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Artist Statement and Research

Every person has a belief about something, and people live their lives according to what they consider to be true. Within my own life, Christianity has influenced the way I live, as well as the personal choices I have both made and continue to make. When I think about my own experience with religion, I reflect on the comfort and relief that derives from the presence of knowing there is something greater than myself. It is encouraging to know there is a higher power with more control than I could ever measure. Although negative associations are traditionally associated with religion, particularly through oppressive and burdening guidelines, I never view Christianity as fitting this typical mold. The stories in the Bible depict a different picture. Jesus opposed the proud and rich, instead, defending the weak and helpless. My identity is so fully and completely wrapped in the label of *Christian* that when approaching my SMP project, I could not fathom making artwork without some remnant of its association or influence, even if this association remains invisible to the viewer.

My artistic goal is to create an object that evokes the same range of emotions that I feel when I am both living according to my faith and when I am among a community of other Christians. I want to create an environment where the viewer is aware of his or her own presence in connection to something much larger and something much grander. I want to translate my experience with religion to my artwork. But how could I bring about a sense of “wonder” to my own work? Through a site-specific installation, I stamp out circular shapes onto the wall to create a pattern of interconnected shapes. As these shapes are impressed repeatedly upon each other, the image that begins to appear is one of effervescent movement. I translate the comfort I feel in Christianity through pattern because pattern is a constant repetition of the same form,

which signifies some notion of stability. The repeating arrangements do not change. Although viewers cannot readily see the influence behind my work, my intention is that they will feel comfort, relief, and awe. The forms I produce for my wall installations are not bound finitely to a two-dimensional surface but also merge into a three dimensional structure. I hope my work beckons viewers into a contemplative state so that they are able to reflect upon their own sense of self in relation to their surrounding world, just as Christianity beckons me into a reflection about myself in my environment.

Since Christianity has played such an influential role in how I want to evoke my artwork, my research about Byzantine art also revealed how past artists have used different techniques to evoke a particular reaction among viewers. In particular, Hagia Sophia, built in 532-537 by Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus, is considered one of Byzantium's greatest architectural projects (Tansey, 260). Spanning 270 feet long and 240 feet wide, with a dome 108 feet in diameter, Hagia Sophia's interior space enhances the Phrygian stone, creating an aura of mysticism. Along the dome, forty small windows are arranged around the base, bringing in a crown of light. This use of light is the central element to Hagia Sophia's transformation of space, which, "glitters in the mosaics, shines forth from the marbles, and pervades and defines spaces that, in themselves, seem to escape definition" (Tansey 260). Byzantine church architecture was often the place for a religious experience, which was shown through the art and centripetal structural layouts. The presence of a dome pushed the viewer's gaze upward, as if he or she were looking upon heaven, made even more magnificent by the ornamentation and mosaic designs. When reflecting upon my own work in relation to Byzantine art, I recognize that while Hagia Sophia is visually different, its intention to employ notions of religious experience is similar to my own objectives. In order to bring about a "heavenly" atmosphere, builders of this basilica

used light to fill the greatness of the space. This helps me question my own interests in pattern and how this translates to the imagery of my own work. What do I see in pattern that relates to what I find in religion? I find stability in replicated forms, yet I prefer more “irregular” repetitions, or rather, designs that are repeated but not strictly perfected. I find beauty in the organic and of the simple. Through pattern, I want to show the comfort that comes from repeated configurations, but I also want to combine this concept with frenzied forms to employ a sense of bubbly movement. I find awe in patterns because I can become swept up in the intricate designs that make up a larger whole. Likewise, Byzantine architecture employs these very concepts of pattern, using elaborate designs to adorn its large constructions. The ornamentation and mosaic designs thrive from Islamic art, which used patterned decoration in all forms of artistic renderings.

Islamic art covers a wide development of many people and many places, spanning from the seventh century to the present. While also covering areas from Spain to China, Islamic art, in particular, involves an integration of the Arab, Turkish, and Persian civilizations (O’Kane 9). Although Islamic art does not pertain to just one form of religion or religion itself, Islam is undoubtedly the most pervasive influence for this historical movement. Muslims conceived a collective belief in the absolute authority of Allah, the One God. Patterned designs represented the relationship between their earthly transience and the experience of the mystical. The prolongation of the patterned form is both an implication of the eternal life, while opposed to the ephemeral existence. In essence, the creation of “only part of a pattern” is a way in which “the Islamic artist relates the static, limited, seemingly definite object to infinity itself” (Grube 11). Islamic art found purpose in using pattern to evoke its spiritual belief in the God, Allah.

Furthermore, I want to use pattern to evoke the emotional response I possess when contemplating my existence in relation to spirituality.

