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Long Version Artist Statement: The Landscape as Language

"One sees new things rapidly everywhere when everything seems new and different. It has become a part of one's world, a part of what one has to speak with...to formulate the new experience into something one has to say takes time." - Georgia O'Keeffe¹

My work deals with the landscape as it *is* and as it *becomes*. The landscape has a dual existence; the first is in its physicality and the second in one's dialectic cognition. The rhythm of continuities and divergences that present themselves in both of these modalities are what interest me. The locations that I employ span across the 200 miles of the Eastern Shore where I have spent my life. The visual language that I explore rests squarely in the tradition of abstract painting. By abstracting the landscape, I invite the viewer to cultivate a relationship with me, the presented landscape, and themselves. They are not simply handed all the information at first glance and so must work with the painting to begin a process that unveils layers of meaning. Through this process they begin a dialogue with the art. I hope this dialogue allows the viewer to exit their own individual, isolated existence and engage with a larger collaborative conversation about context. My artistic process values the inescapability of this collaborative dialogue and externalities found within art. In making my work, I demand external inspection that creates internal growth. This demand values the type of socially cognisant identity that is created

¹ O'Keeffe, Georgia, Doris Bry, and Nicholas Callaway. *Georgia O'Keeffe, in the West*. New York: Knopf in Association with Callaway, 1989. Print.

through extropection and I hope to excite this value within the viewer.

The landscape as subject for this dialogue is natural for me. At a young age I was often interacting with the natural world at least as much as, if not more than, with people. My earliest memories involve playing with little snakes at school and running around horse fields looking for 4-leaf clovers. The result of this intimacy with the outdoors is that it has become integral to my interaction with the world. The outdoor areas were vital to my existence and comfort as a child and this importance has continued into my adult life. I am continually attempting to bring physical artifacts of the natural world into my indoor spaces. I collect small artifacts from outdoor spaces and bring them inside my house. The belief that landscape is an extension of home and self, is the basis for me choosing landscape as subject and content in my artwork. My childhood love of the outdoors makes it a natural subject for my adult self to grapple with larger overarching ideas of community and acceptance.

By exploring the natural environment through drawing and painting, I can create my own visual language which allows me to communicate with the viewer. A series of paintings can create a new language seen in the works, that is used between the artist and viewer. Georgia O'Keeffe conveyed a thoroughly cultivated language within her paintings that maintained and developed over time. Motif as a result of fascination is notable in her Jack-in-the-Pulpit (no.'s 2-5) series. The repetitious and zoomed in focus on the flower allows the viewer to understand the possible intricacies and plain beauty to be experienced in the forms of this natural object.



Georgia O'Keeffe, Jack-in-the-Pulpit no. 2-5.
1930 Oil on canvas, 40 x
30 in.²³⁴⁵

We are given her specific interaction with that flower as it existed in multiple forms which built upon themselves, over time. Through repetition we are forced to look and relook at this flower and by increasing the scale and abstracting the forms she pays homage to the natural while demanding that the viewer engage in the work to gain a new understanding of the subject. I took up this application of return and abstraction in my own process. Over the course of the year I was working with only four locations, and within those locations only one spot mainly. This continued focus within locations, all of which were on the water, let me hone in on those aspects which remained the same and get a much more studied feel for them.

The Color in O'Keeffe's paintings is also a source of inspiration for my own use of color in the final semester. Her color is studied but allows for generality which lets it exist outside of specificity and time. Her deserts have the stark harsh light which characterize the landscape, but appear timeless. O'Keeffe's paintings lack a possessive drive, they are referential instead. This possessive desire can be seen more in landscape paintings that become consumed with pinning

² <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.70177.html>

³ <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.70178.html>

⁴ <https://www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/20centpa/20centpa-70179.html>

⁵ <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.70180.html>

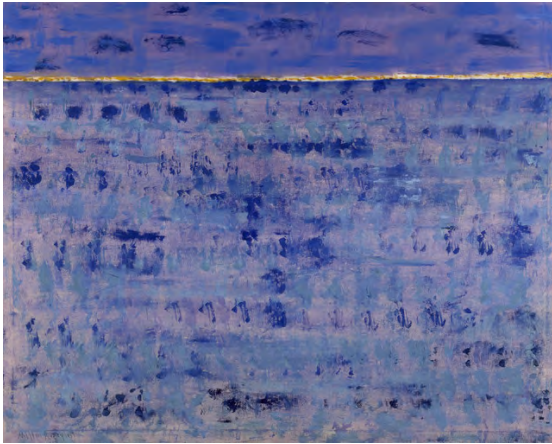
down exact details. O'Keeffe is referential to the landscape in a way that shows an intimate understanding of the landscape and also a respect for the fact that it exists outside of herself.

