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Full Length Statement
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I have developed a strong interest in impulses – small curiosities that form, even about seemingly insignificant parts of our everyday lives. While the majority of such impulses pass through a filter in our minds without even being taken into account, it can be enlightening to reconsider their potential significance as thoughts that could lead to gaining certain new perspectives. Throughout the past year, my work as a photographer has struggled, flourished, and changed, grew as my inspirations have, and has finally become more in-line with my expectations for what this senior project could become as I gradually narrowed my focus down to the concept of dealing with impulse-driven ways of taking photographs. I have gotten into the habit of driving and walking around with no preconceived idea of where I will end up. I often disregard initial thoughts or hesitations that might try to stop me. As long as I have the free time, I go with it. This kind of free wandering has inspired me to keep photographing over the course of the year – spontaneous and solitary exploration of an infinite span of ground that surrounds me, carrying with me only a camera and an eager eye, looking for something to pull from an otherwise ordinary setting.

My experiences with photography are continuously evolving. During the course of my studies here, I've gradually moved my focus towards creating more nonrepresentational photographs. My connection with any subject matter through the camera continues to shape how I think about the medium both as my primary form of expression and as a way to investigate the self. I have come to carefully consider and appreciate how the camera can transform vision. To expand on this notion, I try to vary

my use of the lens and break out of “traditional” ways of framing subject matter. When I photograph, I make a conscious effort to create something that is visually unique while subsequently investigating the individual process that occurs when a viewer sees and responds to a photograph. Much of work in this show reflects my interest in challenging this viewer’s response to an image by thinking about how the human process of perception informs one’s reaction to something visual, consequently influencing their understanding of it.

The photographs I took at the initial stages of this senior project reflect a newly sparked interest in what influential photographer and writer John Szarkowski calls “photographic seeing,” a concept that that I had always considered in my upbringings as a photographer. Szarkowski’s notion of seeing photographically coincides with my interest in the camera’s inherent ability to transform – the idea that the photograph can take on a very powerful kind of language when the photographer realizes the capability of an image to direct one’s vision. A photograph is, in itself, a pictorial representation of reality; however, it can also become a portal into a constructed world, a world that is dictated by the choices of the photographer. I found this concept especially intriguing when considering everyday objects as a subject matter.

Photographer William Eggleston focuses specifically on making art from commonplace objects by taking pictures of literally everything around him. By capturing something as simple and utterly mundane as an oven or a light bulb, Eggleston monumentalizes little objects and creates highly composed images from them, in which every detail deserves equal attention. I was especially drawn to his casual attitude towards the act of taking pictures, as this was something I was just beginning to practice

on an almost daily basis. In an interview from the book *Image Makers/Image Takers*, Eggleston comments on his way of working by admitting that he often goes out with a fully loaded camera and comes back without a single shot he can use, and instead becomes enveloped by the experience of being out and observing. He takes a picture because there is something there, because he wants to know what something looks like when it is photographed. Eggleston also speaks to the idea of an image continuing to register in the viewer's mind long after seeing it, giving the image a kind of unique rhetoric that would achieve such a response. His distinct preference for extracting an uncensored beauty from 'boring' things resonates with me in a keen interest in visual composition. His extraordinary ability to work in such rich color is a quality that separates his style from my own, however the underlying idea behind what is being photographed in both instances is similar.

While a photograph's components originate from aspects in the real world, careful organization of elements inside of the constructed frame can produce an unworldly image, or an image in which a viewer cannot recognize or connect back to their personal perception of reality. As I kept producing images, I began seeing a change in them, both formally and conceptually. This change echoed an underlying desire to take advantage of my control over the camera and think more deeply about how my choices could direct an audience. When used intentionally, techniques that involve the blurring of an image or utilizing an unexpected positioning of the lens are small elements that have a lot of power when carefully considered. I began to really see how I could manipulate the camera in ways that would allow me to be able to envision what the printed photograph would look like before I even snapped the shutter or developing the film.

My interest in setting photography apart from reality pushed me to stick to black and white instead of trying to grapple with color – to me, an image in color is more immediately equated with how things look in real life, while black and white image brings an image a step further from appearing real. More recently, I have honed my subject matter down to a very distinct type of image, one that captures a view of objects that have been abandoned, neglected, weathered, or deteriorated. I found myself becoming more and more drawn to certain textures on objects I came across when out photographing. While my way of working was both meditative and unrestricted in terms of having a specific goal in mind when I went out to shoot, I gradually became more methodical and precise about the objects I chose to frame. Picking what discarded items to photograph became more about which materials on the objects would produce the intricate detail and refreshing feel within the image I desired. In a way, I became more impulse driven, and photographed accordingly.

