of hideous high heels designed to look like a suit and tie and muster on. Someone needs me to tell them they don't need these shoes and all adjacent horrors.



10/30/19 2:57 PM - 4:01 PM

I feel like an outsider, unaffected by the merchandise cluttering my vision: has the burden of consumption been lifted from my shoulders — am I godsent, salvation in girl form, or do I just not like anything here? With the banner in my hands, I feel protected, like I have a mission of the higher order to accomplish.

I pace Von Maur, the most luxurious store in the mall. Past the pyramid of fall booties, I hit the clearance shoe room, out of employee sight. Shoppers come and go, some sit to contemplate shoes and I see them gaze at the banner. No one asks about the banner, but no one buys shoes. Victory? I move on.

I approach the make-up counter at Von Maur and ask if I can hang it around the cosmetics for a photo. I explain that I am an art student with a project in which I photograph a banner in different contexts. She, the manager with an attitude, calls her manager. After the call fails to go through, she says “you know what that means for us...you know that’s against what we are going for...” I say I understand the implications. She says “so what are you going to do with an art degree after college?”

You Have Everything You Need



Nevermind that most shoppers who pass by are clutching their bags like buoys post-capsized at sea, eyes starry from the glass window displays; the slight abhorrence of store policy thrills me. I am having capital F fun. I slink around from Bath and Body Works to H&M, to the Pagoda jewelry stand in the center of the mall. While everyone around me is occupied by getting what they need, I too, in my own sense, am occupied by the same thing.



You Have Everything You Need





Fuji A

YOU HAVE

YETI'S
BEST

EVER

3 Pound
Bag
5.99

WHOLE
FOODS

YETI'S
BEST

WHOLE
FOODS



Produced in Michigan
Gala Apple
\$1.49
WHOLE FOODS MARKET

Heart of Organics
A Customer's Choice

WHAT YOU NEED



I am accompanying my sister Paige

on a mid-afternoon trip to Whole Foods. This store contains a similar volume of goods as the stores in the mall and while food is essential, Whole Foods is known for being luxuriously extra. Will my banner hold up in this context?

We enter at the produce section; I scan for a wide surface to display the banner. After a few lumpy tries on top of squash, I hang the banner from a display of apples. I pace nearby, recover from the adrenaline, and check out the lettuce. It's 2:51 PM.

The pace of Whole Foods is leisurely: 5-10 people shop in the produce area at a time. I hear a few snickerings at the sign. One man laughs, makes eye contact with me, then starts singing a happy tune to his wife who affectionately shushes him. I peak into their cart: apples, eggs, sliced ham, and coffee beans. It looks methodical. I don't see the signs of rampant consumerism. I stalk my sister who is buying sliced cheese. The view from the deli is perfect.

It's 3:03 PM and this feels like endurance art— a sisyphian climb in front of an audience— however, no one else seems to see the mountain. Or maybe they see the mountain as a ski mogul. Three Whole Foods employees pass by and I think they are IN ON IT: one of the employees, I later learn is named Bailey, acknowledges me with a smile as she unloads produce. Another employee, Brian, gives me a wink, although I'm not certain he saw the sign. These exchanges seem like an unspoken pact that I am on their side: it's us against the indulgent clientele.

At 3:17 PM I dive into the cosmetics aisle to watch perplexed apple-buyers. A lady with stunning auburn hair parks her cart in front of the apples and takes a few steps back. Her feet are in fifth position as she bows to read the banner. Her head swivels and then returns to her shopping list.

I come out of the aisle smelling like an Aunt's hug during the holidays (I've tested every cream blush). It is 3:37 PM and I notice the banner has been removed after I briefly looked away. I look around for an employee and scurry over to the customer service desk. The three employees have not heard of my banner; we track down Bailey. This is the part where I learn her name.

You Have Everything You Need



11/1/19 2:57 PM - 3:37 PM

EW: Hi, my name is Erin. I'm working on a project where I photograph a banner in public places. Have you seen my banner here today?

Bailey: Yes, I did see it! It is so cute. I don't know where it went. I didn't take it down. I saw it while I was working.

After a brief chase, Bailey found the banner in the break room. Mike from the deli counter grabbed it. When I asked Bailey if he said anything, she responded: "I have no idea what goes through that man's head most of the time."

What I'm learning is that the banner will always get taken down. The answer isn't because it offends shoppers' sensibilities, it's due to store policy. Passersby will largely ignore the banner. This project is suddenly excruciatingly predictable. I'm starting to feel dumb.