In my own work a limited color palette and repeated forms across multiple paintings form the basis of a visual dialect that clues the viewer into how to read the paintings. They both developed over a period of studying the landscapes and refining the presentation of a location. The rhythm and predictability of certain forms allows the viewer to follow the idea of landscape presented here. They become able to understand basic structures but are still allowed a large amount of interpretation by inspecting the ways in which these repetitions interact in new ways. By creating a "landscape" out of spray paint on mat board the viewer is forced to compare something that is very unnatural to nature. A thin flat line of color, like in *Corolla Marsh*, is understood to be a horizon when a bright yellow burst of color is placed behind it and by reflecting that color onto the other side we gain a sense of horizon over water. While *descriptively* the work is only flat shapes of color combined on a surface, it *conveys* a sense of atmosphere and location through the imaginative process.

Milton Avery's landscapes served as an inspiration for how to maintain both subject matter and abstraction. He valued the interaction with an external subject matter in the creation of art. Color was primary concern for him but even at a time when painting was becoming increasingly non representational Avery never shifted from representation in his paintings because "objects in the subject matter...[they] must take their place in the whole design."⁶ The

⁶ Hobbs, Robert Carleton. Milton Avery. New York: Hudson Hills, 1990. Print.
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effect is that his work oscillates between representation and abstraction with two dimensional and three dimensional forms. Avery's forms themselves exist both as flat geometric shapes and also the natural subject they are referring too, similar to my own. The subject of both our works is essential to the creation of the design on the page and to ignore this connection feels tantamount to a lie.



Milton Avery. *Night Harbor*, 1957 Oil on canvas, 44 × 57 in⁷

In his painting *Night Harbor* Avery balances abstraction and representation. He gives the viewer a simplified version of the horizon in Massachusetts. We can see that this is sky horizon and water but only through suggestion. Avery has interpreted the landscape with the aim of creating something of his own that can communicate a moment. Through this communication between artist and subject matter, something larger than either is conveyed. The beauty of art came from a collaboration between the landscape and the artist. In its totality it existed in neither by themselves, but each was necessary for the collaboration. Avery's work was in direct contrast with his Abstract expressionist contemporaries who were continually removing subject matter

⁷ <http://collection.chrysler.org/emuseum/media/view/Objects/5274/76390?t:state:flow=1e0b2688-09b0-436c-8ab1-868030d6d6ac>

from their art. He was making large, simplified, color-focused *landscapes* and *figures* at a time when many artists were doubting the importance of subject matter at all. He understood the value of the external subject matter in creating art. He was attempting to achieve pure painting while maintaining a subject matter; the aesthetic was the goal for his art and could be achieved through the use of external subject matter combined with personal choices.

This is influential to the work I am creating. The goal of any piece is to still maintain the landscape but allow viewers to see both sides of representation: the abstract and the subject matter. In the forms of the painting the viewer should be able to see both myself and landscape; not as entities fighting against one another for attention but balanced as a synthesis of the two. My paintings hope to be experienced as an object that reminds the viewer of a landscape, they do not pretend to *be* the landscape. The flat shapes created by the coats of spray paint change the texture and depth of the natural world enough that they are foreign, but are still reminiscent of the subject matter. The mat board helps the painting maintain a heft that allows them to be self-sustaining in their objectness. They fight against the history of illusory landscape painting because at no point are they pretending to be a window into a field or present a landscape that one could walk into. They are experienced by the viewer as a visual reminder of a landscape as perceived. They exist to entertain as well, as this is a valuable aspect of visual art. Milton Avery said, "Life is just like art, it needs a rest from all problematical interrogation and dissection, and when it comes down to it what does art have to do with mathematical relativities?"⁸ I have taken

⁸ Grad, Bonnie L., and Sally Michel Avery. Milton Avery. Royal Oak, Mich: Strathcona, 1981. Print.

this to hint at his appreciation for the role art can play as an avenue for escape, both in its creation and viewing.

