WAYS OF GOING, HAVING GONE

by

Anne Smith
A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Fine Arts
Art and Visual Technology

Committee:

__________________________  Director

__________________________

__________________________

__________________________  Director of the School of Art

__________________________  Dean, College of Visual and
Performing Arts

Date: ______________________  Spring Semester 2015
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA
Ways of Going, Having Gone

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at George Mason University

by

Anne Smith
Bachelor of Arts
Williams College, 2007

Director: Helen Frederick, Professor
Department of Art and Visual Technology

Spring Semester 2015
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA
This work is licensed under a creative commons attribution-noderivs 3.0 unported license.
DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my teachers who are present in my practice every day.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have supported me during my time at George Mason University. I would like to especially thank my thesis committee: professors Helen Frederick, Lynne Constantine and Tom Ashcraft, for their incredible guidance and inspiration. They have each, in their own way, taught me to be the best artist and person I can be.

I am deeply grateful to the other faculty members with whom I have had the good fortune to work, especially Paula Crawford, Suzanne Carbonneau and Nikki Brugnoli-Whipkey. Lou Stovall has been an incredible mentor and teacher in many disciplines, as well as a great friend. My fellow grad students, also, have been such supportive teammates and I am so glad to know them.

I would also like to thank my teachers from years’ past, especially Robert Niedzwiecki and Ed Epping, who continue to be, even though I am no longer in their classroom, incredible influences in art and teaching. Big thanks go to my parents and parents-in-law for their endless encouragement and love. And a special thanks to my husband Young, my other half.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prologue</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Cut</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edges and Boundaries</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tethers</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Connect</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craftsmanship</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladder to a Door</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Climb</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inexhaustible Forms</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matter</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness &amp; Perception of Space</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry and Matter</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other References</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biography</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Vitae</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page
Figure 1 Still from an animation by the European Space Agency showing “Rosetta’s Orbit Around the Comet.” ................................................................. 3
Figure 2. Comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko on 31 January, 2015. European Space Agency................................................................. 4
Figure 3 Artist’s interpretation of the badly printed photograph. ........................................ 5
Figure 4 Cut, 2014. Wood. 64 x 54 x 105 in. Exhibited in Ways of Going, Having Gone, Fine Art Gallery, George Mason University. Photo by Stephanie Booth. ................. 6
Figure 5 Dropping a line in the performance of Trace.......................................................... 10
Figure 6 Images of the trace left behind........................................................................... 11
Figure 7 Janine Antoni, Moor, 2001, Mixed media installation, dimensions variable. Free Port, at Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthalle, Sweden. Source: Luhring Augustine......... 12
Figure 8 Janine Antoni, Moor, 2001, Mixed media installation, dimensions variable. Free Port, at Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthalle, Sweden. Source: Luhring Augustine........... 13
Figure 9 ORBIT, EV 4 of 30, 2014, Etching with chine collé, 22.25 x 15 in. ......................... 16
Figure 10 ORBIT, EV 6 of 30, 2014, Etching with chine collé, 22.25 x 15 in. ..................... 17
Figure 11 Connect, 2014, wood, 38 x 36 x 96 in. Photo by Stephanie Booth. ................. 19
Figure 12 Cut, 2014, Wood, 38 x 36 x 96 in. .................................................................. 20
Figure 13 Something to Nothing, 2013, Woodcut on kitakata paper, each approximately 38 x 324 in. ......................................................................................... 22
Figure 14 3-4, 2013. Silkscreen. 11.25 x 14.25 in. ............................................................... 23
Figure 15 3-4-5, 2013. Silkscreen. 20 x 16 in. ................................................................. 23
Figure 16 Six-Ten, 2013. Silkscreen. 16 x 20 in............................................................... 24
Figure 17 Hedron I, 2012, Wood and graphite, 21.5 x 25.5 x .75 in. ............................... 25
Figure 18 Josef Albers, Stacking Tables, 1926. Bethany, The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation................................................................. 28
Figure 19 Ladder to a Door, 2013, Wood, tar paper, spring clamps, graphite, string, hardware, 108 x 192 x 37 in. Exhibited at the Workhouse Arts Center, Lorton, VA. .... 29
Figure 20 detail, Ladder to a Door.................................................................................. 30
Figure 21 View of the drawing made in the second installation of Ladder to a Door, at the Brentwood Arts Exchange, Brentwood, MD. ......................................................... 32
Figure 22 detail of a lap joint in Climb. ............................................................................. 33
Figure 23 Climb, 2014, Wood, 84 x 72 x 108 in. .............................................................. 35
Figure 24 detail, Climb. ................................................................................................. 36
Figure 25 Martin Puryear, *Untitled VI (State 2)*, 2012, Color softground etching with drypoint and spitbite aquatint, 32 x 32 in. (image), 43 x 41 in (paper). Source: Paulson Bott Press...

Figure 26 Martin Puryear, *Thicket*, 1990, Basswood and cypress. 67 x 62 x 17 in. Seattle Art Museum. Source: Matthew Marks Gallery.

Figure 27 Wide shot of *Climb*, on right.

Figure 28 *Passing*, EV 1 of 30, 2014, Etching with chine collé, 22.25 x 15 in.

Figure 29 *Passing*, EV 1 of 30, 2014, Etching with chine collé, 22.25 x 15 in.

Figure 30 *Around back*, 2014. Etching. 14.75 x 20.25 in. Photo by Raphael Warshaw.

Figure 31 *Mass*, 2014. Etching. 20.25 x 22 in. Photo by Raphael Warshaw.

Figure 32 Nancy Rubins, detail, *Drawings & Hot Water Heaters*, 1991. Hot water heaters, wire cable, and graphite pencil on paper. Approx. 9 x 14 x 12 ft. Miami, Martin Z. Margulies.

Figure 33 *Night Shapes*, 2014. Mezzotint and drypoint etching. 13.5 x 11 in.

Figure 34 *Ways of Going, Having Gone VI*, 2014, graphite and conté on handmade paper, 47 x 78 in.

