The Material Image

THESIS

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By

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Abstract

This paper investigates a nexus of ongoing research interests and how they influence the work I have made leading up to the 2014 Department of Art MFA Thesis Exhibition. Beginning with an understanding of studio process in the Introduction sets the reader up to link material decisions to a larger conversation involving philosophical concerns and perceptual phenomena. In addition to my own work, these concerns are discussed through the work of artist Vija Celmins and through concepts of the image and picture-object relationship. Optics, perspective, and the history of science are contextualized within the scope of my research on making and viewing works of art.
Dedication

This document is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Barbara Lewis, who believed in sharing her passion for great works of art with me at an early age in her hometown of New York City.
Acknowledgments

I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to my committee, Laura Lisbon, George Rush, and Michael Mercil for their invaluable guidance, honesty, and encouragement these past three years. I will miss our meetings and studio visits greatly. Special thanks to both Laura Lisbon and George Rush for our discussions regarding the practice of teaching and for our many “hours” in the studio which have composed the core of my graduate education and from which I have learned so much. Thanks also to Laura Lisbon for serving as my advisor, reading and discussing my drafts so thoughtfully, and for her keen eye on the layout our MFA Thesis Exhibition. I’m thankful to Ann Hamilton for our time spent in her studio and in mine, and for always encouraging me to “take the leap,” and to Jessica Mallios for teaching me how to swing, shift, tilt, and rise, with the large format camera.

I am forever grateful to my parents and my sister for their unending support and true understanding of the value of artistic work. Thanks to my mother, Rose Loving, for reminding me to bring the light into dark places.
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Fields of Study

Major Field: Art
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Introduction: Process

My impulses in the studio are driven by material encounters. I initiate ideas for new works by handling and manipulating materials. This happens naturally and without forethought every time I spend time in the studio. I feel my way around. Such explorations lead to understanding the tendencies and contradictions within material forms—how paper may be thin and strong or how toner can be dense and reflective. I might cut, fold, or bend paper, plastic, fabric, rubber as well as mark their surfaces with drawing media. Such action often inspires a counter action, so additive marks might lead to subtractive marks, etched or incised lines. A move towards building or constructing forms might then lead to deconstructing and disassembling. I want to know what breaks a material. How much tension or pull can it take and at what point the structure no longer contains or holds itself together. And further, if it can it be repaired or “healed” as I have done many times with cut paper. The line of cuts that I have made in Figure 1 follows the foundational structure—the ribbing of vaulted architecture—while also potentially undermining the overall integrity of the form by weakening the sheet of paper. Starting with a photocopy image of vaulted architecture, I cut around the vaults and let the pieces, still attached, hang and curl with gravity. The cut is a way to let light through, to expose something under or behind, and to give the flat space of printed paper a third dimension.
If there is illusionistic space in the image, the three-dimensional effect of the cut becomes a break in the illusion. When re-photographed and printed, the cut portions become embedded in the image as another layer of pictorial space.

Figure 2. Left: *Untitled Vault Study*, 2012, charcoal on laser toner enlargement print on pedestal. Right: *Untitled*, 2012 photocopy and cut paper collage.
The works in Figures 1 and 2 illustrate a primary concern throughout my practice: how the repeated shifting between two- and three-dimensional space alters the perception of both “image” and physical form. This concern has led to an investigation of the relationship between image and the constructed picture-object. I will contextualize this relationship further in Chapter 3.

The cyanotype in Figure 1 is from a series that started with photocopies as a material. After making cuts along the ribs of the vaults in the printed image, I coated the reverse side of the paper with emulsion and exposed it face down. The cut parts fell away from the light and remained white, while other areas were close to the light and darkened blue. I took photographs in the darkroom looking down at these prints while they were floating in water and developing. One of these images of the piece developing became the subject for *Untitled Vault Study* pictured in Figure 2. I first printed this image as an 11 x 17 black-and-white laser print-out and then as a 54 x 36 inch laser enlargement print—essentially a large photocopy. After a period of time spent with this large print hanging in my studio amongst many other pieces, I eventually worked into the surface of the paper with charcoal. I had come to recognize and love the way that carbon-black toner, where it is very dense, reflects light when viewed at a certain angle. From another angle it absorbs light and appears to be the blackest black. These observations compelled me to extend the material qualities of the blackness further with charcoal. I worked the very soft matte charcoal powder into the paper fibers in the areas where toner was light or non-existent—thereby suppressing the whites of the image. The finished piece is adhered to a
rectangular base two feet high. The image lies flat on the surface of the base and is positioned so that the viewer may walk around the piece on all sides looking down at the image. The decision to display the piece flat in the manner of a sculpture came from the desire to increase awareness of these surface textures under raking light and to place the viewer in the position of looking down rather than at eye level. Photographic space within this piece functions like a window inward/downward into the space opened by the cut. In this way, the depiction of space within the image-of-an-image might appear to be both more dimensional and more flat than if viewed on the wall.

