A ROOM WITH A VIEW:  
A THESIS INSTALLATION

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Masters of Fine Arts in the
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By
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ABSTRACT

The most encouraging discovery that I have made in the last seven years of my academic art career is that I have work. I don’t mean the many past projects taking up space in my studio, or that I have found a job. The work that I am referring to has not been made or found, it simply "is". It is my work.

Everyone does not have work. I assumed, early on in school, that I had work. That is a general assumption when a student is beginning art school. But I realized that the academic art I was making while learning certain processes, although very necessary, did not reflect my life. It was not until two years ago that I felt I had begun working in direct response to my seeing. I stress my seeing because it is different than the seeing involved in a drawing lesson where the objective is to correctly translate all the values perceived into a picture. My seeing is diffused with all of my opinions, inadequacies, abilities, and disabilities, prejudices, and desires.

These characteristics of me have become my subject and my process. It is not a process that originates in any one medium. I let the idea decide that. For my thesis exhibition, and much of the work surrounding it, I focused on the overlapping of my desire for an urban experience with the images of two different cities (Columbus and
New York City). I have taken pictures, created drawings, utilized physical space, and
written words, in an attempt to clarify this desire. I have overlooked the obvious and
pinpointed the oblique with the full intent of bringing into focus my identity. I guess that
it would be accurate to say that I am searching for the "mine" in "ours" if only to better
understand the idea of "me".
Dedicated to my family
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VITA

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Major Field: Department of Art
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Looking Back

I drove to New York City from Columbus in the early summer of 1999. I had been there several times before. On each occasion I reveled at its enormous size. I felt the excitement of being at once embraced and trapped by the density of people and architecture. This trip was no different, except that I had just recently completed my first year of graduate school and I was busy thinking about my work and different ways to reinvest into it more of my personal interests. I thought in particular, about drawing. Having been a competent draftsman in the past, I found it easy to get involved in the act of drawing. I wondered if it was at all possible to express relevant ideas with this age-old process. It hadn't occurred to me how that relevance could take shape until I was leaving Manhattan. I was on I-78 westbound in New Jersey just getting started on my trip back home. In my rearview mirror I saw a large portion of the Manhattan skyline. It fit tightly inside the rectangular shape. The buildings were small yet remarkably defined. I had to rubberneck on either side in order to see the rest. I couldn't believe the length of it.

The drive was ten hours and during that time I thought off and on about the skyline view. I thought painting or photographing it might be important. The painting idea seemed troublesome because I wasn't after brush strokes, and photo-realism is tough. On the other hand, a photograph would be too easy. It would hardly have a trace
of my involvement. In addition, photographs tend to include everything around the subject and I wasn’t concerned with the surrounding sky or river; nor did I want the buildings in a particular sunlight or at a vertiginous viewpoint. I wanted them alone and at the same front-on view as they appeared in my car mirror. It occurred to me that I should draw the skyline. Graphite seemed the obvious “bare-bones” medium and instead of paper, due to its fragility, I would work directly on the wall. I found the appropriate photograph and began to replicate the skyline one-inch at a time. The result was a fifty-seven inch rendering of Manhattan on my studio wall.

I spent a lot of time simply looking at it. I walked back and forth stopping at different vantagepoints. It felt as if I had paused that moment in time in my car and gotten out to get a better look. I experienced a similar feeling creating and observing the scene as I had while assembling model cars as a child. In a sense, they are both a chance to experience the otherwise impossible. By decreasing the cities’ (car’s) scale I had enlarged myself and allowed for the illusion of power.

Before I took this trip I had begun a photo journal of downtown Columbus. I walked through the downtown area taking pictures at specific angles that filled the majority of the frame with buildings. I wanted the maximum amount of buildings arranged in the picture frame with a minimum sky area. This was not easy. I wouldn’t accept a simple cropping of the sky area. The sky needed to feel as if it were being forced out of the picture frame. I called this The Enlargement Project. The idea was to re-create the same exciting, yet claustrophobic, feeling I get in Manhattan. My adversary was the overwhelming amount of sky in the Columbus skyline. The project inevitably
suffered from its form. The fact that I was not a properly trained photographer made for typically poor images. I had, however, planned to re-visit the idea. The fifty-seven inch, Manhattan skyline on my studio wall presented itself as an excellent opportunity. In some way I had already started a comparison between the two cities scales in *The Enlargement Project*. I decided that it would be less interesting to compare their actual scales and to instead focus on Columbus' “desired” scale. Similar to the handicap of cropping the image in *The Enlargement Project*, I chose to allow Columbus the same fifty-seven inches given to Manhattan. I drew Columbus on mylar laid directly on top of the Manhattan drawing. Naturally, the Columbus skyline had to be enlarged to fit within the fifty-seven inch base line. I spent a lot of time again looking at the drawing. Manhattan resembled a thick, dark, line under the mylar while Columbus looked open and sparse. Even though the obvious defiance of actual scale, both cities could not escape their identity. Manhattan refused to appear small and Columbus could not become large. This new combined image most accurately represented my feelings towards these two cities. It presented my prejudices, desires, and inadequacies, as a collection of facts. The picture gave logic to an illogical situation. I had made, in fact, a model from my idea, but in doing so it transformed into something much more momentous.
A Room With A View

