

*An Exploration of Time: The Ageing Process of the Body*

My work expresses the accelerated passage of time by investigating the body's process of ageing. Like the growth rings of a tree to the wrinkles of the body, time and age are recorded by patterns in nature. Time is based on perception; one's sense of time is shaped by our social and visual experiences. My sense of time is a personal one influenced by the rural environment I grew up in and the large generation gap between my parents and myself. As I watch my parents' bodies begin to wrinkle and their hair turn grey, the passage of time feels accelerated. This same awareness occurs as I experience the aging of my physical environment - as the barns, tractors, and fences on my family's farm deteriorate and are ultimately reclaimed by nature.

Observing the ways in which time affects the physical appearance of nature has influenced my work prior to the SMP. I began by focusing on the patterns in nature that indicates the passage of time. These patterns can be found, for example, in the rings created by trees as they grow older. As the tree gets larger, the rings begin to extend outward in a repetitive cycle. Similarly, the barns and tractors that litter my farm deteriorate physically over time from the continual bombardment of the elements. This has caused their paint to become weathered and corroded. These repetitive cycles vary throughout the ageing process of all things. Like nature, our bodies record time through the physical changes we undergo as we age. For instance, as we go through puberty the height and weight of our bodies increase at an accelerated pace. When we

grow old reaching the end of our lives we develop wrinkles and age spots, as our bodies shrink and become frail. Although we can acknowledge these physical changes, they only become visible over a long period of time. Like the rings from the trees to the changes in our physical appearance, time is recorded through visual changes. I decided to explore nature's ability to record time after my observations of the juxtaposition between abstraction and realism. I noticed after drawing several tree ring studies that I could incorporate these patterns into portraits of friends and family. My goal was to show the similarities between nature and our ability to record time through physical developments. These portraits often emphasized a sense of age through changes in the body. Depending on the age of the figure, changes were depicted differently. Through these variations in age, I was able to see a style contrast between the classical realism of the older figure and the graphic design elements of the younger. In the portraits of my friends and I, patterns of intersecting lines were emphasized to convey age. In utilizing these patterns the figure becomes more abstracted. By abstracting the forms of the younger body I am exploring the development of their bodies. I noticed there were more lines and intersecting curves that made up the form of the body when the sitter was younger. The difference became clearly noticeable when I compared two of my works, *My Mother, My Father* and *Dimension 18*. In *My Mother, My Father*, I combine portraits of both of my parents into one image. While this juxtaposition of two figures creates an overlapping of their bodies, they are depicted through realism. In the work *Dimension 18*, I drew my sisters head suspended in a white background clustered with vibrant ring shaped patterns. Her face is completely made up of intersecting graphic lines that allude to depth.

Instead of using the realism employed in portraits of older figures, I explore the physical age of my sister through complex line-work. Her face has yet to show traditional signs of age and decay, which makes the patterns of time hard to notice. By depicting my sister through these mechanical lines I am showing that her body is not yet affected by time. In that moment it appears that she will live forever, not confined to the limitations of the ageing body. By contrast, the physicality of my parent's bodies makes the inevitability of death increasingly clear. I realized that through the juxtaposition of the figure and nature I was projecting my own perceptions of time and age through these portraits. But the work needed to go further than recording time to better understand these differences in how I perceive time compared to those around me.

After these works I came away with many questions:

What about time is interesting to me?

How do I show the process of change within the figure?

How does my rural environment affect my work/figure?

Why is the figure isolated/alienated within a large majority of my work?

Why was I using multiple artistic styles within the work?

Although the figure is repeated five times in *Dust Accelerator*, she is isolated and in a claustrophobic space. Her pose, curled up in a ball and hiding her facial features, suggests a sense of tension and anxiety. In all of my works there is a sense of isolation, as the figure is alienated within a solitary space. My understanding of isolation stems from my childhood. The farm is isolated from the outside world and enclosed by the surrounding trees that frame the landscape. While I would not trade my experiences growing up in a rural environment for another upbringing, this sense of isolation has deeply influenced my artwork. Being secluded from the outside world has distorted my

perception of time. While the outside world progresses and physical structures are in a constant state of progression, my environment kept aging. Observing the bodies of my parents changing drastically over short periods of time has caused my perception to be distorted. These distortions have caused feelings of anxiety towards time and the aging process of my parents. I did not live in a densely populated area, so I was not able to compare these changes to other individuals as frequently. In my artwork I express these anxieties about time and its effect on the body by isolating the figure in a solitary space. This sense of isolation is representative of the inescapability of death. In my painting, *We Start and End in Dust*, the isolation of the figure in a desert landscape is used to express the figures inevitable mortality. She is nude and holding an orb, while both her body and the orb are disintegrating. Her calming body language casts a state of acceptance for the inevitable effects time has on the body. Seeing the gradual deterioration of the barns and tractors on the farm has given me an understanding, and therefore acceptance of the inevitability of death.