Also, it might be true that people need things. People need apples. People need new shoes when they've worn through the toes and broken the zipper. People need their weekly round up of eggs, coffee beans, ham, and apples. Through my spastic sign placing I've decided that I have the authority to dictate what people can and can't have. I'm seeking a place that does not insult or confront; can this sign be harmonious with its surroundings?



YOU HAVE EV

EVERYTHING YOU NEED

319

11/15/19 3:56 PM

My favorite craft store moved locations.

I learned this the hard way: a closed sign posted on the cloudy window of the old location. Dumbfounded with my friend Madalyn, I U-turned on the dead-end street; our car was pulsing to the beat of the song “Kick it to Me” by Sammy Rae. Driving leisurely, chin cocked, lyrics spilling out of my mouth, my eye caught a pile of junk. Trash! In the dumpster! Luckily, I had the banner and camera in the back of my car for a moment like this.

This seems to be the obvious answer to my qualms found at the grocery store: the banner is not out of place nor in a place. No one can take it down because the dumpster simultaneously belongs to no one and everyone. The difference between trash and everything else is that someone decided no one should want or need this ever again. The banner agrees with its setting.

I make fresh tracks in the shallow snow, running out to get a wider angle. The mountain of rolled carpets and insulation looks as delicate as a pile of satin ribbons. They are beautiful. Interrupting the awe, I feel a devil tapping my shoulder. The banner is out of place.

I labeled something beautiful as something undesirable. Whatever I place the banner on, my mark is authoritative. The banner is just as confrontational as it was in places of commerce: I decide where the line is drawn between abundance and absence. Someone decided these materials go to the dump, but they aren't worthless. I feel despondent—the one place I thought would be an easy yes is also complicated. I retrieve the banner and hustle back to the car.
“Got the shot?” Madalyn asked.
“Yeah...” I say like a deflating balloon.



YOU HAVE EVERYTHING YOU NEED



11/8/19 6:27 PM

I had an idea for a performance piece

earlier this year that involved dressing in business attire and cinematically sprinting downtown as if I'm late to work — work being watching the sunrise from a parking structure. The piece has obvious holes: sleepy Ann Arbor does not have a vibrant walk-to-work culture, nor is there a parking structure with a clear eastern view.

Friday evening I woke up from a cat nap to a sky made of brilliant pinks and purples. I rubbed my blurry eyes. I operate on whim. I decide I'm going to try to recover my banner from project purgatory.

I sprint out of the house and bike to Thompson street like hell on wheels. The urgency I felt transcended being late for class, waiting tables at the french restaurant, the moment I realize a first date is not going well. Time abides by nature only and if I miss the setting sun, it won't dip upwards for an encore.

I double-step seven flights of stairs to the top of the parking structure and let out a sigh of relief/exhaustion. The grey, empty structure floor reflects the sky, turning into a lilac blue. I am between the two color palettes— the expanse seems infinite as I'm above the street noise and the skyline. The banner looks different set against the sky. I squint my eyes and imagine it flying on the tail of an airplane: free, unsolicited advice in the most free, unsolicited space I know. It seems to me I am exactly where I need to be.



10/25/19 9:32 PM

Through all of this I remembered my roommates Katie and Madalyn put the banner up during Madalyn's birthday party. We loved the phrase and they love me for my work even when it's bad. I look at this authentic capture—a celebratory buzz hummed throughout the air, our ceilings trapezed with decorations, friends giddy or resting in anticipation of an energetic night. The night went onward, we drank wine and danced. The banner remained in the background as our touchstone.



YOU HAVE EVER

11/11/19 1:23 PM

EVERYTHING YOU NEED

Clara



This is the first snow of the season.