Construction

Fitting or inlaying materials with different attributes and joining them at a seam is one way I bring attention to the important characteristics of materials. By showing material differences side by side I can force a relationship in which both are necessary to complete a picture plane.

Figure 3. *Untitled*, 2012. Photocopy and polypropylene plastic joined with archival mending tape.
This process of fitting or inlaying or abutting brings together two unlike materials. This conjoining can also be applied according to imagistic qualities rather than physical qualities. One example is *Refit Diptych* which is part of a series in which the materials remain largely consistent (photocopy and archival mending tape) but the source of the image shifts within the framework of the object and shadow.

![Refit Diptych, 2012. Photocopy and archival mending tape.](image)

In *Refit Diptych* the images appear seamless as one printed sheet of paper. The paper is thin copy paper. They are the typical size of a photocopied document. Upon closer inspection, one can see cuts have been made and thus discern that the central form has replaced what was originally depicted. With this knowledge, it follows that the cast shadow is an index of an object that is no longer pictured. What is pictured is difficult to identify. All parts of the image are tonally congruent. The figure sits as an object would
in the foreground of the picture—the edges of figure and ground meet evenly. As a shape however, the form does not perfectly match its own shadow. The “refitting” is achieved by first overlapping two layers and then cutting through both layers simultaneously. Separations that were made from the same cut will fit together smoothly. I do not know if this can be called a collage technique or an assemblage of paper shapes abutted without overlap. Collage by means of overlap reveals its top layer, but covers something underneath. It is important in these works that the refitting is apparent, at least upon close looking, and that all surfaces are equally revealed.

These details of construction are important because there is meaning in the structuring of materials. Whether a structure is perceived as strong or weak, fragile or firm, delicate or rigid, these attributes connect directly to a larger discourse on philosophical structures that influence my research. I look within systems of science and religion, especially in cases where the two overlap, to find instances of when these structures become unstable or fail as well as when they maintain or uphold in spectacular ways. I research attempts to reconcile notions of truth and certainty with a reality that ultimately resists any resolution. From early optical devices to theories of linear perspective, methods for understanding and representing what we see provide one avenue into this research, which I will discuss in Chapter 4.
Chapter 1: Shadows and the Photographic

With this continual shifting into the third dimension comes the potential for shadow, the darkened presence of the form in front. The use of shadows that occur in real space and images of shadows represented in illusionistic space can be seen in work completed in 2011 prior to my MFA program. At OSU, photographic documentation of this site-specific piece titled *Dazzle Camouflage* became a source for developing new work.

![Figure 5. Left to right: Dazzle Camouflage, 2011, fabric, netting, and needles on fabric-lined wall; Untitled (after Dazzle Camouflage) gum bichromate prints; Untitled, cyanotype globe, cyanotype on Kozo tissue-weight Japanese paper.](image)

I used images of a wall installation called *Dazzle Camouflage* to make cyanotypes and gum prints in which shadows from the original work reversed into the sources of light in the new image. A positive image became a negative one through this process. This
reversal is important for several reasons. It takes what is supposed to be a fixed image of documentation and transforms into something potentially unrecognizable. By flipping the dark and light, such features that would help us understand forms in space become disorienting. A new logic to interpreting space must be applied. Reversals between positive and negative images is a strategy I have used in later works produced with black-and-white photographic processes. These processes deal with light in a tactile way that painting and drawing do not. The touch of light makes a mark. This interests me because of the intangibility of how that mark comes to be. It is evidence of form.

The works in Figure 6 were made inside a large-format 4 x 5 inch camera exposing directly onto a sheet of photosensitive paper rather than film.

Figure 6. Three paper negatives. From left to right: Conjecture; Tract; Escalate, all 2013.
This method is relatively unpredictable since it is difficult to estimate for the proper exposure on photo paper. The image that I see on the ground glass of the camera as I focus under the hood appears upside down and left/right reversed. When the exposed paper is developed in the darkroom, I see what I’ve captured for the first time. In these works, I sought to create images where the shapes of shadows and light are spatially convincing in both positive and negative versions, resisting a fixed orientation. The work demands that the viewer overlook this reversal in order to read logical space within the image. A viewer will naturally attempt to locate a referent or find a way to “enter” pictorial space in the image despite this reversal of representation. I want to create conditions for the possibility of such a space even while questioning what it describes.