Figure 35 Georges Seurat, *Woman Reading*, c. 1882, 11.8 x 9 in. Paris, Private collection.
ABSTRACT

WAYS OF GOING, HAVING GONE

Anne Smith, M.F.A.

George Mason University, 2015

Thesis Director: Professor Helen Frederick

This thesis describes the practices, thought processes and influences behind the work in my MFA thesis exhibit *Ways of Going, Having Gone*, exhibited in November 2014 at George Mason University’s Fine Art Gallery, as well as work from 2012-2014. The work spans disciplines of drawing, printmaking and sculpture. The themes in this work include: explorations of space and home, walking and wandering, craftsmanship, community, nighttime, work, play, and passage.
PROLOGUE

The following document is structured in three parts. After the introduction is *Cut*, which is named for a sculpture as well as for the action it suggests and its significance within my art practice. The second and third sections, *Connect* and *Climb*, are also named for their corresponding sculptures as well as the actions they represent. No other roadmap is required; please wander.
INTRODUCTION

For ten years, the Rosetta spacecraft made its way through space, tracing a path from Earth to comet in what would be Earth’s first comet landing ever. Ten years cycling up through our solar system, occasionally sling-shotting around Earth and even Mars, once, in what is called a “gravity assist.”

What if Rosetta had missed the comet by a few feet? Unless you’re a rocket scientist, this scenario seems so probable, even likely, given the distance and duration that this spacecraft traveled. Rosetta was expected not only to go such a distance and stay on track for so many years, but also to land, gracefully, on a spinning hunk of rock hurtling through space at 40,000 mph.

How far-fetched the whole story seems. How mind-boggling and totally awe-inspiring that some humans could launch an object into the air and, ten years later, have it land on what is essentially a postage stamp.

A diagram of Rosetta’s path and final “maneuver” around the comet reveals what appears to be a strangely roundabout, meandering way to go from one thing to another, like the wandering path of the child who is told to walk straight to the bus stop, no dilly-dallying.
The images sent back by the lander were equally astonishing, comic and improbable. Strange rock formations in black and white, thrown into stark relief by… that would be our Sun. And yet the photos look like they might have been made in someone’s basement, by some nerd handy with a glue gun who built a moonscape diorama. As it turns out, that is what a comet looks like. At once comic, unreal and incredibly beautiful.
Figure 2. Comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko on 31 January, 2015. European Space Agency
I. CUT

One evening at the Penland School of Crafts in North Carolina, where I was taking a class in wood, I flipped through a “country” woodworking book and saw a picture of a sawbuck. I do not remember what book it was, but this photo of a sawbuck stuck with me and over the next year and a half, I struggled to build my own version in a way that felt good and right.

Though it was a photo, the sawbuck seemed diagrammatic, with its X’s and simple structure. It looked strong and dense—in part for its stocky proportions but also for the way it was printed—that is, badly, which flattened the form and made it appear as both a photo and an illustration of itself.

Figure 3 Artist’s interpretation of the badly printed photograph.
Back at my studio, I tried and failed and tried again to make my own sawbuck in sculptural form. For such a seemingly simple form, it was elusive, but I eventually found a solution in long lengths of whittled walnut. In a fitting parallel, the act of whittling these seven-, eight-, and nine-foot lengths was itself an act of shaping lines, as much as the form itself was to be about the same action.

Figure 4 Cut, 2014. Wood. 64 x 54 x 105 in. Exhibited in Ways of Going, Having Gone, Fine Art Gallery, George Mason University. Photo by Stephanie Booth.
A line is the basic unit of my making. It is the line drawn by a pencil, the line made by walking, and the line that supports others so that a structure can stand.

To *Cut* is to make lines and lengths. It is a process of producing elements and accumulating materials with which to build. To *Cut* is to make decisions about length and amount and scale. It is an action that marks endpoints and perimeters. To *Cut* is to begin.

**Edges and Boundaries**

On a walk alone, along a road or someplace on the edge of familiar, is an opportunity to be lost, even while knowing how to get back to the beginning.

The house where I grew up sits in an area between countryside and suburbs. It butts up against state park land, which allowed us as kids (and still, as adults) to access wide-open fields and quiet woods just by walking up the hill behind the house, or a short distance to the end of our dead-end street, along a narrow path through a grove of apple trees (long since ripped out and replaced with houses), and up a rocky hill onto a sort of plateau. This is where your view opens up onto former farmland, what we nicknamed the Serengeti, where wide trails cut through tall grasses, wandering for miles, passing by look-outs across other neighborhoods, eventually entering and leaving the woods.

“What a dynamic, handsome object is a path!” (Bachelard, 11). What are paths but edges, boundaries, limits, peripheries, and tolerances. They are made by drawing, building, walking—any of these actions that carve out space through a process of generating and extending. The dynamic, handsome path has an unknown course. Even if its trajectory is well known, as in the case of a road or a trail on the Serengeti, the path contains any number of surprises for someone who is ready to notice them.
Simon Starling, in a 2006 interview with artist Ross Birrell in *Art & Research*, identified the importance of recognizing the things (actions, objects, occurrences) however small or seemingly mundane which nevertheless catch one’s attention. This is a type of learned research that requires paying attention to what would otherwise be a passing blip on the radar screen. “You create the conditions that allow for a somewhat unexpected and uncontrolled chain reaction to occur… these kind of coincidences, these sort of chance findings… it’s about identifying them when they happen, and sometimes that happens immediately and sometimes it happens much later on” (Starling). How do you create the conditions for luck? One way is to set out on a walk with no destination. And the conditions here are really mental conditions—wandering only sets them up, having no agenda but simply making room to look and notice.

Receiving luck—acknowledging what catches your attention—takes listening and trust. Later in the interview, Birrell says, “I like the idea of a ‘leap’ into research…. not knowing where it’s going to go but trusting that the journey itself will be worth it.” Starling replies, “Yeah. Like carrying around with you a rucksack of experience and knowledge, also a nose for things that you develop over the years. I think it’s as much that as research… you can smell it, kinda thing.” They continue:

Birrell: “It also doesn’t really seem to need to make any sense.”