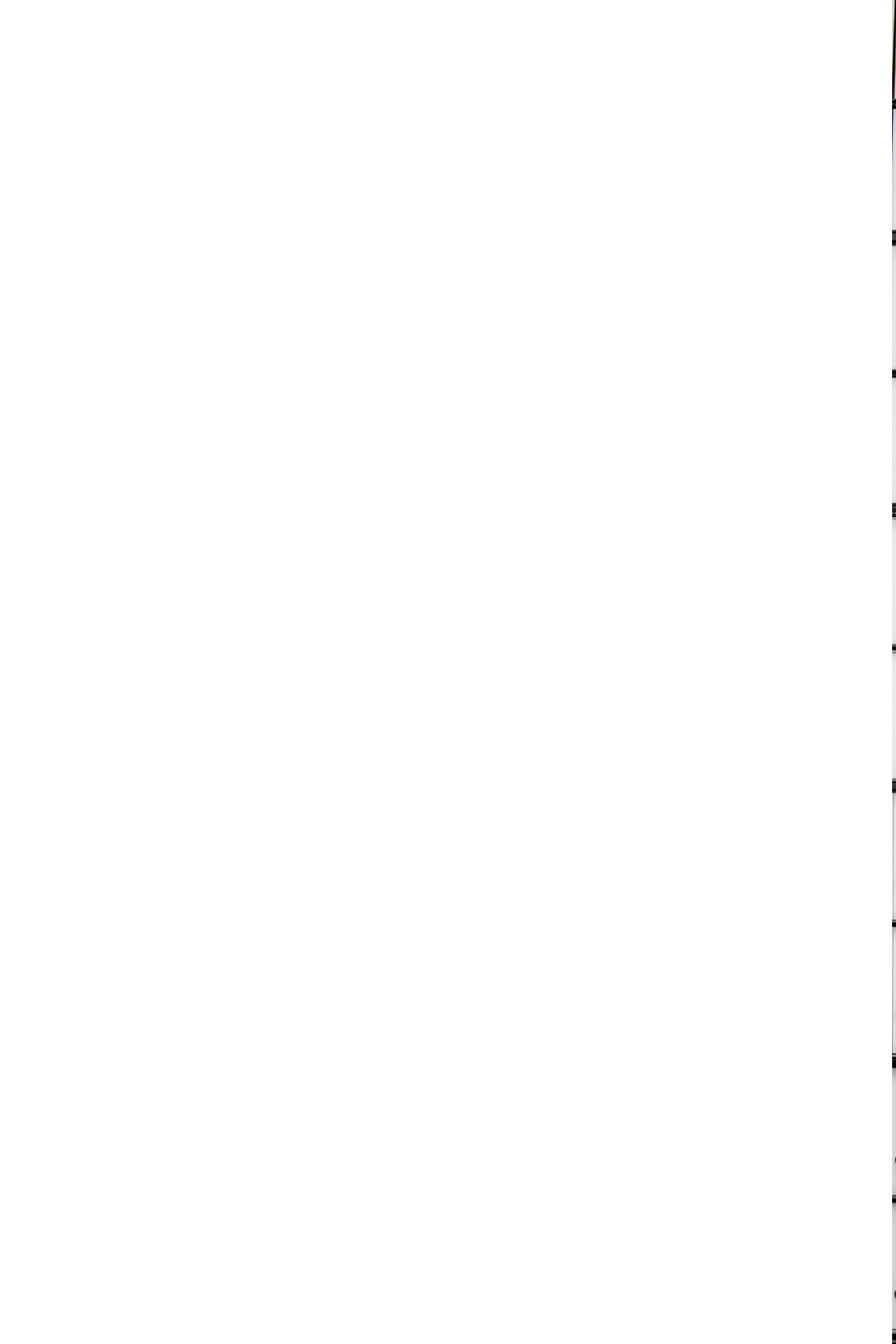
It came down overnight as thick as the frosting on a sheet cake. My bones still seem to carry the sun, so I ran out the door this morning without a heavy coat and stomped around fearlessly. During a break in my day, I went outside to the woods by my school to admire the blinding whites.

The banner feels celebratory, harmonious, and accepted by the branches. I imagine that the banner sprouted from the tree limbs and dropped the way flags unroll from castle windows during celebrations, trumpets play in the background with confetti sprinkling the sky. This feels like a finish line.

When I finish this essay, close this book, eat this apple, do I actually have everything I need? Could you lock me in a vault and not come back for a few days? Humans are very needy. We need to be fed and watered daily. We need love and affection, vitamin D, and material things. Ironically, this project became a litmus test for what we need. But I still question: how can we have everything we need and be aware that we don't need everything?

What I've figured out is that giving unsolicited advice makes me feel bad. And sometimes, I love to be a spectacle. Maybe this project was really all to service my needs. I loved seeing the whistling man in the grocery store and I loved having a sassy conversation with the makeup clerk. I loved chasing the sunset and dancing with friends under the banner. Perhaps what we truly need is something to bring a jolt of joy, and for some people shoes shaped into tuxedos do it for them. Sometimes those joys can be buying unnecessary shoes, but if we fill our days with more living from the square foot in which we are standing (dancing, talking, running...), we might realize we feel full after all. ■

