

**LOOK!**

Oral Presentation

Thesis

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## **INTRO:**

My project, LOOK!, emerged at the intersection of art and design, unfolding as a conceptual practice shaped by an enduring curiosity of the overlooked. Anchored in close observation, the project seeks inspiration by drawing attention to the fleeting, peripheral details that often escape notice throughout everyday life. This approach required a shift in perspective from passive witness to active participant, inviting me to move through the world more attentively, disrupt patterns of habit, and embrace a slower, more deliberate way of seeing.

Over time, attentive observation naturally became a hunt for abstract occurrences. In an urban setting, these revealed themselves as everyday anomalies—moments like cardboard worn smooth by foot traffic, the residue of sign glue left behind on a wall, or a piece of fruit that had somehow escaped someone's lunch. Though easily missed, these incidental scenes caught my attention, revealing the beauty of the unexpected against the city's visual rhythm. Each held a sculptural presence shaped by chance, time, and human trace.

By gathering and responding to these moments, I began to form a visual archive that embraced the beauty of organic happenstance. Over time, this archive transformed into a language of form and material. Fragments were abstracted, layered, and recontextualized through digital manipulation, collage, and mixed-media compositions. While some planning went into the initial ideas, the work didn't fully reveal itself until I physically made it—responding intuitively to what each abstract occurrence asked for.

LOOK! Is equal parts concept and artwork: Evolved into a conceptual practice, drawing inspiration from abstract occurrences to form motifs and a personal narrative, reflecting my creative process and spirit as a maker. Yet beyond me as the individual, the work gestures

toward a deeper inquiry into how we perceive, connect with, and make meaning from the world around us.

These moments began to reveal symbolic metaphors that surfaced in the physical landscape and my psyche. They appeared like messengers, subtly disrupting familiar ways of seeing and inviting a more abstract way of thinking and engaging. Through this process, the work invited not just a shift in how I perceived the outside world, but a shift inward—a call to look within my own.

## **PERSONAL / SHIFT IN PERCEPTION**

As humans, we tend to gravitate toward routine. It gives us structure, a sense of stability, and helps us manage the complexities of daily life. But within that same instinct lies an opposing resistance, the urge to break patterns, to interrupt the familiar, and to rediscover presence through change. I found myself caught in that tension. My hyper-focused hustle of juggling multiple jobs, community events, freelance work, and academia—started to feel like I was tethered to a cycle I couldn't step out of. Even though I believed I was being rewarded for the hustle, I began to feel distant from the city itself—and from a reality beyond my to-do list.

I felt constrained by the pressure to “make it” as I was locked into a pattern of A-to-B destinations. There are only so many times you can drive from home to school to work, then back to your desktop, before you ask yourself what it's all really for.

As someone who thrives in community, culture, and the freedom of the unknown, I began to feel disconnected—not just from the outside world, but from my own spirit. I missed the spontaneity that freedom once brought, and I knew that the only way out of that pattern was to break it.

The conceptual frame behind my thesis, inspired by the Situationist *dérive* practice, became the needle that burst that bubble.

One of the key figures in the Situationist International, Guy Debord, describes the *dérive* in his 1956 essay as “a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances... [involving] playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects... In a *dérive*, one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, work, and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.”

This mindset inspired me to move beyond my A-to-B destinations and to begin carving out space to explore.

At first, it was simple. Walking from the parking lot to school became an art practice in itself. By embodying the *dérive*, I allowed abstract occurrences to guide me. My once-linear route turned into a ping-pong path, leading me to drift, pause, observe, and collect. And in those moments, I started to feel present again. The act of stepping out of my everyday pattern allowed new pathways to open, both physically and within my mind.

I began embodying this practice past the school parking lot, allowing the process of looking to become a habit that coexisted with my everyday life. Now, throughout my A-to-B destinations, I was consistently on the hunt. My eyes wandered left to right and up and down, scanning my environment for another occurrence. Soon after, this practice evolved into randomized walks, in which my destination was loosely defined by the abstractions to which my eyes were drawn to.

## **PROCESS / CONTEXT**

*LOOK!* began as an experimental photography project during the spring semester of 2024. I was primarily focused on documenting found objects and textures shaped by everyday happenstance. Immediately, I was drawn to the natural abstraction that emerges within urban environments. These forms felt unexpected and were often disregarded by the common eye.

I started to notice the small details... like the outline of dried up split coffee, or the chaos pattern of broken glass. These moments started to interest me so I documented them.

In my initial thesis proposal, I was interested in finding the visual relationships between abstract occurrences found in urban environments and those in nature. I envisioned the work would be a juxtaposition of the two worlds. My goal was to use this visual language in an abstracted way, leaning on contemporary design principles to showcase my observations.

This exploration resulted in a growing photographic archive of digital images. I later developed these in duotone colors to emphasize the organic significance of each composition. Through that process, I focused on building a visual balance of light and shadow, revealing a dynamic interplay of texture, patterns, lines, and shapes.