Starling: “But you have to hold onto that, I think, that lack of sense.” If it made sense, I don’t think it would jump out at you as being of interest. I think that what an artist notices are the things that make sense on an intuitive level, but that raise a question. They’re understood on a gut level, but not articulated or fully explainable. These are the
things an artist is after, because in this pursuit, the artist is an explorer, probing around some questions” (Birrell 2006).

What makes a thing jump out as a thing of interest is that it doesn’t make sense, but resonates with some interest the artist already has, even if only recognized on an intuitive level. “You can smell it,” as Starling says. The fact that it is not fully explainable is the exciting thing. It calls out for a closer look.

In an interview with Phaidon, Anish Kapoor perfectly identified the need for an artist to meander, metaphorically. He said, “if I went into the studio each day and said, ‘today I have to make a comment about so and so.’ Then I could do that more or less - whatever the issue. But it sort of excludes the possibility of real discovery. So I see it the other way around. An artist’s job is to go into the studio and say ‘I don’t know what to do, I’m lost.’ That it’s the impossibility, if you like, of any poetic substance. And then you go in there and in spite of that terrible feeling, which you have to live with, you do something and you think ah, maybe that can lead to its own content, not something already there” (Kapoor).

*Trace* was a performative piece that developed much in the way that Kapoor describes; it took shape very slowly and without a real plan by way of steadily making, walking and collecting. In the piece, I held a bundle of whittled sticks of paulownia wood, each tied with bright, plastic flagging tape that I had found discarded along roads and former construction sites. The sticks were tied end to end, and I took them to a suburban playing field where, one by one, I dropped them in the grass to draw a line.
Working along this line, I made a trail of petals and red tumeric powder to mark the path. At the end, I picked up the sticks again, leaving a flowery residue in the grass.

Figure 5 Dropping a line in the performance of Trace
It was not until performing the piece for the first time that I felt the accumulation of those acts of whittling, walking and gathering. The act of tracing the line with flowers felt memorial—to what, I’m not sure, except that the result was an ephemeral trace left by these slow acts of whittling sticks, taking walks along roadside edges, and collecting material.

**Tethers**

What is that recognizable ache in Janine Antoni’s *Moor*?
It’s the feeling of being tethered, of having a cord connecting back to wherever home is, or to some root origin, fastened at the gut. What is it made of? Antoni suggests the stuff of our loved ones, their everyday items: thing they wore, their Christmas lights. Bits of things gathered and saved, woven into a strong cord of lives lived.

Antoni seems to understand the feeling of tension and necessity that is woven into the idea of a tether, or also a periphery, a horizon, a limit. Certainly she takes her materials to their limits, in the way that she works them with exhaustive physical labor, a practice which she connects to empathy and intimacy (Fusaro, 2009). When Antoni
decided to learn how to tightrope walk for a new body of work, it was a lesson in balance, tolerance and risk. These lessons came in the straightforward sense, of balancing on the wire, but also in the broader sense of learning to balance in life, to tolerate imbalance and even falling. She said of this process that “as I was walking, I started to notice that it wasn’t that I was getting more balanced but that I was getting more comfortable with being out of balance.” To be comfortable with being out of balance—that is the working space of an artist. It is in a state of uncertainty, when success and failure are both plausible, that an artist has anything to gain.

In her video performance, *Touch* (2002), Antoni returns to her childhood home of the Bahamas and appear to walk along the horizon where sea meets sky, in what appears to be a miraculous act. As a kid, she could see this horizon on the sea from her bedroom window. She says:

“The horizon seemed to be the edge between our forgotten island and the world out there. I always thought of the horizon as a line that could not be pinpointed or in any way fixed; as you move toward it, it constantly recedes. I was drawn back to this impossible place. I wanted to walk along this line, which was essentially the line of my vision, the edge of my imagination” (Antoni, 2009).

She was drawn back to this “impossible place,” I think, because it was impossible—that is, compelling because it defies understanding and logic; it embodies a constant pursuit of the unreachable thing. What is the edge of the imagination? To think that there is an edge is a bit scary, like thinking that the world is flat. What is on the other side? If you go over the edge, will you fall off? Of course, it is because the world is
round, lacking in edges and endings, that the horizon can never be reached. We are all tethered to this ball in the sky, tethered to home, to people or places. Even Rosetta is tethered by gravity.

A tether always brings one back to the origin (whether that origin has moved is something else to consider). I am drawn by the idea of revisiting and returning to the same place, traveling the same path, only that the path is different every time. This is better said by T.S. Eliot in his poem “Little Gidding,” last of the *Four Quartets*: “We shall not cease from exploration/And the end of all our exploring/Will be to arrive where we started/And know the place for the first time.”

In some essential sense, the path is the same. But in the gritty sense, the sense of having moved through physically, passed time, it has got to be different. Returning allows a person to notice difference. Returning makes difference.
Figure 9 *ORBIT*, EV 4 of 30, 2014, Etching with chine collé, 22.25 x 15 in.
The *Ways of Going, Having Gone* exhibit was an exhibit entirely of drawings, in a way, including the prints and sculptures. Part of this is formal—the way that the sculptures are thin and linear makes them appear as drawings in space. But it is also about attitude—in the way that when I am faced with a piece of paper and some drawing tools, I understand that I can change the image at will. It is malleable. I approached the
etchings in this way, too, as drawings that have no prescribed outcome but will develop and have potential to change in any number of ways. This attitude leaves the door open to discovery and sees value in not planning.

“A drawing is a line that went for a walk.” Paul Klee said this, and then many other teachers, artists, students said it, because it’s simple and surprising, one of those things that makes a person see a little differently. Not unlike taking a walk that redraws a mental map.

On a walk, I can find comfort in solitude and at the same time a bounding feeling of joy at my good fortune to be on an open-ended path with no destination.

Maybe on a walk I will find a comet.
II. CONNECT

After Cut comes Connect. With a collection of lines and lengths, ideas and recognitions, an artist is ready to connect and build.