You Have Everything You Need



4101	4091	4081	4071	4061
------	------	------	------	------

4102	4092	4082	4072	4062
------	------	------	------	------

4103	4093	4083	4073	4063
------	------	------	------	------

4104	4094	4084	4074	4064
------	------	------	------	------

		4069		
--	--	------	--	--

		4070		
--	--	------	--	--

4105	4095	4085	4075	4065
------	------	------	------	------

4106	4096	4086	4076	4066
------	------	------	------	------

4107	4097	4087	4077	4067
------	------	------	------	------

4108	4098	4088	4078	4068
------	------	------	------	------

4051	4041	4031	4021	4011	4001
------	------	------	------	------	------

4052	4042	4032	4022	4012	4002
------	------	------	------	------	------

4053	4043	4033	4023	4013	4003
------	------	------	------	------	------

4054	4044	4034	4024	4014	4004
------	------	------	------	------	------

4055	4045	4035	4025	4015	4005
------	------	------	------	------	------

4056	4046	4036	4026	4016	4006
------	------	------	------	------	------

4057	4047	4037	4027	4017	4007
------	------	------	------	------	------

4058	4048	4038	4028	4018	4008
------	------	------	------	------	------

4059	4049	4039			4009
------	------	------	--	--	------

4060	4050	4040	4030	4020	4010
------	------	------	------	------	------



**What is competency
in life besides**

**1. Deeply noticing
where life takes place**

**2. A loving awareness
and interaction with it?**

What have you noticed lately?

Hello! I'm happy to have found you. Once you respond to the above prompt, drop this postcard into the mail to participate in project, *What are you Looking at?*. Learn more at erinraywakeland.com. All best, Erin Wakeland

Erin Wakeland

PO Box 4029

Ann Arbor, MI

48106-4029

This winter, I placed 100 postcards with this message— stamped and addressed to my P.O. box— for strangers to discover. Partially looking for confirmation that I can believe this manifesto and partially probing for a connection with city-dwellers that closely examine newspaper racks on their walk home.

I'm curious how people would live if they believed competency in life was simply being attentive. Instead of accomplishments and accolades measuring success, what if it was about how well we notice the world? Every smile as you wave pedestrians on from your car grants you a gold star on your life-success chart. We'd go for more streetlight-lit walks in the dead of winter. Maybe we'd host roadkill funerals and spend afternoons following ants until they duck into their sand hills.

The Postcard Experiment





Postcard placements in Ann Arbor, MI.

I loved placing the postcards about town:
I milled about the library to wedge them
between tight shelves of orange books and
float one over an atlas splayed open on
Michigan. One became a mousepad in the com-
puter lab and I dropped another on the library's
marble steps to look as if it precariously fell out
of my hand. I stuck a few on giant rocks across
the Diag with a tiny rock to weigh them down.
I left them on bus stop benches, telephone polls,
newspaper racks, and bathroom sinks. I left a
few at the bookstore, my favorite coffee shop,
and later, Madalyn paraded me around her
workplace, the Farmer's Market, to scatter them
between farmers and produce and pastries.

The first time I checked my P.O. box was two weeks after I first placed them. During the two weeks I went away for Thanksgiving break, I felt uncomfortably pulled from this spider web I've strung across the city.

My boyfriend Julian met me outside the post office. My walk took longer than usual because I was dragging my feet in anticipation. I couldn't preview the results. Asking strangers to do things for your art project isn't always successful, especially when it involves more than one step (filling out the prompt then placing it in the mail instead of your desk drawer for 3 months). I know that I would let the postcard mingle with my papers and become acquainted with the insides of my books, turning it into a bookmark with the intention that now it's with me all the time so when I feel inspired to write, I will. But I won't. I'd grow attached and never part with it. I come to my PO box with this knowledge.

I slide the key in easily. Honestly I'd wished for a little more trouble to stall the reveal. But the box popped open, hollow without postcards. Julian and I let out a groan.

"I'm not disappointed that there weren't any, but I'm disappointed that I was correct to assume I wouldn't get any back," I say to Julian. I promise to him that I won't check it again for a few weeks.

The next time I checked, I went by myself. I crouch down to where my PO box is the height of my shin and wiggle the key in.

I open to see one prized postcard.

What have you noticed lately?

A wedge of a sliced Halloween pumpkin has been left to rot at the base of a tree near my house. But instead of rotting, it froze! The exposed edges of the slice look like rock crystals. ~~It's~~ not so. It's hard to imagine anyone cutting through this. The stringy things that get all over your hands when you carve one are frozen white, like a dense spider web criss-crossing the bowl of the pumpkin slice.

Hello! I'm happy to have found you. Once you respond to the above prompt, drop this postcard into the mail to participate in project, *What are you looking at?* Learn more at erinraywakeland.com. All best, Erin Wakeland



Erin Wakeland
PO Box 4029
Ann Arbor
48106-4029

A few weeks later I receive 3 more.

What have you noticed lately?