As winter break came I researched Gustav Klimt's figurative paintings with an emphasis on the human condition. I found his work relatable as Klimt's paintings explore the human condition through allegorical symbols. Like Klimt, my works explore the human condition through the figure. This similarity is expressed in his painting titled *Hope* I painted in 1903. Here he depicts the pregnant female figure to the right of the composition as she rests her hands over her stretched belly. Ominous figures surround her calming posture as shard like shapes appear as if they are about to strike her unborn baby. A skull is positioned above her head as a metaphor for her inevitable death. Klimt does explore time through the realism of the female figures of various

ages, using them as an allegory for the process of ageing. While I depict time through the female figure as well, I am more concerned with the accelerated passage of time and its effects on the physical state of our material bodies. This can be seen in *We Start and End in Dust* where the skin of the female figure begins to peel off as it blows away with the wind. Her process of ageing is emphasized through the breaking off of her skin, whereas Klimt's process of ageing is suggested through the unborn child and the mother's impending death. The sense of impending death has never been more understood than after the death of my grandmother in the winter of 2014. After her death, my sense of time accelerated, as she was my last surviving grandparent. My focus then immediately shifted towards my parents. Their ageing rate drastically increased due to the idea that they are next to pass. As I had no more grandparents, the only people in my family who would die from natural causes are my parents. We all lose people in our lives from death, forcing us to cherish the moments we have with the ones still living. This causes an awareness of the effects time has on the people in our lives, reminding us no one lives forever.

Out of all the artists I researched, none were similar to the way in which Francis Bacon explores the inevitability of death. Bacon is an English based figurative painter whose work presents a grim view on life. In all of his works, he explores the disfigurement of the figure through manipulation and distortions in paint. These figures appear to fade or liquefy into stark, claustrophobic spaces. All of his figures appear to be in the state of dying; not before, not after. Bacon was interested in the meaning of life; being that he was an atheist he lived in a godless universe where there is no hope for an afterlife. Bacons grim views on the human condition can be seen in his painting

*Portrait of John Edwards* in 1988. Here the male figure is painted sitting in a chair with one leg resting over the other as his body begins to decompose through the liquefaction of his flesh. Bacon liquefies the figure by combining the body with pools of the same pink tones used to paint the figure. The figure is in a beige interior with a black rectangle positioned directly behind him. His body begins to disappear into the blackness of the shape through his face and parts of his side. Although Bacon depicts his figures going through a similar disfiguration to my own work, he wishes to explore the state our bodies in the space between life and death while I am concerned with the entire process of aging. His figures are isolated in stark spaces to evoke a sense of impending doom, which projects his existentialist philosophies about a godless existence. My figures are often isolated to create anxiety about the effect of time on our physical bodies before they disintegrate, in addition to showing a type of rebirth of the individual that explores the possibility of an afterlife. This can be seen in *Dust Accelerator*, in which the final state of the figure shows the metamorphosis into the basic building blocks that make up the body, offering a hope for the recycling of matter. Like Bacon, I choose to explore our own morality through the figure for a better understanding of human condition. What does it mean to live? What does it mean to die? My reason for living is creating artwork to investigate answers to abstract questions. In depicting the disintegration of the figure I am bringing awareness to the inevitability of our own death. Death is a repressed subject; many of us feel a need to ignore its presence even when it is all around us. It is human nature to be scared of death even if one believes in an afterlife. If we hope to live happy lives we all must be more self aware of the concept of dying. When a loved one dies we should celebrate

their lives and the people they were, not mourn and regret the moments we missed out on.

In the beginning of my SMP, I created a wide variety of works during the marathon to clear my mind. One work in particular, titled *Construct, Deconstruct*, focused on the breakdown of an object's form through drawing, specifically by repeating its shape as each stage of drawing becomes progressively more gestural. This breakdown of form acts as the process of physical disintegration an object goes through over time. I used a pin for the object and taped it to the paper for the first stage. The object was drawn vertically four times, including using the attached physical object itself on the paper as one of the stages. For the second stage, I drew the taped pin as a realistic recording of the object. The third time the pin was drawn, its detail was lessened and became more of a sketch rather than a realistic drawing. As I drew the object for the final stage, the pin was completely broken down into gestural lines with few areas of shading. Although at the time I did not consider this work to be an integral part of my SMP topic, I later realized that it was an early indication of where my interests would lead my work. By repeating the form of the object I showed a desire to explore the different cycles a form goes through over a period of time. This idea of repetition shows the gradual changes of an object's physical properties as it breaks down over time.