Figure 11 Connect, 2014, wood, 38 x 36 x 96 in. Photo by Stephanie Booth.
Connect calls to mind doorways, corners, joints, intersections and vertices. The point of change, the point of turning and rotation. The mechanism by which an entire construction is held together! The physicality of this connection lends a character to the whole—is it held together by the strength of material-through-material?

Connect is not just about how material physically is joined, but also about the non-dimensional mechanisms of connecting and joining, as in the lines of a drawing or the drawing of a mental map. This idea of connection lends itself to ideas of space, since
if I am connecting parts, I am constructing and building, too. I seek ways of constructing space non-traditionally and making spaces that contain contradiction.

Drawing students in the western tradition are taught to represent the illusion of three-dimensional space. To draw in perspective, to draw only three sides of a box at a time (thank god for Cubists). What other ways are there to represent a volume? In the print *Something to Nothing*, I wanted to unpack the space contained in a single block of wood, to use it as a print medium and “work the plate until there is no plate left” (memorable words from Barbara Takenaga, my first printmaking professor). It was also a challenge to myself, to prove that I could take on the labor involved in this task, to carve and print, carve and print a block of wood down to splintered bits.
I am drawn to the possibility of creating spaces that have a three-dimensional believability about them, but that could not actually physically exist. The spaces constructed in the geometric silkscreen prints (3-4, 3-4-5, and *Six-Ten*) play on this upending of perspectival rules because of the way their planes intersect and connect. They form a paradoxical architecture, at once undeniably flat (as they are silkscreened and two-dimensional) and exuding a three-dimensional confidence. They exist in contradiction.
Figure 14 3-4, 2013. Silkscreen. 11.25 x 14.25 in.

Figure 15 3-4-5, 2013. Silkscreen. 20 x 16 in.
The stencils are hand-cut, and therefore much more prone to human error than a stencil made digitally, as the slightest under- or over-cut angle would shatter the whole illusion. This is not to put down the use of computers in silkscreen printmaking; it is just that this case seemed to require that the stencils be hand-cut. To use a computer would have drained so much of the fun, the challenge, and the integrity out of the process. The piece would have been just a picture, rather than a construction.

These prints are also the most colorful, crisp images I have yet made. They required a clarity of color and edge in order to form convincing structures, even as they
had internal inconsistencies (facets disappearing or edges connecting illogically). Could I collapse a four-sided shape into a three-sided shape, for example? That is what 3-4 contains. The other two prints simply get more complex from there.

Hedron I contains a similar contradiction, being both three-dimensional and flat. Made of nine pieces of carved pine, a fit as close-to-perfect as possible was critical. Without that fit, the illusion would not stand. This is an example of connection working physically (as in the craft of cutting and joining) in order to produce a piece that works conceptually (as a believable but impossible structure.)

Figure 17 Hedron I, 2012, Wood and graphite, 21.5 x 25.5 x .75 in.
These examples are only to show how physical labor and craft support the intangible success, as well as the tangible success (i.e. the piece not falling apart), in constructing spaces, objects and images. Connection necessitates craft.

**Craftsmanship**

Critic David Levi Strauss emphasizes the *necessity* of craftsmanship in Martin Puryear’s work, writing that “[t]he labor that is compressed into [Puryear’s sculptures] allows them to work over time, and the time it takes to make them is the time it takes to *mean* it” (Strauss, 2). The craftsmanship in Puryear’s work is so solid and confident that there is no doubting the way it has been made. His craftsmanship, coming out of tradition, is so sure and specific that his objects operate in the realm of the handmade, physical thing as well as an abstract, mental, inexhaustible space. The construction is unquestionable, as if this object has always existed, and its construction evolved into this form as it exists today. Indeed, Strauss writes, “[t]hat they so often employ specialized tradesmen’s skills in their making allows them to work at the edges of utility—vessels that might be dwellings in the shapes of bodies—and in that fertile seam between representation and abstraction.” (Strauss, 2). It is the form and also the surety of the form’s construction that lets it live in between spaces of physical clarity and shape-shifting meaning.

Craft and labor go hand in hand. Craftsmanship is not only about skill, but also patience and willingness to do-over. It requires time and duration, as well as being situated already in a tradition of skills and methods passed down through generations.
Making paper for the *Ways of Going* drawings was an exercise in do-overs. It was only with instruction from Helen Frederick and assistance from colleagues Sarah Zuckerman and Sarah Irvin that the paper got made at all. We had the run of the print and paper studio that summer and supported each other, lending an extra hand whenever one was needed.

We ran into many dead ends in making this paper, though, and had to rethink the way we formed it, after several failed attempts. We finally landed on a solution of making large sheets from four smaller ones joined while the formed abaca pulp was still wet. The idea that the paper should have seams was not planned; the seams came out of necessity, and became accepted as part of the piece, in some way lending themselves metaphorically as well as functionally.

Learning skills of craft is like learning a language of how things can be constructed. With fluency, a maker can say anything that is possible to say. She can pick and choose from these skills and rules, and not be constrained by poor craftsmanship (which only screams poor craftsmanship). Knowing the skills allows the maker to choose the rules or break them; both choices having meaning and power.

For example, seeing furniture made by artists is like getting a glimpse into how their brains work, how they organize space and how their thought process play out while they devise a solution to a question of function and aesthetics. In making furniture, versus making art, the decision-making is likely more directed and rational. Making a functional piece presents an exciting constraint; it asks for the simplest solution and has a clear goal;
a good solution will seem, deceptively, like a given, as if the piece had to be built the way it was built as a matter of course.

Josef Albers’ furniture has a striking resemblance to his art. It’s not that he substituted his art for his furniture, it’s that he found functional solutions in his furniture that must have come directly out of his understanding of symmetry, spatial organization, interest in structures and shapes that can exist in compact form or unfold as larger shapes, relationship of edges to other edges. It is fascinating that he designed a set of stacked tables based on the square. His stacked tables are a solution about space—perhaps ideal for someone with a small apartment!—as well as a solution about ideas of expansion and contraction.