Around this same time, I was introduced to the work of Gordon Matta-Clark, an installation artist who lived and worked primarily in New York City in the 1970s. He utilized structures and materials he found on the streets as his subject matter, and altered them on the street to create interactive installations as a way of commenting on the chaotic state of many neighborhoods during this time period. Matta-Clark flourished as a unique artist because of his persistent interest in soon to be demolished buildings due to their dangerous nature caused by declining instability and physical deterioration. Many of them were suddenly abandoned and foreclosed properties that had been left to crumble. He literally made his art out of empty buildings, and he did it all by hand. He is well known for his site-specific artworks, specifically his “building cuts,” in which he carved

sections of floor, ceiling, and wall out of the structures as they sat on the street, making them available for any passersby to see.

Much of his work was about property and ownership. He actually bought several leftover properties for very cheap, seeking to reclaim them and re-examine how the spaces within them function. He was interested in breaking both visual and symbolic boundaries that are normally associated with the architectural “box.” His work was most often viewed on-site to experience the full effect of his structural incisions. In a 2009 exhibition entitled *Urban Alchemy*, Matta-Clark brought his work from a piece he titled *Bingo* into the room of a gallery, where actual portions of the cut-outs were removed from their original sites and placed within the space of an empty room.

Matta-Clark’s work relates to my own in the sense that much of it is about new ways of perceiving an object or space. A deeper relationship can also be drawn from his specific interest in neglected structures and leftover or ambiguous space. Many of the properties were even deemed “inaccessible,” and this excited him. By coming in and altering the buildings, he took ownership of the space by literally shedding a new light on it, subsequently showing different perspectives of the materials there and giving the structure a new meaning. In many of his pieces, he cuts out portions of the exterior walls, letting natural light pierce through and illuminate areas that were new to that kind of exposure. Often times, this “destructive” way of working revealed layers of hidden constructions and materials and layers of the architecture that would not have otherwise been seen.

I’m interested in the way his work embodies transformation, and finding ways to do this through photography. The areas that I photograph are places where people aren’t

normally encouraged to go, which brings up similar issues of boundaries and denial of entry or passage. Each thing that I photograph becomes its own unique encapsulation of an experience – the specific light of the day, the physical state of whatever I chose to photograph, how it sits in the composition – much like how Matta-Clark's buildings remain unique as the light changes, as people come and go around them, and as the structures themselves continue to break and fall away.

Matta-Clark was also interested in each building in terms of how various people left their marks on the architecture. I find that I'm most drawn to things that show signs of degradation, such as rust and splintering. These physical embodiments of nature leaving its mark carry a strong sense of history and time that signify to me that the particular object has a story – how it got there, why it has been left, how long it has been sitting, and why it has not been moved or used.

While finding objects to photograph, the concept of vantage point has remained in my mind, both as a device through which a way of seeing can be directed, but also as an idea that I can use outside the constructed frame of the photographic image. A clearly visible set of textures can be intriguing enough as they are shown on the surface of the photographic print, but I have become more interested in how such textures change when looked at from a slightly different angle.

Aleksander Rodchenko was a Russian sculptor, photographer, and graphic designer who worked in early to mid 20th century. He was part of a revolution in Russia, which involved great innovation in the arts, including attempts to apply modern art to everyday life, through things like posters and ads. Rodchenko was interested in transforming man's perception of ordinary objects. Much of his "non-objective" art was

highly focused on expressing forms directly through their elements and properties, and nothing more, forcing the viewer to focus solely on the visual, while gathering an intuitive response.

His work in photcollage in the 1920s exhibits his interest in constructing in a formally innovative way. Rodchenko used a core principle as a basis for his work, the idea that his “revolutionary” art would require active participation of the viewer, who would then be transformed by the experience of interpreting the work. His photcollages contained charged imagery that was rooted in the world outside of the studio – via items like newspaper clippings – of things and places that people could recognize.

Although this body of work has little visual resemblance to my work, Rodchenko’s ideas of layering and receding through space are ideas that arise in my photographs. Rodchenko sought comment the nature of photography by redefining both the formal, by making vantage point the primary compositional tool, and the conceptual, by integrating both the social and the political in his visual rhetoric. Vantage point has become one of my most useful tools to manipulate. With it, I seek to be innovative by creating a new way of seeing through the photograph. In this sense, his photography has perhaps the most relevant content to my work. He approached the medium experimentally, carrying over his ideas about formal innovation by shooting things from odd, unexpected angles in order to shock the viewer and postpone their process of recognition. In his writings, he discusses photography through the light that the principal aim of art is to recover the immediacy of experience by making the familiar seem unfamiliar.