The “look” of photographic space is grounded in a truthful record of an occurrence in a way that traditional painting and drawing are not. The material qualities and directness of mark-making within practices of painting and drawing serve as crucial counterpoints to the photographic. These attributes are discussed by Rosalind Krauss in her 1977 essay “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America,” in which she identifies photography as an increasingly “operative model for abstraction” as exemplified by much of the art of the 1970s. Krauss outlines the indexes:

“As distinct from symbols, indexes establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents. They are the marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify. Into the category of the index, we would place the physical traces (like footprints),

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medical symptoms, or the actual referents of the shifters. Cast shadows could also serve as the indexical sign of objects…”

While the quintessential indexical medium is agreed to be photography for its inevitable representation of “after,” Krauss places the origin of this indexical impulse in Abstract Expressionist painting with its imprints and traces formed by deposits of paint. In a footnote she writes “it must be understood that there is a decisive break between earlier attitudes towards the index, and those at present, a break that has to do with the role played by the photographic, rather than the pictorial, as a model.” Perhaps one important factor in the shift of attitudes toward the indexical mark could be described as a social or conceptual one. Where previously the mark pointed to the hand of the maker—the individual, solitary, and typically white, male genius—in a postmodern attitude, the mark refers to a condition external to the artist—a state of “having-been-there,” a presence seen as past, or as Roland Barthes calls it, an “illogical conjunction of the here and the formerly.” These two models of the pictorial and photographic I would argue are both present in my work. First, let’s look at the photographic.

Krauss names an example of the photographic in a 1976 exhibition called Rooms at P.S.1 in Queens, New York in which artists created site-specific works in response to the derelict former public school-turned project space. The artists—Michelle Stuart, Gordon Matta-Clark, and Lucio Pozzi—are not photographers, but they use the building as the

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indexical sign that their work points to through the use of photographic techniques for
displacement such as cropping, reduction, and flattening. For Krauss, their work is an
example of the “kind of presence that abstract artists now seek to employ.”\(^7\) Matta-Clark
cut through floor boards of three consecutive floors of the building allowing viewers to
look down and through, seeing perhaps where they had been on the floor below while
also revealing an underlying structure that remains unseen elsewhere in the building.
Stuart created rubbings of sections of walls and hung them opposite and facing the site of
their making like a mirror. Pozzi created two-color paintings hung on the walls
throughout the building in which the split of color on the panel duplicated an actual split
of wall color in the building. In my own work I would propose that it is the process of
making, translating, and re-forming which replaces the building as the thing signified. In
my case the work is an indexical trace of itself in an earlier state of existence.

The artists Krauss named at P.S.1 all made use of succession to establish a kind of
(cinematic narrative sequence and “that narrative in turn becomes an explanatory
supplement to the works” as another kind of written text or caption.\(^8\) Matta-Clark uses a
sequence of floors, Stuart uses the facing position of her rubbings to reflect the original
site, and Pozzi’s panels are situated throughout the building where the wall color shifts.
Sucession and seriality are most useful tools for testing modes of representation in
multiple ways. In my own work the camera functions in part to document the process of
the work’s own making, not in an effort to record (though it does so by default), but as a

\(^7\) Krauss, “Notes on the Index,” Part 2, 60.
\(^8\) Krauss, 66-67.
self-reflexive way to generate new work, as a form of layering information through time and processes. I have often taken a photographic print and constructed a three dimensional shape from it—to then photograph it—and then collage from that photograph—and then flatten the three dimensional shape by running it through the printing press…and so on…all the while not knowing what the final (if any) outcome of the work may be. All are possibilities of representation that may be fruitful and I remain open to their potential significance as I work. This way of working creates distance from any origin or source and through these translations arrives at an object with an indecipherable history.

If we consider again the work *Untitled Vault Study* (Fig. 2) from 2012, we understand that one cannot look down into the image on the flat pedestal and be drawn into the space of it while also seeing the texture and sheen of the surface. When light reflects off of the surface, the viewer is repelled out of the space of the image abruptly and up to the surface—to the reality of the thing in the room. This sense of fractured visibility is also exemplified in Sherrie Levine’s series *Presidents* in which she takes commercial images from magazines or advertisements and cuts them in the silhouette of the famous presidents; Washington, Lincoln, and Kennedy. The magazine pictures she appropriates are all of women—models or mothers with children for example. While this work has many layers of meaning that can be interpreted through a number of lenses—identity, feminism, commerce and capitalism, appropriation and mass media culture—what is most fascinating to me is the problem of fractured visibility that Levine presents here.
The images are striking and graphic as the cut of the silhouette sits against a stark white ground. The viewer is immediately drawn into the scene of the woman which is abruptly excerpted by the cut of the president’s profile. It is impossible to see the woman and the president at the same time. One’s vision can shift back and forth between the two but they do not coexist together on the same plane. The woman exists in mimetic space like a window to a world—like a painting. The profile of the president exists as surface space, as texture, like an object in a room. It breaks the illusion and brings attention back to the constructed nature of the art object. This shifting of visibility between the illusion of photographic space and “surface space” has been an important strategy for me as well. While my work does not appropriate images like Levine’s, I have made material qualities
of the work evident and integral in an effort to strike balance between the two modes of seeing. In photographing photocopies, the next print becomes grainier. Pictorial space is interrupted by paper texture, grain, and digital aberrations. This breaking down of the image is pleasing to me because the graininess is a material quality that counters the smoothness of the photographic space. From a distance the illusion remains intact but upon closer inspection it dissolves into pure mark.