It's important to seek
new knowledge and
reflect on this and
how it applies to
self. It goes beyond
our own awareness
and expands our
possibility of growth.

Hello! I'm happy to have found you. Once you respond to the above prompt, drop this postcard into the mail to participate in the project. What are you looking for? Learn more at erinraywakeland.com. All best, Erin Wakeland



Erin Wakeland
PO Box 4029
Ann Arbor, MI
48106-4029

What have you noticed lately?

I walk a lot to clear my head. I especially like strolling through the graveyard across from Stockwell (Forest Hill Cemetery). Plots in older zones tend to have a large family marker and smaller individual stones. (Once I noticed a stone with my last name and discovered relatives from 100 years ago that my grandparents were even unaware of.)

A family stone deep in the cemetery caught my eye with the last name Butts (haha), but it presented a mystery: it had 4 names and life spans, but a William Henry Butts was missing his death year. That itself is not uncommon (it's cheaper to engrave most of the stone before it's installed and update it after death). William was born in 1857, though, so he should be dead by now. I looked it up on my phone right there. William, turns out, was a professor of mathematics at the university. He's buried with his parents, who died in 1813 and 1906, and his wife, who died in 1935. He died in 1941. His death date is missing because he was the last one to die.

I emailed the cemetery to ask if they would add a date, but they didn't understand my request, and wouldn't do anything for free or without the family's permission, anyway. I've thought about adding his death year myself with chalk or paint. I wonder if anyone would notice or care. The crows roost in that cemetery during the day, before they fly at sunset and roost around the diaz and lawn band at night. I wonder if Professor Butts would have liked this or found it annoying.

-Leila Mullison 

Hello! I'm happy to have found you. Once you respond to the above prompt, drop this postcard into the mail to participate in project, *What are you looking at?* Learn more at erinraywakeland.com. All best, Erin Wakeland



Erin Wakeland

PO Box 4029

Ann Arbor, MI

48106-4029

What have you noticed lately?

Trees - ^{bare} sprawling branches
 majestic crowns opening up to
 the sky, looking so different
 in the fall, near winter grounds.
 Behavior + feelings about transition
 about change, about \$, about
 jobs + careers and about the two
~~pe~~ sides to every person + me! ☺



Erin Wakeland
 PO Box 4029
 Ann Arbor, MI
 48106-4029

Hello! I'm happy to have found you. Once you respond to
 the above prompt, drop this postcard into the mail to
 participate in the project. What are you looking for? Learn
 more at erinraywakeland.com. All best, Erin Wakeland

+
 W
 A
 D
 A

And on my third check, I find 9 more.

What have you noticed lately?

"Who is it that sees through
these eyes
hears through these ears?"

Thank you for this
this loving Awareness

Hello! I'm happy to have found you. Once you respond to the above prompt, drop this postcard into the mail to participate in project, *What are you Looking at?* Learn more at erinraywakeland.com. All best, Erin Wakeland



Erin Wakeland
PO Box 4029
Ann Arbor, MI
48106-4029

What have you noticed lately?

02 JUN 2020 AM 6 L



Erin Wakeland
PO Box 4029
Ann Ar
481C

Hello! I'm happy to have found you. ~~Once~~ you respond to the above prompt, drop this postcard into the mail to participate in project, ~~What are you Looking at?~~ Learn more at erin.wakeland.com. All best, Erin Wakeland

What have you noticed lately?

METROPLEX MI 460

02 JAN 2020 AM 7 L

Rain drops
on pine needles —
the sky in
their droop



Erin Wakeland

PO Box 4029
Ann Arbor, MI
48106-4029

Hello! I'm happy to have found you. Once you respond to the above prompt, drop this postcard into the mail to participate in project, *What are you Looking at?* Learn more at erin.wakeland.com. All best, Erin Wakeland

0 101



What have you noticed lately?

12/15/19 12:15 PM AZM

METRO ON THE STREETS

People are lonely. They

don't ~~smile~~ smile as much if they don't know you. Sadly I think

They long for human interaction but there is a shyness which is growing. We need to open up and LIVE life to the fullest.



JOHN ROUS ROAST COFFEE

Erin Wakeland
PO Box 4029
Ann Arbor, MI
48106-4029

Comm: Project!

Hello! I'm happy to have found you. Once you respond to the above prompt, drop this postcard into the mail to participate in project. What are you looking at? Learn more at erinraywakeland.com. All best, Erin Wakeland

What have you noticed lately?