Such works were produced under the influence of religious doctrine, utilizing ceiling spaces in compelling ways to bring about a sense of wonder. The viewer became aware of his or her own presence in connection to something much greater. How could I bring these awe-inspiring elements to my own work? The forms I produce for my wall installations are not bounded finitely to a two-dimensional surface but also merge into a three dimensional structure that beckons the viewer to approach its residence. My work is about touching the emotional state of the individual, asking him or her to reflect on his or her own expressive state. How does he or she feel? Safe? Calm? What associations are viewers having as they look at this work? My previous artwork was focused on a *system of feelings*, in which, I drew out basic shapes according to my feelings. The term *system* referred to smaller components making up a unified design. Thriving from this idea of *systems*, I first produced drawings of basic shapes, photocopied these small drawings into multiples, and then arranged them into a larger composition. The lighter and darker areas of the shapes made a visual line, which guided the viewer's gaze across the gallery wall. In much the same way, my final project is still concentrated on this sense of guiding the viewer along the gallery wall. As he or she follows the marks on the wall, a sense of flowing movement will manifest itself. When thinking about the visual aspects of my work, Matthew Ritchie's flowing, and organic forms were a leading example in how an artist could successfully use installation to create a grand and beautiful site.

Through Matthew Ritchie's work, I found interest in his connection between drawing and sculpture and the way he took a two-dimensional image and expanded its form to a three-dimensional construction. His work is about the prism of a person's life, which involves

physical, biological and mental processes. Ritchie's structures are produced from his "elaborate cosmology," which "combines elements from the worlds of science, history, philosophy, myth, and religion" (Dexter 270). They loom over the viewer at a large scale, with metal shapes merging together to create organic forms. The information that accompanies one's own prism is conveyed through painted marks on the gallery walls. In particular, *The Evening Line* is a work that merges the two-dimensional form with the three-dimensional form. These non-objective shapes range from large formations to smaller ones, and they drift along corners, almost appearing molecular or cell-like. His work seems to entirely fill the space in which he exhibits his work, which also forces the viewer into the realm of the artist's mind. The work does not constitute a piece of art, but it becomes an experience for the observer.

After looking at Matthew Ritchie's work, I realized I wanted my mark making to extend beyond a piece of paper and onto the wall, flowing along corners and possibly the floor. His work also helped me see a powerful connection between drawing and sculpture, using flattened images to create three-dimensional forms. Ritchie describes the compelling nature of drawing, stating that one could do many things with it, ranging from making it smaller, making it larger, or manipulating it in such a way that it become a more tactile experience ("Structures" Art 21). Likewise, my drawings are not being done with a pencil or pen, but rather, with the bottom of a coffee cup. I use stamping to communicate my lines and marks, which deviates from the traditional sense of "drawing." By impressing with a stamp, I am able give an implication of multiples through a hand commodity implication.

Judy Pfaff is another artist who also creates work that beckons out to her viewers. Through a diverse range of materials, Pfaff uses sculpture to establish a presence in her work, mostly working from the ideas of "entropy, randomness, and chaos" (Sandler 3). Her work

materializes through the spaces of her exhibition spaces, suspending from the ceiling, transcending from the walls, or filling the walking spaces of the floor. In particular, *Horror Vacui* (1988) is one of Pfaff's works that mirrored most closely my objectives within my own artmaking. A series of flat, circular forms are arranged in clusters of varying depths and sizes. Wire shaped into circular spheres hang in front of these clusters, pushing out from the very top of the work and end onto the floor. *Horror Vacui* is also rendered in a monochromatic palette, with various whites, greys, and blacks, enhanced further by the shadows of the clustered discs. The work appears to float along the wall.

While thinking about my own work, my attraction to *Horror Vacui* helped me see that I wanted to focus on basic shapes, particularly circular forms. My interest in circular forms thrives from implications of perfection, completion, and inclusion. I found beauty in *Horror Vacui's* use of round shapes to create something striking. Pfaff layered different materials to create a work that reaches out to the viewer. The added three-dimensionality makes the presentation more interactive, particularly since the observer must be aware of where he or she is walking. Within my own work, I overlap circular forms to create some areas so dense, the circles become a cluster of marks. Following Pfaff's use of solid discs of different sizes, I also decided to use solid discs within my own work, however, I incorporated a much larger amount, assembling them in such a way that they come off of the wall and merge into a structure that touches with the floor.

As viewers follow the effervescent flow of circular shapes stamped upon the gallery walls, they will form their own associations with the visual components presented to them. The arrangement of blue tones, lively mark-making, and three-dimensional discs are meant to suggest notions of water, simplicity, and energy. Although viewers cannot readily see the influence behind my work, my intention is that they will feel some facet of comfort or relief that I hope to

infer. I want them to recognize the influence that allows them to respond in a positive way. In essence, my installation is a place for viewers to reflect upon their own thoughts. As they become lost in the recurring patterns, they also become lost in their own thinking. What do they see when they look at the work? What are they captivated by? What do they notice? Do they sense a sublime presence? I want viewers to become lost in the recurring patterns, just as Christianity summons me into a reflective state.

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