My use of photography as a way to generate images quickly that may be deconstructed, reassembled, and re-photographed, brings to mind Douglas Crimp’s essay, “The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism,” from 1980. Contrary to Walter Benjamin’s notion of an aura that may be associated with an original and authentic work of art, Crimp finds resonance in the work of artists who deal with reproduction, with copies of copies. He says “The extraordinary presence of their work is effected through absence, through its unbridgeable distance from the original, from even the possibility of an original.”

Crimp writes about a group of artists (of which Sherrie Levine is one) who “have addressed photography’s claims to originality, showing those claims for the fiction they are, showing photography to always be a representation, always-already-seen…In their work, the original cannot be located, is always deferred; even the self which might have generated an original is shown to be a copy.”

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Throughout my studio practice, the copy is used as a base from which I generate new original works. When I make copies or prints in multiple I consider how the same form can be manipulated differently. The multiple has very practical functions as well. It allows me room for testing among a stack of images without feeling too precious about each one. Further, it challenges me to either claim or question the notion of an “original.” In most cases I have no interest in producing finished multiples or editioned works—the copy is simply a useful place to start. However, despite each work having qualities of an original, the multiple translations through processes (sometimes circular) make the question of origin much less straightforward. When a copy or reproduction holds differing information, it eliminates the possibility of a finite representation. The marks of process whether it be ink, texture of paper, degradation of the image through multiple printings, cuts in the surface, breaks or demarcations between disparate materials, or any number of other methods I employ, are their own kind of indexical residue. These are the attributes of drawing. Such “drawing” actions build on each other ultimately producing a unique work that can’t be replicated. Herein lies my commitment to the concerns of drawing, surface, and the constructed picture-object.
Chapter 2: Close Observation

In the mid-1970s while spending time in the desert of northern New Mexico, the artist Vija Celmins (born 1938) collected a group of small stones that would become both the subject matter as well as the material for her piece *To Fix the Image in Memory*.

Figure 8. Vija Celmins, *To Fix the Image in Memory*, 1977-82, Stones and painted bronze, eleven pairs, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Celmins cast each of the eleven collected stones in bronze and through an intense method of close observation, painted the bronze casts in the likeness of their original. It took five years. ‘To Fix’ is part painting, part object, made of both representation and reality whereby fact and fiction are rendered interchangeable. As such, the making of this work and the meaning that can be drawn from it points to a number of issues that run parallel in my own work and practice. The question of origin, truth in representation, and the process of building an image over time are key aspects of *To Fix the Image in Memory*
that illuminate its importance as a conceptual work of art as well as a philosophical endeavor of looking and making.

The eleven pairs of stones are shown arranged as a loose grouping on a flat surface. Only when looking at a very close detail of a pair of stones can one tell that the two are not exactly identical. Beyond that, discerning the real from the representation is still more difficult.

Figure 9. Vija Celmins, *To Fix the Image in Memory*, Detail view.

The difference though, however subtle it may be, is a crucial fact of the work. This is not because it gives the viewer a chance to “identify the fake” but rather because it reveals an essential aspect of its making—the effort of looking and translating into the hand-made. This effort is at the heart of Celmins’ work, from her paintings and drawings of oceans, deserts, and galaxies, to her more recent trompe l’oeil slate tablets and desks which like the stones, intermingle (under the radar of the viewer) in a tableau with real found objects. In all of these works, the extended act of looking and making contributes greatly
to their content. Celmins talks about the stones as an act of re-describing or a record of concentrated looking: “Each part of the surface has been observed and noted with a brush.” Her decision to show the handmade alongside the original reflects a desire for the viewer to relive that observation and to see very closely for themselves that one stone was “seen and made and the other was found and quite natural.”

Throughout Celmins’ work she employs strategies that create distance between her mark and the source. Her use of photography, her material handling of paint or graphite, and her use of concentrated labor over time are a few examples. The amount of time Celmins took in making *To Fix* sets up expectations for greatness. To labor for that long on a work of art suggests a masterpiece of sorts, a magnum opus. One could easily imagine classical forms of art such as a large painting or sculpture taking five years to complete. However, *To Fix* is a modest size whether you consider it in terms of painting or sculpture. It is also simple in its direct subject matter—a group of found stones. Therefore a viewer is compelled to wonder initially *how* the stones came to look so identical and furthermore *why* the artist set out such a task for herself. She could have completed one or two pairs of stones instead of eleven. This wonder, this marveling at the mimetic skill, the endurance, and the (seemingly contradictory) modest result of the piece raises questions about the artist’s goals (her efforts to re-create being potentially futile) and our notions of an artist as a producer of unique, creative works. It is this line of inquiry that Celmins

follows and this becomes the indirect subject matter for *To Fix the Image in Memory*.