As I started to organize my archive, something within me shifted. I felt that these abstract occurrences wanted to tell a different story. I started to view them as symbolic motifs, speaking towards my personal narrative, and design thinking. Although the outcome of my thesis evolved, the core intention remained the same: it was always rooted in observation, presence, and finding meaning in what often goes unseen.

## PROCESS OF MAKING

During this visual study, I accumulated roughly 500 abstract occurrences. I began curating each object into categories, finding commonalities within each visual structure. But as I moved through different explorations and design iterations, I kept having to push to craft meaning and find answers.

At times, I began to question the project's purpose. As a designer, I felt the pressure to make sense of things visually. I was eager to find the thread connecting the ideas behind LOOK!'s abstract narrative.

Initially, I decided to focus on using the composition of the image as a visual component instead of mainly just the object itself. But because I felt stuck in one frame of thinking, I drifted into a new one, hoping to find clues to solve my problem. I switched the modality of my operation and started simplifying these abstract occurrences as single-colored objects. By doing so, each object was left up for interpretation. Removing its original Attributes allowed space to redefine and contextualize its meaning.

As a child, I remember staring at my popcorn ceiling, creating faces, characters, and animals from the rough texture left on the wall. I always named my parents' cars and believed they carried their own souls and characteristics as beings. If food was to be discarded, I believed, as a seven-year-old, that their soul energy could not *just* be thrown away. So I would inhale deeply (swooooooooo), thinking I was capturing their soul before they were thrown into the dark abyss of the kitchen garbage bag.

While working on this project, I reflected on those early beliefs—why did I think everything had a spirit? Maybe this was my way of returning to that childhood wonder. A way to rewire how I see and to impose meaningful interpretation onto things that are often ignored. During a studio visit, I was excited to share my Angels with Michelle Ross, mainly because of their symbolic reasoning and how I recontextualized their narratives. She encouraged me to study the pareidolia (pari-DOH-lee-ah) method, as artists like Leonardo da Vinci used this same mode of thinking to remain inspired. I found a journal entry he wrote about the practice, he said "If you look at any walls spotted with various stains or with a mixture of different kinds of stones, you will be able to see in it a resemblance to various different landscapes... and an infinite number of things which you can then reduce into separate and well-conceived forms." So yes, like da Vinci, I found myself projecting meaning onto abstract occurrences, creating storylines that inevitably reflected my personal journey as an artist and a designer.

As I played with this idea, I discovered the narrative of my thesis. Throughout my days spent wandering, I realized what I was looking for. What you see here today is a display of that vulnerability.

## **DEFINING THE NARRATIVE**

This project is definitely a surprise to many, including me. When I first came to PNCA, I had clear intentions of what I wanted to accomplish. I imagined my thesis becoming a pinnacle point of my story. A breakthrough moment as a graphic designer, to prove I deserve a seat at the table. But what this project is—is on the other end of that. It's not the portfolio piece I imagined. It's not the clean, client-ready proof of concept I thought would mark my arrival. Instead, *LOOK!* became something else entirely. It unraveled what I thought I needed to prove and replaced it with something more personally impactful.

My thesis became a journey of self-discovery. It allowed me to step back and observe not just the world around me, but my own way of thinking and creating. Through this process, I uncovered the deeper layers of my creative instincts. It challenged how I see, how I contextualize, and how I create meaning. *LOOK!* became a space to reconnect with curiosity, to reflect on my design process, and to explore my evolving identity as a designer and artist.

The work itself, is a reflection of that vulnerability. It withholds raw and expressive characteristics that embody my spirit. It is also very layered, purposeful, and hidden with meaning.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

Through a shift in perspective, I finally found what I was looking for. These abstract occurrences transformed into symbolic metaphors. So, as I dug through my archive, I allowed my intuition to formulate meaning behind each material used. As a series, from left to right, these canvases demonstrate how I articulated the meaning and message I received from doing the work.

My first piece, titled *Between Heaven and Hell*, felt like a portal into a new frame of thinking. It was one of the first pieces where I let my mind go and allowed instinct to lead. It's a bold composition that is loose, playful, and full of contrast.

The upper half of the canvas is an abstracted tile of varying shades of orange. Psychologically, Orange is associated with joy, emotion, and imaginative thinking. That warmth is juxtaposed with a set of uniform black and white squares, representing the systems we often navigate, whether through routine or strategically.

A black rectangular vessel woven with thread breaks this checkered board system. Inside it, the seven colors of the chakras are stacked like stones. These two states hold a depiction of the world.

Above them are angel-like figures carrying a sense of presence, as if guiding or witnessing. They act as symbolic messengers, found from my archive of abstract occurrences.

For me, overall, this canvas begins to visually reflect my views as a creative spirit. In this world, we can either move through life by the binary code, or we can allow our divine spirit to break it. The shades of orange symbolize the different ways we can be creative, as they also do not conform to rigid guidelines but encourage us to break free. This mind state, of course, could not be guided without my Angels.