Figure 18 Josef Albers, Stacking Tables, 1926. Bethany, The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation.
**Ladder to a Door**

The drawing installation _Ladder to a Door_, first developed at the Art Lab of the Workhouse Arts Center in Lorton, VA, was so much about connections and structure. Many of the solutions to the physical structure were made out of necessity—for example, the folded screen was too heavy to hold itself up and wanted to flop over rather than stand upright. My colleague Ben Ashworth helped me install and came up with this brilliantly simple solution: a set of black, plastic spring clamps sitting in a milk crate back at Mason’s sculpture studio. The clamps attached to the screen and suspended from the wall. This was a functional solution primarily, but was also a solution with aesthetic and metaphorical significance. Their bright orange feet were a visual punch at each point of connection.

*Figure 19 Ladder to a Door, 2013, Wood, tar paper, spring clamps, graphite, string, hardware, 108 x 192 x 37 in. Exhibited at the Workhouse Arts Center, Lorton, VA.*
Points of connection are abundant and apparent in this piece. The clamps, of course, but also the simplicity and clarity in the connection of 2x3 to 2x3 with screws; the accordion folding of two 16’ lengths of tar paper; the doors to the structure, the structure to the wall. All of these connections were left apparent because—how could they be any other way? Their function and presence is essential to the piece.

The drawings made on the wall behind the contraption—drawings of my home in the first installation, and drawings of my husband’s grandmother’s apartment in the second installation—are also made of lines and edges, connected and constructed as
simply as possible. Walls fold out into other rooms, throwing rules of perspective out the window. Opening a door revealed blank wall space, perhaps with one or a few hanging endpoints reaching out from an adjacent drawing hidden just out of sight. These endpoints, truncated lines from some other space, became the connection points for lines in the subsequent drawing. A network of small drawings formed, understood as a whole, though not ever to be seen in full. After all, when a person thinks of a place, she imagines only parts of it at a time, mentally traversing its rooms, one illuminating the way to the next.

Though the entire drawing could not be seen at once, a person moving the contraption and opening different doors could eventually piece together a mental map of the entire drawing. Someone could see only a fragment at a time and still believe in and have a sense of the whole. Bits of insight into the interior became another point of connection to a place otherwise distant.
My own beginning study of furniture-making has found its way into the Cut, Connect and Climb sculptures. It was important that the linear elements in these pieces be joined in as simple and quiet way as possible—a physical joining that could be so simple as to cross over into the intangible, the same way that the each of those structures was both physical, made by hand, and also a mental drawing of sorts, something born out of the ether. They are joined by simple lap joints.
Whittling the lengths of walnut was important, too, rather than leaving the machine-cut edges. It was important that the surface be mine, that I could work the surface so much that it really was of me. This sort of labor over the surface gives me a deeper knowledge of the material, an understanding of its tolerances and behaviors. I whittled until the walnut sticks were thin and bendy. I also whittled straight through a number of sticks. But then I learned, based on feel and the resistance of the blade against the grain of the wood, when to proceed with caution and when I could go busting through, sending wood shavings off in all directions.

My whittling tool was a knife made by my colleague Nathan Loda. Nathan and others, such as fellow colleague Jay Hendrick and Graduate Program Assistant Nikki
Brugnoli-Whipkey, volunteered to help me whittle through the feet upon feet of walnut I needed to troubleshoot and build the three sculptures. Whittling lends itself to gathering and passing time, which enriches the making. It’s easy to talk and whittle at the same time, so inevitably as time passes and shapes emerge from wood, stories are shared, too. Making lengths, connecting parts—passing time working with other makers—begins to give meaning to space.
III. CLIMB

What results from making lengths, taking walks, collecting and noticing? Of traversing edges and wandering a place familiar and unknown? It is passage; work and play. The residue and materiality of these repeated actions, as well as an awareness of the passing arc. This is *Climb.*

Figure 23 *Climb*, 2014, Wood, 84 x 72 x 108 in.
Inexhaustible Forms

Certain places and forms are familiar even as they go unnamed. They are recognized on an intuitive level, not able to be pinpointed as any one thing. These are inexhaustible forms.

In my discussions with my thesis committee, professors Helen Frederick, Lynne Constantine and Tom Ashcraft, this term—“inexhaustible forms”—came up. Right away, I recognized it. It directly names those spaces I am drawn to explore through drawing and building.
An inexhaustible form is endlessly giving. It is specific and familiar. It can be read in any number of ways, but is not vague. Its meaning is called forth from some deep knowing and recognition of one’s origins.

There is an intuitive knowing when a form is right, when it speaks to something deeply internal, whether or not it seems rational (and it probably won’t). Martin Puryear’s forms, for example. Or Joni Mitchell re-tuning her guitar. Other people referred to her “weird chords,” she recalls (Lacy, 23:15). But what, she asked herself, is so weird about these chords if they are of her, if they emote her struggle and spirit? Mitchell innovated and broke rules in order to find that expression that was specific to her. Nothing that existed in the rules at that time had the language to speak what was in her, and she knew that—if not explicitly, she knew she had to root around for that particular expression.

This is why there is power for me in breaking the rules of, say, perspectival drawing. The rules of perspective just don’t contain a complete vocabulary for the way I want to talk about space, so I need to make my own.

“The strongest work for me embodies contradiction, which allows for emotional tension and the ability to contain opposing ideas.” (Puryear, Davies and Posner, 708).
Figure 25 Martin Puryear, *Untitled VI (State 2)*, 2012, Color softground etching with drypoint and spitbite aquatint, 32 x 32 in. (image), 43 x 41 in (paper). Source: Paulson Bott Press.
What else does an artist do? This searching and knowing without having seen or
articulated—an artist must continue to find her own, honest language, to keep mining and
to be tugged along by the “it’s-on-the-tip-of-my-tongue”-ness. What is that thing that I already know, I know I know it, its shape and feel, but that I cannot name?

“Great images have both a history and a pre-history; they are always a blend of memory and legend, with the result that we never experience an image directly” (Bachelard, 33).