Celmins has said that one motive for the work was a desire to question art-making.\(^{12}\) By posing the question in this piece, her answer lies in making it over five years so very thoroughly. It is a resounding affirmation for the relevance of “little unnamable nuances” that compose each of her works where “the image and the making of the image evolve together.”\(^{13}\) The effort of artistic practice here becomes a metaphor for gaining knowledge, discovering truth and attempting to hold on to it. It is about the problems inherent in that endeavor. Memory itself erodes over time and despite our best attempts, it can never be an exact account. It can only be a subjective knowledge based on personally felt and lived experience. In this way, the act of observing and recording the information of the stones over time is an expression of the desire to retain memory by knowing something so thoroughly and marking it as so. Celmins has said of her process:

> What I do is build an image in paint. Maybe that gives you the timeless quality, because they are made over and over again. There’s a certain amount of skill in holding an image so that it seems correct and full. But they are also very restrained and flat so that you get a sense of time that is captured and held…it’s not idea art…I never thought you went to an art museum to say to yourself “what a great idea!” You go to a science museum for that or read a book. You look at art to have an experience with things that compress time.\(^{14}\)

Interestingly, Celmins refers to many of her works as images (rather than paintings or drawings for example), even in this case when the work is literally a set of objects. The title of the work is not *To Fix the Object in Memory*. This distinction alludes to the


“image” as being a pictorial, potentially photographic or illusory space rather than a flat, concrete, or tangible one. In her paintings and drawings of deserts, oceans, and night skies which begin with a photographic source, the image fills the entire picture plane. This causes a sense of limitlessness and a feeling that the particular frame of view is but one glimpse of a vast and unknowable area. This lack of edge or horizon line creates an ambiguity of scale and an inability for the viewer to locate themselves in the vantage point of the work. Her terrains are so intensely detailed but yet unable to be “entered” in the way that one might approach a representational landscape as a window to a world. There is a flatness to the space within the image despite Celmins having rendered it with a high degree of realism. As Dave Hickey describes it:

Celmins’ almost suboptical adjustment of the photographic image to the smooth plane of her work has the effect of freezing it, of denaturing its surface at a single level of articulation that emphasizes the blunt, single-point focus of its photographic provenance. Thus, even though the image seems to invite it, we do not feel free to move outward or upward or inward into those complex fields...Standing before Celmins’ drawings and paintings of the heavens, for instance, we find ourselves imaginatively immobilized by the “frozen” image and denied that cosmic expansion cited so often by Pascal as one of the proofs of the existence of God...”

It would seem then that Celmins has also applied this conception of the “image” as a complication of illusion and flatness to the eleven stones. While she picked up and collected many more than eleven stones, she has noted that the ones she chose to save and ultimately use for To Fix, were the ones that had “galaxies” on them. Indeed, some stones have Saturn-like rings and Celmins has arranged them differently for various

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displays like a shifting constellation. This would indicate not only the compression of time but also the compression of—or projection of—space onto these small stones.

Each painted stone then refers to the model of its natural form—the original stone that can be held in one’s hand—while also modeling something larger and ultimately impossible to encapsulate—such as the scale of the universe. It is the impossibilities here, the inevitable differences within pairs of stones that demonstrate the failings of representation and make Celmins’ pursuit so compelling.

*To Fix the Image in Memory* manages, through an act of re-describing, to articulate themes that span from the accumulation of knowledge to the contemplation of the smallness of being human to a vastness far greater. The physical facts of this piece portray both image and object or perhaps an image that wraps around an object thus appearing not to be an image but an actual rock. Its paradoxes of scale and of craft raise questions that I consider primary inquiries for my own work around the image/object relationship and the confusion of perceptions of space and flatness in both real and depicted dimensions. In Celmin’s work, her building of the image bit by bit in real space is an act of faithful depiction and also a clue that the whole enterprise is but a rigorous construction and only as real or as truthful as an interpretation can ever be. The desire to know something so surely and the success or plausibility as well as the failure of that activity are demonstrated here so succinctly. Celmins depicts her subject matter through

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http://www.moma.org/explore-multimedia/audios/28/677
the use of image and she gives that image physical form through her practice of sustained
mark-making whereby time becomes a visual trait and observational knowledge transfers
from a source to the artist and on to the viewer.
Chapter 3: The Image and Picture-Object

Contemporary concerns of the image and picture-object relationship have turned my attention to a discussion around the tableau form as another route to locating a fractured representation. The notion of image is often relegated to a superficial and temporary existence—an incidental artifact at best. Image, in this context, can only display an idea of some visual thing but it cannot embody the thing itself. The image has no thing-ness. This sets it in contrast to the experience of a work of art such as a picture-object, where scale is set in relation to the body and material facts of the work’s creation are encompassed in its thing-ness.