There is a wall of windows, approximately 24 feet long, that face out onto the
downtown Columbus skyline. Having spent much time assessing Columbus during *The
Enlargement Project* I have found this view to be very unique. The view closely stacks
seemingly residential brick buildings with larger glass and metal business structures.
This is deceiving because actually they are all business structures. When observing this
scene, from the fourth floor of the Art Loft, you can be led to believe that you are in the
middle of an urban neighborhood. Off in the distance, the silver "high rises" appear as
something other. It is a cozy feeling, temporarily, if you pretend that just below you in
the streets are different cultures of people living and working in this neighborhood. You
might imagine that it possesses signature restaurants and unique shops or even that its
tenants, although ethnically diverse, have formed an individual neighborhood identity
(maybe something you could make a nickname out of like "East Enders"). None of this
is really true. The truth is that the old apartment buildings are offices and at around five
every evening (Monday through Friday) the employees go to the parking garage, get into
their cars and head out to their own illusions of "coziness" in the suburbs.

There is no inner-city neighborhood with an identity and there is no overall city-
identity in Columbus. But the fact still remains that there is this view which allows us to
suspend our previous knowledge of this and pretend that it could be possible. That aperture of opportunity is where I began to cultivate my interests.

Again, I drove to New York City in early April. This time it was to take photographs. I had honestly tried to avoid the trip (due to a lack of funds) by looking at source material for the pictures that I wanted. But, after thumbing through stacks of magazines and photo books on NYC, I decided that the only way I would be satisfied was to do it myself. What I was looking for were photographs all taken from a fixed point from inside the city. I needed photos that captured the views North, South, East, and West, from that fixed point. It was obvious that I would need to be above street level in order to get a skyline shot. I was graciously allowed to go to the roof of a building on 34th street between 9th and 10th avenues. I took two rolls of film being sure to get more than I needed since I would be working back in Columbus. The work I was planning involved the making of drawings, from these photographs, in graphite (full value) on the walls in the Art Loft. They would mimic the size of the windows there that look out onto downtown Columbus. I would omit the north view photographs because the wall of windows showing Columbus faces north and it would therefore act as the surrogate north view. Vice versa would be the west, south, and east, views of Manhattan acting as surrogates for Columbus. It was absolutely necessary that the drawings go directly onto the wall in order to divert any attention given to their object-ness. My motto was, “The drawings are to behold, not to be held!” I wanted the drawings to work peripherally, meaning that the focus of the installation was the space itself. I realized that complete anonymity of the drawings in the space was impossible because, after all, they were
drawings existing on the obvious "viewing" walls in an otherwise empty gallery space. Although, I was counting on the fact that the space would be crowded (as art openings often get) with people clustering and conversing in small groups and the interest of graphite on a wall would fade. They would soon avoid the walls and the drawings would then become perfect backdrops for their socializing in the space.

The night of the opening would be the extent of the drawing's existence. The following day I would paint over them returning the walls to their original blankness. I've been asked if doing this would be difficult seeing that I had just invested so much time and effort in their creation. It would not. The entire idea of my show is based on temporality. First I drove to New York City to borrow a temporary moment in time that could then be revisited in Columbus. The purpose of that revisiting was to temporarily suspend a belief that this specific location in downtown Columbus could harbor an active urban identity. And finally, in regards to the drawings as works of art, they too were created temporarily to exist in and for this specific space. They would lose all meaning for me if they were presented on a wall outside of the Artloft. Therefore I believe it is best that they start (as drawings) and end in the Artloft. I should mention that I take some comfort in the belief that they are still there, unable to be seen through the paint but emerging as a memory for those visitors who were present on the evening of May 20, 2000.
I –

Drawing,
Making,
to have
power over
my inadequacies
Need to make precise
Craftsmanship is my tool
for clearer
thoughts.

White American
Midwestern suburbia
suburban Brian
weakness unified
taught to want money
learned to want money
want money.
heard as a voice ?
thinker ?

MY –

ability as a draftsmen.
belief in beauty.
observation of both inner and outer
world.
I have a list in my head of situations to pay attention to. One such being that when I come into a new city, sometimes by air mostly by car or bus, I immediately begin assessing the skyline. I want a city to overwhelm me. I want the buildings to be stunning, gigantic, and unbelievable. I want the streets to be packed with people. I want it to be noisy. I want to go unnoticed. Most American cities do not fulfill these criteria.

...about St. Louis. I grew up there. I don’t live there now, haven’t for five years. But I still have this affinity to it. I follow the sports teams. The local news (If I can get it). I ask my parents and friends still living there about issues involving the city. I love that town! But I could never go back and live there. I have become an outsider. So much so that I don’t really see St. Louis. I see my version of St. Louis. I would rather imagine it as I want it to be instead of seeing it for what it is. I realized all this from living in Columbus. I see Columbus as a gigantic prop. But many people who have grown up here, and have a bond like the one I share with my hometown, may see Columbus as a vital urban center.

Excerpt from diary.