

Intro

Hello everyone, and thank you Sara for the introduction. Thank you all for coming out today to support me in the conclusion of my thesis project. Getting to work on this over the past year has been so incredibly rewarding for me, and revealed so many truths about myself that I'm grateful for the opportunity to share with you all.

For those of you who don't know anything about me, I am Portland born and raised, a multidisciplinary artist working primarily in painting, performance and video, all of which is on display today, but my practice has covered a wide variety of mediums from printmaking to sculpture. One of my earliest memories interacting with objects was as a young child, I loved disassembling, examining, and reassembling old appliances to understand more completely how they worked. I remember doing this with old fans and speakers, and unfortunately they often no longer functioned after I started digging around. I still do this today, trying to repair bits of old tech or machines, but I think this early memory was one of the reasons I have the practice that I do today; I break apart ideas into their essential elements, and try to piece them back together so I can understand more of this world that I live in.

In this presentation today I am going to cover:

- Some of my past work that influenced this project
- The project that I proposed for thesis (and why it didn't work)
- The events of my life that restructured my sense of self, as well as the project itself
- Artistic influences to the work
- My discovery of reduction (and what it means)
- The work that I made over the course of the semester
- And how all of that left me understanding myself and my relationship to the world

Past Work

All the way back in high school, when I got my start out making, I fell in love with functionality in woodworking and ceramics. It was what made me want to come to art school, but really quickly found that I wanted to challenge myself, and saw how potent art could be. I was pretty quickly intoxicated by the idea of being a painter, partially because I had a crush on a painter, but also it felt like the sexy "Artist" thing to do. I hated painting though, it was so contrary to the way that my brain operated, and I remember as I was in my first painting class my Freshman year, I told myself that I would never take a painting class again because it was the most evil, frustrating thing ever. Then of course registration would come around

and I found myself in another painting class every semester of school because I thought “it won’t be so bad”, just starting the cycle over again. Luckily, in all of that kicking and screaming, I actually learned something and found myself both enjoying this process that became incredibly generative for me. I moved through figurative representational painting, to entirely abstract materialist work, and now a move into a minimal symbolic mode of working.

Performance was also hugely impactful to me as a medium. In my Sophomore year here at PNCA, I took Erin Doughton’s performance class, which was the first time I had even considered moving my body for another person. I however found something really special to me. Using my body as the medium, felt like the first time I was able to ever actually articulate the way I felt, and come to terms with it within myself. It was also in this class that I would develop the performance series that became the cornerstone of my artistic practice for two years, in which I would be bound to architectural features for up to several hours, using kitchen twine or cellophane. These works would ultimately be the basis of the framework I would make for my thesis proposal.

Video work has never been the most central to my practice, but has managed to sneak its way into most of the major projects that I have done, particularly in performance. It has acted as documentation, but in a way that has been more than

simply capturing the work to show again later. Many of my video works become actual extensions of the performance work, taking these temporal happenings and allowing them to expand into the world around them. This was particularly true in a short film I made in 2024, titled *Nitrate Kisses*, in which I documented myself bathing and drinking wine in a bathtub of water-filled condoms, as the 1992 film by the same name by Barbara Hammer was projected on top of me. While, yes, I wanted to experience what bathing in a bathtub of water-filled condoms felt like, the performance itself lives in the video, and it is through that lens that I am able to articulate my body.

The Bridge

Last semester I proposed this thesis project, and at the time I had called it *The Bridge*. I had proposed a large installation with six large paintings, six video works displayed on CRT TVs, a noise making machine, and all kinds of other things. It was an ambitious proposal, centered around a framework I had developed. The idea was initially born out of my performance series, with which, in early iterations, I had had what I referred to as transcendent experience as a result of sensory limits being pushed. As I iterated the performance, I found this transcendent space less accessible because the discomfort became more normal, so my two options were to

push even harder (which would be potentially dangerous), or try to find other ways of accessing this space.

Toward the end of the semester, I found myself trying to pull together some of these elements, trying to define experiences, create categories, and throwing work at it to see if anything stuck. Of course, nothing really did, and I found myself trying to contort the work to this model that, upon reflection, was simply too limited and rigid to actually communicate what I was trying too.

Life Happened

As these things do, this change coincided with a massive shift in my life that ultimately reshaped my perspective on the world, my sense of self, and the work I make. For much of my life, I was constantly removing myself from reality, by delusion, depersonalization, and substance abuse. I only knew how to be far from everything, that was my “comfortable”, or familiar state of being. In December though, I was placed in one of the most challenging circumstances I have ever had to face, which ultimately showed me that I could choose between a downward spiral and being an active participant in my life.