The need for such distinctions that denigrate image may come from the desire to make qualitative judgments amidst an overwhelming mass of what could be called images in the world. “Image” as a term has very little specificity and can refer to an actual or a mental picture. Baudelaire has described a world of images as ubiquitous material to be imaginatively processed by the artist. “The whole visible universe is but a storehouse of images and signs to which the imagination will give a relative place and value; it is a sort of pasture which the imagination must digest and transform.” The visible universe in contemporary society has since proliferated through the continual circulation and infinite

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18 The French word tableau is often translated as “picture-object.”
reproductions of digital images of all sorts. To be specific within this vast category, I wish to speak about works of art and how the attributes of image may be found operating in conjunction with each picture-object/tableau/painting/photograph. My interest in articulating the importance of “image” to the picture-object is partly because I want my work to operate through both terms. They each define different aspects of a temporal visual experience.

A picture is a *constructed* image that comes together over time and through media, whereas an image in and of itself has no time. It has no place either, as it is not a physical entity. Instead, it is held in the mind’s eye separate from and unencumbered by the details of any physical material encounter. A picture-object is at first glance an image and then it may once again—later—also be held as an image in memory. An image can exist separately from the picture-object whereas the picture-object, in its constructed nature, always requires its image aspect in order to be seen as a whole. The image can present a unified whole even in cases where the materiality of the work reveals fragments, segments, or components. In this way, the image and picture-object are intertwined though they operate via different temporal modes of viewing.

These concerns were present in my mind as I worked on my thesis installation. I wanted to create a work that required this oscillation between the immersive power of the image and the fracturing or breaking of that image with material interruptions.
In *Split Frame Elevation* (2014), these relationships between image and picture-object were emphasized by increasing the scale and viewing distance to create a work 11 feet tall and 16 feet wide. This work was installed on a “sight line” wall where it could be viewed upon entering the gallery space from 50 feet away.

![Figure 10. Split Frame Elevation, 2014. Laser toner enlargement prints on wall, 11 x 16 feet.](image)

As the viewer gets closer, the material facts of the work become apparent.

![Figure 11. Detail views of Split Frame Elevation, 2014.](image)
The image is divided into segments of hanging strips each measuring 36 inches wide. The strips are hung from the top of the wall like a curtain so that air can move between them and where they reach the floor, they curve softly onto it merging the plane of the wall and the floor seamlessly. I used many overlapping strips so that a sidelong view would reveal the hidden layers of image on strips behind the surface.

In addition to the physical breaks created by the strips, there is also a break in the overall image. It appears to the right of center where two adjacent strips do not entirely align to maintain continuity in the image. The lower half of the strip appears to align but the upper half does not.

All of the laser toner enlargement prints in my work have been produced at the Fed Ex Store using the self-service enlargement machine, Océ TDS400. Only this store location with this vintage of the machine can produce prints that look this particular way. I always enlarge and print on this machine by starting with an “original” laser photocopy print out.
rather than a digital file. This allows the paper fibers and subtle print striations of the small photocopy to become magnified and thus critical part of the final image. One characteristic that attracted me to this print method is the distinct vertical lines that appear in the enlarged image. This effect is the machine delineating an arbitrary shift in resolution which can be seen in Figure 6. As I layered the strips to create *Split Frame Elevation*, I noticed how these vertical striations in the print mimicked the appearance of vertical shadows cast between layers of hanging strips. In this work, a real shadow is confused with a printed one, recalling an optical sensation also utilized in earlier wall installations such as *Dazzle Camouflage* (Figure 5).

Figure 13. Left: *Curtain*, 2013 laser toner enlargement print. Right: detail of same work showing vertical line from the printer shifting resolution.
Between 1969 and 1972, Vija Celmins produced a series of graphite drawings of the surface of the moon. To be more accurate, these drawings depict *photographs* of the surface of the moon. The drawings not only adopt the tonal values from the photographs, but also utilize their format of cropping, framing and compositional conventions. The source photographs were composed of segments of transmitted images pieced together by NASA technicians in order to create a complete view of a lunar surface area. The overlapping image fragments create a patchwork of visual information and Celmins chose not to smooth these areas over in her drawing. Evidenced in her composition is the process by which the imaging machine scanned the moon’s terrain and transmitted visual data for assembly by humans on earth.

In *Moon Surface (Luna 9) #1* Celmins included the white perpendicular lines visible in some of the lunar photographs that testify to the momentary signal dropouts that interrupted the televisual transmission. In this drawing, the juxtaposition of a smaller version of the lunar landscape, seen in sharp detail with its larger, blurry duplicate in the background, evokes the effect of a zoom lens going in and out of focus.  