In the end the object or subject matter of a painting is essential because it demands an artist to go beyond themselves and requires them to interact with the context that formed the way they go about creating art. Through maintaining objective subject matter the artist gains the ability to become a part of their larger context. They can gain perspective and a sense of place in the world. The landscape is not a retreat or separation from my daily life. It is ingrained into my daily experiences, the landscapes I paint are not summer retreats but my home and places I spend the majority of my time at. Similarly Jane Wilson's art was *created by* the landscape. She claims this early exposure to big Iowa sky and the New York skyline had a huge influence on her art.

Her travels around the country were marked by a fascination with the landscape and its colors and character. In this way we are similar; the landscape sparks an inspiration within the artist that is based within the subject. We find aspects of self that can only be located when we experience the natural landscape. When looking at her paintings, the viewer gains awe and appreciation for the experience of the natural. It can be understood that this was at least part of the artist's own motivation for creating the work. Also important to her landscapes is the intimacy of color to the individual; that is the degree to which color is triggered by the personal and is experienced as phenomenon. Within her paintings there is something that seems paradoxically simultaneously celebratory of and humbling for the individual. I found this essential to keep in mind when creating an image of the landscape. My own paintings use color

that refers to the landscape but has been mediated through the spray paint. This is both of necessity and also to stop the paintings from feeling like they must match the natural.

Her process took place in the studio and without the aid of any visual references to the landscape she was creating. These paintings are abstractions/distillations of an experience of landscape, which exists only in the feelings and memories of the artist. This is a vein of inspiration for my own art, but the subtle difference in our relationship with the external is related to her direct adoption of Rothko as inspiration and earlier work as a second generation abstract expressionist and my own relationship to subject matter which refuses to be diluted. My own process is in the studio but I keep images as a reminder of the landscape to more accurately trigger visual memories but also provide specific details, such as the angle shore line or proportion of water to horizon.

Abstract expressionism and thoughts that come from it have implicitly Self centered, not to be confused with self-centered, visions of subject matter even when performing in representative forms. The subject matter in Wilson's art is less tangible than the landscape as a whole, it is "atmosphere and the quality of air as we live it." This flows from a perspective in which the Self is center and *experiences* Other. The other does not necessarily experience the self. All of these aspects are very important and influential to my own art but they are also more like sister ideas than twins.

The constant flux in landscape is a mirror of our lives, both are continually changing but an underlying structure that creates continuity gives leverage allowing an individual to understand themselves and their place in the world. Even as time passes and location changes there

is a level of familiarity with the land and through this familiarity an individual can gain stability. As time passes both people and culture of a location will shift but, for the large part, major geographic markers and plant life stay the same. The horizon stays largely the same even as everything around it changes. The way that the light refracts in specific instances will be predictable. This predictability and stability is also true as I have shifted location across states; the weather patterns, and atmospheric phenomena remain stable. The type of light across the St. Mary's River can still be seen on the sound in Nags Head. This continuity allows for my own personal stability and helps me start to understand new contexts; the similarities allow the shifts to stand out, not become intimidating, in fact highlighting their beauty and reinforcing the benefits of differences. These become the basic subjects of my art, focusing on these over the year has allowed me to better understand why they are important to me.

Highlighting these processes of understanding through my art allows me to communicate to the other people within my community and they can benefit from realizing they think similarly or even just becoming engaged with my own process and disagreeing with it; creating or testing their own means of external analysis in the process. My approach values the inescapability of collaboration and externalities in art. Then since art is this different form of communication we can use it as a platform to discuss old ideas such as environmental awareness or a revitalized cognition in new ways.

All of this requires that art be relatable and non-alienating to the public, but also in a constant dialogue with its culture on some level. The importance of the subject matter could be

related to the arguments of John Dewey⁹. If art, aesthetics and artistic expression are intimately related to all aspects of culture then culture should be integrated into at least some aspects of art, aesthetics and artistic expression. The artistic process, as I imagine it, demands external inspection and interaction; through viewing and working with the external, people can gain perspective and identity. The value to that perspective and the type of identity that is created through extrospection is in the engagement with the public that it forces. Each person processes my interpretations of my surroundings and, in much the same way as I analyze the landscape for similarities and differences, they can analyze my perception for similarities and differences from their own. This then reawakens their senses and allows them to more full engage with the world in which they exist.