It was through this recognition of self, and new found clarity, that I began to redefine my thesis project. I began to explore the essential elements of the self, the infinity of god, and the ways that through this understanding I am provided with the opportunity to empathize with my fellow person simply out of our shared personhood.

Reduction of information

Reduction of information was something that I began to recognize early on in my proposal, but it didn't quite register that it would become the centerpoint of my project overall. I first found reduction in my video work, when I had begun a series of documentation, capturing incredibly slow and passive happenings using CCTV cameras. Early on I was feeling inspired by many of the low resolution clips of security footage that I had seen out in the world. In these low quality images, the viewer is required to work, to study, to understand. The illegibility forces the viewer to, in a way place themselves in the video. There was also a time based element, how in spite of many of these video works being incredibly slow and not much "happening", I do not intend for the viewer to watch the entirety of the work. Rather, they will engage with a short segment, and extrapolate what the likely remainder contains, or why this particular subject is being surveilled.

What is a reduction of information though? Simply, it can be understood as an abstraction, where information is directly removed from a composition to make it non-representational. This becomes particularly important in attempting to depict absolute or intangible things, as I am in this project trying to describe the Self. What is the Self? Perhaps we could say that it is an amalgamation of one's certain set of genes, their past experiences, and the decisions they make in the present moment. We are however incapable of visualizing each of these elements to their complete fidelity, and even if we could, a viewer likely wouldn't be able to take in all of that information at the same time. By reducing information down to categorization, symbolization, and gesture, a viewer is able to *feel* and understand the entirety of the self without necessarily seeing every single component. Jean Francois Lyotard articulates this well in his 1982 essay "Presenting the Unpresentable", in which he states:

"The universe is not demonstrable; neither is humanity, the end of history, the moment, the species, the good, the just, etc.—or, according to Kant, absolutes in general—because to represent is to make relative, to place in context within conditions of representation. Therefore one cannot represent the absolute, but one can demonstrate that the absolute exists—through "negative representation," which Kant called the "abstract." The momentum

of abstract painting since 1910 stems from the rigors of indirect, virtually ungraspable allusions to the invisible within the visual.”

It became my goal in this thesis project to reduce the form, through distortion as well as symbolization, in the goal of achieving base forms which can provide a better somatic and spiritual understanding, in this case, of the self.

The work

In my work over the semester I have remained almost exclusively working in painting, performance, and video work. Each of them acted as different lenses through which I was able to process my understanding of this newly discovered sense of reality and self. This intentional work manifested itself most heavily in my paintings. Early on I had started a drawing practice borrowed from Michelle Ross, in which I would rip out pages from magazines that featured figures, and using my white acrylic paint and blue tempera, would redact only the present bodies. You can see some of these on the wall behind where you are sitting now. This would leave me with vaguely figurative forms that did not bear any kind of identifying features of the subject underneath. I would then iterate these forms through image transfer and sketches, ultimately placing them into larger painting works like we have here.

This process of redacting, translating, scaling, and placing manifested itself first and most fully in this painting *The Self* over here on my left. To me this painting is an accurate depiction of the complete self, with each of the essential elements of the self, those being the Body (represented by the white figure), the Spirit (the yellow floating form and halo), the Mind (the spiked crown) and God (the black form at the center of the Spirit). Each of these elements communicate with one another: God leeching out into the Spirit, the Spirit surrounding the head of the body, and the Mind bringing in information from the Spirit.

I see this work, yes, as a depiction of my own experience, but through a reduction into these base forms that do not articulate identity, it represents a system of self that could be applied across individuals. There is no predetermined way in which the figure will be understood, so it has the capacity to take on any form.

This then developed into my second painting I am showing today, *Yolk*, which is a far more expressive articulation of the same movement of understanding. In a way I see this work as a more “actual” representation of the self, one that can be related to more somatically as it features material degradation, movement, and imperfection, where *The Self* acts more as a conceptually pristine and still version.

My video work in this project began last semester with my discovery of CCTV cameras, and their recording on VHS tapes. I remember early on having these flashes of low resolution security camera footage of a parking lot, where I could barely make out a parked car. A figure who appears no more than a handful of pixels wide runs up to the car, lights start to flash, and then they run away. It felt like a quiet and sort of surreal way of expanding my own senses, while also having a very felt understanding without knowing any details. It provided me the opportunity to be a fly on the wall, that provided a semi-objective view of a moment in which the only thing I could experience were physical relationships between compositional bodies.