The bigger, older oak trees seem to be suffering. I hope I am noticing this because I stare at the same big trees in town all the time, and that ones I don't stare at/notice are doing fine. . . . Nick Durrie



Erin Wakeland
PO Box 402
Ann Arbor, MI
48106-4029

Hello! I'm happy to have found you. Once you respond to the above prompt, drop this postcard into the mail to participate in project, *What are you looking at?* Learn more at erinraywakeland.com. All best, Erin Wakeland

What have you noticed lately?

I have noticed
that it is getting
darker earlier.

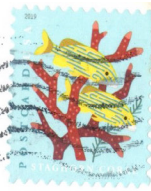


Erin Wakeland
PO Box 4029
Ann Arbor, MI
48106-4029

Hello! I'm happy to have found you. Once you respond to the above prompt, drop this postcard into the mail to participate in project, *What are you Looking at?* Learn more at eriny.wakeland.com. All best, Erin Wakeland

What have you noticed lately?

That it's not so
clear who, what,
I am.

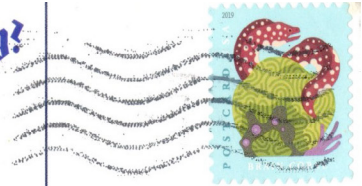


Erin Wakeland
PO Box 4029
Ann Arbor, MI
48106-4029

Hello! I'm happy to have found you. Once you respond to the above prompt, drop this postcard into the mail to participate in project, *What are you Looking at?* Learn more at erinywakeland.com. All best, Erin Wakeland

What have you noticed lately?

I've noticed that walking outside in the early morning light, with a little frost on the ground, is quite magical.



Erin Wakeland
PO Box 4029
Ann Arbor, MI
48106-4029

Hello! I'm happy to have found you. Once you respond to the above prompt, drop this postcard into the mail to participate in project, *What are you Looking at?* Learn more at erinyawakeland.com. All best, Erin Wakeland

What have you noticed lately?

I just finished a deep conversation
 with one of my friends. I notice
 the tears leaving trails from where
 they streaked down my face. I
 notice a feeling of calmness after
 unadressed tension dissipates.
 I love this project!
 from Maine with love,
 Nico

SIA MAINE 15000 000
 25 FEB 2000 PM 3 L



Erin Wakeland
 PO Box 4029
 Ann Arbor, MI
 48106-4029

Hello! I'm happy to have found you. Once you respond to
 the above prompt, drop this postcard into the mail to
 participate in project. *What are you Looking at?* Learn
 more at erinfay.wakeland.com! All best, Erin Wakeland

A month went by and I swung through the post office the way you check if you've turned off all the lights before leaving the house. Nothing. I chalk my total up to 13 postcards.

I keep them in my coat pocket to look at on bus rides. They are held together by the rubber band that came with last week's broccoli bunch. I interchange them like trading cards. A different one faces up each time so that I can be surprised for a split second. I do think about the other 87 postcards roaming this earth. Some might be in the recycling bin, or behind the counter of the bookstore. Some might have found their way onto a dorm room's wall or office desk. Maybe some people needed this reminder for longer than a writing prompt. But if a few people felt eager enough to share their thoughts with me, I will feel content clutching onto these 13 postcards like group therapy. ■

I'd like to hear from you too.
What have you noticed lately?

Email erinwakeland@gmail.com for a postcard.





Hena Patel
Manager
Meijer Store
5645 Jackson Rd
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

Dear Hena Patel,

I am writing to propose myself as a Visiting Artist-in-Residence for the Meijer Superstore on Jackson Rd from November 11th to November 22th 2019.

Over the past thirty years, institutions not normally associated with art have welcomed artists into their doors. The Mall of America in Minnesota invites a single writer to spend five days writing poetry inspired by shoppers' experiences. Artists have taken up residence on moving Amtrak trains and at the Dollar Shave Club. The San Francisco Transfer and Recycling Center, a forty-seven-acre garbage dump, offers access to discarded materials to a small group of sculptors who work with found objects.

Over the next semester I, as an art major in the Stamps School of Art & Design at the University of Michigan, will be taking up residence at stores throughout Ann Arbor. My work as resident will involve observation, as my medium and subject is landscape painting and I will paint inspired by these contexts.

Retail stores, like Meijer, offer an encyclopedia array of ideas about packaging, presentation, and human interaction, and I would be excited to be a resident. I'll provide my own resources as I am not asking for any financial support from Meijer.

Creative work is essential to the intellectual and spiritual well-being of our culture. I appreciate your advocacy for the arts and would love to work as an artist-in-residence at Meijer.

You can reach me at erinray@umich.edu or (517)348-8195.