The idea of apprehending an object through the lens and giving it a fresh life through a reformed vision is a concept that I keep with me at all times. It is not uncommon for me to stray from an intended path and find something that I could look at for hours. But it is only when I get out of the ordinary, routine-like mindset, and off of the beaten path of the everyday, that I find such things.

More recently I have discovered the work of John McCracken, a contemporary sculpture artist who created his pieces using industrial techniques and materials, such as plywood, lacquer, and resin. One of his primary sculptural forms was the plank, a narrow and monochromatic rectangular board that sits leaning at an angle against the wall. While the pieces themselves seem relatively simple, McCracken made them using methods similar to producing surfboards, resulting in highly reflective, smooth surfaces. In addition, his work was largely about the colors he used in such pieces; however, I am attracted more towards the conceptual emphasis he places on creating an object that comes off of the imaginative, illusionist space of the gallery wall and into the three-dimensional realm and physical space of the viewer.

I'm interested in the effects that McCracken's colored planks create within the space of a room. He often placed several planks repeating in a row, emphasizing each thin form as exactly the same as the next, all placed at the same angle against the wall. Some sculptures were highly reflective and polished that they appeared to mirror the surroundings in the room, making them seem almost invisible. What strikes me most about his work is his intentionality for difference in the objects he creates. I feel as though I photograph with the intention of creating an image that is new to the viewer's eye. While McCracken works in a medium that is entirely separate from photography, his

sculptures provoke a sense of surprise and wonder in his viewers that I am trying to distill in my photographs. I am intrigued by the idea of the photograph as a physical object, however, I am more interested in creating illusions within my photographs. Whereas McCracken's work represents the conceptual sense of activating the physical space of the viewer, Thomas Demand's work embodies a more of this illusionistic sense I would like to deal with in my work.

I stumbled across Thomas Demand while reading interviews in a book I mentioned earlier, *Image Makers/Image Takers*. His work struck me because it seemed a bit ridiculous at first. A contemporary German sculptor and photographer, Demand creates incredible life size three-dimensional models of rooms and other spaces out of cardboard and paper, and then photographs them. His work is unique because his constructions are so elaborately detailed that the photographs themselves become highly architectural, conveying a real sense of interior space. At the same time, his images bring to the surface and inescapable tension between the real and the artificial. As I researched him a bit more, I became fascinated with his approach to such an odd way of working because I felt deeply connected to his interest in things he doesn't quite understand and things with a quirky sense of beauty. As I mentioned above, a lot of my work deals with human perception. While the process of perception is an undoubtedly complex topic, it is something that is naturally interwoven into the realm of visual art.

The scale of objects within the images also make you question this notion a bit further in terms of your physical relationship to what you see, further altering your perception of reality. Some things take on a "larger than life" presence, where the viewer is forced to re-evaluate the size of their own body in relation to the scale of the image.

The absence of people in his photographs makes them seem at first rather conspicuous. Looking at each image, we see subtle bits of recent human activity, such as a broken lamp, a glass half full of water, or other things of that nature. His carefully chosen elements within each scene create a thematic effect, making the viewer wonder about things that don't actually exist within the image. This idea of leaving marks on something reoccurs in my work in the way that nature weathers many of the objects I come across.

Demand's work in the gallery exhibits some conceptual ideas of where I see myself presenting my work in a space. Several installation shots of his work will show the large scale of his images in relation to a viewer that would be standing in front of them, encapsulating the experience of one becoming part of the work. He often utilizes the wall space behind and around his pieces in order to enhance this experience a bit more as you walk through the installation. His photographs act almost as portals, literally taking us into the constructed space of a model, making you want to believe it is real, and then throwing you back by making you begin to question your own perception of what is real versus an artificial construction.

Through researching, observing, and interpreting the work of the source artists discussed above, I have come to approach my work through several different lenses, allowing myself to continue to grow and change both as a photographer and as an artist. While Gordon Matta-Clark's work reflects my current interest in renewing things that have been left to wither, I draw from Aleksander Rodchenko a distinct photographic vision and attention to perspective through which I can portray any subject matter I choose. In terms of my artistic process after appropriating the world through my lens,

I've both considered John McCracken's deliberate plank sculptures as they inhabit the physical space of a room as well as Thomas Demand's cleverly disguised photographs of artificial constructions of actual rooms. Between the inspirations I've gathered from these artists and my own personal approach to photography, I have developed a final body of work for this exhibition throughout the course of the year in hopes of creating an interactive space for the viewer that reflects the wide realm of sources I have considered.

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