Early on in the video work I began by documenting passive, mundane, and intimate moments. I would record an hour and a half of a lamp as the sun set, or five hours of happenings in a hotel room. I found these compelling in their simplicity, yet following my shift in reality, I struggled to find the same kind of revelatory value that I had in my painting work. Out of this I began to play with a balance of active versus passive documentation and editing. I was able to intuitively act on the cameras or footage thus conveying a kind of feeling, which could then be contrasted by an almost painful stillness. I found this to be most true in the piece *Flicker*, displayed to my right, in which I combine expansive and slow

documentation with harsh and extremely active video manipulation using the VCR it was recorded on.

As the culmination of my video work, I had the opportunity to work on a collaborative performance with Ruby Tidd titled *Sustained*, in which I activated a candle made from a negative mold of her cupped hands. In the piece, I stood underneath the Hawthorne bridge on the west side and set out the protocol of being required to stand within the confines of a one by three foot rectangle of canvas for as long as it took the candle to go out, either by the wind or it burning itself all the way through. Inspired by Tehching Hsieh's One Year Performance *Time Clock Piece*, in which he was to punch in on a time clock every hour, on the hour, twenty four hours a day, for 365 days. While this was obviously not executed to the same scale, I was inspired by this works' ability to speak volumes by pushing temporal extremes, that I hoped to experience in a small way by pushing my comfortable physical and mental stamina.

Ruby and I had begun talking about doing this work in memory of David Eckard, who was a professor here at PNCA, and a friend to many in this room. He was a pillar of creativity, love, and care at this institution and throughout Portland. He worked as a performer and sculptor, doing many of his performances in which he would activate his sculptures throughout downtown Portland. My presentation

today also happens to fall on the one year anniversary of his passing, making the creation of this work feel all the more necessary.

Going into the performance, I had anticipated that it would have some experience of holding David, or perhaps some memory of him. Instead though, I found that more than David manifesting in the candle, I was holding and cherishing some part of my self. This part of my self that grieves his passing, along with that of trans women in our community and the countless lives taken in Gaza, Lebanon, and Iran.

Just as *Yolk* was a more “actual” manifestation of the language I had developed in *The Self, Sustained* felt like the “actual” manifestation of my previous video work like *Flicker*. I reduced parts of myself into simply my physical body, the candle, and the space around me.

Where I stand now

Over the past six months, I have begun to build a new understanding of the world and my place in it. As politics internationally continue to veer more conservative, and the divide between people has become increasingly viscous,

people in the world today are scared. Scared for their safety, their way of life, their values, among countless other things. Throughout the course of this work, I have found myself empathizing with all people more than I ever have before. I see those people who voted for a president who claims that I, and people like me shouldn't exist, and see the same fear that I feel. They want to have enough food on the table to feed their families, gas to get to work, the ability to maintain stability and normalcy in their lives. Those are the things that we all require, and it is beyond heartbreaking to see that fear being weaponized by those in power, whether they be politicians or those with financial sway.

Recognizing the essence of personhood through this reduction of information shows me that at the end of the day we are all people, and that we don't have to agree with or like each other, but we have to keep each other safe. There seems little other option then to lift up our neighbors, our local collective, to keep each other safe. It has become clear that we cannot rely on the government, or trickle down economics. We only have each other. The only way out of this violent division is showing people an actual alternative, one that actually helps us, not one that accommodates the whims of billionaires.

While yes, this is a thesis defense to receive my BFA at an art school, this work that I am showing you today acts more as a display of my learning as a person

in this world. I love this work, and it has changed me in innumerable ways. I have spent so much time doing analysis and reading art theory in relation to this project, which I do thoroughly enjoy, but what feels miles more important than that to me is that growth which stands behind it.

I want to thank my mentor Sara, for our weekly hour long conversations about philosophy that may or may not have anything to do with the actual work. Thank you to my parents for providing me with the opportunity to be here today and grow into the person I am proud of becoming. Thank you to all of my professors I've had over the past four years who were unbelievably patient with me being late probably every single day to class and being awful at getting my homework in. Thank you to all of my friends who are here who have put up with my bullshit and been so supportive of me throughout this incredibly challenging change. Thank you to David, Lux, and Jet. And thanks to all of you in attendance today. *Sustained*, the video work in memory of David Eckard is just in this room behind me and I hope you get a chance to take a look at it after all of this is done!