Stamps Professor Stephanie Rowden is overseeing the Artist-in-Residence project. She would be happy to provide a reference or further information. You can reach her at srowden@umich.edu.

All the best,

Erin Wakeland, BFA 2020





Feb 10 1-3:30PM, Aisle 1

I walk into Meijer as an artist-in-residence.

The door greeter waves at me like any other customer, but I dodge a conversation, worried about getting flagged for mischief. I am an artist-in-residence at Meijer. I remind myself of this. Easel in hand, the blowing fans meant to dry the welcome carpets instead glamorize my entrance. I'm in uniform: my green cotton jumpsuit holds paint on the surface and my brushes in the front pockets. By painting in the tradition of en plein air painters in the Meijer superstore, I want to show that ordinary places are filled with just as much mystique and beauty as Monet's garden; the french country-side; dappled light at the water's edge.

I've been entertained by the grocery store since childhood. I was always the first to help my mom in exchange for a long look at the packages and produce displays. I've always thought this place was beautiful but I know it's a chore for others. I wanted to display my marvel in a way that prompts others to see it as a visual playground.

As I walk through looking for a place to set up, I notice the entire store is a new frontier in which the ceiling perfectly crops my view into an elongated horizontal landscape. Visions like the colorful produce aisles and unicolor cracker displays make for a visual feast. I decide to choose my painting locations arbitrarily, but aisle one seems like a good place to start. The pickle aisle.



I begin my painting three rows up, where Famous Dave's meets Mt. Olive pickles.



Cindy from the Deli counter is the first to approach me as I set up. She is small, smiling, and wearing a hat that has an embroidered block of cheese on the front.

“What are you doing here? Painting?” she says warmly. I am quick to sputter my status as Hena Patel’s artist-in-residence, but it slides off her back. Cindy was just curious. While the word of my residency may not have traveled at all, no one here is looking to trouble me. They might not understand what I’m doing, but I’m out of the bounds of Meijer mischief. How do employees handle this strange behavior? They smile, nod, and ask a few questions.

Shoppers pass by and I am impressed by their confidence. They approach me to give out words of encouragement and peak behind my shoulder. Shoppers pause for a few minutes at most to watch me looking deeply at the fermented foods.

COMMON QUESTIONS:

why are you doing this?

who are you doing this for?

Is this for the store?

Did the store hire you?

Do you work for Meijer?

Is this for class?

Is this for you or meijer?

Where will these be shown?

Why this spot?

(when not flowers) Why not flowers?

(when not fruit) Why not fruit?

Will you get me in the shot?

Where are the cookies?

Can you point me to the _____?

COMMON EXCLAMATIONS:

I love to paint too.

I love that you are doing this.

I want to peek.

I just want to watch.

Very good.

Oh how great.

I loved art but it
couldn't pay the bills.

I like to make people guess exactly what I'm looking at. The little game of eye spy usually does nothing for them. When I ask they often get the location wrong. And I blush, saying "Close! It's actually 5 rows down and on the other side of the shelf!" — not close at all.

As I paint into the afternoon, employees joke with me as they restock the shelves, and another pair offers my next location to be aisle 8 where they are stationed. I feel very supported by the institution of Meijer, perhaps even coddled. I find myself nearing the end of my painting. I pack up, wave goodbye to my friends at the Deli, the door greeter, and then drive away.



Feb 15 12:30-4:00PM, Produce

I set up camp in a produce aisle, gazing at the avocados. I was drawn to the color variance amongst the avocados: dark brown, green, red, and purple hues lay against the lilac-colored cardboard. Immediately, I ran into a customer that had spotted me last time. He joyfully asks me what I'm painting today. I make friends with the produce stocker, Aaron, whose hands scurry in and out of my frame. Time to work.

NEW QUESTIONS:

What is she doing, Mom?

Can I see?

Can I take your picture?

Why here?

NEW EXCLAMATIONS:

LOOK!

Van
Gauguin! I mean Gogh!





Kids accompany their parents on a Saturday afternoon grocery run. Even when their parents point me out, some kids aren't shocked by my presence. They say, "I do this at home too" or give me a look that says "lady, your painting doesn't look like avocados." On the occasion I'm met with wondrous eyes squatting between their mother's legs and the 24-pack of soda resting on the bottom shelf of the cart. I must be a bit magical to them.



I find Meijer to be a bit magical in return. It's its own metropolis: this superstore appears to have its own local governance, golf cart transportation, and boroughs (food, clothing, equipment, etc.). Shoppers move fluently through the store and bring their cross-country finds with them. They aren't afraid to interact with me or annoyed that I disrupt the flow.