This is why revisiting the same path holds so much potential for notice. This is why Morandi’s hundreds of still lifes never feel redundant. My practice is led by my hands finding the mysterious thing I already know in my gut. This is why there can be endless newness in the things and places I know best.

**Play**

Play is a form of passage. Play comes from a wide open attitude that can recognize what would otherwise go unnoticed (those things one might find on a walk). Being playful is about having all antennae out, working and observing with no prescriptions about what should be.

I admire sculptor Jessica Stockholder’s playfulness in her working process. Her work, of course, is colorful and bright, but this is not the real reason it is playful. It is playful because she remains open in her process. She allows her work to develop by intuition. She says, “it’s odd to be in the studio and not know what you’re gonna do. Being an artist and choosing to put yourself in a circumstance where you don’t know just how things are going to work out and what you’re gonna do is very exciting and rich and also difficult” (Art21, “Play,” 04:33). Difficult, yes, but this is the place an artist wants to
be. If I feel a little uncomfortable in the making process because I don’t know where the work will end up, then I know I’m in a good working place.

More on play from Jessica Stockholder: “I think what kids do that’s play is a kind of learning, a kind of thinking. It’s a kind of learning and thinking that doesn’t have a predetermined end.” (Art21, “Play,” 12:54). Play does not need to make sense, or to result in any product. Play is a form of risk-taking, a way of trusting oneself to try something new when it could very well fail. Play is generative. It suddenly throws into being something completely unexpected—maybe something both unexpected and exciting. Play is lateral and rhizomatic. It branches outward, spawning more of itself. And it does not prescribe a hierarchy of ideas or methods, but suggests solutions and questions that are equally balanced at first. Play operates within uncertainty. Play leads to many nothings, but sometimes the beginning of something altogether new. Play discards expectations. Play does not mind failure.

When recognition enters into play, there is the artist’s practice. The way Tony Feher describes his “epiphany of the marble” reveals the character of his process, arriving from a combination of play and recognition of the discoveries, happenstances, and surprises of play that catch his attention.

He says in a 2013 interview, “Well, one day I happened to notice some marbles in the window of Dinosaur Hill, this little store in the East Village. Somehow the light was reflecting, refracting off of them in just the right way and I realized they were the embodiment of what I was looking for. I knew there was something there; color, form, light, shiny, glossy. So I bought a bunch of marbles and took them home. I had some jars
hanging around—I don’t throw stuff out, I’m a bit of a bum—and I started to layer these marbles in the jars, and as soon as I screwed the lid on I knew that this was sculpture that was my art. I realized that ‘three dimensions’ was where I existed more comfortably—as opposed to the paintings I had been struggling with. That’s the moment when I understood that I have to make art to please myself. After a few transitional moments like that, I let everything else go; I stopped trying to make art and just did what pleased me, what excited me, what took me to some place of consideration where I hadn’t been before” (Feher). He trusts his instincts, holding honest to his own desires, not his expectations (or anyone else’s).

My work may not appear playful, but I see it that way, as having been made in an attitude of open-endedness, with undetermined outcome. I felt at times, in making my drawings, that I was out on a limb, or really, truly still in the dark, searching for my way around and inside these drawings. I felt, as one friend compared it, like I was walking in the dark with only a headlamp to light my way. Only the space immediately in front of me was lit.

For instance, I did not foresee that the sculpture Climb would lean in the way that it does, riding precariously close to collapse. I imagined and sketched a piece that would stand straight up, even knowing that the lengths of walnut were so thin and flexible. With the help of a few colleagues, I was installing the piece for a trial run. One person on either end of the piece, we gently let the sculpture settle. But there was this terrifying and exciting moment when we realized that the piece would not stop settling. It kept leaning more and more. It was an awesome realization: this piece was not under my control. I
literally had to let it go, but also let go of what I had, up until that point, expected it to be. I had to let it be a thing that responds to gravity like any of us. And I learned that I could trust the strength of the material. It was a better piece for this willingness to let go.

Play was a major part of the process of making the etchings, too, especially in ORBIT and Passing. I approached both images as drawings, that is to say, with the knowledge and willingness to change the image at any time, and to leave the end result undetermined. Until I got there, I followed the lead of an “imperfection” in my materials (i.e. chunky hardground) when I decided to etch those little bits of dried up asphaltum.
that someone else might have discarded in favor of traditionally “good” hardground. What emerged on the plate was like a stellar field. Then, the thought of a celestial object of sorts, an ellipse, drawn and poorly transferred, which led me, in the case of ORBIT, to this reiterated, broken ellipse. And the orbit, in a happy surprise, became specific and undetermined—dancing between multiple associations. It became an inexhaustible form, variable in its edition but identical in essence. I value the subtle differences in color (and form, in Passing) that exist between individual prints in each edition of ORBIT and Passing. Each print is both the same as and different from the others, like the incremental changing character of a place over time.
Figure 28 *Passing*, EV 1 of 30, 2014, Etching with chine collé, 22.25 x 15 in.
Matter

These open-ended forms, as well as play and poetry, are the stuff of practice, energy and imagination. They are intangible. An inexhaustible form, even if made physical, is something that exists in the realm of ideas or belief. Play, too, is intangible at its core, as it is a practice and an attitude before it is acted out and put into the physical
world. Poetry also has its physical form, but as much as it is related to the visual arts, exists on a plane of ideas and imagination.

On the other hand are matter and the accumulation of physical material as a result of repeated work. Such an accumulation of labor and materials makes density, and that density is related to intimacy. Two etchings depicting interior spaces, *Around back* and *Mass*, were created from a build up of density and accumulation of work.