The work *Construct, Deconstruct* helped me answer one of my previously listed questions: "How do I show the process of change within the figure?" Although I chose to explore this process of change through an object such as a pin, the same elements could be applied to rendering the human figure. The figure has always been the subject

matter of my work and the breaking down of the human figure has served as a metaphor for the ageing process. By choosing to explore the process of disintegration through repetition I express the desire to accelerate time, not record its current pace. This accelerated passage of time was accomplished in my first finished work, *Dust Accelerator*. The final stage of our ageing process is destruction, as we get older our bodies change, eventually leading to its total disintegration. In the painting I express an accelerated passage of time by repeating the figure, thus implying an aging process that inevitably leads to destruction. In the work the figure is repeated horizontally from left to right; I chose this composition because it represented how we measure time through a timeline. Joseph Priestley, the inventor of the timeline, argues that “time can be represented through a line even though time itself is an abstraction, since it has relation to quantity, the line acts as a unit of measurement” (Rosenberg 60 qtd). As the figure is repeated five times her body gradually becomes simplified through line and shape. Each figure represents a different stage of the decomposing body. By exploring this process of disintegration I show the accelerated passage of time through repetitive cycles.

I choose to express the inescapable effects time has on the body through different artistic styles. The mixture of both drawing and painting in my work acts as a bridge, connecting two generations. In my work prior to the SMP I was investigating this gap in time, but fell short of my goal. The work focused on nature's ability to record time but did not address what time meant to me. After further investigation in my SMP, I realized I could bridge this generational gap through the juxtaposition of two artistic styles. Hearing about my parent's childhood has made me realize that their past



upbringing drastically differs from my own. They had no form of communication outside of physical contact - the phone lines they used were usually shared by multiple people, leaving no room for privacy. Today my generation is constantly being introduced to new forms of communication like smart phones and the Internet. Although these new technologies offer faster and more efficient forms of communication and gathering information they also cause us to forget the real world. The people growing up today are losing touch with reality; they are more interested in an online post than what is happening in the real world. These effects have caused us to feel disconnected from the real world as we are too preoccupied by the digital realm. This fundamental difference has caused a large generation gap in my family that has been unavoidable at times. I have always associated art that emphasizes realism with my parents. Their reality focuses more on the physical environment they live in, one that can physically be experienced. The realism that I incorporate in my work reflects the time period in which my parents grew up during. The style that I associate my time period with is a more biomechanical sci-fi representation of a subject. Being that my generation is more connected to the devices in their hands rather than nature, I explore the figure through intersecting lines and patterns rather than traditional realism. Each style such as realism and biomechanical is representative of a different time period, each defining my perceived values of that culture. Using multiple styles is a way for me to create a connection between my parent's generation and my own, as I am able to connect these two time periods into one image. In my final work *Oblivion*, I explore both of these stylistic choices through the biomechanical body. The work portrays the physical disintegration of the body by condensing the visual process of ageing. I begin

with a highly detailed figure drawing in graphite. As I continue to apply layer after layer of paint, intersecting lines and simplistic shapes overtake the body's highly realistic form. As time passes, the figure breaks down, revealing the structure of the body underneath. This structure revealed through the realistic body emphasizes the transformation of modern human. In addition to depicting the process of ageing through breakdown of the body's form, I am also concerned with how our bodies change through new technologies. These new technologies create an extension of the self almost unknowingly. We rely on these technologies so much that they become a part of us. Through the extension of the self comes the biomechanical body. While I am always looking towards the past for references for the realism in my work, I am also looking towards the future. The future provides me with a framework for the style I associate with my generation. As I am thinking about the inescapable effects time has on the body I find my work in between both generations. In addition to looking in the past I am looking in the future, thinking about how our bodies change over time through both biological and mechanical means.

This juxtaposition of styles is realized both in my works *Dust Accelerator* and *We Start and End in Dust*. In *Dust Accelerator* I render the figure in a highly detailed way by blending graphite and layering paint to create a sense of realism. As the figure is repeated from left to right, I begin to create depth through stylistic intersecting lines. A biomechanical quality is emphasized as the figure begins to disintegrate by showing the basic shapes that make up the body overlapping with one another with little regard for realism. In the painting *We Start and End in Dust*, this process is continued through a single figure. While the figure and the landscape are drawn and painted in a realistic

way, the pieces that break off of her, as well as the hair and timeline are rendered in a graphic quality. Black and gold pieces break off her body, showcasing the two sides of life and death as they blow through the wind. Like the pieces, her hair is black with long gold strokes for the highlights. The ribbon like shape of the timeline fades from orange to a sandy color as the eye moves vertically through the shape. Thick curved lines move throughout the shape mimicking the patterns of a tree's growth rings. These stylistic changes within my work act as metaphors for both a bridge between two generations, and the way we perceive reality. The realism within the work provides viewers with the recognizable aspect of the human condition – life. Due to our fear of understanding our existence, we tend to regulate death to an abstract concept. The graphic style within my work acts as the unrecognizable aspect of our lives, and therefore a metaphor for death. As the figure disintegrates, the graphic style of the medium unites with the realistic rendering of the figure, resulting in a simultaneous exploration of life and death.