⁹ Dewey, John. *The Public and Its Problems*. New York: H. Holt, 1927. Print.

Annotated Bibliography

"April Gornik (American, Born 1953)." *April Gornik Biography – April Gornik on Artnet*. Artnet Worldwide Corporation, n.d. Web. 04 Mar. 2016.

April Gornik was important as an artist for my practice because of similarities in practice and similarities in motivations for choosing our subject matter. Her use of landscapes which inspire her is related to my own motivations and also her paintings are as inspiring as many natural landscapes so they serve as a source of fascination on their own. This site provided a great online source to look at her work and gave an overview of her artistic motivations and practice.

Agee, William C., and Irving Sandler. *American Vanguards: Graham, Davis, Gorky, De Kooning, and Their Circle, 1927-1942*. Andover, Mass.: Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy; 2011 Print.

This collection is based on a show that travelled in 2012 which featured these artists to show the progressive art that was being created in mid-century America. The compilation of these artists gave a great view of the variety and growth of avant-garde art in the American context. They were pushing boundaries on what the role art ought to play on both a personal and cultural level. They were vital for my development on the role of art, and its significance to the individual and world. Discussing these pivotal artists provides a springboard for discussion about later movements in American art as they provide the backboard of which contemporary American artists are bouncing ideas. These artists became of interest for further reading to better understand the purpose of creating art.

Cezanne, Paul, and N.Y. York. *Cézanne: The Late Work : Essays*. New York: Museum of Modern Art ; 1977. Print.

The compilation gathers multiple essays on the artist and places them in one context. The result is that upon inspection the reader can understand the development of the artist's philosophy, the importance of motif in his work and the expansive impact he had on later generations of artists. It is also something that plays a role in my own work, especially that wrl not included in the show. There is also an extensive collection of reproductions of lesser known works by the artist. These lesser known work included many of his sketches and watercolors, which much more explicitly connect his visual and mental interaction to my own. Through looking at them it was much easier for me to understand why I relate so much to his own work. The explicit discussion of his landscapes proved very useful to understand these works more in depth.

Davis, Holly. "Abstract Expressionist Wolf Kahn: Spontaneous Tendencies - Artist's Network." *Artist's Network*. N.p., 30 Apr. 2014. Web. 10 Feb. 2016.

The article on Kahn discusses his Abstract Expressionist roots, his use of color, and divulges very interesting insights from the artist on the artistic process. His advocacy and fascination with gray is one that I feel and admire. His color conversations are particularly of interest as he discusses the ability of color to instantly bring one to a location and time, all on its own.

Drohojowska-Philp, Hunter, and Georgia O'Keeffe. *Full Bloom: The Art and Life of Georgia O'Keeffe*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004. Print

The biography is compelling and well written. It provides an outline of O'Keeffe's life and the steps she took towards creating her success. Drohojowska-Philp provides wonderful detail on the life of O'Keeffe and internal motivations for the often misinterpreted artist. Her discussion of the subject matter and the artist's upbringing are very interesting and add another layer to looking at the work. O'Keeffe is a great example of a talented female artist who was working from nature and using artistic choices to force viewers to examine those elements more closely. Her art, especially the Jack-in-the-Pulpit series force the viewer have a new interaction with nature that is guided r cultivated by the artist.

Franks, Lucinda. "Unlocking the Unconscious - Wolf Kahn." *Unlocking the Unconscious - Wolf Kahn*. ARTnews, Dec. 2001. Web. 10 Feb. 2016.

This article is an account of a workshop Kahn put on which discussed the internal landscape. It was an insight into the inspiration for his vast portfolio. The focus he places on the unconscious guiding the creation of art was difficult for me to embrace with my desire for maintaining a 'real' and external subject

Grad, Bonnie L., and Sally Michel Avery. *Milton Avery*. Royal Oak, Mich: Strathcona, 1981. Print.

This book has one of the largest collections of color reproductions of Avery's work. It points out how his work remains both observational and abstracted throughout his later period. Bonnie Lee Grad placed an emphasis on the importance found in the fact that Avery never reached true abstraction and so his work cannot fairly be analyzed in formal terms alone. Avery's work is visually inspiring and his landscapes depicted here were intimately related to the ways in which I have been depicting the landscape.

Gimferrer, Pere, and Joan Miró. *The Roots of Miró*. Parets De Vallès, Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 1993. Print.