Figure 30 *Around back*, 2014. Etching. 14.75 x 20.25 in. Photo by Raphael Warshaw.
In Nancy Rubins’ drawings, the density of graphite on paper brings an awareness of materiality to the forefront. They feel as dense as lead. Is it too much to think that the density of her materials and the intensity of her working somehow touches something about our origins, our own materiality? I can’t help but feel that the physicality of her work spans some unfathomable distance, from here to our beginnings. A distance built one particle at a time.
Figure 32 Nancy Rubins, detail, Drawings & Hot Water Heaters, 1991. Hot water heaters, wire cable, and graphite pencil on paper. Approx. 9 x 14 x 12 ft. Miami, Martin Z. Margulies.
“A physical experiment begins on a single sheet and constantly expands: the body produces the drawing, the drawings fill the studio, the studio is part of Topanga Canyon, the canyon is part of California and so on. The smallest particle must be understood as a defining element of the universe just as, inversely, infinity must be viewed as a concrete phenomenon that begins at home. Rubins says that, when drawing, she feels she is adding to the accumulation of matter. The energy expended in blackening hundreds of sheets of paper adds to the huge quantity of matter in the universe” (Céline, 175).

The generative activity of depositing matter (graphite) on matter (paper) is somehow like the generation of fire from striking two stones together, or the generation of a living thing from some primordial sludge. And in the description of Rubins’ work, echoes of Gaston Bachelard: “A house that is dynamic,” he wrote, “allows a poet to inhabit the universe. Or, to put it differently, the universe comes to inhabit his house” (Bachelard, 50).

**Awareness & Perception of Space**

“As soon as you take a three-dimensional world in which there is movement and put it on a two-dimensional surface, you move into the world of metaphor, inevitably. Perspective is an attempt to standardize the metaphor of the depiction of space… I don’t want solutions. That would not interesting to me. The process is itself is an unsolved problem and always will be.” - Rackstraw Downes, in an interview with Art 21. (11:09)

Each drawing in the *Ways of Going* exhibit presented its own challenge. No one drawing felt comfortable, familiar, or like any of the others. Each drawing was its own search in which I had to feel my way around how it wanted to be made. In the large
drawings of interiors from my first home, I realized that any revisiting of that place challenged what I thought I knew of it. I began to understand the possibility of understanding every inch of that house while at the same time harboring any number of factual inconsistencies about it. It’s possible to know it fully and completely and at the same time be wrong about how it physically exists. There is contradiction here in what a space really is and how it lives. It has a physical, external existence and a mental, internal existence. Each changes over time and each shapes the other. Both are right in their own way but exist in tension with one another.

Where the shape of this space in my mind was created from years of physically living in it and passing through it, the act of drawing this mental space shaped my subsequent experience of being in the space physically. Returning to the house months later, after making the drawings, my awareness of its rooms had changed. The act of drawing and mentally occupying the space changed my physical experience of it later.

To be aware of the surrounding space, and the internal and external space creates a more complete understanding of it, in a way. The space constantly changes because of this simultaneous existence in matter and mind. In this sense, it is living and breathing.

Visiting, observing, drawing in the dark, alone—“among the shadows at home”—removed abstracted the space for me, since I had never spent time observing it this way, all empty and dark. I had a strange feeling of experiencing the space as a stranger or at least from a great distance. This feeling of remove allowed me to approach the drawings with an attitude of searching and exploring. Was this also what Merwin felt?

**Among the shadows at home**
by W.S. Merwin

Life after life at nightfall
in houses I have loved
I see them now here at home
where I walk in shadow
through open doorways
from room to room
leaving the lights off
as I always loved to do
knowing beyond belief
echoes of no sound
from other times other ages
how did I ever find
my way to this place now
these shadows
one after the other
through all the loud flashing days
how could I have known
the ancient love of these shadows
with the lights on
Nighttime invites reflection, quiet. It invites hunkering down, maybe feverish work for night owls. Nighttime is a time of arriving. The darkness of night obscures detail. Only clues of what’s there are illuminated, perhaps by a streetlight, a flashlight, a light streaming from the window of a house. Nighttime is quiet but not stationary.

Figure 33 Night Shapes, 2014. Mezzotint and drypoint etching. 13.5 x 11 in.
**Poetry and Matter**

Bachelard, I think, is the great connector between poetry and matter. He quotes the French writer Pierre-Jean Jouve, who wrote in *En miroir* that “poetry is a soul inaugurating a form.”

Bachelard adds, “even if the ‘form’ was already well-known… the soul comes and inaugurates the form, dwells in it, takes pleasure in it” (Bachelard, xxii). A house is just a house until it is lived in.

The Ways of Going drawings depict a space that appears dense, made of an accumulation of matter and particulates, the residue of repeated passage. These drawings came about as a gradual formation—the physical depositing of graphite—much like the gradual formation of the space as an accumulation of experience and passage over a period of time. The space takes shape in shades. Rubbing a chunk of graphite along an area that will form a hallway, a door, the corner of a room, deposits that layer of material that I only imagine a person deposits as they move through a space. The lines of red, white, or black conté describe what is there but cannot be seen. “Thus we cover the universe with the drawings we have lived” (Bachelard, 12).
I imagine that experiencing a space and physically moving through it acts in a similar way on the mind, gradually shaping and forming an understanding of the space mentally. One’s understanding of a space is an amalgamation of physically being in the space at that moment and the mental understanding of it made the former experiences that have pressed against the mind to create a shape.

The physical materiality, the sheer density of material and labor that went into the *Ways of Going* drawings is really about the accumulation of imagining that forms an image of the interior. Matter gives physicality to an intangible thing, the intangible thing being an inexhaustible form of a very real and concrete, measured space. Matter and the
intangible—the tension between them as opposites makes each needed by the other, involved in an exchange such that their boundaries become less distinct.