By incorporating the format of the photograph, Celmins achieves two things. She makes works that appear to be actual photographs before revealing themselves as drawings upon

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closer viewing. Secondly, she points to the apparatus of imaging as a device that is
mediated both by hand and by machine, across space and time.

Celmins mimics the mosaic effect caused when human hands pieced together
the individual photographs transmitted electronically by the camera on the moon
to the laboratory on earth...Celmins’s drawings testify to a scientific practice that,
in overcoming the quarter-million-mile distance between earth and moon to
photograph the lunar surface and to reassemble the images back on earth, allowed
uncertainties to arise about the identity of machines and humans.

The breaks in transmitted data and the act of piecing together to make an image whole
area crucial elements to these drawings that emphasizes a continued process of
translation.

Figure 14. Left: Technicians at Work, 1966. Photo by J.R.Eyerman, National Geographic
Image Collection. Right: printed source image cropped by Celmins.

For Celmins, there is meaning in this process that has value beyond the scientific data.
The subject of this series is not simply the surface of the moon, but also the surface of a
photograph and the way that time and distance is compressed through these photographic

21 This image is reproduced in Cécile Whiting’s, “It’s Only a Paper Moon,” American Art.
media. From the machine in outer space to the hands of the scientists on earth, and from the reproduction print cropped by the artist to her hand on the drawing paper—from these disparate sources, a new “original” is made.

The period of time when human sight was first extended with the help of lenses coincided with innumerable discoveries about the natural world. Galileo first viewed the moon through his handmade telescope in 1610. He made a series of seven wash drawings (figure 15) depicting what he saw through this newly invented device.

In the last chapter of his book *The Mirror, the Window, and the Telescope*, Samuel Y. Edgerton explains how Galileo’s extensive knowledge of perspective and chiaroscuro played a crucial role in the astronomer’s understanding of what he saw through the telescope. Because Galileo had studied instructional engravings on how to draw spheres with “raised protuberances and recessed channels” in raking light, he had the knowledge to recognize upon viewing the moon that it was not the perfect sphere composed of vapor or pure atmosphere as previously thought. Galileo could tell by the way that light fell irregularly along the line of the sun’s illumination (the terminator) that the moon must have had mountainous ridges to catch such light before the valleys. Further, he was able to use the principles of perspective geometry to calculate the height of the moon’s mountains. While the British cartographer Thomas Hariot had used a telescope to view
the moon just several months before Galileo, Hariot had none of the visual literacy of Galileo and did not recognize the spottiness he saw as being significant.\(^{22}\)

![Figure 15. Left: Thomas Hariot, drawing of the moon “July 26, 1609.” Right: Galileo, wash drawings (page 1), 1609. Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence.](image)

The project of constructing instruments to extend one’s vision—to arrange an often elaborate and unwieldy set-up for a certain type of observation—ran counter to the notion of passive observation espoused in Aristotelian philosophy. Following Galileo and Descartes, a “scientific rationalism” arose in the convergence of mathematical truth and empirical observation.\(^{23}\) As Rebecca Newberger Goldstein writes,


“Scientific rationalism, then, as it emerged to challenge the old system, placed its hopes not in logic, but in mathematics. Whereas the old system’s working hypothesis had been that all physical processes are striving toward an end they seek to accomplish, the working hypothesis of the new rationalists was that all physical processes have a quantitative structure, and it is this abstract structure that distils the laws of nature that provide their explanation.”

It seems that the use of telescopes is one example where mathematical truth went hand-in-hand with observation drawn from the senses. The naked eye, with the help of the apparatus, could discern observations whereby measurements and calculations could be made on celestial bodies that were otherwise obscured.

The knowledge of perspective that helped Galileo interpret and analyze his observations points to the role of perspective and optics in making sense of the world through a mathematical and by extension, truthful, system. Several centuries before Galileo, linear perspective came about in the West not through a desire for more accurate representations in paintings but from a desire understand how the physical world and real spaces exist in relation to each other and how human sight functions. It was essentially a scientific inquiry. As a tool for depicting space, linear perspective leads to a representation that is fundamentally different from how the eye sees the world. It brings up questions of subjective and objective views and the problems inherent in finding truth in representation.