The more I began to understand my art as a way to explore my understanding of time in relation to my environment and parents, the easier it was to find comparisons in the artists I researched. Ian Francis is a UK-born contemporary artist I have been following. His mixed media works explore the relationship we have with the illusionary nature of media, focusing on TV shows and movies. He is interested in the simulated aspect of our lives, how the imitation of real life experiences through digital media affects the way we perceive the real world in relation to the 'copy' or imitation of the real world through these TV shows. His work offers a way to understand a realm that is both real and unreal. I feel like my work at times exists between these two generations,

not tied to one specific time period. For example, in my work *Oblivion* where the female figure becomes a hybridized being made up of both organic and mechanical forms. His figures appear to interact with each other in the realm between the real and the illusory. He bridges these two realms through mixed media, just as I use mixed media to connect two different periods of time. By mixing mediums we both express a desire to convey a sense of transformation in the figure. Although our works are similar in terms of mixing mediums to alter the figure's body, his works focus more on "the particulars of modern experiences - things like television, world events, celebrities, and day-to-day-living" (OPUS). Being that the images I make are static, mixing different materials offers a solution for two dimensional time based works. Revealing the process of disintegration through the mixture of drawing and painting leaves a trace of the past. Layers of paint over different drawing materials like graphite, charcoal, and pastel evoke a sense of time through the evolving figure. Francis's figures are highly detailed while some disappear into space. In his mixed media work *Interview Disaster* he illustrates an interaction during an interview between three people. While they are all sitting at a table, their bodies begin to disappear into the abstract backdrop. The two figures on the left still have their faces intact which shows they are in control of the figure across from the table. The figure being interviewed appears to be swiped off the panel as paint moves across the composition to show the figure disappearing.

My work expresses the accelerated passage of time by breaking down the form of the figure in order to investigate the body's process of ageing. "The inevitability of death forces everyone to explore its meaning in and for life" (Kramer 15). I paint to show a veiled truth, the fact that we all go through the process of ageing through the

disintegration of our material bodies. I measure the body's disintegration through an accelerated passage of time. We often ignore the effects of time on our bodies, repressing the thoughts of the inevitability of death. By projecting my own perceptions of time onto the panel, I show my own anxieties about the fear of losing a loved one through the disintegration of the figure. By changing styles in the figure's disintegration I choose to bridge the large generation gap between my parents and myself. By using realism in juxtaposition with intricate lines and shapes that convey a futuristic tone, I am merging the ideas of the post modern and the contemporary. Bridging these gaps in time through the figure's disintegration is a way to understand the human condition as a means to explore my understanding of time and its effect on my life.

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Images



Hope I



Portrait of John Edwards



Interview Disaster



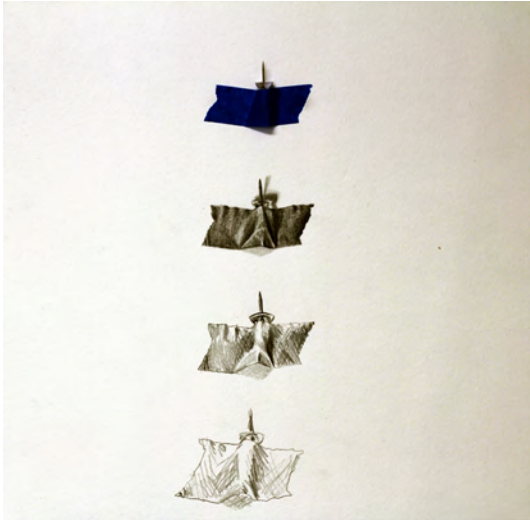
Dimension 18



Oblivion



My Mother, My Father

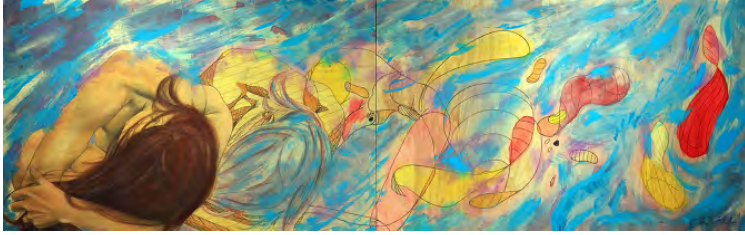


Construct, Deconstruct



We Start and End in Dust





Dust Accelerator