If Bachelard connects poetry and matter in words, the post-impressionist artist Georges Seurat does so in images. Like my own, Seurat’s drawing technique in which he rubbed black conté on laid paper is also an accretion of material that creates a form. As material as his drawings are, they also speak to something immaterial, a simultaneous presence and absence. An appearing and disappearing. This is best described by MoMA senior curator Jodi Hauptman:

“It is clear that the striking characteristics of Seurat’s drawings—the dramatic play of light and dark, subjects that simultaneously coalesce and dissipate, the tension between a gridded scrim and a picture—emerge from the relationship, the resistance, between paper and conté. While we derive enormous visual pleasure from the material presence of these drawings, how we read their subject matter and meaning depends entirely on absence… These drawings are suffused with quiet” (Hauptman, 13).
Figure 35 Georges Seurat, *Woman Reading*, c. 1882, 11.8 x 9 in. Paris, Private collection.
What keeps an artist going, I think, is this pursuit of certain questions and uncertainties. I feel that I am trying to reach that impossible horizon, trying to grasp the thing that I know is there but is not quite named. Martin Puryear says of his work that, “[t]he strongest work for me embodies contradiction, which allows for emotional tension and the ability to contain opposing ideas.” (Davies and Posner, 23). With my knowledge of what it is to cut, connect and climb, I feel equipped now to pursue these complexities and contradictions. These tools will sustain me in uncertainty on this dynamic, handsome path.
WORKS CITED


OTHER REFERENCES


ANN SMITH

BIOGRAPHY

Anne Smith (b. 1985 in Syracuse, NY) is an artist based in greater Washington, DC. Her practice spans disciplines of drawing, printmaking and sculpture. She is a 2015 graduate of George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, and in 2007 earned a BA in Studio Art from Williams College, Williamstown, MA. She has also studied woodworking at the Penland School of Crafts in 2013 and 2014.

In addition to her studio work, Smith has curated two exhibits at Mason’s Fenwick Gallery, Artists’ Maps and Verbal/Visual: The Texts and Influences Behind Mason’s MFA Artists. Smith has also designed and edited two art catalogs: Jacob Lawrence: The Toussaint L’Ouverture Series at the SEED School and Vertical Views: Silkscreen Monoprint Collage by Lou Stovall.
CURRICULUM VITAE

**Education**

2015  MFA Art and Visual Technology  
George Mason University  Fairfax, VA

2007  BA Studio Art, *cum laude* with departmental honors  
Williams College  Williamstown, MA

2013-4  Two-week intensive workshop in wood  
Penland School of Crafts  Penland, NC

**Selected Exhibitions**

2015  *EMULSION*, juried show, Gallery O on H, Washington, DC (juror, Adah Rose Bitterbaum of Adah Rose Gallery, Kensington, MD)

2015  *3rd Annual MFA Exhibition*, group show, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA (curator, Adah Rose Bitterbaum of Adah Rose Gallery, Kensington, MD)

2014  *Ways of Going, Having Gone*, MFA thesis show, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA

2014  *Trace*, solo show, Workhouse Arts Center, Lorton, VA

2014  *In 24 hours, everywhere the dawn rises again*, group show, Fenwick Gallery, Fairfax, VA

2014  *2nd Annual MFA Exhibition*, group show, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA (curator, Jayme McLellan of Civilian Art Projects, Washington, DC)

2014  Short film fest, group show, Brookland Artspace, Washington, DC

2014  *Artifex: GMU Graduate Student Exhibit*, group show, Capital One Corporate Art Program, Richmond, Virginia

2014  *Exchanged III*, group show, Brentwood Arts Exchange, Mount Ranier, MD

2013  *44th Annual Treasury of Art Show*, juried show, Vienna Art Society, Vienna, VA (juror, Jack Rasmussen, director and curator, American University Museum, Washington, DC)

2013  *Past Continuous*, group show, The Gallery at NOVA Woodbridge, Woodbridge, VA

2013  Drawing installation at the Art Lab, solo show, Workhouse Arts Center, Lorton, VA
2013 *Inner Librare*, group show, Workhouse Arts Center, Lorton, VA
2013 *1st Annual MFA Exhibition*, group show, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA
2012-3 *Parallel Lives*, group show, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA
2012 *Exchanged II*, group show, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA

**Honors**
2014 Nominee, Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture award, International Sculpture Center
2014 Recipient of the Michael Pierschalla Scholarship for wood working, Penland School of Crafts
2013 Honorable Mention, 44th Annual Treasury of Art Show, Vienna Arts Society, Vienna, VA

"Anne Smith commands the silkscreen process to do things in Six-Ten that few people in the world can do, works of subtlety of color and crispness of design that crackle with intelligence." - Jack Rasmussen, director and curator, American University Museum, Washington, DC

2013 Selected to participate in a seminar with the Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence
2007 Departmental Honors for outstanding thesis work
2005 Peyser Prize in Painting

**Teaching Experience**
2015 Graduate Lecturer, George Mason University School of Art, Fairfax, VA
Drawing I (AVT 222), Spring 2015

2013-14 Teaching Assistant George Mason University School of Art, Fairfax, VA
Critical Theory (AVT 472), Fall 2013
Sculpture I (AVT 262), Spring 2014

2004-07 Teaching Assistant Williams College Art Department, Williamstown, MA
Drawing I (ARTS 100), Fall 2004–Spring 2007
Lithography (ARTS 264), Spring 2007

**Other Experience**
2014-15 Graduate Professional Assistant, Fenwick Gallery, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA
2010- Studio Assistant to Master Printmaker Lou Stovall, Workshop, Inc, Washington, DC
2008-10 Book Designer and Author Liaison, The Troy Book Makers, Troy, NY
2007-09 Freelance Illustrator, Washington, DC
2007-08 Researcher, Media Matters for America, Washington, DC
2006 Gallery Assistant Delavan Art Gallery, Syracuse, NY
Professional Development
2013-4  Preparing for Careers in the Academy - Center for Faculty and Teaching Excellence, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA

Service and Memberships
2012-2015  Artifex, organization of George Mason MFA candidates in visual art
            Treasurer, 2014-2015
2014-      College Art Association, member
2014-      Washington Sculptors Group, member
2013-      Washington Project for the Arts, member

Exhibits as Curator
2015  Verbal/Visual: The Texts and Influences Behind Mason’s MFA Artists,
      Fenwick Gallery, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA
2014  Artists’ Maps, Fenwick Gallery, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA

Lectures and Talks
Here and Now, Visual Voices Panel Discussion, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA

Collections
United States Department of State, Washington, DC