My second piece, ***Fruits of Labor***, is more emotional and vulnerable. It represents the troubles of doubt, inner turmoil, angst, and the physical process of unlayering and shedding mental blocks. I used a photo transfer method on this canvas to lay down a base layer of digitally collaged abstract occurrences. Anyone who's worked with this method knows how labor-intensive it is. I spent hours, day after day, rubbing away each micro-particle of paper fiber. It became a ritual. A meditative practice. One that mirrored the mental unraveling I was going through at the time.

During this stage of my thesis, I was in a state of worry. I felt anxious about my decision to commit to this project. A dark cloud hung over me, shadowing my inner light with doubt and comparison. I was unsure if this work would hold up—or— if I could find the meaning I was searching for.

I began revealing the photo transfer from the bottom of the canvas, slowly uncovering a pattern of vertical black and white lines, broken by cross-sections of white. As I worked my way

upward, five objects emerged, each enclosed by horizontal bands. The original digital composition used seven abstract occurrences, selected intuitively, without an exact intention. At the time, I was following impulse and visual rhythm.

But as I spent more time with the piece, I realized what my subconscious had placed there. The five revealed objects came to represent five inner voices I was battling with:

One, the **inner critic**, who is always comparing and has a fear of failure.

Two, the **inner child**, holding wonder and space for vulnerability.

Three, the **intuitive self**, confident and clear, and guided by instinct.

Four, the **perfectionist**, driven by the anxiety for perfection

And five, the **observer**, quiet, speculative, and willing to let things unfold.

These five voices weren't easy to face, but giving them space while creating this piece helped me understand that inner conflict is part of the creative process. *Fruits of Labor* became a turning point. It allowed me to listen to my inner world and become vulnerable with myself. I realized these contradictions weren't new—they were patterns I've faced every time I make something that feels uncertain or unfamiliar.

Layered on top of the black and white grid are repeated oval-like shapes in various colors. I didn't fully realize it then, but those forms became stand-ins for my emotions: happiness, worry, frustration, hope, contentment, and the blues. Each one held a moment I was moving through. Then, almost instinctively, I crossed them all out in black. It felt like an act of elimination—maybe for self-protection. But looking back, it wasn't about denying those emotions. It was about confronting them. Acknowledging their presence, and then letting them go.

The white breakthrough that cuts through the black and white pattern felt like a metaphor, like my mind was trying to rewire a past habit. The realizations I had while making this piece brought me face to face with the emotional states that shape my creative process. It became a breakthrough moment, a reminder to be more gentle-minded and kinder to my inner spirit.

My third piece, ***Reflections***, marked a turning point in my understanding of not only the subject matter but also my creative process. The base of the work is acrylic mirror—a material that inherently invites the viewer to see themselves within the composition. Mounted on the surface are cutouts of abstract occurrences I encountered throughout the course of *LOOK!*—real-world fragments like banana peels, ziplock bags, crushed cardboard, telephone towers, and other ephemeral moments that would typically go unnoticed.

By translating these forms into single-colored acrylic plastic and then placing them on a mirrored surface, the work becomes interactive. Its meaning shifts depending on the viewer's position, their proximity, and even the light in the room. In that way, the piece reinforces a central idea in my thesis: that perception is not fixed—it is fluid, and deeply shaped by presence and attention.

But *Reflections* also mirrors my own process as a creator. This project required me to step outside rigid design expectations and adopt a more intuitive, responsive approach to working. Over time, I realized that meaning didn't need to be designed in a linear or predetermined way. It can emerge through observation, interaction, and reflection—both internal and external.

The mirror, then, is more than a material choice. It became a metaphor for the act of looking—outward at the world, and inward at my own patterns of thought. This piece asks both

myself and the viewer to pause, to shift perspective, and to recognize how meaning is often found NOT in grand gestures, but in subtle disruptions—and in the willingness to truly LOOK!.

### **Culture / Next Steps / Conclusion.**

Throughout this body of work, I've been asking myself how meaning is created—not just in art, but in everyday life. And while the process began as deeply personal, I began to see how *LOOK!* enters a larger conversation. A conversation about slow looking, shifts in perception, symbolism, and the way we choose to interact with our environment.

This project is for the curious—for those willing to think abstractly, to question their habits of seeing, and to become active participants in the grandeur of the world around them.

As I continue to build my archive of abstract occurrences, I plan to expand my research on the ideas behind the pareidolia effect and the study of perception. I envision this project eventually taking the form of a published visual study—a photo archive layered with transparent pages, illustrated reflections, and personal interpretations of what I see. And of course, I'd love to leave some pages open for the viewer to contribute their own readings. Because *LOOK!* was never meant to be finished. It is a conceptual practice—meant to be shared, expanded, and reframed through the eyes of others.

This project reminded me that there is still magic in the mundane—and that sometimes, all it takes to see it is the willingness to pause, to look, and to imagine.

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