This compilation has an extensive focus on the process of creating abstract art. The plates provide guidance for myself. The drawings that Miro used during the planning process are of the most interest. The vast number of works catalogued give great insight into how to go about creating abstract works.

Harrison, Charles. *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2003. Print.

Harrison has collected a wonderfully inclusive collection of essay and information of important artists through modern times. This anthology is an essential book for understanding the breadth of the development of art theory in the Euro-American context. It provides very accurate introductions into a plethora of ideas and artists that remain accessible and accurate. I read multiple sections throughout the entirety of the book.

Hills, Patricia. *Stuart Davis*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, in Association with the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1996. Print.

Hills wrote an analysis of Davis' work in regards to the European avant-garde which he was exposed to through the 1913 Armory Show and the influence African-American jazz played on his art. Davis understood forms essential role in communication and how communication could occur across media. Davis came into my radar as he was first influenced by Cezanne and the Cubists. He again came up while researching American artists and Gorky.

Hobbs, Robert Carleton. *Milton Avery*. New York: Hudson Hills, 1990. Print.

This is the main book on Avery, listed in his artnet page. There are considerably more plates that are different from the other Avery book. Avery's methods and painting serve as a very good template to base my own process on and they are more thoroughly discussed here. The painting process, color and shape use, and maintaining observational qualities are areas that I hope to learn more about through studying his work.

Hoffman, Katherine, and Georgia Keeffe. *An Enduring Spirit: The Art of Georgia O'Keeffe*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1984. Print.

Hoffman wrote an encompassing and extensive review of O'Keeffe. It encompasses the biographical history of the artist herself littered with quotes that give you a sense of her personality. Also included is a wide review of the critics of O'Keeffe's body of work, in combination with her own thoughts on her work. It ends with an extensive analysis of multiple paintings and sculptures done by the artist. The extensive inclusions of O'Keeffe's own words in this book provide a wonderful insight into the mind of the artist and her work in itself is uniquely inspiring since she is a prominent female American artist. Her use of simplified forms of recognizable objects is impactful and related to the language we use to recognize ideas.

O'Keeffe, Georgia, Doris Bry, and Nicholas Callaway. *Georgia O'Keeffe, in the West*. New York: Knopf in Association with Callaway, 1989. Print.

This book was used by a previous SMP student who also looked at Georgia O'Keeffe and is where i pulled the quote that opens my paper from. Coincidentally this is

the same qte the other student used, which I did not realize until after I had already excerpted it. The essay was written by an acquaintance of O'Keeffe's and discusses her life and the travels that were so important to the development of her visual language.

Popova, Maria. "Georgia O'Keeffe on Art, Life, and Setting Priorities." *Brain Pickings*. N.p., 17 Sept. 2014. Web. 10 Feb. 2016.

This article combined historical biography with curated quotations from the artist in a way that casts her as an independent spirit who was constantly driven in the creation of art to gain a larger understanding of her world. It discusses her character and the effect that had on her work.

Rudick, Nicole. "Jane Wilson, 1924–2015." *The Paris Review RSS*. N.p., 15 Jan. 2015. Web. 04 Mar. 2016.

One of the few articles available on this artist, again showing the gender preference to write about male artists, this article was a tribute to the artist after her death. It named some of her many, unnoticed contributions to the artistic community she was so ingrained within. It also spoke to her fascination with the monumentality of landscape. Our interest in our subject matter then seems to be similar.

Seed, John. "Six Decades in Wolf Kahn's Landscape." *Hyperallergic RSS*. N.p., 30 Apr. 2014. Web. 10 Feb. 2016.

John Seed interviewed Kahn on his use of color, the development of his work over time and which artists he was surrounding himself with over time. The interview provided some of the artist's philosophy on the creation of art. It also supplied with the people who were creating art around him that he thought were influential on his work. It was very interesting to see his personal connections to such artists as Milton Avery and Mark Rothko.

Spring, Justin, and Louis Finkelstein. *Wolf Kahn*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996. Print.

Kahn is an artist of high affinity for myself and this book provides a good overview of his work, through numerous color plates and a discussion of his process. His subject matter is almost exclusively landscape and his imagery is representationally specific and universal at the same time. This book served to introduce his ideas and influences, clearly and simply. Most of the plates were in color and with work like Kahn's that is vitally important. Overall it was a useful source.