24 Newberger Goldstein, “What’s in a Name?” in Seeing Further, 118.
Galileo felt that the art of painting was superior to that of sculpture because it was analogous to the limits of our vision.\(^{25}\) Painting had the power to depict the spatial relation that we infer when we look at a three dimensional object. However, painting maintains the surface constraints of length by width and our understanding of depth comes not because we “see” depth, but because we interpret shapes of light and shadow on the object. Interestingly, the camera also correlates with the abstraction created by linear perspective. Both rely on a fixed and single point of view and do not account for the effects of the curvature of the human eye. Neither could possibly mimic the nuances of embodied vision. Hans Belting writes on the problems of perspective:

Movements of the eye muscles make what we see stand in sharp contrast to pictures, representing an immobilized gaze. The area we see in clear focus shifts when the muscles of the eye move, whereas perspective produces a static image…As the view before us changes, our perception occurs in a fragmentary and fleeting way. The perspective method took none of these circumstances into account.\(^{26}\)

In his book *Florence and Baghdad: Renaissance Art and Arab Science*, Belting traces the understanding of optics and perspective as a theory of vision in the Middle East and as a theory of pictures in the West. Both cultures relied on the same ancient texts written by the eleventh-century mathematician known as Alhazen. Natural philosophers of the West such as Kepler and Descartes who studied Alhazen’s texts were quick to link the retinal image in the eye with that of a “picture” or painting whereas in the Islamic world, optics

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was a science that did not extend into the realm of artistic or pictorial representations.

Belting points out that Alhazen understood the mechanics of perception as a temporal process in which glancing and extended looking function differently:

[Alhazen] opened his book with an empirical investigation of the process of seeing as it unfolds in time. Our eyes move with the visual rays scanning objects as if with antennae or feelers. Imagination is required, however to integrate their separate properties into a “picture.” Only in the imagination is the “shape” established that becomes fixed in the soul (optics II. 4.22). Alhazen observes that “sight perceives visible objects in two ways: by glancing and by contemplation” (II.4.5); “vision by mere glancing is vision of objects which sight neither recognizes nor contemplates at the moment of noticing them” (II.4.33)….Since our perception subjects us to constantly changing appearances, we must fall back on the ideas or representations of objects that we have previously formed.27

It would seem then that visibility in the eye and visuality in the brain or the imagination corresponds here to my conception of “image” and the glance while the picture-object may be seen only after contemplating appearances before us alongside those that are fixed in the mind’s eye.

Adjacent to my installation *Split Frame Elevation* were two silver gelatin prints from paper negatives. I constructed these images using the large-format camera. As paper negatives, they were contact-printed in the dark room to create the positive images in the exhibition. These works in which the image measures just 5 x 4 inches pose an obvious and dramatic change in scale from the 16-foot wall installation just a few feet away.

Upon entering the gallery the viewer is at a 50 foot distance from *Split Frame Elevation* and is able to see the whole work. At this vantage point you cannot also see these two small prints on the left adjacent wall. They require close looking. While standing in front of them, if you turn to the right you are faced with the large wall work at such close proximity that you cannot take in the whole image. Instead the viewer sees graininess, texture, reflections of toner and shadows between strips. By positioning the small
photographs this way, I set up a shift in viewing from one of a precision and clarity to one of the hazy detritus of magnification.

Despite being able to see a high degree of detail in Entail and Sliver, the subject matter they depict remains unknowable. There is space within each image, perhaps evocative of a landscape or terrain, but with no indication of scale it could be vast or miniscule. This is true of all the thesis works I presented, which take carbon paper sculptural forms as their subject matter. Loosely drawn from architecture, I designed and carefully hand-constructed the forms, the largest being about five feet, before crushing them in a printmaking press. The clean geometry of my ruled and scored lines became crisscrossed with the irregular jagged creases from the form collapsing on itself. Pulling the flattened forms back into three dimensions produced compelling subjects to photograph and draw for nearly a year. Because the forms themselves have no external real-world referent, the images of them will always be of something wholly unknowable while still appearing to be an accurate account of some real occurrence.

I didn’t plan to be using these forms for anything more than a one-time print in the press but instead they became a body of evidence for me to examine. The industrial carbon paper’s matte black finish absorbs light making it a complex subject for black-and-white photographic mediums. The large-format camera allows for countless ways of manipulating the focal plane and achieving startling clarity. The strangeness of seeing these forms differently in each viewing and through each printing and drawing process—
as architecture, as ruins, as caverns and simply as paper—these viewing experiences showed me the impossibility of a finite representation. Making is a form of knowing, and conversely, un-knowing or undoing by making unfamiliar. Through generating these structures and making them unfamiliar, I felt that I was following a line of inquiry. At times it seemed circular as I would return to manipulate earlier versions of images. Instead of leading to a place of resolution, my results were continually complicated by new and changing circumstances, always producing new translations. These works ultimately represent a practice where viewing does not mean understanding—where knowledge that is gained through close observation still leaves more questions than answers. It is by maneuvering the varied modes of representation I have described that I can show these forms in multiple states of integrity and dissolution. In these ways, the making of the work is also a potent expression of its content.
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Chapter 2: Close Observation


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Chapter 3: The Image and Picture-Object


Chapter 4: Extending Vision