Later on in the day, an older man in a black fleece zip up with a cap and glasses over his glossy skin leans on his cart like a crutch and says to me: “Most landscape paintings are dreary with a dilapidated barn and grey sky. And I think why not fix the plank and make it sunny?”

I’m thinking he’s on to me. Edging towards the conversation I hope to have — one of expanding which landscapes we deem beautiful and attention-worthy — I ask him what he thinks about this scene of avocados.

“I think it’s fine. If it were any darker I wouldn’t like it but I’m no expert.”

“You’ve got some paint on your chin” he ends with and carts off.

I'm realizing that, while my presence changes the shopping experience for people, I am perhaps the only one deeply aware of the marvelous differences in texture and color of the avocados on cardboard; of the way pickle jars retain hues of blue, green, and yellow; of the modular shapes made with glimmering glass jars.

I'm enthralled because I've given this scene the attention necessary for fascination. While I chose my placements arbitrarily, I no longer see the aisles as one of many. I am seeing the store differently than when I first arrived, and sometimes I'm not seeing the store at all: I'm absorbed in the beauty of my subjects. This is something that is totally normal in nature, I beg why not in Meijer?





Feb 16 1-3:30PM, Dairy

With a long, horizontal canvas in tow, I stand in between cheese coolers for the best landscape view of the dairy aisles. I get comfortable under the fluorescent lights. If Meijer were its own metropolis, I'm on the shoulder of a heavily trafficked road; the prime spot for small talk, quick glances, and glares from afar.



NEW INTERACTIONS:

picture taken + tagged
on instagram.

A dentist tells me
about her love of art
and comparison to
dentistry.

Meat counter ladies
came back to visit
and ask "why this
scene?"

A cheerful woman stopped me and first said: "Can I take your picture to show my students? I'm a painter too!" I said yes and she promises to text it to me. Her name is Miji. "Usually you think of landscape paintings of the outdoors but this is brilliant!" Miji finds her husband and calls him over to see my painting. Her husband is not as amused, says "That's great honey!" and with a smile slowly carts away toward the bananas.

Miji said she understands how there are so many crevices and interesting scenes to paint here, that I must be wonderfully occupied. She's teaching her students observational painting and asks me how I thought of this project.

Miji understands my reference to en plein air painting, and was the only shopper to acknowledge it. But I like to think that while others might not have the term at the tip of their tongues, the argument that I was making was widely understood: the ordinary can be fascinating and it is a joyful discovery to come upon.

I'm finishing the landscape while realizing that I will miss this artist-in-residency. While I may not have made people see differently, I made the grocery store a new place for them in those moments. And now when I go to the grocery store, I see this place less as a place of transience but a museum for these ordinary objects. ■





Background Reading

Odell, Jenny. *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*. Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2019.

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013.

Tolentino, Jia. *Trick Mirror: Reflections on Self-Delusion*. New York: Random House, 2019.

Kaprow, Allan, and Jeff Kelley. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life, Manifesto*. University of California Press, 1996.

Kaprow, Allan, and Jeff Kelley. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life, The Real Experiment (1983)*. University of California Press, 1996.

Kaprow, Allan, and Jeff Kelley. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life, Performing Life (1979)*. University of California Press, 1996.

July, Miranda, and Brigitte Sire. *It Chooses You*. Canongate, 2012.

Sagmeister, Stefan, et al. *Things I Have Learned in My Life so Far*. Abrams, 2013.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Stephanie Rowden, Jim Cogswell, and Megan Freund for your project oversight and insight.

Thank you to Rebekah Modrak for your guidance and wisdom. Thank you for the cups of tea and listening ears.

Thank you to Stamps and ArtsEngine for funding this project.

Thank you to Miriam Siegel for documenting *Returning Red Solo*.

Thank you to Alex Snow for documenting *Artist-in-Residence*.

Thank you Cynthia Greig for telling me about kintsugi and that my cups follow the tradition.

Thank you Hena Patel, Director of Meijer on Jackson Rd. for accepting my residency proposal.

Thank you to my roommates Katie Seguin and Madalyn Osbourne for your patience when my stuff is all over the house and for your listening ears and copy-editing eyes!

Thank you to my parents and sibs for your love and support always!

My dream dinner party guest list includes Jenny Odell, Jia Tolentino, Stefan Sagmeister, Allan Kaprow, and Miranda July. Thanks for doing nothing directly for me, but sharing your lives and work so that I learn from everything.

About the Author

Erin Wakeland is a 2020 graduate of the University of Michigan. This is her integrative project for the Penny W. Stamps BFA program. She enjoys a lot of things. Some more than others.

erinraywakeland.com

